



HIDDEN

Secrets of the Western Esoteric Tradition

WISDOM

TIM WALLACE-MURPHY

"The best book about the secret tradition I've read for many years.

Tim Wallace-Murphy writes with style, passion and truth. A magnificent achievement."

— GRAHAM HANCOCK, AUTHOR OF *FINGERPRINTS OF THE GODS*

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TIM WALLACE-MURPHY

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TIM WALLACE-MURPHY

This book is respectfully dedicated to my first literary collaborator, Trevor Ravenscroft. A warm, rumbustious, humanly flawed genius who knew how to turn his soul into a magic mirror to reflect his love of God on all who knew him.

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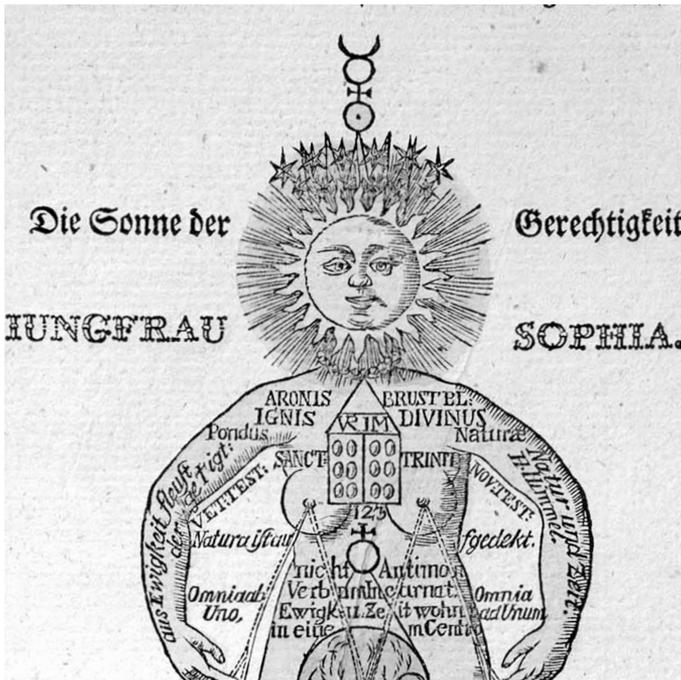
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Detail from *Secret Figures of the Rosicrucians of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Altona, Hamburg, Germany, 1785.

INTRODUCTION

The mystery surrounding the Knights Templar and the controversies that have perpetually surrounded the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians and the other heirs to Templar traditions, have tended to disguise the fact that their common knowledge and insight predates the foundation of the Templar Order by several thousand years. This hidden stream of spirituality and that of sacred knowledge are inseparably entwined to form the single most important, continuous strand in the entire Western esoteric tradition. This tradition which, despite its hidden nature, was described by Theodore Roszak of California State University as “probably the single, most profoundly imaginative and influential spiritual tradition of European culture,” exerted a seminal influence on the thinking of the builders of the great cathedrals; leading teachers in ecclesiastical schools; philosophers, playwrights and poets such as Shakespeare, Goethe, Blake and Yeats; artists and Renaissance giants such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo; and indirectly on all generations of European Christendom. It is also the root from which sprang alchemy and modern science. While there has been enough continuity to use the term “tradition” accurately, it should, nonetheless, be understood as one that is dynamic, pervasive, loose and constantly re-synthesising, disappearing from plain sight for most of the time only to be intermittently and indirectly perceived by its fruits, the achievements of its many, multi-talented and spiritually perceptive initiates and disciples.

This vibrant hidden stream of spirituality irrigated the intellectually barren wastes of medieval Europe and brought the beginnings of peace and stability to a continent riven by squabbling

feudal barons, warring kings and dominated by an oppressive clergy. The Knights Templar created the climate wherein the seeds of capitalism could grow and flourish, and the underground streams of hidden wisdom that were passed down by their heirs stimulated and sustained the Renaissance. Yet despite the obvious benefits that flowed from their insight, the Knights Templar and all who followed in their footsteps were slandered, harried and persecuted by Holy Mother the Church, to the point of near extinction.

It has always been a mystery how a church, supposedly founded on the teachings of the “gentle Jesus,” deliberately created a regime of repression founded firmly on intolerance, torture and genocide. When we examine the relationship between the Christian Church and its supposed spiritual rivals in the light of the Dead Sea Scrolls material, the answers emerge with startling clarity.

It is not my intent to add to controversy, to criticize or blindly praise that which I do not fully understand, but any close and dispassionate examination of the facts soon discloses that spiritual insight is both very real and highly relevant to everyday life, especially in the turbulent and troubled world which we now all inhabit. Indeed, it may well prove to be the key to the very survival of mankind as a whole. Therefore this work is dedicated to all those, throughout the ages, who kept this spiritual tradition alive despite appalling persecution so that we in the twenty-first century might benefit from its accumulated fruits and ennoble our lives by emulating their example.





Cave painting at Lascaux, France.

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CHAPTER 1

From A State Of Grace? Prehistoric Man and the Dawn of Civilization

Most civilizations have evolved similarly – from the wandering band, egalitarian, co-operative, sharing resources and in awe of nature, through the tribe, to the settled agricultural community and town and so to the city, at first usually centred on religion. As numbers grow, bureaucracies evolve and, from them, secular elites. Hierarchies of rule and ownership bring the desire first to defend power and wealth, then to acquire more – by force. Each rise in numbers is led by a new order – with scope for peace and war. As we pass from the industrial into the information age, we seek a global order – but, unless we control our technology, risk global destruction.¹

– The Gaia Peace Atlas

Nothing arises in a vacuum. Culture, religions and civilization itself all have their roots in the past and any study that ignores this ever-present fact is valueless. Therefore in order to gain a true appreciation of the nature of esoteric knowledge and learn why it had to remain secret in the European context, as well as its long-term effects, we need to begin our research at the earliest time possible. Then, progressing forwards, step by step from that mysterious beginning we can begin to understand the nature of the massive advances and changes that have

occurred in the evolution of man and of society itself and appreciate the formative role that esoteric knowledge has played in creating the culture that sustains us all.

The past is a very strange place; people behaved differently there. Even recent history is distorted in our perception by our own inability to understand the thinking patterns and basic attitudes that were the foundation of earlier cultures. It seems almost futile to try and appreciate attitudes, ideas and beliefs that have long since been consigned to intellectual oblivion on the short but misty road from those days to the present. In any attempt to resolve the problems, not merely of history, but of prehistory – the time of myth and legend – we must try to correct this distortion by whatever reasonable means that modern scientific and academic disciplines can provide.

History, as we now understand it, did not begin until the development of writing and written records. The multi-faceted and mysterious problems of the interpretation of the prehistory of our race are compounded by our own previous reluctance, or unwillingness, to concede that man himself is an integral part of the evolutionary process: a process which is not just biological in nature, but also encompasses the evolution of both intellect and consciousness. Our only guidelines in this attempt to understand our own early development as a species are the archaeological artifacts that have come to light, our present level of conscious intellectual ability and, above all, the mythology that has been handed down over the ages. Mythology used and evaluated with circumspection may yet provide some of the keys to unlock the doors that, at present at least, bar the way to a more comprehensive understanding of our cultural and religious origins.

Yet how can one speak seriously of mythology in this age of modern technology and science? Of what use can it be in our

search for understanding and factual evidence? Many scientists, philosophers and historians of the present century are divided in their evaluation of the use of mythology as an historical tool. However, the value placed on myth as an indication of historical truth is undergoing a profound change. Interpreted with discretion and in conjunction with archaeological evidence or, supported by the opinions of scholars of repute, far from confusing the issue, mythology can provide insights into the developmental prehistoric era of man that stand the test of dispassionate scientific analysis. One modern scholar, Theodore Roszak, claims that: "The meaning of myths lies in the vision of life and nature they hold at their core."² This confirmation of the value of oft-derided myth was echoed by Joseph Campbell who claimed that: "Mythology is the penultimate truth – penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words."³ This point was reinforced by Kathleen Raine, who stated that "Fact is not the truth of myth; myth is the truth of fact"⁴ and by the Indian scholar, Ananda Coomaraswamy, who wrote: "Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be stated in words."⁵ Bill Moyers remarked to Joseph Campbell, "Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance." Campbell replied, "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life."⁶

The precursors of our species evolved in the heartland of Africa over two million years ago. Scientists begin to call these creatures "early man" at the stage of development they reached one million years later. It is generally believed that they lived in small family-based bands of "hunter-gatherers." These were the first demonstrable form of human organization: one within which man formed his earliest relationships with other men, with nature and with the planet that continues to sustain him. This

primitive way of life persists to this day in the more remote regions of the globe, and it is doubtful if the basic manner of living of the modern hunter-gatherers differs greatly from that of mankind's distant ancestors.

Hunter-gatherers live in small mobile groups and have to adopt ecologically sustainable lifestyles. When the population outstrips the available food supply, they have no alternative but to travel on in search of new territory. Their choice is brutal – move or starve.⁷ Thus we can see that early man had to devise ways to create and maintain a social organization which allowed for and encouraged a nomadic, or at best, semi-nomadic lifestyle. With continuing growth of population, these small bands had to extend their range of movement over an ever-widening area. They moved inexorably onwards and outwards until they eventually spread in ever increasing numbers, fanlike, across the face of the Earth and established themselves throughout the globe from China in the east, to Europe in the west.⁸

Archaeological evidence exists that sheds some light on the general nature of some of the belief systems that may have sustained their social organization. Burial patterns and certain other practices provide evidence that disclose the essentially “spiritual” nature of these beliefs. Cave paintings such as those at Altimera, Lascaux, Montespan and Les Trois Frères in the Ariège in France reflect the shamanistic practices of the early cave dwellers, a form of ritual magic that is still practiced today by hunter-gatherers in many parts of South America, Africa and Australia today. As man became more numerous and pressure on the available food supply became greater, it was inevitable that magic, or some form of ritual, spiritual enhancement became of greater importance. Cave paintings, burial practices and female figurines found in excavations all point to a strong and persistent belief in spiritual

powers by our Stone Age ancestors.⁹ In fact it is now generally agreed that primitive man lived in awe of nature, seeing some form of living spirituality in every leaf, every creature, and every aspect of their lives.

Indeed that insightful English author, Colin Wilson, suggests that primitive man had one great advantage over his modern counterpart, in that he knew that he possessed spiritual powers. Knowing this, if he wanted to develop and deepen them it was simply a question of finding the best possible method of doing so. The insight probably came first, the method followed and, as we have seen in the example of the so-called cave art, Stone Age man soon found at least one. Wilson also introduced the conception that among all peoples are natural leaders. Perhaps they are the dominant males of the animal kingdom, normally about one in twenty of any population. These he called the “Few.” It is to this group that he ascribes the search to increase and pass on to succeeding generations the spiritual or magical powers designed to enhance the chance of survival of the entire band. This search for shamanistic rituals and procedures to heighten man’s spiritual powers, allied to the time-consuming search for food and shelter, explains to some degree the pressures that tended to restrict prehistoric man’s inventiveness and cultural progress.¹⁰

Until approximately ten thousand years ago our ancestors had little impact on the planet, or on the animals and plants around them. Then came a quantum leap in the development of man with profound implications for not only man himself, but for all the plants and animals and, ultimately, for the survival of the planet as a whole. In some inexplicable way our primitive ancestors found ways to domesticate animals and plants, thus entering into a new and evolutionary partnership with many of them.

No other living species has accomplished this in anything like the same manner.

Darwin's much ignored co-discoverer of the theory of "natural selection," Alfred Russel Wallace, claimed that some "metaphysical force" had directed evolution at three different and critical points: the beginning of life itself; the beginnings of consciousness; and at the start of civilization.¹¹ This presupposes that mankind passed through a period when man himself was not a conscious being. Julian Huxley, in his introduction to a work on the same subject by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, states quite clearly that human intelligence and consciousness were an integral part of the evolutionary process.¹² Thus three leading scientists suggest that consciousness emerged at a critical stage of evolutionary advance as something genuinely new and startling. When it did emerge it had a dramatic effect on the course of history as the evolution of consciousness provoked significant and wide reaching behavioral changes in man, particularly the dramatic shift from the nomadic lifestyle of the early hunter-gatherers to the creation of settled communities of the earliest agriculturalists. This is the single most dramatic change in the way of life mankind has ever experienced. This massive change, which laid down the direct roots of our present civilization, did not take place instantaneously across the settled regions of the globe. It happened piecemeal and spread slowly. With this change we commenced the process that began to separate us from the spiritual heritage that was so important to our Neolithic ancestors – one that is not given substance by written records or mythology, for there are none, but by monuments that have fascinated modern man for centuries.

Throughout Western Europe, especially in Great Britain, there is a vast and imposing body of evidence testifying to the

supreme value accorded spirituality by our first ancestors who began to raise crops, domesticate animals and live in settled communities. Stonehenge, Avebury, Carnac and an infinite variety of other megalithic structures stand in mute testimony to early man's spiritual beliefs.



Stakes around the Newgrange burial chamber. County Meath, Ireland.
Photo courtesy of Jimmy Harris, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.

CHAPTER 2

Mute Testimony to Neolithic Spirituality

All places that the eye of heaven visits
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens¹³

– William Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second*

Sacred sites of Stone Age man are mysterious in the extreme. Irrespective of their location or size they are all imbued with a tangible mystical power that attracts awe-stricken tourists and pilgrims by the thousands. It is not simply the size of the structures erected upon them that amazes the twentieth century observer. Some innate, haunting quality seems to lie tantalizingly just beyond the understanding of modern man, puzzling him, attracting him and, apparently, satisfying some deep inner need. Is this quality something spiritual perhaps, or does it derive from the mystical power of the site itself? Even the Romans were aware of this; indeed, they used to describe it, as the “genius loci” – the spirit of the place.

The puzzle deepens if we understand that people who left no written records constructed this vast range of megalithic structures scattered right across the globe. Their compelling allure arises, in part, from the immense size of the stones used in their construction and the fact that we have no clear idea of how or why many of them were built. Some, such as the long barrows and dolmens, are quite obviously burial places but the exact function

of most of the others is still beyond the understanding of modern man. The siting of these ritual monuments poses an even more intriguing problem. Their location was deliberate and calculated on sites of demonstrable telluric power. The Greek philosopher and initiate, Plato, believed that the ancients were simple people who accepted things as they were. If a particular place had a mystical appeal, a magical effect or a healing power, they used it. Did our ancestors discover the telluric energy first, or the magical sites? We will never know. What is beyond doubt is that one vitally important attribute required of a Druid was the ability to discern the Earth's sacred places.

Amateur archaeologist Alfred Watkins rediscovered strange lines of telluric energy in the early 1920s and demonstrated that man could still detect them.¹⁴ Water divining had been known for centuries and was accepted as a “God-given” means of finding water. Now a “new” use was found for divining, or dowsing – the location of a complex network of lines of energy linking a wide variety of ancient sites. They join the sites of long barrows, dolmens, henges, healing wells, sacred grottos and many early churches – tangible and detectable lines connecting them all with amazing, yet predictable, precision. In the East, these lines of energy, or *chi*, have been known and recognized by Chinese feng shui experts for millennia, but in the Western world the ability to detect and use them had been lost for centuries.

Another enigma arises from the inexplicable, and truly amazing, precision of alignment found between so many monuments and the planetary bodies and stars. This is not an isolated phenomenon – there are many Neolithic temples that are orientated to receive light and energy from heavenly bodies. The best-known example is, perhaps, Stonehenge, but it is at Newgrange in Ireland that one of the most fascinating alignments is to be

found. This Neolithic passage grave dates from 3200 BCE. It predates Stonehenge and Avebury and is several centuries older than the Pyramids of Giza. In 1963 the examination of an anomalous stone slab at the beginning of the passage led to the discovery of a “roof box” immediately over the entrance. This had been constructed in such a manner that on midwinter’s day the first rays of the morning sun shine down the passageway and fall upon the burial chamber at the far end. How did Neolithic man in 3200 BCE know how to align such a vast structure in this precise manner? The precision is such that these so-called “primitive” people must have possessed an incredible degree of astronomical knowledge.¹⁵ A study of ancient Egyptian construction proves that this knowledge persisted and developed well into the era of early civilization.¹⁶ This precision and skill is not the only dramatic discovery we make when we study Neolithic sites and artifacts. Meticulous archaeological excavation reveals even more startling evidence of the power of spiritual insight and its effects upon human behavior, disclosing facts that flatly contradict many widely held beliefs about the essentially warlike nature of mankind.

One such settlement which had been continuously occupied from the middle of the seventh millennium to the middle of the sixth millennium BCE was discovered in 1961 at Çatalhöyük in Anatolia. Excavations brought to light evidence that amplified and transformed the whole conception of Neolithic behavior. Arts and crafts were well represented, giving a crucial insight into man’s activities, appearance and dress, as well as his religious beliefs. Fragments of textiles were found that are among the earliest yet discovered. Bones discovered on the site clearly show that animals had not yet been domesticated; the inhabitants lived on the results of their agriculture, supplemented by hunting. From the evidence

provided by this site much can be deduced to illuminate man's behavior at that time and even earlier.

No evolutionary development takes place in a vacuum. Each step forward is related to the habits and actions that preceded it. From detailed analysis of finds at the Çatalhöyük site we find, to our intense surprise, that war is neither a part of human nature, nor necessarily of urban life. This site has now been excavated back to the seventh millennium BCE and, surprisingly, in the eight hundred years of its occupation that have so far been studied, there is no evidence of any act of war; no sign of any sack or massacre; no single skeleton that discloses any indication that death was caused by an act of violence. This apparently startling find came as no surprise to many scholars whose opinions prior to this discovery had been devalued or overlooked. One noted writer, Charlene Spretnak, talks movingly of the culture revealed by the archaeology in such settlements in Old Europe:

... which have revealed sophisticated art and religious symbols reflecting reverence for Mother Earth, the elements and animals; egalitarian graves; and no fortifications or evidence of warfare before the invasions of the barbarian tribes we now call the Indo European tribes from the Eurasian steppes.¹⁷

Jacob Bronowski gave a simple explanation as to how war came about: "But war, organized war, is not a human instinct. It is simply a highly planned and co-operative form of theft." Yet, the majority of people in the twenty-first century, working on the experience of our own time and that of history, believe implicitly that war is part of human nature. This conception is now completely untenable – for there is no firm evidence whatsoever from any source to indicate that humanity engaged in inter-group conflict

or mass violence, until as late as 10,000 BCE. The first recorded war of which we have any historical certainty took place between Upper and Lower Egypt about 3200 BCE. This conflict, like so many others since, was concerned with the acquisition of land. In the hunter-gatherer societies that have survived until the twentieth century, violent and aggressive behavior is ritualized and rarely results in serious injury. It is so-called civilized man, not the primitives, who invented and engaged in war, later refining it in all its awful technological, amoral destructiveness to the point where the entire planet could be destroyed and all forms of life extinguished forever in a nuclear holocaust.

Yet is the evidence from Çatalhöyük the only basis from which we can deduce the importance of spiritual matters to our Stone Age ancestors? We have mentioned the burial practices, wall paintings and figurines that have been discovered elsewhere. There are many mythologies that tell of the “divine” origin of agriculture and handicrafts. Joseph Campbell wrote prolifically about the mythology of the North American Indians and the Polynesian peoples of the Pacific who both claimed, quite clearly, to have received agricultural knowledge as a “God-given gift.”¹⁸ Although there is no evidence whatsoever for any cultural contact between these races there is a unanimity between their myths that is truly startling. This is in harmony with the ancient traditions of all peoples who invariably speak of a “divine origin” for their practical skills. In Persia, Zoroaster learned the art of agriculture from the Sun god, Ahura Mazda; Osiris taught the Egyptians the art of growing corn; Dionysus traveled the lands to impart the knowledge of the vine; Moses received the Tablet of the Law from Jehovah on Mount Sinai; Hammurabi was personally instructed by the god Shamash; the goddess Egeria inspired Numa Pompilius to instigate the religious rituals of Rome.¹⁹

In each of the early civilizations an elite corps of initiates guarded and interpreted a body of sacred knowledge and magic that was then used to the benefit of the entire community, tribe or race. This elite corps of rulers, priests and kings were initiated members of the “Few” and acted as stewards of the gods. They are believed by many to be the spiritual heirs to the shamans, or medicine men, of their hunter-gatherer ancestors. The knowledge, or “gnosis,” that they guarded, preserved and increased, was the very foundation of the sacred texts and rituals of the state religion and influenced the way of life of the entire people. This was as true for the civilization of ancient Egypt – which is now known to be the source of much of Western esoteric knowledge – as for that of the Chinese, Mesopotamian and Mayan peoples. In each instance this gnosis had its roots deeply embedded in the mysterious era of the prehistory of the civilization that recorded it. Its true earlier origins and evolutionary development can only be guessed at, for by the time that civilization had evolved to the point of literacy, the knowledge itself had developed a depth and complexity that is truly beyond our present understanding. Yet in our arrogance we have the temerity to describe the people who first used this knowledge as “primitive.”





The Pharaoh Akhenaten depicted in painted limestone,
located at the Louvre Museum, Paris.

Photo by Rama, Wikimedia Commons, Cc-by-sa-2.0-fr.

CHAPTER 3

Egypt – Land of Magic and Mystery

Early civilizations, all founded firmly on the new practice of agriculture, developed in five major centers around the world. The first three – Egypt, Sumer and India – developed completely independently of one another. The other two – China and Central America – came much later but apparently in the same way. Each individual center developed blindly, separately, struggling to survive, to spread and to ramify, as though each was specifically designed to transform the entire globe.²⁰

Written records, so essential for an accurate understanding of the past, only came into being with the development of city building societies, with the rise of early civilization in fact. The development of writing in the first civilizations has enabled modern archaeology to expand and amplify the previously silent form of witness given by ancient structures. Interpreted with care, an archaeological site, be it the excavation of a city, royal grave or temple, when examined in the light of written records, can speak to us like the disembodied voice of truth arching over the millennia directly from the early decades of civilized man to the present. The knowledge and skill that built these memorable structures, the beliefs that underpinned both their purpose and their construction, has reached out and touched nearly every generation since that time: at first in the countries of the Middle East, then through the Roman Empire into Europe and beyond. All three of the great religions that span the globe, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, owe a great debt to their common ancestor, the initiatory religion of ancient Egypt.

Careful study now demonstrates that the reality that manifests itself within the monuments of ancient Egypt evolved inexorably from a complex basis of profound knowledge and technical skill whose precise extent and origin we still regard with astonishment. Each one of these enormous buildings not only freezes that stream of ever expanding knowledge at a precise moment in its overall development, but provides a magical “rear-view mirror” giving a snapshot of a very different culture, a distinct flavor and scent of a subtly evolving belief system founded firmly upon “sacred knowledge,” at a reasonably dateable time in history; which may tend to explain why Egyptology has been such a compelling field of study for over two centuries.

The fascination of Western European academics with this ancient and mysterious world has proved both obsessive and full of controversy and dispute. Public interest has been stimulated and sustained by the splendor of the archaeological successes of the early twentieth century. The treasures of Tutankhamun and the popular mythology of the so-called “mummy’s curse” which followed, brought what was then an art and is now an arcane science, to the level of “pop” culture. Is this profound and continuing interest in Egyptology so strange? Not when you consider that this ancient land, which flourished so productively along the fertile narrow valley of the Nile, has produced not only the enormous troves of treasure and intriguing monuments such as the pyramids, but also the seeds of modern science, medicine, surgery, astronomy, mathematics and civil engineering on a grand scale. It was also the land of Moses, a figure of immense importance to all three of the great worldwide religions. One way or another, modern Western civilization owes an incalculable debt to the divine gift of “gnosis,” or sacred knowledge, that is the vibrant, spiritual legacy of Egyptian civilization.

One monument that reflects this sacred knowledge in its construction is believed to be the oldest masonry building in the world, King Djoser's seven-stepped pyramid at Saqqara.²¹ The designer and builder of this imposing structure was a towering figure in his own right: the priest-architect and genius, Imhotep, high priest of Annu and the Egyptian astronomer general. He was granted the title "chief of the observers" and the Greeks later equated him to their god of medicine, Asclepius.²² His wisdom, knowledge, insight and healing powers were qualities particularly prized and revered in ancient Egypt. The seven steps correspond to the seven planetary spheres that encircle the Earth. According to the ancient Egyptians the seven planets were held to represent the seven stages of ascent to the heavens through which the soul must pass after death. The comparison between this Egyptian belief in a seven stage planetary ascent after death and the Druidic belief in a seven stage purification of the soul before death is intriguing, to say the least. Some of the keys to the puzzles posed by the levels of skill and technology needed to construct the Pyramid of Djoser are to be found nearby in pyramids of a much later date. Here, texts were discovered that grant us a fascinating understanding of the depth of knowledge possessed at a very early stage of development by this complex civilization.

It is ironic that in this modern scientific age so many important discoveries come about by accident. The history of medicine, physics and the pharmaceutical industry are littered with so-called "accidental" discoveries that have changed the course of modern history. The discovery of the "Pyramid Texts" is a classic example of this. The true agent of discovery in this instance was a desert fox, an animal that has inhabited this region since time immemorial and which is, in reality, a jackal, a creature who is

best remembered in Egypt for his two deified forms. One, the god Anubis, is responsible for the final judgment – a weighing of the heart – to see if the dead are worthy of admission to the court of Osiris; the other form of this jackal god is that of Wepwawet or Upuaut, the “Opener of the Ways.” An uncannily prophetic title in light of what occurred in the late 1800s: an Arab head workman spotted a lone jackal outlined by the dawn’s early light, sauntering towards one of the pyramids at Saqqara. Stopping intermittently, as if inviting the astonished workman to follow him, the jackal seemingly vanished. Urged on by dreams of treasure perhaps, the workman followed, finding the entrance to a small tunnel that he then entered. Eventually he reached a chamber containing not the treasure he expected, but one of far greater import to the archaeological fraternity so busy in Egypt at that time.²³

The precise date of the discovery is not known and even which of the leading archaeologists to first see the texts is unclear. Two of the Pyramid Texts were almost certainly first examined by Auguste Mariette, the director of the Egyptian Antiquities Services.²⁴ Others were discovered by Gaston Maspero, who was the first European to explore the interior of the Pyramid of Unas. What is supremely obvious is that the modern four-legged incarnation of Upuaut had indeed opened the ways, both literally and figuratively. The same could be said for the Pyramid Texts themselves for they led, ultimately, to a more profound understanding not only of the priestly belief system of the time of Unas but also, more importantly, of the great depth of that knowledge that had been accrued in the era before the time the texts were actually inscribed.

The Pyramid Texts were found on the walls of several chambers within five of the smaller pyramids at Saqqara. They consist of hieroglyphic inscriptions, carved or incised in the limestone

walls and decorated with exquisite gold and turquoise coloring. In all there are over four thousand lines of hymns and formulae, the greater portion of which, according to Masparo, were first formulated during the prehistoric period in Egypt. In his opinion they are, without doubt, the oldest collection of religious writings ever discovered. I. E. S. Edwards, former keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, wrote of them in 1947: “The Pyramid Texts were not the invention of the Fifth or Sixth Dynasties, but had originated in earlier times.”²⁵

There is no doubt that the texts and the astrological knowledge they embody date back to a very much earlier period. In the opinion of Masparo, they certainly predate the writing of the Old Testament by at least two millennia, and the writing of the New Testament by nearly 3,400 years. They are, in fact, the earliest known recordings of an oral tradition of secret knowledge that, in all probability, had its origins in tribal shamanism; a tradition handed down in secret by members of the “Few” from master to pupil in the process known as “initiation.” The religious, ritual and esoteric content disclosed by a modern translation clearly shows that it was a highly complex and well-developed stellar cult that was being described, one in which the dead king would ascend to heaven and be ritually reunited with the stars. The definitive translation was published in 1969 by Raymond Faulkner who wrote that: “The Pyramid Texts constitute the oldest corpus of Egyptian religious and funerary literature now extant.”²⁶

The texts repeatedly refer to the so-called *Zep Tepi*, or “First Time,” the legendary time of Osiris, the ancient era in which Egypt was ruled directly by the gods who gave the Egyptians the sacred gift of knowledge. As no archaeological or archival proof exists that gives the slightest hint as to when, or indeed what, the so-called First Time was, it is difficult to establish precisely what

the texts are referring to. Many mythologists lean towards the theory that this is a reference to earlier Babylonian or Sumerian civilizations, citing the obvious parallels between the Osiris legends and the worship of the goddess Ishtar and her resurrecting consort or son, Tammuz. Perhaps more importantly, the Pyramid Texts also disclose a complex, profound and uncannily accurate knowledge of astronomy which is inseparable from the ancient esoteric concept of “as above, so below.” This finds an echo in a phrase from the Lord’s Prayer, “on earth as it is in heaven,” in which the visible stellar reality in the heavens is matched, in this instance, by the physical and tangible geographical features of the Egyptian landscape. For example, the constellation of the Milky Way in the heavens was believed to be represented by the River Nile that brought life, sustenance and prosperity to the land known as the two kingdoms of Egypt.

According to the ancient initiates of the Egyptian priesthood, the two kingdoms of Egypt were a living temple, built by the “spirit of God,” where man could play his ritual part and reunite his spirit with the divine as the result of an alchemical process. The Temple of God on Earth, Egypt itself, was patterned on an “eternal archetype” of the supreme achievement of nature – namely man.²⁷ This geographical representation of the human archetype had a spine, a head in the north and a body in the south. Along the serpentine spine, represented by the River Nile, lay seven great mystical centers marked by temples, which were the earthly equivalent to the seven major energy plexii or “chakras” in the human body. Each of these had specific rituals and secret teachings that directly related to their function. Those who were initiated at particular temples were expected to serve their chakral and spiritual purpose for the benefit of all who inhabited the two kingdoms of Egypt. Thus we find the fundamental concept that

the fruits of initiation, sacred knowledge and wisdom were to be used for the benefit of the entire community.

The outward complexity of Egyptian religion with its multiplicity of gods masks a very different concept of ritual duty that is hard to appreciate for modern people used to the idea of public participation in religious rituals. Apart from the great festivals of each year when the public did attend, most religious duties were performed in private by an initiatory priesthood who were led by the highest initiates of them all, the pharaohs.

The growth of sacred knowledge and insight, and mathematical, scientific and astrological skill up to this point had been enormous. Secret systems of language were developed to encode mathematical symbolism, esoteric knowledge and magic. These secret languages were known as “Hieratic” for written work, and “Senzar” for the spoken form. Healing had reached a standard of subtlety and sophistication that was not equaled in Western Europe until the late twentieth century. Post-mortem examination of mummified bodies demonstrates that highly complex and effective brain surgery was common. The wealth and creative artistry of the Egyptian artisans of that time, and later, were given graphic demonstration by the discoveries in the tomb of Tutankhamun. The boy king, like all his ancestors, was not only pharaoh, but also an initiate of the Egyptian Temple Mysteries. Those who were initiated in this manner developed a solemn and resigned worldview. They had faced the goddess Isis and had partaken of her wisdom and perceived themselves as “sons of the widow” – a phrase that rings bells with the worldwide brotherhood of Freemasonry today.²⁸

These royal initiates performed the duties and secret rites that ensured that divine blessings would continue to flow and nourish all the Egyptian people. The fruits of a body of sacred knowledge known only to the initiated – such as medicine, surgery, healing,

astronomy, engineering and science – were then deployed to the benefit of all the inhabitants of the two kingdoms of Egypt. One man from the very heart of this tradition, who was raised as the son of a pharaoh and was an initiate of the highest degree, was to lay the foundations of a religious system that would transform the world and bring the benefits of sacred knowledge to a far wider community. The man we know as Moses.

Until relatively recently, no one had ever been able to identify Moses with any recognizable character in the Egyptian historical record, and even today there is some dispute about exactly who he was. The first breakthrough in the search for the historical Moses came in 1934 when Sigmund Freud wrote the introductory chapters to a book on Moses. They were published in the German magazine *Imago* in 1937 under the title “Moses an Egyptian?” In this article Freud not only showed that the name Moses was Egyptian but also demonstrated that the biblical mythology surrounding his birth was an inversion of the norm as described in the mythology of Sargon, where the child of rich or royal parents is brought up in humble circumstances. Freud stated that this was to hide Moses’ Egyptian origins. In a later article, also published by *Imago*, the question was posed “Why did the lawgiver, if he was an Egyptian, pass on a monotheistic belief to his followers?” The father of psychoanalysis then showed the great similarities between the religion of the Pharaoh Akhenaten and that of Moses. The Jewish Credo is *Schema Yisrael Adonai Elobenu Adonai Echod* – “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One God.” Freud showed that as the Hebrew letter *d* is a transliteration of the Egyptian letter *t*, and as the *e* becomes *o*, this sentence in Egyptian script becomes “Hear, O Israel, our God Aten is the only God.” A prayer that can only be ascribed to the Akhenaten era.

Suffering from terminal cancer, Freud sought refuge in

London in 1938. His two published articles, plus a third, also written in Vienna, were soon published as a full book in English. He thought this would prove to be a fit and proper culmination to his life of study. *Moses and Monotheism* was published in 1939. According to Freud, Moses was, in fact, a high official in the entourage of Akhenaten called Thuthmose, who chose the Hebrew tribe living at Goshen to be his followers and then led them out of Egypt. Freud's theory was virulently refuted by many, mainly Jewish scholars, who chose as the focus of their attack not Freud, but Akhenaten and the religion he founded. They hoped that by debunking the religion of Atenism and slandering Akhenaten's reputation with the mix of abuse and invective common to all theological disputes, Freud's theories would be devalued and negated. This is truly ironic, for it has now become apparent that the most likely candidate for the role of Moses in history was not Thuthmose, but Akhenaten himself.

It was in 1991 that a meticulous scholar from the Islamic tradition, Ahmed Osman, published research proving beyond any reasonable doubt that the biblical figure of Moses was the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten himself.²⁹ Akhenaten had tried to institute a monotheistic belief in Egypt that nearly provoked civil war; one that had within it, oddly enough, the concept of a Trinity.

The God Aten had become a Trinity, consisting of Re, as the father, Aten as the visible form of the father, and Akhenaten – who was both the son of Re, the son of Aten and yet at the same time the father of both; and further he was both Aten and Re.³⁰

After a period of considerable unrest, Akhenaten was deposed and fled into Sinai taking his serpent headed staff with him. No fur-

ther mention of him is to be found in the Egyptian records. The biblical story recounts that Moses also had to flee in the same direction after supposedly killing an Egyptian.³¹ Akhenaten's tomb has been discovered, but all the available evidence indicates that it was never used for a burial and no trace of his body has ever been found. With the disappearance of Akhenaten and the death of Tutankhamun, the stage was set for the rise of a new line of kings. It was the eventful years of the first two reigns of this new dynasty that became both the setting and the cause for the biblical events we know as the "Oppression" and the "Exodus." Thanks to the work of Freud and Osman, we believe that we now have a scenario that is not only in accord with the Bible, but also marries up with Egyptian history in a highly plausible manner. While there has been considerable dispute over the dating of the Exodus, a growing number of scholars have come to the conclusion that it was at, or soon after, the time of Akhenaten. They too believe that there was some direct relationship between the faith of the Israelites and the monotheistic beliefs of the "heretic king." The Name Moses itself is, undoubtedly, Egyptian. This is not so surprising; even if we take the biblical account of his birth and upbringing as absolute truth, the name could have come from his royal, adoptive mother. To refute the claim that Akhenaten was not the rightful heir to the twin thrones of Egypt, his followers called him the "Son," that is the rightful heir to Amenhotep III. The Egyptian word for son is *Mos*.³²

Osman's identification of Akhenaten as Moses is still debated. For instance, Egyptologist David Rohl suggests that the Exodus took place during the reign of the Pharaoh Dudimose, the 36th ruler of the Thirteenth Dynasty. Despite this, two early twentieth century Jewish scholars, Karl Abraham and Sigmund Freud, as well as the more recent Muslim researcher Ahmed Osman and the

Christian academic Robert Feather, are all in agreement that those who led and took part in the Exodus originated among Akhenaten's entourage and believed in his distinct form of monotheism.

The strange desertion of Amarna and the sudden disappearance of all who lived in it imparts a high degree of plausibility to this new vision of the Exodus. Not only did the nobility and priesthood vanish but also so did all the artisans, craftsmen, workers and servants. Akhenaten's Egyptian priests, scribes and notables – the national elite – were the first true monotheists in humanity and believed in one god, Aten.³³

Other dissatisfied Egyptians as well as various foreign residents, which the Bible describes as a “mixed multitude,” joined Akhenaten's religious and political entourage. This view of the so-called early “people of Israel” is not new. That renowned medieval Jewish scholar Rashi wrote that they were a mixture of nations newly converted to monotheism and described them as a “mixed multitude.”

One other important matter has puzzled all scholars who have vainly tried to correlate the Egyptian records with the biblical account of the Exodus. How could such a vast migration of people take place under such bizarre circumstances without any mention of it being recorded in Egyptian history? Many Egyptologists and biblical scholars, including modern Israelis, have voiced the unpopular belief that there are such grave doubts about the historicity of the Exodus that the entire account may simply be a matter of myth and legend.

Indeed Sigmund Freud declared that he could find no trace whatsoever of the term Hebrew prior to the Babylonian Exile when the scriptures were first transcribed from oral legend into

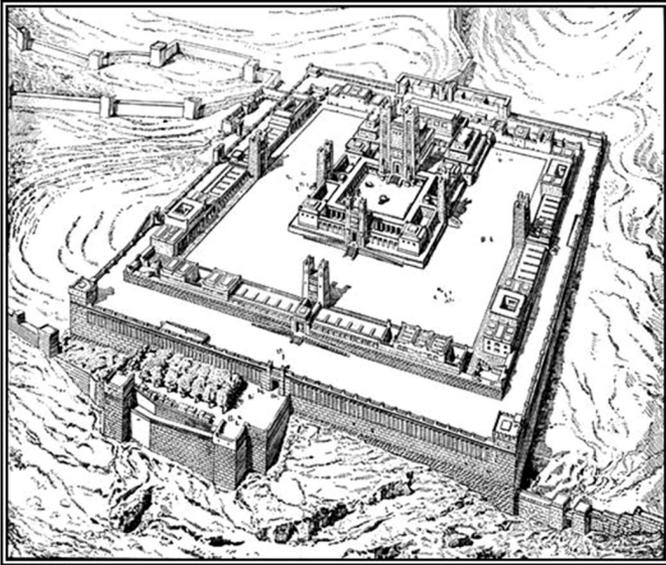
written form. This was over seven centuries after the events described in Exodus and Kings, and the modern Israeli scholars Messod and Roger Sabbah claim that there is no proof of the Hebrews' existence as a nation or tribe at the time of Moses as described in the scriptures. The voluminous and extensive Egyptian official archives record the power achievements and knowledge of the pharaohs and priests; defeats, however, are largely ignored. Any pharaoh's actions that brought the state into disrepute were never mentioned. In the matter of Akhenaten's heresy, this idea was taken even further; the name of the heretical pharaoh was deleted from statues and temple walls in an attempt to remove all trace of him from the records. Akhenaten had become a non-person. Thus his emigration would pass unrecorded and would be quietly expedited with all speed.

The treasure carried by the "people of Israel" as they left, the "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold" recorded in the Bible, were a strange and inexplicable burden for supposedly newly emancipated slaves to carry. Robert Feather claims that this treasure was composed of Moses' personal wealth and the treasure of Amarna and compensation for Akhenaten's claim to the throne. The Sabbahs believe that the right to settle in Canaan went along with the right to export the Atenist treasures of Amarna, and as Canaan was an Egyptian province, this too was part of the compensation package.

The fact that early post-Exodus Judaism was, ethnically and spiritually, clearly Egyptian in origin has been known by scholars for years, but this has not impinged upon the public consciousness because of the theological blinkers that limit the perceptions of fundamentalists of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The devout in all three great faiths need to recognise the essentially Egyptian nature of their religious beliefs. Judaism, from the time of Moses until the time of Jesus, was constantly evolving and owes much

of its development to the influence of polytheism and paganism and the ancient system of the transmission of sacred wisdom than most modern theologians would care to admit.

Moses led his new people, a strange mixture of the descendants of his grandfather, the patriarch Joseph, and his loyal Egyptian followers, from Succoth to their first camp at Etham and then through the wilderness towards the Reed Sea. Because in the Egyptian and Hebrew scripts there are no written vowels, this was later mistranslated as the “Red Sea.” For much of the year, the Reed Sea is passable on foot, but it is subject to sudden inundations by tidal waves of enormous proportions. It was one of these that swamped the pharaoh and his army, who by this time were in full pursuit of Moses and his followers.³⁴ The Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, then left the shores of the Reed Sea and, according to the Bible, spent forty years in the wilderness before their eventual entry into the “Promised Land.”



The Visionary Ezekiel Temple plan,
drawn by the 19th century French architect and Bible scholar Charles Chipiez.

CHAPTER 4

The Covenant and the People of Israel

The only evidence we have for the Israelites forty years wandering in the wilderness, their invasion of the Promised Land and their history up to the time of the invasion by the Assyrians in 722 BCE is to be found in the Bible. Despite the fundamentalist belief that the entire work is “the inspired word of God” it is, nonetheless, a highly unreliable historical source. The vivid and detailed descriptions of these events were not written in anything like their present form until many centuries later, during the Babylonian Exile that lasted from 586 until 538 BCE. Indeed, the Exodus itself along with the sojourn in Egypt, has been described by one serious historian of the Jewish people, Norman Cantor, as having been “... fabricated in later centuries for some ideologically conditioned or socially advantageous purpose.”³⁵

The alleged conquest of Jericho and the rest of Canaan by the people of Israel has long been viewed with outright scepticism by scholars. Indeed Sigmund Freud described this particular period as one that “is particularly impenetrable to investigation.”³⁶ The rest of the so-called historical content of the Bible covering the period up to and immediately prior to the Exile is equally dubious in its accuracy. Only two sources of independent verification for any part of it exist in the archaeological or archival records of neighboring states. The first is a stele erected by the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah in 1207 BCE that records his victory against the people of Israel and which reads “Israel is laid waste.” The second can be found in the annals of Sargon II, king of Assyria who wrote in 722 BCE, “In the beginning of my royal rule, I have

besieged and conquered the city of the Samaritans [the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel] ... I have led away 27,290 of its inhabitants as captives.”³⁷ Apart from those corroborations, we must read the historical events described in the Bible with a large grain of salt. David and Solomon, despite their alleged wealth and power, passed signally unrecorded by any other states. The Dead Sea Scrolls scholar, John Allegro, described this entire period as one in which “We are in a shadowy world, where the hard facts of history fade off into Mythology.”³⁸ The American historian, Norman Cantor, was even more direct: “... such is the Biblical story whose verification defies the course of historical and archaeological science. It is a romantic fantasy.”³⁹ This leaves any serious student of the Bible, or of history, with one very pertinent question: what can we believe from our scriptural analysis? To even begin to answer that we have investigate the manner in which the scriptures were composed; who wrote them and what were they trying to achieve.

The Old Testament that we know and revere only began to take shape during the Babylonian Exile as a devout compilation of earlier material both oral and written. It included one book of the Law, most probably Deuteronomy, which had been discovered in rather suspect circumstances immediately prior to the fall of Jerusalem and the Exile that followed.⁴⁰ It is apparent from the account in Chronicles that this detailed exposition of the Law of Moses was an entirely novel idea to the king, the priests and the people of Israel at that time. Most scholars then deduce that, apart from the Ten Commandments and the Gnostic traditions they had brought with them from Egypt, all pre-Exilic Jews, including David and Solomon, had lived and died without the benefit of this Law (which, according to Deuteronomy, had been binding on all of them as an essential part of the Covenant with God, the *Berit*).

During the Exile, combining this new source along with oral tradition and other unidentified documents, the scribes began to create the basis of the scriptures we know today. According to the modern “Documentary hypothesis” at least four major sources can be discerned in its composition. Two, the J and the E, are each so described, according to whether they refer to God as Jahweh or the Elohim. These are believed to originate from oral traditions or documents dating from about the eighth century BCE. The most predominant sources are called the Deuteronomist and the P, or Priestly school, and are both believed to have been written during and immediately after the Exile.⁴¹ Furthermore, the traditions being transcribed disclose the intertwining of two different and distinct sources of spiritual inspiration. In common with all early nomadic tribesmen, the Jews had their own “shamans,” or prophets, whose mystical insight was one of the most revered sources of revelation; the second and equally important source of revelation was a direct inheritance from their Egyptian ancestors, the sacred Gnostic tradition that inspired Abraham, Melchizedek and Moses, all initiates of the Temple Mysteries. Subtle Babylonian influences can also be detected which may have developed during the Exile itself.

The scribes and priests who took on this mammoth task were undoubtedly spiritually inspired, but they also had their own personal and professional agendas to protect. It is apparent that the scriptures developed during and after the Exile, enhanced and stressed the role of the priesthood, especially the twenty-four *ma'madot* or priestly families who took turns to discharge the high-priestly function at the temple. Eligibility for membership of these privileged groups was seemingly dependant upon provable descent from Zadok, the Jebusite priest appointed to serve at the Temple by King David. In writing the “history” of their

people, the priestly scholars had projected their own, newfound importance backwards across the centuries so that the scriptures read as if they had maintained their role from the time of King David at least. Furthermore, their insistence on the validity of the newly written Law of Moses gave them an ingenious explanation for the trauma of the Exile. Namely that Israel was suffering because the entire nation, individually and collectively, had ignored the Law that lay at the heart of its sacred covenant with God. Therefore, if individual behavior came into conformity with the new 613 strictures of the Law, God would smile upon them once more and restore the nation to its former glory.⁴²

As the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed and the leading people of the Jewish nation were now exiled in Babylon, a new form of worship had to be developed. Thus the synagogue was born as a meeting place for the exiles, one where the new scriptures could be read, God could be praised and where prayers replaced the rituals and sacrifice that had been the central function at the temple. The exiles learned and used Aramaic as their spoken language and Hebrew was reserved for the scriptures. Indeed, according to Freud at least, the term Hebrew as an indication of race now came into use for the first time.⁴³ The overall effect of these new habits of worship, the insistence on the primacy of the Law and the reverence for the scriptures changed Judaism completely, from a nature loving, rather tolerant, loosely monotheistic religion into a strictly conformist, legalistic and tightly structured and exclusively Jahwist cult that continued unabated until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans some six hundred years later. The historian Karen Armstrong summed this up when she wrote: “Yahweh had finally absorbed his rivals in the religious imagination of Israel; in exile the lure of paganism lost its attraction and Judaism had been born.”⁴⁴

Understanding the circumstances that shaped the writing of the scriptures gives us a particular insight into what the priestly scribes really held to be of prime importance. The mystical tradition that sustained the prophets was given considerable prominence and while they certainly distorted and exaggerated their own historical importance as a race, they were brutally honest about the religious back-sliding of the past, those lapses into paganism that seem to have been endemic from the time of the Exodus to the beginning of the Exile. Above all, the overriding importance of wisdom was repeatedly stressed. The Hebrews obviously held their Gnostic heritage in reverence. From the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea to the end of the reign of King Solomon, wisdom is referred to again and again. The Pillar of Cloud that led them during their forty years in the wilderness was now interpreted as the very seat of Wisdom herself.⁴⁵ Wisdom was also described as becoming unto them a covering in the daytime and a flame of stars throughout the night.⁴⁶ In Proverbs we read that, “She built her house, she has set up her Seven Pillars of Wisdom.”⁴⁷ Wisdom was also described as a consort of God, a somewhat bizarre idea for any true monotheists to consider. Later this eternal principle of divine wisdom was understood to be an attribute of God himself, similar to the “Glory of God.”⁴⁸ Ask any Bible reader for the most distinguishing attributes of King Solomon, surely the most mythologized character in the Old Testament, and they will invariably reply, “his wisdom.” It is as though wisdom above all was the sole route to righteousness, to the revelation of God’s will for his people and the major source of national and spiritual unity.

The new insistence on the supreme authority of the scriptures as the record of God’s plan for his Chosen People, changed the nature of Judaism in another, far more lasting way. The Jews,

who had always had a high literacy rate, became completely focussed on their sacred books, which, because they were formed by the amalgamation of differing strands of tradition, were, as often as not, vague, contradictory and difficult to understand. Not to worry, the priests were always on hand to guide, interpret and explain. The English historian Paul Johnson described this situation in the following terms:

The Jewish scriptures, formidable in bulk and often of impenetrable obscurity gave employment ... to a vast cottage industry of scribes and lawyers, both amateur and professional, filling whole libraries with their commentaries, enmeshing the Jewish world in a web of canon law, luxuriant with its internal conflicts and its mutual exclusions, too complex for any one mind to comprehend, bread and butter for a proliferating clergy and an infinite series of traps for the righteous.⁴⁹

This complex and ever proliferating process of scriptural exegesis and interpretation started during the Exile in Babylon and continues to this day. Each individual Jew was expected to be able to read the holy books and started at an early age to learn Talmudic disputation, an adversarial form of debate, disputation and analysis. Thus Judaism began to take on even more contradictory aspects. On the one hand it became completely dismissive of other religions, while on the other, because of the multiple, and often contradictory interpretations that could be discerned not only in its scriptures but also in its law, it became increasingly tolerant of differences of opinion on religious matters among its own people. This gave rise to the old Jewish aphorism, “Where you have two Jews, you will have three arguments.”

The Exile was merely one issue among others in the catalogue of disasters that befell the people of Israel between 734 and 581 BCE. Between those years there were six different and distinct enforced deportations of the Israelites and many other Jews fled voluntarily to Egypt and elsewhere for safety. Thus these events marked another major and transformative turning point in Jewish history for, from that time onwards, the majority of Jewish people would live outside the Holy Land. The Diaspora had begun in earnest, which gave further impetus to synagogue worship, for who could reach the Temple in Jerusalem from distant lands?

The Babylonian Exile therefore was a mixed blessing, for this major dislocation in Jewish life stimulated the writing of the scriptures, the foundation of synagogue worship and the transformation of Judaism into the highly legalistic, formalized cult that we recognize from the accounts in the Bible. These lasting effects tend to mask the fact that the Exile was remarkably short, lasting about seventy years. It ended in 536 BCE. The Babylonian Empire was conquered in its turn by the Persians, a race who took an even more tolerant and pragmatic view of the Jewish people and their homeland than the Babylonians. The return and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was led by Sheshbazzar,⁵⁰ the son of King Jehoiachin of Judea, and Zerubbabel, the king's grandson.⁵¹ The apocryphal scriptures record that the return came about as a result of Zerubbabel's ability to answer a riddle that was posed in a dream experienced by the Persian King Cyrus, an almost identical replication of the mechanism allegedly used by Joseph to attain rank and power in Egypt centuries earlier. The answer to the riddle set in the dream was "Wine is strong, Women are stronger, Kings are stronger still, but Truth conquers all."⁵² The Persian king soon made the following proclamation:

Thus saith Cyrus King of Persia, the Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem.⁵³

As a result, the return to Jerusalem began along with the slow, intermittent and tedious rebuilding of the Temple, the city walls and with them, the identity of the Hebrew people.

After many trials and tribulations, the Temple was rebuilt and the religious and commercial life of the people of Israel started to attain some semblance of normality based firmly on the 613 strictures of the Law of Moses. The Jews learned to accommodate their lives to their new masters and, after them, to the Greeks against whom they eventually rebelled. Throughout this period of several centuries, worship in the Second Temple continued to play its central role in Jewish life. Despite the strictures in the Law against building other temples to rival the one in Jerusalem, others certainly existed. One was sited at Yeb, or Elephantine, on the River Nile and the form of worship there pre-dated the Exodus;⁵⁴ another was founded in Leontopolis, again in Egypt, in 174 BCE, by the deposed high-priest Onias⁵⁵ and a third was constructed by the Samaritans at Gezarim in about 200 BCE.⁵⁶ Meanwhile in the ever-growing Diaspora spread around the coast of the Mediterranean, sizable Jewish communities flourished and multiplied under the protection of the Roman Empire.





The Olympian gods; work by Monsiau (1754–1837).

CHAPTER 5

The Glory Of Ancient Greece And The Power Of Rome

Abstraction, logic, reasoned choice and inventions, mathematics, art, calculation of space and time, anxieties and dreams of love – all these activities of inner life are nothing else than the effervescence of the newly formed centre (of consciousness), as it explodes onto itself.⁵⁷

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*

The ancient world did not make one sudden, inexplicable leap from primitive hunter-gatherer societies to the breathtaking architectural glories and intellectual pinnacles of Athens. The speed of development of differing cultures varied from community to community, depending primarily on the quality of the spiritual insights that fueled their drive towards civilization. Archaeological evidence indicates that while powerful kings and emperors ruled the East, settlements developed in Europe which had their own sophisticated art forms, crafts, weaving skills and religious symbols displaying somewhat different concepts of gods and their relationship to man. Evidence, though scanty, is beginning to accumulate that clearly demonstrates that our Neolithic ancestors in Europe had a profound reverence for “Mother Earth,” for plants and animals, for the very elements themselves. Little is known as yet about the various forms this worship may have taken, but sufficient evidence

exists for scholars to delineate some of the myths associated with Gaia, or Mother Earth.

With the passage of time, Mother Earth took on new names and was married in mythology with the stars or the sky. New lesser gods emerged, replacing the spirits who had previously been believed to inhabit different plants and animals, until by the early years of classical Greece a complex pantheon of gods were believed to exist in the heavenly abode of Mount Olympus, with Zeus, the god of thunder, rising above them all. These gods were held to be capricious, mischievous and in conflict with each other, treating men as mere pawns as if in some complex, irrational, heavenly chess game.⁵⁸

With increasing influence from the empires of the East, another trend, which was to be uniquely Greek, began to develop in a new and significantly different way. Its effects were to indirectly, but completely, change the world. The importation of initiation cults and their development into the “hidden” Mysteries, or “hermetic” cults, created a fertile seedbed for the flowering of philosophy, science, art and architecture.

The hidden Mysteries all have a common origin. We have spoken of Colin Wilson’s conception of the “Few” – the natural leaders who knew of their innate spiritual powers and deliberately sought means of extending and strengthening them. The Mystery cults of early man arose when the “Few” tried to gain knowledge of the three apparently inescapable facts of life that confront all mankind: pain, toil and death. Pain that occurs in every birth; the necessary toil to survive in the face of hostile nature and, finally, the death that ensues in all created beings. This conception is the foundation of many, far older religious systems, in which it was called “primal karma.” Only two basic attitudes are possible towards this fate of mankind: it can be regarded as a curse that has

arisen from a blind evolution; or it can be regarded as a purposeful blessing at the hand of God.⁵⁹ The original path of initiation arose from the latter view in which pain, toil and death were regarded as the means through which humanity was protected from evil. As I have written elsewhere: “The first known system of initiation appeared in ancient Persia around 7000 BC when Zarathushtra divined the conversion of these three primal necessities.”⁶⁰

Initiation was restricted to a privileged few and the novice was introduced and taught by a “hierophant,” or revealer of holy things. Initiation rites and the ceremonies of the Mystery cults were secret. The participants were granted knowledge of the spiritual world during the ecstatic periods of these rituals, which were held to be so sacred that they could not be revealed to outsiders except on pain of death. Some of the Greek cults, just like the Essenes of Israel, developed a deeper cosmology and, oddly enough, characteristics which were replicated in the early years of Christian belief and practice. Baptism by fire or water, the confession of sins, a period of purification and fasting, and a ritual meal of bread and water or wine. All of which were, in one form or another, part of initiation rites.

Two of the earliest, and perhaps the purest, of such Mystery cults were the Magi of Persia and the Orphic cults in Greece. The Orphic Mystery religion was supposedly founded by the legendary singer Orpheus, an approximate contemporary of Zarathushtra, known also as Zoroaster. It provided a vital, reforming and moderating influence on the savagery of the later city-states of the first waves of civilization. Its doctrine tends towards asceticism and emphasizes mental ecstasy. By this it was hoped to achieve “enthusiasm” (*entheosism*) and as a result gain mystical knowledge.⁶¹ Little is known for certain of the Orphic Mysteries of initiation, but perhaps something can be inferred from what we do know of

the rites of Eleusis. These began with a cleansing in the sea followed by the imparting of occult knowledge. In common with all initiation rites it certainly involved tests or trials – probably wandering through underground passageways with carefully prepared surprises designed to try and test the fortitude, faith and courage of the novice. Scholars suggest that the ceremonies ended with the ritual garlanding of the new initiate. The cult had a body of sacred texts and held its followers together by bonds of shared belief. It produced a philosophy which directly related to real life and the temporal world, and which provided just the vibrant conception that was needed for a passionate search for truth and beauty.⁶²

Many of these early Mystery cults, such as those pertaining to Dionysus and Demeter, had a well-established “ecclesiastical year.” Seasonal festivals were inherited from earlier religions – and were usually closely associated with the sowing and reaping of corn or the production of wine. Each cult or Mystery school, despite their stress on the values and reality of the spiritual world and its distinct superiority in importance to the temporal world, clung closely to the well-established links between the divine and the earthly. A close study of the Egyptian Isis cult reinforces these close links between the teaching of the Mystery schools and the cycles of growth and regeneration of the Earth in all its fruitfulness.

The supposed author of the earliest Mystery texts still extant is Hermes Trismegistos, usually identified with the divine Hermes – the messenger of the gods – or with the Egyptian god Thoth, who was also the scribe of the gods. This may be why Hermes Trismegistos is reputed to be the author of the hermetic texts, which only came to light in the third century of the Christian era. The similarity of some of their contents with Christian ideas at first led to accusations of forgery, neo-Platonists usually being held to be responsible. However it is now generally accepted that

the contents of the texts themselves, or at least of such fragments as have survived, are authentic and confirm the linkage between Greek hermetic schools and the Mystery cults of ancient Egypt.⁶³ This is reinforced when we study the first Greek initiate who can clearly be identified as an historical figure. This supreme individual, a mathematician, the founder of a school, a religious mystic who was interested in everything and who had a truly formative influence on Greek thought, science and philosophy – was the legendary Pythagoras.⁶⁴

Pythagoras was born on the island of Samos about 570 BCE. His family sent him to Egypt to be initiated into the Egyptian Temple Mysteries. Diogenes Laertes wrote that Pythagoras was initiated at Thebes, where excavations in 1888 revealed a statue of the god Kabeiros with a hammer in his hand.⁶⁵ Some scholars believe that Kabeiros was worshipped by the Egyptian-Hebraic sect of the Kabeiri, early precursors of the Therapeutae and the Essenes.⁶⁶ Pythagoras was later associated with the Persian Magi and the Chaldeans. He is also reported to have spent ten years in Babylon studying the Mesopotamian Mysteries. According to Posidonius, one of Pythagoras' principle teachers was Abaris the Druid, who came from Scotland.⁶⁷ After more than thirty-four years away from home, mostly spent in the East, Pythagoras developed an oriental form of mysticism that shows through clearly in his later philosophical works.⁶⁸ He founded a school in Crotona in Southern Italy, shortly after his return to Greece. This was a school for mystics whose initiation rites were both lengthy and rigorous, and it was here that he developed his own brand of philosophy⁶⁹ that became, over the centuries, one of the most profound and lasting influences over the entire field of mysticism and the occult. Colin Wilson claims that:

Instinctively Pythagoras ... never lost his secure grasp on the mystical, “The One” – what Hindus would call Brahman – but he tried to understand the “one” by the use of his intellect.⁷⁰

Under the influence of the Pythagoreans the verifiable rise of the Mystery cults began. With them came the close identification of the gods with nature and all its bounty, and an all-consuming curiosity about life before and after death. This led to the further development of philosophy, mathematics and science. Under the influence of the Pythagoreans, the old Olympian religion began to be displaced and a new distinctly spiritual outlook took its place. The newly emerging beliefs had something in common with those of most early cultures. The power and spirit of nature lay at their very heart and the Earth itself was described as a goddess under various guises: the great goddess of harvest and vegetation was worshipped as Ishtar, Isis, Demeter, Cybele or her pre-Hellenic name, Gaia.

The outpouring of art, philosophy and literature that accompanied and sustained the emergence of Greek civilization has been passed down to us virtually intact. Greek culture quickly developed all of the literary forms that we now regard as classic. Experience, knowledge, inquiry and expectations, were all recorded and passed on. This irreversible accumulation, the very art of storage and transmission of ideas and experience, constantly both augmented consciousness and acted as a catalyst for further evolution. An evolution which, in its turn, transformed human life itself.

The power and cumulative influence of the Gnostic initiatory culture that developed in ancient Greece, pervaded, sustained and influenced all the cultures that followed for over two millennia, including the so-called modern advances of the twentieth century. Never is this more clearly demonstrated than when we move

on from the works of Pythagoras to the time of Socrates and his pupil Plato. At this time in the Greek city-states, citizens recognized that laws were made by men alone solely for the benefit and governance of men.⁷¹ The new philosophy held that thought, philosophy and politics would inevitably lead to the knowledge of the “Good, the Beautiful and the True,” and the law – man-made terrestrial law – was the ultimate expression of this. Law was thus given the twin accords of respect and a capacity for ultimate perfection as the expression of the state and therefore of man himself. The humility of Socrates was such that he held that he himself knew nothing, yet he believed that knowledge lay within the reach of all who earnestly sought it. He believed that sin derived from man’s lack of knowledge and if only man had sufficient knowledge he would not sin. As the overriding cause of sin was ignorance, to reach the “Good” we must attain knowledge.

The sacred and indissoluble link between the “Good” and knowledge became one of the hallmarks of Greek thought and philosophy for many centuries. The contrast between this philosophical concept and the dogmas of early Christianity could not be more stark, for the medieval Christian ethic is quite opposed to the ideas of Socrates. The early popes, and all those who inherited their mantle for many centuries to come, held that the most important quality was a pure heart and a capacity for implicit belief, and that therefore these qualities were more likely to be found among the ignorant.⁷²

After the death of Socrates, Plato took refuge with many of Socrates’ followers in Megara. Then began a period of exile and travel that lasted until 387 BCE when he finally returned to Athens. There, in a grove to the north of the city, on land dedicated to the memory of the legendary hero Academus, he founded a school which from this time forth, like many centers of learning

that succeeded it, became known as the “Academy.” Its organization was modeled on the Pythagorean school in Southern Italy which was still flourishing, and which Plato himself had visited during the course of his travels. These two schools became the direct ancestors of all our universities, serving as role models for them from the Middle Ages to the present day.⁷³ The curriculum of the Academy was a direct product of the central teaching of the hermetic initiates who had exerted such a formative influence on Pythagoras many years before. The aim of the course of instruction was to turn the thoughts of men from the constantly changing world of experience, the temporal, phenomenal world, to the framework that lay behind it, the spiritual world: from becoming to being!

The Academy gained such importance, power and influence over the minds of thinking men that it lasted for far longer than any other center of learning established before or since, surviving for over nine hundred years, until it was forcibly closed by the Christian Emperor Justinian in 529 CE.⁷⁴ Justinian, like many blind, intolerant and bigoted men before and since, had failed to learn that closing or burning schools, or men for that matter, has proved singularly ineffective in stamping out ideas regarded as unorthodox or heretical. The influence of the Platonic Academy is still felt today.

No brief discourse such as this can possibly begin to trace in detail the full flowering of art, literature, philosophy and the new sciences that took place during this truly seminal era. All I can do is to give some flavour of the complex and vital development of the many intertwining strands of thought that still influence us to this day. The Greek city-states were fragmented, each proudly autonomous, each at war from time to time with its own immediate neighbors, yet also sometimes in alliance with them against

the hostile empires of Persia, and later Rome. How was the concept of the “Good, the Beautiful and the True” able to spread and ramify its undoubted influence throughout the known world, not only at that time but even down to the modern era? To answer this question we must turn our attention to a newly emergent empire, one established by military force and alliances which created a stability, power and influence that the Greeks themselves, for all their achievements, never attained. This was an empire based on military might, the rule of man-made law, and concepts of order and stability that had never before been sustained for so long or over such a wide area, providing the perfect vehicle for the transmission of ideas – the Empire of Rome.

Rome took to its very heart the full flowering of the first fruits of consciousness and spread them throughout the world, not only then, but through its profound influence on Christianity, throughout all time. Thus, two distinct and separate national characteristics, firstly that of the sublimely gifted, inspired creators and innovators, the Greeks, became allied to the second, that of the sharp-eyed, innovative, pragmatic and powerful Romans, combined to develop and sustain a political and intellectual climate within which were refined the ideas that became the very foundation for Western culture in the two millennia that followed.

By the time of the birth of Jesus, the Roman Empire, which had doubled in size every generation since its foundation, encompassed nearly all the then-known world. It comprised the entire Mediterranean Littoral and had pushed its borders well beyond: westwards into Spain, France and Britain; and northwards into Germany. Although imposed by force, it was in many ways a liberal empire, for having gained territory by force, it maintained its rule by military might twinned with tolerant acceptance of local customs and religions – as long as the Roman law was upheld and

lip service given to the state religion.⁷⁵ For the first time there arose an imperial establishment which brought not only stability but also widespread peace, freedom of movement and trade, tolerance to old religious forms, local customs and new philosophical ideas. Ideas were far from regimented and stultified; indeed their propagation and exchange were actively encouraged. Thus Rome absorbed the art, philosophy and religious culture that was the glory of Greece, raised it to a pinnacle of respect, and became the means whereby Greek culture, religion and ideas were transmitted throughout the world.⁷⁶

Mystery cults began to infiltrate Roman life during the Republic. Some cults took root in their original form, others became modified with the latinization of the original Greek names, or the identification of Greek gods with specifically Roman deities. Certain cults eventually degenerated into social clubs for men only, and few of the truly great initiation cults lasted for long, with the notable exceptions of the Persian cult of Mithras and the Egyptian cult of Isis. In the two centuries following the birth of Christ, Mithraic solar worship under the protection of the god Sol Invictus grew in popularity.⁷⁷ Knowledge of these various gods and their cults spread widely, providing a confusing multiplicity of religious ideas that, as often as not, intermingled, spawning new ones all the time.

Transcending all religions and ideas of tribe or nationality, and rising above them all in the Roman Empire, was the respect accorded to education – the perfect vehicle for the new philosophical and spiritual ideas from Greece. Theology was inseparable from philosophy. Had not the first philosophers of note been initiates into the spiritual worlds? Rhetoric became the handmaiden of both; Greek the common language of the educated empire. Thus religion became, through its main derivative philosophy, the guide to intimate personal conduct, responsibility and moral virtue and,

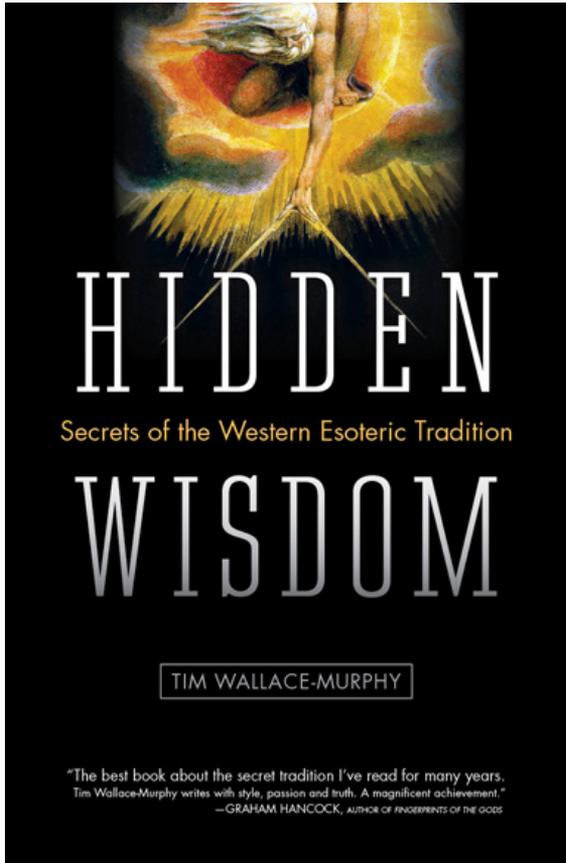
as a consequence of the Greek hermetic and philosophical influence, an age of personal religion dawned, in sharp contrast to the collective state or tribal religions of the recent past.

Greek culture provided an ambience, within which the intellect was used to transform religious ideas, but they were all ideas that came from other cultures and other times, such as Babylon, Persia and Egypt, that were now re-synthesized in Greek forms. The Greek cosmology, such as it was, derived directly from these ancient sources, as we have seen in the case of Pythagoras and those who followed him. Thus, the Roman Empire permeated by Greek culture, created and sustained a world of religious tolerance, high levels of culture and art and a deep respect for the values of education. Only once was Rome known to persecute the religion of one of its subject states, and that was in the far west of the empire, in the land of the Celts.

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