

## Lawh al-Zumurrud

### Prefatory Note

An interpretation of meaning of the Arabic text Lawh al-Zumurrud from SIRR al-khaliqa, dating from between the eighth and ninth century CE. <sup>1</sup> The text is also known by its Latin title *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis* and by the English title *The Emerald Tablet*.

I have added some footnotes to explain unusual words in my interpretation, with an Appendix providing the Latin text from the *Secretum Secretorum* as given in a critical edition, published by Oxford University Press in 1920, of a thirteenth century manuscript in the Bodleian Library. Which text, for some reason, does not mention *telesmi*, although an alternative sixteenth century Latin text, translated by Isaac Newton, does. <sup>2</sup>

Much has been written about the 'emerald tablet' which is considered to be one of the primary texts of hermetic philosophy and of alchemy. For this second edition I have extended my footnotes, included as Appendix II an updated version of my 2017 essay *Talismata In The Picatrix*, and corrected a few typos.

David Myatt  
January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Revised February 2024

1. Ursula Weisser, *Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung und die Darstellung der Natur (Buch der Ursachen) von Pseudo-Apollonios von Tyana*. Sources and Studies in the History of Arabic-Islamic Science. Aleppo, 1979.

2. The Latin is "Pater omnis telesmi totius mundi est hic". Newton's manuscript is Keynes MS 28.

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Veritas is veritas <sup>1</sup>  
For the higher is as the lower  
With the lower as the higher.

The signs <sup>2</sup> were from The One  
As all beings are from The One  
Through one design:  
The father, the Sun,  
The mother, the Moon,  
The Pnuema, <sup>3</sup> the womb  
The Earth, the nourishment.

Telismata: <sup>4</sup> of the father  
Guardian of balanced signs.  
Pyros, <sup>5</sup> the Earth  
Separating the harsh from the gentle.  
With the gentle, <sup>6</sup> noble,  
Ascending from Earth to Empyrean <sup>7</sup>  
Descending from Empyrean to Earth  
Influencing the higher, the lower,  
The gentle, the harsh:  
The illumination of the illuminated.

Thus, it is for this the Magnum Opus <sup>7</sup> came-into-being  
For I am Hermes Trismegistus of The Wisdom.

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### Notes

1. Veritas. I have used the Latin *veritas* rather than the English word 'truth'. As noted in my commentary on v.14 of chapter One of the Gospel of John,

I have chosen the Latin *veritas* in order to avoid the disputations - philosophical and otherwise - and the assumptions that the English word 'truth' so often now imputes and engenders, with the reader (or the listener) thus having to reflect on what *veritas* might, in this context, signify. In addition, ἀληθείας here suggests not some abstract, impersonal, 'truth' but rather truthfulness, sincerity, integrity: the type of person that Jesus of Nazareth is. In respect of 'veritas' suggesting such truthfulness and sincerity, qv. the entry for *veritas* in *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis*, volume 4b.

2. Signs, cf. σημεῖα in relation to God, qv. The Gospel of John, and the Signs of Allah as mentioned in the Quran. It is notable that the Gospel of John has σημεῖον and not δυνάμεις as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, For example, in John 3:2, οὐδεις γὰρ δύναται ταῦτα τὰ σημεῖα ποιεῖν ἄν σὺ ποιεῖς, ἐὰν μὴ ἦ ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ, "for no one is able to do the signs you do unless Theos is with them."

Since *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis* was a translation of an Arabic text, σημεῖα here instead of δυνάμεις or *miraculum* seems apposite.

3. The Pneuma. The Wind as archetype, as a hermetic principle, cf. tractate III of the Corpus Hermeticum:

ἀδιορίστων δὲ ὄντων ἀπάντων καὶ ἀκατασκευάστων, ἀποδιωρίσθη τὰ ἐλαφρὰ εἰς ὕψος καὶ τὰ βαρῆα ἐθεμελιώθη ἐφ' ὑγρᾶι ἄμμωι, πυρὶ τῶν ὄλων διορισθέντων καὶ ἀνακρεμασθέντων πνεύματι ὀχεῖσθαι· καὶ ὤφθη ὁ οὐρανὸς ἐν κύκλοις ἑπτὰ, καὶ θεοὶ [ταῖς] ἐν ἄστρον ἰδέαις ὀπτανόμενοι, σὺν τοῖς αὐτῶν σημεῖοις ἅπασι, καὶ διηρθρώθη ... σὺν τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ θεοῖς, καὶ περιελίγη τὸ περικύκλιον ἀέρι, κυκλίωι δρομήματι πνεύματι θεῖωι ὀχούμενον.

With all beings unformed and not yet presenced,  
What was lightsome was separated out, upward  
And what was burdensome set in fluidic ground  
With all defined through Fire, then elevated - and conveyed - by Pneuma.  
Thus the heavens became perceivable in seven spheres,  
Deities represented in the arrangements of the stars,  
With the outer revolving in the æther, and circulating by the Pnuema of theos.

4. Telismata, rather than the later English word 'talisman'. As I wrote in *Telesmata In The Picatrix*, included as Appendix II,

"Telesmata is from Greek τέλεσμα via the post-classic Latin telesma and is possibly the origin of the English word talisman, dating as that English word does from 1638.

τέλεσμα in Ancient Greek meant a payment, or an offering to offset a debt or for services rendered. According to my fallible understanding, in Hellenistic times it acquired the sense of an object intended as an offering to the gods, and to lesser divinities such as daemons, as a mark of respect or in order to seek their favour or ward off their wrath. Thus if a person had toiled to make the offering, the telesma, or had at the very least exchanged goods or money for it, it was believed that such labour or such an exchange revealed that one had earned their protection or their help. The more valuable the object, the more help or protection they might expect.

This belief in such offerings and their efficacy was an integral part of not only the diverse Greco-Roman paganus weltanschauungen but also of many other paganus weltanschauungen around the world, past and present, founded as such weltanschauungen are on the understanding, on the ancestral wisdom, or on the intuition that we mortals are part of a living cosmos with the gods (the divinities) and Nature considered as living beings (or as archetypes, manifestations of cosmic forces) who and which can affect us and who have affected us - as individuals, and as communities - in terms of good fortune and misfortune."

5. Pyros. Fire as archetype, cf. Heraclitus as recounted by Diogenes Laërtius:

ἐκ πυρὸς τὰ πάντα συνεστάναιβεις τοῦτο ἀναλύεσθαιβπάντα 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 ψυχή and Dæmons.

6. Gentle, πρᾶος, a mild, balanced, temperament as in my translation of 5:1-10 of The Gospel Of Matthew, μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν, "Fortunate, the gentle, for they shall acquire the Earth", qv. <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/the-beatitudes-v1.pdf>

7. Empyrean. Not 'heaven', but οὐρανός - Empyrean - the abode of the Greco-Roman gods, and also suitable for the abode of those mortals gifted by the Egyptian gods with an after-life. As I noted in my translation of 1:3 of The Gospel Of John:

οὐρανός here is always translated as 'heaven' although the term 'heaven' - used in the context of the Gospels - now has rather different connotations than the Greek οὐρανός, with the word 'heaven' now often implying something explained by almost two thousand years of exegesis and as depicted, for example, in medieval and Renaissance Christian art. However, those hearing or reading this particular Greek gospel for the first time in the formative years of Christianity would most probably have assumed the usual Greek usage of "the heavens" in the sense of the "the star-filled firmament above" or in the sense of "the sky" or as the abode of theos and/or of the gods, ἐν οὐρανῷ θεοί [...]

It therefore seems apposite to suggest a more neutral word than 'heaven' as a translation of οὐρανός and one which might not only be understood in various 'classical' ways by an audience of Greek speakers (such as the ways described above) but also be open to a new, and Christian, interpretation consistent with the milieu that existed when the Gospel of John was written and first heard. That is, before the exegesis of later centuries and long before post-Roman Christian iconography. Hence my suggestion of the post-classical Latin term Empyrean, which can bear the interpretation of the abode of theos and/or of the gods, of "the sky", of the "the star-filled firmament above"; and a Christian one suggested by Genesis 2.8 - παράδεισον ἐν Εδεμ (the Paradise of Eden) - and also by shamayim.

<https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/myatt-gospel-john-1-5.pdf>

Given that *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis* was a translation of an Arabic text the sense of "Ascending from Earth to Empyrean" is also apposite because it does not directly refer to the Christian heaven.

An alternative translation would be Celestial, as in my translation of a passage from Book I, Chapter One, of Ficini's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*:

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 studious.

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; the next three toward the Anima, 4 and the last three to guide us [back] to The Earth.

<https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2024/01/dwm-notes-on-ficini.pdf>

8. Magnum Opus. The work of hermeticism, as for example explained in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the aim of alchemy which is Lapis Philosophicus. In the *Poemandres* tractate of the *Corpus Hermeticum* this is described as the journey, the ἄνοδος, through the seven spheres:

καὶ οὕτως ὁρμαῖι λοιπὸν ἄνω διὰ τῆς ἁρμονίας, καὶ τῆι πρώτῃ ζώνῃ δίδωσι τὴν αὐξητικὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν μειωτικὴν, καὶ τῆι δευτέρῃ τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν, δόλον ἀνενέργητον, καὶ τῆι τρίτῃ τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν ἀπάτην ἀνενέργητον, καὶ τῆι τετάρτῃ τὴν ἀρχοντικὴν προφανίαν ἀπλεονέκτητον, καὶ τῆι πέμπτῃ τὸ θράσος τὸ ἀνόσιον καὶ τῆς τόλμης τὴν προπέτειαν, καὶ τῆι ἕκτῃ τὰς ἀφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλούτου ἀνενεργήτους, καὶ τῆι ἑβδόμῃ ζώνῃ τὸ ἐνεδρεῦον ψεῦδος.

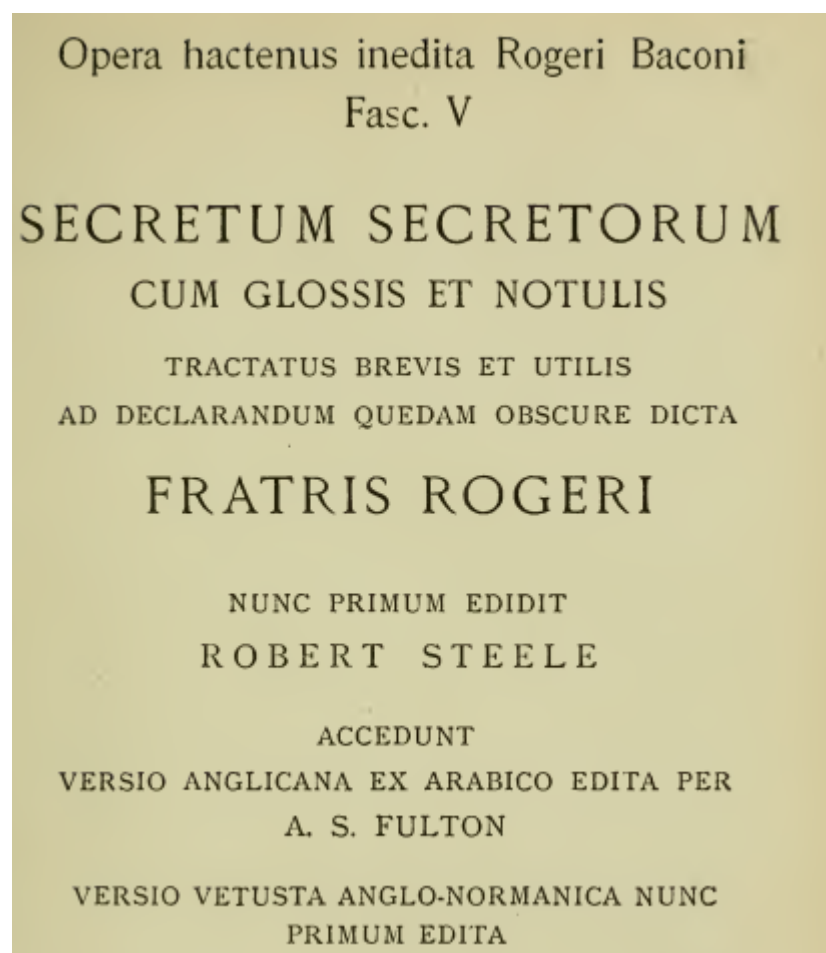
Thus does the mortal hasten through the harmonious structure, offering up, in the first realm, that vigour which grows and which fades, and - in the second one - those dishonourable machinations, no longer functioning. In the third, that eagerness which deceives, no longer functioning; in the fourth, the arrogance of command, no longer insatiable; in the fifth, profane insolence and reckless haste; in the sixth, the bad inclinations occasioned by riches, no longer functioning; and in the seventh realm, the lies that lie in wait.

<https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/eight-tractates-v2-print.pdf>

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## Appendix I

### The Latin Text From *Secretum Secretorum*



Veritas ita se habet et non est dubium, quod inferiora  
superioribus et superiora inferioribus respondent.

Operator miraculorum unus solus est Deus, a quo descendit<sup>1</sup> omnis operatio mirabilis.

Sic omnes res<sup>2</sup> generantur ab una sola substantia<sup>3</sup>, una sua sola dispositione.

Quarum pater<sup>4</sup> est Sol,<sup>4</sup> quarum mater est Luna.<sup>5</sup>

Que portavit ipsam naturam per auram in utero,<sup>6</sup> terra impregnata est ab ea.<sup>7</sup>

Hinc<sup>8</sup> dicitur Sol causatorum pater, thesaurus miraculorum, largitor virtutum.

Ex igne<sup>9</sup> facta<sup>11</sup> est terra<sup>10</sup>.

Separa terrenum ab igneo,<sup>12</sup> quia subtile dignius est grosso, et rarum spisso. Hoc fit sapienter et discrete. Ascendit enim de terra in celum, et ruit de celo in terram.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> per creacionem et regimen universale mundi.

<sup>2</sup> scilicet, naturales.

<sup>3</sup> scilicet, celestis.

<sup>4</sup> scilicet generans et producens sub Deo.

<sup>5</sup> *Sic omnes res*, scilicet, naturales, istud potest exponi alkimistice et figurative de auro et argento, quia in rebus humanis temporalibus omnia fiunt per aurum et argentum. Unde per solem potest intelligi aurum et per lunam argentum, et hic est mos alkimistarum. Et terra quantum ad res humanas impregnatur et fecundatur per argentum, et aurum est pater miraculorum, et cetera, id est, per ipsum fiunt mirabilia in humanis rebus.

Et inde interficit<sup>1</sup> superiorem et inferiorem virtutem.

Sic ergo dominatur<sup>2</sup> inferioribus et superioribus | et tu<sup>89 a.</sup> dominaberis sursum et deorsum, tecum enim est lux luninum,<sup>3</sup> et propter hoc fugient a te omnes tenebre. Virtus<sup>Alcher changi</sup> superior vincit omnia.<sup>4</sup>

Omne enim rarum agit in omne densum. Et secundum dispositionem majoris mundi currit hec operatio, et propter hoc vocatur Hermogenes triplex in philosophia.<sup>5</sup>

## Appendix II

### Telesmata In The Picatrix

Telesmata is from Greek τέλεσμα via the post-classic Latin *telesma* and is possibly the origin of the English word *talisman*, dating as that English word does from 1638, with τέλεσμα in Ancient Greek meaning a payment, or an offering to offset a debt or for services rendered. According to my fallible understanding, in Hellenistic times it acquired the sense of an object intended as an offering to the gods, and to lesser divinities such as daemons, as a mark of respect or in order to seek their favour or ward off their wrath. Thus if a person had toiled to make the offering, the *telesma*, or had at the very least exchanged goods or money for it, it was believed that such labour or such an exchange revealed that one had earned their protection or their help. The more valuable the object, the more help or protection they might expect.

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For such understanding, such ancestral wisdom, or such intuition included the insight that some mortal deeds were wise and some mortal deeds were unwise because wise deeds were those which aided or did not upset the natural cosmic balance and because unwise deeds – acts of hubris – did upset the natural cosmic balance and invited, sooner or later, retribution by the divinities, be such retribution personal (against the hubriatic individual) or against the family and descendants of that individual or against the community that the hubriatic individual was a part of. A pattern of hubriatic deeds which both Aeschylus and Sophocles so well described: Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*, and Sophocles in his *Antigone* and his *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

In respect of the Greek belief in such divinities and asking for their help there is of course that beautiful poem by Sappho [1]

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα,  
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,  
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,  
πότνια, θῦμον,

ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κάτέρωτα  
τὰς ἔμας αὔδας αἰοῖσα πήλοι  
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα  
χρύσιον ἦλθες

ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον  
ῶκεες στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας  
πύκνα δίνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωϊθε-  
ρος διὰ μέσσω·

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,  
μειδιαίσαισ' ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ  
ἦρε' ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι  
δηῦτε κάλημμι

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι  
μαινόλαι θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω  
μαῖσ' ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ  
Ψά]πφ', ἀδικήει;

καὶ γὰρ αἶ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,  
αἶ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει,  
αἶ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει  
κῶκ ἐθέλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον  
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσαι  
θῦμος ἰμέρρει, τέλεσον, σὺ δ' αὐτὰ  
σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

Deathless Aphrodite – Daughter of Zeus and maker of snares –  
On your florid throne, hear me!  
My lady, do not subdue my heart by anguish and pain  
But come to me as when before  
You heard my distant cry, and listened:

Leaving, with your golden chariot yoked, your father's house  
To move beautiful sparrows swift with a whirling of wings  
As from heaven you came to this dark earth through middle air  
And so swiftly arrived.

Then you my goddess with your immortal lips smiling  
Would ask what now afflicts me, why again  
I am calling and what now I with my restive heart  
Desired:

Whom now shall I beguile  
To bring you to her love?  
Who now injures you, Sappho?  
For if she flees, soon shall she chase  
And, rejecting gifts, soon shall she give.  
If she does not love you, she shall do so soon  
Whatsoever is her will.

Come to me now to end this consuming pain  
Bringing what my heart desires to be brought:  
Be yourself my ally in this fight.

By the time the manuscripts of the Picatrix were written, as translations of a translation of an Arabic manuscript dating from some three or more centuries earlier, the concept of telemata seems to have become somewhat divorced from its pagan origins since the Picatrix begins with a doxology to a singular God - Ad laudem et gloriam altissimi et omnipotentis Dei cuius est revelare suis predestinatis secreta scienciarum - echoing as it does the doxology to Allah, Al-Ahad, in that earlier Arabic manuscript and containing as that Arabic manuscript does several quotations from the Quran.

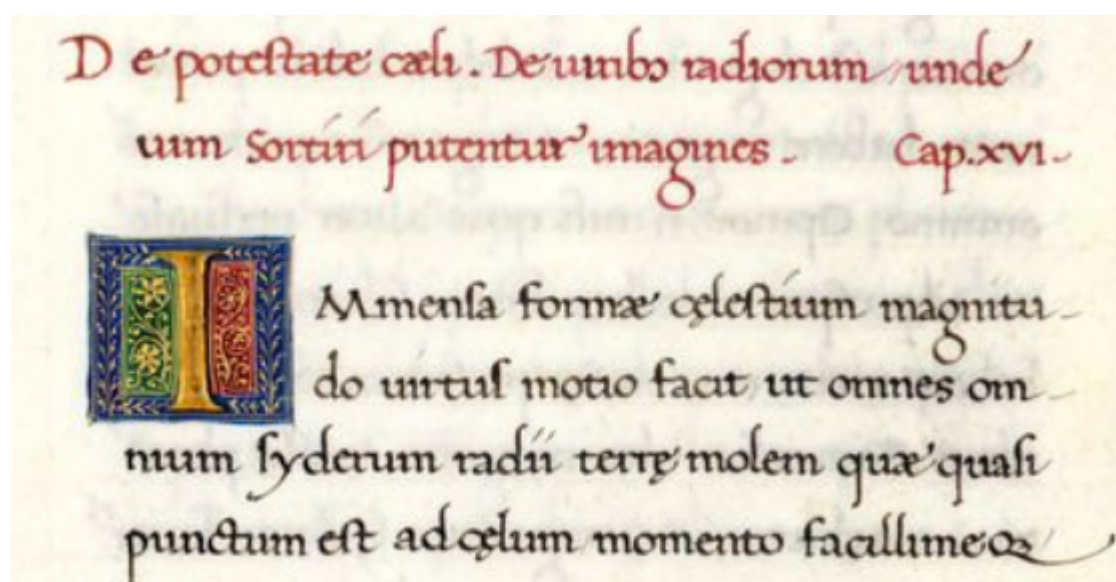
Thus, and again according to my fallible understanding, it seems to me that, given the importance attached in both the Latin and the Arabic text to telemata [2] - the locus has, despite such doxologies, moved away from the pagan understanding of mortals as an integral (Ciceronian) balancing part of the cosmos, as part of Nature and of their community and personally aware of the consequences of hubris, toward the εἶδος - the abstraction - of mortals as individuals who can by telemata and other means achieve certain personal desires or bring about certain changes beneficial to themselves. Almost as if telemata and other similar means have replaced the numinous, the pagan, awareness of our status as mortals who depend on the harmony that the older divinities represented, manifest as this awareness is in the phrase *memento homo* [3]. A phrase adopted by the Roman Catholic church in the form "memento homo quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris," [4] and which church, despite its faults, perhaps for centuries kept alive at least something of the pagan understanding of the error of hubris, its awareness of our temporary mortal life and of our fallible mortal nature.

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2017

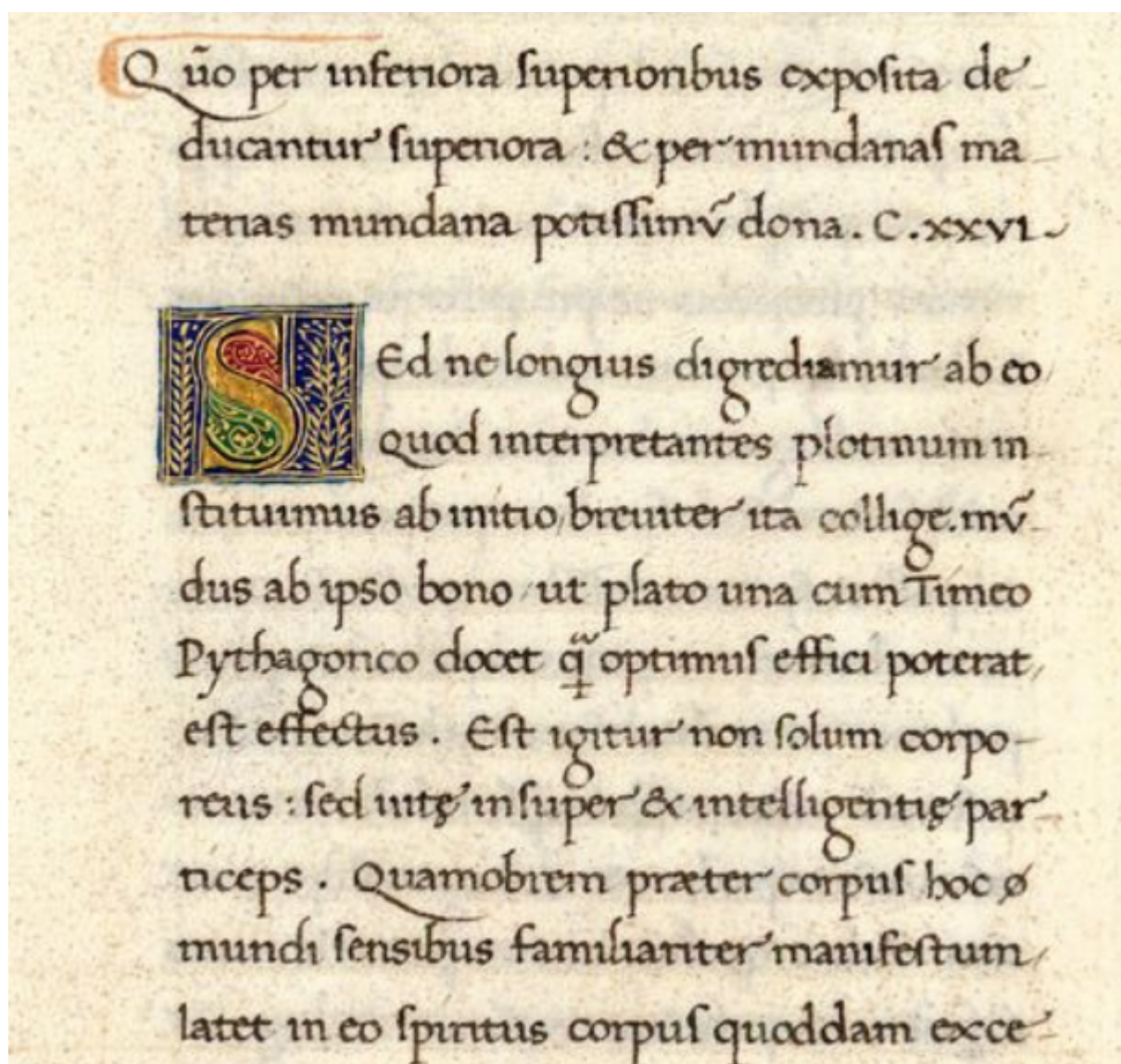
Note: This text is an edited version of a communication sent this year to someone who had enquired about the relation, if any, between the talismans described in the Latin text entitled Picatrix and Greco-Roman pagan beliefs.

[1] My translation. The Greek text is that of Lobel and Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, Oxford 1955.

[2] In the Picatrix the word used is imago, usually (in my opinion) mis-translated by the fairly recent (c.1638) word 'talisman' and which English word implies 'a semblance', a crafting by someone of something material which of itself presenced, was a semblance of, what was 'higher', numinous, by something which was 'lower', material, with such a presencing described by Marsilii Ficini in his *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*.



From a 1489 manuscript:  
Marsilii Ficini, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, XVI



De Vita Coelitus Comparanda, XXVI

Interestingly, imago occurs in the Latin version of the nine doxologies - v. 31 - of the Poemandres tractate of the Corpus Hermeticum, cuius universa natura imago nata est, with the original Greek being οὐ πᾶσα φύσις εἰκὼν ἔφυ which I translate as "you who engender all physis as eikon", with eikon suggestive of what Maximus of Constantinople in his Mystagogia [Patrologiae Graeca, 91, c.0658] explains. Which is of we humans, and the cosmos, and Nature, and psyche, as eikons, although according to Maximus it is the Christian church itself (as manifest and embodied in Jesus of Nazareth and the Apostles and their successors and in scripture) which, being the eikon of God, enables we humans to recognize this, recognize God, be in communion with God, return to God, and thus find and fulfil the meaning of our being, our existence.

[3] Although the use of a similar phrase about mortality in the Triumphus is disputed, there is evidence to suggest that during those victory processions in Rome the triumphant General was reminded by someone of his mortality, qv. M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. p. 272f.

[4] "Recall, mortal, you are dust and you will revert to being dust."

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