

## *Abstract*

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Two Greek hermetic texts, *Poimandres* (Corpus Hermeticum I) and *On Rebirth* (Corpus Hermeticum XIII), are analysed and compared to each other in this thesis. They are also compared to other traditions, which are close in history and content to the two hermetic texts. The texts of Zosimos of Panopolis, which belong to the history of gnosticism, hermetism and Greco-Roman alchemy, are discussed as well. The purpose is to draw new and close attention to how the two hermetic texts represent a special tradition in hermetic literature and what their relation is to gnostic texts, especially Sethian gnostic texts. Hermetic texts are often held among scholars to be positive towards cosmos and matter, while gnostic texts are considered negative. Such assumptions are questioned in this thesis, which instead departs from a delimitation based on themes that occur in certain texts, for example primal man and the ascent. The analysis finds further common themes from particular traditions. Examples of such themes are the idea of God's Will as separate entity, and Man as a descendant and image of God. More exclusive themes are the angel Poimandres, stability and empowerment as expressions of mystical illumination, and the idea of a mystical transformation called Life and Light.

Our sources for the socio-historical reality of gnosticism and hermetism are fragmentary. Instead of trying to determine how gnostic and hermetic traditions developed over time, the analysis focuses on the contents of each text and how themes and motifs are depicted and related to each other. The analysis of texts and the comparisons constitute the major part of the thesis (Chapters 2 to 5). Possible implications for social reality are discussed when it is necessary to consider different lines of interpretation of the texts, but no direct connection between textual idea and social context is made in these chapters. The final chapter (Chapter 6) investigates to what extent it is possible to demarcate a social context of the texts. There are no certain answers, but it is probable that the texts were studied by groups of like-minded people gathered around a teacher. It is also possible that these individuals practised some rituals such as prayer, singing of hymns and mystical contemplation.

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