

The Phoenix

[by the Master of Pelican Camp]

Yea, O my master, thou art the beloved of the Beloved One; the Bennu Bird is set up in Philae not in vain.

-Liber 65, IV:22

The modern age is in the throes of nostalgia for the rich and fantastical symbols of the past. An attempt to resurrect glyphs of ancient religions has exhumed meaningless shells of neglected understanding. The naïve assumption that the modern interpretation of esoteric symbols is as valid as the ancient understanding is a gross blasphemy against them and many agree that we are left only to contemplate the vestigial remnants of the past through such mockeries as the Roman Catholic Church (Guenon, 2004). However, the author believes that an intensive look at ancient esotericism will have one of two positive effects, and this to be decided by the reader's insight. It will either enrich understanding of these symbols thus strengthen the meaning found therein or it will mock the ignorance of those blasphemers and discourage further profaning.

Of the many symbols of antiquity that trickled into the modern age, precious few have gained a great deal of popularity. These few are often composite with modern religion and interpreted in light of that paradigm. One particularly mercurial memory is the Phoenix which is as commonly known now as when it was said to have lived. However, very little of this remarkable bird's background is popularly preserved.

The modern image is that of some flaming bird capable of resurrecting deceased heroes in popular role-playing games. The dominant motif is the power of re-birth, itself being capable of rising from its own ashes thereby surviving the most annihilating of ends, immolation, reduction to nothing but dust and ash. This power makes the phoenix as a

symbol of triumph, overcoming the overbearing, and victory over the impossible. What is forgotten is the divine beauty of this bird and the complex method by which it accomplishes the miracle of resurrection.

This work will take its data primarily from sources dating from Hellenistic Greece, Ancient Egypt, Foul Arabia, and poetic adaptations of the Phoenix in, broadly considered, late-Renaissance literature in the Rosicrucian genres of Hermetica and Alchemy. The "fire-bird" symbol is far-reaching and has corollaries throughout the Far East, Central Asia, and even the Americas. These will be discussed briefly to honor the Phoenix's enormous effort to fly so far around the world that all cultures may listen to its magnificent song.

This work will examine appearances of the Phoenix in ancient literature and mythology. The antiquity and far-reaching renown of the Phoenix will favorably yield a well spring of information for this analysis, but the sands of time obscure many of the connections between these observations. The author begs the pardon of the reader if fallacious correlations are made on too little evidence.

The various sections here contained have a common subject. However, as time and culture varied, this subject gained and lost meaning. The goal of this piece is not to homogenize this symbol but instead to explore its richness and plurality. It will give two different Phoenix's, the ancient and the modern, and will show how one relates to the other.

While reading, recall certain motifs that appear cross-culturally. Some are superficial such as the Phoenix's color and lifespan. The more important motifs are the more esoteric, such as its androgeneity/ hermaphroditic character, the method of its rebirth, its identification with the sun (and how), and the properties of its ash. Also, try relating the Phoenix to one's soul, the Sun's migration both short and long term, and the Sun as God.

The Myth of the Fire Bird

In the style of Hermetica, ancient and modern, an exploration of the multi-religious appearance of the Phoenix will bring understanding of the implicit quality that was preserved through its inter-continental migration. This is not to inductively determine what the Phoenix represents but instead to re-establish its transcultural history. For the sake of crowning the symbol itself with a divine name I will refer to the subject of this essay as “the Phoenix,” preserving its Grecian title and the better known. Several appearances of the Phoenix will be treated more fully later, but for the present a migratory history can be built through the etymology of its various names.

Phoenix is an antiquated Greek word with multiple interpretations. Its root could be traced to the literal Greek *phoinos*, “blood-red.” The late Egyptian color scheme of the Phoenix follows suit. Curiously, the Greek *Phoenix* was also used to denote the date and the date palm of Egypt. The connection between the Phoenix and the palm tree is treated more fully below.

The bird and the tree's sharing of a common name is not unique to Greek. It is also the case in Egyptian, Hebrew, and Persian tongues. The double-meaning of *Phoenix* for the bird and the date palm may have arisen from the Ancient Egyptian. The Egyptian Benu bird is the mythological origin of the Grecian one. The word *Benu* comes from *weben*, “to rise brilliantly,” or, “to shine.” *Benu* was used for both the Phoenix and the date palm. The date palm was given this resurrection role due to its hermaphroditic reproduction (self-fertilization), potentially leading the ancient man to believe it possessed the power of spontaneous generation, as did the Benu Bird. *Benu* is similar to the Egyptian *benben*, “to copulate,” a word used to denote the mythical stone or mound of Heliopolis upon which the world was created. This connection is treated more fully below.

The Persian Huma shares many traits with the Egyptian Benu and Greek Phoenix.

Huma derives from the Persian word of power *hum*, the equivalent of the Sanskrit *Om*, and shares meaning with the Sufi word of power *hu*, and also the Arabic name for God, *hua* (Khan, 2005). The Sufi word of power *Haqq*, “truth,” is a composite of *Hu*, “God,” and *Ek*, “one.” Also, the Prophet Zoroaster is said to be born of a Huma Tree, potentially another connection between the palm and fire bird (Tame, 1984). The Huma bird's role was one of granting luck, and should the Huma bird land on a man's head then that man was destined to become King. (Tame, 1984) Interestingly, in Egyptian hieroglyphs and statues, Pharaohs and Harpocrates were often depicted as having a Hawk surmounting their head.

The Huma is mentioned by some sources to be involved in the rituals of the Tower of Silence, the Persian and Indian method of disposing of corpses. The connection could be through the ever-burning flame of the Zoroastrians kept within the Tower, the role of Birds in devouring the corpses contained therein, or the role of the Sun's flames in the purification of the corpses. (Godrej and Mistree, 2002).

Some other Phoenixes are noteworthy. However, their relation to the western Phoenix is questionable.

The *Zhar Ptitsa*, or “fire bird,” appears often in Russian folk-lore as a kind of trickster who initiates a quest for some young hero by dropping a feather. (Spirin, 2002) Once the hero collects the feather he begins a hunt for the *Zhar Ptitsa*, the trapping of which would grant some boon. Other than it being depicted as a peacock, very reminiscent of Late Greek and early Phoenician fire-birds, and having a flaming plumage, it does not bear the same quality of resurrection as its cousins. However, the power of a fire-bird's feather is a recurrent motif in Hermetica, appearing both in the works of St. Christian Rosencreutz and St. Michael Maier. The *Zhar* comes from the old Russian жар, “fire,” pronounced similar to

Tzar, yielding an interesting connection emphasized by St. Crowley to *Tzaddi*, *Caesar* and similar words that denote divine temporal authority.¹

In the Far Eastern Orient similar fire-birds are of note; however, they share traits with the Phoenix only superficially. China's *Fenghuang* dates to pre-historic times, but was more of a chimera than the simple birds of the west. It also lacked the power of resurrection. It was common in its colored plumage, peacock tail, longevity, and dominion over other birds. *Fenghuang* is often paired with the Dragon, they being symbolic of yin/yang, mercy/severity, life/death, wife/husband, etc. The Japanese Ho-o' is effectively the *Fenghuang* of Japan.

Both etymologically and descriptively it is safe to assume that the western Phoenix derives largely from a Hellenistic combination of the Egyptian Bennu and Arabian Huma. The appearance of the Phoenix throughout eastern European and Russian folklore is a less magical interpretation of the Huma and the Far Eastern Phoenix is mythically far removed from the western Phoenix though it shares some deific traits. The only other bird worth mention is the American Quetzalcoatl which, despite its chimeric appearance, shares a strong mythological role with the western Phoenix in its power of Resurrection.

The Grecian Phoenix

The Phoenix of Europe derives largely from the Hellenistic Phoenix. This Phoenix's myth seems to be in no way novel and merely a Grecian interpretation of the Heliopolitan myth. The Phoenix's appearance in Greek literature is important to consider since this would have been the primary reference point for the revival of interest in the Phoenix. Grecian authors

¹ “[Tzaddi] is derived from Sanskrit roots meaning Head and Age, and is found to-day in words like Cæsar, Tsar, Sirdar, Senate, Senior, Signor, Señor, and Seigneur.” (Crowley, 2000)

were the first to consider the allegorical nature of the Phoenix as either some Aeonic device or metaphor for the soul.

The earliest reference to the Phoenix is the *Precepts of Chiron* where Hesiod simply discussed its longevity, saying, “A chattering crow lives out nine generations of aged men, but a stag's life is four time a crow's, and a raven's life makes three stags old, while the phoenix outlives nine ravens, but we, the rich-haired Nymphs, daughters of Zeus the aegis-holder, outlive ten phoenixes.” (Parada, 1997)

Of ancient Greek authors, the more informative description appeared three Centuries later in Herodotus' *Histories*, and deserves to be quoted at length:

There is also another sacred bird called the phoenix, which I did not myself see except in painting, for in truth he comes to the Egyptians very rarely, at intervals, as the people of Heliopolis say, of five hundred years. They say that he comes regularly when his father dies; and if he be like the painting, he is of this size and nature, that is to say, some of his feathers are of gold color and others red, and in outline and size he is as nearly as possible like an eagle. This bird, they say (but I cannot believe the story), contrives as follows.

Setting forth from Arabia he conveys his father, they say, to the temple of the Sun plastered up in myrrh, and buries him in the temple of the Sun. He conveys him thus. He forms first an egg of myrrh as large as he is able to carry, and then he makes trial of carrying it, and when he has made trial sufficiently, then he hollows out the egg and places his father within it and plasters over with other myrrh that part of the egg where he hollowed it out to put his father in, and when his father is laid in it, it proves (they say) to



be of the same weight as it was; and after he has plastered it up, he conveys the whole to Egypt to the temple of the Sun. Thus they say that this bird does.

(124, Herodotus, 2003)

Herodotus' account is the most worthwhile evidence of the Grecian phoenix being derived solely from Egypt. Tacitus' description in his *Annals* contains no other information than what Herodotus offers and it carries the same sound of trust in second hand information.

The information Greek authors most frequently referenced came from the priests of an Egyptian city called Heliopolis. This was a popular spot for philosophers, including Plato, Solon, Hipparchus, and Pythagoras. This was due to its proximity to the Great Pyramids and other famous monoliths and also the Temple of Heliopolis. This temple is particularly important to the Phoenix myth; for it was there that the Phoenix would undergo the necessary preparation for resurrection upon the "altar of the Sun."

The resurrection of the Phoenix was also believed by Greeks to correlate with the transition of Aeons. This connection was explained by Manly P. Hall (2003, p. 231) and Aleister Crowley, who, positing a 600ish year lifespan, saw three Phoenix's marking the three decans of whatever zodiac sign marked an Aeon. Crowley saw the Moses/Dionysus to Christ to Mohammad to Jacques de Molay to himself as being marked by the Phoenix's lifespan.

Before going on to the Egyptian Benu it is worthwhile to consider the Phoenix in other Grecian contexts. In the *Iliad*, Phoenix was one of the three most influential soldiers of Achilles. It was Phoenix's speech to Achilles that was the most moving and inspired Achilles' return to battle. Phoenix was the favorite of Achilles and mediated between him and Agamemnon. This dating places Phoenix's life some time between the 12th and 19th century bc, long before Herodotus wrote his *Histories*

in the 5th century bc. This dating also roughly corresponds to the end of the Egyptian Old Kingdom when the Benu Bird (below) gained notoriety throughout Egypt. Scholars have suggested that Phoenix's name derived from Phoenicia, a possible homeland of both the hero and the bird.

Other than these scant appearances and references by Grecian authors and poets, the real mythology of the Phoenix comes from ancient Egypt in the form of the Benu. There seems to be no evidence of any Hellenistic Phoenix independent of this Egyptian myth. The main variation is its description. The Greeks stylized the Phoenix with a Hawk's face, Peacock's tail, and Eagle's size. This is very different from the Egyptian phoenix.

The Benu Bird

"O Atum-Khoprer, you became high on the height, you rose up as a bbn-stone in the Mansion of the Benu in On."

Pyramid Texts, utt 600, § 1652

The Grecian Phoenix came from the Egyptian Benu Bird. Benu is believed to derive from the verb "weben," meaning "to rise brilliantly," or "to shine." Curiously, *bennu* is also the Egyptian word for the date palm, a hermaphroditic plant. Their similarity is obvious, self-fertilization, or the possibility of one existing at a time. Other similarities

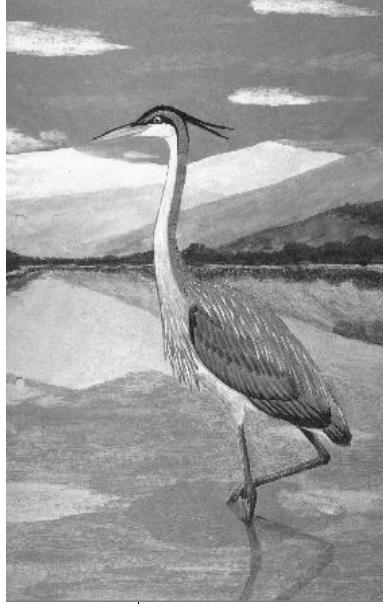


between the illustrious date palm and the Benu bird are to be noted later.

The Benu's hieroglyphic description is reminiscent of a pre-historic Heron which populated the Egyptian Nile and Arabian Peninsula, *Ardea bennuides*. Its exact date of extinction is unknown; however, it did interact with men in a religious capacity before its unfortunate obliteration. This is known by the recent (2006) discovery of *Ardea Bennuides* skeletons in the tombs of Umm al-Nar in modern UAE (UAE Interact, 2006). These tombs dated between 2700bc and 2000bc, which roughly corresponds to the period of time of the Old Egyptian Kingdom. While not their area of expertise, the German archaeologists who discovered these skeleton remains are confident in its connection to the Benu bird. (Bestiarium, 2007) Further, this position in Arabia in proximity to Egypt and Philae corresponds to ancient authors description of the Benu's migration from Arabia to Egypt. Arabia was the Benu's home but Egypt was its holy land. The fact that the Benu bird had a likely biological root is fascinating. None but the Ancient Egyptians argued for the Benu's literal existence. The Greeks and onward all argued an allegorical interpretation and the notion of its literal existence was preposterous.

Its plumage, depicted in hieroglyphs, varied between blue, purple, gold, and red with white. As a testament to its size, the ancient temple for the rites of Isis and Osiris, on the small island of Philae in Upper Egypt, is home to a cage-like structure said to have housed the Benu bird. (341, Massey, 1998) This cage is a monumental structure, and the Benu would've been twice the size of an ostrich to be contained within Philae's pillars.

The Benu bird is given a different life span by each source. Some blurring between



the Benu and Phoenix is necessary, for Grecian authors, in reference to the Egyptian Benu, still refer to it as the Phoenix. These dates seem like typical antiquated exaggerations of life span, but as scholars of esotericism note, there is often mystical import behind the age of a period or person. Herodotus believed the lifespan to be around 500 years and Tacitus posited between 500, 1400, and 6100 years. The complex lifespan in the Precepts of Chiron yields around 1000 years. (Parada, 1997) Later authors were fond of Herodotus' estimate and often agreed with around 600 years.

All authors agree that the pilgrimage site for the Benu's sacrifice is Heliopolis, the "city of the sun."² Heliopolis is a fascinating city in Egyptian history. It was called, "city of the pillars," and the Hebrew title, *On*, is the Greek word for *being*. Many Greeks traveled to Heliopolis for education and initiation. An exhaustive list of travelers to this popular destination is impossible, but St. Pythagoras and Plato (both invested in understanding "being") along with Solon, Herodotus, and Hipparchus all traveled to this mystical city. Among other things, Heliopolis taught the sciences of geometry and mathematics, which to both Pythagoras and Plato were staples to a permanent world of Form or permanence. This principle of permanence would be critical to the soul's survival after death. This, and other myths of Heliopolis, is the only way to understand the Benu's reason for trusting the priests of Heliopolis above all others.

²Where it resided in the meantime varied between India, Arabia, or Philae.

The Bennu's connection to Heliopolis' study and application of this science of being may come from its use of music. The Bennu and other Phoenixes share the gift of song which the Pythagoreans, who derive their lineage from Heliopolis, greatly emphasized. Music was a way of "tuning" the mind to the world of numbers, harmony, and beauty and this was an educational exercise encouraged in Plato's *Republic*. This is a possible reason Apollo or Helios visited the Phoenix (either at dawn or noon) to listen to its brilliant song while drinking from the well at which the Phoenix made his home. The music trait was lost in modern European adaptations.

Heliopolis' central deity was Atum, the "self-created," who willed himself into existence and then created the entire Heliopolitan ennead with a fascinating spell. Accounts vary and co-mingle with those of Ptah, the Memphis correlary of Atum, and Amoun, his Theban counterpart. He either spat, ejaculated via masturbation, or spake the other Gods into existence. The Egyptians, noting the curative effects of saliva, saw spitting as a means of blessing or bestowing health. This is the most common method of creation credited to Atum. However, he and Ptah were also believed to produce the Gods from semen, and the hand eventually came to replace the traditional hieroglyph for Atum. Lastly, speaking the Gods into existence is more the domain of Ptah, but the Egyptian words for speech and ejaculate were often interchangeable.³

A strange motif in Egyptian mythology is self-fertilization. Atum, the primordial God of Heliopolis, impregnated himself with the next two Heliopolitan Gods. The lone date palm, a common sight of the Sahara, is a hermaphroditic plant, meaning that it is capable of self-fertilization.⁴ Since only one Bennu exists at a time it reproduced similarly.

³ It is of note that the phrase Ejaculate, before being used to denote that gorgeous moment during which man celebrates his divinity, is also the term for a brief prayer or exclamation of faith.

The Benben (trans: to copulate) stone upon which Atum stood at the moment of creation has been translated as both "a stone" and "a mound." The stone is described as that stone which surmounts the central pillar in Heliopolis or as the mound upon which everything was made and Heliopolis lies. Heliopolis was the home of Imhotep, the reputed inventor of stone-carving and creator of the step pyramid, pillar, and obelisk. This central pillar in Heliopolis is claimed to be an Obelisk of Imhotep's design, being a pillar surmounted by a pyramidal black stone, identical to that stone which was held in reverence by the followers of Cybele in Rome. The Bennu bird's altar for its incineration is believed to be an altar in the centre of Heliopolis upon the Benben stone. This brings two important allusions. Atum standing on the Benben to create the ennead seems synchronous with the Bennu's resurrection upon that very same stone. The alternative interpretation of Atum standing upon the "mound" bears no particular relevance to the Bennu outside of another text which places the Bennu on that mound, mentioned below. However, the idea that Atum spat/ejaculated/uttered some creative formula to birth the Gods is also connected to the Huma bird of Persia whose name derives from *Hu*, the creative word of the Zoroastrians. Another more physical connection between the Bennu, Benben, and the palm is seen in the shape of the palm itself. The palm is a straight-standing pillar, similar to an obelisk, atop of which is a flourish of ray-like leaves very similar in appearance to an exploding sun. Were the Bennu to immolate itself atop a pillar it would appear very similar to a date palm.

Atum pre-dated existence, but stories differ as to how he arrived at the Benben. The Egyptologist Lasko relates, "Atum Kheper, you have come to be high on the hill, you have arisen on the Benben stone in the mansion of

⁴ Mentioned above, the Greek and Egyptian words for Phoenix are also the words for the date palm.

the Benben in Heliopolis...” (92, Baines, Silverman, and Lasko, 1991) Discussed above is his method of self-creation via willpower. Alternatively, he flew to the Benben as a great bird. All things considered, this great bird could've well been the Bennu bird. Papyrii from the 21st Dynasty indicates that Atum himself may have been born from the cry or song of the Bennu bird,

"...that breath of life which emerged from the throat of the Bennu bird, the son of Re in whom Atum appeared in the primeval nought, infinity, darkness and nowhere."

Descriptions of this bird vary between that of the Bennu and Ba. The Ba was depicted as the soul of certain Gods and also deified men. Upon the death of Osiris the Ba leapt from his Heart.⁵ Also, the Ba of Atum is said to leap from body to body as it wishes. Ba is strongly identified with the soul, more specifically the magical image or Ruach. Considering the Ba as Atum's soul, it lands upon the obelisk, or Phallus, and through an act of masturbation it creates the Ennead, all of which symbolize some material feature of both Egypt and the human body. Thus, the creation myth of Atum could be a depiction of a soul self-creating itself into corporeal form on the altar of the sun in Heliopolis, the obelisk, or phallus. The interchangeability of Ba and Bennu as Atum's soul shines light on this sexual metaphor of re-generation.

A final look at various hieroglyphs that depict Bennu will help

⁵Horapollon says, "Moreover, the HAWK is put for the soul, from the signification of its name; for among the Egyptians the hawk is called BAIETH: and this name in decomposition signifies soul and heart; for the word BAI is the soul, and ETH the heart; and the heart, according to the Egyptians, is the shrine of the soul; so that in its composition the name signifies 'soul enshrined in heart.' Whence also the hawk, from its correspondence with the soul, never drinks water, but blood, by which, also, the soul is sustained."

understand his connection to the esoteric side of Heliopolis. In Gardenius(G)-32 we see the Bennu standing on one leg in the style of the Ibis. Recall the hieroglyphic translation above that told of Atum's birth from Bennu's cry. This would imply that Bennu came before Atum. We find also in various Memphis and late-Kingdom Heliopolitan deviations from the original story that Thoth, the Ibis-headed God, was a pre-existent deity with Atum or Ptah. Conversely, in the Theban creation myth it was



Amoun who spoke the Ba into existence. The plumage jutting from the back of his head recalls his relation to the Heron.

In G-53 we see the Bennu depicted as having the head of a human. The Ba, again, was the part of the Soul which survived death and would take a trip to a desired location, be it joining the Ka in the Sun in the afterlife (by way of the Obelisk) or, in the case of a King or Priest, the Ba would re-enter the world through another body. At the time of death the Ba would rocket from the heart of the deceased man. The stone in front of G-53 is believed to be the actual Benben stone. (Philae.nu, 2008)



G 53

The Bennu's life is another story. The Bennu was renowned for its musical talents. It was said to perch and sing at a cool well. The location of this well differed between the Arabian Peninsula and the temple at Philae. Again, isolation with a well, or source of water, is also a characteristic of a palm tree.



G 32

Palms, whose roots reach deep into the earth, are capable of finding underground sources of water and are therefore indicators of the feasibility of digging a well near their location. Apollo, at either the dawn or noon-tide of his daily journey, would stop at and refresh himself at the well while listening to the Bennu sing. Perhaps his songs bestowed powers to others to cross through the night of death.⁶

The Bennu's connection to the Ba of Osiris is seen in this excerpt from the Ani Papyrus,

"I am the great Benu-bird which is in Heliopolis, the supervisor of what exists. Who is he? He is Osiris. As for what exists, that means his injury. Otherwise said: That means his corpse. Otherwise said: It means eternity and everlasting. As for eternity, it means daytime; as for everlasting, it means night."

Dr. Ogden Goelet, Jr. commented,

"The accompanying caption identifies this bird as benu "the heron," a Heliopolitan deity associated with the beginnings of creation as a manifestation of Atum, or Re as a creator deity. The Benu is often described as the 'Egyptian Phoenix,' an error which may derive from Herodotus, who has transmitted a faulty description of a legend he claimed to have heard from priests of Heliopolis. In the Egyptian legends, however, the benu is not reborn from his ashes after a fiery death; rather, the Benu made his appearance on the primordial mound when the land emerged from the water, bringing the light with him, a concept fundamental to Heliopolitan religion. As an example of how puzzling the glosses in the

⁶ Apollo's next destination was the western edge of the Libyan desert, Siwa Oasis, which he would reach at dusk. The way the Bennu flies, there is roughly 600 miles between Philae and Siwa. With these simple figures we can deduce that Apollo traveled around 100 miles per hour, well under the Egyptian speed limit. Egyptian driving is also the most probable cause that Phaeton lost control of Apollo's Sun chariot.

accompanying text can be, the Benu is said to be Osiris in one explanation and Osiris's corpse in the other, two associations the Benu does not seem to have outside this chapter."

Dr. Goelet's assumption of the Phoenix's religious role is a little short sighted. Because the Bennu resurrection myth does not appear in Hieroglyphs at hand it does not mean that the myth or ceremony did not occur. It would be silly to try to argue the physical occurrence of this myth, but the initiatory or alchemical allegory may have been preserved by the priests and communicated to visitors. If such a myth did appear in writing it would have definitely been a subject to early Christian censorship. Nevertheless, this passage and its interpretation give the Bennu a very high position in the Egyptian pantheons. His utterance, cry, or song would have birthed Atum and then the remainder of the Gods. The Bennu would have been the creative word that stood upon the mound in the Nile, the place of creation. Further, as the Ba of Osiris, it would also bear the title of Bau or Bo, the plural form of Ba used to denote the powerful Ba of a God.

In the *Hieroglyphica Horapollinis*, Horapollo lists denotations and connotations of various ancient hieroglyphs, two of which allude to the Bennu. Ch. XXXIV uses a Bennu bird to depict the "soul continuing a long time here." Ch. XXXV uses a Bennu to depict a man returning home from his travels, this being a sign of prestige and accomplishment. Conversely, an Onocephalus⁷ is used to depict a man who has not left his country.

As a final note, there is an interesting identification between Horus and Bennu. Nephthys' relation to the Bennu is similar to her relationship with the infant Horus. She is the protector and nurse of Horus and simultaneously a type of keeper of the Bennu bird. The connection between Horus the Hawk and the Bennu is seen visually in upper Egyptian temples such as Edfu and Philae

⁷Ass-headed man.

where hieroglyphic depictions of the Bennu are composites between the large and lurking crane and the facial features of a hawk. Similarly, their importance in Heliopolitan ceremony is much the same. It is possible that Nephthys embodies the role of the Priest preparing the Bennu for resurrection.

The Miracles of Heliopolis

Much of Heliopolis' fame is due to the mysterious miracles and magick said to take place there. Many of these were later interpreted into Hebraic or Christian myths. For instance, depictions in middle to mid-lower Egypt of Baptism are common, usually Horus and/or Thoth pouring Ankhs onto some Egyptian personage. Heliopolis was supposedly a primary place for this ceremony taking place in the waters of the Nile. This would have been convenient at Heliopolis since many believe the Temple itself was located on an island-hill in the middle of the Nile while the settlement itself was located nearby to the east. A similar arrangement is found with Philae, where the temple and priest residence is located on the island but a large habitation is found nearby. Another miracle of Heliopolis, which gave it the title "place of multiplying bread," was when Horus supplied an enormous crowd of people with loaves of bread from only a small cache. During the time of Christ it is recalled one Roman's remark that Christ's miracles are nothing impressive and if one truly wants to see magic they ought to visit Egypt.

One ceremony occurred in Heliopolis that is paramount in importance in this essay, and that is the ceremony by which the Bennu is reborn. How this occurs varies between storytellers. The Bennu's gender is ambiguous, but since there is only one at a time it is safe to say it is hermaphroditic (such as the palm). At some point, the Bennu bird reaching the end of its life will do a combination of several actions.

Several variations are below recounted that are particular to the Egyptian myth (as delivered by the Greeks).

In the first myth, the Bennu bird gives birth to a nestling Bennu and then immolates itself, hopefully with the nestling at safe distance. The nestling then brings the prepared ashes of its parent to Heliopolis where the Priests prepare this into a type of Eucharist and the nestling, upon eating the Eucharist, is fledged and inherits the fiery and immortal properties of its parent thereby becoming the new Bennu.

A second and more popular story is the Bennu bird being born of the ashes of its parent rather than some squeezing out process. As to whether this takes place in Arabia or Heliopolis



is the source of variance. If the immolation did not occur at Heliopolis, the nestling wraps the ashes and delivers them there.

Another variation is who does the preparing. Some account that the nestling itself prepares the Eucharist or this is done by the priests. The subject of preparation is the final one. Exactly what occurs to make this Eucharist? Several resinous woods and gums are prepared into which the ashes are rolled, forming a ball. These reagents differ between some combination of cacia, myrrh, cinnamon, frankincense, palm leaves, or palm ashes. Palm is almost always present in the story. This is sensible since palm oil is highly flammable and

has been used for millennium as both a combustible and a drink. It's delicious, particularly the Tunisian blends. This flammable quality of the palm was relegated to the only palm in the region, the date palm, and this fuel use may be the reason that the Arabic word for the dates translates to "fingers of light."

The nestling Benu is not born as fowl. It is initially a worm.⁸ Accounts vary as to whether some process brings it to the next stage or it occurs naturally, but one day later it becomes a nestling. Then, at the height of the second day it is fed the Eucharist of its parent and resumes the office of the Benu on the third day.

The place of immolation varies. It is believed to occur on an altar of special preparation in the central chamber of Heliopolis (referred to by later alchemists as the "altar of the Sun"). The central chamber of Heliopolis was believed to also be the place of the Benben stone, or the central pillar. Being in a chamber would not dwarf a pillar's size or importance since many rooms in Egyptian temples are without ceiling due to the lack of rain or, well, weather. The immolation itself would occur on that pillar (which was surmounted by the Benben stone), again recalling the Obelisk's similarity to the palm. Thereupon also would the ashes be prepared, a worm would arise, it would be nurtured into a nestling, and finally fed the Eucharist to become the Benu. Alternatively, the Benu would self-immolate outside of Heliopolis, doing so on a palm tree.

The Egyptians guarded this ceremony closely. Supposedly, Greeks were allowed to watch the ceremony if they should be so timely. However, most of the information acquired came second-hand. Egyptians were convinced of the myth's literal nature and the subtleties of the ceremony are most obvious in the understanding of the Egyptian soul. Their

⁸Whose relevance to the Phoenix is seen through insect metamorphoses, explained below.

mass-obsession with eternal life in the sun was an obvious influence on this mythology. Frazer describes similar ceremonies where the integrity and spirit of the nation are preserved through some Kingly rite. The Phoenix rite may have been used for similar communal ends or may have been a ritual to extract the essence of the eternal soul.

As a side note, this exact burnt offering was continued in early Judaism. In Exodus Ch. 30 the Altar of Incense is described similarly. It is, in a sense, an obelisk cut off near the base and is the exact size of Crowley's "doubecube" used in the Gnostic Mass as the Altar of Incense. Of the oil to be prepared and also the incense to be burned thereupon it is to be of myrrh, frankincense, and calamus (palm leaves). This altar of incense burns before the veil which is near the Tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant. Naturally, burning a combination of thick resins such as this would leave a pillar of smoke burning before the Ark. At other times the pillar of smoke before the Ark is said to be the force of Shekina, a type of force or essence of a spiritual community in esoteric Judaism.

In Exodus this ritual was performed in the Tent of the Tabernacle. However, when the Jews found their home in Jerusalem and constructed the Temple of Solomon the King the ritual was performed therein. Another connection exists in Masonic lore with Solomon's Temple and the Heliopolis Temple. They were both known for their pillars and both measured 120-cubits across. (Skinner, 1875) Heliopolis' central pillar, the altar of the Benu's sacrifice, was located in the center of the complex. Solomon's Temple's Altar of Incense takes the same location. The Egyptian middle-pillar was surmounted by the Benben stone. Late Qabalists name the middle pillar, fixed between Jachin and Boaz, Ben (beth-nun), the Son. It is obvious that the Jews stole both material and spiritual wealth from the ancient Egyptians.

The Abrahamic Phoenix

*Flamma Dei viua succenso in pectore veram,
Non adimit vitam, quae renouata viget.*⁹

The Phoenix made some biblical cameos which carried its name into the west via Christianity and Judaism. It was an uncommon subject in Midrashim, but in Christianity it was frequently found in early art. The reason is obvious; the death-rebirth power recalls Christ's resurrection. The Phoenix complimented another Christian allegory, that of the Pelican. The Phoenix represented Christ's divine nature and the Pelican his human.

This appearance of the Phoenix in the Book of Job deserves greater attention. As mentioned above, its quality of endurance was considered analogous to Job's patience and fortitude in dealing with his feral God. The Phoenix appears several times in the Midrashim dealing with several books of *Torah*. In Job 29:18,¹⁰ the translation of Chul (Cheth-Vav-Lamed)¹¹ is both "sand" and "Phoenix." This conflict appears only in Jewish volumes and not in any Christian Old Testament. The confusion could be a mystical elaboration, but since the Hebrew word for Phoenix is Chul it may have been a simple translation error. Each translation makes sense in context of the verse and therefore the "correct" translation is debatable since this ambiguous point is as old as the *Torah* itself.

Other Midrashim, such as the *Berashit Rabbah*, discuss the Phoenix's place in the Garden of Eden. Eve fed the rest of the

⁹ "The long-living/Phoenix flame of God kindled in a true breast will not diminish/take away life, which blooms in its renewal." – trans. compliments of S. G.

¹⁰ "I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand."

¹¹ Students of Qabalah should enjoy Chul's enumeration in light of Liber 333, this being a connection of which A. C. was likely aware given its appearance in the 1911 Encyclopedia. Note: 1911encyclopedia.org

animals the forbidden fruit, resulting in their exile, yet the Phoenix was the only animal that did not partake, thereby securing its purity and immortality. The *Babylonian Talmud* records a story where Noah's son Shem recounts his father's encounter with the Phoenix in the depths of Noah's ark. (Saggo, 2005)

As for the phoenix, my father discovered it lying in the hold of the ark. 'Dost thou require no food?' he asked it. 'I saw that thou wast busy,' it replied, 'so I said to myself, I will give thee no trouble.' Noah replied, 'May it be God's will that thou shouldst not perish.'
(Sanhedrin, 108b)

The Aggadah, a Midrashim intimately describing the Seven Days of creation, discusses the Phoenix as one of God's odd creatures created on the 6th day. Slight deviations from the regular myth are obvious:

"Among the birds the phoenix is the most wonderful. When Eve gave all the animals some of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the phoenix was the only bird that refused to eat thereof, and he was rewarded with eternal life. When he has lived a thousand years, his body shrinks, and the feathers drop from it, until he is as small as an egg. This is the nucleus of the new bird.

The phoenix is also called "the guardian of the terrestrial sphere." He runs with the sun on his circuit, and he spreads out his wings and catches up the fiery rays of the sun. If he were not there to intercept them, neither man nor any other animate being would keep alive. On his right wing the following words are inscribed in huge letters, about four thousand stadia high: "Neither the earth produces me, nor the heavens, but only the wings of fire." His food consists of the manna of heaven and the dew of the earth. His excrement is a worm, whose excrement in turn is the cinnamon used by kings and princes. Enoch, who saw the phoenix birds when he was translated, describes them as

flying creatures, wonderful and strange in appearance, with the feet and tails of lions, and the heads of crocodiles; their appearance is of a purple color like the rainbow; their size nine hundred measures. Their wings are like those of angels, each having twelve, and they attend the chariot of the sun and go with him, bringing heat and dew as they are ordered by God. In the morning when the sun starts on his daily course, the phoenixes and the chalkidri sing, and every bird flaps its wings, rejoicing the Giver of light, and they sing a song at the command of the Lord”.

(Ginzberg, 1909)

Later Jewish and Christian authors would mistakenly translate the Book of Job’s passage in question even further through the Latin. *Palma*, meaning Phoenix, was mistaken for the Latin *Paloma*, dove. It is safe to argue that this mistranslation came well after the identification of the Phoenix with the dove given the earliest mistranslation recorded dates to the 16th century.

However, the cognate symbol of the Benu as the Ba and Dove as the Holy Spirit is unmistakable. They were both portrayed as a flame in their greatest antiquity. The Shekina, in a way the Jewish Holy Spirit, would descend as a tongue of flame on the heads of the faithful during Passover. Similarly, the Shekina was conjured before the Ark of the Covenant by means of the same resins and incenses used to preserve the power of the Benu. The Ba itself was depicted more as a ray of sunlight rather than a flame, but the Ba as the Phoenix and Benu and their connection to fire still provides a strong connection with the dove as the Holy Spirit.

A further connection with the ceremonial invocation of Shekina or Spiritus Sancti and the Phoenix is the respective celebration of Passover or the Last Supper which roughly fall at the same time.

The Last Supper became celebrated regularly in the form of the Agape Feast, the revelry of which was said to invoke the Holy Spirit as a comfort for the darkness of Christ’s death and promise of his resurrection. The magical sexuality behind the Agape feast hearkens back to the Old Testament where Abraham was said to be in the presence of the Shekina during sex, resulting in the prophetic birth of Isaac. Just as the Benu would consume a Eucharist to renew its life the early Christians would consume Christ’s flesh and blood in the Agape feast to remind themselves of Christ and his covenant, the promise of everlasting life.¹²

Christ had an interesting ancient connection to *phoinos*’ alternative translation, the palm. Recall that the Phoenix would use palm fronds or oil in its immolation and that palm fronds would be used to embalm its ashes for the Communion to follow. Palm fronds were used in ancient times during various ceremonies of the Levantine and Near East. They were used to mark the doorways of holy men’s, prophet’s, and saint’s tombs, Mohammad had built his home from palms, they were waved during celebrations and festivals, Romans granted palm fronds to victorious soldiers, and palms were used to cover the grounds of armies returning home victoriously. Using palms to cover someone’s path also welcomed St. Dionysus in a city.

Two Roman Catholic ceremonies mark the use of palms and their relation to Christ. Palm Sunday marks the Sunday before his Crucifixion and his return to Jerusalem

| <u>Lent</u> | <u>Phoenix</u> |
|--|--|
| Ash Wednesday | Immolation and receiving of parent’s ashes. |
| Intermediary Period or Christ’s Wandering in Desert | Delivery of Ashes across desert to Heliopolis (or Jerusalem) |
| Christ’s death and 3 days that follow up until his resurrection. | Phoenix’s 3 days of transformation: worm to nestling to reborn phoenix |

¹² Later alchemists gave the bread to the white tincture and the blood to the red tincture. It makes one wonder if the relation of these tinctures to sexual fluids didn’t put a different kind of spread on the table for the Agape feast.

amongst exclamations of the savior having come to free the Daughter of Israel, a title of Shekina. Palms thrown before his path recognizes Christ as a redeemer, savior, conqueror, and Saint. Another Catholic holiday using palms marks the beginning of the season of Lent. This is Ash Wednesday, during which time Christians take the ash of palm fronds (traditionally being the palms of the previous year's Palm Sunday) and receive the Mark on their forehead. While marking the Christian the priest reminds them, "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." Ash Wednesday begins 40 days of repentance, sacrifice, and asceticism. These 40 days are related to Christ's time in the desert during which he underwent the same meditation. The season of Lent can be correlated with a certain interpretation of the Phoenix myth.

The Phoenix's primary color being red, indicating fire and blood (*phoinos*), this is also the liturgical color used for the Feast Days of Palm Sunday, Pentecost, Good Friday (when Christ died), and the death-days and martyrdom days of Popes, Cardinals, and Saints.

Other connections between the Phoenix and early Christian symbolism are likely. Many authors speak of its use in Christian symbolism, but few provide physical references. One catacomb called St. Miltiades dating to the 2nd Century has "an impressive carving: a phoenix with rays and an aureole surrounding its head." (Christian, 2004)

It seems as if the Phoenix took an extended leave from the west after this late Roman period. During the gestation of Christendom Europe experienced and expressed little in the ways of art, literature, and culture. But, when Europe reawakened to its Hellenistic heritage through the reintroduction of Greek and Roman literature during the Renaissance the Phoenix made a strong come back. The Phoenix was preserved on heraldry and art, but the primary renewed interest probably came from Renaissance revival of Hellas and the Renaissance church's

appeal to Midrashim for elaboration on the old testament. Both of these currents fed into Rosicrucian circles and contributed to the genre of Hermetica.

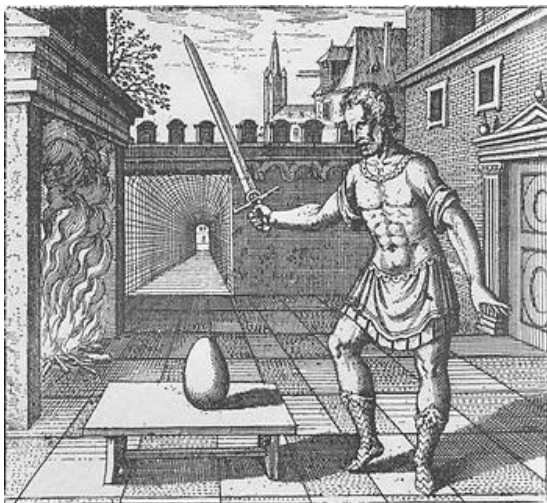
The Phoenix in Hermetica

Early Rosicrucians are responsible for the revival of interest in the truly esoteric and an attempt to subvert religion by reviving the study of the first principles of the ancient mystery schools. The Renaissance was a time of great bastardization of the mysteries and western spirituality became caught in a vice between Protestant subjectivism and Erasmian humanism. However, some believed that the objective integrity of the mysteries could be preserved through initiation and allegories. This paradigm was called Hermetica and its proponents the Rosicrucians.

There are two Rosicrucians particularly worth noting for their contribution to the Phoenix myth. These are St. Christian Rosenkreuz (whose existence and authorship are irrelevant for present purposes) and St. Michael Maier. Their canonization is evidence of their importance in a later development of the Phoenix myth, and a return to its ritual import, in the context of Magick.

Bear in mind while reading the following alchemical dissections that, following an early Hermetic maxim, anything which displays a certain power is believed to be capable of bestowing that power by virtue of its components' consumption or ritual use. For instance, bread's ability to "rise" is conferrable by "risen" bread's consumption. Also, red wine's quality is related to its exposure to the sun, making good red wine capable of transferring that to its drinker. Similarly, the Phoenix's feathers or ashes were believed to possess this quality, and their ritual use in ceremonies such as St. Rosencreutz's Chemische Hochzeit intended to emulate its power.

St. Rosenkreuz is the famed founder of the *Fama Fraternitatis*. Several works of his pen were considered the manifesto of Rosicrucianism. One of these, published in 1616, was the Chymische Hochzeit, or Chemical Marriage. A fast-paced and dense work of layered symbolism would be difficult and insulting to summarize here, but several editions of this work are available for a free reading online. It tells a story of an old and wise man, stern in his faith and enlightened through his love of God, and his 7 adventurous days leading up to a Royal Wedding.



Nothing about this week is normal and many feats are required of St. Rosenkreuz to test his spiritual mettle. During Day 3, when St. Rosenkreuz was set at liberty to tour the Castle, he came upon many treasures whose experience he described as communicating more than all the books in any library. He says, “there in the same place stands also the glorious phoenix (about which, two years ago, I published a particular small discourse),” but he is not so kind as to name this small discourse. Whether this is the Phoenix itself or an image is not said, but 2 days later, during Day 5, he mentions a Sepulcher again, saying “Herewith my companions were deceived, for they imagined nothing other but that the dead corpses were there. Upon the top of all there was a great flag, having a phoenix painted on it, perhaps the more to delude us. Here I had great

occasion to thank God that I had seen more than the rest.” St. Rosenkreuz is the hero of this tale in managing to accomplish the resurrection of the King and Queen at the end of Day 6. Day 6 involves an alchemical transformation of a little bird which St. Rosenkreuz presided over. Perhaps something was revealed to him at one of these Sepulchers that gave him the insight to perform this operation correctly.

Day 6 contained an adventure through a tower. On the 3rd floor St. Rosenkreuz and his companions opened a globe and therein found an egg which was ushered off by the Virgin. On the 4th floor they found the egg again and it had completely matured by some process of which St. Rosenkreuz was unaware. The egg hatched and a healthy, bloody, and undeveloped nestling emerged. After being fed blood of the beheaded King and Queen it fully fledged with black feathers. A second bloody meal caused it to molt and grow snow-white feathers, and lastly a third feeding caused his feathers to gain some multi-colored luster. On the 5th floor a heated bath of water and white powder was prepared for the bird. Its feathers were boiled off, but the bird was unharmed by the heat. It was set at liberty, and the feathers had turned the water into a type of blue paste which the naked bird was then painted with, all save its head. On the 6th floor an altar was prepared upon which was a serpent. The bird pecked at the serpent, killing him, and was then fed a draught of its displeasing blood. The bird then willingly gave its head to be removed, and after the head was cut off (from which no blood poured) the breast was opened and a blood flow as gorgeous as rubies spurted from its corpse. Its corpse was burnt and the ashes thereof were taken to the 7th floor where they were prepared into dough and baked. From the oven emerged two lifeless homunculi that, when fed the blood of the deceased bird, grew to full size. A short while later the decapitated King and Queen had reincarnated in the animal flesh made by the components of the little bird’s sacrifices.

| <u>The Bird</u> | <u>Alchemical Bird</u> |
|---|------------------------|
| “black feathers” | The Black Crow |
| “snow-white feathers” | The Swan |
| “such beautiful colors” | The Peacock |
| “he yielded not a drop of blood until his breast was opened, and then the blood spurted out so fresh and clear as if it had been a fountain of rubies.” | The Pelican |
| “burn the body to ashes” | The Phoenix |

Several aspects of this transformation recall the myth of the Bennu. A bird’s ashes are prepared into a Eucharist to a powerless image of itself and thereby it is reborn. The Phoenix, through its ashes, seems to work in concert with a Pelican nature, though the blood of its breast. Adam McLean (1979) provides a description of the alchemical bird’s transformation which seems to soundly follow the description provided in Day 6. He describes a “sequence, one which occurs in various sources: Black Crow - White Swan - Peacock - Pelican - Phoenix - as these correspond to a developing inner experience which involves a progressively deepening encounter with the inner spiritual dimension of our being.” In short it is a process of purification through sacrifice resulting in a perfect and immortal quality, the Phoenix. This Phoenix would Hermetically possess this process of resurrection and its ashes would be capable of bestowing this power, thence the resurrection of the King and Queen. Their blood was consumed by the “bloody and shapeless” bird and ultimately the bird’s blood and ashes were combined into a body and blood of the resurrected King and Queen.

It is unfortunate that St. Rosenkreuz does not cite where he previously discoursed on the Phoenix. The *Chemical Marriage*, *Fama Fraternitatis*, and *Confessio* are the only works ascribed to him; however, another Rosicrucian writing around the same time did study the Phoenix much more thoroughly.

St. Michal Maier was a German intellectual and physician whose cosmopolitan education contributed much to Rosicrucian literature. In 1617 St. Maier published an alchemical emblem book titled Atalanta Fugiens which depicted etches of various alchemical processes and a commentary in lucid prose. A few of these mention the Phoenix and are great descriptions of its alchemical role.



Emblem-33, “The Hermaphrodite, lying like a dead man in darkness, wants Fire,” depicts a hermaphrodite with two heads lying on a funerary pyre. The full moon illumines the spiritual darkness of the hermaphrodite’s death as Maier describes nature’s desire of external heat to ignite the internal flame. The Phoenix is used as a metaphor. Recall that the Phoenix itself is neither male nor female, but because its offspring is born of itself then it can be considered Hermaphroditic.

“One only Phoenix there is, which is restored by Fire, renewed by Flames and revived out of Ashes; and this, being known only to the Philosophers, is burnt and restored to life, whatever others fabulously may report of a certain Bird that never yet was seen or had any Being. Likewise, the Hermaphrodite of which the Philosophers speak is of a mixed Nature, Male and Female,

one of which passes into the other by the Operation of Heat. For from a female it becomes a male, which ought not to seem strange in the Work of the Philosophers.”

(Maier, 1617)

The allusion of the female becoming male in the Philosopher's Work is a plausible reference to the Great Work, the transmutation of metals or the transformation of the soul. The depiction of the soul as a hermaphrodite is not uncommon and implies the soul itself contains the seed of its own manifestation and rebirth. German Qabalism and mysticism were strongly influenced by simplistic interpretations of common Qabalism. The Hebrew word for Soul is feminine, as was the Hebrew word for Shekina, a type of Sophia Perennis or Minerva Mundi. The various messianic figures such as Logos, Christ, Lucifer, etc., were traditionally portrayed as masculine. These two genders in conjunction were seen as being hermaphroditic, and their union initiated transformation of the soul's nature from feminine to masculine.

“By the increase of heat the genital parts are thrust out of the Body: for seeing a Woman is much colder than a male, and has those parts hidden within which a man has outwardly... After the same manner it is with the Philosophers, for by the increase of heat their woman becomes a man; that is, their Hermaphrodite loses the female sex and becomes a man stout and grave, having nothing in him of Effeminate Softness and Levity.”

Alchemy's allegorical (as opposed to metaphorical) nature makes it frequently difficult to discuss, dissect, and digest. Key words and themes are noteworthy. In this excerpt, the theme of “coming out” and “hardening” is critical. As we will see later, the application of heat (literally or through Sulfur) hardens Mercury (making it “fixed”) and is a reference to making something substantial rather than incorporeal.

As a final point it is noteworthy that the Emblems in *Atalanta Fugiens* describe a very long transformation and the summation of this part is,

“For Heat sequesters and separates the superfluities of Moisture and will Establish the Idea of the Philosophickal Subject, which is the Tincture.”

Ah the tincture! Often described as a variety of colors and consistencies, blue or red or white, or as a paste, powder, or fluid, a tincture represents some material which can initiate some sort of chemical change, typically to metals. Mentioned at the beginning of this work, certain things which exhibited a type of transformation were believed to be reducible to that hidden hermetic component which presided over that transformation. In similar fashion we see that the first microbiologists were cultivators of yeast for the fermenting of wine and beer or rising of bread. The alchemists saw similar products bearing a power to change matter. In this case, the Hermaphrodite is a combination of two elements, masculine and feminine, dry and moist¹³, sun and moon. It was desirable to purify this compound into a single element, thereby extracting a tincture. The little bird of St. Rosenkreuz underwent a terrible series of ordeals where its components were divided and coagulated into a final product. Its plumage, blood, and ash were all recombined after being separated and purified. Therefore the Phoenix, as the hermaphrodite, possesses some quality of resurrection (through self-fertilization), and it is desirable to the alchemist to find this immortal quality. The Phoenix's sacrifice is a description of the soul's liberation, the separation of the subtle from the gross, or the

¹³ Note also that Atum, compared to the Phoenix above, was a primordial God which produced a chain reaction of deific birth through self-fertilization. Atum was a hermaphroditic God, and the first two Gods he produced were Shu and Tefnut, or “dryness” and “moisture.”

fire and air from the earth and water, the masculine from the feminine.¹⁴

The *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians* mentions the Hermaphroditism of the Phoenix in an alchemical context as being a combination and careful balance of various alchemical polarities. Quoting,

“The same Salt-Mother of the elements is the nitrous, aluminous and spiritual gumosic water, ☉ earth or crystal, which has Nature in its womb, a Son of the Sun, and a Daughter of the Moon. It is a Hermaphrodite, born out of the wind, a phoenix living in fire, a pelican, reviving his dear young ones with its blood; the young Icarus, drowned in the water, whose nurse is the earth, whose Mother is the wind, whose Father is the fire, the water her caretaker and drink, one stone and no stone, one water and no water, nevertheless a stone of living power and a water of living might; a sulphur, a mercury, a salt, hidden deep in nature, and which no fool has ever known nor seen.”

(Rosicrucian, 1785)

St. Maier mentions the Phoenix again in passing in his description of Emblem-43, titled “Give ear to the Vulture’s words, which are in no wise false.” The Vulture is not the sole subject of this Emblem; instead St. Maier discusses the “philosophic bird.” He describes certain birds as being able to speak so as to pronounce their nature and that which they govern. Also, certain birds possess the power to self-fertilize. The vulture’s impregnation by wind in Egyptian mythology comes to mind.

“He conceives from himself (for so Rosarius towards the End.) And he is the Dragon who marries himself and impregnates himself and brings forth in his

¹⁴ Bear in mind that the masculine feminine dialectic was a convenient way of explaining the sexual interactions inherent within various alchemical processes. One should not confuse the philosopher’s words as accusations and condemnations of whatever gender. Therefore here it would be easy for an uneducated person to assume St. Maier is calling women “gross.”

own Season. And Rosarius to Sarratanta, “ And that is the Serpent, Luxuriant in itself, impregnating itself, and bringing forth in one day. ” It lives and endures a very long time, and multiplies itself. For what Virgil writes concerning the Phoenix agrees likewise to this, for it is the same Bird... It is very difficult to climb the nest of this Bird. It fights with the Mercurial Serpent, and overcomes it, that is Sol. With Luna it is conceived by the wind and carried in its belly, and born in the Air.”

This is the second place in the referenced Rosicrucian literature where the bird is mentioned in contrast to the snake. The Phoenix is given a quality of Sulphur and the snake that of Mercury. As the snake possesses some immortal quality, St. Rosenkreuz’s little bird drinking the blood of the snake before its death seems to be a preparation of sulphur by fixed mercury to preserve its life through death.

Before going on to *Allegoria Bella* it is worth discussing the Phoenix’s fire as an alchemical agent. In *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians*, at the end of Book I, three fires are mentioned in presiding over the uniting of moist and dry. The first fire is the outer fire, “which the Artist or watchman maketh, which the Wise Men call *ignem frontem*¹⁵, upon which *Regimen*¹⁶ dependeth the safety or the ruin of the entire Work.” The second fire is born of the Phoenix,

“...the nest wherein the Phoenix of the Philosophers hath its abode, and hatcheth itself therein ad regenerationem¹⁷. This is nothing else than the Vas Philosophorum¹⁸. The Wise Men call it ignem corticum¹⁹, for it is written that the Phoenix bird collected all fragrant wood whereon it cremateth itself. If this were not so, the Phoenix would freeze to death and it could not attain to its Perfection. Sulphura

¹⁵ The Projecting Fire

¹⁶ The Kingdom or State.

¹⁷ Total Renewal

¹⁸ The Way of the Philosophers.

¹⁹ The Fire of the Heart

Sulphuribus continentur²⁰. For the nest should protect, assist, cherish and keep the brood of the bird unto the final end.”²¹

But, there is a final and third fire which exists hidden and secret with Mercury.

In the essence of the Mercurii is a sulphur which finally conquereth the coldness and the moisture in the Mercurio. This is nothing else than a small fire hidden in the Mercurio, which is aroused in our Mineris, and in the fulness of time it absorbeth the coldness and moisture in the Mercurio or removeth them, and that is also said about the fire.

Thus the combination of the Phoenix’s sulphur and Serpent’s mercury results in perfected sulphur and some completion of the Philosopher’s Great Work. (Rosicrucian, 1785)

Allegoria Bella

Published in 1617 by St. Maier, this alchemical classic describes the author in an existential funk much like that of St. Goethe or Don Quixote. Dissatisfied with the burden of mundane life, St. Maier decides upon a quest,

“for I had heard that there was a bird called Phoenix, the only one of its kind in the whole world, whose feathers and flesh constitute the great and glorious medicine for all passion, pain, and sorrow; which also Helena, after her return from Troy, had presented in the form of a draught to Telemachus, who thereupon had forgotten all his sorrows and troubles. This bird I could not indeed hope to obtain entire, but I was seized with an irresistible longing to become possessed of at least one of its smallest feathers.”

²⁰ “Sulphurs are maintained by sulphurs.”

²¹ Manly P. Hall in *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* provides a correlative anecdote:

The Three Lights: Stellar Fire- Solar Fire Lunar Fire
Alchemical Substances: Mercury- Sulphur- Salt

His inspirational quest to find a cure for melancholy would take him across the world. And as an allegorical piece, each element in the story represents some type of alchemical change.

For St. Maier, adventure accomplished the same transformation as the alchemical process. Maier “regarded his earthly existence as a spiritual journey... and a reflected image of the alchemical process itself.” (Tilton, 2003)

Being thorough would overwhelm the present volume, so instead simple correlaries will be discussed.

“The plan of my journey was determined by the relative quality of the elements which the different parts of the world represent, i.e., Europe stands for earth, America for water, Asia for air, and Africa for fire; and earth cannot become air except through the medium of water; nor can water become fire except through the medium of air. I determined, then, to go first to Europe²², which represents the grossest, and last to Africa, which represents the most subtle element. But my reasons will be set forth more clearly as I come to speak of the different parts of the world.”

-(Maier, 1617)

Europe is considered earth due to earth possessing a large proportion of the other elements, the result of which contains some method for the production of Heroes and Kings. He calls Europe a Virgin Lion, “Virgin because of her beauty and spotless purity; a Lion because she has conquered others, but has never herself been conquered.” St. Maier expected to find the Phoenix in Europe since Europe represents the sun upon the earth, but instead he was met with mockery by Europeans. He rebutted, saying that casual searching would never yield this greatest of treasures and that he must seek the Phoenix as the King his Queen or Princess her Prince.

²² Note that Europa is either the daughter or sister of Phoenix, Achilles’ companion.

Europe seems to be here characterized as the alchemical Green Lion, the spontaneous generation born from sulphur and stone, the first sulphur and first matter. This sulphur, St. Maier's ambition born of melancholy, must be purified by the prepared solvent²³.

America is the next destination, to which he sailed on a ship with an Eagle as its prow. In Emblem-46 of *Atalanta Fugiens* Maier describes the eagle as being sacred to John and the two eagles which circumnavigate the globe (east and west) to Sulfur and Mercury. The phoenix's relation to the Eagle is described further elsewhere. St. Maier's hope to find the exotic Phoenix among the other exotic birds of America led to disappointment. Instead he found a stupid kind of people and became engaged in the proper breeding of mules. There was also much discussion of some water in America being capable of making Gold malleable, and also the transformation and separation of other elements, and the extraction of the "red Tincture" from quicksilver (mercury). St. Maier compares the soil of America to that of Peru, "Now all these are different kinds of mineral earth: the black earth, if mixed with water or wine, makes an excellent ink, the red soil is said to be the ore of quicksilver, and the Indians paint themselves with it." St. Maier brought back with him a piece of black wood. This black wood may represent a fixed or solid form of sulphur, resulting from Europe's Green Lion and Virgin Earth being transformed by American's watery solvent.

Asia, or specifically Asia Minor, yielded an encounter with Jason (of the *Argonautica*) who instructed him as to the acquisition of the Golden Fleece. Inspired by this, St. Maier prays to Christ for assistance in his quest. He then finds himself in a city where many people are ranting about returning to paradise, so he follows his nose and discovers a pearl which he believes to be an important

component of this Medicine he seeks. After discovering a statue of Mercury, he decides to continue his trek to Africa.

In Africa he sought the Sibyll, a prophetess, who answered his question as to the Phoenix's location with the following,

"The object of your search is a great and glorious one; doubt is the first stage of knowledge, and you have also come to the right place and the right person. For the country in which you now find yourself is Araby the Blest, and nowhere else has the Phoenix ever been found; moreover, I am the only person who could possibly give you any definite information about it. I will teach you, and this land will exhibit to you, the glad sight of which I speak. Therefore, listen to my words Arabs the Blest and Egypt have from of old rejoiced in the sole possession of the Phoenix, whose neck is of a golden hue, while the rest of its body is purple, and its head is crowned with a beautiful crest. It is sacred to the Sun, lives 660 years, and when the last hour of its life approaches, it builds a nest of cassia and frankincense, fills it with fragrant spices, kindles it by flapping its wings towards the Sun, and is burnt to ashes with it. From these ashes there is generated a worm, and out of the worm a young bird which takes the nest, with the remains of its parent, and carries it to Heliopolis (or Thebes), the sacred city of the Sun in Egypt. Now, this whole tale which you find in the books of the Ancients is addressed to the mind rather than to the ear; it is a mystical narrative, and like the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians, should be mystically (not historically) understood. An ancient Egyptian writer tells us that the Phoenix rejoices in the Sun, and that this predilection is its chief reason for coming to Egypt. He also relates that his countrymen were in the habit of embalming the Phoenix if it died before its time. If you therefore regard this tale as an allegory, you will not be far wrong; and you know that the flesh and feathers of this bird were of old used in Heliopolis as a remedy for anger and grief...Nevertheless, the most important part of the enterprise must be

²³ A similar solvent was used in several occasions on St. Rosenkreuz's bird during Day 6.

performed by the toil of your own hands. I cannot describe to you in exact and unmistakable terms the place where the Phoenix lives, yet I will endeavor to make it as plain to you as I may. Egypt, you know, owes all her fertility to the Nile, whose sources are unknown and undiscoverable; but the mouths by which it is discharged into the sea, are sufficiently patent to all. The fourth Son of the Nile is Mercury, and to him his father has given authority to shew you this bird, and its Medicine. This Mercury you may expect to find somewhere near the seven mouths of the Nile; for he has no fixed habitation, but is to be found now in one of these mouths, and now in another."

St. Maier then took to searching the mouth of each of these rivers, which he believed to relate to the seven planets. He found Mercury in none of them, but upon retracing his steps he found Mercury. Dr. Tilton (2003) posits the Tanitic mouth was Mercury's home, being the 5th mouth which was Mercury's position in relation to the Saturn in St. Maier's cosmology. This was the mouth where the locals actively denied Mercury's presence rather than feign ignorance. Mercury directed him to the Phoenix's location, and St. Maier, but the Phoenix was temporarily absent. Shockingly, St. Maier left to his homeland with the knowledge he had obtained. His alternative was to tack on a mere three weeks to his quest which up to now had already exceeded a year. Why did St. Maier not wait? Dr. Tilton posits the answer can be found in the author referenced by the Sibyl, "Horus Apollo", or more commonly known now as Horapollo. His *Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, 5th Century, attempts to explain certain motifs in Egyptian hieroglyphs. When he says the Phoenix is used to indicate "a traveller who returns from a long journey to his native land" (Horapollo, 1598) we can assume that St. Maier, in his return, did find that Phoenix in a more subtle way. As Egyptian hieroglyphs would assume that native land is Egypt, St. Maier's "return" to Egypt was

the very discovery of that Phoenix where he is "mystically served with funerary rites."

In his search for the medicine, St. Maier traversed the world and its four elements seeking the Phoenix whose feather was a necessary reagent for this great treasure. The Virgin Earth of Europe was too fixed to possess the Phoenix, and the changeability and wateriness of America would not be its home either. In Asia's scented air and mystic cities St. Maier found traces of the Phoenix and learned a vital function for the production of the medicine. Indeed, he even came upon a statue to Mercury, directing him to Africa. Inspired, he traveled to Africa and there found the Erythraean Sibyl, the same prophetess who professed the divine parentage of Alexander the Great. She revealed to him that Mercury has the key to the Phoenix's discovery and that Mercury is found in one of the seven planets at any given time. As Mercury is one of the seven planets, the Mercury discussed is the alchemical agent of Quicksilver rather than the planet. What planet in which Mercury is found is not disclosed, but he is found on a second run-through of the Nile Delta and reveals the location of the absent Phoenix.

This conclusion leaves the reader wondering, but it is obvious in this context that the quest for the Phoenix represents an initiation and the discovery of the Phoenix is an internal one, the reason for his satisfaction, rather than an external one. It may also represent a way of undergoing Rosicrucian initiation and thereby finding the Rosicrucians who, at the time of St. Maier, were operating much in secret.²⁴ St. Maier is not so cliché as to confess the journey's success despite its

²⁴ "Now there are a kind of men, as they themselves report, named *Rosie Crucians*, a divine fraternity that inhabit the suburbs of heaven, and these are the officers of the *Generalissimo* of the world, that are as the eyes and ears of the great King, seeing and hearing all things: they say these *Rosie Crucians* are seraphically illuminated, as Moses was, according to this order of the elements, earth refin'd to water, water to air, air to fire." – from John Heydon's "The Rosie Cross Uncovered"

seeming failure for reason of a quest's intrinsic value, but instead he seems to allude to a spiritual satisfaction or alchemical completion resulting from finding the Phoenix's home.

The Alchemical Phoenix

Alchemical literature between the 15th and 17th century was at its aleatory height, in a stage that Kuhn would call pre-science. The Phoenix was not as popular a subject in the alchemical animal kingdom as the eagle, lion, bear, or man. The Phoenix was more of a leitmotif which many authors would invoke to sanctify conclusions given its popular approximation to Christ. St. Maier was one of the only alchemists to fully penetrate this mystery and he scorned his contemporaries for their naïve understanding.

The birth of the Phoenix was a subject of speculation. In Egyptian literature, discussed above, the Bennu was often considered to pre-date creation. This theme was resonant with the Huma as well. Early Jewish midrashim gave the Phoenix a place in Eden which later Qabalists considered to exist outside of temporal or spacial dimension. Alchemists sought an origin whether to reduce its divinity or to discover a key by which one may be born. In an allegorical sense, the Phoenix possessed profound mystical and medicinal properties. The creation of this "Phoenix" reagent was a goal of early alchemists for this reason.

The tree is a surprising source of origin for the Phoenix. St. Maier describes one type of duck borne from a tree on the Orcanian Isles. This tree produces a fruit which then falls into the water. From this fruit a duck is born. St. Maier compares this duck to the Phoenix, saying,

"But, that our tree-born bird appear not to our reader unique and sole among the vast host of winged beings, let us place him in the company of the Phœnix, that bird of fire, veritable nestling of the Sun, Vulcan's nursling — to whose birth hasten all gods

and goddesses thronging the chapels of Egypt, that they might shower it with gifts upon its birth day."

-(Maier, *Tractatus de Volucris Arborea*)

This description continued into a chemical one. St. Maier proclaims the Phoenix's residence in Araby was due to the riches of their temples which contained many rare metals. The description is here cited, but bear in mind St. Maier's obsession with the sun as the true god and the Phoenix as a representation of that sun.

"Indeed, Nature first engendered In Araby a pupa, the seed from which the full-blown bird arises. For should one dispute to know which came first, the egg or chicken, let it then be answered that the first bird was created by God from nothing, with no pre-existent seed, and came from no egg... The celestial Sun produces the larva by a putrefaction in its own substance which is procured by Mercury. Thence, Mercury, Vulcan, and Apollo, who is the Sun, engender that Orion from the stagnation of urine or, rather, semen, enwrapping it in an cow-hide... The larva is thus first born in Araby from the viscous matter of Mercury by the operation of the Sun's heat, and in the same place, by the ministrations of Vulcan, artist of Egypt, it is transmuted into the Phœnix itself... The Tincture is Phœnician or Tyrean in colour and stems from a subject which is burnt and reduced to ashes, which ashes are consecrate to the Sun and both celestial and terrestrial, because of the solar child hid within them, and which resume life or, rather, their multiplication, in the manner of a propagation. They are thus never extinguished but, like fire, augment unto infinity by means of their self-nourishment."

In *Commentaire sur le Tresor des tresors de Christophle de Gamon* (1610) the Phoenix is posited as being a symbol of the purified sulfur. Henri de Linthaut says,

"Wishing to veil this Treasure of Treasures, and its augmentation, the Poets invented the

Phœnix which, dying, produces always of itself another of its species, ever taking birth, dying and being reborn within the fire. Such that by this fable, they wished us to understand how the real Phœnix, this divine Elixir, is born of fire, that is to say of Sulphur: and is transformed into ashes in the fire, when the work once again resolves into Black Sulphur: and revives in the fire on becoming the Red Sulphur or Red Elixir. Thus it is always one and the same bird, sacrifices itself to the rays of the Sun, which, in our fermentation, means that it is withdrawn by the Gold, or Sun of metals. It is also, say our Poets, this Phœnix that asserts itself as animal, for it vivifies all things, and also vegetable, in that it believes in quantity and virtue; and mineral with regard to the material from which it is born. This also is the bird who once born, cries that the artist shall never leave him, and he never quit the artist; thus is its pyre built, that it may burn itself, be reborn and multiply unto infinity."

The Phoenix has been identified with both the white tincture and red tincture, each the purification of mercury and sulfur respectively. This alchemical process was also described as an interaction between other mystic aviary. The Crow to Phoenix description given above is one example, but its focus on the exoteric symbols and meaning reduces the importance of the subtle process described by earlier authors. Clovis Hestean de Nuysement in 1620 composed a poem describing the Phoenix:

*In the same forest, my eye was carried/
to a nest wherein lay Hermes' two birds./
One was attempting to take flight/
while the other prevented his escape;/
Thus the one holds back the other, and never leaves it.*

*Above this nest I saw upon a branch,/ Two
birds locked in combat, destroying each
other./ One the colour of blood, the other
was white,/ And, dying, both assumed a
happier form.*

*I saw them transform into snow white
doves,/ And then, together, become one,
single Phoenix,/ Who, like unto the Sun, on
brilliant wings,/ Leapong aloft from that
Park, betook himself unto the Empyrean
heights.*

This metaphor was taken by P. J. Farbre (in *Panchymicum*, 1646) as a typical illustration of the interaction of the red and white eagles. These two eagles recall St. Maier's eagles of the East and West. Their mutual murder results in the consumption of one another's blood and from this intermingling is borne two doves. These doves unify, and thence is born the Phoenix. Farbre goes on to compare the Phoenix to a silk work whose metamorphoses in its cocoon gives birth to a new creature.²⁵ "The virtue of this seed can never be destroyed in any manner... and cannot be annihilated in anyway. Were it otherwise, and if nothing of ourselves subsisted, there would be no hope that we might, one day, raise ourselves from our own ashes, for resurrection is not a creation but the renewal of the body from one that existed before."

Farbre further gives the ashes to salt, saying,

*"Indeed, the fire consumes all that is
thick and foul, and nothing is left but the
ashes containing a fixed and pure salt
within which the various colours dwell.
These are communicated to the
reincarnating bird without effort, for this
salt in the ashes of the Phoenix, in
consequence of its immolation, is its true
seed, whence, as from an egg, a new
Phoenix is born. And also that extremely
long"*

²⁵ This worm-symbol seen in caterpillars, silk worms, etc., is a potential reason the Egyptians said it was a worm that would arise from the Phoenix's ashes. Insect metamorphoses' relation to the Phoenix's resurrection is better studied in [The Great Work of Insect Metamorphoses](#) by Frater Y. V. (site: <http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/insect.htm>)

Elsewhere he continues:

“The Phoenix... is the salt of the Wise, and, thus, their Mercury; it is Bazil Valentine's salt of glory, the albot salt of Artephius, Trevisan's double Mercury, which is the philosophic embryo, and the bird born of Hermogenes; it is dry water, fiery water, and the universal Menstruum, or Spirit of the Universe... it is itself the sugar of the Moonwort, the spirit and soul of the Sun, the bain-marie, where King and Queen must bathe. ... it contains within it the unnatural fire, the moist fire, the secret fire, occult and invisible.”²⁶

Its role in relation to the Elixer is seldom disputed. Some posit the Phoenix itself is the Elixer, others that its role is the multiplication of the Elixer (of life). Giovanni Bracesco posits that “our Jupiter” is derived from the Phoenix's ashes which, when mixed with the Elixer, multiplies it.

St. Paracelsus posits this multiplication, and the role of the Phoenix, in relation to the Iliastric soul to the Cagastric body, saying,

“The Iliastric soul, on the other hand, is so made that neither heat nor cold may harm it, but that heat is its life and nourishment, its air and pleasure, its joy and delectation. In other words, the salamandrine Phœnix lives in the fire and is the Iliastric soul in man. This being so, the soul also growing in the body of man, and rooting itself in the heart, but, like a tree and its branches, separating its branches into the blood and veins where dwell the spirit of fire and fire itself, there is the soul upright upon its throne and its dwelling in the blood and the veins. So much for the Phœnix”

-Paracelsus, Liber Azoth (1591)

²⁶This secret fire recalls the fire Qadosh that “darts and flashes through the endless depths of the Universe.” It is also the fire in Chapter 7 of Liber ARARITA.

The identification of the Phoenix with the Iliastric soul is an important recollection of the Bennu as it relates to the Ba. The Ba's reentry into the body carried the soul of a past life into a future life. The strength of that Ba, and also of that Iliastric soul, determined how well it survived the intermediary period before reincarnation. The Elixer of Life or Phoenix tincture as the strengthening of this Iliastric soul is a brilliant introduction to St. Crowley's use of the Phoenix symbol, discussed below.

Mystical aviary is often derived from other mystic aviary as shown above in the crow to Phoenix transformation. Other transformations were described.

St. Maier describes the Phoenix as being born from several first principles and the interaction of the sun and moon.

The Phoenix of St. Aleister Crowley

Neglect not the daily Miracle of the Mass, either by the Rite of the Gnostic Catholic Church, or that of the Phoenix. Neglect not the Performance of the Mass of the Holy Ghost, as Nature herself prompteth thee.

-Aleister Crowley:
Liber Aleph, De Cultu

St. Crowley mentions the Phoenix several times in his more esoteric compilations, particularly *The Book of Lies*, or *Liber 333*. St. Crowley's understanding of the Phoenix is derived from both the historical context, in the case of the Bennu bird, and his studies of alchemy. St. Rosenkreuz and St. Maier were both canonized by St. Crowley in his *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica*, declaring them to be major influences in the symbolism of the Gnostic Mass and also St. Crowley's magical and alchemical philosophy. St. Crowley declared each of these men in *Liber 52* as having constituted originating assemblies of the O.T.O. This is offered as evidence of his influences.

Much of St. Crowley's writings are not merely poetic or symbolic homilies. Many are practicable in an abstract ritual capacity, either as meditation, metaphor, or ceremony. The most 'literal' interpretation of St. Crowley's rituals is more common and exoterically explored in modern commentaries such as Lon Milo Duquette's *Magick of Aleister Crowley* (2003). In this way, St. Crowley's writings differ from his predecessors by making symbolism an interactive, practical, and dynamic weapon for the Magician to employ, a means by which his will may affect himself and his world.

These rituals make several appearances in St. Crowley's body of literature. The original appearance of many noteworthy rituals is in *The Book of Lies*. This includes the *Star Ruby*, the *Star Sapphire*, and the more relevant *Mass of the Phoenix*, chapter 44. Many of the 93 Chapters in *The Book of Lies* deal with alchemical subject matter, similar to St. Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*. Not surprisingly, several chapters address both the Phoenix and its transformations. These are worthy of a full description, but much of St. Crowley's writings were literary gifts to his brethren of certain degrees of initiation, making a full dissection of symbolism and meaning difficult, particularly with the volume of inferences already mentioned.

The Mass of the Phoenix is obviously a relevant chapter. As all chapters in *The Book of Lies*, its number, 44, bears a relation to its subject. This number is "the special number of Horus; it is the Hebrew blood, and the multiplication of the 4 by the 11, the number of Magick, explains 4 in its finest sense. But see in particular the accounts in Equinox I, vii²⁷ of

²⁷ Equinox I: vii contains several references to 44. In The Temple of Solomon the King St. Crowley describes his ritual raiment including a necklace of 44 pearls. However, the more likely reference is to Across the Gulf which intimately describes many bloody sacrifices. As the Phoenix's death depicts cyclical change through time, the same is the subject matter of Across the Gulf.



the circumstances of the Equinox of the Gods." By "Hebrew Blood" Crowley could be referring to the early Jewish practice of the Blood Libel or the Hebrew word for Blood, *dem* (daleth-mem), and its enumeration of 44.²⁸ *Daleth* is the Empress, Venus, who plays a subtle role in the *Chemical Marriage*, and *mem* is the Hanged Man, appropriate to water. *Daleth's* position on the Tree of Life is the gate, or door-way, so in conjunction with *mem* and *dem* it may be suggestive of blood flow or menstrual blood, a key component in Indian alchemy and St. Maier's Emblem-33 (by virtue of the full moon). As noted earlier, Job 29:18's *choll* enumerates to 44 as well. *Choll* is the Hebrew word for both "sand" and "Phoenix". Meditations on *choll's* Hebrew lettering may provide further insight. Lastly, the Greek word *Phoinos* is the color "blood-red" and several of the above alchemists posited the Phoenix produced the "red tincture."

During the Mass of the Phoenix, the Magician cuts their breast to draw blood to

²⁸Enumerations of 44 from Sephir Sephiroth:

| | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|
| | Aries: a ram, lamb- teth-lamed-heh |
| | Aquarius: a bucket- daleth-lamed-yod |
| | Drops- aleph-gimel-lamed-yod |
| | A pool, pond; sorrow- aleph-gimel- |
| mem | Captive, captivity- gimel-vav-lamed- |
| heh | Blood- daleth-mem |
| | Sand- cheth-vav-lamed |
| | Flame- lamed-heh-mem |
| | Garment- mem-daleth |

soak a cake. The significance of blood to the Phoenix myth and Mass is obvious by virtue of the Phoenix's compliment in the Christian context, the Pelican, and by blood's association with sacrifice. St. Crowley explains, "The word 'Phoenix' may be taken as including the idea of 'Pelican', the bird, which is fabled to feed its young from the blood of its own breast. Yet the two ideas, though cognate, are not identical, and 'Phoenix' is the more accurate symbol." The natural question is: accurate towards what? The subject of the chapter? What each concept is trying to express? Their role in alchemy is largely complimentary; the Phoenix is Christ's divine nature, the Pelican his human. The Phoenix performs the process of spiritual perfection and rejuvenation, the Pelican performs a sacrifice by which its offspring are fed. Depending on the myth of the Pelican it may or may not die, but the more common is that the Pelican does die in its sacrifice. However, Christians elaborated on this, saying by virtue of its sacrifice the Pelican itself is reborn. It would seem logical to assume that a similar process is being undergone by each bird, yet each have a different goal. The Pelican's goal is temporal and external; the Phoenix's is spiritual and internal. In cases such as the bird transmutation (above) and St. Rosenkreuz's phoenix-pelican sacrifice to revive the King and Queen it is obvious how the two can work in conjunction. But even in the latter case the function of the blood and the ash are distinct. Why then appropriate blood to the Phoenix?

The blood is behaving in the magical capacity as the vital essence, soul, Azoth, or semen. It is acting in a magical capacity in its conjunction with the Host (the bread) which is feminine. The introduction of the vital essence into a physical medium for its transmutation and transmission is similar to the Bennu's ashes being preserved in a host of resinous woods and gums. This recalls the blood (of the bird) being used to feed the host (baked from the ashes of the bird) in *Chemical Marriage*, the

result being a living (yet unconscious given its lack of a soul) and royal host.

The blood in the *Mass of the Phoenix* is drawn from the Magician's breast by a burin. This blood is the will or energy of a Magician. The burin, a weapon used for carving (talismans), is the magical weapon of Aries along with "the horns" and "energy." Aries, in Hebrew, is Heleth, 44. The Horns adorned Exodus' Altar of Incense. Aries, in the Tarot, is the Emperor, Sulphur. Again, Sulphur enters the picture as that which is being transmuted. On the Emperor Card a red eagle with two heads is depicted upon his shield. The blood itself is *dem: daleth*, the Empress,²⁹ Salt, and *Mem*, perhaps here representing Mercury. This vital essence of the Magician, his Ba, his Ruach, his *Vav*, his masculine force, is introduced to a Cake of Light. This recalls the combination of the *vav* with the *heh*, initiating the marriage of matter with a spiritual or vital force, and beginning the transmutation of the three alchemical principles.

The blood can also be Shamayim or Azoth. Herr von Welling gives an interesting interpretation of this mysterious substance,

"The universe is surrounded by the sphere of the stars. Beyond that sphere is the sphere of Schamayim, which is the Divine fiery water, the first outflow of the Word of God, the flaming river pouring from the presence of the Eternal. Schamayim, the fiery androgynous water, divides. The fire becomes the solar fire and the water becomes the lunar water. Schamayim is the universal mercury--sometimes called Azoth--the measureless spirit of life. The spiritual fiery original water--Schamayim--comes through Eden (in Hebrew, vapor) and pours

²⁹ And in contrast to the Emperor's Lamb/Ram, the Empress sits with a Pelican doing what it does best. Her shield contains the same double headed bird as the Emperor; however, the Empress' bird is white. Duquette comments that these two-headed eagles represent the white tincture and red tincture respectively. Their two-headedness represents androgeneity, therefore the balance of the forces within the tincture.

itself into four main rivers [the elements]. This is the river of living water--Azoth [the fiery mercurial essence] that flows out from the throne of God and the Lamb.”

The introduction of this hermaphroditic liquid to a stabilizing element

such as the Virgin Earth, the Host, would materialize it in a form fit for consumption. The Magician, in the *Mass of the Phoenix*, assumes a

Christ-role and spills the blood of Aries, the Ram or Lamb, here the Azoth, onto the Host. The Host then elevates the Magician’s soul during the *Mass of the Phoenix*, strengthening the Ruach and solidifying the astral body. As the magick of the Phoenix’s sacrifice allowed its essence to survive its body’s death, so does the *Mass of the Phoenix* for the Magician. St. Crowley’s recommendation of this rite to be daily employed by “the Magician” may be a general anecdote for those practicing magick, but it may directly refer to the II° of OTO, the degree appropriate to Life, properly preparing himself for the III°, death, the dark night of the soul which St. Maier’s Emblem-33 depicts. This is the likely reason the *Mass of the Phoenix* is to be performed at dusk. Lines 5, 6,³⁰ and 21³¹ portray this crisis as well. Finally, the immolation occurs immediately after the Priest consumes the bloody Cake, saying,

*This Bread I eat. This Oath I swear
As I enflame myself with prayer:
There is no grace: there is no guilt:
This is the Law: DO WHAT THOU WILT!³²*

The issue of the elements is worth elaboration. In *Allegoria Bella* we see St.

³⁰ Hail Ra, that goest in Thy bark
Into the Caverns of the DarK!
³¹ Bring me through midnight to the Sun!
³² Underlining mine.

Maier undergoing a type of elemental initiation in his quest for the Phoenix. In *The Mass of the Phoenix* various weapons are used to stimulate the senses. From Chapter 62 Crowley explains, “The Phoenix has a Bell for Sound; Fire for Sight; a Knife for Touch; two

| <u>Mass of the Phoenix</u> | <u>Tantra- Element/Chakra</u> | <u>Western- Element/Chakra</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Bell for Sound</i> | <i>Aethyr/Vajrayana</i> | <i>Spirit/Vajrayana</i> |
| <i>Fire for Sight</i> | <i>Fire/Manipura</i> | <i>Fire/Manipura</i> |
| <i>Knife for Touch</i> | <i>Air/Anahata</i> | <i>Earth/Muladhara</i> |
| <i>Cake for taste</i> | <i>Water/Svadhithana</i> | <i>Water/Svadhithana</i> |
| <i>Cake for smell</i> | <i>Earth/Muladhara</i> | <i>Air/Anahata</i> |

| <u>Tetragram</u> | <u>Chapter 62</u> |
|------------------|---|
| <i>H</i> | <i>The first cake, burnt, illustrates the profit drawn from the scheme of incarnation.</i> |
| <i>V</i> | <i>The second, mixt with his life's blood and eaten, illustrates the use of the lower life to feed the higher life.</i> |
| <i>H</i> | <i>He then takes the Oath and becomes free-unconditioned-the Absolute.</i> |
| <i>I</i> | <i>Burning up in the Flame of his Prayer, and born again-the Phoenix!</i> |

| <u>Chakra</u> | <u>Tantra- Sense/Element</u> | <u>Western- Sense/Element</u> |
|---------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Muladhara | Smell/Earth | Touch/Earth |
| Svadhithana | Taste/Water | Taste/Water |
| Manipura | Sight/Fire | Sight/Fire |
| Anahata | Touch/Air | Smell/Air |
| Vajrayana | Hearing/Aethyr | Hearing/Spirit |

cakes, one for taste, the other for smell.” If this ritual’s purpose is to fortify the astral body, here are the weapons by which one may consecrate the senses. In *The Serpent Power* (Avalon, 1974) the chakras are viewed as sensory organs attuned to the tattwas (subtle elements). Each chakra corresponds to a gross sensory modality and it is necessary for the yogi to purify each gross sensory modality into its tanmatra or subtle form. This is done through pranayama techniques and chakra meditations. In accomplishing this, the yogi dedicates each sensory modality to subtle rather than gross perception and gradually attunes his body of light to the astral plane. This is the primary method by which one strengthens their body of light. The Body of Light (Ba or Ruach), if properly prepared, will survive the Body’s death. This method of preparation is seen in the *Mass of the Phoenix*.

Appealing to the Tantra attributions given by Arthur Avalon, the order of weapon usage is the reverse of St. Maier's travels. The western elemental attribution has no meaningful arrangement.

Lastly, an interesting note is found in *The Book of Lies*, Chapter 62. "The second [cake], mixed with his life's blood and eaten, illustrates the use of the lower life to feed the higher life." This seems contradictory to the previous assertion of the divine reaching and enriching the lower. However, this exchange between the Ruach and Shekina, the Son and Daughter, is a reciprocal one. The descending force is seen as enriching and enlivening the lower force and the lower force is sacrificing its material or personal nature to be united with the higher. In Qabalah this specific process is called *devakut*, "clinging," the construction of a divine link and sharing (intermingling) one's life (blood) with the higher life (royal blood). This is a part of the IHVH formula, otherwise known as the Sacred Marriage. This IHVH is illustrated by the last four stanzas of Chapter 62. With H and feminine and V as masculine, their resultant combination would be the hermaphroditic Phoenix. Their addition (H+V) gives 11, 1/4 of 44. The bell (spirit) is tolled upon 11 times during 4 occasions of the Mass of the Phoenix, once for each element, thus signifying the consecration of each sense. Lastly, the 11-lettered word Abrahadabra is uttered twice during the Mass. Adding this (22) to 44 we get 66, 1/10 of 660, St. Maier's professed life-span of the Phoenix.³³ An interpretation of Abrahadabra is "I create as I speak." Speech's consideration as an immortal quality was held in high regards by the ancient Egyptians, and the power to create through the utterance of a word was mentioned above as a primary Bennu myth.

The title of Chapter 62 is *Twig?*. A brief allusion is made in the comment to the

³³ Sepher Sephiroth gives 660 as the Latin *Scintillae*, meaning Sparks. Its phonetic similarity with *Scire*, knowledge, gives an interesting understanding of one's Ruach as partaking of the Gnostic Pleroma.

twigs a Phoenix gathers for its pyre. However, gematria tells a different story, showing *twig* as 28³⁴. 28 is the mystic number of 7 and also the sum of four 7's. This gives it a strong relation to Netzach, Venus, who lived in the deepest part of the castle in *Chemical Marriage* and thereby alchemically represented the most esoteric part of the process being performed. Netzach (the 7th sephira) is typified as a burning desire to reach God-head, the path connecting it with God-head (Tiphareth) is the path of Death and the liberation of spirit from matter. Netzach is Hebrew for "victory," the simple historical meaning of the palm. Netzach's connection to love (as Venus) and its element being Fire offers a symbolic allegory of the Phoenix utilizing Netzach's power to liberate itself by Death's burning Fire of Love.

Each of the four 7's also represents one of the elements being acted upon in the Mass of the Phoenix. Upside-down, these four 7's are the four L's of Light, Life, Love, and Liberty, manifestations of Law. St. Crowley comments in Book 4 on the Mass of the Phoenix, calling it, "An instruction in a simple and exoteric form of Eucharist. A Ritual of the Law." Law could be considered the fifth and crowning L of the other four L's, showing that the Mass of the Phoenix, through the Eucharist, takes control of Light, Life, Love, and Liberty.

Some dispute exists as to which Eucharist the *Mass of the Phoenix* uses (by virtue of how many components it contains). For this, the following citations pull from *Magick in Theory and Practice*. St. Crowley's description of the Eucharist of one component as being "secret in every respect" seems at odds with the "simple and exoteric form" of *Mass of the Phoenix's* Eucharist. The Eucharist of Two

³⁴ Enumerations of 44 from Sephir Sephiroth
 The Mystic Number of Netzach $\Sigma(1-7)$
 The God HADIT (cf. 419)- heh-daleth-yod-teth
 Mire, clay- teth-yod-teth
 Union, unity- yod-heh-vav-daleth
 Power, strength- kaph-cheth
 Palate- cheth-kaph
 One beloved- yod-daleth-yod-daleth

Elements, blood and the host, seems to be here used. Again, Chapter 20,

The Eucharist of two elements has its matter of the passives. The wafer (pantacle) is of corn, typical of earth; the wine (cup) represents water. (There are certain other attributions. The Wafer is the Sun, for instance: and the wine is appropriate to Bacchus). The wafer may, however, be more complex, the "Cake of Light" described in Liber Legis. This is used in the exoteric Mass of the Phoenix (Liber 333, Cap: 44) mixed with the blood of the Magus.

If the wafer itself is considered one element, and the blood another, then the Mass of the Phoenix uses the Eucharist of Two Elements. However, the wafer has many components complexly combined.³⁵ Liber AI seems to read seven components, the last of which is blood. Blood is introduced to the Host during the Mass of the Phoenix, making this either six elements or seven elements if the ash (of previously prepared and consecrated cakes) is counted. Seven elements seems the more logical, as the Phoenix is often classically and gematrially given the number seven. However, St. Crowley says, "The Eucharist of seven elements is mystically identical with that of one." This introduces a troublesome paradox. Chapter 20 is titled "Of the Eucharist and of the Art of Alchemy," and it is well known (or should be after this read) that Alchemists deliberately set up blinds in their writings so as to conceal the Truth. Keeping in mind St. Crowley's labeling the Eucharist in the Mass as "simple and exoteric," read his description of the Eucharist of One Element:

| <u>Element Number</u> | <u>Components</u> (from L. 220,3:22-29) |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Meal |
| 2 | Honey |
| 3 | Thick leavings |
| 4 | Oil of Abramelin |
| 5 | Olive Oil |
| 6 | Ash ("this burn...") |
| 7 | Rich Fresh Blood |

"The highest form of the Eucharist is that in which the Element consecrated is One. It is one substance and not two, not living and not dead, neither liquid nor solid, neither hot nor cold, neither male nor female. This sacrament is secret in every respect. For those who may be worthy, although not officially recognized as such, this Eucharist has been described in detail and without concealment, "somewhere" in the published writings of the MASTER THERION. But He has told no one where. It is reserved for the highest initiates, and is synonymous with the Accomplished Work on the material plane. It is the Medicine of Metals, the Stone of the Wise, the Potable Gold, the Elixir of Life that is consumed therein. The altar is the bosom of Isis, the eternal mother; the chalice is in effect the Cup of our Lady Babalon Herself; the Wand is that which Was and Is and Is To Come."

The description of the One Eucharist is similar to St. Maier's discussion of the universal medicine and the power the Phoenix holds. The first two sentences in the above description strongly recall the hermaphroditic quality of the Phoenix. The imagery is resonant with that of the *Chemical Marriage*. The bird was sacrificed on an altar on the seventh floor of the tower by the Virgin. Its blood was caught into a golden cup and appeared as a fountain of rubies. The bird was then reduced to ashes by fire, the element of the wand.

The Eucharist of seven elements and one element are not the same Eucharist but are "mystically identical." The One Element is expressible in many ways and the Eucharist of seven elements is an alchemical way of capturing or producing that one element. Liber Ararita would perhaps serve as an adequate meditation on this mystery, particularly the final chapter which deals with the Fire Qadosh burning through 7 aspects of creation. Alchemists described this Qadosh as an invisible centre of the triangle of the three

³⁵ See Liber 220, 3:22-29

principles of salt-sulphur-mercury. The Phoenix being depicted as various combinations of these elements, its incineration could be seen as the immortal flame of Qadosh. Qadosh is the literal Hebrew for “Sacred” and equates to “Tabernacle” and “Holy.” A slight corruption, Qadish, is a funerary prayer promising the departed that God will resurrect them and “reestablish his Temple within.”

One final point concerning the Mass of the Phoenix is worth addressing. Frater Osiris (2003) and others have claimed this is a sex magical ritual and either semen or menses is the “blood” called for to soak the Eucharist. The argument lies in St. Crowley’s reference to the Mass of the Phoenix in Chapter 12 of *Magick in Theory and Practice*:

“But the bloody sacrifice, though more dangerous, is more efficacious; and for nearly all purposes human sacrifice is the best. The truly great Magician will be able to use his own blood, or possibly that of a disciple, and that without sacrificing the physical life irrevocably. An example of this sacrifice is given in Chapter 44 of Liber 333. This Mass may be recommended generally for daily practice.”

The “bloody sacrifice” mentioned is alluded to as a reference to sexual fluids. The logic behind this analogy’s need is the censorship laws of St. Crowley’s time preventing him from writing on sex but permitting the open discussion of child sacrifice. However, the bloody sacrifice as a magical act may not be limited to the use of semen. Just as multiple types of blood are suggested for use in Liber AI, so too may the bloody sacrifice be performed with a variety of mediums. Also, herein is the Mass of the Phoenix (Chapter 44 of Liber 333) only referred to as an example of this sacrifice. As referenced above, St. Crowley eloquently describes the many ways blood can be spilt in *Across the Gulf*, thus relieving the sticky

supposition that one must cum on something to empower it.

Sexual fluids do carry a meaning with the Phoenix myth. In alchemy the application of heat, red, will reduce something to ash, white. Various tinctures are produced, including both the white tincture and the red tincture, mercury and sulphur respectively. The Phoenix as a combination of these two elements is hermaphroditic, having the power of both sexes and all alchemical polarities that follow suit. In sexual alchemy the red lion and white eagle represent these polarities. St. Crowley saw them as an expression of the sexual fluids. Their interchange represented a kind of fertilization, as depicted on the Art card where the tinctures co-mingle under the supervision of the Hermaphrodite. The result is VITRIOL, a Latin acronym describing the method of finding the “Hidden Stone.” This recalls the Benben stone or mound upon which the universe and its Gods were created.³⁶ A further relation of this to the Green Lion borne of the Virgin Earth (from St. Maier’s allegorical European adventure), referenced elsewhere as an iron stone (perhaps meteoric) upon which raw untempered sulphur grew.³⁷

While several chapters in *The Book of Lies* allude to magical fowl, outside of Chapters 44 and 62 only one other references the Phoenix directly. Chapter 33, Baphomet,

³⁶ Mentioned before, this Bennu stone was described as being pyramidal. Other pyramidal stones have appeared in religious history, including the famed Stone of Cybele, believed to have been the stone spat from the mouth of Chronos. Several sources have posited this stone being meteoric iron; however, the ‘iron sulfide’ mentioned below has several forms. The most common of these is pyrite, or “fool’s gold.” Pyrite comes from the Greek *purites*, meaning “fire.” It is assumed pyrite got this name due to its sparking when struck against flint or steel. Its crystal form is cubical.

³⁷ Dr. Wächtershäuser’s hypothesis for the origin of life having come from the metabolic process initiated by Iron and Sulfur shines a brilliant scientific light on an ancient and universal myth concerning life’s origin. The result is Iron(II) sulfide, otherwise known as the Green Lion. (See: “Origin of Life: Life as We Don’t Know It” by Dr. Wächtershäuser in *Science* 289: 1307-1308.)

describes a black two-headed eagle. An allusion is here made to the Phoenix, "This Eagle is burnt up in the Great Fire; yet not a feather is scorched." It is identified as a black triangle.(p. 519, Regardie 1989) This black triangle denotes the fallen Venus of the earth, or Sophia trapped in matter, according to Homer. The Golden Dawn is the more likely source, saying, "The black triangle will represent Saturn." (506, Regardie, 1989) This is a Masonic symbol, "a bird, which is master of the four elements, and therefore of the name Tetragrammaton." (Crowley, 1980) The Phoenix previously mentioned had arrived at its perfection by virtue of those four elements. Continuing with the comment, St. Crowley says,

The Eagle may be identified, though not too closely, with the Hawk previously spoken of. It is perhaps the Sun, the exoteric object of worship of all sensible cults; it is not to be confused with other objects of the mystic aviary, such as the swan, phoenix, pelican, dove and so on.

(Crowley, 1980)

The Eagle and Hawk are here called exoteric while the swan, phoenix, pelican, and dove are not. This makes them esoteric, or internal, and somehow related to a spiritual process. The above mentioned bird-transformation alchemical analogy lists the swan, pelican, and phoenix, mentioned by St. Crowley, and the dove has elsewhere been identified with the Phoenix.

Conclusion?

This essay has one subject, the Phoenix, in two contexts, the historical and the hermetic. The historic Phoenix, or the Bennu Bird, is a fascinating subject and as much data as can be uncovered with limited resources was molded into my description. The alchemical Phoenix is quite a different subject. The Rosicrucians Great Work was a revival of esoteric purism.

But much is lost in the translation, and thousands of years brings religious, cultural, and linguistic challenges to any historian, particularly one trying to uncover something that in its own time was safe-guarded against the uninitiated. Therefore the meaningful connection between the historic and alchemic phoenixes will forever remain an obscure one.

The hermetic interpretation of the Phoenix is a complex one and each author had a unique way of describing this bird. The three Gnostic Saints referenced each had a rich vocabulary by which they wove the tapestry of their cosmology. Comparing these is a dangerous work, and the author hopes that the reader will appeal to those persons' writings for a novel understanding.

Qabalism and the traditionalist method are useful in cross-referencing these ideas, but only so far. Gematria, for instance, is often criticized as a system by which anything can be equated with anything. When discussing esoteric subjects, there is a time when the information must be capped. When comparing and dissecting symbols an attempt was made to not digress into an exegesis of their mystical import. Instead, primary and secondary relationships have been referenced in both the occult and historic context. Developing a theology of the Phoenix myth was not the goal of this paper and the author considers moralism very distasteful.

But the question remains: what the hell is the Phoenix? It depends on who you ask. However, it is obvious that some mystic concept escapes the confines of simple language and therefore symbols were necessary to color this lucid idea. The exploration of these symbols, the language of alchemy, the unspeakable language of mysticism, and the pursuit of St. Maier's great quest will initiate one into the mystery of this marvelous bird and there you should find your answer.

However, several trends have been noted. The Phoenix is a symbol of a vital essence existing outside of the biological

processes. The alchemical descriptions of the Phoenix are diverse and one is left to conclude that it exists within all elements but must be separated from them. It impregnates the feminine, water and earth, acts through the air, but its nature is closer to that of fire. It is not the Holy Fire of Qadosh, but is a manifestation of that as the Solar Flame. Alchemically, it is strongly connected to Sulphur. However, Mercury knows the secret to the Phoenix's location (planetary and elementally). There is an initial purification of the Sulphur in some prepared water, perhaps a tincture. Mercury treats this, hardening it and making it hermaphroditic. But the essence itself must be extracted from this by process of heat. Heat and fire produce ash, ash is infused with dew, and dew is left to evaporate giving birth to a salt which preserves the Phoenix's power. Others attempts may yield different insight and conclusions are reserved for those brave enough to "do the work."

Intensive appendices with real answers are available for guests and initiates of MMM.

Final Word

I would like to thank Dr. Hereward Tilton of the University of Amsterdam for his excellent research on the subject of St. Michael Maier's relation to the Phoenix itself. His patient advice directed me to several avenues which gave a new and different life to this essay. His book, while pricey, is very worth studying. Thanks also to Br. S. L. G. of the Alombrados Encampment in New Orleans for his help with the Latin and also Dr. Michael Nutzkiewicz of the University of New Mexico for help with understanding Midrashim and some Hebrew translation issues.

I encourage those who had questions, disagreements, or other reasons worth writing to do so. It is a personal goal to breed a culture of academia in the OTO and other occult "communities." Inviting opposition is the only way to keep swords sharp and shields sturdy.

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