



CHEMICAL SERPENTS

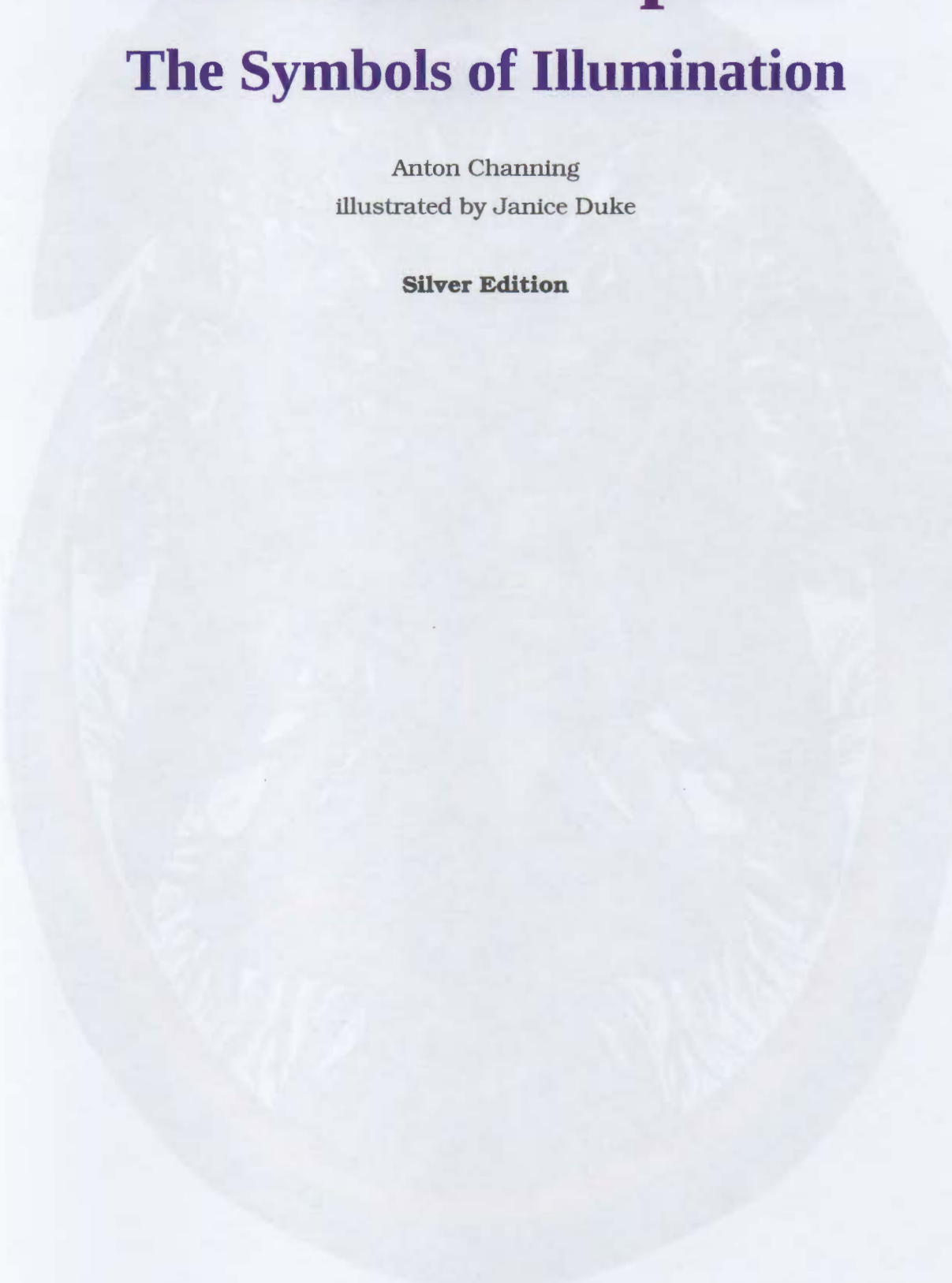
ANTON CHANNING
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JANICE DUKE

Chemical Serpents

The Symbols of Illumination

Anton Channing
illustrated by Janice Duke

Silver Edition





Chemical Serpents: The Symbols of Illumination

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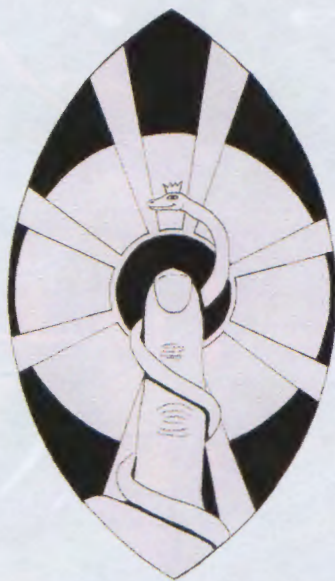
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*“That is exactly what it is necessary for you
to realise,” the master tells him. “Gods,
demons, the whole universe, are but a mirage
which exists in the mind, 'springs from it,
sinks into it.'”*

Alexandra David-Neel

*In the wind of the mind arises the turbulence
called I. It breaks; down shower the barren
thoughts.*

Aleister Crowley

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GRAAL Regenerative Autonomous Alchemists Laboratory
Free Illuminism
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Introduction

In this book I share my research into alchemical symbolism, and related symbols in various religious, mystical and magical traditions from around the world. I emphasise the similarities whilst noting the differences, making no argument for the superiority of any particular view where none exists.

Through my study of the symbols and experience of the magical and mystical practices to which they allude, I see that a universal message emerges from these disparate traditions, especially when one strips them of the various authoritarian political ideas that attach themselves to philosophy of all kinds like persistently greedy parasites.

In a nutshell, the message tells us that by bringing the awareness of our minds into harmony with our bodies, senses and emotions, we free ourselves from illusion, most especially the illusion of self, and the desires born of such illusions so we can instead begin life in accord with what we might call our 'divine will'.

This for example, forms the goal of simple awareness meditation. To still the mind and simply experience our senses, without interpretation. To experience the moment. Easier said than done, but far from impossible, and something each of us can achieve for ourselves.

It also forms the goal of Left-Hand path traditions where the aspirant seeks to 'become a god'. What kind of god would lack awareness of its own true nature, would willingly imprison itself in illusion and not attempt to break free?

In an age where we face a bewildering array of illusions in the form of mass media advertising campaigns, from political and religious institutions trying to persuade you to support their power hierarchies on the one hand, to corporations trying to convince you that you really will have a better life if you just buy their products on the other, the art of seeing through illusion becomes one more necessary than ever.

This guide to the symbols of illumination, in addition to providing a good background on the history of the art and symbols of the path, also serves as an introduction in how to illuminate oneself.



Serpents

We find Serpents throughout the worlds religious and mystical systems, including the Hermetic alchemy of Europe and Arabia. They can also be found in the related alchemical traditions of India, China and Tibet.

Sexually speaking, serpents represent the hermaphrodite. Francis Huxley explains the phallic and vaginal symbolism of serpents in *Way of the Sacred*.

Freud, we know, came to the conclusion that trees and snakes were phallic in character, because they were stiff, rod shaped and erectile. But here he missed not only the etymology of matter that we have noted, but the fact that in mythology the main characteristic of primal serpents is their habit of swallowing everything...

In addition to the sexual we can quite easily find other important meanings of serpent symbolism.

Huxley also mentions how both gods and heroes were worshipped in serpent form in ancient Greece, and in '*Seidways - Shaking, Swaying and Serpent Mysteries*', Jan Fries discusses the soul as a serpent, and also it being a symbol of sorcerers. One may speculate on this association by thinking of the practise of astral projection or visualisation. I remember reading various new age ideas on astral projection as a teenager about the 'astral body' travelling around connected to the 'physical body' by a silver thread. Well, from my own experience, my astral 'body' does not have arms or legs unless I visualise them, so mostly I am an astral head emanating from my physical body via this thread. This sounds so much like a serpent that I was not surprised to simply find it easier to project by imagining a serpent form emanating from myself once it occurred to me to try it.

So, we can see in the serpent both sexual symbolism, male and female united, and also a symbol of the power to astrally project. Both physical and sensual, yet also our connection to some form of spirit realm, of both above and below.



Roman Caduceus

This above and below symbolism we see reinforced in the serpents skeletal structure, which seems to consist almost entirely of a spine and head. Our own spines reach from the vicinity of our reproductive organs to our mind, and again we find in traditions such as those of Kundalini, an association between spine and serpent. The term Hermaphrodite comes to us from the child of Hermes and Aphrodite in Greek myth, and in addition to representing a being of mixed gender, represents the union of Hermes, very much a god of the mind, trickery, wits and quick thinking, with Aphrodite, a goddess of the body, of physical love, romance and poetry.

Serpents came to symbolise everything from our most earthy lust and carnal desire, right through to knowledge of the most sacred wisdoms and illuminations. Passing through sacred sex, trickery and numerous other meanings beside.

The alchemist sees no contradiction in all this and seeks both pleasure in the fruits of the Earth and the illumination of wisdom, often at the same time. The union of mind and body, of Hermes and Aphrodite, form a central and important mystery, to those who appreciate the role of the serpent.

The world alchemy comes from the Arabic *al-kimia*, and *kimia* possibly derives from the old Greek word *chumeia*, which means "mixture" and refers to the preparation and production of medicines. Serpents also symbolise poisons, medicines and entheogens due to the venomous nature of some species of snakes, and this may go some way to explaining their prevalence and importance within Hermetic symbolism.

The word entheogen refers to psychedelic substances when taken as part of a spiritual or magical practise. The word means something that causes one to become possessed by or filled with the divine. Some people use the word to distinguish spiritual use of psychedelics from recreational use. Personally however, I find that when you practise a path of spiritual development, all use of such substances, including recreational, can lead to illumination, and thus fail to notice such a distinction. Others may experience this differently to myself. I may experience a drug as entheogenic, whereas someone else may experience the same drug as hallucinatory or psychedelic.

Furthermore, at certain times, taking a drug for an entheogenic experience may only result in illusion whilst at other times taking it for recreation may lead to a genuine and unexpected illumination. Whilst I appreciate the term entheogen, I do not agree with those who seek to use it to demonise recreational use of hallucinogens.

Caduceus

Images of a staff or wand with one or two serpents coiled about them date from thousands of years ago. The earliest example currently known to us dates from between 2200 and 2025 BCE in Mesopotamia, representations of the deity, *Ningizzida*. Depicted as two horned dragon-like snakes, probably 'bashmu' dragons, the animal sacred to Ningizzida. His name means 'Lord of the Good Tree', and he appeared as one of two guardians at the gates of Anu's celestial palace in Sumerian myth, yet strangely also one of the two guardians at the gate to the underworld.

In both cases the second guardian was *Dumuzi*, one time husband to the goddess Ishtar, the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Stephen Herbert Langdon notes that Dumuzi in one myth gets referred to as 'Ningizzida, the child Damu'. In another myth we find Ningizzida bound by a demon, taking him to the underworld, and his sister bargaining with the demon to lessen his burden. This reminds us of Geshtinanna who similarly intervenes when demons take her brother Dumuzi to the underworld.

In this myth, amongst other appellations, Ningizzida gets called Damu by his sister. Langdon also notes that both Ningizzida and Dumuzi bore the name, *Ama-ushumgal-anna*, which means Great Heavenly Mother Serpent. Ningizzida was associated with the constellation of Hydra, whilst Dumuzi, was associated with the constellation we know as Orion, but which the Sumerians called Sbzianna, the faithful shepherd of heaven. These stand either end of the Milky Way.



Ningizzida

Without the staff, even older images of coiled serpopards, (serpents with the bodies of large cats), were found in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. An example in the Louvre, Paris, in the form of a cylinder seal from the Uruk period (between 4000 and 3000 BCE) shows the two cats facing each other with serpent necks coiled before their catlike heads face each other. In Egypt, the Narmer Palette from the 31st century BCE depicts two similar serpopards.

In Greek myth the messengers Iris and Hermes carried a staff known as the *karykeion*, which was topped with two serpents that coiled about each other once and faced each other, like the top of the Ningizzida image, or the necks of the serpopards.

The Roman version carried by Mercury, known as the caduceus, had two wings beneath the serpents and in time this image became simplified to a crescent atop a circle, like the zodiac sign for Taurus, and with the wings forming the cross bar became the symbol for the planet Mercury.



Hermes



Solar Disk of Heru-Behdeti



Solar Disk of Heru-Behdeti

A form commonly found today, which is to say that of two serpents coiled about a staff, crowned with a winged disk, seems to combine elements of Ningizzida and the Roman caduceus with the solar disk of *Heru-Behdeti*. The latter a name of the Egyptian god Horus in the form of the solar disk, depicted with wings, and supported by two cobra serpents.

Hermes gave the Hermetic tradition its name, in the guise of Hermes Trismegistus, equated with the Egyptian god, Thoth. Mercury, as both god, metal and planet, also features strongly throughout the history of the tradition. Hermes and Mercury, in addition to their role as heavenly messengers, both also act as psychopomp, the guide of souls to the underworld, so like Ningizzida and Dumuzi have both Chthonic and Heavenly associations.

One use of the messenger staff was as a sign of peace or truce, and so the two snakes could represent two opposing forces uniting. This may echo the symbol of serpopards, which have also been said to represent the unification of two historical enemies, in the Narmer Palette the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt for example.

Some myths denote that Hermes obtained the karykeion from Apollo in exchange for a lyre he made from a tortoise shell. This apparently occurred when the two made peace after Hermes returned the cattle he stole from Apollo. However, in an another myth, Hermes came across two fighting serpents, and placed his wand

between them. Obliging they coiled up the wand and stopped fighting to become the karykeion. This version has a parallel in the myth of Merlin and his vision of the two fighting dragons.

Entwined snakes can also symbolise sexual union, as in '*The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*', where Roberto Calasso describes two giant entwined snakes encountered by Zeus when he travels to the beginning of time after devouring Phanes.

Space no longer existed. In its place was a convex surface clad with thousands upon thousands of scales. It extended beyond anything the eye could see. Looking downward along the scales, he realised that they were attached to other scales, the same colour, interwoven with them in knot after knot, each one tighter than the one before. The eye became confused, could no longer tell which of the two coiling bodies the scales belonged to. As he looked up again, towards the heads of the two knotted snakes, the body of the first snake rose, and its scales merged into something that no longer partook of the nature of a snake: it was the face of a god, the first face to reveal what a god's face was, and on either side of it were two other huge heads, one a lion and one a bull, while from the shoulders opened immense, airy wings. The white arm of a woman was twined to the arm of the god, just as below the tails of the two snakes were knotted together. The woman's face gazed steadily at the god's, while with her other arm, behind which trembled an immense wing, she stretched out toward the farthest extremity of everything: and where the tips of her fingernails reached, there Everything ended. They were a royal and motionless couple: they were Time-Without-Age and Ananke.

Calasso refers to the god of time, Chronos, as Time-Without-Age alluding to the idea of eternity, who with his consort Ananke, begat Phanes.

In his book '*Living Midnight - Three movements of the Tao*', Jan Fries describes an older form of Taijitu, the symbol for the yin and yang, which took the form a circle containing a black and white vortex, or double spiral. A double helix, the coiling form of two serpents, found in DNA, looked on from above would also appear as a double spiral. Some ancient North American images of rattle snakes have two serpents inside a circle, spiralling to face each other in the centre.

An ancient description of two serpents found in the Pyramid of Unas (24th Century BCE) reads:

"A serpent is entwined by a serpent, when a young hippopotamus coming on the pasture is entwined. Earth, swallow that which came out of you! Monster, lie down, glide away!"

This could refer to a caduceus type image, although a further passage later in the text reads:

"The male serpent is bitten by the female serpent, the female serpent is bitten by the male serpent. Heaven is enchanted, earth is enchanted, the male behind mankind is enchanted. Enchanted will be the god Blind-is-his-head. You, yourself, Scorpion, will be enchanted. These are the two knots of Elephantine which are in the mouth of Osiris (Unas), knotted for Horus over the backbone."

The text fails to make clear whether the entwined serpents face each other or bite each others tails, but it suggests that they 'knot' or entwine about the backbone.

We also find the idea of serpents coiling about the spine in the Kundalini yoga of Tantric alchemy. C.W. Leadbeater compared the caduceus to the Kundalini serpent in *'The Chakras'*.

In India the spine is called the staff of Brahma. The archetype of the Caduceus, whose two serpents symbolise the Kundalini or serpent fire.

An older 17th century Tantric illustration from the Basohli region of India also shows two serpents entwined in caduceus-like formation. These represent *Ida* and *Pingala*, subtle Lunar and Solar channels, or *Nada*, to the left and right of the central Kundalini channel, which passes more directly up the spine. The three channels meet at the Ajna chakra, located in the region of the eyebrows, and commonly known as the "third eye".

The Asklepian

The Asklepian, with its single serpent, also suggests the raising of energy, and if we see a parallel between the Ida and Pingala with the Caduceus, we can see another parallel between the serpent of the Asklepian and the Kundalini serpent itself.

Serpents recur as a theme in the myths and practises surrounding the medicine and healing god, *Asclepius*. In addition to the serpent on his staff, we find depictions of his daughter *Hygiea*, the goddess of health and disease prevention, draped in a large serpent. In one Orphic hymn, Hygiea plays the role of Asclepius's wife rather than daughter, and her earliest worship seems to be in the form of Athena Hygiea, rather than an independent goddess. Her depictions often show her feeding the serpent from a cup or bowl, nursing it back to health, and just as the asklepian survives today as a symbol of medicine, we find the bowl of Hygiea, usually a bowl or chalice about which coils a serpent, surviving as a symbol of pharmacy. We also derive the modern English word Hygiene from her name, although it actually meant something more like 'well-being', 'wholeness' or 'divine blessing'.



Hygiea



Asclepius

In honour of Asclepius, snakes were used in healing rituals and many non-venomous snakes were allowed to crawl on the floor of the dormitories where the sick slept. The interpretation of dreams played an important role in the healing process of patients, especially dreams received whilst sleeping in the abaton, the holiest part of the healing temple, where new patients slept after making offerings and sacrifices.

The prophet and miracle worker Alexander of Abonutichus founded a second century cult on a glove puppet serpent god, *Glycon*, which he claimed was a reincarnation of Asclepius. Apparently Glycon started as a serpent inside an egg which Alexander hatched in the marketplace of Abonutichus before an assembled crowd,

and within a week this serpent grew into a large serpent with the head of a man, having long blond hair. This was apparently either a puppet, or an actual serpent wearing a mask.

We find another serpent image coiled about a staff in the form of the Brazen Staff of Moses. According to the Bible, Moses used a brass serpent set upon a pole to heal the Israelites in exile from poisonous snake bites they received in the desert. Looking upon the staff cured them of their snakebite. The priestly source of the Torah refers to it as a fiery serpent, like the Kundalini. In Christian mythology Christ compares himself to this serpent in the Gospel of John. Christ was also compared to Asclepius, since both were the sons of a god, and had miraculous healing powers, even able to restore life to the dead. Both also died only to be raised up to heaven, Zeus placing Asclepius in the stars as the constellation of Ophiuchus, the serpent holder.

In *'Secrets of Voodoo'*, Milo Regaud refers to Simbi as the Voodoo Mercury, messenger of Legba, god of the Sun, who also has the role of psycho-pomp. In Haitian Voodoo the large and diverse family of serpent spirits known as the Simbi, derive from a similar family of serpent water spirits from the Kongo of the same name.

Whilst the Kundalini serpent rising up the spine also resembles the Asklepian, the sleeping Kundalini serpent coils about herself and holds her tail in her mouth. Furthermore, the awakened Kundalini rises up the spine, but also loops back down the front of the body to create an Ouroboros-like circuit.

Ouroboros



Ouroboros from the
'Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra'

The name Ouroboros refers to the serpent biting its tail, one of the oldest examples of which dates from Egypt around 1600 BCE. The name comes from the Greek for 'tail eater', although some alchemists have noted the Coptic word "Ouro" means King, and in Hebrew "Ob" means snake, and thus they refer to the Ouroboros as the King Snake. This explains why some alchemical images of the ouroboros show the serpent wearing a crown.

The symbol most likely entered the Hermetic tradition directly from Egyptian culture, or via its use by the Gnostics. In either case it can symbolise eternity, regeneration/reincarnation and a self contained system. One of the most famous and oldest depictions of the Ouroboros in Hermetic tradition, in the *'Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra'*, encloses the words *hen to pan* the Greek for

'One, the All'. The one in the tomb of Tuthmosis III enclosed a winged Scarab.

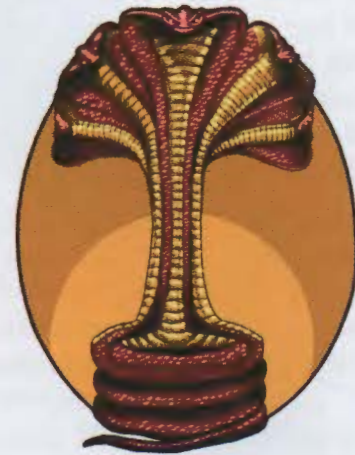
Johannes Macarius talks of the Ouroboros, the Scarab and *hen to pan* in *'Abraxas en Apistopistus'*.

The scarab, the holy "ball-roller" of the Egyptians, embodies the self generating T-shaped, hermaphrodite principle of Sun-Osiris and Moon-Isis. Both, the Ouroboros and the Scarab are an expression of the 'hen to pan', the eternal transformation of the Ever Unchanging.

We find similar regenerative and tail biting serpents from many myths of many cultures around the world. In Norse myths the troll-wife of Ironwood, *Angrboða*, had

three monstrous children fathered by Loki, one of whom, *Jörmungandr*, was a serpent so large it encircled the world and bit its own tail thus becoming the Midgard Serpent. The ragnarok myths say the serpent will rise out of the sea and poison the sky before Thor strikes it dead with his hammer. Thor himself then walks nine paces before dropping dead from the serpents venom. We can see a kind of parallel in the alchemical writings of Nicholas Flamel where a serpent devours a virgin only to be poisoned by her in his work the Hieroglyphical Figures. Flamel explains this as the uniting and mutual destruction of Sulphur and Mercury in the alchemical process.

In Hindu myth, we can sometimes find the serpent *Shesha*, usually a many headed serpent upon whom Vishnu rests, depicted as encircling the giant tortoise *Kurma*. Instead of biting its tail however, Shesha calls itself into being. Other names of Shesha include *Sheshanaga*, *Ananta Shesha*, and *Adishesha*. These names tell us that Shesha is the first snake, king of the Nagas and Endless. Generally the name Shesha means 'that which remains' as Shesha, unlike the midgard serpent, survives the end of the world. In some tales Shesha loosens a mountain so it can be used to churn the ocean of milk for the preparation of *Soma* or *Amrita*, both medicines said to grant immortality.



Shesha

In the Americas images of the feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl depict him coiled in a circle biting his tail in both Aztec and Toltec ruins.

Tail biting serpents can also be found in West Africa. The Yoruba rainbow serpent *Oshunmare*, bites her tail, and retains importance in many diaspora traditions, including Vodou. To the *vodouisants* she became known as the loa *Aida-Wedo*. Her consort *Damballa*, another ouroboros like snake, coils around the Earth like the Norse *Jörmungandr*.



Aida-Wedo

In Australian myths, the Rainbow Serpent (known by various names by different Aboriginal tribes) represents the power of water, and the way water reflects and refracts light in rainbow colours as it meanders serpent-like through the landscape. The serpent has the role of creator in many Dreamtime creation myths, often alongside the Sun and the Wind, who together shaped the earth into mountains and valleys.

The San of Botswana tell a myth of a creator Python, from whom humankind descends, and who, like the Australian Rainbow serpent, created the streams and river valleys as it circled the hills looking for water. A place in the Tsodillo Hills, known to the San by the names *'Mountains of the Gods'* and *'The Rock that Whispers'*, a 70,000 year old carving of a Python was discovered around 2006, along with evidence of ritually made and destroyed spear heads. A cave behind the

Python contains two cave paintings, one of a giraffe, and another of an elephant. The

giraffe helped the Python escape from a deep pool in one myth, and the elephant's trunk symbolises the serpentine nature of the python.

The Greek messenger goddess Iris, who as we mentioned previously carries a serpent karykeion staff like Hermes, also holds rainbow associations. She dresses in rainbow colours and flies on golden wings. As the Greek myths evolved, the rainbow became her means of transport between the mortal world and the gods.

In the Norse myths a similar bridge connects Asgard, the realm of Æsir gods, to Midgard, the mortal world, and the gods are said to cross it daily, with the exception of Thor who must wade through the rivers by foot. Only those slain in battle and the gods themselves can cross this bridge, known as *Bifrost*, the shimmering path and *Asbrú*, the Æsirs bridge.

Speculation on the name shimmering path has led some scholars to speculate that Bifrost may refer to the Milky Way, our galaxy. *Mixcoatl*, identified as the father of *Quetzalcoatl* and whose name means 'cloud serpent', was worshipped in several Mesoamerican cultures and also identified with the Milky Way. In ancient Egypt, representations of the Ouroboros such as the one in the 'Papyrus of Dama Heroub' from the tenth century BCE, apparently represent the zodiac, but might actually represent the Milky Way. Both also encircle the night sky, although only half remains visible of each when viewed from a position on the Earth.

The representation of the Ouroboros in the 'Chrysopoeia of Cleopatra' shows the bottom half of the serpent coloured in black, which may represent the hidden half of the Milky Way. It can also represent duality within the unity of the serpent, like the yin and yang in the Taoist *Taijitu* symbols.

We find this duality symbolism emphasised in alchemical illustrations showing two serpents biting each others tails, such as the ones from the 'Ripley Scroll' of 1588, which show the two serpents formed into a circle inside the zodiac, with a Sun and Moon interlocked with them. The alchemist Sir George Ripley, author of the scroll, describes this as the 'Hermaphroditic matter of Sunne and Moone'.

Nicholas Flamel, in 'Chemische Werke' described the two dragons as sulphur and quicksilver, which return to the quintessence when brought together. Abraham Eleazer also depicts these two serpents in 'Uraltes Chymisches Werk', and shows them devouring each other to become the single serpent of the Ouroboros. In one of the illustrations, these two serpents form a circle in front of a tree. In another they are surrounded by glyphs of the four elements.

Some Gnostics, such as Simon Magus, equated the Ouroboros with the solar deity Abraxas, whose name in Greek formed the number 365, the number of days in a year. Later Gnostics saw Jesus Christ as a phantom sent by Abraxas to Earth.

The Gnostic Ophites, or Serpentinians, a sect of early Christianity from the first century, saw Christ as both the serpent on the staff of Moses and as the serpent on the tree of life that brought the gift of illumination to Adam and Eve, freeing them from their prison in the garden of Eden. They also saw the watery Leviathan as



Iris

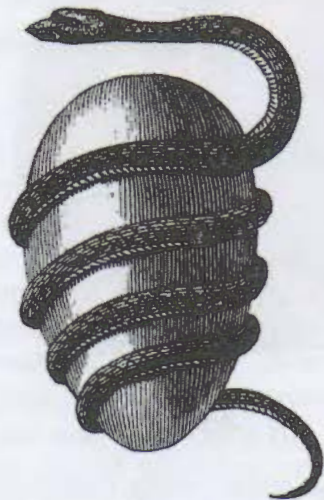
representing the celestial primordial water and the outermost circle of the world of creation, a giant Ouroboros located between the planets and the zodiac.

The name Abraxas was also written on egg shaped stones and used as amulets, although the earliest examples of these spell the name as Abrasax, suggesting the modern spelling in Roman characters derived from confusing the Greek letters *Sigma* and *Xi*.





Eggs and the Androgynous Child



Orphic Egg

We can find the symbolism of the Egg in many traditions, and often associated with serpents and dragons. The symbol of the Orphic Egg for example shows a serpent coiled about an egg. In the Orphic mysteries, this was the egg from which hatched Phanes, whose name meant Light, but who was also considered as a form of Eros, the god of Love.

This egg was said to have been laid by the serpent goddess Ananke, and fathered by the three-headed serpent god, Chronos.

There is also a folk tale of an egg thrown up by a ball of hissing serpents, made from a secretion in their bodies called *anguinum*. To steal this from the serpents it must be caught in a cloth before it hits the ground. Apparently you must then run-off and cross water before the serpents catch you. One account of this tale is given by Pliny in '*Naturalis Historia*'.

Jan Fries in '*Seidways*' recounts another tale of a group of swaying and whistling serpents passing a serpent egg, or serpent stone, around before having a race to a nearby spring to elect a new 'serpent king' for the next year. Apparently variations of this tale come from throughout Scandinavia and parts of Germany. In some variations the slowest serpent in the race is spat at until it petrifies into an Ouroboros-like ring that the others then jump through. Those wishing to steal the egg from the serpents are warned that they are very fast runners. This suggests that the serpents in the tale are not actual serpents at all, but members of a serpent trance cult.

These tales help highlight another aspect of serpent symbolism, that of trance, and entering possession-like trance states through serpent or reptile consciousness.

The Philosophical Egg

As with many symbols in alchemy, the Philosopher's Egg has taken on many meanings. On one level the name is simply code, or an alias, for the crucible in which they hoped to produce the Philosopher's stone, the *aludel*. This in turn may have been a symbol for the alchemist's body, psyche, or both, in addition to, or as well as an actual aludel.

Paracelsus, the 16th century alchemist, explained natural phenomena as occurring from eggs made from the union of salt, sulphur and mercury, the three alchemic principles. Lightning hatched from such an egg made from the union of the three principles of the element of fire. Whilst earthquakes hatched from an egg made from the three principles of earth.

The Philosophers' Egg has been described as representing the union of the four elements, and therefore as being a symbol of the quintessence or aether. This is explained by equating earth with the shell, air with the membrane between shell and white, water with the white, and fire with the yolk.

It is also said to be laid by the Lunar hen as a result of her union with the Solar cock, so we can see in the egg another symbol of the union of opposites.

The Cosmic Egg

The egg can also represent the world egg or cosmic egg, the previously mentioned Orphic egg being one example. The '*Brahmanda*' in Sanskrit scripture tells of a golden egg from which the universe was formed. Taoist monks also developed a myth in which the universe began from a cosmic egg from which the god *Pangu* was born. He broke the egg into two halves, one became the heavens, the other the earth. The Hindu egg also broke into these halves in the *Upanishads*.

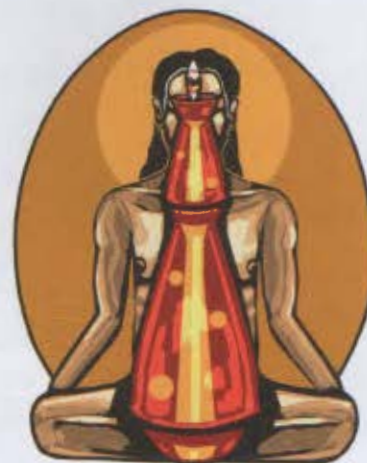
In the Egyptian myths, Ra was born from an egg laid by a chaos goose upon a mound of dirt that had risen up out of the waters. The mound identified as the Milky Way was later deified as Hathor. No explanation of where the goose came from has been given although it was known as the *Great Cackler*, on account of cackling wildly at its consort, the chaos gander, before laying the egg. Later the chaos goose and gander were combined into a hermaphrodite goose and identified as a form of *Amun*, a hermaphrodite creator deity.

After the rise of the cult of Thoth however, the egg was said to be a gift from Thoth and was laid by an ibis.

In the Finnish Kalevala, a diving duck lays the cosmic egg upon the knee of *Ilmatar*, the goddess of the air:

*One egg's lower half transformed
And became the earth below,
And its upper half transmuted
And became the sky above;
From the yolk the sun was made,
Light of day to shine upon us;
From the white the moon was formed,
Light of night to gleam above us;
All the coloured brighter bits
Rose to be the stars of heaven
And the darker crumbs changed into
Clouds and cloudlets in the sky.*

To later medieval alchemists the cosmic egg represented the solar system, the seven classical planets of Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn thought to orbit around it.



Aludel

The Monas Hieroglyph

This glyph is described by the alchemist and magician, Dr John Dee, in his treatise 'Monas Hieroglyphica', and shows an egg surrounding a stylised glyph closely resembling the symbol for Mercury.

Dee describes the egg as representing the cosmic egg, and includes a diagram showing the seven classical planets in a strange egg-like orbit. In addition, he also describes the inner glyph as containing all the planetary symbols. The disk and crescent at the top are the interlocked symbols for the Sun and the Moon. Include the cross below the disk and you have the symbol for the planet Mercury, or without the crescent the symbol for Venus. With the stylised arrow instead of the cross, a downwards pointing symbol of Mars. The stylised arrowhead at the bottom is made from two crescents. Considered separately with the cross, you can see the symbols for Jupiter and Saturn.

This implies the existence of a perfected whole within the perfected whole, a perfect microcosm of the macrocosm, and recalls the scarab or the *hen to*

pan in the Ouroboros. This also recalls to mind the Egyptian 'Papyrus of Dama Heroub' with its depiction of the child Horus inside an Ouroboros zodiac.

This also recalls the second line of the Emerald Tablet, which may be read as 'As above, so below. As below, so above. Working the wonders of One the All.'

In the book Dee also describes the symbol as representing the cross as a symbol of a transition from the 'Age of Aries' to the 'Age of Taurus', and indeed the arrow head at the bottom of the symbol does resemble the astrological symbol for Aries, and the circle and crescent above the cross do resemble the symbol for Taurus. The age of Aries, ruled by Mars, and also named after the Greek equivalent of the Roman god Mars, both being gods of war, Dee proposed represented an age of war and conflict. Taurus on the other hand, being ruled by Venus, he said was to be an age of Love, Harmony and peace.

One way to interpret this, involves comparing it to the alchemical maxim *solve et coagula*, which means divide and unify. Aries then would represent the dividing, whereas Taurus would represent uniting.



Monas Hieroglyphica

I also interpret the symbol in my own personal ways not described by Dee. One such way sees the central part of the glyph as a figure in a seated or meditative pose. This suggests to me the figure of the magician, or alchemist, as the microcosm in harmony with the macrocosm. This idea relates to the concept of the point and the circumference.

D. A. Freher, a follower of Böhme's and member of his Philadelphia Society, drew a series of images on the theme of the point and circumference in his book, *'Paradoxical Emblems'*. The concepts can also be seen in *'The Book of the Law'*, channelled by Crowley in 1904, after being directed to by another spirit channelled by his wife Rose Kelly. This occurred over three days, each day being dictated by a different entity. The first Nuit, the Egyptian goddess of the night sky, calls herself, *'Infinite Space and the Infinite Stars thereof'*, whilst in the second, Hadit says of himself in relation to Nuit, *'In the sphere I am everywhere the centre, as she, the circumference, is nowhere found'*.



Ouroboros of Dama Heroub

Hadit also says, *'therein am I as a babe in an egg'*. He also describes himself as both a snake and a serpent. Furthermore, in the *'Stele of Revealing'*, Hadit is depicted as a winged Solar disk flanked by two small serpents.

The Androgyne

As we have seen, we can interpret the hermaphrodite as another symbol of the *hen to pan*. We have explored the idea of serpents as hermaphrodite symbols, in addition to the scarab, and have mentioned the god Amun as a hermaphrodite creator.

I also mentioned the hermaphrodite as union of body and mind, and explored the connection between that idea and that of Kundalini as energy flowing from the lower body to the head and back again in a loop.

Certain hermaphrodites I find worthy of deeper exploration, and the one that appears most in Hermetic illustrations would be the androgyne.

The androgyne appears in many alchemical illustrations, shown as a two headed person whose body has male and female halves, divided left and right. Many examples exist and they often include images of the Sun and Moon. The androgyne of the *'Rosarium Philosophorum'* stands upon a crescent moon, with their two heads illuminated by the sun like a halo. The symbol has been described by some alchemists as the union of Sulphur and Mercury, although we can interpret the description itself as another code.

Versions of the left-right form of hermaphrodite date to the bronze age Mesopotamia, where at least one depicts a two faced hermaphrodite with the bearded male face looking to the right at a Sun haloed serpent above a chalice, with the female face looking the other way towards a moon crescent, underneath which is another serpent above a bowl. The two serpents also commonly appear in many of the later alchemical images. They also bring to mind the two serpents of the caduceus, reinforcing the association of equivalence between the images.

A version also exists in Hindu and Tantric mysteries as the union of *Shiva* and *Shakti-Parvati* and known as *Ardhanarishvara*. Depictions and statues of Shiva often show him garlanded with a cobra or other serpent, and the male half of *Ardhanarishvara* wears a similar serpent as an armband.

One recurrent theme that seems to emerge from these symbols and myths so far is that of two becoming one. From the two serpents coming together to form Ningizzida, the karykeion and the caduceus, Yin and Yang together forming the Taijitu, the Goose and Gander of Egyptian creation later replaced with a hermaphrodite Amun goose, male and female uniting to form the hermaphrodite, all hint at a transcendence of duality.

They also put me in mind of the phrase '*The beast with two backs*', a term whose first recorded use in English was by Shakespeare in *Othello*, although the equivalent phrase in French, '*la bête à deux dos*' was earlier used by François Rabelais in '*Gargantua and Pantagruel*'. These of course refer to a couple in sexual union becoming a single beast.

Of course, we can find many layers of meaning in the mysteries, and we can interpret sex itself as another symbol. Indeed the symbols can also be seen as self-referential, recursive and cyclical, such that we can view each interpretation as symbolic of all the others, with none as the ultimate truth. In this way we can see sex itself as a symbol of uniting the different aspects of ones own consciousness.

The left-right split of the androgyne symbol seems to reflect the modern neurological understanding of the hemispheres of the brain. Even here we can see another correlation or meaning in the serpent symbol, as our current understanding of the hemispheres suggests they both developed in the mammalian branch of our ancestry. With the part of our brain understood to have evolved in our reptile ancestors located at the back and at the top of the spine.

Many of the techniques of the world's mystery schools aim to shift consciousness from either the dominant hemisphere to the least dominant, or even to shift consciousness into the reptilian parts of our brains.

Baphomet

In 1854, Eliphas Lévi published his first book on magic, '*Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*'. In it we find the first known depiction of Baphomet as a hermaphrodite, whom he described as a '*pantheistic and magical figure of the absolute*'. Baphomet has *Solve* and *Coagula*, the alchemical formula of dividing and uniting, written on their arms, one of which he describes as female. The Hermaphrodite nature is emphasised with the use of a caduceus to represent a phallus, and breasts, representing the male and female natures respectively. One arm points up to a light moon crescent and the other down to a dark one, both a reference to the alchemical formula of '*As above, so below*', but also to the kabbalistic pillars of Justice and Mercy. The light and dark moons also represented Set and Osiris in ancient Egypt, who were said to fight in the form of two wild boars.



Baphomet

Lévi depicted Baphomet with the head and legs of a goat, in a reference to *'The Goat of Mendes'*, *Banebdjedet* mentioned in a mistranslation of the historian, Herodotus. However, in the original Herodotus calls Banebdjedet the Ram of Mendes, not goat. Banebdjedet translates as the Ram or Soul of Djedet. The Egyptian word *Ba* means both Soul and the animal of the Ram. Accordingly they depicted the soul of a god with a rams head. The Egyptian name for the town the Greeks called Mendes was Djedet, so Banebdjedet literally means the soul of the lord of that town. The name can also refer to the *'soul of the lord of djed'*. *Djed* means the pillar of stability, and can refer to both the backbone of Osiris and the river Nile, thought of as the backbone of Egypt itself. Herodotus also told a story about Zeus appearing to Heracles, hiding behind the severed head of a ram so as not to reveal his true face, using it to explain why Egyptians depicted Zeus with a ram's head. It seems the Greeks saw Banebdjedet as a form of Zeus. Certainly both gods were associated with prolific sexual virility. The sexual nature of the gods cult led to early Christians demonising him.



Behemoth

Lévi imagined Banebdjedet as the origin of the name Baphomet, the name of the devil or idol the Inquisition accused the Knights Templar of worshipping. Evidence fails to support this hypothesis, although the use in magic of Baphomet as the Goat of Mendes developed a history and set of mysteries of its own.

According to Peter Partner's book *'The Knights Templar and their Myths'*, the name *Bafometz* first appears in a poem by a troubadour in the 1260's: *"And daily they impose new defeats on us: for God, who used to watch on our behalf, is now asleep, and Bafometz puts forth his power to support the Sultan."* Most scholars interpret 'Bafometz' in this context as a Provençal corruption of *Muhammed*, the prophet of Islam. I would speculate that the corruption may have its origins in confusion with another, albeit more obscure, name from the Arabic world, *Bahumed*.

In *'Witches, Druids and King Arthur'*, Professor Ronald Hutton mentions that the name 'Bahumed' appears in a book of alphabets by Ibn Wahshiyya, as a bogus translation of an Egyptian hieroglyph. Whether bogus or not, if the text is genuinely by Ibn Wahshiyya, this would place its first, (known), use around the 9th or 10th century. Hutton describes the name Bahumed being used in a context that *'concerns a figure used to represent the secret of the world's nature'*. This may or may not be a reference to the pre-Islamic beast mentioned in Arabic folklore, *'Bahamut'*, described as a giant fish with the head of a hippopotamus or elephant. This name in turn has etymological links to the Biblical *'Behemoth'*, a beast which some have also linked to these same animals. Of course the Biblical Behemoth was not a giant fish, but definitely a beast of the land, the Arabic version also inheriting the physical sea dwelling characteristics of the Biblical *Leviathan*. My own speculation would be that the Provençal name Bafometz came at least in part from either Bahamut or Bahumed, possibly as a result of getting these names confused with that of the Muslim prophet, or deliberately confusing them for purposes of political propaganda.

Behemoth, or *Beemoth* also appears in the Ophite Gnostic system. Whereas the watery serpent Leviathan Ouroboros coils about the heavens above the seven planets,

Behemoth they saw as the air surrounding the Earth below. In his work '*Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*', the German Lutheran pastor, Hermann Gunkel, speculated that Leviathan and Behemoth corresponded to the Babylonian *Tiamat* and *Kingu*.



Ganesha

The elephant connection reminds me of the ancient cave painting behind the Python stone in Botswana, and its relevance in local San creation myth today as a symbol of the Python creator because of its serpentine trunk. It also reminds me of the Hindu *Ganesha*, whose head Shiva replaced with one from a monster with the head of an elephant. This could mean that Ganesha obtained the head of Behemoth.

Depictions of Ganesha as a thin god with cowrie shell eyes also link him to the gods *Eshu* and *Legba*, both of whom get depicted with these shells for eyes. We might also note that the mother of Buddha, *Maya*, dreamt of a child riding a white elephant that announced his conception.

Interestingly, some conspiracy theorists try to claim that the statue of George Washington, by Horatio Greenough, was modelled on Eliphas Lévi's famous depiction of Baphomet. However, the statue was commissioned in 1832 and completed in 1840, whereas the Eliphas Lévi's book wasn't published until 1855, fifteen years later. Greenough apparently modelled the statue of the first US president upon the statue of Zeus at Olympus by the ancient Greek sculptor Phidias. In some myths, the infant Zeus is said to have suckled from the breast of the goat *Amalthea*, whose name is Greek for '*tender goddess*', and in others he was raised by *Melissa* on goats' milk and honey. Melissa is Greek for '*Honey Bee*'. Perhaps the same statue of Zeus inspired the Baphomet illustration. Some cite the 1798 painting, '*The Witches Sabbath*', by Francisco Goya, as another influence.

Ask people for a god associated with goats and I suspect many would answer '*Pan*'. Whilst the Greek word *pan* means 'all', the name of the god most likely originates in the word '*paein*' which means '*to pasture*'. Like Baphomet, Pan has the legs of a goat, although facially he is depicted as a bearded man with goat horns rather than a full goat head. Generally Pan is depicted in the manner of a faun. His father is said to be either Zeus, Hermes or Dionysus. The theme of highly sexual virile gods is maintained. In some Hellenistic mystery cults, Zeus, Phanes, Dionysus, Pan and Eros were all considered cognate, different masks of the same essential mystery.

So what mysteries do these goat deities reveal to us about the significance of Baphomet's goat head and legs? Well the theme of sexual potency is very strong from many of the male gods associated with goats, so this would definitely be a part of Baphomet in that regard. Of course Levi depicts Baphomet as Hermaphrodite so goddesses associated with goats also come into the picture, such as Amalthea, the tender goddess who nursed the infant Zeus. According to some versions, ambrosia, the food of the gods, came forth from her horns to feed him. This brings to mind the cornucopia, the horn of plenty, although the word horns in this myth could be a euphemism or innuendo for breasts. Either way the divine goat also manifests a strong nurturing aspect.

Lévi's hermaphrodite form endures as a popular image for depicting Baphomet, and not surprisingly really considering the mysteries contained within. This seated horned figure, with Lévi's symbol for the microcosm, the pentagram, on his forehead also puts me in mind of the central glyph in Dee's '*Monas Hieroglyph*', which itself resembles the symbol for mercury, based on the caduceus, which itself appears in the Baphomet image.

The arm marked 'Solve' points upwards, whereas the arm marked 'Coagula' points to the below, representing that in ascent we divide and to descend we unify. Unity comes from allowing our conscious 'higher' nature, or mind, to descend into awareness of our bodies. In other words shifting our awareness from intellectual abstraction to bodily awareness and mindfulness of the now and our immediate surroundings.

Since the origin of name Baphomet seems veiled in mystery, even now, one feels no surprise that occultists, magicians and scholars offer us a plethora of alternative origins for the name.

Lévi also proposed the name as a backwards spelling of *tem. o. h. p. ab* an abbreviation of *templi omnium hominum pacis abbas*, "Abbot" or "Father of the Temple of Peace of all men."

Arkon Daraul, thought to be a pseudonym of Idries Shah, proposed the name came from the Arabic, *Abu fhamat*, meaning "The Father of Understanding".

Montague Summers proposed the names came from the Greek words *Baphe* and *Metis*, "Baptism of Wisdom" or "To Absorb Knowledge". Peter Carroll in '*Liber Null & Psychonaut*' translates this as "Union with Wisdom". Carroll goes on to describe Chaos as '*an inexpressible pregnant void*' and claims that '*Almost any attempt to say anything about it would be a denial of its other properties, and so a lie.*' Whilst he describes the vastness of Chaos to be of little use to the human magician, he goes on to describe Baphomet as a part of the Chaos more locally relevant to us, the animating life force of our planet.

N'Aton

An entity appeared to three magicians, Nema, Louis Martinie and Herb Zigler, during a group working in the 1970s. None others present apparently reported meeting the entity. This entity appeared as androgynous, with golden skin, but with their right side always in shadow. The shadow side apparently contains different things at different times, including stars, human faces and symbols.

The entity revealed itself as N'Aton, apparently a gestalt or egregore of all humanity, from a possible future time when all humans will evolve a strange dual consciousness of being both individual and part of the whole simultaneously. It apparently includes any of our ancestors that lived in wisdom and helped our species survive and change, everyone currently living and all our future descendants.

A similar Gnostic hermaphrodite, *Barbelo*, the first feminine principle, but also known as 'Mother-Father', or *metropater*, the first human, the triple androgynous name and the eternal aeon. As an androgyne and the first human we can see a parallel to the Hebrew and Kabbalistic *Adam Kadmon*, the first man, made both male and female until separated into *Adam* and *Eve*. Adam Kadmon also appears in some Gnostic mythology as the *Anthropos*, or *Adamas*. In some Gnostic thought they embody the idea or mind of humanity, and the World-Soul.

In Sufi and Alevi teachings we also find a version of Adam Kadmon, *Insan-i Kamil*, the perfect or complete man. According to Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, the word 'Sufi' itself derives from the Greek word for wisdom, Sophia.

Sophia

Hugh Schonfield argued in his book *The Essene Odyssey*, that the name Baphomet forms a Hebrew cypher for the Greek word Sophia. This could either reference the Gnostic goddess who bore that name, the abstract concept of wisdom, or to Sophia in the Christian sense of the Wisdom of God. This is interesting because in some Gnostic myths Sophia displays hermaphroditic qualities herself, by impregnating herself and giving birth to her child, *Yaldabaoth*, "Son of Chaos" or *Samael*. Also known as the *Demiurge*, the artisan, a being credited with claiming itself as the creator, when in fact it simply reorganised pre-existing material, either previously created by an elder god, or which other Gnostics considered uncreated and eternal.



Demiurge

The oldest references to the Demiurge however come from Platonism. Plato himself referred to the Demiurge in his *Timaeus*. Plato however considered the Demiurge as benevolent, who works to manifest the will of the Monad, the One. Later Platonists revealed a secret meaning, the Demiurge as the mind or consciousness, organising our experience of the material world for the good. This contrasts with the later Gnostic view of the malevolent Demiurge.

Sophia also plays an important role in the mythology of various branches of Christianity, perhaps most notably Eastern Orthodox churches, where many theologians consider Sophia part of the godhead. Sergie Bulgakov considers her as co-existent with the Trinity, a feminine aspect of God, although the authoritarian leadership of

the Russian Orthodox church renounced this view as heretical.

Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th Century Benedictine Abbess, who founded two convents on the Rhine, celebrated Sophia as a cosmic figure in both her writing and art.

In Protestant mysticism, we find Sophia of importance in the Philadelphia Society of Jakob Böhme and its derivatives, such as the Harmony Society of George Rapp. Here we find the Virgin Sophia, who Jane Leade claims revealed to her the workings of the Universe, whilst Böhme refers to Sophia as the Wisdom of God.

Of course, Sophia impregnating herself may not be a reference to a hermaphrodite nature so much as parthenogenesis, or virgin birth. From the Christian mysticism point of view this would connect her to the Virgin Mary, although from a biological viewpoint parthenogenesis usually occurs when a female finds herself in a remote location away from any males of her species. When she does this she invariably creates a male offspring, otherwise genetically identical to herself.

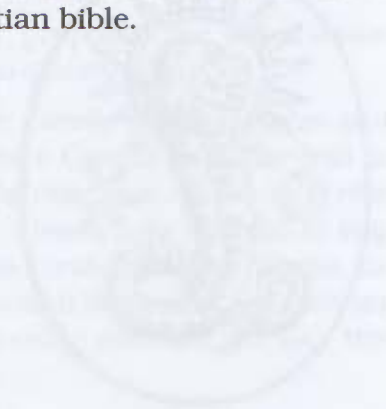
This biological behaviour has been verified in animals as complex as Komodo dragons, hammerhead sharks and turkeys. In mammals parthenogenesis has been artificially induced in rabbits although none so far have been found to do so in the wild. Furthermore reproduction of this kind would likely lead to increased risks of

deformities and other developmental abnormalities. This may correspond to the Gnostic conception of the Demiurge as being born blind and so monstrous even his mother abandoned him.

In one of the later versions of the birth of *Hephaestus*, *Hera* gave birth to him parthenogenetically in a competitive quarrel with *Zeus* for his automatic birthing of *Athena*, (like *Sophia*, a goddess of Wisdom), but who then rejects him for his deformity, and throws him from Mount Olympus. Whilst other myths give various other reasons for his fall, and varying accounts of whether his lameness was the cause or result of it, but at least one version seems to parallel the Gnostic myth. Furthermore, *Hephaestus* later makes a net to trap his wife *Aphrodite* with her lover *Ares* when he realised she was cheating on him. The Gnostic story parallels this with *Yaldabaoth* capturing the spirits of *Adam* and *Eve* in his false creation, the garden of *Eden*. The serpent later teaches them to escape by eating forbidden fruit to reach gnosis and invoke a fiery angel that banishes the illusionary world.

To *Plato*, and his teacher *Socrates*, philosophy was understood as philo-sophia, the Love of *Sophia*, or the Love of Wisdom.

In Hebrew mysticism, *Sophia* was adopted as the Greek translation for *Chokhmah*, during the creation of the Septuagint, the first Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures that later formed the old testament of the Christian bible.







Trinity

As sure as one plus two equals three, a unity comprised of duality implies a trinity. In the various traditions of the world we find the concept of trinity expressed in many ways. The three mother goddesses of the Celts, the three fates of Hellenic mythology, the three Norns of the Norse, (although they numbering three may result from Hellenic influence), the three Shakti of Shaktism and the Trimurti of Hinduism offer some examples. We can also look to the three Marys, the Holy Family, and the Holy Trinity of Christianity. Or, to other Holy Family trinities, such as Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha.

We can examine the three pillars of the Kabbalah, or to the trinity at its top of Kether, Chokmah and Binah. Also the Ida, Pingala and Kundalini serpents of Tantra. Or, the three serpents emerging from the cup held by the androgyne in many Hermetic illustrations, or the heads of Chronos and the Yin, Yang and Tao of the Taoists.

This trinity symbolism can even be found in the philosophy of Discordianism, with the duality of the twin sisters, Eris, (Disorder), and Aneris, (Order), and their father, Chaos, from whom they both emerged.

Sometimes these trinities reference the past, present and future, creation, preservation and destruction, other times they appear as the heavens, the underworld and the earthly realm between. Yet other times they present themselves as male, female and egg/child/androgyne.

Tria Prima

In '*Kaos Hieroglyphica*' I focused on the trinity symbolism of Salt, Sulphur and Mercury, although this trinity only arrived in European Hermeticism during the Renaissance thanks to Paracelsus. Before then, European alchemical symbolism tended to use Sulphur and Mercury as a duality similar to that of Sol and Luna. In one sense they were considered the Soul and Spirit of mankind and were sometimes depicted as two fish in a sea, or a deer and unicorn in a forest, the sea and forest in these cases representing the body.

In the eastern alchemical traditions of China and India we find a third element of *Cinnabar*, Mercury Sulphide, a salt formed by the mixture of Mercury and Sulphur included even as far back as the sixth century BC. When this third concept finally arrived in Europe via the Islamic alchemist Al-Razi, (Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya, or Rhazes as he was known to European alchemists), Paracelsus equated it with the body.

In that Sulphur was also equated with the Solar principle and Mercury with the Lunar, Salt became associated with the egg or child as the hermaphroditic union of the opposites.



Three Fates

However this symbolism contrasted with the more usual role of Mercury as hermaphroditic. For example, in 'Words made Flesh', occult philosopher Ramsey Dukes refers to Salt as the feminine principle, Sulphur as masculine principle and Mercury as hermaphroditic, and I followed this attribution in my own writing. Paracelsus himself also called Salt and Sulphur the parents of Mercury.

One often finds the same sets of symbols in alchemy used in apparently contradictory ways, sometimes to convey the same general message. Sometimes even by the same author.

Interestingly, where we see the Tria Prima arranged in a triangle, we often find Mercury and Sulphur on the left and right, and Salt on the downwards point when the triangle points downwards, such as one found in a plate in '*Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur*', (*Cabala: Mirror of Art and Nature*), by Stephan Michelspacher in 1615.

When arranged with the triangle pointing upwards however, we often find Mercury occupying the central upwards point such as in the title engraving from '*Solis e puteo emergentis*' by Johann Rhenanus in 1613, or in the cosmological diagram of '*De Opere Dei Creationis, seu, de mundo hypotheses*' by Helisaeus Röslin,. In the former we find the symbol for Tartar (Tartaric Acid Salt) in place of the divided circle symbol for Salt, whilst the latter labels the Tria Prima with words rather than symbols.

Trinitarianism

In '*The Good, The Bad, The Funny*', Adamai Philotunus, (a pseudonym of Ramsey Dukes), discusses the use of threefold thinking to avoid the oppositional nature of dualism and the analytical nature of fourfold schemes. Of course he does not propose always thinking in terms of threes, just that dualism and fourfold schemes might not work as well when the philosopher desires certain results.

He also compares the threefold schemes in astrology, where each sign has a quality of cardinal, fixed or mutable, and describes these in terms of initiating, maintaining and transforming. He also notes that this fits with the threefold scheme Sulphur, Salt and Mercury we find in alchemy. One could also see in it a direct comparison to the threefold goddess of Maiden, Mother and Crone. Or, perhaps to the Hindu Trimurti of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Maintainer and Shiva the Destroyer. Or, even the concept that a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Threefold thinking often seems connected to the flow of time. Like the three-headed serpent god of time in Greek mythology, Chronos.

I also find the following idea from the book of value, "*Trinitarian thinking should ideally involve three equally powerful or significant factors, without one being either dominant over or subservient to the others.*"

Each of the three positions should have the ability to mediate the balance of power between the other two. We can see then that some of the expressions of trinity found in various traditions do not completely satisfy this condition, so we might see in them expressions of duality with a third position of balance, or expressions of unity and duality together to make three. Such schemes also prove useful in their own right, and sometimes we can better understand them in combination with a trinitarian model of similar concepts.

Neither-Neither and Kia

Man implies Woman, I transcend these by the Hermaphrodite, this again implies a Eunuch; all these conditions I transcend by a "Neither" principle, yet although a "Neither" is vague, the fact of conceiving it proves its palpability, and again implies a different "Neither." But the "Neither-Neither" principle of those two, is the state where the mind has passed beyond conception, it cannot be balanced, since it implies only itself.

~ Austin Osman Spare



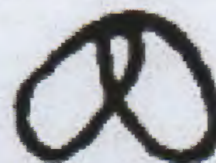
Kia as a vulture

The sorcerer and artist, Austin Osman Spare, used a technique he called neither-neither to enter a kind of mind state in tune with what he called the 'Kia'. Spare describes Kia as less obscure the less we try to describe it, in a way alluding to the Taoist concept that the Tao that can be described is not the true Tao. None-the-less, Spare calls Kia the ultimate freedom, free from concepts of freedom or means, but rather more to do with the Ego's freedom to receive it.

At times Spare symbolised the Kia as a vulture, and in his work *'The Book of Pleasure (Self-Love): The Psychology of Ecstasy'*, he also describes a sigil for it composed of two interlocking ovals. Of this he says, *"One form made by two, that is three-fold and having four directions. Of name it has no name, to designate, I call it Kia..."*

By "three-fold" he probably means that the lines of the symbol enclose three spaces, by having four directions he probably refers to the cross in the symbols centre.

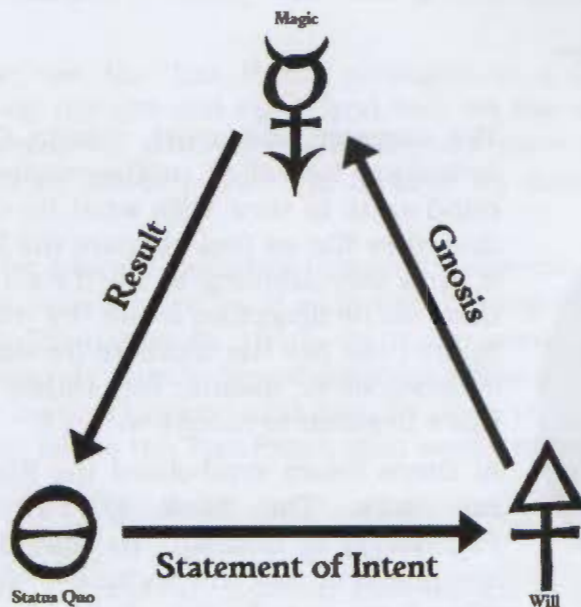
The Neither-Neither he calls *"The Kia which can be vaguely expressed in words"*. He describes a method for reaching an awareness of neither-neither that starts with an idea which implies an opposite, a duality. To transcend it think of something which is neither. Then think if this new thing implies an opposite, and repeat until you can only use the word neither to describe the concept of something other than the last duality in the chain. However, the opposite of such a vague notion implies an equally vague opposite and the two become indistinguishable and thus imply unity rather than duality.



Kia sigil

Spare wrote that through this method the 'I' then attains a state of what he calls *'Does not matter, need not be'*, thus free from what Crowley called *'Lust for Result'*, and can more easily make its desires manifest.

I described a similar method employing the alchemical Tria Prima, in '*Kaos Hieroglyphica*', which I called 'The Formula of Three'. In this method Salt represented the fixed nature of the world and its resistance to change, whereas Sulphur represented the magicians will, or desire to change this world. Only by transcending the duality of these two, via the principle of Mercury could the magician resolve this conflict and allow their will to come to pass.



We could compare this to Shiva the destroyer, or the crone in her destructive Hecate or Kali-like aspect, clearing away the old to make way for the new growth of Brahma or the maiden, respectively.

As the process ends with a new 'Salt' or 'world' that emerged out of the old 'Salt' or world, one could see the three principles as points on an Ouroboros-like cycle. Thus, in one sense we can see the three as a map depicting the cycle in a certain way. In the tarot we could think of the three figures on the wheel of fortune of many decks. The description Crowley gives of this card in '*The Book of Thoth*' also compares the three figures to the Tria Prima.

Trinity

icr

Ado





The Elements

We can also map the cycle through the four elements, using their symbols of the elemental triangles. Fire, depicted as an upwards-pointing triangle, represented ascent. Air, shown as an upwards pointing triangle cut-through with a horizontal line, represents the limit of ascent, the zenith. Water, a downwards pointing triangle, represents descent. Whereas Earth, depicted as a downwards-facing triangle cut-through with a horizontal line, descends limit, the nadir.

The four elements themselves come from the ancient world, the names used by hermetic alchemists having their origins in ancient Greece. These may have developed from the four elements of the Babylonian world, of sea, earth, sky and wind.

Various forms of square, diamond shapes and crosses get used to depict the four elements, which we can also visualise as points, or faces on a tetrahedron if we desire a three dimensional form.



Elemental triangles

Quintessence

In various schemes of the four elements, a fifth element, (and sometimes sixth and seventh elements), appear. Aristotle, for example suggested the existence of a transcendent fifth element he called *Aether*, (higher Air), because he could not accept that the stars were composed of the four Earthly elements. In India much the same elements appear in Hinduism, with Air sometimes also called Wind. The fifth element they call variously *Akasha*, which means *Aether*, or sometimes simply, Void. In Tantra, the lower four chakras correspond to Earth, Water, Fire and Air, whereas the higher three correspond next to Aether, Light/Dark and Space. The Bön tradition of Tibet calls the fifth element Space.

The Taoist five elements differ in that they lack a transcendent fifth element, with all five considered equal, and Air replaced with Wood and Metal. The idea that these principles form a cycle of transformation, rather than constituting material building-blocks, receive particular emphasis in China. There they are not considered elements at all, but rather something closer to permutations, movements or phases. Sinologists currently seem unable to agree on a single translation.

The cyclical description of the triangular symbols used for the four elements in Hermetic alchemy, suggests we can also conceptualise them as phases of transformation.

Armed with these different schemes, we can see three, four and/or five stages in a cycle, each important in their own way since they can serve as maps of the same process with different features highlighted.

Tattvas



Tattvas

The word *tattva* means 'thatness', 'principle', 'reality' or 'truth' in Sanskrit. The word has importance in various Hindu and Jain traditions, some of which represent them with a set of simple meditational images. The exact number of tattvas varies from tradition to tradition. For example, practitioners of *Shaivism* use 36, whilst those of *Samkhya* use 25. In both these sets, five represent the five elements. The Golden Dawn imported these five and incorporated them into their own system, albeit in a simplified form.

A black egg, (sometimes indigo and sometimes a vesica piscis), represents the tattva for Akasha, or Ether. In the Hindu versions this often has a yellow background. The Golden Dawn versions lack background colours.

A red upwards-pointing triangle represents Fire. The Hindu versions depict this on a green background.

A light blue, or cyan, circle represents Air. Hindu versions depict it with an orange background.

A white crescent represents Water. Hindu version depicts this on a black circular background. The Golden Dawn versions sometimes show a purple half circle.

A yellow square on a purple background represents Earth.

These can then be depicted inside each other to create composite tattvas. Naturally the versions with background colours produce more complex composites.

These images of the elements find use in fixed-gaze meditation, and as components of more complex mandalas.

Elemental Weapons

Another set of elemental symbols enjoys popularity in Tarot, ceremonial magic and other derivative traditions, that of the four elemental weapons. Names and forms vary from tradition-to-tradition, but the weapon of Earth usually has a circular form, with names such as Pentacle, Coin, Disk or Shield. Usually these symbols emphasise materiality or solidity, and in tarot the suit often represents practical and material considerations. The suit also represents our sensuality and indulgence of physical and sensual pleasures. In contemporary playing cards the suit became that of diamonds. Disks also symbolise the magical operation of evocation, the external manifestation and contact with 'spirits' or entities which can be communicated with and which may aid with divination or enchantment.

Water is usually represented by a container for holding liquid, ranging from drinking vessels such as Cups, to large mixing vessels such as cauldrons. Generally this suit represents the emotions, feelings and compassion. In many traditions this suit also carries the sexual symbolism of the yoni and/or womb. The individual drinking vessel of the Cup would more likely emphasise the yoni symbolism whilst the mixing cauldron would emphasise the womb-nature, although one can see both symbols present in both forms. The cups of the tarot became the hearts of common playing cards. Cups also became associated with the magical operation of divination,

perhaps because of their similarity in form to a scrying bowl filled with water and ink, but also because they symbolise receptivity.

The other two weapons usually take the forms of a sword and a wand. The sword usually represents the element of air, whilst the wand represents fire, although some traditions use reverse attributions. According to Janet and Stuart Farrar, this confusion may result from misinformation spread by the Golden Dawn in an attempt to prevent outsiders from correctly performing their rituals. This in itself might betray a deep misunderstanding of how symbols work when employed during ritual, a belief that each symbol somehow possesses a true meaning that holds true regardless of the understanding of those using them. Or, it could represent an attempt to create a magical egregore that thwarts incorrect attempts to use it, much like the strict theology of any authoritarian religious system.



Vesica pisces

As the element of Air, the sword, knife or athame represents the ability of the critical and philosophical mind to differentiate, discriminate and create form from ideas, just as the blade can divide and shape that which it cuts. The philosopher may strike down ideas they oppose like a warrior slaying their opponent with a sword, or they may take a crude argument they favour and with skill and patience craft it into a representation of truth, beauty and detail like a sculptor carving a masterpiece from a block of wood. As such it can represent the dividing Solve to the Coagula of Water. In playing cards, the sword was replaced by the suit of spades. Swords also symbolise the magical operation of invocation, a form of entering an altered form of consciousness through ritual, usually by inviting a spirit, usually a deity, to 'take control'. Like evocation, invocation generally finds use by the magician in aiding enchantment and divination, although long term possession may also be of use in working on the fifth operation of illumination.

Fire has either a wand, rod or staff as its weapon, although sometime these take the form of the spear and the arrow in specific contexts and traditions. These variously represent the will or indicate some form of status or position. Generally they refer both to the inner true self, but also to standing, respect and position in the outer world. This weapon became represented by the suit of clubs in playing cards. Wands also symbolise the magical operation of enchantment, causing change to happen in conformity to will.

The knife and wand both find themselves used in different traditions to represent the phallus, the male counterpart to the cup. Personally I favour the wand as a phallic symbol as it may enter only where it is welcome, unlike the knife which can create openings where none were intended. Also, as the weapon of fire we see then the union of the wand and cup as representing the union of Fire and Water, the union of the irreconcilables in addition to their sexual symbolism.

A fifth weapon corresponding to Aether, known as the lamp of illumination, has also been proposed. We can see this lamp on the head of Baphomet in the drawing of Levi, suggesting a relationship between it and the crown chakra.

Tetramorph

Another representation of the four elements found in tarot and other places in western mysticism derives from the *tetramorph*, the four forms of the man, the bull, the lion and the eagle. These forms appear in the Hebrew scripture of the prophet Ezekiel who wrote while exiled in Babylonia. He may have been influenced by Assyrian mythological creatures known as *Aladlammu* or *Shedu*. These had the appearance of winged bulls or lions with human heads. Often the heads were of Assyrian kings, but Assyria, (at the time of Ezekiel), had also fallen to the neo-Babylonian empire. The female form were known as *Lamassu*. They served as guardian spirits.



The *cherubim* also served as guardian spirits, notably a cherub said to guard the tree of life from Adam and Eve. The word 'cherub' relates from the Assyrian *karabu*, which means 'great' and 'mighty' and to the Akkadian and Babylonian words *karabu*, and *kuribu* which mean 'blessed' and 'propitious'. These words were used in some regions to describe spirits that served the gods, the shedu in particular.

Similar hybrid creatures appear in Egyptian sculpture where they usually had the heads of Pharaohs or gods. Another similar hybrid appears in Greek myth in the form of the *Sphinx*, who has the head of a woman, body of a lioness, wings of an eagle, and a serpent headed tail.

Sphinx like creatures also appear throughout the Buddhist and Hindu traditions of southern and south east Asia. Often they play the role of temple guardians, purifying the visitors of sins as they enter.

The four forms also appear in Christianity where they symbolise the four evangelists of the Gospels as proposed by Irenaeus of Lyons around the year 160, who argued that *"it is not possible that there can be either more or fewer than four"* based on the vision of Ezekiel and a similar vision in the book of Revelations where the four beasts surround the throne of Christ. He proposed the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and his proposal became accepted in the earliest forms of the Christian bible when a first attempt at compiling one was made in around the year 383. Christian iconography often shows Christ seated on his throne inside a vesica pisces surrounded by the tetramorph. As we noted earlier the tattva for aether also sometimes takes the form of a vesica pisces.

The four beasts also relate to the four 'fixed' constellations of the zodiac, Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius. The eagle, in addition to the scorpion, gets associated with the constellation of Scorpio. In Chinese astrology, the sign of the snake approximates to Taurus. The sphinx and the tetramorph also represent these four constellations, that form the points of a cross with the Earth at the centre.

The *Anzu*, or *Zu* bird appears as another hybrid guardian spirit in Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian myths, usually depicted as a large eagle with the head of a lion. The word 'zu' in Sumerian means the verb 'to know', and 'an' means 'heaven', so the bird's name means 'to know heaven'. Anzu guarded the sanctuary of *Enlil*, the god of the air. In earlier Sumerian myths Anzu had a benevolent nature and its

young were fed by *Lugalbanda* while it was away. Later Babylonian and Assyrian stories however have Anzu betray Enlil by stealing the 'tablets of destiny', hoping to determine the fate all things. For this crime the gods hunt down the bird and according to different variants of the story Anzu gets slain by either *Marduk*, *Ninurta* or *Lugalbanda*.

Anzu and Cherubim were both thought of as spirits of wind, storm and thunder. Whilst the cherub that guarded the tree of life wielded a fiery sword, Anzu was said to breathe fire and water, possibly alluding to the lightening and rain of a storm.

The Pentagram and Pentacle

A common symbol named from the Greek *Pent* (Five) and *Grammon* (Lines), we know as the pentagram, a regular five pointed star, drawn as a series of five continuous lines. This symbol has been used magically for a wide range of often seemingly conflicting meanings. In contemporary occultism it generally represents the five elements. Most commonly depicted showing one point at the top or bottom, as opposed to left or right, the pentagram has endured as a lasting symbol of the mysteries, although perhaps one most often defamed. With the addition of a bounding circle it forms a pentacle.

One of the earliest known groups to use the pentagram were the Pythagoreans, who used the version with one point down, and two points up. They labelled the alcoves with the Greek characters, Υ, Γ, Ι, ΕΙ, Α or *Ugieia*, a spelling of the goddess *Hygieia*, the daughter of *Asclepius*. On many Pythagorean pentagrams the letters ΕΙ were replaced with Θ, so as to give that alcove a single character like the others, and because the two characters resembled theta when combined.

These letters also happen to correspond to the initials of the Greek words for the five elements:

Υ = U: Hudor = Water

Γ = G: Gaia = Earth

Ι = I: Idea = Form/Idea or Hieron = Divine Thing

ΕΙ = EI: Heile = Sun's Warmth or Θ = Th: Therma = Heat.

Α = A: Aer = Air

With two exceptions these match the elemental names given by Aristotle. Aristotle's student Plato equated his concept of *Ideai*, the World of Forms, with his teachers Aether. Also, Aristotle used the word *Pur* for fire, but an older form of the four elements given by Empedocles, a Pythagorean philosopher, used the word *Eelios* or Sun.

In his essay '*The Pythagorean Pentacle*', Apollonios Sophistes also mentions *theta* as the initial for *Thermos*, (or Hot), and *iota* as the initial for *Hieron*, which means a holy or divine thing. The top alcove was labelled with *iota* with the four elements fitting in the lower four gaps, in a similar fashion to a contemporary one-point-up pentagram.

In the essay '*Tartaros - Pythagorean Satanism*', Comrade August makes the case that five element attributions of *Ugieia* and the pentagram recesses, likely originate with Neo-Pythagorean philosophers, as pre-Socrates the Greeks only used four elements, and the inclusion of *Idea* suggests their usage postdates Plato. They speculate, perhaps with a certain amount of justification, that the five alcoves of the pentagram actually represent the five chambers of *Tartaros*, the *Pentemychos*. Kronos or Zeus cast five eternal chaotic beings into the recesses after defeating them in the writings

of Pherecydes. Possibly Ophioneus, Cthonie, Eurynome, Echidna and Callirhoe but only fragments of the book survive so we don't know for sure. Pythagoreans also counted five planets on the heavenly ladder.



**Greek coin showing horned Zeus Ammon
with PITAN pentagram on obverse side.**

Greek coins from around the fifth century BC also show that the alcoves were sometimes labelled with the word *PITAN* or Python, which means serpent. This could also be a reference to the serpent dragon that guarded the Oracle of Delphi, and which was reportedly slain by Apollo in later Greek myths who buried her corpse under the *omphalos*.

The oracle herself was known as the *Pythia*, and the place was known as Pytho. Omphalos stones, according to myth, were placed in the location where two eagles cross paths after being sent to fly across the world by Zeus. He apparently sent them to discover the 'navel' or centre of the world. The word Omphalos means navel. This recalls that other symbol of the five elements, the circle containing an equal armed cross, the cross in this case marked by the flight of the two eagles. The omphalos were stones sometimes depicted entwined with a serpent, including on ritual coins whose other side showed a pentagram.

The idea of the one-point-up pentagram as symbolising 'good', whilst the one point down pentagram represents 'evil' originates in the writings of Eliphas Lévi. Despite both versions enjoying a long history of use without negative connotations, including in Jewish and Christian symbolism.

Jar handles from Israel depicting the pentagram also date from the fifth century BC, these used the alcoves to arrange the Hebrew letters YRSLM, for Jerusalem, which derives from the Hebrew words *yarah* which means 'he threw' or 'he cast', and *shalom* which means 'peace'.

Constantine the Great, the first Roman emperor to legalise Christianity, used the pentagram in his seal along side his *Cho Roh* symbol. The latter being a combination of the first two Greek letters of the word Christ. Scholars have suggested the pentagram was a lesser used Christian symbol at this time.

Catholic Christians replaced the Greek characters with Roman ones, SALVS. These spell the Latin word *salus*, which means health, a direct reference to Hygiea, if not an

exact translation. In medieval times Christians saw the symbol as representing the five wounds of Christ, and in Arthurian legend even ascribed it five-fold meaning, where it appeared on the shield of Sir Gawain. It referred to the five senses, the five fingers, the five wounds of Christ, the five joys Mary had of Jesus: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Assumption. Lastly it symbolised the five virtues of knighthood: generosity, fellowship, purity, courtesy, and compassion.

In Orthodox iconography, a pentagram often represents the mount of Christ's transfiguration, and in other Christian iconography it has depicted the star of Bethlehem, that guided the magi from the East. Pentagrams, usually two points up, appear on many Cathedrals, including the south facing stained glass window of *Cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens*, (Cathedral of Our Lady of Amiens), in France.

The Taoists also depict their five elements with a pentacle. They consider the relations along the circle clockwise as generative and the relations along the star as destructive.

The oldest known pentagrams date back to ancient Sumer however, where from at least as far back as 3000BC it served as a pictogram for the word *Ub*, which had various meanings including corner, angle, nook, a small room, cavity, hole and pitfall. It may have originated from observing the motions of Venus in the night sky, whose inferior conjunctions form a processing pentagram against the zodiac. Venus was the star of Ishtar, a goddess who descends into the underworld.

Connecting the five recess idea of the Pentamychos with the Pythagorean Pentagram and the Sumerian word *Ub*, Comrade August and Tani Jantsang in their article, '*The Pythagorean Pentacle - it is Two Points Up*', make some interesting speculation concerning the pentacles symbolism as a gateway into not just Hades, but also Tartarus, two levels of the underworld in Greek mythology which sometimes were seen as the same but at others distinct. Possibly they started off as different names for the underworld in separate regional traditions that later became absorbed into what became Greece, where like gods that began as almost identical equivalents, they began to take on specific characteristics that emphasised their differences.

They speculate that *Mychos*, ('Creek', a valley or recess through which a stream of water runs), and *Krater*, (A mixing bowl in which wine and water were mixed, which the Romans later adopted as a word to mean the bowl shaped pit of a volcano), were used as gateways to and from the underworld. The pentagon at the centre of the pentagram they associated with *Kore*, (perhaps a modern English pun connecting the Greek word for Girl or Maiden to our word 'Core' as in 'centre'), a name often used for *Persephone*, the Queen of the Underworld.

They also connect the five-pointed star shape of the pentacle to the core of an apple, which cut across sideways reveals such a star. In their system the state of *Eros* reflects having a healthy core, being alive, and living life to the full, whereas *Thanatos*, meaning Death, means the symbolic death of living without depth, or as we might say leading a shallow life. I'm not sure about their claim that the apple was sacred to Persephone, possibly confusing it with the pomegranate. The etymology of the English word derives from the Latin meaning seeded apple, but the Greek use the distinct word *ρόδι* (*rodi*).

Persephone was also associated with the element of water by Empedocles, who used the title *Nestis* for her. The other three of the four elements he associated with Hera, Hades and Zeus. Only the name of Persephone, dread Queen of the Dead, was taboo.

Even the name of her husband, Hades, could be spoken. *"Now hear the fourfold roots of everything: enlivening Hera, Hades, shining Zeus. And Nestis, moistening mortal springs with tears."*

This connects her to the idea of Mychos, the creek with water running through, as the source of the springs she would be the ultimate source of the water in the streams. This also connects her to the water serpents of the rivers that carve out the valleys, such as the ancient Python and the various rainbow serpents manifestations.

Mathematically speaking, a regular pentagram contains the golden ratio in various ways. For example, each pentagram contains five acute isosceles triangles, and five obtuse ones. In both types the ratio of a shorter side to a longer side is the golden ratio. The golden ratio refers to the ratio of two values such that the ratio between the sum of the two and the larger of the two equals the ratio between the larger and the smaller. Expressed algebraically:

$$x+y/x = x/y \text{ (where } x > y \text{)}$$

As an irrational mathematical constant it has an approximate value of 1.6180339887...



Golden spiral

The ratio appears in many geometric forms, including the golden spiral, a type of logarithmic spiral. Approximations of the golden spiral include the Fibonacci spiral, with which some people confuse it. Spiral shells of the nautilus and other molluscs do exhibit logarithmic properties but rarely form golden spirals. Such spirals do however appear in nature, such as in the spiral arms of galaxies.





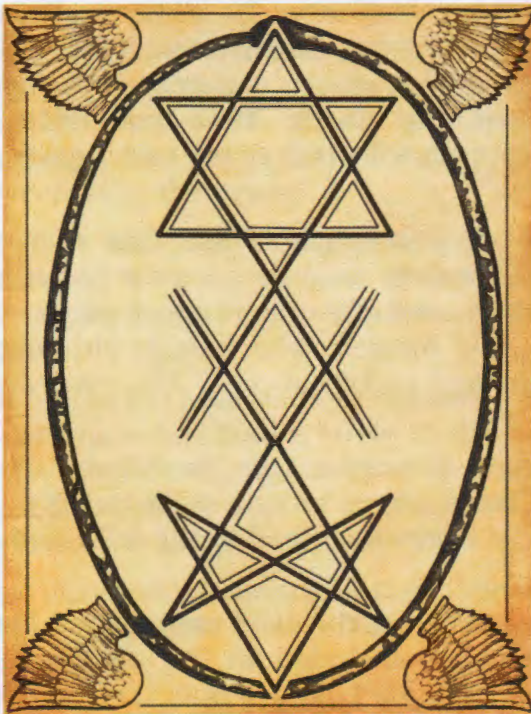
Macrocosm and Microcosm

The reasons Aristotle gave for believing the stars were made of unearthy material included their unchanging nature and their movement in circles rather than straight lines. This eternal circle once more reminds us of the starry associations of the Ouroboros, the One the All, even if we now know that stars do have a life cycle and eventually die. Still, the life of a star seems so immeasurably vast when compared to our own experience of time that they still seem constant and eternal to us much of the time.

Aether simply means 'Higher Air', which we could interpret as the near vacuum state of space, and thus roughly equivalent to the alternative names of Void and Space found in Tantric and Bön traditions.

The Hexagram

A symbol whose name derives from the Greek meaning 'six lines', and generally depicted as formed by two interlocking equilateral triangles one pointing up, the other down has been described in occultism as the union of the irreconcilables, meaning Fire and Water. This references the common triangular forms of these two elements. When interlocked, the horizontal lines of these two triangles dissect the other triangle to reveal the symbols for Earth and Air, thus we can see all four elements in the symbol, so in one sense we can say it represents a synthesis, balance or harmony of the four.



Top: Hexagram or Shaktona, Centre: Vévé of androgynous totality, Bottom: Unicursal Hexagram

Whilst the symbol was formed from the union of the two triangles, these remained unreconciled, because the resulting star was not unicursal. One could not draw it in one continuous movement. At least not easily. One could draw the inner hexagon first, followed by the points but this would effectively take eighteen lines rather than six to draw the symbol.

For this reason, the Italian philosopher, Giordano Bruno, devised the unicursal hexagram in the sixteenth century. He achieved this by replacing the horizontal bars of the triangles with crossing diagonals to form a unicursal figure. This unicursal form of the hexagram was later used by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and other experimental members of the Golden Dawn for tracing the symbol in the air during banishing rituals. Tracing unicursal figures can prove smoother than non-unicursal symbols as they can be traced in one continuous movement.

The unicursal hexagram was then later taken by Aleister Crowley, who combined it with the Rosicrucian symbol of the Rose Cross

to form the symbol he used for Thelema, a unicursal hexagram with a five-petalled rose in the centre.

In Judaism, the symbol didn't gain prominent use until the 17th Century, when it became known as 'the shield of David'. The name shield of David had been used from around the 11th Century as a name for the god of Israel. Earlier than that a hexagram appears as an ornament on a 3rd century Galilee synagogue and on a Jewish tombstone from a similar time in Taranto, Italy. The symbol also appears in the Kabbalistic grimoires including the '*Sefer Raziel HaMalakh*', a 13th Century text by Elazar Rokeach, also known as Eleazer of Worms.

In Tantra the upwards pointing triangle can represent Shiva, whilst the downward pointing triangle can represent Shakti. In the complex form of the *Sri Yantra*, four upwards pointing triangles represent Shiva and interlock with five downwards pointing Shakti triangles. However, in alternative forms of the Yantra and other Tantric mandalas such as a Tibetan *Vajravahni* Mandala from the 19th Century, single upwards and downwards triangles overlap to form a hexagram, known as a *shatkona*. Shakti creates and Shiva destroys, and their union brings about evolution. As a representation of the union of Shiva and Shakti/Parvati we can also see a parallel between the symbol of the hexagram and the hermaphrodite form of Ardhanarishvara.

The Hexagram also represents the Tamil Hindu god *Murugan*, known as six-faced and described as the red god seated on a blue peacock. In Sri Lanka, both Buddhists and Hindus visit a dual-faith shrine dedicated to the god at Kataragama. In one myth Parvati shapes six babes into one with six faces after they are born from the fire of Shiva's third eye opening. The '*Chandogya Upanishad*' refers to him, by one of his many alternative names, *Skanda*, as the way to wisdom. The elder brother of Ganesha, although in one popular myth from Southern India, Ganesha won the honour of being called the elder brother after displaying superior wisdom in a contest. In a race to run around the world three times Ganesha simply circled their parents three times whilst Skanda ran about the Earth. Both nonetheless demonstrate in different ways the same alchemical principle, that of the androgynous child.

In Voodoo, the *vévé* for androgynous totality takes a similar form, that of two interlocking chevrons, these essentially being upwards and downwards pointing triangles with their horizontal side not drawn. The attribute of androgyny plays an important role in many of the loa, including Legba himself, who though although depicted as an old man, also represents the womb and umbilical cord. His own *vévé* incorporates that of androgynous totality.

Jakob Böhme, an influential protestant mystic and alchemist, who lived from 1675 till 1724, also used the hexagram to represent Christ, whom he saw as restoring the original androgyny of Adam, lost in the creation of Eve, which led to the fall. Early Christians also depicted Christ as androgynous.

Other alchemists also associated the hexagram with the alchemical androgyne. For example, a robed androgyne appears in an emblem included in the alchemical compendium '*Musaeum Hermeticum*' of 1625, compiled by Lukas Jennis. This figure holds a circle containing a hexagram, whilst either side sits a man and a woman. The man holds a circle that contains an ascending fire triangle, whilst the woman holds a circle containing a descending water triangle.

Alchemists also use the hexagram to symbolise the seven planets. Modern science defines a planet as a celestial body orbiting a star or stellar remnant that is massive enough to be rounded by its own gravity, but is not massive enough to cause thermonuclear fusion, and has cleared its neighbouring region of planetesimals. However, the word actually derives from the Greek for wanderer, and refers to any heavenly body that appears to move in relation to the fixed stars. So arrangements of the planets can also include the Sun and the Moon.

When arranged in a hexagram we usually find the sun in the centre with the other planets in the six outer triangles. For example, in the title page for '*Opus Medico-Chymicum*', an alchemical text by Johann Daniel Mylius, published in 1618, we find a hexagram with a Sun in the centre, Saturn above, the Moon below, Jupiter top-left with Mercury opposite in bottom-right, and Mars top-right opposite Venus. This surrounded by the twelve signs of the Zodiac representing the fixed stars.



Hexagram in ouroborus by Eliphas Levi

About this we also see the four elemental triangles, showing the glyph representing the harmony or balance of the four elements and the seven planets in the same image. Suggesting perhaps that the two were seen as equivalent.

The illustrations by Dionysius Andreas Freher in the works of Böhme, and also in Freher's own '*Paradoxical Emblems*', also show the Sun in the centre with the Moon opposite Saturn, Mercury opposite Jupiter and Mars opposite Venus, and this system of opposites appears also in the works Crowley, perhaps most obviously in the card from the Thoth deck, the six of disks. In Crowley's '*The Book of Thoth*' he states the six disks, "*are arranged in the form of a hexagram*". He represents The Sun with a rose cross in the centre.

We can also see this arrangement in the works of Peter Carroll, particularly evidenced in the *Alphabet of Desire* chapter of '*Liber Null*', which seems to have formed the basis for the different opposites in his later *Eight Colours* chapter in '*Liber Kaos*'.

The origin of these pairs of opposites stem from observation of the relative speed by which the seven bodies circle in the heavens in relation to the backdrop of the fixed stars. Saturn, the slowest paired to the Moon, the fastest. Jupiter, the next slowest paired with Mercury, the next fastest. Mars paired with Venus leaves the Sun in the centre of the list without a partner.

This observable ordering of the planets was known in ancient times. In the '*Dream of Scipio*', the sixth book of '*De re publica*' by Cicero, written in 51 BCE, we find it mentioned...

"Seven of these spheres contain the planets, one planet in each sphere, which all move contrary to the movement of heaven. The sphere neighbouring the outermost sphere is occupied by the planet named after Saturn. Below Saturn shines Jupiter, a planet which brings good fortune and health. Then comes Mars, blood-red and evil to men on earth. Next, the Sun, prince, lord and king of all other worlds, the mind,

the guiding principle of the entire universe, so enormous that everything in every corner of the universe is pervaded by its light. Attending the Sun are Venus and Mercury, and the lowest sphere of all contains the Moon, which derives its light from the Sun."

The Stoic philosophers may have discovered the ordering, which was adopted in Egypt during the reign of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs.

The Heptagram

Not surprisingly we also find the seven classical planets arranged about a seven pointed star or heptagram. By arranging the planets in the Stoic order about the circumference of a circle and then connecting each one to the two furthest from it, we draw a heptagram whose path puts the planets in the order of Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Sun. This in turn corresponds to the order of the weekdays as named in many languages, with local god-names used instead of the Roman in some cases.



With some exceptions for specific day names, we find this pattern of weekday naming in Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Germanic languages and the Celtic and Gaelic languages. After Hindu astrology adopted the Greco-Roman system in the 2nd

century, they adopted the same weekday ordering which we now find used throughout the Asian languages.

Planet	God		Weekday	
	Roman	Old English	Latin	English
Moon	Luna	Moon	dies Lunae	Monday
Mars	Mars	Tiw	dies Martis	Tuesday
Mercury	Mercury	Wōden	dies Mercurii	Wednesday
Jupiter	Jupiter/Jove	Thunor	dies Jovis	Thursday
Venus	Venus	Friga	dies Venēris	Friday
Saturn	Saturn	-	dies Saturni	Saturday
Sun	Sol	Sun	dies Solis	Sunday

Japanese, Korean and Tibetan and other languages that adopted the Chinese alphabet, also use, or once used, the same ordering. They name the five planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn after the five Taoist elements: Water, Metal, Fire, Wood and Earth, respectively.

The heptagram of the planets from which the weekday names originate came from Ptolemaic Egypt, and appears in many alchemical woodcuts, such as the title-page of '*Anatomia Auri*' by Mylius, published in 1628, which also features a solar-centred hexagram arrangement.

A second heptagram formed by connecting every second point of a regular heptagon instead of every third point was adopted by Aleister Crowley as a symbol for *Babalon*, the Thelemic goddess also known as The Scarlet Woman, the Sacred Whore, the Great Mother and the Mother of Abominations. In addition to referencing the whore of Babylon from the Bible, Crowley also appears to reference not only the Babylonian goddess of Ishtar, but also Tiamat, a great chaotic dragon goddess of the sea, who gave birth to many unruly children.

Linguists consider Ishtar cognate with Semetic Astarte and equivalent to Sumerian Inanna. Comparative mythologist Joseph Cambell also compares her to the Greek Aphrodite and thus also the Roman Venus, with which planet Inanna was also associated. Although Herodotus in the fifth century BC wrote that *Mylitta* was the local name of Aphrodite. Mylitta, or Mulittu, was the Assyrian equivalent of the Sumerian, Ninlil.

One can also see a parallel between Crowley's Babalon and the Gnostic Sophia. The Gnostic Sophia was said to have brought the divine spark to the material world from the Pleroma, whilst Crowley said of Babalon "*[S]he guardeth the Abyss. And in her is a perfect purity of that which is above, yet she is sent as the Redeemer to them that are below.*"

Sophia was the bride of Christ in some forms of Gnosticism. Whilst in others, the syzygy of Christ with the Holy Spirit. The lowest aeon (or emanation) from the divine

Pleroma, she represented the descent of the divine spark down the cosmic ladder from the heavens above Leviathan.

The seven metals

Of course, not all arrangements of the planetary symbols in alchemical diagrams were based on this ordering. Some seem to relate more to the nature and appearance of the planets' sacred metal.

From ancient times until the 13th Century only seven metals were known, and correspondences between these seven metals and the planets became established. These seven metals were Gold, Silver, Copper, Lead, Tin, Iron and Mercury.

Gold was first used during the stone age, mostly for decorative purposes as its malleability made it less useful for tools at the time. Mostly the gold contained varying amounts of silver as an impurity and varied in colour between pure gold, through the alloy known as electrum, to white gold, which we now know as an alloy of gold with nickel or another white metal. The modern chemical symbol for gold, *Au*, derives from its Latin name, *Aurum*, which means 'shining dawn'.

Copper proved more useful for tools, and its use in this regard became widespread during the Chalcolithic period, between 6000 and 4000 BCE. The oldest known evidence of copper working comes from a site located in modern day Pakistan known as Mehrgarh, where copper tools found date from 7700 BCE. The knowledge of copper tools during this period was more widely available than copper itself, as stone battle axes from Europe during the period were carved to look like copper axes, even to the extent of showing imitation mold markings! The most common source of copper in the ancient world was Malachite, a green copper carbonate mineral. Its chemical symbol *Cu* derives from its Latin name *Cuprum*, which derives from the name Cyprus, the island from which much of it was mined during Roman times.

Silver could be found pure in nature, but only very rarely so its use did not become widespread until it was noticed as a by-product in the extraction of another metal, lead, from its sulphide, galena. Galena commonly contains silver as an impurity. Silver from galena became the main method of silver production from around 2500 BCE after it was noticed that bone ash would absorb the lead oxide leaving the silver behind. Like gold, its main use was in ornamentation and jewellery. The chemical symbol for silver, *Ar*, comes from its Latin name *Argentum*, which derives from the Indo-European root *Arg*, which means 'grey' or 'shining'.

Lead itself, obviously, also mainly comes from galena, so the idea of silver coming from lead, (perhaps combined with gold found in varying impurities with silver), could prove a possible origin of the idea of transforming lead into gold, a dream of the metallurgical alchemists. Galena appears as a dark grey or blackish shiny mineral, depending on how much silver it contains as an impurity. In Egypt galena was applied around the eyes to both reduce the glare of the desert sun and to repel flies. Lead extraction began around 3500 BCE and was mostly used as a container. The Romans used it extensively for piping, and the English word, 'Plumber', meaning someone who works with water pipes, derives from the Latin word for lead, *plumbum*, as does its chemical symbol, *Pb*.



Tin was first thought of as a kind of lead, the Romans called them both *Plumbum*, although they distinguished the different kinds by calling lead - '*Plumbum Nigrum*' and tin - '*Plumbum Candidum*'. The former means 'black lead', whilst the latter means 'white lead'. The Sumerians also noticed that some of their copper ores when mixed produced a metal both easier to work with and stronger when hardened. Analysis of a Sumerian axe from 2500 BCE contained about 11% tin. However, local tin supplies ran out and later axes from around 2000 BCE contained none. Usefulness of Bronze in tools for farming and weapons meant a search for more commenced, resulting in long distance trading. The near-East got tin from Asia via the silk trade routes. European cultures obtained tin from Iberia, Brittany and Dumnonia. The Minoan civilisation on the island of Crete became rich on the tin trade between these mines and the Mediterranean, partly by maintaining maritime

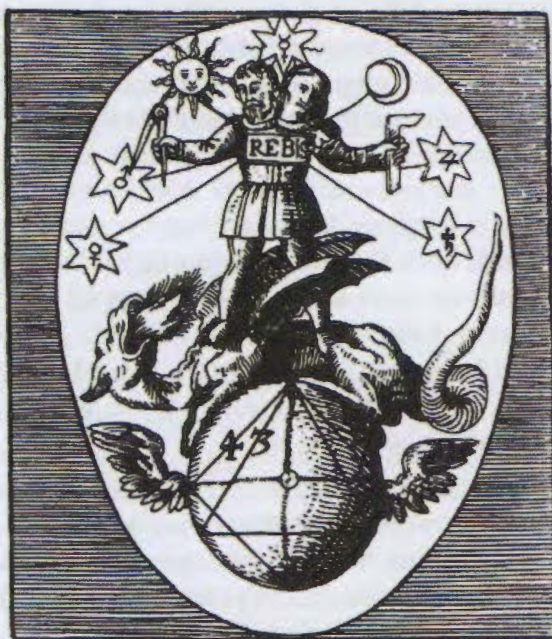
superiority. The later Latin names for tin, *stannum* and *stāgnum* were originally used by the Romans to mean a mixture of lead and silver, and whilst the origin of these words remains unknown, they could derive from the Brythonic word for tin, *Stean*. Its modern chemical symbol, *Sn*, derives from the Latin name, *stannum*. The Minoan civilisation traded many things, but its decline in power and influence came with the end of the Bronze age and the rise of the next metal discovered, Iron.

Iron was discovered in very small quantities by the ancients in meteorites, and we can identify artefacts made from this kind of iron because it contains traces of nickel. The ancients also used haematite, an iron oxide ore, as decoration. Extraction of actual iron from the ore however proved difficult, as it required heat in excess of 1100°C to make iron that could be used. Production did not begin to a significant degree until around 1200 BCE. As a result of its difficulty in production it originally proved more expensive than gold and was used in ornaments and jewellery as a sign of wealth. Later however, iron weapons and tools revolutionised both warfare and farming. Haematite varies in colour from black, through grey and brown to red. The chemical symbol for iron, *Fe*, derives from its Latin name, *ferrum*, whose origin currently remains unknown.

Mercury, or quicksilver, was in use in many ancient cultures and has played a central role in alchemical traditions. The Indian word for alchemy, *Rasavātam*, even means '*the way of quicksilver*'. The first Emperor of the united kingdoms of China, Qin Shi Huang, died aged 49 in the year 210 BCE from eating mercury that his alchemists told him would bring immortality. He was apparently buried in a large tomb with a golden relief map of China, with the rivers made from flowing mercury and the constellations in the ceiling made from embedded diamonds. Mercury has also been found in Egyptian tombs dating back as far as 1500 BCE. The Egyptians

highly prized the metal and may even have worshipped it. Mercury was mostly found and extracted from cinnabar, its sulphide salt, although it was also found in ores such as: calomel, livingstonite and corderoite. It was fairly easily extracted via distillation. Its main use was in the extraction of gold and silver through the process of amalgamation. The term quicksilver derives from the Latinised Greek term for the metal *hydrargyrum*, which means 'water silver'. 'Quick' in English can also mean runny or liquid. The chemical symbol for mercury, *Hg*, also derives from this name.

In the work of the 15th Century alchemical writer Basilius Valentinus, 'Azoth', we repeatedly see Mercury in the centre with the Sun and Moon either side. The Sun we see attended by Mars and Venus, whilst Saturn and Jupiter attend the Moon. In one drawing, the glyph of Mercury, inside a six-rayed star, sits atop the two heads of the androgynous *Rebis*. Either side of the heads we see the Sun and the Moon, each attended by their two respective planets, also in six-rayed stars. The Androgynous *Rebis* stands upon a fire-breathing dragon, which itself rests upon a winged disk within which we see a triangle, a square and equal-armed cross. In the centre we also see the symbol of the Sun, a circle with a central point. The whole representation sits inside a cosmic egg.



We can observe that a circle forms the symbol of the Sun, and appears again in the glyphs for its attendant planets Mars and Venus. We may also observe that a crescent symbolises the Moon, and appears again in the glyphs for Jupiter and Saturn. Only the glyph of Mercury combines the circle and crescent.

Further in colour iron, the metal of Mars, oxidises red and copper has an orangey-brown appearance, making them closer to gold, the metal of the Sun, whilst tin and lead both appear grey and oxidise to stable blue-black and black forms, closer to silver the colour of the Moon.

Don Pernety explains this ordering of the planets in his works '*Dictionnaire mytho-hermétique*', and '*Les Fables égyptiennes*' in relation to the three phases of the Great Work: the Black, the White and the Red. Mercury represents the start of the work, the substance worked on, the alchemist themselves. Saturn, the metal lead, represents the start of the *Nigredo*, the Black stage. Jupiter, the metal tin, represents the grey stage at the end of the *Nigredo*. This gives way to the *Albedo*, the white work, symbolised by the Moon and the metal silver. Venus, the metal copper, represents a citrine phase where the white slowly begins to redden until it reaches the Mars stage, the metal iron, known by the colour rust, or orangey-red. The Sun and the metal gold represent the completion of the Red phase, the *Rubedo* and the completion of the work.

This arrangement of the seven with three solar, three lunar and one hermaphroditic planet puts me in mind of the seven chief *Orisha* from *Obeah Yoruba* tradition and its numerous diaspora. In these traditions, the supreme being emanates through a trifacta of 'aspects': *Oludumara*, *Olofi* and *Ayé*. In turn, they manifest through the forces of nature, the personifications of which they call, the *Orisha*. Whilst these

apparently number 17,000, they consider seven of them as chief. In some of the new world diaspora traditions these seven have been called the Seven African Powers.

These seven include three male Orisha, namely *Papa Legba* - aka Eleggua or Elegua, *Chango* - aka Shango, and *Ogoun* - aka Ogum. They also include three female Orisha, namely *Yamaya* - aka Yemalia or Yemalla, *Oshun* - aka Ochum and *Oya*. The remaining Orisha, namely, *Obatala* or Obatalia, they consider both Mother and Father, both old and young, and corresponds to the primordial serpent *Damballa*, the world serpent, as well as a benevolent sky god.

In the Mithraic mysteries of ancient Persia, which became popular in the Roman Empire during its latter days, each planet was associated with a metal, although these metallic correspondences differ from those of the Hermetic tradition.

The Mithraic planetary order, described by Celsus in the 2nd Century, gives the order of the planets on the ladder as Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, and finally the Moon and the Sun. In the account, only Saturn, the Moon and the Sun get the same metallic associations found in Hermeticism, of Lead, Silver and Gold respectively. Tin and Copper, find themselves swapping places as the metals of Venus and Jupiter and he also describes Iron as the metal of Mercury instead of Mars and to Mars simply 'a mixture of metals'. This gives the metallic ordering of Lead, Tin, Copper, Iron, Mixture, Silver then Gold.

That Mars is given a 'mixture of metals' suggests these correspondences pre-date the iron age, when soldiers mostly used weapons made of bronze alloys. Also, the absence of quicksilver suggests it was not in common production when this scheme originated, or was not considered a metal. It may even have simply been considered a liquid form of silver like its Greek name suggests.



Stairway to Heaven

The order found on the '*Mithraeum of Felicissimus*', (in Ostia, Italy) shows a different order however, so either the order varied between different groups, or Celsus was not as familiar with Mithraism as his account required.

Payam Nabarz describes these seven grades in '*The Mysteries of Mithras*' as follows:

- Corax (Raven) – Mercury*
- Nymphus (Male Bride) – Venus*
- Miles (Soldier) – Mars*
- Leo (Lion) – Jupiter*
- Perses (Persian) – Moon*
- Heliodromus (Sun Runner) – Sun*
- Pater (Father) - Saturn*

Nabarz goes on to describe how this initiatory order found its way into the Persian Sufi tradition during the rise of Islam.

The planets in Mithraism represented impurities, and as one ascends up the ladder the initiate casts off these impurities, until they reach the Milky Way, the origin of the soul, reversing the descent of the soul at birth.



Jacob's ladder

The earliest forms of the Sephiroth, or spheres, in the Kabbalah of Jewish mysticism, were depicted as ten concentric circles with the light of God emanating from the circumference down into the centre. Diagrams of the Sephiroth shown this way can be seen in modern images such as one by Z'ev Ben Shimon Halevi (Warren Kenton), but also in older examples, including a diagram found in an anonymous manuscript from Italy dating from around 1400, show the same structure.

The Sephiroth also had links to the planetary spheres found in other mystical traditions. Kether represented the primum mobile, the first moved. Chokmah was the fixed stars, whilst Binah down to Yesod represented Saturn through to Moon in classical Stoic order. Malkuth represented the sublunary elemental region and the Earth at the centre.

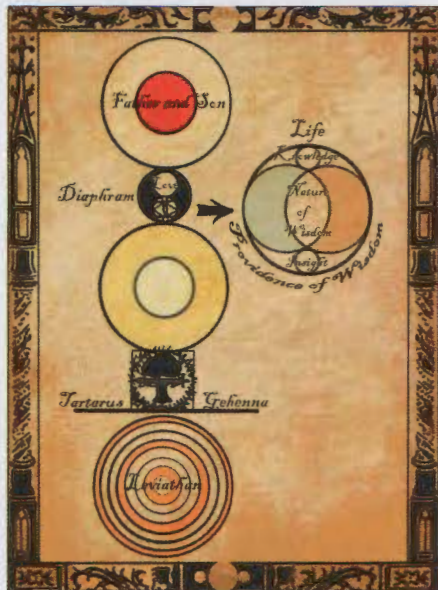
Qabalistic tradition also compares this heavenly stairway to the dream or vision of Jacob of the Heavenly Ladder upon which angels ascend and descend, a story told in the Torah and in the Bible.

The Ophite Gnostics described a similar cosmology, with Behemoth circling the Earth, followed by the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn with Leviathan enclosing the planets and cutting them off from the heavens in which lies the Zodiac. For them it represented a ladder of increasing impurity that corrupted the soul during its descent from heaven down to incarnation on Earth.

Servius mentions a similar tradition in the teaching of the '*Mathematici*', a branch of Pythagoreans that encouraged further scientific study, only with five, not seven spheres, Sun and Moon excluded. As souls descended the spheres, Saturn added sluggishness, Mars added passion, Venus added lust, Mercury added cupidity, the

excessive desire for wealth and Jupiter added the desire to rule. That the Pythagoreans numbered the planets five may relate to their wearing of the pentagram. The Books of the Saviour appended to the Gnostic document, '*Pistis Sophia*' also only mentions five spheres.

These impurities find an echo in Christianity in the form of the seven deadly sins, Greed, Lust, Wrath, Sloth, Gluttony, Envy and Pride.



In the Orphic tradition however, as described by Macrobius, Dionysus in the form of *Nous* (Mind) descends through spheres of the planets which grant consciousness with various abilities. Saturn grants consciousness the ability to reason and theorise, whilst Jupiter grants the ability to put ideas into practise. Mars grants the ability to feel strongly for and against certain ideas, the Sun grants the ability to sense and imagine and Venus adds the ability to desire. Mercury grants the ability to interpret and express feelings and finally the Moon grants the ability to cause growth and movement.

A seven stepped ladder or stairway appears in Masonic imagery, where it symbolises various stages of the work of each degree and different levels of consciousness.

In Hermetic alchemy we see the seven steps again representing the seven stages of the Great Work. In his illustration for '*Cabala*', Michelspacher labelled the steps with names of seven metallurgical processes, calcination, sublimation, solution, putrefaction, distillation, coagulation and tincture.

The Chakras

Another ladder that usually has seven steps from below to above, this time more specifically described as located in the microcosm of the body rather than the stars can be found in the chakra meditations of Tantric yoga and similar traditions. The word '*chakra*' itself derives from the Sanskrit for Wheel or Turning, and whilst the most well known system has seven located along the spine, other systems vary between 5 and 12. For example Vajrayana tradition has 10 whilst the Bön tradition has 6. From around the 11th Century Hindu Tantra has favoured either 6 or 7 chakras.

In some systems we find the location of the chakras where the Nadi channels of Ida and Pingala cross the spine. In others the side channels only cross at certain chakras. In Vajrayana we also find the idea that the channels form knots about certain chakras that the practitioner needs to loosen and untie.

In the Hindu Tantra, the seven main chakra have mandalas that represent them. These take the form of circles with differing numbers of petals on the outside and various symbols on the inside. The exact locations vary depending on tradition, and those given in the descriptions below represent only one variation.

The mandala for the *Muladhara* chakra, located at the plexus of nerves around the coccyx bone and whose name means 'root place', has four red petals and contains the yellow square tattva for the element of Earth. The Kundalini serpent rests here,

sometime depicted as coiled three times about a smokey-grey lingam. The channels of Ida and Pingala also begin here. The *perineum*, the skin located between the anus and the genitals, acts as a point of activation for the chakra.

That of the *Swadhisthana* chakra located a couple finger width above the first, around the location of the tail bone, whose name means "One's own abode", has six orange petals and contains the silver crescent of the tattva for water. This chakra represents the seat of emotion.

The mandala of the third chakra, *Manipura*, located at the solar plexus, has a yellow circle with ten petals and contains the red triangle form of the tattva for the element of fire, although this may point down in contrast the tattva's usual orientation. Its name means 'city of jewels'.

The heart chakra, *Anahata*, whose name means 'unstruck', has three chakras above and three below. As the central chakra of the main seven it represents the place where the below meets the above and where feelings come into contact with thought. Its mandala of a green circle has 12 petals and contains a shatkona, a form of hexagram representing the union of male and female. Symbolically reinforcing the expressed concept of the meeting of above and below.

Vishuddha, the throat chakra, has a mandala formed from a blue circle with 16 petals. Inside a triangle contains another circle representing the element of akasha, the aether. Techniques for opening this chakra include meditation, certain yogic asanas, breath control or pranayama, chanting, singing and playing musical instruments.

The mandala for the *Ajna* chakra, whose name means 'summoning' or 'command', has a white circle with two petals. These represent the channels of Ida and Pingala which end in the chakra. The circle also contains a triangle, which in some systems contains a *lingum*, within which resides the hermaphrodite Ardhanarishvara, the union of Shiva and Shakti. An alternative name for the chakra of 'the third eye' enjoys common usage, and its location usually lies between and a little above the eyes.

Sahasrara, the chakra of the crown, sometimes equated to the soft spot of a babies head, the last part of the skull to grow, has a multi petalled flower of all hues of the rainbow. The number of petals usually described of one thousand tends towards smaller numbers in actual artistic representation. Activating this chakra means contact with the divine, detachment from illusion and an awareness of the oneness of everything. The latter perhaps relating to the concept of *hen to pan*, the one the all in Hermetic alchemy.

In *Qigong* centres known as *Dantians* play a similar role to the Tantric chakras. Loosely translated, Dantian means either '*elixir field*' or '*sea of qi*'. The martial art of Tai Chi and schools of Taoism and Buddhism place great importance on the lower Dantian, located three or four fingers below the navel, and sometimes compared to the *Manipura* chakra, as a focal point for breathing and balance. It also serves as an aid to the harmonisation of thoughts and emotions.

However, a central Dantian in the heart like the Anahata, and an upper Dantian located at the third eye like the Ajna, also play a role in *Qigong*. Akin to the chakras in Tantra, they form centres of meditation that facilitate and transmute 'subtle energies', or what we might label as 'states of consciousness'. Through this practise, one learns to focus and harmonise our desires, emotions and thoughts, as opposed to letting their perpetual conflict disrupt our lives and cause suffering.

Traditions similar to chakras also appear in other mystical schools. For example the protestant mystic Johann Georg Gichtel taught that the body contained inner force centres in his book '*Theosophia Practica*' published in 1696.

They also appear in a more superficial way in NLP, neuro-linguistic programming, where practitioners connect different personal goals to different parts of the body.

In Islam, the Sufi tradition teaches a system of points on the body known as *Lata'if*, meditation upon which brings the Sufi closer to Allah.

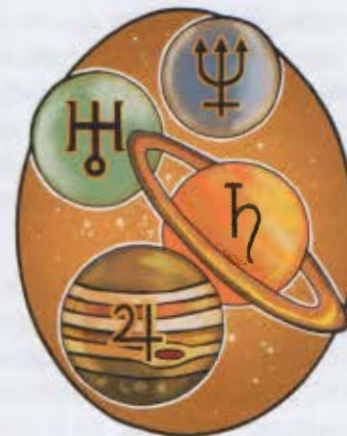
The Eastern Orthodox form of Christianity also formed a meditative tradition known as, *Hesychasm*. The tradition uses different areas of the body to concentrate on during prayer, in order to attain awareness of the uncreated energies of God.

The inner ladder to illumination then appears to serve a similar function to the heavenly ladder of the planets. The microcosm in the body an echo of the macrocosm in the heavens. Ascending the heavenly ladder and raising our awareness through the realms of the chakras can therefore be seen as equivalent mystical traditions, the common goal of which appears as the attainment of some kind of divine awareness or illumination.

The Outer Planets

As I write astronomers recognise two extra planets, and five extra dwarf planets as fitting their definition, in addition to five of the seven classical planets known to the ancients. The two outer planets, named Uranus and Neptune, astronomers classify as belonging to the type 'Gas Giants', which classification also includes the classical planets of Jupiter and Saturn. The dwarf planets have been named *Ceres*, *Pluto*, *Haumea*, *Makemake* and *Eris*. The other four planets, including our own Earth, astronomers classify as 'rocky terrestrials'.

The first recorded sighting of Uranus dates from 1690, when astronomer John Flamsteed recorded seeing what he thought was a star in the position we can now calculate as the position of Uranus at that time. Its first identification as a planet dates from the observations of the later astronomer, William Herschel, who on first noticing its orbit mistook it for a comet in 1781. By 1783, after Anders Johann Lexell calculated its orbit, it was identified as a planet. Various astronomers proposed various names, and eventually the world settled on the name Uranus, first proposed by Johann Elert Bode, who reasoned that as Saturn was the father of Jupiter, so Uranus was the father of Saturn. Unlike the other planets whose names come from Roman mythology, the name Uranus comes from the Latin spelling of the Greek god, *Ouranus*, whose name means 'sky' or 'heavens'. The equivalent Roman god has the name, *Caelus*, which derives from the Latin word for sky, *caelum*. In Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages the name was translated as 'Sky King Star'.



**Widdershins from bottom left:
Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and
Uranus**

The first discovered dwarf planet, which orbits inside the asteroid belt found between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, was discovered in 1801 by Guiseppe Piazzi and. It was named Ceres, after the Roman goddess of crops, agriculture, fertility and motherhood. It remains the largest object in the asteroid belt, but the smallest of the five dwarf planets, the others of which orbit in the Kuiper belt beyond Neptune.

Neptune was observed by Galileo in 1612 and 1613, but he mistook it for a fixed star, although evidence suggests the he was aware that it moved slightly in relation to the other fixed stars. Its recognition as a planet derives from independent calculations made by mathematician, Urbain Le Verrier, to account for discrepancies noticed between the predicted orbit of Uranus and its actual movement. Johann Gottfried Galle found Neptune close to where Le Verrier predicted he should find it, in the year 1846. Le Verrier initially proposed the name Neptune before changing his mind, but his first choice became the accepted name after it was backed by Friedrich Georg Wilhelm von Struve. In Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages the name was translated as 'Sea King Star'.

The name of the second discovered, and second largest of the five dwarf planets, Pluto, was first proposed by an 11 year old school girl, Venetia Burney. In addition to preserving the Greco-Roman naming convention, the name honoured the initials of astronomer Percival Lowell, who discovered the planet in 1930. I find it interesting that Pluto was named by a young girl when in mythology Pluto chose Proserpina as his bride, whose Greek equivalent Persephone was also known by the appellation Kore, which means girl. In Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages the name was translated as 'Underworld King Star'.

Haumea, was discovered in 2004 by a team of astronomers headed by Michael Brown has been named after the Hawaiian goddess of childbirth. Brown's team also discovered Makemake in 2005, named after the Easter Island Rapa Nui god of fertility, and Eris in 2006 after the Greek goddess of strife and discord, who Brown claimed was his favourite Greek goddess. Eris currently reigns as the largest dwarf planet, although astronomers suspect that around 200 such planets might orbit in the Kuiper belt and around another 2000 orbit our sun beyond that. Many currently under observation await classification.

Viewing all these trans-Saturnian objects requires the aid of telescopes, as they remain invisible to the naked eye. In the Ophite gnostic system, Leviathan, the Ouroboros that coils the solar system beyond Saturn was said to make the heavens beyond inaccessible to our senses. I find this slightly strange since they placed the Zodiac as lying beyond Leviathan, and yet these stars can clearly be seen with the naked eye. Of course the first planet beyond Saturn, now bears the name of the god of the heavens, Uranus. So in a poetic sense the Ophite cosmology has confirmation.

Astrologers were quick to adopt the newly discovered planets into their charts and horoscopes. The practical alchemy of mixing metals had mostly given way to modern chemistry, which has little use for planetary symbolism. The practise of spiritual alchemy largely continued to work mostly with the seven classical planets. perhaps out of some sense of tradition, but also showing some signs of losing touch with its origins where it mostly based its theories and symbols on observations of reality and the cosmos.

Some Qabalists reassigned the higher two Sephiroth of Chokmah and Kether to Uranus and Neptune respectively, instead of the fixed stars and primum mobile as they had been assigned previously and Pluto became associated with the Sephiroth of Da'ath to some Qabalists that used it.

In '*Liber Kaos*' Carroll built upon the earlier pairs of planetary opposites based on the Stoic ordering in his *Eight Colours* chapter. Seven of these colours were based on those of the classical planets and six were arranged opposite their traditional counterpart from that ordering. Carroll added an eighth colour, *Octarine*, named after the concept of a magic colour visible only to magicians, taken from the '*Discworld*' fantasy fiction of Terry Pratchett. This colour Carroll attributed to the planet Uranus. This became the opposite of the Solar colour of Yellow which he used to represent the Ego whilst Uranus represented Magic itself, which Carroll sees as opposite to that.

In '*Kaos Hieroglyphica*' I amended Carroll's scheme to place Neptune, as ruler of the hidden inner self, in the depths of the subconscious sea as the opposite of the outer self represented by the Sun. Uranus, as god of the Heavens I placed in a new polarity with Pluto, the god of the underworld, which I identified with Chaos itself. I called this system the *Cybermorphic Kaosphere System* to distinguish it from Carroll's eight colours scheme, that many of the Chaos Magicians I was working with called the 'Chaosphere'.

The word chaosphere was originally used for the concept of cubing the sphere, similar to the alchemical concept of squaring the circle, in which the three dimensional form of a sphere had eight arrows emanate from the eight corners of a cube contained in the sphere. Whilst this three dimensional form was said to represent the axis of four dimensions, it was based on the earlier symbol for chaos that originated in the fiction of Michael Moorcock, where the eight arrows represented all possible choices, as opposed to his symbol for law, a single arrow representing the one right choice.

Crowley also used a single arrow to represent the 'True Will', the following of which formed the Law of Thelema. As Crowley puts it in his introduction to the Book of the Law, "All events are equally lawful and everyone necessary, in the long run, for all of us, in theory; but in practice only one act is lawful for each of us at any given moment."





The World Dragon Tree

We find the image of the tree as a symbol for the cosmos in traditions throughout the world. I do not find this surprising given their importance as a resource for food, shelter, wood, medicines and entheogens since prehistory. With their roots drilling deep into the earth and branches reaching far into the sky above, they also make good symbols for the connection between the above and the below.

We mentioned how the name of the serpent god Ningizzida meant 'Lord of the Good Tree' and that his consort was Geshtinana, and how she agreed to take the place of her brother Damuzi, in the underworld for six months each year. Her name meant 'heavenly grapevine'. The Sumerian word '*geshtin*', which means grapevine, was made by combining the syllable for 'tree', *ĝiš* with the syllable for 'wine', *tin*. *An* or *ana* meant heaven.

A relief from the palace of Ashur-nasir-pal II, at Nimrud, dating to the ninth century BCE, shows the king attended by a winged man described as a protective spirit, beside a grapevine, partaking in a ritual known as 'cone smearing'. The 'cone', possibly grapes from the vine, were used to consecrate the King and his weapons. The relief depicts a winged solar disk directly above the tree. Another relief shows another winged protective spirit with the head of an eagle, also standing beside the grapevine.

We also see this connection of birds and serpents to the symbolism of the tree in the myth of the *Huluppu* tree. In this story Inanna, the queen of heaven, wants to cut down a willow tree and use it to make herself a throne and a bed. However, before the tree was ready, an untameable serpent made its home in the trees roots, and the *Anzu* bird made its home in the branches. A third spirit named, *ki-sikil-lil-la-ke*, made its home in the trunk, *ki-sikil* meaning 'sacred place', *lil* meaning 'a spirit' and *la-ke* 'water', suggesting the water spirit of a sacred place.

Inanna needed the help of the warrior, Gilgamesh, who struck the serpent, which caused Zu and *ki-sikil-lil-la-ke* to leave with their young. Inanna makes her bed and throne from the trunk, and gives the roots and branches to Gilgamesh.

Examples depicting a Chinese tree of life have also been found. Three bronze trees found in a sacrificial pit in Sichuan dating from 1200BCE, one 4 metres high, with a dragon in its roots, fruit in its branches and a phoenix sitting at its top. Another find in Sichuan, (dating from the late Han dynasty), shows a horned winged beast guarding the base; coins and people in the branches; a bird with coins and the Sun at the apex. In Taoism the dragon represents immortality and drawings of Taoist immortals show them riding dragons.

In the Slavic myths the serpent underworld god *Veles* challenges the ruling thunder god *Perun* by climbing the world tree towards his heavenly domain. Sometimes he would steal Perun's wife, children or cattle. Perun would then chase Veles back to the underworld with lightning. Like Anzu and the Cherub, Perun had the eagle as an attribute. The Slavs also associated Perun with high places like hill and mountain tops, whilst Veles worship took place in valleys. Like Ningizzida, scholars suspect Veles was pictured at least partially as a horned serpent. He also presided over trade, trickery and magic, like Mercury and Hermes, in addition to cattle, music, wealth and dragons. Hermes of course, also stole the cattle of Apollo, although this dispute was resolved more amicably.

The name Veles probably derives from the Indo-European root word **wel-*, meaning wool. An alternative derivation of the word Sufi has it deriving from the root *suf*, which also means wool. In the case of Veles this may relate to the gods role as patron of horned cattle.

The name of *Vala*, a cave in the Vedic myths in which some stolen cows and *Ushas*, (goddess of the dawn), were hidden by *Panis*, miserly demons, also derives from the root **wel-*, although in this case the word came to mean enclosure, or veil. The storm god, *Indra*, had to split the cave to free the cows and goddess, and this act compares to his slaying of the stone serpent, *Vritra*, brother of Vala, known as the blocker of rivers.

Yggdrasil

In the Norse myths, the world tree has the name *Yggdrasil*, and the midgard serpent coils about the base while the *Aesir* gods live near the top. At the very top resides an unnamed eagle, with a hawk, *Veðrfölnir*, (whose name means 'storm-witherer'), perched between its eyes. The roots reach down into the underworld beneath. As noted, *Thor*, one of the Aesir, and a thunder god battles this serpent with his hammer.

In addition to the serpent, Thor also battled a race of giants, the *jötunar*, who became known as trolls in Norway. To this day they say lightning frightens them away. The word *trolla* in Swedish means 'to conjure', perform magic or perform illusions and tricks that look like magic. Though rarely used, the word *trollkona* means both female troll, and a female magician, whilst the word *trollkarl* means magician. In English the word troll also means to saunter about, to walk in circles, to sing aimlessly or in a loop, to fish or otherwise hunt using bait or lure. We find an extrapolation of the these meanings in its use both to wonder around in such a way intended to attract a sexual partner, and to bait members of an internet community in order to start an argument or get a discussion going on a particular subject.

The Middle High German word *trolle*, refers to supernatural monsters or Ogres. The word Ogre derives from an old name of Odin, *Yggr*, meaning 'the terrible one'. The word Yggdrasil, the name of the world tree means 'Yggr's Horse'.

Odin hung himself on the world tree for nine days in order to receive the secrets of the runes, and a gallows was known as the 'horse of the hanged'. He also had an eight-legged horse, *Sleipnir*, which he used to journey between the heavens, the underworld and middle-earth, essentially the same places the tree reached and given the transformative and dreamlike nature of myth, the tree and the horse may represent two aspects of the same.

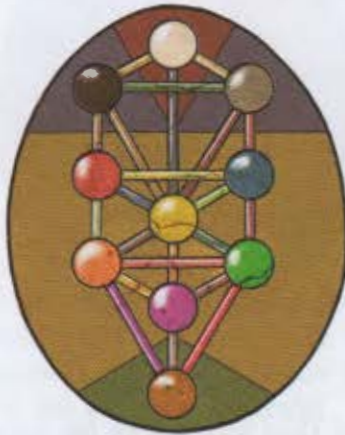
A mount with eight legs also implies a spider, which implies a connection to the 'Web of Wyrð', the fabric of life, fate and destiny woven by the norns. Spiders make their webs in the branches of trees, and as Orryelle Defenestrade-Bascule writes in '*Emít fo Yrotsreh feirb A*', the shape of every rune appears in every spiders web. The branches of the trees, when we look up through them, also form a confusing web like pattern and again the forms of the runes appear in this lattice.



Siberian shamans ascended the world tree with the aid of various mounts, often initially on horseback, then when the horse tires transferring to a goose. In Hindu myths the gods and goddesses each have a *Vāhana*, usually in the form of an animal or mythical beast mount. Ganesha for example rides upon a mouse or rat, said in one myth to be the demi god *Kroncha*, who was cursed to become a rodent for stepping on another gods toes. Voodoun initiates themselves take on the role of the mount or 'horse' for the loa, the 'divine horsemen'.

Whilst at first glance it may appear that in Norse mythology the trolls represented the chthonic earth counterparts to the gods, in fact both displayed mixed attributes, perhaps in this case representing how one group of heavenly and earthly deities displaced another, in addition perhaps to some entities changing their roles over time. With his mercurial associations and serpent form we could see Odin as quite Chthonic, perhaps even as equivalent to the serpent on the tree, Jörmungandr, whilst in Germanic folklore he appears as the storm giant, *Wode*. Odins name, which means 'fury', also implies his origins as a storm deity.

Kabbalah



The Sephiroth

We see this serpent and lightning symbolism again in the tree form of the kabbalah. The tree form of the Kabbalah probably originates from a mapping of the sephiroth, (emanations) to points on the *Menorah*. The Menora depicts a stylised tree formed from a central pillar intersecting three cup-like crescents. The exact origins for the system remain unknown at the present time, but the most likely candidates include the 12th - 13th century Rabbi, Isaac the Blind, (Rabbi Yitzhak Saggi Nehor) or his students. The ten Sephiroth, until Isaac, were considered the words of creation. Isaac apparently pioneered the idea of the Sephiroth as vessels with differing characteristics capable of receiving and passing on the light of creation.

The term 'lightning flash' appears in the third edition translation of the *Sefir Yetzirah*, or '*Book of Formation*', an early Kabbalistic text whose date of origin remains uncertain but which seems to date from the first few centuries.

“The Ten ineffable Sephiroth have the appearance of the Lightning flash, their origin is unseen and no end is perceived.”

Earlier versions of the Westcott translation, (from which the above passage was taken), used the words 'scintillating flames' instead of lightning flash. The original Hebrew does however use the word *BRQ*, which does mean lightning. The zigzag path of the sephiroth formed by traversing them in numerological order, which resembles a lightning bolt.

Conversely, the path back up the tree, in reverse numerological order, became known as the serpent path, resembling as it does the serpent coiled about the central column. In Kabbalah therefore, the serpent represents ascent, whereas lightning represents descent. Together they form a circuit. Some depictions of the lightning path on the tree show it as the flaming sword of the angel that guards the garden of Eden.

Whilst traditional Jewish mysticism considered the Sephiroth as ten in number, disagreement existed over the exact naming of these ten, at least from the time of Isaac Luria in the 16th Century, who taught that Kether was not an actual Sephiroth but transcendent, apparently taking sides in an earlier debate of medieval origins over whether Kether was too transcendent to consider a vessel. Instead he listed the hidden Sephirah of *Da'ath*, (Knowledge) as one of the ten. *Da'ath* became considered an inner reflection of Kether, associated with the the cerebellum, the back brain and also to the heart. It connects the conscious intellect with the conscious emotions.

Thunderbirds

The Thunderbird appears in many of the North American mythologies, sometimes a specific entity, sometimes as a type of entity. It pulls clouds together with its wing beats, and creates thunder when its wings crash together. It shoots lightning from its eyes and makes lightning bolts from glowing snakes it carries.

In the stories of the *Nuu-chah-nulth* of North West Canada, the Thunderbird sits on a mountain, whilst the Sioux tell that in the old times it fought dragon-like monsters known as *Unhcegila*. In their sundance ceremonies, the *Anishinaabe* place a Thunderbird nest near the top of the tree of life.

The *Kwakwaka'wakw*, *Nuu-chah-nulth* and *Squamish* tell of a three-headed serpent creature they call *Sisiutl*, so powerful only the thunderbirds can hunt it. To see it or even cross its slime trail can bring illness or death. In masks the central head takes an anthropomorphic shape and all three heads have horns of power, like the thunderbirds themselves. It guards the house of the sky people and can turn into the magical war canoe, *Winalagalis*, that can sail underground. It can take the form of woodworm, salmon and rubber boa and grow so big they can block an entire bay. The rubber boa has a tail that resembles its head. They can use orca whales as a mount for transportation.



Racine Sans Bout

In Haiti, the Vodouisants consecrate certain trees, usually at crossroads, to the various loa, and see them as roads by which the loa manifest. In particular to Legba, they consecrate two trees to create an avenue, a word that has itself come to mean a broad road lined with trees, although it derives from the old French *avenir*, to approach. The crossroads itself represents the intersection of the vertical with the horizontal. The vertical axis leads to both the abyss below and the heavens above the Earth.

Likewise the tree both towers high above, whilst sending its roots deep into the ground. As such the tree acts as a gateway not just for the loa of the heavens, but also for the dead. The most ancient loa they call *loa racine*, or root loa, and songs tell of the *racine sans bout*, or roots without end. Whilst Legba clad in white announces the arrival of the loa from above, *Ghede*, lord of the dead, clad in black announces the arrival of the loa from below.



Like the world trees of the Asia and Europe, the roots connect with the underworld and the realm of the dead, just as the branches connect to the heavens. In the mythologies of Mesoamerica we find a similar world tree which again serves as an axis mundi, or world axis, connecting the sky and underworld to the terrestrial realm. It has been interpreted as the band of the Milky Way. Depictions show birds in the branches whilst the roots extend into either the earth or water. Sometimes the tree sits atop a water monster that symbolises the underworld. The type of tree was conceived as a *ceiba* tree and sometime depicted as an upright caiman because the the reptiles underbelly resembled its bark.

The connection between the World Tree and the dead finds expression in Siberian shamanism. During their initiation the shaman is said to be dismembered upon the tree, then reborn and reconstructed. As many bones as remain after this process represent the number of spirits the shaman gains. These represent the shamans relatives, who must then die. The spinal column however has a special significance for this represents the world tree itself. An eagle again sits atop of the tree and shaman are hatched from eggs, as related by Huxley:

Throughout Siberia it is held that shamans are hatched in nests lodged on the branches of this tree – a great shaman takes three years to come out of the shell, a mere conjurer only one. The eagle, bird of the sun, perches at the summit. To interiorize the light of this sun, the shaman must climb the tree, branch by branch, heaven by heaven, bone by bone.

The journey through death appears in the mythology of many religions, especially via dismemberments. Dionysus undergoes dismemberment at the hands of the titans before resurrection. Set slays and dismembers Osiris before Isis puts him back together. We also see the theme appearing the initiatory rituals of Tibetan Buddhism and the practise of *chöd*. In this rite the apprentice goes alone at night to a lonely haunted place, such as a graveyard, the more fearsome its aspect the better, and if a terrible legend or recent tragedy occurred there, so much the better. This lone celebrant blows upon *kangling*, a bone trumpet made from a human femur, beats a rhythm on drum and tinkles a bell whilst performing a ritual dance designed to summon demons that the apprentice must offer themselves to as a meal as an act of sacrifice. This begins with a female deity representing their own will springing from their crown and beheading them with a sword and climaxes as they visualise their own bones sinking into the mud of misery and suffering.

In the Sumerian story of Inanna's descent, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, decides to pay the land of the dead a visit. Perhaps she was curious of this realm outside her domain, or perhaps she thought to conquer it and become queen of all. But upon entering she found herself stripped of all her power until she stands naked before the Queen of the Dead, *Ereshkigal*. She gets turned into a corpse and hung from a hook. Only when Enki sends two asexual figures, *gala-tura* and *kur-jara* for her corpse is she restored to life and saved. Demons of Ereshkigal followed Inanna however and demanded that she wasn't free until someone took her place. When Inanna found her own consort, Dumuzi, not mourning her, she chose him. And as we have seen,

Dumuzi and Ningizzida coil as serpents about the roots of the tree, guardians of the gateway to the underworld.

According to the '*Apostles' Creed*', Jesus also made a visit to the underworld, or Hell, after his crucifixion, where he apparently 'rescued' the captives held there. In particular, he is said to have saved Adam and Eve and the righteous men and women of the Old Testament. In some stories, John the Baptist went to Hell ahead of Jesus to foretell to the dead of his coming and their imminent rescue. In the Protestant alchemy of Jakob Böhme, Christ became the hermaphrodite symbolised by the hexagram, since he, as a second Adam, restored Adam's primal androgyny. This is what allowed him to travel downwards, break down the gates of hell, defeat death and rise up and become known as the 'serpent treader'. The theme of androgyny allowing Christ to return from the underworld echoes the androgynous rescuers of Inanna from the older myth.

The word Hell derives from the Norse name for the underworld *Hel*. The older Christian scriptures used the words *Sheol*, the Hebrew word for grave, pit or abyss, *infernus*, Latin for beneath and *Hades*, the Greek underworld named after its god, whose name might simply mean "the invisible".

Like the vertical column of the Voodoun crossroads, the cross of Christ represents the axis mundi, the world axis, the pathway from the underworld to heaven, and made of wood it symbolically represents the tree. The crossroads represents the meeting place of the quick, those of us living on the horizontal earthly place, with *les Invisibles*, the loa of above and the ancestral spirits of below.

Azoth

The name Azoth may have derived from the Arabic word for mercury, *al-za'uq*, but was used by many early alchemists including, Mary the Jewess and Zosimos of Panopolis.

The Latin, Greek and Hebrew alphabets all begin with the phonetic sound *A*. They differ in their last letters, Latin having *z*, Greek having *o* (omega) and Hebrew having *th* (tav). Together these sounds make the name Azoth, which to the alchemists represents Mercury as both the beginning and end of the great work. This name echoes the appellation of Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, from the book of revelations, and also to the names of Allah in the Qu'ran, *al'Awwal* and *al'Akhir*, the first and the last. A combination of the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *Alef-Tav* appear in the Torah regularly whilst not being an actual word. Their combination represents a 'sign' or the concept of 'word' itself.

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the second century, calls 'the Word', "*the Alpha and the Omega of Whom alone the end becomes beginning, and ends again at the original beginning without any break.*" This suggests an enclosed loop rather like the Ouroboros.

Representing the alchemical process as a tree, the beginning of the work is depicted as the alchemical root powers, whilst the uppermost branches represent the philosophers mercury, the all-healing elixir.

A drawing by Basilius Valentius dated 1659 depicts the mercury of the below as the bottom point of a descending water triangle in the roots of a tree, the other two points of which contain the symbols of salt and sulphur. The mercury of the above however sits outside and directly above an upward pointing fire triangle, on the

highest central branch of the tree. The other branches to the left and right depict the other planets.

To live or not to live

The underworld and its gods therefore represent not just death, but also fertility, regeneration, reincarnation and immortality. In Egypt, Osiris, god of the dead, also had the attribute of lord of vegetation. For this reason Egyptians depicted him as a Pharaoh with green skin, and celebrated yearly with a soil bed in the form of his corpse, with the resulting shoots signifying his resurrection.



In the Greek myths the Queen of the underworld, Persephone, had the attributes of spring, flowers and new growth, and in Sumer, Damuzi the god of farming also guarded the underworld, along with Ningizzida, lord of the good tree.

We should not find this surprising since plant life arises from the ground. Many cultures bury their dead in the earth, and many cemeteries grew trees between the graves. A shallow grave, often a place where a murderer attempts to hide a body without the time or ability to dig a deep grave, often becomes detected due to the excess of plant growth compared to the surrounding soil, as the corpse enriches the fertility of the soil around it.

A 15th century Italian manuscript, *'Miscellanea d'Alchimia'* shows a tree growing from the corpse of a man slain by an arrow to his chest. The tree grows from his groin like a monstrous deformed phallus that might even make Priapus blush.

The Midnight Sun

Not all death and resurrection myths directly relate to vegetation however, but instead relate to the observations of heavenly bodies and constellations descending below and rising from the horizon. The underworld visit of Inanna may relate to the times when the planet Venus disappears from the night sky.

Most visibly the sun sets every evening only to rise again at dawn, giving rise to countless tales of the sun's journey through the underworld.

In Egypt, a mighty Ouroboros-like serpent, *Apep*, known as 'world encircler' waited just below the horizon to devour the sun god, *Ra*, as he set, and also as he tried to rise each morning. The god Set would defend Ra against the serpent with his spear or lance.

In some variants of Mayan mythology the sun actually does get devoured each night, either by a cave, the ocean or a wide mouthed gourd. The Yucatec word for West, *chik'in* means 'eaten sun'. In one account, the sun grows tired each day and turns into a skeleton as it sets until



Set verses Apep

resurrected at dawn. In another the sun climbs down the trunk of a tree and enters the underworld via its roots. This mirrors pre-Columbian imagery which depicts the rising sun climbing out of the underworld via a tree.

In Voodoo Ghede is sometimes thought of as a form of Legba, the sun god, in particular the sun in the underworld. Deren says of this:

"In a sense, Ghede is the Legba who has crossed the cosmic threshold to the underworld, for Ghede is now everything that Legba once was in the promise and the prime of his life..."

Ghede is considered lord of life and death and represents their meeting, the meeting of the quick and the dead. The dance of Ghede was the dance of copulation and he tends to have a phallus on his altar along with the three tools of a grave-digger. Both he and his consort, *Maman Brigitte*, have a reputation for sexual humour and especially like to tease and sexually provoke any present who maintain a prudish attitude.

The Greeks also worshipped Hermes, their psychopomp, in the form of a phallus known as *herma*. The earliest forms of these consisted of piles of stones on the side of roads, often at crossroads. Later they evolved into elaborate carved four-sided columns, topped with the bearded head or bust of Hermes, and with just his phallus showing further down.

The Hindus worship the god Shiva in the form of a phallus or *lingam*. Linga-worship could even predate the worship of Shiva originating in indigenous Indian religion. Like the herma, the linga take the form of stone pillars, some adorned with the faces of Shiva. Paired with linga we often find a *yoni*, a symbol of the vagina and womb.

The journey of the sun through the underworld can also be seen as time in the womb, and thus its rising again in the morning as a birth. Indeed the Egyptians saw the umbilical cord as a manifestation of Apep, which must be cut during birth, just as Apep was cut by Set at dawn. In tombs they left symbolic versions of the knife used to cut the umbilical cord with the dead so they could be reborn in the afterlife.

We see this connection between the sun, death and initiation in the Siberian shaman who we mentioned earlier die on the tree and must be reborn from an egg. Whilst an egg they must absorb the power of the sun.

The black sun also appears in alchemical symbolism. Dionysus Freher depicts a sun with a bright interior and dark exterior based on the writings of Jakob Böhme and a black sun also features in the 16th Century work, the '*Splendor Solis*'. In Arabic alchemy, according to Alexander Roob, the blackness of the sun refers to the impurities of common gold, which the alchemist needed to wash away.

A 1624 woodcut from the '*Viridarium chymicum*' of D. Stolcius von Stolcenberg depicts a skeleton standing upon a black sun, holding aloft a raven in its right hand. Two angels flank the figure, one descending from another sun, (non-black), the other from the moon. The word '*Putrefactio*' appears in the centre of the image.

The nigredo, or black work, forms the first stage of the alchemical process. It involves the finding of the alchemical Philosopher's Stone deep in the bowels of the Earth, as revealed in the phrase hidden by the alchemical acronym *VITRIOL*, or in full *VITRIOLUM*. This stands for '*Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem Veram Medicinam*' which translates as '*visit the interior of the Earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone, the true medicine.*' Paracelsus refers to this

formula when he says, *'He who wants to enter the divine realm, first must enter his mother's body, and die herein.'*

Another black sun symbol from ancient Egypt also found its way into the alchemical tradition, this being the sacred scarab, *Khepri*. Khepri represented the force that moved the Sun through the heavens, and also through the underworld, his pushing of the sun being ceaseless. Despite this, Khepri particularly symbolised the rising sun, in part because of the way scarab beetles emerged from eggs laid in dung or the corpses of animals. The emergence of life from death and decay mirroring the emergence of the sun from night.

Mistakenly believing that scarabs reproduced without a mate, they compared the scarab to their Atum, who also parented children without the aid of a partner. Atum, the god of completion or 'the complete one', returns the world to watery chaos at the end of the creative cycle. He also symbolises the setting sun opposite Khepri in the Egyptian solar cycle. The *'Egyptian Book of the Dead'*, or rather the *'Book of Coming Forth by Day'* describes Atum as dwelling in the watery abyss in the form of a serpent that devours its own tail, the Ouroborus. With the destruction of the world, Atum declares he will resume the form of this eternal serpent.



Khepri

Khepri, we sometimes see as riding in the solar barque, held aloft by *Nu*, god of the watery abyss. At other times we see him depicted as the rather odd figure of a man with a large black scarab in place of his head.

In his *'Monas Hieroglyphica'*, John Dee describes the scarab as pushing an egg made of the four elements along a spiral path representing the metamorphosis of the planets. In the 'small work' of the Moon, the path takes the scarab past Saturn and then Jupiter, whilst in the great work of the Sun the scarab passes through Mars and Venus. Mercury he tells us, consists of both properties.

The androgynous, hermaphrodite nature of the scarab we see more explicitly in the works of Johannes Macarius, who we noted previously depicted the scarab inside an Ouroborus, after the fashion of the one in the tomb of Thutmose III.

Forbidden Fruits

"I have soared as the primeval one soars:

I have become Khepri,

I have grown as plants grow,

I have clothed myself as a turtle,

I am the fruit of every god"

Book of Coming Forth by Day

Trees bear fruit, and so unsurprisingly, where trees feature in mythology we also find various fruits. Given the desirability of fruit, we often find them forbidden or tempting spirits, heroes or even gods and goddesses to stray from their intended course, break taboos or incite them to steal.

In '*Journey to the West*', Wu Cheng'en, tells the story of the Monkey King, *Sun Wukong*, whose name means something like Little Child Aware of Vacuity, and how he stole the heavenly peaches of immortality from the Heavenly Queen Mother of the West, *Xi Wangmu*, along with *Lao Tzu's* pills of immortality and thus won eternal life. Writing in the 16th Century, it appears that Wu wrote what became the definitive version of older oral folk tales.



The Apple of Discord

In Greek myth, the Queen of Heaven, *Hera* kept an orchard in the far West, known as the garden of the Hesperides. The trees of this orchard grew golden apples. These were guarded by a dragon with a hundred heads named *Ladon*, whom Heracles had to slay in order to steal three of the fruits.

The apples appear a couple more times in Greek myth, with Aphrodite giving three of them to *Hippomenes* in order to allow him to win a race against *Atalanta*, and again when Eris engraved one with *Kallisti*, 'For the Fairest' and thus caused the goddesses to fight over it at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. This latter golden apple was later given to Paris who was to judge which of the goddesses should receive it, Hera who bribed him with the promise of becoming a famous and powerful king, Athena who bribed him with the promise of becoming wiser even than some of the gods and

Aphrodite who promised him the most beautiful woman in the world as his bride. Paris chose Aphrodite who made good her promise, which led to the Trojan war.

Golden apples appear also in Norse myth as an attribute of *Iðunn*, the goddess of youth. Like the peaches stolen by the monkey king her apples grant immortality. When she was kidnapped by the giant *Thiazi* in the form of a giant eagle after being tricked by Loki, the gods begin to age. After realising Loki was to blame they threaten him into agreeing to bring her back. Loki agrees if Freya lends him her falcon-form. The story culminates in a chase where Iðunn in the form of a nut, held by Loki in the form of a falcon flees from Thiazi in the form of a giant Eagle that brings with it the storm.

In Greek mythology, the goddess of spring, seeds and vegetation, *Persephone* gets abducted by *Hades*, lord of the underworld. Whilst in the realm of the dead she could not eat anything lest she remain there forever. During her absence the vegetation dries up and the people experience drought and famine. Finally the gods act to bring her back. However, before they succeed, Hades tricks Persephone into eating seeds from the pomegranate fruit and for each seed eaten she must spend a month each year in the underworld. In Greece these were the dry barren summer months.

The Roman equivalent to Persephone was *Proserpina*, whose name means '*to emerge*'. For the Romans, Proserpina spent winter in the underworld, emerging in spring when the crops blossom, and flourishing in the summer. In the autumn, Proserpina's mother, Ceres changes the leaves brown and orange, her favourite colours, as a gift before she returns to rule the underworld once more.

A Sumerian myth tells of how Enki, a god of wisdom associated with *Ab*, (water and semen), became ill after consuming eight plants. His wife *Ninhursag*, lady of the

mountain, bore him a daughter, *Ninsar*, lady greenery. Enki seduced Ninsar who then gave birth to *Ninkurra*, lady of pastures or fruitfulness. In turn Ninkurra gets seduced by Enki and gives birth to another daughter, *Uttu*, weaver or spider, the weaver of the web of life.

Uttu, however, is not happy about her union with Enki and consults Ninhursag, who happens to look with disfavour upon her husbands infidelity. Ninhursag removes Enki's seed from Uttu's womb and advises her to plant them in the earth, where they grow into the first eight plants.

Despite warnings, Enki consumes these plants, or their fruits, and falls ill. Effectively he becomes pregnant, but lacking a womb this manifests as swellings in different parts of his body. None of the gods know what to do. Only after Ninhursag comes before them, brought by her messenger, the fox, and agrees to remove the seed and bear them herself does Enki recover. She then bears eight children, deities of healing for eight parts of the body. *Abu* for the Jaw, *Nintul* for the Hip, *Ninsutu* for the tooth, *Ninkasi* for the mouth, *Azimua* for the side, *Enshagag* for the Limbs and *Ninti* for the ribs. Ninti, lady rib also forms a pun in Sumerian because it also means lady of life, a title of Ninhursag herself, implying that life gives birth to life in an Ouroboros-like eternal cycle.

We find the theme of the tree with a serpent and winged beast in the Biblical creation myth. Yahweh had told Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit from this tree as they would die. However, the serpent persuades Eve that the fruit from the tree of knowledge will not kill her, will open her eyes, and she will *'be like god, knowing good and evil'*. She shares the fruit with Adam, they eat it together and their eyes open and they know good and evil. Yahweh sets a cherubim, as we noted earlier a hybrid guardian spirit similar to the Anzu, to guard the tree of life, so that Adam and Eve should not eat of the tree and gain immortality.

So, the serpent told the truth, whilst Yahweh's prediction that they would die only became true because he decreed that they not eat of the tree of life. The Ophite Gnostics saw this as evidence that the serpent was basically a benign spirit and that Yahweh was malevolent, so they identified Yahweh with the Demiurge, and the serpent as the bringer of wisdom.

The original myth does not mention what kind of tree the forbidden fruit was from, and so over the years many kinds have been proposed. Adam and Eve both hid behind fig leaves when they became aware and ashamed of their nudity, and this lead some, particularly during the renaissance, to depict the fruit as a fig. More popularly the fruit was represented as an apple. This perhaps derives from a Latin pun on the noun *Malum*, which meant both apple, (from the Greek) and evil (the noun form of *Malus*). A similar pun lead some Rabbis to consider wheat the forbidden fruit, given the similarity of the Hebrew for wheat, *khitah*, and sin, *khet*. The kabbalistic text, *the Zohar*, and some old Slavonic texts refer to the forbidden fruit as the grape, possibly referring to the making of wine. Wheat also formed the base ingredient for another common alcoholic beverage of the ancient world, beer.



Eve and the Serpent

Entheogens

The earliest historical mention of beer, an alcoholic beverage made from malted wheat and the malted grains of other cereals, appear in writings on stone tablets from Ancient Iraq that date to 6000BCE. A Sumerian reference appears in a hymn to the goddess Ninkasi, one of the eight healing deities. She was associated with curing illnesses of the mouth and also with making beer. Her hymn contains all the instructions for making a beer made from bread, malted and soaked grains, date-honey and aromatic spices, fermenting it as the waves rise and the waves fall, and finally filtering it into a collecting vessel. The hymn probably served as a means for remembering the recipe for a preliterate people and thus could pre-date its inscription.



Ninkasi

The term *enthoegen* was coined by a group of ethnobotanists and scholars of mythology in 1979 to replace the terms hallucinogen and psychedelic, both of which they saw as problematic. It combines the Greek *entheos*, which literally means 'having a god within' or 'possession by a god' with *genesthai*, 'to come into being' which combine to mean 'that which causes possession'. Since Greeks also used the word *entheos* for the inspiration experienced by poets and artists, as a term of praise it could also mean 'that which causes divine inspiration'.

In the context of intoxicants it usually refers to their use as sacraments when taken in religious or magical context, but perhaps can also refer to when recreational use unintentionally induces spiritual experiences and divine inspiration.

Alcohol in the form of wine, was used as the entheogen of choice in the Dionysian mysteries. The name Dionysus probably comes from a combination of *Dios*, a name of Zeus in his genitive aspect, and with *nūsa*, an archaic Greek word for tree. His other names and titles also include *Bromios*, 'the thunderer', *Dendrites*, 'he of the trees', *Endendros*, 'he in the tree'. *Nysa*, the mountain on which he was born and nursed by nymphs, the Nysiads, also derived its name from *nūsa*, possibly as a result of the interchangeability of a world tree and world mountain as symbols of the axis mundi in Indo-European mythology.

The fig tree featured as an attribute of Dionysus, whilst he resurrected his lover and friend, the beautiful satyr youth, *Ampelos*, as the first grape vine after he was slain by a bull he was riding. Dionysus made the first wine from his friends blood.

Prior to the introduction of wine, the early Aegean civilisation favoured mead, fermented honey and thus the bee featured significantly in their mythology. *Potnia*, the 'Mistress of the labyrinth' at Knossos in Crete had the bee as an emblem and was also referred to as 'the pure mother bee'. Her priestesses held the title *Melissa*



Dionysus

or 'bee', as did the priestesses of Artemis and Demeter. In addition to being named after the serpent Python, the oracle at Delphi was also called 'The Delphic Bee'.

The gift of prophecy came from three bee goddesses known as the *Thriae*. Homer acknowledged that even Apollo himself was given the gift of prophecy from them.

Evidence of mead making vessels found in China date from 7000BCE, whilst the oldest written account of making mead appears in the '*Rigveda*', composed between 1700 and 1100BCE. Mead arrived in Europe with the Bell-Beaker culture between 2400 and 1800BCE.

In Norse myth, the mead of poetry was made by mixing honey with the blood of *Kvasir*. When the Aesir and Vanir gods ended their war they all spat into a vat.

Kvasir was formed from their combined spittle to seal their truce.



He was a being of great wisdom who travelled far and wide spreading his knowledge, but was eventually killed by two dwarves who made the mead with his blood. These dwarves then lost the mead, bargaining it for their lives to the giant *Suttungr*, who gave it to his daughter *Gunnlöd* to guard. Odin eventually stole this after enlisting Suttungr's brother *Baugi* to drill into the side of the mountain and crawling through the hole in the form of a snake. After emptying the containers of mead he flew off in the form of an eagle, chased by Suttungr, also in the form of an eagle. This echoes the chase of Loki and Thiazi.

Odin spat the mead out into containers for the gods, but since the giant was so close behind him he hurried and spilt some, which they say anyone could drink, the *skáldfjfla hlutr* or "rhymester's share". The rest Odin reserved as gifts for the gods and poets.

The sixth century British bard and poet, Taliesin, could have originated the poems written down four centuries later in the Welsh '*Book of Taliesin*', passed down via oral tradition. They contain praise and references to mead as a source of inspiration.

"The intoxication of meads will cause us to speak."

and

*"I love the high trees, that afford a protection above,
And a bard that composes, without earning anger;
I love not him that causes contention;
He that speaks ill of the skilful shall not possess mead."*

In Haitian voodoo, strong alcohol can serve as a test of divine possession, rather than the means to attaining it. The sacred drink of Ghede, the loa of the dead, takes the form of a rum so spiced as to be undrinkable, except by those possessed by him. A serviteur possessed by Ghede may even have this spiced rum sprayed into their eyes, the possession judged insincere or faked if they blink.

In the Tantric rite of *Panchamakara*, participants indulge in five observances normally forbidden to them. Usually the rite requires a minimum of four couples, four men and four women. The name of the ritual literally translates as the Five

Observances, and often gets referred to as the 5 M's, since *makara* means observance and each of the five observances also begin with the letter M. These vary from group-to-group, but usually included an alcoholic beverage.

Madya, or wine refers to any alcoholic beverage. In medieval India, palm wine or coconut liqueur would have been the most likely drinks available. Right-Hand path tantra groups, or *dakshinacara*, substitute coconut juice.

Mamsa means beef, a normally forbidden meat in Hindu culture. The Right-Hand groups use cheese in its place.

Matsya means fish. Again the Right-Hand groups use a substitute, usually ginger.

Mudra usually means a cereal wafer, generally thought to be made from rice with aphrodisiacs and Cannabis, although it can also refer to the women taking part in the ritual or to their yonis. Right-Hand groups use only rice.

The fifth M refers to *Maithuna*, ritual sexual union, consecrated so the couple become for a time divine: Shiva and Shakti. The Dakshinacara groups substitute honey.

Cannabis or Hemp use dates to at least as far back as the Neolithic period of European history. Whilst the primary use of hemp comes from its strong fibres, used in the making of textiles, cords, ropes and sacks, evidence also exists of its early use as an intoxicant. Polypod bowls, decorated with imaginative patterns using hemp rope when the clay was still wet, date to the third millenium and spread from Pontic Steppes westwards into the rest of Europe. These were probably used as braziers for burning cannabis as an intoxicant. Charred hemp seeds in a pipe cup, found in a pit grave in Romania date from the later third millennium provide the earliest evidence of burning cannabis in Europe.



Ganga and Makara

The plant originated in South and central Asia. The oldest recorded use appears in Taiwan from around 8000BCE where it was used for its fibre.

Ancient Hindus in India and Nepal consumed the plant, where it was named *ganjika* in Sanskrit, or *ganja* in modern Indic languages. *Ganjika* means 'belonging to the Ganges river', the river worshipped in the form of the Hindu goddess *Ganga*, who rides upon the sea dragon *Makara*, depicted as a fish with the head of an elephant, or sometimes crocodile, stag or deer, bringing to mind the forms Behemoth and Leviathan. Other variations depict Makara with the tail of a seal or peacock.

In Hindu myth, Shiva created cannabis from his own body in order to purify the elixir of life, amrita, or in another story it grew up from the ground when a drop of amrita fell to the ground. The '*Atharva Veda*', written

somewhere between 2000-1400 BCE mentions cannabis as one of the 'five sacred plants'. Shiva likes cannabis, and devotees often make offerings of *bhang*, a beverage made with the tops and leaves of the plant along with milk, ghee and spices. During the spring 'festival of colours', *Holi*, participants consume a special bhang made with cannabis flowers. Drinking bhang can help cleanse sins and bring union with Shiva.

Worship of Kali predates that of her consort Shiva, himself the longest continuously worshipped god on Earth. Her worship also involves the use of cannabis. This includes ingestion of cannabis and ritual sex to raise the Kundalini serpent.

A basket buried next to a mummified wu shaman in the Xinjiang province in China sometime between 800BCE and 500BCE, contained both seeds and leaves of the plant. Various Chinese texts prescribe cannabis for communication with demons and spirits and causing lightness of body. The eldest of these, '*Shennong Bencao Jing*', reads, "*To take much makes people see demons and throw themselves about like maniacs. But if one takes it over a long period of time one can communicate with the spirits, and one's body becomes light*" Taoist texts from the fourth century mention the use of cannabis as incense used to call down the immortals, and also consuming it with ginseng for gaining miraculous knowledge of the future.

The Scythian and Thracian shaman known as *kapnobatai*, or 'those who walk on clouds', burned cannabis flowers to aid them entering into trance.

Depictions of the Egyptian goddess of wisdom, writing and knowledge, *Seshat*, the consort of Thoth, show her with a curious crown which somewhat resembles a cannabis leaf. Scholars do not know what it represents, but cannabis was used medicinally in ancient Egypt as early as 1700BCE according to the '*Ramesseum III Papyrus*'. It appears in the oldest known complete medical text, known as '*Eber's Papyrus*' which dates from 1550BCE, but scholars suspect it a copy of an earlier work that dates as far back as 3400BCE.

Seshat also became patron of architecture, surveying and building, as well as mathematics, astrology and astronomy. Hemp cords were used for measurement. A spell found in coffin texts reads "*Seshat will open the door of heaven for you*", hinting that Seshat, like Ningizzida and Hermes may also have played the role of 'guardian of the threshold to heaven and the afterlife', as well as that of messenger.

Use of cannabis as a medicine has existed throughout Africa. Documented uses include: to restore appetite, relieve haemorrhoid pain; treat tetanus, hydrophobia, delirium, infantile convulsions, hay fever, asthma, skin diseases and even protracted labour during childbirth, amongst other conditions. During an expedition in 1881, Pogge and Wissman came across the *Bena Riamba*, whose word for cannabis, *moio*, also means life, and the name for their tribe means '*the sons of hemp*'. Smoking as often as possible demonstrated devotion to the cult of Riamba. They smoked before combat or travel and initiation rites for new members. All holidays, peace treaties and trade agreement required the compulsory inclusion of smoking from the cannabis pipe.

The Rastafari and some modern gnostic Christian sects equate cannabis with the Biblical Tree of Life. Referencing 'Revelation 22:2' as '*the herb is the healing of nations*' they sometimes call cannabis 'the healing of the nation'. The use of cannabis in the Rasta rite of 'reasoning sessions' involves smoking it in long stemmed water-pipes they call chalices. The practise aims to bring them closer to God, or *Jah*, and penetrate to the truth of things, removing the wool from their eyes.

Anthropologist, Jeremy Narby, gives an account of a conversation he had with Carlos Perez Shuma, in which the latter explained that '*the property of tobacco is that it shows me the reality of things*'. These purported properties correspond to the mystical goal of illumination, which means to see through illusion and thus see true reality.

No culture in the world seems free of the use of narcotics as entheogens. Before the arrival of alcohol and cannabis use in Europe, the evidence shows that opium poppies were widely cultivated and used. Around the world we see the use of coffee, cocoa, coca leaves, cola beans, tea, lotus and countless other plants used in ritual contexts. Post-industrialisation we also see the use and introduction of the use of various synthesised substances in ritual contexts, including some that were not intended for use as narcotics at all. In Australia for example, a problem emerged of aboriginal youth sniffing petrol for its mind altering properties, whereas the early punk movement of the 1970's glamorised the use of glue and solvents.

However, those substances classified as having hallucinogenic properties more often find themselves associated with the term entheogen. Not surprising since term enthoegen originated as a replacement for the term hallucinogen in the first place. Most research into hallucinogens before their widespread prohibition centred on LSD, a synthetic drug not found in nature discovered by Albert Hofmann in 1938. It has enjoyed use both as a recreational drug and a means of inducing mystical experience. In 1964, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert published, *'The Psychedelic Experience'*, a manual for the spiritual use of LSD, mescaline and psilocybin based on the *'Bardo Thodol'*, commonly known in the west as the, *'Tibetan Book of the Dead'*.

The synthetic drugs, psilocybin and mescaline, have hallucinogenic properties. Mescaline also occurs naturally in the peyote cactus, a sacred plant in the Americas, whose use was known to date as far back as the archaic period, at least 2000BCE. To the *Huichol* of Mexico, peyote forms one of their four principle deities, along with its three siblings: the blue deer, corn and the eagle, all four children of the sun god, *Tao Jreeku*. Stacy B. Schaefer was told by a shaman that *"Peyote is everything, it is the crossing of the souls, it is everything there is. Without peyote nothing would exist."*

In parts of South America, including Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and parts of Brazil, shaman prepare a brew made from various plants and known by various names including ayahuasca, yage, cipo, caapi, daime, natem and shori. Whilst different plants form the ingredients in different areas, they have common properties. The two main active plants used in the potion include one that contains the psychoactive DMT, whilst the other plant provides compounds that allow the gut to absorb the DMT without destroying it. Commonly the the mixture includes *Banisteriopsis caapi*, or one of its close relatives, with a second plant that contains DMT. Narby reports that Shuma also told him that ayahuasca is the mother of tobacco and that the mother of ayahuasca is a snake. He backed this cosmology up by pointing out the similarity in appearance between the caapi vine and a snake. The potion finds use as both a religious sacrament, used in such rituals as initiation, funerals, vision quests and in local medicine, both taken by the shaman to aid in the diagnosis of ailments, and as a treatment for certain conditions, such as purging the body of worms and other tropical parasites.

We find psilocybin in numerous mushroom species from around the world and the earliest evidence of their use dates to between 5000 and 7000BCE in what is now the Saraha, where murals depict horned figures dressed in clothing decorated with geometric designs and holding



mushroom shaped objects, and in one case with mushrooms sprouting from their arms, body and legs. The '*Selva Pascuala*' rock art in Spain, from around 4000BCE also appears to depict a local species of psilocybin mushroom.

In the Americas, the Aztec word for the mushrooms, *teonanácatl* translates as 'divine flesh'. Carved Mayan artefacts from Guatamala known as mushroom stones depict animals and cross-legged figures with large mushroom forms sprouting from them. Early Spanish explorers recorded their use in local religious and ceremonial practises.

In 1962, a theology graduate student at Harvard Divinity School, Walter N. Pahnke, conducted the Marsh Chapel Experiment, with supervision from Professor Timothy Leary. Twenty volunteer students for the study were subjected to a double-blind test, one administered synthesised psilocybin, whilst the control group were given niacin. The latter was chosen as a 'control placebo' as it stimulated clear physiological changes in the subjects, and at least some subjects in the control group initially believed they had received psilocybin.

All subjects then stayed in a private chapel, listening to the Good Friday church service taking place in another part of the building. None of the subjects had taken psilocybin before. After the two and a half-hour service the subjects were given a questionnaire which ranked their levels of mystical experience. The results indicated that all those in the psilocybin group had a statistically significant higher level of mystical experience on the factors measured. Although, Pahnke did note that, '*When analysed most rigorously and measured against all possible categories of the typology of mysticism, the experience of the experimental subjects was considered incomplete in this strictest sense*'. This means that whilst the experimental group achieved a much higher mystical state than the control group, a single psilocybin trip in and of itself does not guarantee the achievement of the highest mystical states.

None-the-less, 25 years after the experiment all of the subjects given psilocybin still described the experience as a high point in their spiritual life and held that they experienced elements of a genuine mystical nature. Huston Smith, a participant who went on to write textbooks on comparative religion describes the experience as, "*the most powerful cosmic homecoming I have ever experienced.*"

A number of medieval Christian paintings depict Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge, which takes the form of giant mushrooms, often *Amanita Muscaria*. A 13th century fresco in Plaincourault Abbey, in France, depicts the tree of knowledge as a giant *Amanita Muscaria*, standing between and as tall as Adam and Eve themselves. The serpent coils about its stem. Psilocybin mushrooms also appear frequently in medieval Christian paintings and book illuminations.

- Use by Siberian shaman of the mushroom has been well documented, but its use elsewhere has not appeared widespread. The shaman of western Siberia use it as an alternative method of achieving a trance state, drumming and dancing remaining their main method.

Mushrooms form as the spore-carrying fruiting bodies of certain kinds of fungus. Mostly these live underground or inside a decaying host. Many psilocybin mushrooms grow from the faeces of bovine animals which may explain why the rock art in Spain depicts the mushrooms next to a large bull, or possibly an auroch. These underground fungal organisms can in some cases grow much larger than many trees and sprout numerous fruiting bodies. In a way we could see mushrooms symbolically as a fruit of the underworld.



Illumination

We might call the process of discovering our 'true will' the path of mysticism, and success in the endeavour illumination. Illumination then would involve freeing ourselves from fears and desires that originate from a false view of reality. Fears and desires born from illusion, and which distract us from our most sought desire.

We face a barrage of illusion every day, via the multitudinous forms of advertising, political propaganda and new-formats that having being prior-filtered through the editorial control of the dominant institutions: political parties and lobby groups, major religions, corporations, banks, charities, the military-industrial complex and academia. Generally these illusions intend to evoke fear or desire to inspire attachment to certain things we wouldn't otherwise desire or care about. Advertising has the intent of inflaming desire for the product, whilst political propaganda intends to engender attachment to a cause, be it a religion, a political party or ideology, a war, or a nation.

Even fiction continues to support these illusions by presenting the viewer with visions of normality, or some glamorous image of success towards which they think we should aspire, regardless of our chances of success.

Those who do not sit back and allow themselves time to enjoy their own company, to silence these images born from illusion, effectively become controlled by them. The situationist anarchists called the use of images to mediate social relations amongst people '*the spectacle*'.

However, we can find analogues in the religious and mystical teachings of the world. The concept of '*Samsara*', in the teachings of the various main religions of India, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Bön, Jainism and Sikhism means 'continuous flow'. Whilst it has come to mean the physical world, it originally referred to the endless stream of consciousness, and the continuous, but random, drift of passions, desires, emotions and experiences.

The Gnostic Demiurge, or artisan, the creator of the false world, also has its origins in the more benign Platonic concept of demiurge, a reference to the mind as a flawed creator, and the inability of its concepts to accurately map reality. This parallels the Hindu *Maya*, whose name means 'Not That', the god of illusion who creates Samsara.

The monotheist faiths varying degrees of aversion to the worship of images probably stems from a reaction to their use by their authoritarian polytheist oppressors of their times. However, authoritarians can use words to create illusion and control desire as easily as they can actual images.

Taoism hinted at as much by saying, '*The Tao that can be described is not the true Tao*'.

The will that remains when we exclude all fear and desire born of illusion, we can call the 'true will'. In Hinduism ignorance of one's true self, a state called *avidyā*, leads to enslavement by Maya in Samsara.

In the Gnostic tradition, *Gnosis*, which means Knowledge, sets one free. Specifically knowledge of oneself. As the serpent said on the tree, "*For Yahweh knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be gods, knowing good and evil.*" Which Yahweh confirmed when he said, "*The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.*"

When Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree Yahweh casts them to the dust of the earth and sets a cherub to guard the tree of life. The earliest description of a cherub, in the Biblical book of Ezekiel, describes them as a tetrad, with the four faces consisting of: a lion, a bull, an eagle and a man. Etymologically their name derives from the Assyrian Kirubu '*blessed*' or '*propitious*', a term used for the sphynx-like guardian spirits, the *aladlammu*, winged bulls with human heads.

Shiva destroys the world when his third eye opens, the eye of the mind. Yet physical reality remains. Only our internal perception of reality gets destroyed.

To the Qabalist Isaac Luria, *Da'ath*, or Knowledge, was the Sephiroth of the True Self, and some traditions locate Da'ath in the heart. Others place *Tiphareth* or Beauty in the heart and associate it with the higher self also, transcendent of the illusion of *Yesod*, an illusionary reflection of the true self.

At the roots of various mythological trees we find the serpent, whilst at the top, in the sky we find various sky gods, often with hawks, eagles or owls as their symbol, or with bird-like qualities such as wings. These often hold back the serpent with feiry swords, or bolts of lightning. In Qabala, the '*serpent path*' up the tree has the name '*lightning path*' on the way down.

Sometimes the lightning takes form of an arrow, shot from the rainbow. At other times this same rainbow appears in the form of a serpent, or reveals a bridge connecting Earth to the heavens. "*As above so below, as below so above, working the wonders of the one.*"

In the heart lies a clue. The centre of centres, the union of above and below, mind and body, the whole self working as one. When the desire of your mind lacks conflict with the desires of the body and the emotions, then you feel only one desire. We can call this one desire the 'true will'.

Mystics and magicians of the various traditions employ many and varied techniques to attempt to reach this state and hold many seemingly contradictory ideas about the nature of achieving it. This could result from the diversity of human nature, and the variety of our individuality. However, we must also remember that these ideas themselves lie in the realm of language and concepts, the very things we need to silence. They represent only a map of how to get to the destination, not a description of what you will see when you get there.

We can say the same about the images and symbols described in this book. They symbolise the path to illumination. Authoritarians may use the same symbols and the same traditions to cast illusion, in order to control and deceive, but look carefully and they still reveal the secret of illumination no matter how much they try to hold you back.

Each illumination brings new awakenings, even for the same mystic. Chaos magician Phil Hine says of the process, "*The initiatory cycle can be likened to a snake sloughing off its skin. So too, we must be prepared to slough off old patterns of thought, belief (about ourselves and the world) and behaviour that are no longer appropriate for the new phase of our development.*"

Many paths lead to illumination, yet the act of walking them requires the same skill of movement. We may progress swiftly along these paths or we can gently stroll along them at our pleasure. Perhaps rushing for success even takes longer. Slow down and let the destination come to you. In the words of Lao Tzu, "*A good traveller has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.*"



Appendix A: Asides.

My research into this book uncovered some interesting facts and humorous asides that do not fit into the main body of this work. I include them here for reference.

Rir-Rir

The Pyramid of Unas, mentioned in the caduceus chapter, contains hieroglyphs that seem to form part of a protective spell for the tomb. The Egyptians also seem to have employed Canaanite serpent sorcerers to add their serpent magic to the spell. Parts of the recently deciphered Canaanite section has been translated as:

*“The message of Rir-Rir, Mother-Snake, Mother-Snake,
Turn away, my lover and come, come to my house.”*

And later in the text Rir-Rir, the two-headed mother snake goddess apparently enters the mummy of the dead Pharaoh in order to transform him:

“Hiss the message of his chant:

Rir-Rir is in me.

Look please at my mouths,

look please at my yonis.

My mouths are my yonis.

Who are we? Rir-Rir.

Our nose sniffs well. We are they.

Hurry from before Rir-Rir whose hands will kill.”

With thanks to Richard Steiner and Yitzhak Sapir for the translation, which I have only amended slightly for readability.

Set, Seb, Geb

In MacKenzie's *'Egyptian Myth and Legend'* it states *"Set, the Earth deity, was believed to have flown through the air at the beginning in the form of the chaos goose."*

This is quite an amusing red herring on a number of accounts. Firstly, 'Set' in this case is probably a misprint of 'Seb'. Secondly, Seb is an older less accurate translation of the name we now know as Geb (or sometimes Keb). Thirdly, the confusion of associating Geb with the chaos goose seems to come from Geb's name being spelled in a very similar manner to that of the white goose in Egyptian. However, the chaos goose is always depicted as a different kind of goose, namely the Fox Goose or Egyptian Goose. As MacKenzie's book is out of copyright, copies of it can be found all over the internet. All that I have seen reproduce the misprint.

Baphomet

I call Lévi's image the first known depiction of Baphomet as hermaphrodite, because whilst there exists hermaphrodite gargoyles on certain Templar built churches, no evidence currently links these to the name Baphomet or shows the builders intended them as connected with the name as far as I am aware, and I wish to avoid jumping to conclusions. This does not invalidate a contemporary magician from working with

such images as representations of Baphomet however, as we can view any hermaphroditic image as representing the same essential mystery, with names and images interchangeable in a way that historians, academics and stuffy traditionalists might find offensive.

Lame Smiths

The image of the smith as lame appears in many bronze age mythologies, and may result from a number of causes, such as workplace accidents, arsenicosis resulting from the use of arsenic in place of the rarer tin to harden copper into bronze, or even wounded warriors gaining re-employment as smiths after receiving permanent injury during battle.

Constantine I

Whilst adopting some Christian symbols as personal attributes, he also continued to honour the Roman pagan gods. For example, his triumphal arch was decorated with depictions and references to the gods and goddesses Victoria, Apollo, Diana and Hercules, but no direct Christian symbols at all. Further evidence suggests Constantine personally favoured the cult of Sol Invictus and attempted to unite pagan and Christian members of his empire under its celebrations.

Athame

I've included the Wiccan term 'Athame' here because many contemporary practitioners use the term for the main ritual blade. Yet it seems to derive from a misspelling of the Latin name 'Artavus', a knife from the '*Key of Solomon*'. This was misspelled as 'Arthame' in Grillo de Givry's '*Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*' in 1931, who also misidentified the term with the main ritual knife. Whilst the actual knife labelled as such in the '*Key of Solomon*' was hooked and sickle-shaped more akin to the knife Wiccans call the 'Boline'.

Dumnonia and Kernow

The Celtic Kingdom Dumnonia in South West Britain, mentioned as a main source of the metal tin, was inhabited by the Dumnonii tribe at the time of Roman Britain, and approximates to the modern counties of Devonshire, with parts of Somerset and Dorset. It included Cornubia, roughly the same area as modern-day Cornwall, although its inhabitants, the sub-tribe of the Cornovii seem to have at least been semi-independent at times. Other Celtic tribes with similar names to the Dumnonii were found in Scotland, (the Damnonii) and Ireland, (Fir Domnann). In Brittany, France, where some of the tribes emigrated, the kingdom of Domnonea was established, or Domnonée as it became known in French. The name of the tribe comes from the proto-Celtic root 'dumno', which means both 'deep' and 'world'.

Dumnonia remained unconquered by the Romans, but was eventually taken over by the Saxons in the 8th Century. The region of Cornwall continued as an independent kingdom, Kernow, until the 11th Century. The modern county name of Devon derives from the old Brythonic name for the region, Dyfnient. Modern Welsh and Cornish both derive from Brythonic, and in these languages the region is known as Dyfnant and Dewnans respectively.

Pernety

Antoine-Joseph Pernety, mentioned in the chapter on metals, and also known as, Don Pernety, was the founder of the 18th Century secret society, 'Rite hermétique', along with Count Tadeusz Grabianka of Poland. This society was also known as the 'Illuminati of Avignon'.

Ki-sikil-lil-la-ke

Samuel Kramer interpreted this name as Lilith, and this went unquestioned for a time and has led to numerous inaccurate accounts of Lilith taking up residence in Inanna's tree, from other academics and writers copying from Kramer's account. This interpretation has now been discredited. Some Assyriologists have also suggested an 'owl' as an interpretation, based solely on the fact that the spirit made its home in the tree's trunk. It may simply be a veiled or even subconscious attempt to retain a Lilith connection, since her name has also been translated as 'screech owl' in the King James version of the Bible.

The Thunderbird and Kumugwe

To the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Thunderbird rules winter and opposes an undersea god Kumugwe, who rules the summer. If Kumugwe raises his head above water it appears so big it looks like an island. They sometimes depict him as an octopus and say he lives in a house under the sea with pillars made from living sea lions. He is master of seals and they call him the copper maker and the bringer of wealth. His most important animals include seals, sea lions, octopuses, orcas, sculpins and loons. Orcas also serve as mounts for the Sisiutl, suggesting a relationship between the magical serpents and Kumugwe.



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About the author



Anton's spiritual journey of self-discovery began in the Roman Catholic church, but later expanded to include meditation and the Korean martial art practise of Tae Kwon Do. In the former, he took up practise as an altar boy, and later as a teenager began readings at mass and training as a minister of the Eucharist. Whilst in the latter he attained black belt 1st dan. Aged sixteen he began exploring Tarot and psychic visualisation exercises whilst remaining active in the church. As a young adult however he found the authoritarian teachings of the Vatican

rather suspect, and began to question the version of Christianity modern society practised till he eventually rejected the religion in favour of paganism and chaos magic.

He joined and became active in a group called the 'Illuminates of Thanateros', a hierarchical chaos magic group with a healthy disrespect for authority. None-the-less he eventually felt the need for a hierarchy misplaced and problematic, and formed the Kaotic and Illuminated Adepts. During this time he remained part of the IOT for a few years more, and published his first book '*Kaos Hieroglyphica: Alchemy for the New Aeon*', an exploration and expansion of the Eight Colours system described by Pete Carroll in '*Liber Kaos*'.

Since then, he has explored working in many other traditions including QiGong and Tai Chi, Zen, Japanese Tantric Buddhism, Thelema, Gnosticism, Hermetic Alchemy and collaboration with many deities, animal and plant spirits, and other guides. The serpent, on a series of illuminations and awakenings that have lead to the writing and completion of this, his second book, played an especially important role. During this time he has also learnt to embrace an anti-authoritarian and mystical interpretation of Christianity, which he feels has been an important part of reclaiming his own spiritual upbringing, transforming it alchemically into something positive and useful.

About the illustrator



Janice Duke has been inspired to create art for as long as she can remember. She was captivated by animals and nature from a young age, particularly by her many pets and the goings-on within her back garden. In adolescence: fantasy fiction, computer games, and a profound need to escape from reality led her deeper down the artistic rabbit hole, her subjects becoming fantastical-beings, heroes and heroines, and epic journeys. Since 2007 she has worked as a freelance illustrator, portrait painter and designer. Far from escaping reality, it is her contention that in art, as in any creative endeavour, we find the starkest confrontation with reality possible.

Janice has practised her own form of intuitive magick and studied tarot since childhood, influenced by various psychic and mystical experiences. She has experimented with a variety of occult and spiritual disciplines, taking whatever elements suited her and weaving them into her own solitary practices. Magickal organisations, and the inevitable politics that go with them, have little attraction for her, although she enjoys networking with many within such, as well as other solitary practitioners. This led her to join the KIA network, an impressively non-hierarchical magickal organisation, eschewing crude politics and therefore providing a conduit for candid information sharing.

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