Egyptian Elements in Hermetic Literature

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Abstract
The Hermetic literature (HL) or the Corpus Hermeticum, as it is more commonly referred to, concerns an extensive body of writings which evolved in the early Christian era around the personage of Hermes Trismegistus; Trismegistus meaning three times great. The name Hermes Trismegistus has been generally accepted as a Greek ascription to the Egyptian god, Thoth; Thoth being the ancient Greek attempt to pronounce Djehty (Dhwty). While some portions of the HL may have been written prior to the beginning of the Christian era, it is generally believed that most of the HL was produced between 100 and 300 CE (that is, the Christian or Common Era) in Egypt. While it has been generally accepted that the frame-work of the HL is Egyptian, the content has been construed as an eclectic mix of ideas and concepts derived from the various schools of Greek philosophical thought --- Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neo-Platonism et cetera. The literature is extant in Greek, while one long tractate has come down to us in Latin; namely, the Asclepius tractate which is sometimes also referred to as the Perfect Sermon. Several Hermetic excerpts were found at Nag Hammadi (in Upper Egypt) in late 1945. The Nag Hammadi excerpts have been preserved in Coptic. Curiously enough, Corpus Hermeticum XVI, paragraphs 1 and 2 constitute a very explicit polemic against translating the HL into Greek. See note 48 for my translation of these paragraphs (from chapter four of my thesis) accompanying this abstract. In a thesis of four chapters, I present evidence with a view toward demonstrating that the Egyptian element in HL is present to a more significant degree than many previous interpreters, particularly in the twentieth century, have argued. However, I am hardly the first to assume such a stance; Pietschmann, Reitzenstein, Stricker, Derchain and Griffiths are some of those who have taken positions quite similar to mine. In conclusion, my interest in the HL is a two-fold one. On the one hand, this interest has evolved directly out of my identity as a person of African descent. On the other hand, it has also grown out of my interest in the bible in general and the New Testament in particular. Most specifically, my interest in the HL has ultimately stemmed from the realization that there is a seminal relationship between the development of the New Testament and Christian origins and northeastern Afrika in general and ancient Egypt in particular.

Comments
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