

## The Emerald Tablet of Hermes

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### Ladder of Lights

History of the Tablet (largely summarised from Needham 1980, Holmyard 1957) The Tablet probably first appeared in the West in editions of the psuedo-Aristotlean *Secretum Secretorum* which was actually a translation of the *Kitab Sirr al-Asar*, a book of advice to kings which was translated into latin by Johannes Hispalensis c. 1140 and by Philip of Tripoli c.1243.



**Thoth**

Other translations of the Tablet may have been made during the same period by Plato of Tivoli and Hugh of Santalla, perhaps from different sources. The date of the *Kitab Sirr al-Asar* is uncertain, though c.800 has been suggested and it is not clear when the tablet became part of this work. Holmyard was the first to find another early arabic version (Ruska found a 12th centruy recension claiming to have been dictated by Sergius of Nablus) in the *Kitab Ustuqus al-Uss al-Thani* (Second Book of the Elements of Foundation) attributed to Jabir. Shortly after Ruska found another version appended to the *Kitab Sirr al-Khaliqa wa San`at al-Tabi`a* (Book of the Secret of Creation and the Art of Nature), which is also known as the *Kitab Balaniyus al-Hakim fi'l-`Ilal* (book of Balinas the wise on the Causes). It has been proposed that this book was written may have been written as early as 650, and was definitely finished by the Caliphate of al-Ma'mun (813-33).

Scholars have seen similarities between this book and the Syriac Book of Treasures written by Job of Odessa (9th century) and more interestingly the Greek writings of the bishop Nemesius of Emesa in Syria from the mid fourth century. However though this suggests a possible Syriac source, non of these writings contain the tablet.

Balinas is usually identified with Apollonius of Tyna, but there is little evidence to connect him with the *Kitab Balabiyus*, and even if there was, the story implies that Balinas found the tablet rather than wrote it, and the recent discoveries of the dead sea scrolls and the nag hamamdi texts suggest that hiding texts in caves is not impossible, even if we did not have the pyramids before us. Ruska has suggested an origin further east, and Needham has proposed an origin in China. Holmyard, Davis

and Anon all consider that this Tablet may be one of the earliest of all alchemical works we have that survives.

It should be remarked that apparently the Greeks and Egyptians used the term translated as 'emerald' for emeralds, green granites, "and perhaps green jasper". In medieval times the emerald table of the Gothic kings of Spain, and the Sacro catino- a dish said to have belonged to the Queen of Sheba, to have been used at the last supper, and to be made of emerald, were made of green glass [Steele and Singer: 488].

Arabic Version (from the German of Ruska, translated by 'Anonymous').

0) Here is that which the priest Sagijus of Nabulus has dictated concerning the entrance of Balinas into the hidden chamber... After my entrance into the chamber, where the talisman was set up, I came up to an old man sitting on a golden throne, who was holding an emerald table in one hand. And behold the following in Syriac, the primordial language- was written thereon:

- 1) Here (is) a true explanation, concerning which there can be no doubt.
- 2) It attests: The above from the below, and the below from the above -the work of the miracle of the One.
- 3) And things have been from this primal substance through a single act. How wonderful is this work! It is the main (principle) of the world and is its maintainer.
- 4) Its father is the sun and its mother the moon; the
- 5) wind has borne it in its body, and the earth has nourished it.
- 6) the father of talisman and the protector of miracles
- 6a) whose powers are perfect, and whose lights are confirmed (?),
- 7) a fire that becomes earth.
- 7a) Separate the earth from the fire, so you will attain the subtle as more inherent than the gross, with care and sagacity.
- 8) It rises from earth to heaven, so as to draw the lights of the heights to itself, and descends to the earth; thus within it are the forces of the above and the below;
- 9) because the light of lights within it, thus does the darkness flee before it.
- 10) The force of forces, which overcomes every subtle thing and penetrates into everything gross.
- 11) The structure of the microcosm is in accordance with the structure of the macrocosm.
- 12) And accordingly proceed the knowledgeable.
- 13) And to this aspired Hermes, who was threefold graced with wisdom.
- 14) And this is his last book, which he concealed in the chamber.

### **Twelfth Century Latin**

0) When I entered into the cave, I received the tablet zaradi, which was inscribed, from between the hands of Hermes, in which I discovered these words:

### **Another Arabic Version (from the German of Ruska, translated by 'Anonymous').**

- 1) True, without falsehood, certain, most certain.
- 2) What is above is like what is below, and what is below is like that which is above. To make the miracle of the one thing.
- 3) And as all things were made from contemplation of one, so all things were born from one adaptation.
- 4) Its father is the Sun, its mother is the Moon.
- 5) The wind carried it in its womb, the earth breast fed it.
- 6) It is the father of all 'works of wonder' (Telesmi) in the world.
- 6a) Its power is complete (integra).
- 7) If cast to (turned towards- versa fuerit) earth,

- 7a) it will separate earth from fire, the subtle from the gross.
- 8) With great capacity it ascends from earth to heaven. Again it descends to earth, and takes back the power of the above and the below.
- 9) Thus you will receive the glory of the distinctiveness of the world. All obscurity will flee from you.
- 10) This is the whole most strong strength of all strength, for it overcomes all subtle things, and penetrates all solid things.
- 11a) Thus was the world created.
- 12) From this comes marvellous adaptations of which this is the procedure.
- 13) Therefore I am called Hermes, because I have three parts of the wisdom of the whole world.
- 14) And complete is what I had to say about the work of the Sun, from the book of Galieni Alfachimi.

### **Translation from Aurelium Occultae Philosophorum..Georgio Beato**

- 1) This is true and remote from all cover of falsehood
- 2) Whatever is below is similar to that which is above. Through this the marvels of the work of one thing are procured and perfected.
- 3) Also, as all things are made from one, by the consideration of one, so all things were made from this one, by conjunction.
- 4) The father of it is the sun, the mother the moon.
- 5) The wind bore it in the womb. Its nurse is the earth, the mother of all perfection.
- 6a) Its power is perfected.
- 7) If it is turned into earth,
- 7a) separate the earth from the fire, the subtle and thin from the crude and course, prudently, with modesty and wisdom.
- 8) This ascends from the earth into the sky and again descends from the sky to the earth, and receives the power and efficacy of things above and of things below.
- 9) By this means you will acquire the glory of the whole world, and so you will drive away all shadows and blindness.
- 10) For this by its fortitude snatches the palm from all other fortitude and power. For it is able to penetrate and subdue everything subtle and everything crude and hard.
- 11a) By this means the world was founded
- 12) and hence the marvellous conjunctions of it and admirable effects, since this is the way by which these marvels may be brought about.
- 13) And because of this they have called me Hermes Trismegistus since I have the three parts of the wisdom and Philosophy of the whole universe.
- 14) My speech is finished which I have spoken concerning the solar work.

### **Translation of Issac Newton c. 1680.**

- 1) Tis true without lying, certain most true.
- 2) That wch is below is like that wch is above that wch is above is like yt wch is below to do ye miracles of one only thing.
- 3) And as all things have been arose from one by ye mediation of one: so all things have their birth from this one thing by adaptation.
- 4) The Sun is its father, the moon its mother,
- 5) the wind hath carried it in its belly, the earth its nourse.
- 6) The father of all perfection in ye whole world is here.
- 7) Its force or power is entire if it be converted into earth.
- 7a) Seperate thou ye earth from ye fire, ye subtle from the gross sweetly wth great indoustry.
- 8) It ascends from ye earth to ye heaven again it desends to ye earth and receives ye force of things superior inferior.
- 9) By this means you shall have ye glory of ye whole world thereby all obscurity shall fly from you.
- 10) Its force is above all force. ffor it vanquishes every subtle thing penetrates every solid thing.

- 11a) So was ye world created.
- 12) From this are do come admirable adaptaions whereof ye means (Or process) is here in this.
- 13) Hence I am called Hermes Trismegist, having the three parts of ye philosophy of ye whole world.
- 14) That wch I have said of ye operation of ye Sun is accomplished ended.

**Translation from Kriegsmann (?) alledgedly from the Phoenician**

- 1) I speak truly, not falsely, certainly and most truly
- 2) These things below with those above and those with these join forces again so that they produce a single thing the most wonderful of all.
- 3) And as the whole universe was brought forth from one by the word of one GOD, so also all things are regenerated perpetually from this one according to the disposition of Nature.
- 4) It has the Sun for father and the Moon for mother:
- 5) it is carried by the air as if in a womb, it is nursed by the earth.
- 6) It is the cause, this, of all perfection of all things throughout the universe.
- 6a) This will attain the highest perfection of powers
- 7) if it shall be reduced into earth
- 7a) Distribute here the earth and there the fire, thin out the density of this the suavest (suavissima) thing of all.
- 8) Ascend with the greatest sagacity of genius from the earth into the sky, and thence descend again to the earth, and recognise that the forces of things above and of things below are one,
- 9) so as to posses the glory of the whole world- and beyond this man of abject fate may have nothing further.
- 10) This thing itself presently comes forth stronger by reasons of this fortitude: it subdues all bodies surely, whether tenuous or solid, by penetrating them.
- 11a) And so everything whatsoever that the world contains was created.
- 12) Hence admirable works are accomplished which are instituted (carried out- instituuntur) according to the same mode.
- 13) To me therefor the name of Hermes Trismegistus has been awarded because I am discovered as the Teacher of the three parts of the wisdom of the world.
- 14) These then are the considerations which I have concluded ought to be written down concerning thereadiest operations of the Chymic art.

**From Sigismund Bacstrom (allegedly translated from Chaldean).**

- 0) The Secret Works of CHIRAM ONE in essence, but three in aspect.
- 1) It is true, no lie, certain and to be depended upon,
- 2) the superior agrees with the inferior, and the inferior agrees with the superior, to effect that one truly wonderful work.
- 3) As all things owe their existence to the will of the only one, so all things owe their origin to the one only thing, the most hidden by the arrangement of the only God.
- 4) The father of that one only thing is the sun its mother is the moon,
- 5) the wind carries it in its belly; but its course is a spirituous earth.
- 6) That one only thing is the father of all things in the Universe.
- 6a) Its power is perfect,
- 7) after it has been united with a spirituous earth.
- 7a) Separate that spirituous earth from the dense or crude by means of a gentle heat, with much attention.
- 8) In great measure it ascends from the earth up to heaven, and descends again, newborn, on the earth, and the superior and the inferior are increased in power.
- 9) By this wilt thou partake of the honours of the whole world. And Darkness will fly from thee.
- 10) This is the strength of all powers. With this thou wilt be able to overcome all things and transmute all what is fine and what is coarse.

- 11a) In this manner the world was created;
- 12) the arrangements to follow this road are hidden.
- 13) For this reason I am called Chiram Telat Mechasot, one in essence, but three in aspect. In this trinity is hidden the wisdom of the whole world.
- 14) It is ended now, what I have said concerning the effects of the sun. Finish of the Tabula Smaragdina.

### **From Madame Blavatsky**

- 2) What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is similar to that which is below to accomplish the wonders of the one thing.
- 3) As all things were produced by the mediation of one being, so all things were produced from this one by adaption.
- 4) Its father is the sun, its mother the moon.
- 6a) It is the cause of all perfection throughout the whole earth.
- 7) Its power is perfect if it is changed into earth.
- 7a) Separate the earth from the fire, the subtile from the gross, acting prudently and with judgement.
- 8 ) Ascend with the greatest sagacity from earth to heaven, and unite together the power of things inferior and superior;
- 9) thus you will possess the light of the whole world, and all obscurity will fly away from you.
- 10) This thing has more fortitude than fortitude itself, because it will overcome every subtile thing and penetrate every solid thing.
- 11a) By it the world was formed.

### **From Fulcanelli (translated from the French by Sieveking)**

- 1) This is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth:-
- 2) As below, so above; and as above so below. With this knowledge alone you may work miracles.
- 3) And since all things exist in and emanate from the ONE Who is the ultimate Cause, so all things are born after their kind from this ONE.
- 4) The Sun is the father, the Moon the mother;
- 5) the wind carried it in his belly. Earth is its nurse and its guardian.
- 6) It is the Father of all things,
- 6a) the eternal Will is contained in it.
- 7) Here, on earth, its strength, its power remain one and undivided.
- 7a) Earth must be separated from fire, the subtle from the dense, gently with unremitting care.
- 8) It arises from the earth and descends from heaven; it gathers to itself the strength of things above and things below.
- 9) By means of this one thing all the glory of the world shall be yours and all obscurity flee from you.
- 10) It is power, strong with the strength of all power, for it will penetrate all mysteries and dispel all ignorance.
- 11a) By it the world was created.
- 12) From it are born manifold wonders, the means to achieving which are here given
- 13) It is for this reason that I am called Hermes Trismegistus; for I possess the three essentials of the philosophy of the universe.
- 14) This is the sum total of the work of the Sun.

### **From Fulcanelli, new translation**

- 1) It is true without untruth, certain and most true:
- 2) that which is below is like that which is on high, and that which is on high is like that which is below; by these things are made the miracles of one thing.
- 3) And as all things are, and come from One, by the mediation of One, So all things are born from

this unique thing by adaptation.

- 4) The Sun is the father and the Moon the mother.
- 5) The wind carries it in its stomach. The earth is its nourisher and its receptacle.
- 6) The Father of all the Theleme of the universal world is here.
- 6a) Its force, or power, remains entire,
- 7) if it is converted into earth.
- 7a) You separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, gently with great industry.
- 8) It climbs from the earth and descends from the sky, and receives the force of things superior and things inferior.
- 9) You will have by this way, the glory of the world and all obscurity will flee from you.
- 10) It is the power strong with all power, for it will defeat every subtle thing and penetrate every solid thing
- 11a) In this way the world was created.
- 12) From it are born wonderful adaptations, of which the way here is given.
- 13) That is why I have been called Hermes Trismegistus, having the three parts of the universal philosophy.
- 14) This, that I have called the solar Work, is complete.

### **From Idres Shah**

- 1) The truth, certainty, truest, without untruth.
- 2) What is above is like what is below. What is below is like what is above. The miracle of unity is to be attained.
- 3) Everything is formed from the contemplation of unity, and all things come about from unity, by means of adaptation.
- 4) Its parents are the Sun and Moon.
- 5) It was borne by the wind and nurtured by the Earth.
- 6) Every wonder is from it
- 6a) and its power is complete.
- 7) Throw it upon earth,
- 7a) and earth will separate from fire. The impalpable separated from the palpable.
- 8) Through wisdom it rises slowly from the world to heaven. Then it descends to the world combining the power of the upper and the lower.
- 9) Thus you will have the illumination of all the world, and darkness will disappear.
- 10) This is the power of all strength- it overcomes that which is delicate and penetrates through solids.
- 11a) This was the means of the creation of the world.
- 12) And in the future wonderful developments will be made, and this is the way.
- 13) I am Hermes the Threefold Sage, so named because I hold the three elements of all wisdom.
- 14) And thus ends the revelation of the work of the Sun.

### **Hypothetical Chinese Original**

- 1) True, true, with no room for doubt, certain, worthy of all trust.
- 2) See, the highest comes from the lowest, and the lowest from the highest; indeed a marvellous work of the tao.
- 3) See how all things originated from It by a single process.
- 4) The father of it (the elixir) is the sun (Yang), its mother the moon (Yin).
- 5) The wind bore it in its belly, and the earth nourished it.
- 6) This is the father of wondrous works (changes and transformations), the guardian of mysteries,
- 6a) perfect in its powers, the animator of lights.
- 7) This fire will be poured upon the earth...
- 7a) So separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, acting prudently and with art.

- 8) It ascends from the earth to the heavens (and orders the lights above), then descends again to the earth; and in it is the power of the highest and the lowest.
- 9) Thus when you have the light of lights darkness will flee away from you.
- 10) With this power of powers (the elixir) you shall be able to get the mastery of every subtle thing, and be able to penetrate everything that is gross.
- 11a) In this way was the great world itself formed.
- 12) Hence thus and thus marvellous operations will be achieved.



***Baphomet***

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