

Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia - Reading List

Hermes Trismegistus and the Mystery Religions

a) Texts

KINGSFORD Anna and MAITLAND Edward (Translators & Editors):

The Virgin of the World by Hermes Marcurius Troismegistus (1885).

Translations of the Asclepios and the Fragments which, while in no sense being academic, reflect the attitudes and beliefs prevalent during the 'Occult Revival' of the Victorian era.

MEAD G R S (Translator): Thrice - Greatest Hermes. Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis (1906) 3 volumes. Later reprints exist.

A classic translation of the extant Hermetic literature which epitomises an all too rare ability to harmonise scholarly methodology with a sympathetic approach to esoteric ways of thought.

NOCK A D and FESTUGLIERE A J: Corpus Hermeticum (Paris 1945 - 1954) 4 volumes.

The TEXTUS RECEPTUS of the Hermetic writings, fully annotated and with a translation into French.

SCOTT W: Hermetica Edited with English translation and notes (Oxford 1924 - 1936) 4 volumes.

The Ancient Greek and Latin writings which contain religious or philosophic teachings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus. While it is not a received text, Scott's version is academically the most acceptable English translation

b) Studies

BURKERT W: Ancient Mystery Cults (Cambridge, Mass., 1987)

CAMPBELL J (Ed): The Mysteries. Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks (1965) Thirteen papers on Egyptian, Eleusinian, Orphic and Christian Mysteries, as well as on the Kaberoi and on parallels in Indian and Iranian religion, and in Islam.

FOWDEN G: The Egyptian Hermes. A historical approach to the late pagan mind. (Cambridge 1986)

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KERENYI C: Eleusis. Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter. (1967)
Very much a Jungian approach to the problem of the Mysteries.

MYLONGAS G E: Elusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries (1961)

REITZENSTEIN R: Hellenistic Mystery Religions: their basic ideas and significance. (1978)

The English translation of a classic study first published in 1910, although the author's views on a late date for and Iranian influence on, the Mystery Religions are not - it should be noted - now generally accepted.

TAYLOR Thomas: The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, a Dissertation
Edited by Alexander Wilder (New York 1891) later reprints exist.
The classic 'traditional' treatment of Eleusis, and a text revered by nineteenth century hermeticists from its first publication in 1790.

Oriental Religions in the Greeco - Roman World

a) Texts

LUCIAN: The Syrian Goddess. Translated and edited by H Attridge and R A Oden (1982)

A modern translation of one of the most influential works in the formation of Renaissance ideas of sub-classical Mystery religions>

PLUTARCH: De Iside et Osiride Edited by J G Griffiths (1970)
Text and translation in parallel

b) Studies

CUMONT F: The Mysteries of Mithra (Chicago 1903) Reprints available.

HINNELL J (Ed): Mithraic Studies (Manchester 1975) 2 volumes.
Thirty papers from the Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies.

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LEGGE F: Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity Being studies in religious history from 330 BC to 330 AD (Cambridge 1915) two volumes. Later reprints exist.

A pioneering study which is still of great value.

VERMASEREN M J: Mithras, the Secret God (1963) - A standard work.

VERSLUIS A : The Egyptian Mysteries (1988)

An examination of the Egyptian Mystery tradition in the light of the continuing Tradition.

WITT F : Isis in the Greco - Roman World (1971)

ZAEHNER R C: The Dawn of the Twilight of Zoroastrianism (1961)

A comprehensive work with an excellent analytical bibliography. Mithraism which developed from the Zoroastrian religion, is well covered.

NOTE - The following work may profitably be avoided.

WYNNE - TYSON E: Mithras, the Fellow in the Cap (1972) Second edition. Although this book may appeal to latter - day hermeticists by reason of its sympathy with esoteric ideas, it is opinionated, meandering and virulently and uncritically hostile to Christian orthodoxy.

Alternatives to Orthodoxy: the formation of the Tradition in the early Christian World.

Gnosticism and Apocryphal Gospels

a) Texts

APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS:- JAMES M R: The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford 1924).

A convenient translation of most of the apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses. Whilst superseded as regards early Christian material, it remains of value for its translations of medieval texts.

APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS:- HENNECKE E : New Testament Apocrypha
Edited By W Schneemelcher. English translation edited by R McL Wilson
(1963 - 1965) 2 volumes.

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NOTE:-

It should be pointed out that one commonly met with translation, William Hone's Apocryphal New Testament (1820 and many reprints), is utterly worthless from any academic viewpoint, but it undoubtedly influenced the more uncritical of nineteenth century hermeticists.

FOERSTER W: Gnostia. A selection of Gnostic Texts. English translation edited by R McL Wilson. (Oxford 1972, 1974) 2 volumes.

An excellent handbook on Gnosticism. The two volumes contain translations of both patristic texts on Gnosticism and original Coptic and Mandaic sources, with concise introductions to each text.

FRYTON B: The Gnostic Scriptures. A new translation with annotations and introductions (1987).

A comprehensive collection covering both early and later Gnostic texts and associated material.

PISTIS SOPHIA: SCHMIDT Carl (Editor) Pistis Sophia. Translation and note by Violet Macdermot (Leiden 1978).

Schmidt established the textus receptus of this highly important Coptic Gnostic document in 1905. It is difficult to see how either the text or this outstanding English translation can be superseded.

PISTIS SOPHIA: MEAD G R S (translator) Pistis Sophia a Gnostic Miscellany; being the most part extracts from the book of the Saviour, to which are added excerpts from a cognate literature. (1921) Revised edition. A complete English translation of the forty - five Gnostic codices (and others: including a fragment of Plato and several strictly Hermetic texts) discovered at Nag Hammadi on the Nile in 1945 - with two related texts from the Berlin Codex. It gives a far more comprehensive view of Gnostic beliefs and attitudes than any earlier collection of texts could have done.

b) Studies

JONAS H: The Gnostic Religion The message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity. (Boston 1963) 2nd edition.

A classical work of what may be termed the 'pre - Nag Hammadi' period.

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KING C W: The Gnostics and their Remains ancient and medieval. (1887)
2nd edition. A modern reprint exists.

The writer was an authority on ancient engraved gems, and the value of the work lies in its detailed discussion of Gnostic gems. The author's speculations on the perpetuation of Gnostic symbols among the Templars, Rosicrucians and Freemasons have no scholarly foundation, but they illustrate nicely the manner in which the Hermetic Tradition has been continually created and reinforced.

KRAUSE M, ROBINSON J, and WISE F (Ed.) Nag Hammadi Studies
(Leiden 1971 - continuing).

The most important scholarly series of texts and studies relating to Gnosticism. It is also, alas, a very highly priced series.

MANSEL H L: The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries.
Edited by J B Lightfoot (1875) A modern reprint exists.

A very dated work, but important as the principal source of information on the Gnostics available to those who were active in the 'Occult Revival' (most of whom did not read Latin or Greek and thus could not cope with the Church Fathers in the original)

MEAD G R S: Fragments of a Faith Forgotten (1906) 2nd edition - later reprints exist.

A valuable, if somewhat dated, overview by a sympathetic scholar.

MEAD G R S: The Gnostic John the Baptizer. Selections from the
Mandaean John - Book (1924)

The Mandaeans of southern Iraq are important as perpetrators of a debased form of Gnosticism down to the present day, Mead's work is one of the few in English that treats of them.

PAGELS Elaine: The Gnostic Gospels (New York 1979)

An admirable introduction to the Nag Hammadi texts and to Gnosticism in general. Unlike many other commentators, the author offers her personal opinions on and interpretations of the value of Gnosticism today - and thus, all unknowingly, helps to perpetuate the Hermetic Tradition.

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RUDOLPH Kurt: Gnosis, the Nature and History of an Ancient Religion

Translated and edited by R McL Wilson (Edinburgh 1983).

The best modern survey of the subject, well illustrated and with a very full bibliography.

YAMAUCHI E: Pre - Christian Gnosticism. A survey of the proposed evidences (1973).

A scholarly argument for Gnosticism having been derived from Christianity rather than having been a formative influence upon it.

NOTE

Readers may well come across two other recent works which, for different reasons, are best left alone.

CHURTON Tobias: The Gnostics (1987)

Designed to accompany a television series, this book fails to make its case for the continuation of Gnostic ideas down the centuries. It is not an implausible notion but the author is not its best advocate.

LACARRIERE J : The Gnostics Forward by Laurence Durrell (1977).

The association of so distinguished an author with so worthless and irrational a book may lead to its being taken up by the undiscerning of Gnosticism it should be left on the critical dung heap.

Neoplatonism and Later Classical Paganism

a) Texts

IAMBlichUS : On the Mysteries of the Egyptians Chaldeans and Assyrians

Translated from the Greek by Thomas Taylor (1895). 2nd edition. Later reprints exist.

PHILOSTRATUS : The Life of Apollonius of Tyana With an English

Translation by F C Conybeare (1912) 2 volumes currently in print.

Apollonius has been taken as a model of Christ by Rationalists and Hermetic Traditionalists alike (despite the manifold chronological and typological differences) and a knowledge of the Life throws light on his religious attitudes inherent in the Hermetic Tradition.

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PLOTINUS : The Enneads. Translated by Stephen MacKenna 3rd edition revised by B S Page (1962).

The standard translation, and a model of both clarity and elegance.

PYTHAGORAS : GUTHRIE K S : The Pythagorean Source book and Library
An Anthology of ancient Writings which relate to Pythagoras and
Pythagorean Philosophy. Introduced and edited by D R Fideler, with a
Forward by Joselyn Godwin. (Grand rapids 1987).

The text includes not only the various Lives (by Iamblichus and others) but a
wealth of extracts from Neoplatonist sources.

NOTE

For minor Neoplatonist writings the translations of Thomas Taylor (listed in
Thomas Taylor the Platonist) are a convenient source. Many of them are
available as modern reprints from either the Philosophical Research
Society of Los Angeles, or The Wizard's Bookshelf of Minneapolis. Other
translations are to be found in G R S Mead's Echoes from the Gnosis (1906
- 1908), an eleven volume series of Gnostic, Mithraic and Neoplatonic texts.
these have been recently reprinted in a single volume.

b) Studies

INGE G R: The Philosophy of Plotinus (1929) 3rd edition 2 volumes
The final version of Dean Inge's famous Gifford Lectures of 1917 - 1918. it
constitutes the most significant study of Plotinus to appear in English.

MEAD G R S: Apollonius of Tyana, the Philosopher Reformer of the First
Century A.D. (1901).

Written in Mead's theosophical period and thus pre-eminently of a piece
with Hermetic views on the subject.

WALLIS R T: Neoplatonism (1972)

A lucid account of the whole philosophical movement termed Neoplatonism

WHITTAKER T: The Neo-Platonists. A Study in the History of Hellenism
(Cambridge 1928) 2nd edition.

A standard work in its day and the only general survey in English before the
publication of R T Wallis's book.

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Man and the spread of Dualism

a) Texts

EPHTAIM S: Prose Refutations of Man, Marcion and Bardaisan Transcribed by C W Mitchell (1912 - 1921) 2 volumes. A modern reprint exists. The Syriac text and translation of the most important of the works attacking Manichaeism. It was through such texts, rather than those of the Manichees, that Manichaeism was known to follow Hermetic Tradition.

CONYBEARE F C: The Key of Truth. A Manual of the Paulician Church of Armenia The Armenian text edited and translated with illustrative documents and introduction (Oxford 1898)
Although hostile to Manichaeism, the Paulicans continued the unorthodox dualist tradition of Gnosticism. This is the only accessible translation of the text, but it has become a very rare book.

b) Studies

BURKITT F C: The Religion of the Manichees (Cambridge 1924)
An excellent introductory survey.

WIDENGREN G: Man and Manichaeism (1965)
Manichaeism viewed in a wider context than Burkitt's Christian setting.

MYSTICISM

Because mystical experience is so intensely personal, a reading guide to mysticism may seem to be inappropriate, but there is much within the compass of mysticism that cannot be fully understood without reference to the works of the mystics themselves. The purpose of this list is to provide Frates who wish to study the subject with a guide to the more important mystical texts; to histories of mysticism; and to studies of its place in world religions and its essential structure.

General Studies of Mysticism

FERGUSON John: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions (1976)
A good general guide, but not, alas, comprehensive.

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GILBERT R A: The Elements of Mysticism (1991)

A brief overview of the whole subject.

HAPPOLD F C: Mysticism, a Study and an Anthology (1963)

An excellent introductory work illustrated with carefully chosen texts.

UNDERHILL Evelyn: Mysticism, a Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness. (1930) 12th edition revised (often reprinted)

One of the great classic studies of the subject. It contains an extensive bibliography.

ZAEHNER R C: Mysticism Sacred and Profane An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience (1961)

A scholarly and wide - ranging work.

The Philosophy of Mysticism

HERMAN E: The Meaning and Value of Mysticism 2nd edition (1916)

One of the few books to consider in depth the importance of mysticism in everyday life and for society as a whole.

STAAL Frits: Exploring Mysticism (1975)

An original study in which the author seeks to take mysticism out of the purely religious sphere.

STACE W: Mysticism and Philosophy (1961)

A critical analysis of philosophical arguments about mysticism.

WAITE A E: The Way of the Divine Union, being a Doctrine of Experience in the Life of Sanctity, considered on the Faith of its Testimonies and Interpreted after a New Manner (1915).

WAITE A E: Lamps of Western Mysticism. Essays on the Life and Soul in God. (1923 modern reprints exist).

Waite is one of the most important writers on mysticism, and although his books are difficult to read, they well repay the effort.

WOODS Richard (Ed.): Understanding Mysticism. (1980)

Thirty - six essays and extracts on all aspects of the subject.

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The Nature of Mystical Experience

BUCKE R M: Cosmic Consciousness A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind (1923 frequently reprinted),

Long recognised as a classic of its kind, the text includes many 'instances' of Cosmic Consciousness collected by the author.

COXHEAD Nona: A Contemporary Exploration of Mystical Experience. (1985)

The experience analysed scientifically and philosophically.

CROOKALL R: The Interpretation of Cosmic and Mystical Experiences (1969)

A large number of 'mystical' experiences, collected, classified and analysed

HARDY Sir Alister: The Spiritual Nature of Man. A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience. (1979)

A pioneering study that classifies and analyses all such experiences

JAMES William: The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature (1902 frequently reprinted)

The most significant of earlier historical and psychological analyses of religious experience.

LASKI Marghanita: Ecstasy (1961)

A study of some Secular and Religious Experiences

LASKI Marghanita : Every Ecstasy (1961)

Two important and (despite the author's agnosticism) sympathetic enquiries into all ecstatic states.

OTTO Rudolph: The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-rational factor in the Idea of the Divine and its relation to the Rational (1923 reprints exist)

Although the text is not limited to mysticism, this is one of the classic accounts of the mystical experience.

TART Charles (Ed) : Altered States of Consciousness (1972)

A collection of thirty - five papers on the psychological and physiological bases of all such states.