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STUDIA HERMETICA’S REBIRTH

Category: Essay.

Abstract: In this brief introduction, I’m going to explain the purposes of this new journal on Hermetism, beside my methodological perspective and tenets regarding our field of study, as well as the mainstream ideas which I plan to develop in Studia Hermetica’s project.

Key words: Introduction, Studia Hermetica, Hermetism.

I’d like to give you a warm welcome in regards to this new Academic undertaking which adopts the shape of a journal (SHJ) and a divulgator and artistic website (the New Studia Hermetica), and obviously I’d like to express my everlasting gratitude to my dear colleagues Mar Rey Bueno, Miguel López Pérez, Francisco de Mendonça Jr., José Rodríguez Guerrero, Carlos Gilly and at last but definitely not at least, Francisco García Bazán, our brand new and prestigious Assistant Director. Thanks a lot for your generous and disinterested support. I do consider this new step as a brother in arms of Azogue Journal, which has been my main platform to let the

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1 Anyway, I must to clarify that Azogue Journal (URL: http://www.revistaazogue.com/) has no formal relationship with this Studia Hermetica Journal, and both projects have different purposes and are inspired by different mottos. Moreover, it’s not my intention to compare this humble undertaking with the prestigious gained by Azogue in the last ten years, in great part due to the amazing skills of its editor and director, José Rodríguez Guerrero, obviously next to its two assistant directors Mar Rey Bueno and Miguel López Pérez. In addition, I’ve developed since the year 2008 my project Studia Hermetica (in Spanish language), and this project will be continue according to Rodríguez Guerrero’s discretion. Briefly, Azogue is just one of our Academic supports, no more, no less.
Academy know my work and ideas, next to the international journal MHNH\(^2\). It was a fruitful and interesting journey to jump from the isolation and austere Castilian libraries to worldwide Academy, and the tool to accomplish this complex task was merely an Internet connection and a hard will for learn and surely good friends, embracing the new ways of this new century but armed by the same weapons of the past.

As you probably know, during the last years, I’ve been displaying the difficult chore of value the study of Hermetism inside and outside the Academic world (as well as in Spain and Hispanic World)\(^3\), and I can properly assure that it has been a delicate and exhausting enterprise, partially due to the common misunderstandings normally attached to this sort of knowledge inherited from the Ancient World. My main intention since the very beginning was to clarify, one by one, the most obscure parts of our field of study, just trying to go deeper through the hypothetical answers of the central questions, and accordingly to this mainstream consideration, running away from vague starting points and terminologies. And consequently my motto has always been to learn about the venerable roots of the so called “Hermetic Philosophy”, beginning from Trismegistus’ first appearances on stage, and leaded with a multidisciplinary aim\(^4\). But let’s begin to research about the question itself:

*What is Hermetism?* A frequent and passionate question to resolve for scholars around the world since, at least, the Renaissance period of our Western Civilization to our current days. Concerning my own vision on the topic, I’m going to try in this brief introduction to clarify this question humbly and self-consciousness of been using a mutilated phraseology to achieve it. Well, in few words, we can consider Hermetism as a gnosis (in a broad sense) originated in the Ancient period of our Western History, I mean, not a Gnostic philosophy, nor an “Esoteric” knowledge in modern terms, and definitely not a corpus of comprehensive and closed doctrine, but just a Hellenistic philosophy skilled by a curious religious framework. In short, the texts which integrate the so called *Hermetica*, are a joint of doctrines developed by anonymous authors,

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\(^2\) MHNH. *Revista Internacional de investigación sobre astrología y magia antiguas*, published and supported by two of the best Spanish scholars on the field: Aurelio Pérez Jiménez (University of Málaga) and José Luis Calvo Martínez (University of Granada).

URL: http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/revista?codigo=6856


\(^4\) See my paper “Ciento cincuenta años de hermetismo” in this sense.
probably since the first century of our Christian Era (or even earlier) to the Gnostic Hermetism itself, originated, as we certainly know, in the fourth century. Those hermetists put their own writings and opinions under the advocacy of a syncretic deity named Hermes Trismegistus, and currently the scholars have tried to dissect their doctrines from the rest of philosophical and religious labels from the epoch.

As everybody see, there’s nothing new or original in my attempt to answer the question. On the contrary, more and more derived questions arouse: Was Hermetism a contradictory joint of degenerated Greek philosophy, as Festugière affirmed?, or maybe the Egyptian roots are a valuable and unavoidable point at the time to start our inquiries? Can we identify so easily the “hermetic condition” of a text? Is it a Hermetic unitary doctrine elsewhere?… Too much queries to resolve attending to the limited purposes of this introduction. Anyway, I’ve never tried to avoid these questions: my opinion as a researcher on the matter has been partially developed in three previous papers⁵, but briefly, I can display my impressions in the following points:

1. According to Festugière’s perspective, we can consider Hermetic Philosophy as a part of the wider philosophical context called mystique hellénistique, next to other philosophies (the reinterpretation of Platonism constructed by Plotinus and Porphiry), other new religious systems (e.g. the Theurgy), and finally close to the efforts of magicians, astrologers and alchemists. In every manner, we can observe similitudes in those doctrines but we can’t confuse them at all. Nevertheless, they were born inspired by the peculiar spirit of an entire religious era, aimed by the disillusion and despair, but aimed by the desperate desire of rationalized and even rule our material world too.

2. The classic scholars used to think our (Late) Ancient Era using terms like anxiety, irrationality, degeneration, crisis, religiosity or syncretism, but I’ve always tried to avoid aprioristic concepts at the time to the face the texts (because textual criticism must be our major procedure to face the texts themselves), and the result always has been suggestive: I’ve never found something in these texts that firmly supports these

asserts. Certainly, it was a religious era (I mean, from Hellenistic period to the collapse of Roman Empire and the triumph of a revealed religious current of thought, the Christianism). Undoubtedly, it was an era of changes, confusion, academicism and crisis, but History demonstrates that mankind uses to provoke this sort of conditions constantly; on the contrary, we’re dealing with an exciting period in both philosophical and social perspectives. And definitely, the philosophical height of Western Civilization in Antiquity was achieved by Plato and Aristotle, but scholars sometimes forget the enormous amount of intellectual treasure originated since the Alexander’s Conquest of Eastern World to the Roman dominance.

3. Hellenistic World (including Roma), was a special kind of civilization which goes far away from the phenomenon of syncretism, so I deeply feel that the efforts of separate the “Egyptian side” from the “Greek side” of a current of thought like Hermetism, are a waste of time. In my opinion, Hermetism is not Greek or Egyptian current of thought, but plainly a genuine product of a certain period of our History. Sure: we can properly trace an Egyptian signs in the Trismegistus’ doctrines, as Iamblichus attempted in his *De Mysteriis* (or modernly, Iversen or Assmann), but we should not misunderstand the question: Hermetism is not a pharaonic intruder in our era; on the contrary, it was a *new* and special religious current of thought, and consequently we can identify elements of a wide range of Ancient philosophies developed in the same period, as Middle Platonism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, and surely from the *Peripatos*.

4. Anyway, there’s one point that in my opinion scholars have never insisted sufficiently: the *Hermetica* themselves are strictly philosophical texts, and it seems there are few magical, alchemical or astrological elements (in a “mechanical sense”) in

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6 We adopt Festugièr’s point of view on regards Hellenistic Mysticism developed in his great “Cadre de la mystique hellénistique”, in *Hermétisme et mystique païenne* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, pp. 13-27). The argument is the following: there’re many different method to *transcend* the sublunar world in mystical and gnostic terms, and magical mysticism, and undoubtedly the procedures attached to astro-magical conceptions (and even theurgical ones), introduce a more mechanical attempt to gain access to the One or God.
there, apart from the variety of texts frequently known as “technical Hermeticism”\(^7\). Well, anyway, this is a harsh matter, because, we’re suddenly committed to explain the nature of these “technical” elements, which is a difficult and delicate task that I’ll avoid here. As I said above, I do consider Hermeticism as a “gnosis”, which it means that its purposes are religious or even philosophical, and its practitioners had no intention to influence or violent the *heimarmêne*. And the most “theurgical” of Hermetic texts, the *Asclepius*, is absolutely conclusive regarding this point\(^8\).

On the other hand, and in spite of appearances, I’m not particularly interesting in methodological matters. As historians, we must face the text directly and merely focus our attention on them; the rest is, in many ways, a waste of time or simply intellectual entertainment.

Coming back to our brand new journal’s inspiration, my major purpose at the time to conceive it, is to encourage the study of these obscure and few known philosophies from Antiquity to the rise of Modernity, trying to include many others currents of thought within my range of interest, and first of all, the beautiful metaphysics gifted by Hermetic and Platonic basement developed by Giordano Bruno of Nola and Francesco Patrizi of Cherso, or the modern theodicies constructed by Spinoza, Leibniz, Comenius, or even related currents like Deism and Pietism. Moreover, be sure that the “free condition” of Studia Hermetica always be a *conditio sine qua non* in my particular and personal way to understand the pursuit of knowledge: I’m going to show my work to everyone eager to learn about these obscure matters, so please do not confuse yourself at all in this point: if you display a good will to learn and to work hard, surely you’ll persevere in Hermetic or in other region within your range of interest, inside of a public or private institution such a university or a formal research cabinet. Knowledge, as love, does not belong to anybody in this astonishing orb, and money does not always lead good research projects. It depends much more on our talent, time and humility. In other words, I desperately wish that my main contribution to the Academy will be leaded by a single and humble spirit of falling in love with the

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\(^7\) Obviously, including Hermes Latinus’s project or simply those Astrological and Magical procedures observed in Ancient texts under the advocacy of the Trismegistus or plainly related to the Hermetic Gnosis itself. However I don’t see in some cases a clear frontier between magical and philosophical texts.

\(^8\) *Asc.* 41.
knowledge constantly, and purely devoted to the will for learning and to go beyond. I really hope that you’ll join us, and I’ll look forward for your attention, suggestions and contributions.

Thank you very much for your time and warm regards from the very beautiful Spanish city of Granada.