

## Some Notes On De Vita Coelitus Comparanda And Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis

### Chapter One

The genesis of this essay was some correspondence from a reader of my translation of *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis* who enquired about the Latin text of the two illustrations from a manuscript of *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* that I included. In response, I translated the relevant passages, in the process discovering some interesting connections to the Corpus Hermeticum, alchemy, and the Art (Latin *Ars*) of μαγικός as understood by Pliny the Elder, Ovid, and Tacitus, with Pliny in Book XXX, iii relating that Homer's *Odyssey* is based upon that Art and recounts a legend that Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato, all journeyed abroad to learn that Art. <sup>1</sup>

The context of those passages in my *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis* are the heading and the beginning of Book I, Chapter One of *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* and the heading and the beginning of Book III.

The heading and the beginning of Book I, Chapter One of *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* are, together with my translation:

Novem studiosorum duces.

Quicumque iter illud asperum arduumque et longum ingrediuntur, quod quidem vix tandem ad excelsum novem Musarum templum assiduo labore perducit, novem omnino itineris huius ducibus indigere videntur. Quorum primi quidem tres in coelo, tres sequentes in animo, postremi tres in terra nos ducunt.

Nine guides for the studios. <sup>2</sup>

Those proceeding along that perilous, arduous, tedious, journey will, following difficulties, finally be brought to the Temple of the Nine Muses for that journey requires nine guides to enable it to be reached: the first three toward the Celestial; <sup>3</sup> the next three toward the Anima, <sup>4</sup> and the last three to guide us [back] to The Earth.



Καλλιόπη, The Beautiful-Voiced Muse  
(Pio Clementino Museum, Vatican City)

ταῦτ' ἄρα Μοῦσαι ἄειδον, Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι,  
ἐννέα θυγατέρες μεγάλου Διὸς ἐγγεγαυῖαι,  
κλειώ τ' Εὐτέρπη τε Θάλεια τε Μελπομένη τε  
Τερψιχόρη τ' Ἐρατώ τε Πολύμνια τ' Οὐρανίη τε  
Καλλιόπη θ' ἥ δὲ προφερεστάτη ἐστὶν ἀπασέων.

Such were the things the Muses who dwell on Olympus sang:  
those nine daughters born of Mighty Zeus.  
Cleio, Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene,  
Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Urania,  
and Kalliope who is pre-eminent among them all.

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The heading and the beginning of Book III are, together with my translation:

Marsilii Ficini Florentini Liber De Vita Coelitus Comparanda compositus ab eo inter Commentaria eiusdem in Plotinum.

In quo consistat secundum Plotinum virtus favorem coelitus attrahens, scilicet in eo, quod anima mundi et stellarum daemonumque animae facile alliciuntur corporum formis accommodatis.

A book by Marsilius Ficinus the Florentine Concerning Acquiring Life From The Celestial, and written around his commentaries on Plotinus.

Following Plotinus, what ability is there that can worthily presence <sup>5</sup> the celestial? It is this: when the Forms <sup>6</sup> correspond to their corporeality, the anima-mundi <sup>7</sup> and the anima of the stars and of daemons <sup>8</sup> can be obtained and accommodated.

Which places into context Ficini's use in Chapter XXVI of Book III of the alchemical expression Quomodo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora, which is a restatement of an expression from the Arabic text in *Sirr al-khaliqa* dating from several centuries earlier, which I translated as

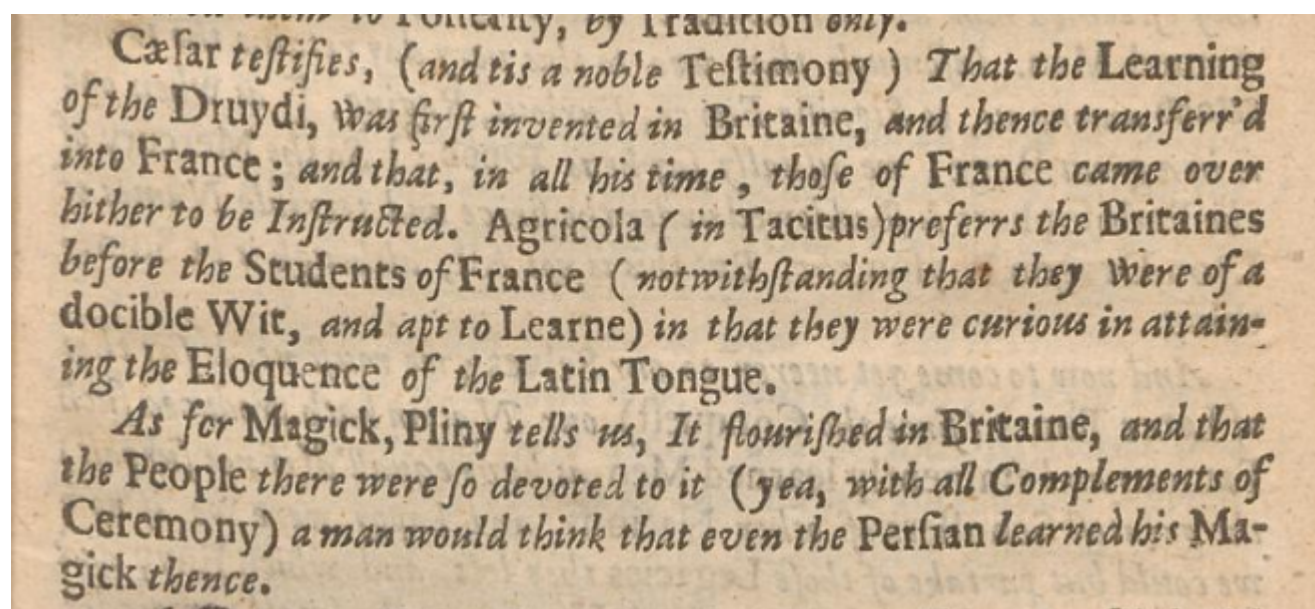
For the higher is as the lower  
With the lower as the higher.

Which brings us to the Latin text of the two manuscript illustrations mentioned above published in my *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis*.

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#### Notes On Terms Used

1. The term μαγικός - Latin magicas - was later translated, in my view mistranslated, as 'magick' and which 'magick' was described by Elias Ashmole in relation to the Druids in his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* published in 1652:



2. Studiosus. Studious, rather than 'eager'.

3. Celestial rather than 'heavenly' since stars and planets are meant.

4. Anima. Retaining the Latin, and not translating as 'soul' since it is a basic hermetic and alchemical principle later appropriated and reinterpreted by Carl Jung. The context is the expression "anima mundi" which Ficini goes on to use and which is usually translated as "world-soul" - German Weltseele - whereas what is implied is ψυχή κόσμου with κόσμος as suggested in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Poemandres:17, Tractate VIII:1 and by Cicero) an ordered structure which includes we human beings, the Earth, and the celestial.

Thus an alternative would be to translate as psyche, as in Tractate VIII, 1 of the Corpus Hermeticum:

Περὶ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, ὧ παῖ, νῦν λεκτέον, τρόπῳ μὲν ποίῳ ἀθάνατος ἡ ψυχὴ, ἐνέργεια δὲ ποταπὴ ἐστὶ συστάσεως σώματος καὶ διαλύσεως. περὶ οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ὁ θάνατος, ἀλλὰ νόημά ἐστὶν ἀθανάτου προσηγορίας, ἢ κενὸν ἔργον ἢ κατὰ στέρησιν τοῦ πρώτου γράμματος λεγόμενος θάνατος ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀθάνατος. ὁ γὰρ θάνατος ἀπωλείας ἐστίν· οὐδὲν δὲ τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπόλλυται. εἰ γὰρ δεύτερος θεὸς ὁ κόσμος καὶ ζῶιον ἀθάνατον, ἀδύνατόν ἐστι τοῦ ἀθανάτου ζῶιου μέρος τι ἀποθανεῖν· πάντα δὲ τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ μέρη ἐστὶ τοῦ κόσμου, μάλιστα δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τὸ λογικὸν ζῶιον.

It is regarding psyche and the corporeal that, my son, we now must speak: of why psyche is deathless and how its vigour assembles and separates the corporeal. For there is no death of what-is, only an apprehension grounded in the denotatum 'deathless', either through unavailing toil or, by discarding the important part, that what is called deathless is deathful. That is, for the deathful there is a loss. But nothing of the Kosmos is ever lost, for if Kosmos is a second theos and a deathless living being then it is not possible for any portion of such a deathless living being to be lost since all beings of Kosmos are part of Kosmos, as most certainly are mortals, the noetic living being.

Notes of the translation:

corporeal. σώμα. Here, the context - qv. for example the following τῶν γὰρ οὐρανίων τὰ σώματα μίαν τάξιν ἔχει in section 4 and τοῦ δὲ ἔννοιαν λαμβάνει ὡς ἀσωμάτου καὶ νοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ in section 5 - suggests corporeal rather than a literal body. A subtle distinction, between "of the nature of matter" and a specific type of "physical body". Compare also the fourth tractate: αἰὲν ὄντος καὶ πάντα ποιήσαντος καὶ ἐνδὸς μόνου, τῆ δὲ αὐτοῦ θελήσει δημιουργήσαντος τὰ ὄντα· τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα ἐκείνου, οὐχ ἀπτόν, οὐδὲ ὄρατόν, οὐδὲ μετρητόν, οὐδὲ διαστατόν, οὐδὲ ἄλλῳ τινὶ σῶματι ὅμοιον.

apprehension. νόημα. cf. Poemandres 3, "I seek to learn what is real, to apprehend the physis of beings."

denotatum. For προσηγορία. In this case, the denotatum - the naming - is the word 'deathless'.

the noetic living being. τὸ λογικὸν ζῶιον. The word λογικός imputes the sense of both the faculty of speech and the faculty of thought, something well-expressed by Sophocles: φθέγμα καὶ ἀνεμόεν φρόνημα καὶ ἀστυνόμους ὄργας ἐδιδάξατο καὶ δυσάυλων πάγων ὑπαίθρεια καὶ δύσομβρα φεύγειν βέλη παντοπόρος, (Antigone, 355f).

There is also in Tractate XI:14 the enigmatic

ζωὴ δὲ ἐστὶν ἔνωσις νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς· θάνατος δὲ οὐκ ἀπώλεια τῶν συναχθέντων, διάλυσις δὲ τῆς ἐνώσεως

Life is the enosis of perceivance and psyche, while death is not the loss of what was joined but the end of enosis.

Which as I explained in my commentary on the verse returns us to the mention of Plotinus by Ficini:

enosis. ἔνωσις. A transliteration given that it is a mystical term with a particular meaning and describes something more than is denoted by the ordinary English word 'union'. It was, for example used by Plotinus, by Maximus of Constantinople, and was part of the mystic philosophy attributed to Pseudo- Dionysius, The Areopagite - qv. Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca. vol IV, 396A. 1857 - and denoted, for Plotinus, a desirable ascent (ἄνοδος) and a 'merging with The One', and for both the Areopagite and Maximus of Constantinople a self-less mystical experience of God.

To translate as psyche has a long history in English, dating back to 1559. In 1918, DeWitt Burton published a monograph - listing, with quotations, the various senses of πνεῦμα - titled *Spirit, Soul, and Flesh: The Usage of Πνεῦμα, Ψυχὴ, and Σὰρξ in Greek Writings and Translated Works from the Earliest Period to 225 AD* (University of Chicago Press, 1918).

5. The term 'presenced' is from the noun 'presencing' (derived from the Latin praesentia) and means "the action or process of making some-thing manifest and/or present and/or established."

6. Formis. Forms, such as a human manufactured shape/artefact. Thus the physical, earthly, corporeal form or shape is a mimesis (μίμησις) of a celestial or several celestial ones. Which corporeal Form could be a telemata into which what is celestial can be presenced, drawn-down. Regarding telemata, qv the appendix *Telemata In The Picatrix* in my *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis*.

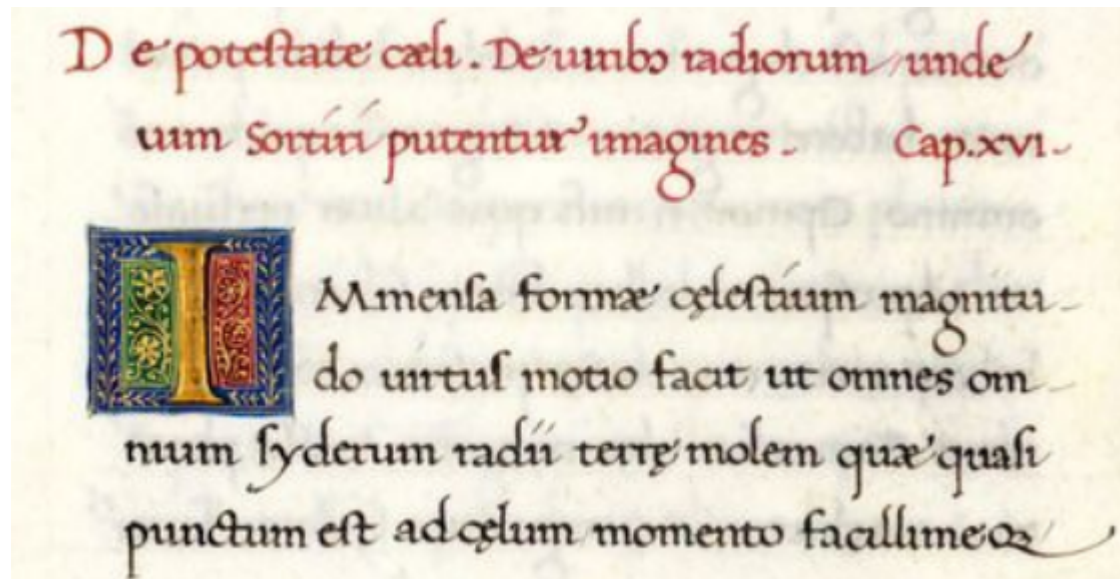
7. See note 4 for the context.

8. Daemons. The guardian entities of sacred places who could bring fortune or misfortune to human beings, qv. the saying attributed to Heraclitus as recorded by Diogenes Laërtius:

ἐκ πυρὸς τὰ πάντα συνεστάναι εἰς τοῦτο ἀναλύεσθαι πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα καὶ πάντα ψυχῶν εἶναι καὶ δαιμόνων πλήρη

The foundation/base/essence of all beings [ 'things' ] is pyros to which they return, with all [of them] by genesis appropriately apportioned [separated into portions] to be bound together again by enantiodromia, and all filled/suffused/vivified with/by ψυχὴ and Dæmons.

## Chapter Two



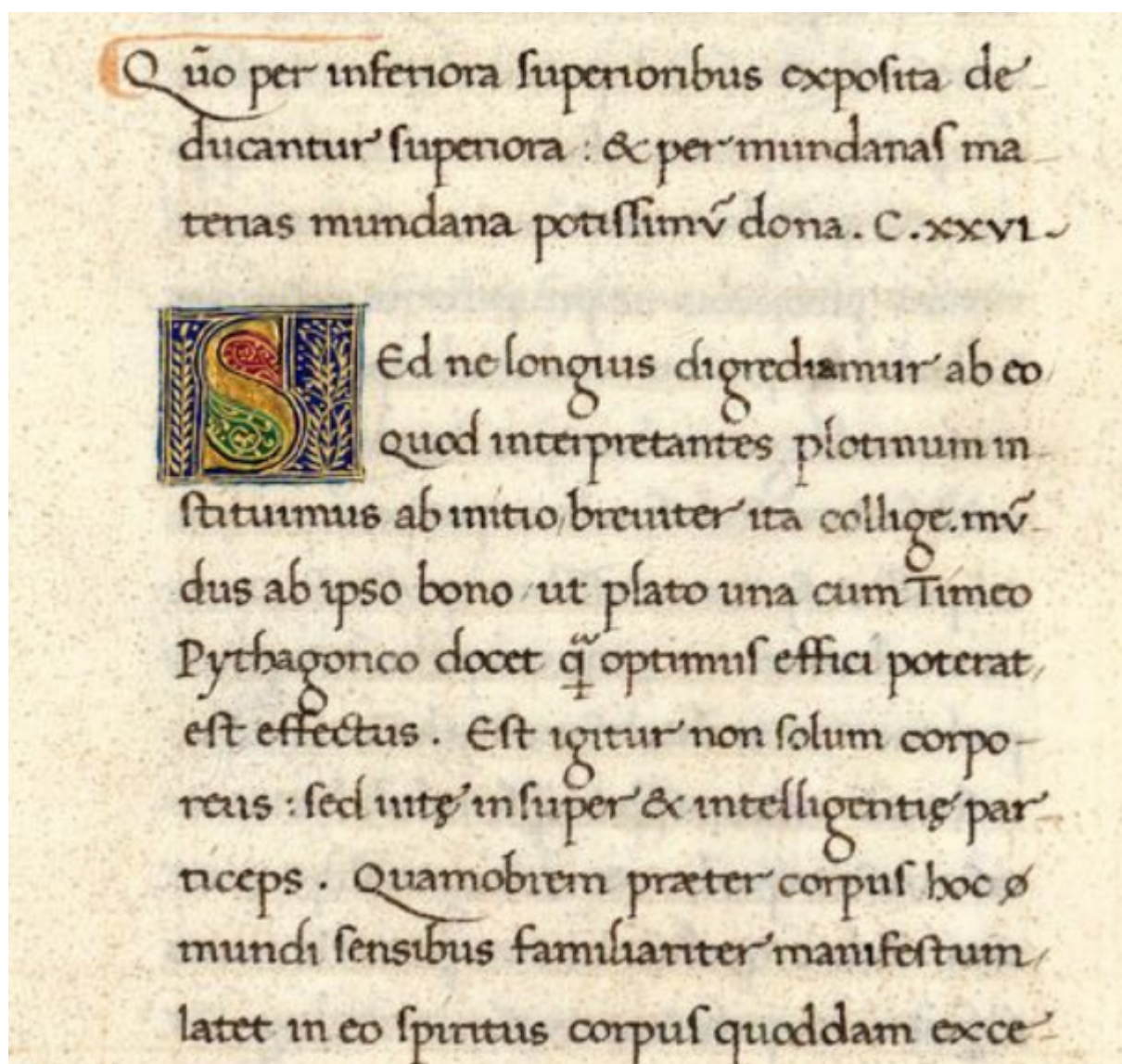
The Latin text and my translation of this image, from my Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis, of the beginning of Ficini's Chapter XVI are:

De potestate coeli. De uiribus radiorum, unde vim sortiri putentur imagines.

On the operation of the celestial. On the potency of emanations <sup>1</sup> on which telemata <sup>2</sup> are considered to draw.

Immensa ferme coelestium magnitudo, uirtus, motio facit, ut omnes omnium siderum radii terrae molem, quae quasi punctum est ad coelum, momento facillimeque usque ad centrum recti penetrent, quod omnes astronomi confitentur.

The immense magnitude, potency and movement of the celestial results in the emanations entering the bulk of the Earth, just a point compared to the celestial, with no difficulty and to its centre, as all astronomers agree.



The Latin text and my translation of this part of Chapter XXVI:

Quo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora, et per mundanas materias mundana potissimum dona.

How, when what is lower is touched by what is higher, the higher is cosmically presenced <sup>3</sup> therein and thus gifted because cosmically aligned.

Sed ne longius digrediamur ab eo, quod interpretantes Plotinum instituimus ab initio, breviter ita collige: mundus ab ipso bono (ut Plato una cum Timaeo Pythagorico docet), quam optimus effici poterat, est effectus. Est igitur non solum corporeus, sed vitae insuper et intelligentiae particeps.

However, to be concise lest we digress too far from our interpretation of Plotinus: Mundus <sup>4</sup> as Plato and Timeus the Pythagorean informed us, was by Fairness <sup>5</sup> itself able to be optimally arranged. Thus it is not solely corporeal, but with Life and Perceiveration <sup>6</sup> and the ability to perceive and discern what is perceived.

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#### Notes On Terms Used

1. Emanations. Not 'rays' or anything similar. Emanations of the divine body' sent down as human beings:

κόσμον δὲ θείου σώματος κατέπεμψε τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ζώιου ἀθανάτου ζῶιον θνητόν, καὶ ὁ μὲν κόσμος τῶν ζώιων ἐπλεονέκτει τὸ ἀείζων, καὶ τοῦ κόσμου τὸν λόγον καὶ τὸν νοῦν. θεατῆς γὰρ ἐγένετο τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἐθαύμασε καὶ ἐγνώρισε τὸν ποιήσαντα.

A cosmos of the divine body sent down as human beings,  
For just as the ever-living cosmic order had an advantage over them  
So did they have an advantage over other living beings in their cosmos  
Because of Logos and Perceiverance.  
Thus did mortals perceive the works of theos, admire them,  
Gaining knowledge of their creator.

Tractate IV:2

Apposite here is my commentary of that verse:

Hence why the twenty-sixth chapter of the book *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* by Marsilii Ficini (published in 1489 CE) has as its heading:  
Quomodo per inferiora superioribus exposita deducantur superiora, et per mundanas materias mundana potissimum dona.

How, when what is lower is touched by what is higher, the higher is cosmically presenced therein and thus gifted because cosmically aligned.

Also, in respect of ἄνθρωπος I have used here - as in my *Poemandres* - the gender neutral 'human being' instead of the more usual 'man', and also - as there - occasionally used the term 'mortal' when the context suggests it. Regarding 'the cosmic order' (κόσμος) itself qv. *Poemandres* 7; 14, and *Ιερός Λόγος* 4:

τὸ γὰρ θεῖον ἢ πᾶσα κοσμικὴ σύγκρασις φύσει ἀνανεουμένη· ἐν γὰρ τῷ θείῳ καὶ ἡ φύσις καθέστηκεν

The divine is all of that mixion: renewance of the cosmic order through Physis  
For Physis is presenced in the divine.

mixion. Alternate (old) spelling of mixtion, meaning the condition or state of being mixed, melded, compounded, combined.

2. Regarding telemata, qv the appendix *Telesmata In The Picatrix* in my *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis*.

3. The term 'presenced' is from the noun 'presencing' (derived from the Latin praesentia) and means "the action or process of making some-thing manifest and/or present and/or established."

4. Mundus. Not simply 'the earth' but κόσμος, as in Tractate IV of the *Corpus Hermeticum*: κόσμον δὲ θείου σώματος κατέπεμψε τὸν ἄνθρωπον, a cosmos of the divine body sent down as human beings."

5. Bonum. Not an abstract or theological 'good' subject to exegesis, but personal fairness, equity, balance, nobility manifest in deeds.

6. Intellegentia. Not 'intelligence' which has too many irrelevant modern connotations but perceiveration as in Tractate IV:2-4 of the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

κόσμον δὲ θείου σώματος κατέπεμψε τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ζώιου ἀθανάτου ζῶιον θνητόν, καὶ ὁ μὲν κόσμος τῶν ζώιων ἐπλεονέκτει τὸ ἀείζων, καὶ τοῦ κόσμου τὸν λόγον καὶ τὸν νοῦν. θεατῆς γὰρ ἐγένετο τοῦ ἔργου τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἐθαύμασε καὶ ἐγνώρισε τὸν ποιήσαντα.

τὸν μὲν οὖν λόγον, ὃ Τάτ, ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμέρισε, τὸν δὲ νοῦν οὐκέτι, οὐ φθονῶν τισιν· ὁ γὰρ

φθόνος οὐκ ἔνθεν ἔρχεται, κάτω δὲ συνίσταται ταῖς τὸν νοῦν μὴ ἔχόντων ἀνθρώπων ψυχαῖς. – Διὰ τί οὖν, ὦ πάτερ, οὐ πᾶσιν ἐμέρισε τὸν νοῦν ὁ θεός; – Ἡθέλησεν, ὦ τέκνον, τοῦτον ἐν μέσῳ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὡσπερ ἄθλον ἰδρῦσθαι.

– Καὶ ποῦ αὐτὸν ἰδρύσατο; – Κρατῆρα μέγαν πληρώσας τούτου κατέπεμψε, δοὺς κήρυκα, καὶ ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῷ κηρύξαι ταῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων καρδίαις τάδε· βάπτισον σεαυτὴν ἢ δυναμένη εἰς τοῦτον τὸν κρατῆρα, ἢ πιστεύουσα ὅτι ἀνελεύση πρὸς τὸν καταπέμψαντα τὸν κρατῆρα, ἢ γνωρίζουσα ἐπὶ τί γέγονας. ὅσοι μὲν οὖν συνῆκαν τοῦ κηρύγματος καὶ ἐβάπτισαντο τοῦ νοός, οὗτοι μετέσχον τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέλειοι ἐγένοντο ἄνθρωποι, τὸν νοῦν δεξάμενοι· ὅσοι δὲ ἤμαρτον τοῦ κηρύγματος, οὗτοι μὲν οἱ λογικοί, τὸν νοῦν μὴ προσειληφότες, ἀγνοοῦντες ἐπὶ τί γέγονασιν καὶ ὑπὸ τίνων,

[2] A cosmos of the divine body sent down as human beings,  
For just as the ever-living cosmic order had an advantage over them  
So did they have an advantage over other living beings in their cosmos  
Because of Logos and Perceivance.  
Thus did mortals perceive the works of theos, admire them,  
Gaining knowledge of their creator.

[3] Thus, Thoth, to all mortals logos was assigned, but not perceivance  
Even though there was no ill-will, for such ill-will arrives not from there  
But below, associated with mortals whose Psyche does not convey Perceivance.  
On account of what, father, did theos not assign perceivance to all?  
Son, the desire was to position it half-way between those psyches, as a reward.

[4] Where, then, was it placed?  
In that large repleteful chaldron which was dispatched down  
With an envoy assigned to declaim to the hearts of mortals:  
If you have strength enough, immerse yourself in the chaldron  
Should you accept you can ascend -  
Having discovered how you came-into-being -  
To the one who dispatched down that chaldron.  
The many who understood that declaration and were immersive with perceivance  
Gained a certain knowledge, becoming more complete mortals  
Through having received the perceivance  
While the many who misunderstood that declaration,  
Having logos without the addition of perceivance,  
Are unperceptive regarding how and why they came-into-being.

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### Summa

The "perilous, arduous, tedious, journey" mentioned by Ficini can lead to the knowledge of "the operation of the celestial [and] the potency of emanations" and thus to an understanding of telesmata and of how they are a mimesis, μῆμις.

The tedious journey can be an alchemical one, a hermetic ἄνοδος as described in the Poemandres tractate of the Corpus Hermeticum; or a studious one involving alchemical texts such as Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis, Ghayat al-Hakim and its Latin version titled Picatrix; or a more 'occult' one, based on mimesis and the Art of μαγικός, such as outlined in De Vita Coelitus Comparanda.

David Myatt  
January 26<sup>th</sup> 2024

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### Bibliography

§ David Myatt, *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis*, e-text, 2024, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2024/01/myatt-tabula-smaragdina-hermetis.pdf>

§ David Myatt, *Corpus Hermeticum*, e-text 2017. (i) Printed version, ISBN-13: 978-1976452369 (ii) Gratis pdf, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/eight-tractates-v2-print.pdf>

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