

Vorstellungen geändert hat und ändern wird (denken wir nur an die neuen Konzeptionen über das Verhältnis der koischen Schule zu Knidos), in unseren Händen zu haben.

Heikki Solin

Garth Fowden: The Egyptian Hermes. A historical approach to the late pagan mind.
Cambridge University Press, 1986. XVII, 244 p. GBP 27.50.

Nowadays when it is obvious that there is not much authentically Persian in Roman Mithraism, very little of the doctrines of Zoroaster in the teachings of his alleged pupils, the Hellenized *magoi*, and nothing Chaldaean in the second century A.D. Chaldaean Oracles, new attempts are still being made to study the Egyptian impact on the writings attributed to (Thoth-)Hermes. According to legend, these were long claimed to originally have been written in hieroglyphs. The renewed interest is not witnessed only by the present book, but also by E. Iversen's *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen 1984).

While Iversen, in my opinion, clearly over-emphasizes the role of Egyptian thought, Fowden appears far more balanced. His aim is not to prove the Egyptian essence of the doctrines in question, but rather to seek the diverse modes of cultural interaction that occurred in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt in order to distinguish between the different elements in the tradition of the Hermetic writings. In the second part of the volume, which seems to be its most original and valuable contribution, the author proceeds to investigate more closely both the technical (alchemical, astrological, iatromathematical, magical) and the philosophical (metaphysical, theological) Hermetica with the purpose of putting forward the new hypothesis that these two groups of texts point in the same direction and present only two sides of Hermetism, the common goal being knowledge of God through knowledge of both the world and the self. The previous scholarly opinion has constantly emphasized the differences between the technical and philosophical Hermetica, concentrating on the study of the latter texts, the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*. The last chapters of the book are dedicated to the question of the social milieu of Hermetism.

So there are many variegated problems to which the author seeks solutions. Consequently it is somewhat difficult to understand the link between the various parts of the work. Moreover, the choice of the Hermetic texts for a social historically oriented study is somewhat problematic. Hermetism is clearly not a coherent and isolated phenomenon, but rather a heterogeneous bulk of writings which have many fundamental contacts (historical as well as ideological) with other Platonic or Platonically influenced religious-philosophical trends of the time (e.g. the Chaldaean Oracles, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism), for which reason the milieu and audience of Hermetism cannot be easily detached from this larger framework. The second handicap is that the Hermetic texts themselves contain but little information for this kind of study, and the author must sometimes seek the Egyptian Hermetic milieu in writings quite distant geographically and chronologically.

In what follows, some details will be discussed which may not be so simple as the author presupposes. In the first part, which analyzes the Egyptian background, the Greek tendency to ascribe mystic and revelatory wisdom to Oriental and un-Greek cultures should

also have been pointed out, even if this is not always the case (cf. already the myth of the Pamphylian Er in Plato's Republic, the Thracian Orpheus, the Hyperborean connections of such 'iatromanteis' as Aristeas, Abaris and Empedocles, and the later examples mentioned at the very beginning of this review). The accounts of Plato's and Pythagoras' visits to Egypt are significant from this point of view. We might be justified in (carefully) speaking of pseudo-Orientalizing and pseudo-Egyptianizing processes in Greek religion and philosophy.

Fowden certainly simplifies things in the first chapter (p. 15) asserting that "in the Imperial Roman period men continued to believe sufficiently in the wisdom of Egypt to travel there and seek out its far-famed temple-dwellers". We are also dealing here with a touristic desire to see the marvels of Egypt and do not have to conclude that these travellers believed in ancient Egyptian wisdom.

A further problem not touched upon by Fowden is the historical dimension of the Egyptian influences: they are chronologically stratified in diverse periods. We know that Orphism and perhaps even Plato exhibit traces of Egyptian thought. To what extent, then, are such things as the alleged Egyptian elements in the Hermetic metaphysics already part of the pre-Hermetic Greek tradition?

When examining the literary antecedents or formal models for Hermetic literature Fowden points out the Egyptian origin of the diction in some parts of the technical Hermetica (the sacred literature of the priests and the so-called instruction genre). However, he passes the immense Greek impact on the form and content of at least the philosophical Hermetica in silence, even though these (esp. Poimandres) share many important features with the Greek apocalyptic genre.

The most remarkable contribution of Fowden seems to lie in the connection of the technical and philosophical texts as two aspects of a single "way of Hermes", as well as in the idea that in Egypt Hermetism was not only *Lesemysterien* but that there were also small Hermetic circles gathered around a teacher and devoted to study, asceticism, and pious fellowship. What we still miss, however, is a study where the Egyptian and Greek Hermes would be analyzed with equal emphasis.

Jaakko Aronen

Giulia Sfameni Gasparro: Misteri e culti mistici di Demetra. Storia delle Religioni, 3. "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, Roma 1986. 371 p. ITL 200.000.

This well-informed and well-documented study is from the school of Ugo Bianchi, and it has the corresponding virtues and, some will add, vices. It attempts a typology of the various mystery cults connected with Demeter, concentrating on the relations between the Eleusinian and the Thesmophoric types of cult. The approach is very formal (and, some will say, 'post-structuralistic'): little attention is paid to aspects of a more or less speculative character, e.g. the contents of soteriology in its relation to fertility rites, the psychological, social and other aspects. Short shrift is also made of some features that might have been studied formally, such as the 'mito/rito' relation, the contacts with other mystery beliefs. (Orphic and/or Pythagorean, etc.), and the reminiscences of Elysian paradise traditions in Eleusinian beliefs.