
L'Alchimie et ses racines philosophiques: La tradition grecque et la tradition arabe edited by Cristina Viano

Paris: Libraire philosophique J. Vrin, 2005. Pp. 242. ISBN 2-7116-1754-8. Paper € 28.00

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This book is a rather delayed publication of a series of seminars organized by two sections of the Centre national de recherche scientifique between 1996 and 1998. Six of the 11 contributions have already been published in the alchemical periodical *Chrysopoeia* 8 (2000–2003). The introduction by Cristina Viano, however, gives more recent bibliography, and most of the articles themselves have been brought up to date. The book provides a valuable overview of the interface between theories of matter and alchemy. It begins with three articles by established historians of Greek philosophy concerning, respectively, matter in the *Timaeus* of Plato and Aristotle's criticism of Plato's theory (Luc Brisson; accompanied by useful diagrams of Plato's regular solids), the Stoic theory of matter and its relationship with the Timaeian account (Jean-Baptiste Gourinat), and matter and emanation in Plotinus' *Enneads* (Denis O'Brien). This is followed by sections on Greek and Arabic alchemy respectively. The Platonic aspects of alchemy are particularly emphasized in Viano's own article on Greek alchemists and in Maria Papatthanassiou's article on the alchemical work of Stephanus of Alexandria, where Plato's *Timaeus* is particularly prominent. The 'Plato' of the *Liber quartorum* (an Arabic text also extant in a Latin version, discussed by Pierre Thillet), however, has little to do with the genuine Plato.

The article by Thillet is the first study to be devoted to the *Liber quartorum*. This work purports to be a text of Plato, commented on by an otherwise unknown Abu'l-^cAbbas Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn Juhar Bukhtar on the request of a 'Thabit', who has been presumed to be Thabit ibn Qurra (Thillet follows the common view that this attribution should be held in doubt, but does not discount a 'Har-

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ISSN 1549-4497 (online)

ISSN 1549-4470 (print)

ISSN 1549-4489 (CD-ROM)

Aestimatio 4 (2007) 6–7

ranian' origin for the text). Thillet wonders whether the text and commentary were forged together (as has been suggested by Richard Lemay for the *Centiloquium* attributed to Ptolemy and its commentary by Ahmad ibn Yusuf, who incidentally appears here [205] as the forger of 'Greek Testaments' based on the *Republic* of Plato). The interruption of longer lemmata would seem to argue against this. There follows the more general question of the extant and nature of pseudo-Platonic literature, which has not received as much attention as pseudo-Aristotelian literature, though we can now add to Thillet's study a chapter on the subject by Dag Nikolaus Hasse [2002]. While many of these pseudo-Platonica have been listed, and some edited, by Abdu'l-Rahman Badawi, the only alchemical writing we know is a brief treatise entitled *fi'l-kimiya* in MS Tehran, Majlis-i Sura-i Milli, 6160, pp. 342–345, though some of the recipes in the magical *Liber vaccae*, which concentrates on organic concoctions, could be described as alchemical. This work, by the way, is mentioned twice by Thillet as an Arabic fragment taken from the *Book of Laws (al-nawamis) of Plato*, in Paris, BNF, ar. 2577 (pp. 205–206), without notice of the fact that the full text appears in Latin, with the title *Liber vaccae*, in several manuscripts. The title of the *Liber quartorum* recalls the fact that Plato's dialogues were arranged in groups of four ('tetralogies'). The 'third part' is said to have been translated by 'Astuminas' who appears as the dedicatee of Balinas' *Great Book of Talismans*¹ in Arabic and corresponds to Soustomos Thalassos in the Greek version of the same text. Another 'Harranian' work cited is Hermes' *Kitab al-Ustutas*. Most of the article is taken up with the discussion of titles in the Arabic text, the possibility that 'Iklidis' is not Euclid but a transcription of the Greek word for 'keys' and that the pupil of Plato, 'Umanitis', may simply be $\delta \mu α θ η τ ή ς$ (a 'pupil'). The book ends with useful summaries in English of all the articles.

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¹ Balinas = Apollonius of Tyana.