

# The Emerald Tablet in Arabic, Latin, and English

**Joseph Azize**

## **Abstract**

The Emerald Tablet is generally considered to be the most important single document in the history of alchemy. In modern times, the mystic G.I. Gurdjieff (?1866-1949) made reference to it throughout his career. Yet it is known only in the Latin translation of an Arabic version which may itself be a translation of a Syriac original. There are substantial differences between the Arabic and the Latin. Lacking from every available English-language presentation of the Tablet is the full context which the Arabic provides. The purpose of this article is to present the first full translation of the Arabic into English, known to me; and to briefly compare it with Latin-based versions.

**Keywords:** G. I. Gurdjieff; P. D. Ouspensky; Emerald Tablet, *Tabula Smaragdina*, H. P. Blavatsky; Western Esotericism; Western Alchemy; Arabic Alchemy; Syriac Alchemy

## **Introduction - The Emerald Tablet**

The Emerald Tablet is generally considered to be the most important single document in the history of alchemy. Linden opens *The Alchemy Reader* with the Tablet, and closes it with Newton's commentary upon it.<sup>1</sup> The Emerald Tablet, like many an alchemical text, was presented as an ancient oracle, hidden away from profane eyes, but miraculously restored with its arcane mystery intact. The unknown author would doubtless have been gratified by the mystery which has attended the history of this short terse text.

There is insufficient evidence to ascertain when, where, by whom, or the context in which the aphoristic Tablet was composed. The document itself states that the Arabic had been translated from Syriac: *maktūb bisiryānee bilisān al-awwal*: "written in Syriac, in the first language".<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, there is reason to accept that the Arabic is in fact a translation of a Syriac text. It has survived in two Arabic versions and in Latin translations made from some Arabic version, but possibly from one which has not survived. According to the Arabic preamble: "He said that he acquired this wisdom from the last book of Balīnās the Wise ... (when) he came upon the *shaykh* seated on a throne of gold, and in his hand, a tablet of emerald, written in Syriac, in the first language."<sup>3</sup> The person who gave this report was the priest Sājīyūs. The object in the hand of Balīnās was an emerald or possibly

---

Joseph Azize is a contemplative Maronite priest. His publications are related chiefly to Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way (especially the meditation-like exercises which Gurdjieff taught), but also to Syriac Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Julius Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina: Ein Betrag zur Geschichte der Hermetischen Literatur*, (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universität ÄtBuchhandlung, 1926), pp. 112, and 109.

<sup>3</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 112. All translations from Ruska's German are my own.

chrysolite tablet (*lawH zabarjad*). Cowan translates *zabarjad* as “chrysolite.”<sup>4</sup> However, the Syriac word *zmargōdō* means “emerald,”<sup>5</sup> which would be a loan word into Syriac from the Greek *smaragdos*, “emerald.” In Revelation 21:19-20, *smaragdos* is distinct from *chrysolithos*. The suggestion that “emerald” is meant is, therefore, not without foundation. As we shall see, this is not the only place where reading the Arabic as if it were Syriac yields a plausible if not preferable translation.

It is often thought that Balīnās was “Apollonios” i.e. of Tyana.<sup>6</sup> I have nothing against this identification, my only caution is that I have only ever seen this asserted, never established. That the throne was of gold may indicate a link to the gold-making of “the wise,” of whom Balīnās is thus among the preeminent. The relevant passage significantly commences: “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the one God, Amen.”<sup>7</sup> This lends a literary air of authentication to Sājīyūs’ status as a priest. But, like the reference to the tablet’s being written in Syriac (by now the prestige language of Christians in the Islamic kingdoms) it also places the entire narrative within a Christian context.

The numbering of lines is not original, but was added by Ruska to align his translation with the Latin translation. After the words: “What was said by the priest Sājīyūs about the (i.e. his) entry into the dark tomb.”<sup>8</sup> It continues:

مكتوب بسرياني بلسان الاول

فيه تفسير صحيح لا يشك به 1.

يقول ان الاعلا من الاسفل والاسفل من الاعلا عمل العجائب من واحد 2.

وتلبت الاشياء من ذلك الجوهر بتدبير واحد ما اعجب عمله وهو راس الدنيا وقيمها 3.

ابوه الشمس وامه القمر فحملته الريح في بطنها وغذته الارض 4.

ابو الطلسمات وخازن العجائب 5.

كامل القوى محق الانوار 6.

نار صار ارضا اعزل الارض من النار يصير لك اللطيف الزم من الغليظ برفق وحكمة 7.

يصعد من الارض الى السماء يقيس الانوار من العلو وينزل الى الارض وفيه قوة الاعلا والاسفل لان معه نور 8.

الانوار فلذلك يهرب منه الظلمة

قوة القوى تغلب كل شيء لطيف وتدخل في كل غليظ 9.

على تكوين العالم الاكبر تكوين العالم الأصغر 10.

و على هذا سلكت العلماء 11.

ولذلك سمت هرمس المثلث بالحكمة 12.

وهذا كتابه الاخير الذي ستره في السرب 13.

I translate this as follows:

Written in Syriac, in the first language.

<sup>4</sup> J. Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: Hans Wehr*, (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980 [1961]), p. 373.

<sup>5</sup> J. Payne Smith (ed.), *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 107.

<sup>8</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 112-113.

1. In it is the true explanation, (there is) that which cannot be doubted.
2. (It) says that the highest (*al-a3lā*) is from the lowest (*al-asfal*), and the lowest from the highest, it worked [all] wonders from one.
3. [All] things are gathered from that essence by the direction of one, the most wonderful it worked, it is the origin of the world and its custodian.
4. Its father is the sun and its mother is the moon. The wind carried it in its womb, and the earth nourished it.
5. It is the father of talismans and the treasurer (keeper) of wonders.
6. Perfecting [all] strength, keeping right [all] lights.
7. Fire became our earth. Separate earth from fire, and the subtle will become yours. Attend to that which is coarse with gentleness and wisdom.
8. It ascends from the earth to the heavens; it acquires lights from above, [then] descends to the earth, and in it is the strength of above and below because with it is the light of lights, and thus the darkness will flee from it.
9. The strength of the strong, it takes possession of [all which is] fine, and enters into all which is dense/coarse.
10. Thus is the formation of the greater world and the formation of the smaller world.
11. The worlds were formed thus.
12. Thus inscribed Hermes Threefold in Wisdom.
13. This is his final book, which he hid underground.

First, some notes on the text.

In line 1, I read *lā yuṣak* rather than *lā yašik*, which would mean “he cannot doubt.” The Arabic is without the diacritical marks which would indicate any vowels, so either reading is possible.

The phrase in line 2 that there is no doubt in it, *feehi ... lā yuṣak bihi*, “In it is the true explanation that cannot be doubted,” is redolent of the Qur’anic verse: *dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba feehi*, “This is the book in which there is no doubt.” (Sura 2.2) This may be coincidence, or it may point to having been produced in an Islamic milieu. I would have thought it unlikely that a Muslim would produce such a line which might be understood as a parody of scripture. Again, a Christian origin is a little more likely. But of even more significance, I suggest, is that whether it was written by Christian, Muslim, or Jew, with this phrase it seems to be framing the Tablet as scriptural in authority, and not only the summation of Hermes’ wisdom (being his last book) but even a revelation.

In line 3, I am fairly certain that the text in Ruska is incorrect.<sup>9</sup> The first verb seems to me to end with an additional *tā’*. The verbs could be translated into English as third person singular masculine, rather than neuter, (i.e. “he” rather than “it”), but the context seems to demand the neuter.

More obscure is the idea expressed in the fourth line. It is often assumed that the subject is the formation of the Philosopher’s Stone, and “sun” refers to gold, and the

<sup>9</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 112.

“moon” to silver, or else to fire and water, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Our interpretations need not be exclusive. Moreover, this verse can be read with those following. Georgina Saadie, an amateur scholar of Syriac Christianity, has noted to me that the Arabic word used for the wind here is *reeh*, which is cognate with *rooh*, meaning “spirit,” and used in *rooh al-qudus*, the “Holy Spirit.” In Syriac, the connection is even closer, the word *rooh* can mean both wind and spirit.<sup>11</sup> Saadie opines that the passage can also be read as referring to the conception of Christ: the sun being God the Father, the moon being Mary, and the wind the Holy Spirit which facilitated the “overshadowing” of Mary by the Most High to effect the conception of Christ (Luke 1:35). This interpretation, which strikes me as quite feasible but beyond any chance of being firmly established, would indicate that the author of the Emerald Tablet was a Christian. Thus, a polyvalent interpretation of lines 4ff is in order: in addition to the possibility they allude to the Incarnation of Christ, they can be read as both traditional alchemy (Philosopher’s Stone, manufacture of gold), and as Spiritual alchemy: (a higher body is nursed in the “earth” of the physical body, from the blending of the three creative elemental forces, the sun, moon, and wind.

In line 5, the word *Talismāt* has been cited as evidence for a Greek original, but it was used in Syriac: hence there was a Greek origin for this word which appeared in Semitic languages, but there is no reason at all to see it as proving a Greek original for this text. Payne Smith’s Syriac dictionary lists both *Talesmā* and *Taleesmees*, (both meaning “magic,” “incantation” and “wonders worked by magic.”)<sup>12</sup> I would conjecture that the adoption of two different spellings indicates borrowings at different times and probably different places, both of which found some currency.

In line 6, I read the two verbs as participles; *muhiqq* being a IV participle, i.e. “keeping true/right.” Ruska tentatively translates “Dessen Kräfte vollkommen, dessen Lichter bestätigt sind(?)”<sup>13</sup> I make no claims for my Arabic, but on my reading we have, in these lines which even Ruska found enigmatic, a consistent series of epithets.

In line 7, Ruska has “Ein Feuer, das zu Erde wird,”<sup>14</sup> “A fire, that becomes earth.” It is difficult, but the sentence structure, with the subject followed by a verb and then an object strikes me as better Syriac than Arabic. *Sār*, being perfect tense, suggests my translation, but I see little if any difference in the meaning. Further, I discern three sentences in this line. In the third, I read the text’s Arabic *men* (meaning “from”) as Syriac *mān* (*d*) meaning “that which”), and the verbs *a3zl* and *alzm* as imperatives.

Lines 7 and 8 are pivotal: the opening verses describe the process of the creation of the worlds. It then introduces the processes of transformation, commencing in line 7(b). In line 8, it speaks of the transformation which continues perpetually, but also of a return or

<sup>10</sup> David M. Litwa, *Hermetica II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 315 n.3.

<sup>11</sup> Payne Smith (ed.), *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, pp. 533-534.

<sup>12</sup> Payne Smith (ed.), *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 114.

ascension to the source. Finally, there is a summation which recapitulates the entire document, short as it is, in accordance with the Semitic tradition

If line 11 is read as straight Arabic, we have the nonsensical translation: “Thus the erudite have proceeded.” Despite the oddity, Ruska offers: “Und danach verfahren die Gelehrten.”<sup>15</sup> The noun العلماء (*ʿulamā*) is usually masculine, although nouns with that form are often feminine, and here the verb *salakit* is feminine. Thus a reading which refers to male scholars is unlikely, and one which referred to female scholars alone would require special explanation. Given the terms of line 11, it is preferable to read the noun here as from the Syriac *ʾōlme*, “worlds,” which ending in an olaph (alep) and an e vocalisation may have suggested the Arabic final aleph and hamza.

The root *ʾ-l-m* is unusual in that it apparently displays a number of quite diverse ramifications. I would conjecture that the attested sense of “a sign, a mark” is the basic meaning. From that it came to produce words meaning “to know” (and hence to be one who knows), i.e. to be able to read signs. The sense of “world” or “kingdom” as in the “animal kingdom” would be related in that a “world” is – in this conception – a meaningful network: hence Arabic has two words, *ʾālam*, “universe, cosmos,” and *dunyā*, “world, earth, material world.” The verb *salaka*, which governs the noun *ʾulamā*, has the basic sense of following a road; hence my translation suggesting that the Tablet is describing the process by which the worlds were formed: a reading which, given the clear terms of the preceding line, has much to commend it.

Touching line 12, identifies Hermes with the Greek Trismegistus (Hermes identified with the Egyptian Thoth), who was “thrice great,” as priest, philosopher, and king.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the close of the text ties back in with the discovery narrative: the Emerald Tablet of a priest is found by another priest. The association with a priest may be a fiction, but one could not dismiss out of hand the possibility that the Syriac original was the work of a priest. The suggestion that the material was preserved and passed on by Christians is irresistible

## The History and Significance of the Emerald Tablet

Not even Ruska, whose study of the Emerald Tablet is still the only monograph upon the subject, would offer a tentative dating.<sup>17</sup> This issue is complicated if the Arabic text was itself produced from a Greek- or Syriac-language original. Ruska stated that if one sought to derive the Latin text that appeared in the 13th century from a Greek manuscript, one would not only have to solve the riddle that the Greek version remained hidden for around a millennium and left no trace anywhere, but one would also have to explain why the Greek manuscript from which it was supposed to have been translated was not even mentioned,

<sup>15</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 5.

but disappeared without a trace.<sup>18</sup> He finally opines: “So dürfen wir das Jahr 750 als die Zeit ansetzen, in der das Buch spätestens geschrieben wurde, während wir die obere Grenze kaum über das 6. Jahrhundert hinaufrücken können.”<sup>19</sup> That is, it cannot be earlier than the sixth century or later than 750. That sounds reasonable, but on the material considered by Ruska, there is no guarantee that the lower limit, in particular, is correct.

I would suggest that there are two other reasons to accept a date sometime in the first millennium, and, I would venture to say, after the dissemination of the text of the Qur'an: first, that it may have been originally written in Syriac by a Christian; and second, that this writer almost certainly knew the Qur'an (whether in whole or in part) and was aware that it was treated as revelation by Muslims.

I must also mention the question of gold-making. It is not a straightforward one: the Tablet does not unequivocally refer to it, although the preamble describes Balīnās as sitting on a golden throne. Then, if the text refers to the *transmutation* of gold, it is a coded reference (e.g. by means of the symbol of the sun). The transmutation of base metals into the noble metals of gold and silver was, quite arguably, the chief focus of alchemy in the Middle Ages, and we cannot today conceive of alchemy without it. However, Beretta argued that until late antiquity, precious gems, especially lapis lazuli, were regarded as equally if not more valuable; and since glass-making could produce fair substitutes for these, alchemy often concerned glass-making and colour-changing more than the transmutation of gold. Beretta argues that the ancient and Byzantine evidence betrays no knowledge of a predominant concern with the noble metals until the time of Diocletian (284-305). Many minerals were allowed a religious significance in Egypt, and the sciences concerned with minerals, glass-making and colouring valuable substances, were seen as holy and sacred.<sup>20</sup> However, even if we accept this thesis, gold-making was not absent from even the most ancient witnesses to alchemy: e.g. in the *Physika kai mystika* of Ps-Demokritos, which is thought to date from the time of Nero (d. 68).<sup>21</sup> So, in the final analysis, Beretta's thesis will not help us in dating the Tablet. However, it does possess the value of fixing our attention on the larger question of ancient minerology and glass-making.

From its origin in Mesopotamia around 2500 B.C. to its transmission to Egypt around 1400 B.C. during the reign of Akhenaten, glassmakers kept a record of their craft, wherein the instructions were not only what we would today call scientific, but also religious, calling for rituals and prayers, but, in Mesopotamia anyway, without any mention of transmutation.<sup>22</sup> According to Beretta, it was in ancient Egypt that the ability to change throughout the colour of a material was seen as an instance of transmutation.<sup>23</sup> When the

<sup>18</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 166.

<sup>20</sup> Marco Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications. 2009), pp. x-xii.

<sup>21</sup> Matteo Martelli, *The Four Books of Pseudo-Democritus* (Leeds: Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry, 2013), pp. 1-2 and 30.

<sup>22</sup> Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass*, pp.1-9.

<sup>23</sup> Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass*, p. 22.

art was acquired by Greeks, it found a philosophical basis in Empedocles' theory of the four elements, and Heraclitus insistence on fire's part in transforming substances.<sup>24</sup>

Martelli also marshals the evidence that the accounts of Khalid ibn Yazid (668-704) are legendary, and cannot agree which of two Christian monks were said to have been his instructor in alchemy.<sup>25</sup> The Syriac learned tradition was closely associated with the monastery of Qennešre in Northern Syria, which was founded in 531. Many monks, from there and elsewhere of its monks were alchemists.<sup>26</sup> It is, however, interesting that the latter of the two monks, Stephen the Monk (*al-rāhib*) lived in the ninth or tenth century.<sup>27</sup> Their learning was international: not only the heritage of ancient Babylon, but also the Hellenistic, Persian and Indian worlds contributed to the Syriac-language enlightenment.<sup>28</sup> Given that the Emerald Tablet probably antedates the rise of Islam, it could be a product of Qennešre or its influence.

A word must be said about the Babylonian tradition. As of 1997, the last known datable document composed in cuneiform was an Akkadian astrological tablet of 75 A.D. Numerous Sumerian tablets, were copied in the first century B.C. for temple liturgies, by scribes who could write the colophons in Akkadian.<sup>29</sup> Geller concludes that: "... as long as Babylonian (i.e. pagan) temples survived in Mesopotamia, then it is also likely that cuneiform script survived as well."<sup>30</sup> More remarkably, to my mind, there is evidence that Iamblichus, in the age of Septimius Severus (193-211) knew Syriac and was taught Akkadian, as well as Babylonian customs and history. The Mesopotamian temples continued into the Seleucid period, while the pagan faith continued at Harran into the Islamic period; and a Syriac text from Edessa, dating from 497/8, written by Joshua the Stylite (a Christian), mentions a pagan festival in Edessa at which myths were recited.<sup>31</sup> That the Syriac tradition was in direct contact with the ancient Mesopotamian cultural and religious tradition is potentially relevant to any analysis of the Emerald Tablet.

Given that it is said to have fitted into Balīnās' hand, as most cuneiform tablets did,<sup>32</sup> it may well have been understood as similar to a cuneiform tablet, but written on a precious stone (as some Mesopotamian seals were engraved on gems), and in Syriac rather than Akkadian. Emerald was popular in Roman and early Byzantine jewellery, and was

<sup>24</sup> Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>25</sup> Matteo Martelli, "L'alchimie en syriaque et l'oeuvre de Zosime", in *Les sciences en syriaque*, ed. Émilie Villey (Paris: Geuthner, 2014, 191-214), p. 191.

<sup>26</sup> Martelli, "L'alchimie en syriaque", pp. 191 and 194-199; and Muriel Debié "Sciences et savants syriaque: une histoire multiculturelle", in *Les sciences en syriaque* ed. Émilie Villey (Paris: Geuthner, 2014, 9-66) pp. 12 and 38.

<sup>27</sup> Martelli, "L'alchimie en syriaque", p. 195.

<sup>28</sup> Debié, "Sciences et savants syriaque", pp. 12 and 39.

<sup>29</sup> Mark J. Geller, "The Last Wedge", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, 87, 1997, 43-95, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Geller, "The Last Wedge", p. 47

<sup>31</sup> Geller, "The Last Wedge", pp. 50-55.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathon Taylor, "Tablets as Artefacts, Artisans as Scribes", in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, eds Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 8.

sometimes shaped in hexagonal prisms.<sup>33</sup> I know of no evidence for emerald cuneiform tablets, but the Phoenicians sometimes made seals from green jasper, and in the first millennium B.C. manufactured scarabs in that material.<sup>34</sup> Some tablets were inscribed in Aramaic letters and language, and others are written in a cuneiform language with Aramaic additions.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the “Emerald Tablet” was meant to be understood as a cuneiform tablet of a precious material. Ruska states that emerald was Hermes’ stone: “der Stein des Hermes,” citing a work not available to me.<sup>36</sup> It is fair to think that the Tablet was meant to represent what was most precious in the most ancient tradition: hence it was written in the first language, Syriac. For those who had seen cuneiform tablets with Aramaic additions, or tablets written entirely in Aramaic, but of the same size as the cuneiform type, an Emerald Tablet in Syriac was marvellous but not without parallel.

The Emerald Tablet may have been envisaged as appearing like the Arslan Tash Amulet (estimated 7th century BC, from NW Syria): an amulet or talisman with spiritual even supernatural significance, self-consciously in the tradition of Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets, but written in the prestige language of Syriac (as the Arslan Tash tablet is inscribed in the prestige language Phoenician), and thus claiming the authority of the ancient tradition. The once questioned authenticity of the Arslan Tash Amulet is practically beyond dispute now that more and analogous tablets have been located.<sup>37</sup>



Image 1: The Arslan Tash Amulet (Wikimedia Commons).

The Emerald Tablet states that “the highest (*al-3alā*) is from the lowest (*al-asfal*), and the lowest from the highest.” This is reminiscent of the opening of the Mesopotamian Creation Epic, *Enuma Eliš*, 1:1-2:

*e-nu-ma e-liš la na-bu-ú šá-ma-mu*

<sup>33</sup> Jack Ogden, *Ancient Jewellery* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992), pp. 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> Dominique Collon, *Near Eastern Seals* (London: British Museum, 1990), pp. 36-37.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathon Taylor, “Tablets as Artefacts”, pp. 1-18.

<sup>36</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Jessie De Grado and Madah Richey, “Discovering Early Syrian Magic”, *Near Eastern Archaeology*, vol. 84, no. 4 (2021), pp. 282-292, p. 290.

*šap-liš am-ma-tum šu-ma la zak-rat*<sup>38</sup>

When skies above were not yet named  
Nor earth below pronounced by name.<sup>39</sup>

The Akkadian words *eliš* and *šapliš*, for “above” and “below” are reproduced in their Arabic forms in the Emerald Tablet, *al-a3la* and *al-asfal*, and both roots are productive in Syriac. The *3ayn* in Arabic reflects the early Semitic *3ayn*. This letter was lost in Akkadian, and the remaining vowel changed to an “e.”<sup>40</sup> I do not suggest that the Tablet was in any way based on the *Enuma Eliš*, but I do contend that it witnesses to the same Semitic world-view. The upper and lower worlds are analogous. The *Enuma Eliš* tells how the two worlds took their modern forms and were named. The Tablet complements it, and reflects the same outlook which anxiously sought to discern the pattern of heaven on earth, but it hails from a monotheistic world, not that it expresses any theistic doctrines, but that it lacks any polytheistic narrative. Again, to speak simply of “above” and “below” is suggestive of a religious context: the opening of the book of Genesis where the Spirit of God hovers above (*3al*) the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2).<sup>41</sup>

The point is that the substance of a theosophy of macrocosm and microcosm existed in the ancient Semitic world, although those words were later coined in Greek. The concept expressed by the polarity of “upper” and “lower” can also, I would suggest, be found in that of “the beginning” and “now,” for in the beginning, the creator was “above.” One feature of these early lines in the Emerald Tablet is that they express not only that the earth was created by the heavens, but also that the heavens come from the earth. Although this may be related to the ancient concept of feeding the gods by sacrifice and other rituals, but all this takes me rather too far from the present topic.

### The Emerald Tablet in Latin

Ruska presents W. Chr. Kriegsmann’s attempt to establish the original form, in Latin:

1. Verum, sine mendacio, certum et verissimum.
2. Quod est inferius, est sicut (id) quod est superius, et quod est superius, est sicut (id) quod est inferius, ad perpetrenda miracula rei unius.
3. Et sicut omnes res fuerunt ab uno, meditatione unius; sic omnes res natae fuerunt ab hac una re, adaptatione.
4. Pater eius est Sol, mater eius Luna; portavit illud ventus in ventre suo; nutrix eius terra est.

<sup>38</sup> Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth: Enuma Eliš* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, volume IV, 2005), p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000 [1989]), p. 233.

<sup>40</sup> John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, Corrected reprint 1998), pp. 38-39.

<sup>41</sup> Note the Our Father: “thy will be done as in heaven so on earth.” The author is presently engaged in a study of this Semitic typology.

5. Pater omnis thelesmi totius mundi est hic.
6. Vis (virtus) eius integra est, si versa fuerit in terram,
7. Separabis terram ab igne, subtile a spisso, suaviter, cum magno ingenio.
8. Ascendit a terra in coelum, iterumque descendit in terram, et recipit vim superiorum et inferiorum. Sic habebis gloriam totius mundi. Ideo fugiat (fugiet) a te omnis obscuritas.
9. Hic (haec) est totius fortitudinis fortitudo fortis: quia vincet omnem rem subtilem, omnemque solidam penetrabit.
10. Sic mundus creatus est.
11. Hinc adaptationes erunt mirabiles, quarum modus est hic.
12. Itaque vocatus sum Hermes Trismegistus, habens tres partes Philosophiae totius mundi.
13. Completum est quod dixi de operatione Solis.<sup>42</sup>

In *Isis Unveiled* (1877) Blavatsky states that the Emerald Tablet “contains, in a few sentences, the essence of the Hermetic wisdom ... it merely begins by saying that it speaks not fictitious things but that which is true and most certain.” The translation found there coincides fairly closely with the Latin text above, although I do note some departures. Blavatsky continues:

2. What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is similar to that which is below to accomplish the wonders of one thing.
3. As all things were produced by the mediation (*or* meditation) of one being, so all things were produced from this one by adaptation.
4. Its father is the sun, its mother is the moon. (*Blavatsky omits* The wind carried in its womb, its nurse is the earth.)
5. It is the cause of all perfection throughout the whole earth. (*Kriegsmann's Latin would better read:* This is the father of every talisman in all the world.)
6. Its power is perfect if it is changed into earth.
7. Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, acting prudently and with judgment.
8. Ascend with the greatest sagacity from the earth to heaven, and then descend again to earth, and unite together the power of things inferior and superior; thus you will possess the light of the whole world, and all obscurity will fly away from you.
9. This thing has more fortitude than fortitude itself, because it will overcome every subtle thing and penetrate every solid thing.
10. By it the world was formed.
11. (*Blavatsky omits:* Such miraculous operations as will be, come about in this manner.
12. So I am called Hermes Trismegistus, having three parts of the philosophy (wisdom) of all the world.
13. What I have said about the operation of the Sun is complete.)<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, pp.1-2.

<sup>43</sup> Helena Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* vol. I. (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press., 1988 [1877]), p. 507.

Perhaps the major difference between the Latin and the Arabic is that the latter has a clear teaching of macro- and microcosmos: thus line 10 of the Arabic patently presents the principle described as being the cause of both macro- and microcosm, even if it does not use those Greek words.

Another difference is that in line 2 the Arabic says that the higher and the lower come from each other: the Latin refers only to likeness. In line 5, the Arabic has this principle being the preserver of the wonders of the world, an idea which is not expressed in the Latin, even if it is by no means inimical.

Then, the verse “Ascend with the greatest sagacity” may possibly but not necessarily be read in the Latin as an instruction to the sage to ascend and descend, whereas the Arabic clearly enough speaks about the mysterious principle of the three broad perpetual processes: creation, transformation, and return.

However, it may well be that the most significant omission is that of the framing narrative, an omission which is reflected in how the final line of the Arabic refers to the tablet having been secreted away beneath the earth, whereas the Latin ends only with the assertion that the sage has said all he wishes to about the operation of the sun. Thus, the frame, the context, which as we saw is quite Christian, and links this tablet to a priest, has been dismantled, and in its place is a fully pagan text. It is not that there had been no pagan element in the Arabic, but it had been introduced by an invocation of the Trinity, and put through the cleanser of the East Christian prestige-language, Syriac; not to mention the possibility of an allusion to the conception of Jesus through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit which is entirely lost in the Latin.

In a future study, I shall examine the Emerald Tablet from the perspective of the ideas of G.I. Gurdjieff: the only figure known to me since Isaac Newton who has treated the Emerald Tablet as a text to work with.