

Notes On The Corpus Hermeticum

Given renewed interest among certain Occultists in the ancient texts of the Corpus Hermeticum following David Myatt's translations and commentaries on five of the texts {1} it seems timely to provide an overview of the Corpus Hermeticism, particularly as it has been suggested that:

"If many MSS of the Order of Nine Angles are vital to acquire a certain understanding or at the very least, presence through words what a practical life and wyrdful ἄνοδος can bring, the Corpus Hermeticum is, in itself, sufficient to make sense of the Order of Nine Angles quiddity as a whole." {2}

The eighteen Greek texts grouped together under the title Corpus Hermeticum are generally regarded as having been written between the first and the third century AD. As Myatt pointed out, the texts reveal "how diverse the Hermetic weltanschauung is in respect of some details while nevertheless retaining an underlying ethos." {3}

This 'hermetic' ethos is basically the metaphysical belief that we human beings can find and understand our place in the cosmos, that we were created by theos/the god/the primary divinity; that we can "apprehend the physis of beings, and...have knowledge of theos," {4} and - via an "anados" (a mystical quest or journey) or by some other means - can become "immortal" and thus achieve the purpose of our human existence:

"you who are earth-bound, why do you embrace death when you have the means to partake of immortality?" {5}

Assumptions About Influences

While many scholars - from Hienrici to Dodd {6} to those of more recent times - have argued or accepted that Judaism (as manifest, for example, in LXX, the Septuagint, the ancient Greek text of the Old Testament) has influenced the Hermetica, they have largely done so based on the presumption that the Judaic tradition is older than the traditions described in the Corpus Hermeticum and that it is quite different from - in terms for example of cosmogony - other cosmogonies and specifically the one of ancient Greece.

Hence they for example take the mention of ἀύξάνεσθε and πληθύνεσθε in section 18 of the Poemander to be evidence of such a Judaic influence since the same words occur in Genesis 1.22. Likewise, when other Greek words or phrases are found in the Corpus Hermeticum and also in the Septuagint.

Yet it is just as possible that the contrary is true, and that it is the Old Testament which was influenced by ancient Greek ideas and cosmogony with those Greek ideas and cosmogony - or echoes of those ideas and cosmogony -

also forming the basis of the hermeticism described in the Corpus. A possibility that ancient fragments of the Old Testament in Greek and in Hebrew seem to confirm.

For the earliest fragments of the Old Testament in Hebrew are in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and date from c.150 BCE to c. 70 CE, with the oldest of these Hebrew fragments thus dating from a century or so after Greek fragments of the Septuagint found in Egypt.

Furthermore, the earliest (almost complete) Greek text of the Old Testament - Codex Vaticanus - dates from c.315 (± 15) CE while the earliest Hebrew text - the Aleppo Codex - dates from c.920 CE.

Thus, based solely on the actual physical evidence available it is justifiable to conclude not only that the Greek texts pre-date the Hebrew texts but also that the assumption of the Hebrew Old Testament (more correctly, the Tanakh) having its origin in the eleventh or tenth centuries BCE is at best just a presumption, unsupported by physical evidence, and at worst just a myth designed to propagate the claim of such an ancient origin for the Tanakh.

Given that the earliest texts of the Old Testament were written in Greek, not Hebrew, it is reasonable to conclude that the scribes - or authors - of those texts were familiar with Greek culture and ideas and thus with Greek cosmogony and legends.

That this logical possibility - of Greek influence on the Old Testament - has not been mooted by contemporary scholars is interesting, and perhaps indicative of a certain bias.

Likewise, when certain texts of the Corpus Hermeticum have - or seem to have - echoes of the Greek New Testament, the presumptions always seem to be that the New Testament (the theology, ideas, cosmogony, of early Christianity) influenced those hermetic texts and ideas, not that the New Testament was influenced by those hermetic texts or ideas; a presumption in favour of Christianity that has no physical or even any textual evidence to support it. Since the texts of the Corpus date from between the first and the third century AD and usefully summarize the hermetic ideas and cosmogony then it is reasonable to assume those ideas and cosmogony had been circulating within certain Hellenic circles certainly from around the time the Gospels were written and probably for at least a century before, as attested by the Greek Magical Papyri {7} and certain Orphic texts {8}.

That this logical possibility - of Greek influence on the New Testament - has also not been mooted by contemporary scholars is interesting, and perhaps indicative of a certain bias toward Judaic influence.

A Greek Oral Tradition

In his Introduction - *A Pagan And Esoteric Mythos* - to the third text of the Corpus, Myatt states that in his opinion this third text "most probably reasonably represents, like the Pymander tractate, a pagan metaphysical weltanschauung germane to the period of its composition and one which is based upon or recounts an earlier, and most probably aural, tradition."

In support of this he quotes Herodotus and Hesiod and also several inscriptions which, centuries after Hesiod, echo almost word for word what Hesiod wrote.

Hesiod, written c. 700 BCE,

οἱ Γῆς ἐξεγένοντο καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος

those who came-into-being from Gaia and the starry heavens

An inscription from Pharsalos, Thessalyon, c.300 BCE,

Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος

I am a child of Gaia and the starry heavens

There does thus seem to be a continuity of Greek ideas and cosmogony by means of an oral tradition, lasting over three hundred, and probably more, years, and thus it does not seem unreasonable of Myatt to claim that the third text of the Corpus, and probably some others as well, primarily represent Greek ideas and a Greek cosmogony rather than being influenced by Judaic beliefs or by native Egyptian beliefs from Pharaonic times.

Indeed, Myatt suggests that "it is part of this ancient [Greek] esoteric mythos, and/or its antecedents, that may well be echoed in LXX (Genesis, 1:1), written centuries later." {9}

What all this amounts to, in Myatt's quite unfashionable if not iconoclastic view, is that several of the texts of the Corpus - presumably the five he has translated and written commentaries on - represent a basically pagan cosmogony and ethos redolent of Greco-Roman culture (and especially of Greek culture) and that while there may be some other cultural influences, they are minor because an essentially pagan cosmogony, ethos, mysticism, and weltanschauung remain.

An ancient pagan cosmogony, ethos, mysticism, and weltanschauung, that is brought back to life by Myatt's translations.

Footnotes

{1} Four of the texts - I (Poemandres), III (An Esoteric Mythos), IV (Chaldron Or Monas) and XI (From Perceiverance To Hermes) - are currently (March 2017) accessible in a single, free, pdf document at <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2017/03/08/corpus-hermeticum-i-iii-iv-xi/>

A fifth text - VIII (That No Beings Are Lost) - is currently accessible in a free pdf document at <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2017/03/20/corpus-hermeticum-viii/>

{2} <https://acausality.wordpress.com/2017/03/17/corpus-hermeticum/>

{3} *Corpus Hermeticum - Tractate VIII. A Translation And Commentary.* 2017. Available, March 2017, at <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/2017/03/20/corpus-hermeticum-viii/>

{4} Corpus Hermeticum I, Poemandres, section 1 (translated by Myatt).

{5} Corpus Hermeticum I, Poemandres, section 28 (translated by Myatt).

{6} C. F. Heinrici, *Die Hermes-Mystik*, 1918. C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*. 1935.

{7} Preisendanz, K. & Albert Henrichs. *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri.* 1974.

{8} Bernabé, Alberto, and Francesc Casadesús. *Orfeo y la tradición órfica: Unreencuentro.* 2008.

{9} Myatt, *Corpus Hermeticum III, Ἰερός Λόγος.*
