

The Visions of Zosimos of Panopolis: Text, Translation, and Commentary



Joshua Werrett
St John's College
University of Oxford

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List of Abbreviations

- BeRu Berthelot, M., Ruelle, Ch-Em. (1888) *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs II : Les Œuvres de Zosime*. Paris: Collège de France.
- CAAG Berthelot, M., Ruelle, Ch-Em. (1888) *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs*. Paris: Collège de France.
- CGL Diggle, J. (2021) *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CH Scott, W. (1985) *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*. Boston: Shambhala.
- CMA Syr. Berthelot, M., Duval, R. (1893) *La Chimie Au Moyen Âge. 3 Vols*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.
- FC *Final Account*, in M. Berthelot, Ch-Em. Ruelle (edd.), *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs II: Les Œuvres de Zosime*. Paris: Collège de France, 239-46.
- Fest. Festugière, A.J (1944-1954) *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste. 4 Vols*. Paris: Lecoffre.
- Frag. Alch. Halleux, R. (1981) *Les Alchimistes grecs. Tome I: Papyrus de Leyde. Papyrus de Stockholm*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- LS Lewis, C. T., Short, C. (1879) *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- LSJ Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S. (1940) *Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mert. Mertens, M. (1995) *Les Alchimistes Grecs. Tome IV : Zosime de Panopolis. Mémoires Authentiques*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Omega *On the Letter Omega*, in M. Berthelot, Ch-Em. Ruelle (edd.), *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs II: Les Œuvres de Zosime*. Paris: Collège de France, 228-35.

MS A *Parisinus Graecus* 2327 (f. 84v-88v)

MS B *Parisinus Graecus* 2325 (f. 88v)

MS L *Laurentianus Graecus* 86.16 (f. 90v-95v)

MS M *Marcianus Graecus* 299 (f. 92v-95r)

MS M' *Marcianus Graecus* 299 (f. 115v)

Abbreviated titles of works of Classical literature follow the conventional abbreviations of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

Introduction

Zosimos of Panopolis

As the first alchemical author to whom some biographical information can be confidently assigned, Zosimos of Panopolis emerges from the rich intellectual tapestry of Late Antique Egypt as a seminal figure in the history of alchemy, the occult, and Late Antique religion. His immense influence in his field – he penned twenty-eight books – is noted by fellow alchemists and alchemical exegetes in the generations immediately following his death: he is frequently cited as the ‘divine Zosimos’ (as indeed he is in the title of the work which is the focus of the present thesis: Ζωσίμου τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἀρετῆς) and is even named the ‘στέφανος τῶν φιλοσόφων’ (the ‘crown of philosophers’) by an anonymous commentator on his work.¹

Zosimos and Panopolis

Zosimos seems to have flourished around the beginning of the 4th century AD. With a reference to Julius Africanus (d. 240) serving as a potential *terminus post quem*, and a reference to the Serapeion (destroyed by Theodosius I in 391) serving as a potential *terminus ante quem*, the more specific dates of 240-391 have been proposed.² Despite references claiming Zosimos as either a Theban or an Alexandrian, one can be confident that he was in fact from Panopolis – present day Akhmim – a city in Upper Egypt.³ It is possible that he studied or practised in Alexandria at some stage in his life – not unlikely given the city’s reputation as the home of learning in Roman Egypt and the subsequent pull it doubtlessly would have had on a man of Zosimos’ interests (interests which may well alone have earned him the epithet ‘Alexandrian’) – but tradition overwhelmingly holds Zosimos to be a Panopolite.

¹ *Suda*, s.v. Ζώσιμος (Z 168 Adler). See introductory subsection on the Greek title to Zosimos’ *Visions. On Virtue and Interpretation* 11.

² Mert. xvi. See also Jackson 1978: 4-5. The reference to Julius Africanus appears at *On What the Art Said About All Bodies in Treating a Single Dye* 1 (CAAG 3.18); the reference to the Serapeion appears at *Omega* 5.

³ *Suda*, s.v. Ζώσιμος. Note that Panopolis is a Greek exonym for the city known by the Egyptians as *Hnt-Mn*. The indigenous Egyptians also referred to the city as Χέμμις (Hdt. 2.91; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 356d) (or Χεμμώ, according to Diod. Sic. 1.18) – χημε in Coptic – providing a possible etymology for the term alchemy (with the prefix *al-* being the Arabic definite article, seen also in terms like alembic (*al-* + ἄμβιξ)). Another possible etymology for the term is the Arabic definite article prefixed onto χημεία (which appears at *True Book of Sophe* 1 (CAAG 3.42)), from the verb χέω (I pour a liquid / I smelt metal) (see further Mert. xcvi).

Panopolis was famous in Late Antiquity as a thriving hub of intellectual exchange and synthesis, especially in terms of religio-philosophical thought, blending Judaeo-Christian, Greek, and indigenous Egyptian traditions. Although it remained a pagan city into the 5th century, Panopolis became a centre for several emerging religious currents, particularly Gnosticism and Hermeticism, both of which heavily influenced Zosimos' worldview.⁴ These religio-philosophical currents – which overlap in several key areas, including a dualistic cosmology and a notion that salvation can be achieved through the acquisition of mystical knowledge – will be explored in great detail throughout the present thesis. These traditions, however, did not simply exist side-by-side; rather, there developed a vibrant, dynamic atmosphere of intellectual syncretism, in which Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Judaeo-Christian thought intermingled. This produced a stream of synthesised intellectual currents, culminating in magical healing spells addressed to 'Jesus Horus, son of Isis' and the school of Hermeticism, based on a fusion of Greek philosophy, Egyptian religious tradition, and Christian mysticism.⁵ As is explored in greater depth in the section on the literary context of *The Visions*, Panopolis – also famous for its Greek literary culture – developed into a flourishing copyist hub, where a range of texts, ranging from Biblical scriptures and Judaeo-Christian apocrypha to Platonic treatises and indigenous Egyptian wisdom literature were copied and circulated.⁶ It is in this context that Zosimos wrote.

Indeed, Zosimos came to be something of an exemplar of the syncretistic mindset which defined Late Antique intellectual culture in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Throughout his corpus, Zosimos treats figures such as Christ and Hermes as equally central to his worldview, while also treating figures such as Plato, Moses, and Thoth as equally authoritative sources of some ancient mystical wisdom.⁷ It is for this reason that Zosimos' personal religious views have been a topic of intense scholarly debate. It would, however, be a mistake to consider Zosimos a religious universalist; rather, Zosimos' unique synthesis of these religio-philosophical influences into a coherent, yet deeply layered, religious and alchemical tradition stems from the fact that he believed that these select currents could be traced to a single primitive tradition, which eventually split into two strands: Judaeo-Christian and Egyptian (that is to say, Gnostic and Hermetic).⁸ Despite this web of traditions with which Zosimos associated

⁴ On Gnosticism, see especially Jonas 1958; Pearson 2007; Brakke 2012. On Hermeticism, see especially Fowden 1986. These two systems are crucial for an understanding of Zosimos' worldview; on overlaps between the Gnostic, the Hermetic, and the Zosimean, see Mertens 2002: 172-4. The Temple of Min – which was the largest in Panopolis – was found to be full of engraved alchemical symbols which were studied and deciphered by medieval Islamic alchemical scholars (El Daly 2003: 51).

⁵ *P. Berlin* 8313b (see further Frankfurter 2018: 1-2).

⁶ Fowden 1986: 174; Smith 2002: 237.

⁷ Zosimos' unique synthesis of these religio-philosophical influences is discussed below in the section on Zosimos' alchemy.

⁸ Cf. Fraser 2007: 39 for Zosimos as a religious universalist.

himself, it can safely be asserted that Zosimos was a Christian, owing to his fundamental belief in the soteriological power of Christ. Indeed, this is the conclusion drawn by Dufault in his article exploring Zosimos' own religious convictions.⁹ The most obvious example of this belief in Zosimos' corpus comes at the end of his Gnostic account of the creation of man and the story of man's place on Earth in his *On the Letter Omega* (hereafter, *Omega*). As Zosimos narrates, *Phōs* (the spiritual man of pure light) was persuaded by daemons to 'put on Adam' (ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν...Ἀδάμ), and thus was enslaved in the external man (δεδουλαγωγημένου αὐτοῦ τὸν ἔξω ἄνθρωπον).¹⁰ In other words, mankind became trapped in the corporeal prison of the body which tied them to the sensible world. Zosimos, however, claims that one's inner intelligence makes it apparent that man can be redeemed and returned to the spiritual realm by Christ:

φησὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς ἡμῶν · ὁ δὲ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ πάντα δυνάμενος, καὶ πάντα γινόμενος, ὅτε θέλει, ὡς θέλει φαίνει ἐκάστῳ · Ἀδάμ προσῆν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς <ὄς> ἀνήνεγκεν ὅπου καὶ τὸ πρότερον διῆγον φῶτες καλούμενοι.

Our intelligence says: the son of God, able to do everything and able to be everything, whenever he wants, appears as he wants to each person. Jesus Christ attached himself to Adam and led him back to the place where spirits had previously lived.¹¹

Although it is famously difficult to define early Christianity, this fundamental belief in the soteriological power of Christ seems clearly to qualify Zosimos as a Christian, both by modern and Late Antique syncretistic standards.¹² Even though he religiously identified primarily as a Christian, it appears that Zosimos ethnically identified primarily as an Egyptian.¹³ Prior to the aforementioned Gnostic aetiology of man's attachment to the material world, Zosimos describes how Hermes interpreted the Hebrew Bible in both Greek and Egyptian terms (εἰρμηνεύσε πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑβραϊδα ἑλληνιστὶ καὶ αἰγυπτιστὶ), and that the first man is called Thoth 'by us' and Adam 'by those people': οὕτως οὖν καλεῖται ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ὁ παρ' ἡμῶν Θωϋθ καὶ παρ' ἐκείνοις Ἀδάμ.¹⁴ Zosimos' ἐκείνοις refers to those adopting the Jewish (and eventually Christian) tradition, while the alchemist counts himself amongst the Egyptians (παρ' ἡμῶν). This self-identification aligns with Zosimos' geo-

⁹ Dufault 2022.

¹⁰ *Omega* 7.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² See e.g., Frankfurter 2021.

¹³ Dufault 2022: 145.

¹⁴ *Omega* 5-6.

cultural context; Panopolis, in addition to remaining pagan throughout Zosimos' life, retained an indigenous Egyptian identity, with cults to Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Min continuing deep into the period of Roman occupation in Egypt.¹⁵ It is worth noting that Zosimos does not seem to have recognised any kind of contradiction in his identifying primarily as an Egyptian, his treating Hermes and Thoth as authoritative (divine, even), and his belief in the soteriological power of Christ; indeed, Zosimos embodies the syncretistic atmosphere which pervaded and defined Late Antique intellectual culture in Panopolis. This syncretistic style is evident throughout his entire corpus, perhaps especially in *The Visions*, throughout which – as will be demonstrated throughout the present commentary – a range of Hellenistic, Judaeo-Christian, and Egyptian traditions seamlessly interact to form a narrative which espouses a coherent alchemical worldview.

Whilst his interest in alchemy is plain to see, Zosimos' exact career – his entrance into the esoteric world of alchemical practice – has come to be a topic of huge scholarly debate. At no stage does Zosimos refer to his own line of work; he refers to himself simply and frequently as a philosopher (φιλόσοφος), regarding the likes of Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus among his intellectual forefathers.¹⁶ This, however, does little to illuminate the means by which he was able to gain access to mystical and alchemical knowledge and resources. Three careers have been suggested in Zosimean scholarship: Dufault (2019) has suggested that Zosimos was a client scholar; Grimes (2018) has suggested that Zosimos was a priest involved in temple metallurgy; and Escolano-Poveda (2022) has suggested that Zosimos was a high-ranking member of a temple workshop. Dufault's hypothesis places Zosimos within the context of a patron-client relationship, in which he would have been an expert craftsman, philosopher, and Christian scholar – educated in Jewish, Platonic, and Hermetic thought – working for a wealthy family or individual, for whom he could provide tutelage, practical alchemical services, and serve as a general symbol of intellectual status.¹⁷ Dufault suggests that Zosimos may have been a client in the home of Theosebeia, the addressee of many Zosimean epistles and the recipient of a great deal of alchemical and religious instruction.¹⁸ As Dufault states, scholarly patronage could have been a means by which subjects came to be legitimised and rendered part of an established curriculum – a curriculum through which Zosimos attempted to turn Theosebeia away from Egyptian alchemical traditions, practised by figures such as Nilus, and towards the Judaic, syncretised tradition which he endorsed, based on the likes of Pseudo-Democritus and

¹⁵ Smith 2002: 238.

¹⁶ Viano 2018b: 469.

¹⁷ Dufault 2019: 117.

¹⁸ Cf. *CMA Syr.* 308, which describes Theosebeia as a priestess. On the possibility that Theosebeia did not exist, but is rather a literary invention, personifying Christian virtue and alchemical learning through initiation, see Edwards 2015: 153.

Maria the Jewess.¹⁹ As Escolano-Poveda retorts, however, this suggestion considers neither the practicalities of Zosimos' physical alchemical work nor his interest in and endorsement of Egyptian temple traditions on several occasions throughout his corpus, nor indeed does Dufault's hypothesis explain how Zosimos came to acquire his alchemical knowledge prior to being a 'scholar-for-hire', his suggestion being that Zosimos may formerly have been involved in temple practices (as Grimes and Escolano-Poveda propose), with the libraries attached to certain Egyptian temples being repositories of such secret knowledge.²⁰ The second possibility for Zosimos' career – as Grimes suggests – is that he was a priest specifically involved in temple metallurgy, which was combined with Greek philosophy to create what can be recognised as Graeco-Egyptian alchemical practice.²¹ Grimes's argument is largely based on a Zosimean fragment preserved in the Syriac tradition which hints at a wider sacred metallurgical tradition within Egyptian temples, aimed at the ritualised production of cult statues.²² Whilst Egyptian temples were often centres for production, including metallurgical production, Escolano-Poveda notes that there would have been a difference in the privileges afforded to uninitiated and initiated temple personnel (a division, respectively, between statue makers in a workshop associated with a particular temple culture and the priests within that temple) in terms of their access to sacred knowledge.²³ The most compelling hypothesis concerning Zosimos' line of work comes from Escolano-Poveda herself, who suggests that Zosimos was a high-ranking member of a metallurgical workshop which specialised in the production of sacred objects.²⁴ Whilst access to the sacred inner rooms of temples (the type which one of Zosimos' characters describes as τὰ ἄδύτα, 1.14) was ordinarily reserved for priests, evidence from the Chamber of Gold at the Temple of Dendera demonstrates that exceptions were made for certain uninitiated specialists, including sculptors, inlayers, and indeed goldsmiths in specific contexts, such as the placement of sacred statues.²⁵ This suggestion is the one which best fits the available literary evidence and historical context. Indeed, this would allow for Zosimos' involvement in temple culture, his access to sacred spaces and protected knowledge, as well as allowing space for his clear interest in physical

¹⁹ Dufault 2019: 92, 144. See also Escolano-Poveda 2020: 285. For Zosimos' reference to Nilus, see *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnesia 8* (CAAG 3.27). On Zosimos' acquiring his alchemical knowledge from time spent closely involved in Egyptian temple culture, see Fowden 1986: 66-7.

²⁰ Escolano-Poveda 2020: 285. On priests becoming client scholars following economic crises in temple culture across Egypt during the period of Christianisation in Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 2003. Note, however, that this may be an inappropriate model for Zosimos, given that temple culture in Panopolis seems to have continued to thrive deep into the Late Antique period. On alchemical recipes being kept in royal archives and temple libraries – comparably to industrial secrets being keenly guarded today – see Luck 1985: 436.

²¹ See the following introductory section on Graeco-Egyptian alchemy.

²² *CMA Syr.* 2.223. Grimes 2018: 84.

²³ Escolano-Poveda 2022: 83-4.

²⁴ *ibid.* 115.

²⁵ *Dend.* 8.128.15-131.6.

alchemical practice, bridging the gap between the mystical and metallurgical, as Zosimos does throughout his corpus.

Graeco-Egyptian Alchemy

Much like the religious traditions practised throughout Egypt during Zosimos' time, alchemy is itself the result of cultural syncretism. The result of his work on the birth and development of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy in this context, Arthur Hopkins famously entitled his monograph *Alchemy: Child of Greek Philosophy*. Indeed, it is widely accepted that alchemy developed from an application of Greek philosophy onto Egyptian chemical techniques for tincturing metals and dyeing fabrics, the sort with which Zosimos may have become familiar through his work as a craftsman in a metallurgical guild.²⁶ Several strands of Greek philosophy – including primarily Presocratic and Platonic notions of atomism and the *prima materia*, as well as Aristotelian and Platonic notions of substantive qualities – clearly had a profound influence on the minds behind ancient alchemy, and acted as a theoretical basis for the practice.²⁷ Whilst the simplicity of Hopkins's title is at least somewhat rhetorical, the importance of a range of intellectual traditions, beyond the Hellenic, which led to the birth of Late Antique alchemy can hardly be overstated. To refer to the practice simply as a 'child of Greek philosophy' is to ignore the impact of Judaeo-Christian and indigenous Egyptian thought, as well as the fact that much of the Greek philosophy which reached the earliest alchemists had been recast in light of these other traditions. For example, Gnostic and Hermetic notions of redemption from the material world, as well as Philo's reinterpretation of Platonic theories on Nature in the light of Jewish wisdom literature, significantly affected alchemical theory and practice.²⁸ The syncretism between all of these threads will be explored in great detail throughout the present edition.

Graeco-Egyptian alchemical authors are generally regarded as split into three distinct groups: the 'semi-mythical'; the 'expounders'; and the 'exegetes'.²⁹ The 'semi-mythical' grouping refers to a series of anonymous alchemical authors whose works are preserved only as quotations or paraphrases – either scientific or philosophical in nature – in the treatises of later writers, where they are attributed

²⁶ Hopkins 1934. See further Fest. 1.218-9; Hopkins 1938a: 424; Luck 1985: 436.

²⁷ The philosophical arguments which form this theoretical basis are discussed in 'Scientific Context'.

²⁸ This reinterpretation of Greek philosophy in light of Judaeo-Christian and Egyptian thought, and especially its reinterpretation in light of pre-existent alchemical traditions and theories, is discussed by Viano: "on pourrait dire que la pratique des alchimistes est le fondement de leur appropriation de la philosophie grecque, et non l'inverse" (Viano 2005: 92).

²⁹ This division was first proposed by Fest. 1.238-40. On the difficulty of establishing an exact chronology of ancient alchemical authors, see Letrouit 1995.

to names such as Hermes, Agathodaemon, Cleopatra, Moses, and Maria the Jewess.³⁰ The most important text from this selection of authors – although it is very poorly preserved – is the *Natural and Mystical Things* (Φύσικα καὶ Μυστικὰ) of Ps.-Democritus.³¹ This is not the earliest extant alchemical source, but is the earliest text to which later Graeco-Egyptian alchemists make specific reference.³² The writings attributed to the ‘semi-mythical’ authors are dated from the 1st to 3rd century. The second grouping – the ‘expounders’ – develop and systematise the techniques and theories attributed to the aforementioned authors, and are the ones who make the most reference to their own practices. Zosimos himself is by far the most influential and prolific alchemist within this group. The final set of alchemical authors within the Graeco-Egyptian subset are the ‘exegetes’ – figures like Olympiodorus, Stephanus, and Comarius, dating primarily to the 5th century – whose texts interpret and preserve the treatises of the expounders (Zosimos, Synesius etc). Included in this final subsection is the anonymous early exegete of Zosimos’ *Visions*, author of the text *On Virtue and Interpretation* (CAAG 3.6). Whilst this text is fascinating for the glimpse it offers into how ancient Graeco-Egyptian alchemists themselves interpreted Zosimos’ work, nothing further is known about its author.

The most sophisticated definition of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy to date can be attributed to Grimes:

Early Greco-Egyptian alchemy (first through fourth centuries CE) is a craft (*technē*) rooted in ancient artisanal traditions involving the coloration of metals. Alchemical literature, which began to appear in Roman Egypt, consists of recipes and notes about techniques and equipment; these often include religious and philosophical ideas about the transmutation of the qualities of matter, as well as legends about the origins and great masters of their craft.³³

³⁰ On the tendency to recast pagan deities into ancient sources for secret, mystical knowledge, see Lightfoot 2007: 70-7.

³¹ Ps.-Democritus is often identified as Bolos of Mendes, though cf. Hershbell 1987: 8.

³² The earliest extant Graeco-Egyptian alchemical texts – the *Leiden Papyrus* and the *Stockholm Papyrus* – have been dated between 250-300 AD, making them roughly contemporaneous with Zosimos. They were also discovered in the Thebaid, a vast provincial region of ancient Egypt which comprised the southernmost nomes of Upper Egypt, including Panopolis. They contain a series of recipes and technical instructions for gold and silver tincturing, as well as the creation and manipulation of precious stones.

³³ Grimes 2022: 78. This definition comes as a direct response to Edmonds’s definition: “Alchemy in the ancient Greco-Roman world may be defined as the art or craft of the transmutation of the qualities of matter. Such a definition hinges on the theoretical aspect, stressing the importance of considering qualities as transferrable in the abstract, but it encompasses a range of practices, from procedures to change the colour of metals to rituals to purify and perfect the soul” (Edmonds 2019: 270).

Grimes's two fascinating notes on 'religious' ideas and 'legends about the origins' of alchemy relate primarily to the Zosimean corpus, in which these ideas play a central role in making Zosimos' alchemical style unique among other Graeco-Egyptian practitioners.

Zosimos' Alchemy

André-Jean Festugière, the philologist famous for his work on Neo-Platonic and Hermetic texts and trends in the Late Antique period, referred to Zosimos as the "father of religious alchemy".³⁴ Although some have argued that Graeco-Egyptian alchemy had always been fundamentally religious in nature – indeed it may be somewhat anachronistic to divide alchemical literature into its 'technical' and 'religio-philosophical' components in the first place – it is in Zosimos' works that we find the most thorough picture of the ancient art as simultaneously a (proto-) scientific practice aimed at the transmutation and perfection of matter, and also a spiritual practice aimed at the transmutation and perfection of the soul.³⁵ The logic behind this association is certainly easy to follow: if matter can be perfected by drawing out the divine spark of gold within an otherwise base substance, surely the same can occur by releasing the soul from the body. In fact, as discussed in depth at 'Scientific Context', the alchemical process of drawing a vapour from a metallic body is discussed in terms of drawing $\pi\nu\epsilon\tilde{\upsilon}\mu\alpha$ from $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$, highlighting this key analogy between the purification inherent in bodily transformations and that inherent in alchemical transformations.³⁶ The notion of freeing the soul from its corporeal prison was certainly not new in the 4th century AD; such ideas had existed in Graeco-Roman thought for the best part of a millennium, with Plato's treatises providing a sophisticated early picture of this dualistic worldview.³⁷ Certain interpretations of dualism by Zosimos' time, however, took on a more radical shape, no longer simply asserting the priority of the spiritual realm, but coming to regard the sensible world as evil, the view of several sects of Late

³⁴ Fest. 1.260.

³⁵ See e.g., Grimes 2018: 84. It seems similarly anachronistic to divide Hermetic literature into practical and philosophical components, as editors of the *Corpus Hermeticum* have tended to do. It seems that these are divisions which would not have been made by ancient practitioners.

³⁶ Some alchemists seem to have taken the analogy of the human body as an alchemical vessel / experimental substance a little too literally. Ps.-Democritus explains that Ostanos died by ingesting poison in an attempt to release his soul from his body (Martelli 2013: 83).

³⁷ Such dualistic attitudes are explored at length in e.g., Pl. *Ph.*, *Ti*.

Antique Gnosticism.³⁸ This anti-materialistic stance is pervasive throughout Zosimos' corpus, culminating in his explicit instruction to Theosebeia to cower away from the material world (τῶν φυσικῶν τῆς ὕλης κατάπτησον).³⁹

In terms of Zosimos' confirming alchemy as a religious *praxis*, it is also significant that the term for an alchemical tincture throughout these Graeco-Egyptian treatises is βαφή, a noun formed from the verb βάπτω (I dip in liquid), the intensive form of which becomes βαπτίζω (I baptise); there is a deep connection in ancient alchemy – particularly pertinent for Zosimos – between the spiritual transformation of the self through baptism and the chemical transformation of metals through similar dipping processes.⁴⁰ This association is brought to life in *The Visions*, as Zosimos' characters are not just cut up and boiled in alembics similarly to metals, but are themselves often said to be made of metal. Indeed, Zosimos instructs his reader to imagine a man made of copper (χαλκάνθρωπος, 1.66); having barely finished that thought, however, Zosimos says that the figure has become a man made of silver (γένονεν ἀργυράνθρωπος, 1.66), and that soon the reader will find a man made of gold (εὐρήσεις χρυσάνθρωπον, 1.67). For Zosimos, alchemy was simultaneously the science of transmuting material quality, the philosophy of understanding Nature, and the religion by which the soul might be redeemed and reunited with the divine.⁴¹

It is ignorance of or apathy towards this religious aspect of alchemy which forms the basis of the majority of the anger and criticism which Zosimos directs towards his alchemical rivals. He is especially disparaging of an alchemist whom he deems as ignorant of mystical and philosophical truth as he is of correct alchemical technique, Nilus. Zosimos also regards Nilus as particularly dangerous, expressing concern that he might lead Theosebeia astray and jeopardise her salvation. Nilus is attacked throughout Zosimos' *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnesia* for a host of faults, but the primary reason is that he and the company of uneducated men (ἀπαίδευτοι ἄνδρες) he keeps are said to be more interested in gold than in philosophical theory (χρυσοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ λόγων

³⁸ Interestingly, some Gnostic sects seem to have balanced a prioritisation of the spiritual world with a belief in material monism (e.g., Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 1.4.2) discusses the Valentinian belief that all things were formed from the emotions of Sophia). Nevertheless, though complicated by some sects (e.g., the Valentinians and Naassenes), the practice of regarding the material world as evil seems clearly to have been a core element of the groups known today under the umbrella term of Gnosticism. In *Enn.* 1.9, Plotinus, a Neo-Platonist, attacks the idea that suicide is beneficial to the soul as it prematurely releases the soul from its corporeal prison and allows for its return to the divine realm. As Fowden asserts, the fact that Plotinus even felt the need to write this suggests that it was a topic of debate in his students' discourse on salvation (Fowden 1986: 90). For this idea in the Gnostic tradition, one only need recognise Christ's quasi-suicidal ideations in the *Gospel of Judas* 56.

³⁹ Fraser 2007: 49. *FC* 8.

⁴⁰ As is discussed further in connection with the religious context to *The Visions*, the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* also interestingly equates God's imparting divinity to a human through baptism and an alchemist's imparting colour to a substance through 'baptism'. The gospel even refers to both God and the Son of Man as 'dyers' (*Gospel of Philip* 43, 54).

⁴¹ Fest. 1.219. See also Lindsay 1970: 153. On alchemy as Gnostic theurgy, see Stolzenberg 1999: 29-31.

ἐπιθυμοῦντες).⁴² This distinction is noted particularly well by an anonymous alchemical author who identifies two types of alchemist: those referred to as the race of gold (χρυσέου γένους), lovers of wisdom (ἐρασταὶ τῆς σοφίας), and investigators of the egg yolk (τῆς λεκιθώδους ὕλης μεθοδευταί) – egg yolk being a common ancient alchemical analogy for the essence of gold trapped within an external body – and others referred to as people of the crucible (ὄσοι τοῦ ὄστρακίνου χοροῦ).⁴³ These men attempt to create gold for the sake of their own greed, focusing only on the material essence of alchemical practice, and are indifferent to or ignorant of the practice’s spiritual implications. That is not to say that Zosimos is totally uninterested in the income inherent in a practice which claims the ability to create gold, silver, and precious stones; he even refers to poverty as the incurable disease (τὴν ἀνίατον νόσον), expressing a hope that he might be able to conquer it through alchemical means (νικήσωσι πενίαν).⁴⁴ Alchemy clearly has practical economic value for Zosimos, but he very clearly considers this as secondary, imploring his rivals to be guided by reason, claiming that gold would then accompany them, citing reason as the master of gold: εἰ γὰρ ἠνιοχοῦντο ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου, εἶπετο ἂν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἠκολούθει ὁ χρυσός ὅ γὰρ λόγος δεσπότης ἐστὶν τοῦ χρυσοῦ.⁴⁵ Zosimos’ corpus places a level of importance on the religious implications of alchemical practice which is unparalleled in the work of his rival artisans.

Zosimos might well have been, as Festugière intimated, the first to write about this spiritual approach to alchemical practice, as well as its most vocal advocate in the ancient world, but he most certainly did not view himself as the father of this tradition. Zosimos’ belief in the legends behind alchemy’s inception and transmission, as well as the philosophical conclusions he draws as a result of these legends, add to his unique alchemical style. Zosimos claims to have been influenced by two alchemical traditions which he deems to be entirely compatible; these are what he calls the two sciences and wisdoms (δύο...ἐπιστῆμαι καὶ σοφία), those of the Egyptians and those of the Hebrews (ἡ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ ἡ τῶν Ἑβραίων), which come from ancient times (ἐκ τῶν αἰώνων).⁴⁶ He frequently references the semi-mythical authors of these traditions, asserting that the ancient writers are more authoritative and trustworthy than he is himself: ἀλλὰ μὴ οἴου ἀξιοπιστότερον ἐμὲ τῶν ἀρχαίων ξυγγραψαὶ ἰγίνωσκε ὡς οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην.⁴⁷ Zosimos considers the Jewish tradition to be a slightly adapted improvement on the Egyptian tradition, giving a great deal of authority to

⁴² *On the Body of Magnesia and its Treatment* 7 (CAAG 3.28).

⁴³ *Advice for Those Who Practice the Art* 1 (CAAG 3.10).

⁴⁴ *Omega* 12.

⁴⁵ *On the Body of Magnesia and its Treatment* 7 (CAAG 3.28).

⁴⁶ *True Book of Sophe* 1 (CAAG 3.42).

⁴⁷ *Omega* 13.

figures like Maria the Jewess, but retains many elements of the Egyptian tradition in his work.⁴⁸ As previously suggested, Zosimos' belief in the Hebrew and Egyptian alchemical traditions – mirroring his dual belief in Gnostic and Hermetic wisdom – does not render him a religio-philosophical universalist. Rather, Zosimos believed in a singular primordial alchemical tradition from which these later traditions eventually came to exist, with the Hebrew and Egyptian traditions being preserved and transmitted through temple traditions and their priests, from Old Kingdom Egypt to the Late Antique period.⁴⁹ In a passage preserved in the *Chronographia* of George Synkellos, Zosimos describes alchemy as having been revealed to mankind by daemons, who traded mystical secrets in exchange for sexual favours with the human women after whom they lusted.⁵⁰ In *Final Account* (hereafter, *FC*), however, a slightly different aetiology for alchemy is preserved. There, Zosimos claims that natural tinctures (φυσικαὶ καιρικαὶ καταβαφαί) have always existed; these tinctures are reliable and work without any outside influence from daemons.⁵¹ In a fit of greed and jealousy, however, the daemons hid these natural tinctures, giving mankind unnatural tinctures (ἀφύσικαι καιρικαὶ καταβαφαί), which work only with the aid of daemons:

ἵνα μὴ διώκωνται παρὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ λιτανεύωνται καὶ παρακαλῶνται, οἰκονομοῦνται διὰ θυσιῶν...ἔκρυψαν πάντα τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ αὐτόματα, οὐ μόνον φθονοῦντες αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῆς ἑαυτῶν ζωῆς φροντίζοντες, ἵνα μὴ μαστίζωνται ἐκδιωκόμενοι καὶ λιμῶ τιμωρῶνται, θυσίας μὴ λαμβάνοντες, ἐποίησαν οὕτως ἔκρυψαν τὴν φυσικὴν καὶ εἰσηγήσαντο τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀφύσικον.

So that they might not be chased away by mankind, but rather receive praise, be called upon, and be treated with sacrifices...they hid all of the natural and automatic tinctures, not only because they were envious of men, but also because they were wary of their lives, lest they be whipped, driven away, and be honoured with nothing but hunger, receiving no

⁴⁸ *FC* 5. Despite the Hebrew and Egyptian traditions being, respectively, Gnostic and Hermetic, it is difficult to identify further distinctions – particularly practical – between them, owing to a lack of extant evidence. Grimes (2018: 161) suggests that the Hebrew tradition is more interested in sublimation, while the Egyptian tradition is more concerned with dilution.

⁴⁹ Fraser 2007: 34; Fowden 1986: 68.

⁵⁰ As is discussed later in the present introduction in connection with the literary context of *The Visions*, this same story about the origin of alchemy can be found in the Enochian tradition, as the angel Azazel teaches mankind to work with and colour metals in exchange for sexual favours (*1 Enoch* 8), and also the Hermetic tradition, as the angel Amnael teaches Isis about alchemy in exchange for sexual favours (*CAAG* 1.13.3).

⁵¹ Whilst Zosimos primarily uses βαφή to refer to silver dyes, the term καταβαφή seems to refer to a stronger, more permanent, more incorruptible golden dye (*On Tincturing* 1 (*CAAG* 3.37)). See also Charron 2005 (esp. 441).

sacrifices. They did the following: they hid the natural tinctures and brought unnatural tinctures to mankind.⁵²

Whether given in exchange for sexual favours (which may simply be Zosimos engaging with the Enochian tradition) or to preserve human reliance on them, Zosimos claims that daemons hid natural tinctures, replacing them with unnatural tinctures, which are unreliable and which rely on appeasing these lesser spiritual beings with sacrifices and praise. The natural tinctures are the goal of Zosimos' alchemical practice, a fact which he claims distinguishes him from rival alchemical schools who mock his ideas about alchemical and religious orthopraxy (αἱ καιρικαὶ καταβαφαὶ...εἰς χλευασμὸν ἐποίησαν τὴν περὶ καμίνων βίβλον).⁵³ Zosimos offers solutions to achieve these natural tinctures, including performing apotropaic sacrifices and being calm in one's senses and passions (καθεζομένη δὲ τῷ σώματι, καθέζου καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν) to become unified with God and to undertake alchemical processes in a religiously legitimate manner, unlike his rivals.⁵⁴ Zosimos' alchemical practice has a much greater and more sophisticated religious dynamic than that of other practitioners whom he frequently admonishes throughout his corpus. He emphasises true knowledge of the divine world (*gnōsis*), spiritually pure unification with God, and a recognition of the true redemptive power of alchemical operations at the core of his own practice. These are currents which run throughout – indeed, are fundamental to – his most famous text, *The Visions*.

⁵² FC 7. On the distinction between these tinctures, as well as an exploration of the term καιρικαί in this context, see Werrett 2023.

⁵³ *Omega 2*.

⁵⁴ FC 8.

The Visions

Of all Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature, *The Visions* of Zosimos of Panopolis stands prominently as the most captivatingly enigmatic; it is, in fact, one of the most mystifying, mystical, and mysterious texts in history.

The narrative of *The Visions* is part of a longer series of texts known as Zosimos' *Authentic Memoirs* (Mertens splits the entire Zosimean corpus into four catalogues, including texts from Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Arabic sources: *Authentic Memoirs* – including both *The Visions* and *On the Letter Omega; Chapters to Eusebia; Chapters to Theodorus; and True Book of Sophe / Final Account*).⁵⁵ For our purposes, concerned solely with *The Visions*, it will suffice to say that *The Visions* are elsewhere known as *Authentic Memoirs* 10, 11, and 12 (*Lessons* 1-3 respectively).

Summary

More detailed summaries (with scholarship and interpretative notes) for each section of the text appear before the commentary on that section. For now, however – given the relative obscurity of the work – it will be useful simply to provide a brief overview of *The Visions*, such that later introductory subsections conveying scientific, religious, and literary context, as well as points on Zosimos' style, will be easier to follow.

[1.1] In general, *The Visions* allegorises scientific and religious practices in the guise of a series of dream sequences. The text opens with some cryptic musings on alchemical theory, disguised in terms of the relationship between body and soul, and the nature of the cosmos. Zosimos states that the separation of body and soul, and the reconstitution of body and soul, are one process, just as hard metals and wet fluids also share a common nature. This monistic thread, portraying variety in the cosmos as merely illusory, continues as Zosimos claims that alchemical products are polychromatic, but are still a singular product. The introduction closes with the statement that alchemical operations are affected by timing, in particular the waxing or waning state of the Moon.

[1.2] Having mused over these things, Zosimos falls asleep, thus initiating the first dream sequence. He sees a priest standing at the top of fifteen steps over what he calls a βωμός φιαλοιδής (and eventually a φιαλοβωμός); in an attempt to retain the sense of the religious-alchemical compound

⁵⁵ Mert. xlvi-lxix. According to the *Suda*, Zosimos also wrote a no longer extant *Life of Plato*, a figure to whom he refers as thrice-great (τρίμεγας) in his *Omega* (*Suda*, s.v. Ζώσιμος; *Omega* 5). It is also worth noting that many texts attributed to Zosimos are preserved in the Syriac and Arabic alchemical traditions. On Zosimos in the Arabic tradition, see Hallum 2008.

noun, this edition translates as *Crucibaltar* (crucible + altar). It is difficult to say what exactly the setting of Zosimos' dream might be. The altar and priest certainly suggest a temple, while the text's later emphasis on initiation and an ascent towards salvation imply some planetary, cosmic setting; I suggest that the location is an imaginary temple in some liminal space between Heaven and Earth.⁵⁶ In his dream, Zosimos hears a voice from above him (which may or may not be the aforementioned priest) which says that it has descended fifteen dark steps and ascended fifteen steps of light, and that, having cast away the body, it had become a spirit.

The reader then meets Ion, a pivotal figure throughout Zosimos' narrative. Ion introduces himself as the priest of the inner sanctuaries and states that he has endured an unbearable act of violence. Ion then relates this act of violence, bizarrely recounting the story of his own death and eventual rebirth. He says that a man tore him apart, cut off his head, mashed up his flesh and bones, and burned them in a transformative fire, such that he was reborn as a spirit. Immediately after he finishes speaking, however, Ion undergoes another transformation: his eyes turn to blood and he vomits forth his own flesh, turning into a *homunculus*, the alchemical icon made famous by the likes of Goethe and Paracelsus.⁵⁷ Afraid of Ion's transformation, Zosimos bolts awake. He considers this dream, concluding that it was about 'the composition of the waters', and falls asleep again, thus initiating the second dream sequence.

[1.3] Zosimos sees the same *Crucibaltar*, but this time filled with boiling water, with a countless number of people suffering – but not dying – within the vat. Another *homunculus* – described both as the one handling the *xēria* (the product of the alchemical stage of *melanōsis* – see further on the stages of the alchemical process in 'Scientific Context') and as the 'guardian of the spirits' – approaches the alchemist and explains that the *Crucibaltar* is 'the entrance, the exit, and the process'; he later explains that the process is that of embalming, and that those wishing to obtain excellence suffer in the *Crucibaltar* before becoming spirits. Zosimos is then approached by a man made of copper who explains that he helps those in the waters write on lead tablets, look up to the sky, and keep their mouths open 'until your grapes are grown'. It is then suggested that the copper man – described using the astrological term, 'the master of the house' – may actually be Ion. Zosimos wakes once again and concludes that the cause of his dream is alchemy (more specifically, the use of a substance called 'Divine Water').⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Principe (2013: 19) also suggests a temple setting for the narrative of *The Visions*. See Escolano-Poveda 2022 for a suggestion that the setting may be an imagined version of the historical Temple of Dendera.

⁵⁷ On the *homunculus*, see 1.20 and Ball 2006.

⁵⁸ On Divine Water, see relevant subsection in Scientific Context and (esp.) Martelli 2009.

[1.4] The narrative then moves away from the dream world, as Zosimos produces further musings on the nature of Nature, the nature of the cosmos, and the nature of alchemy. In these considerations, Zosimos states the benefits of a series of opposing actions: he says that it is good to speak and good to hear; good to give and good to receive; good to be poor and good to be rich. Zosimos then takes these opposing actions to the *Crucibaltar*: he says that all things are combined and mixed together, and that all things are taken apart and separated in the altar shaped like an alchemical alembic. Nature is said to be the cause of all of these opposing forces, as it acts harmoniously – according to a specific natural method – to bring about material transformations, even onto itself.

[1.5] At this stage, Zosimos seems to address the reader directly, charging them with creating a temple in their minds (a temple which must be made of one stone and have neither beginning nor end). Zosimos tells his reader to imagine a snake guarding the temple, a sure reference to the alchemical ouroboros. They must take the snake, cut it apart, separate its bones and its flesh – in a manner reminiscent of Ion's mutilation in the first dream sequence – before bringing the constituent parts of the snake back together to form the first step of a staircase leading into the temple itself. Inside the temple, seated in a spring of the purest water, sits the priest made of copper, who has now, however, become a man of silver, and who will – Zosimos assures the reader – eventually become a man of gold.

[1.6] The narrative then returns to Zosimos' cryptic musings, as he ponders the meaning of the famous alchemical maxim: 'Nature conquers Nature'. An answer to this is not straightforwardly given. Rather, Zosimos writes two further cryptic phrases, both of which represent Nature – seemingly personified – as dizzy, in love, consuming her own face, believing that she is dead, imitating a Hebrew accent, and punishing herself, before she is said to be made lighter, and ultimately to be made complete. Zosimos gives no explicit indication of what these bizarre phrases might mean.

[1.7] Instead, he says that Nature has clearly been transformed in the reader's imagination, and that, although satisfied with themselves, they should not reveal these secrets to anyone, lest they be destroyed. Zosimos concludes this section by stating that it is beautiful to see the transformation of the four metals – lead, copper, silver, and tin – into gold.

[1.8] At the end of this first section of the text, Zosimos provides a recipe, very similar to the many technical works in his corpus, but seemingly rather out of place in *The Visions*. Provided in these lines is instruction on how an acid can be produced from salt and vitriol, and how that acid can tint whitened copper to produce the colour of gold underneath what Zosimos calls 'three smokes'. Zosimos closes the first section by reminding the reader that they can control matter, and thus create 'one thing from many things'.

[2.1] The remainder of the text is missing in half of the manuscripts which contain extracts of *The Visions* and which are considered in the present thesis (*Lessons* 2 and 3 appear in MSS A and L, but not in B and M).⁵⁹ The narrative returns to Zosimos' adventures, as he states that he wished again to climb the seven steps and to see the places of punishment which he had previously been shown by the *homunculi*. On climbing, however, Zosimos says that he got lost; in response to his ensuing state of despair, he falls asleep, implying that the aforementioned ascent happened while he was awake. Asleep, Zosimos sees another *homunculus* – one wearing royal clothes – whom he follows towards another place of punishment, a pit of fire. Shockingly, the *homunculus* hurls himself into the fire and his body is consumed by the flames. Zosimos, once again afraid of what he has seen, wakes up. He concludes that this *homunculus* is the copper man from earlier in the narrative and asserts the importance of throwing copper into the fire.

[2.2] Again wishing to climb to the places of punishment – this time specifically to the third step of the staircase – Zosimos gets closer, but again loses his way, and again falls asleep. In this dream sequence, he sees a man whom he identifies as Agathodaemon.⁶⁰ Agathodaemon leads Zosimos back to the vat of fire before he too hurls himself into the flames. Zosimos, however, holds his nerve and asks why the man lies there in the fire; Agathodaemon repeats Ion's line from the first dream, saying that he is enduring an unbearable force. Zosimos wakes up and ponders the meaning of his dream, this time asserting the importance of throwing lead into the fire.

[3.1] In the final section, Zosimos claims to see another sacrificial priest, said to be the 'priest of the inner sanctuaries', as Ion was described, standing over an altar – the narrative comes full circle and is startlingly similar to the first dream. Zosimos then falls asleep – again implying that his previous vision happened while awake – and climbs to the fourth step, approaching the place of punishment without the assistance of a guide. Two men approach Zosimos: one carries a sword; the other carries a third person, a bound sacrificial victim. The first man gives instructions on dismemberment and purification, after which Zosimos wakes up and asserts that he understands that his dreams have been about 'the liquids of alchemy'. The men, having followed Zosimos into the waking world, confirm that he has understood and that the work is complete. Thus ends Zosimos' narrative.

⁵⁹ The implications of this are discussed in the introductory subsection entitled 'Manuscript Tradition and Modern Editions'.

⁶⁰ On the significance of Agathodaemon's name, see the introduction to *Lesson* 2.2.

The Title

Perhaps one of the most mysterious aspects of this text is its title. The manuscript tradition preserves two different titles: whilst MS M reads Ζωσίμου τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἀρετῆς (*Divine Zosimos' On Excellence*), MSS B and M' read περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων (*On the Composition of the Waters*). Interestingly, MSS A and L somewhat combine the two, in the grammatically rather awkward title Ζωσίμου ἀρετῆς περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων. The present edition follows the lead of Mertens by adjoining the two separate titles, thus: Ζωσίμου τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἀρετῆς ἠ περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων (*Divine Zosimos' On Excellence and On the Composition of the Waters*).⁶¹ In keeping with the scholarly tradition, and for the sake of brevity and clarity, the text will hereafter be referred to simply as *The Visions*.

The question remains, however: what exactly is meant by ἀρετή and σύνθεσις ὑδάτων in these contexts? Although the texts adhere to the well-known convention of technical treatises (found across philosophical, medical, and indeed alchemical texts) of being titled περὶ X, with X being the subject matter of the discussion, a reader of *The Visions* will readily notice that the text does not fit the regular explanatory style of such technical works – not least because it is a fictional narrative – nor does it at any stage clearly discuss excellence or the composition of any liquid. One could say that the title is the opening mystery of a text which requires a great deal of interpretative work by its reader.

The problem of what exactly is meant by σύνθεσις ὑδάτων (the composition of the waters) and how it relates to the content of the work is the slightly easier of the two to solve. It seems likely that 'the waters' here refers to a substance which Zosimos calls θεῖον ὕδωρ, which can be translated either as Divine Water or sulphurous water.⁶² The nature of this Divine Water is discussed in the subsection of this introduction entitled 'Scientific Context'.

The problem of what exactly is meant by ἀρετή (excellence) and how it relates to the content of the narrative is a more difficult question. On the surface, as suggested, Zosimos' text makes no clear reference to excellence or virtue, so the standard definition of ἀρετή seems to be an inappropriate translation. Given the relative paucity of Zosimean scholarship, the question of the title's true meaning has received a surprising amount of attention. Karle points to the line ἡ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετὴν ('silence teaches excellence', 1.77) to suggest that ἀρετή represents the supernatural powers of the alchemists (*die übernatürlichen Fähigkeiten der Alchemisten*) – presumably to control

⁶¹ See also Grimes 2018: 127.

⁶² Zosimos provides a litany of different terms which might refer to the liquid, including 'sea water', 'vinegar', and 'the urine of a prepubescent boy' (*On Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.25)).

Nature and to cause material change themselves – which the alchemists acquire through contemplation of and some kind of union with the divine.⁶³ This certainly seems to be the implication of ἀρετή as it appears in Hermetic literature. In a treatise which presents Hermes Trismegistos teaching Tat, his son, the secrets of rebirth (παλιγγενεσία), the thrice-greatest prophet explains that Tat will receive immortal virtues (τὰ ἀθάνατα (τῆς ἀρετῆς) γεννήματα) which stem from his understanding of truth (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας) as well as from his knowledge of himself and God (ἔγνωσ σαυτὸν καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἡμέτερον).⁶⁴ Further, Hermes warns Tat to keep silent about this virtue ([τῆς ἀρετῆς] σιγὴν ἐπάγγελαι), revealing the lesson on rebirth to no-one (μηδενὶ...ἐκφα[ι]νεῖν τῆς παλιγγενεσίας τὴν παράδοσιν), simultaneously echoing the line of Zosimos quoted above (ἡ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετὴν, 1.77) and the line immediately preceding this: μηδενὶ σαφῶς κατάλεγε τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρετὴν ('explain such great excellence to no-one', 1.76).⁶⁵ Although no reference is made to Zosimos' work, Jonas, in his crucial monograph on Gnosticism, suggests a Gnostic understanding of the term ἀρετή as that which is achieved when one attempts to understand God, when one attempts to achieve *gnōsis*.⁶⁶ There is clearly a common thread between these suggestions.

Mertens takes a slightly different approach, developing the suggestion of Lalande that ἀρετή retains its general meaning of the virtuous excellence sought by mankind throughout *The Visions*, but has a specialised definition for Zosimos of the perfection imbued into metallic bodies by the alchemist ("le but de l'alchimie...de traiter les métaux vils pour en faire des métaux parfaits").⁶⁷ This notion that the term refers to the transformative power of Nature is supported by Dufault.⁶⁸ I argue that the true interpretation of ἀρετή in the title of *The Visions* is likely a complex interplay between all of the above possibilities. It represents simultaneously the perfection which Nature effects during the transformation of matter, as well as the quest for and achievement of this power of perfection by the initiated alchemist: that is, the power to perfect matter, and indeed to be reborn, having perfected themselves. In short, the general power to bring about material and spiritual transformation is encapsulated within the complex term ἀρετή.

There are several references to ἀρετή throughout Zosimos' narrative, and it is worth testing this definition against each. I hope to demonstrate that my interpretation is the only one which

⁶³ Karle 1925: 33-6.

⁶⁴ CH 13.22a-b.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* The term παράδοσις is elsewhere used by Zosimos (in a fragment preserved by the Byzantine chronicler George Synkellos, *Chron.* 24) and in the Hermetic *Kore Kosmou* (4.30) to represent the transmission of alchemical knowledge (see Bull 2018: 19; Lopes da Silveira 2020: 60).

⁶⁶ Jonas 1958: 277. Jonas's claim is made in light of 2 *Corinth.* 10:5.

⁶⁷ Mert. 213; Lalande 1972: s.v. vertu.

⁶⁸ Dufault 2015: 241.

satisfactorily explains each instance. Beyond the title, the first appearance of the term comes as Zosimos sees men in boiling water who wish to achieve excellence (οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν, 1.30): those suffering are undergoing a perfecting, initiatory experience which will leave them with the power to bring about transformation. The second appearance of the term comes as Zosimos mentions the ‘nature of excellence’ at the end of an exploration into Nature’s powers both for transformation and for making a monistic cosmos appear to be teeming with diversity and multiplicity (καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ παντός κόσμου τῆς ἀρετῆς φύσις καὶ σύνδεσμος, 1.54-5): this is self-explanatory. The third appearance of the term comes as Zosimos cryptically explains that his text is a search for virtues (καὶ ζητήσεις ἀρετῶν, 1.67-8): the odd plural is discussed further in the comment on this line, but one can see that the quest for transformative power fits my suggested definition of ἀρετή.⁶⁹ The fourth appearance of the term comes as Zosimos says that the ‘time of excellence’ affects all things (καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς μεθοδεύει χρόνος, 1.69): the phrase ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς...χρόνος is explained fully in the comment on this line, where I suggest that the ‘time of excellence’ refers to the moment of initiation. The fifth (previously mentioned) appearance of the term comes as Zosimos warns his reader not to share their knowledge of this excellence with anyone else (μηδενὶ σαφῶς κατάλεγε τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρετήν, 1.76): secrecy surrounding alchemical knowledge and transformative power is an obvious implication here. Finally, the sixth (again, previously mentioned) appearance of the term comes as Zosimos claims that silence teaches excellence (ἡ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετήν, 1.77): here one need only look to Karle’s claim, mentioned above, that the ability to perfect matter – which is the *magnum opus* of alchemy – is born through internal contemplation of God.⁷⁰ This use also, of course, fits the title of the work: Zosimos’ text is indeed concerned with the perfection of both physical matter and the soul. It is important to remember that Zosimos may not have given this title to his work; indeed, it may have been added by a later exegete or a Byzantine scribe. The consistency, however, with which the term ἀρετή is used throughout the text with fairly non-traditional implications suggests that the title may well be authentic.⁷¹

This text – Ζωσίμου τοῦ Θείου περὶ ἀρετῆς ἢ περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων, *The Visions* – is subdivided into three sections (in Greek, three πράξεις). The latter two are explicitly labelled in MSS A and L as, respectively, Ζωσίμου πράξις β’ and ποίημα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ζωσίμου πράξις γ’. The title of the first section in the same manuscripts does not include the term πράξις, but its position as the first of several sections is denoted with α’ (for the sake of conventional continuity with πράξις β and πράξις γ, the term πράξις is supplied in the title given in the present edition). The convention of titling

⁶⁹ On the use of ζήτησις in alchemical literature, see Lopes da Silveira 2020.

⁷⁰ Karle 1925: 36. In *FC* 8, Zosimos also tells Theosebeia to calm her emotions and to remain silent during prayer.

⁷¹ Dufault (2015: 241) also argues for the authenticity of *The Visions*’ Greek title.

individual πράξεις within the text is not employed by the scribes of MSS B, M, and M', but it is important to note that only *Lesson 1* – or even only the first paragraph of *Lesson 1* – appear in these manuscripts, so perhaps this titular convention was deemed unnecessary by the manuscripts' respective scribes.

How exactly one ought to translate πράξις in this context is also interesting. *LSJ* offers several possible interpretations of the term, including (among others) action and treatise.⁷² It seems to me that these are both realistic options. The text certainly functions as a treatise, but it is also one aimed at providing its reader with a *praxis*: either a *praxis* for achieving spiritual perfection, or a technical *praxis* consisting of alchemical operations (or indeed both). The use of πράξις, therefore, may play on both of these senses, being simultaneously a lesson on an edifying action and Zosimos' intra-narrative performance of that action. Scholarship has tended to translate πράξις as 'Lesson' and this edition follows suit.

Manuscript Tradition and Modern Editions

Extracts of Zosimos' *Visions* can be found in over forty manuscripts, dating from the 10th to the 19th centuries. There are, however, four manuscripts which are considered particularly important as the earliest (all pre-16th century) and the best preserved:

- *Parisinus Graecus* 2327 (f. 84v-88v: *Lessons 1, 2, and 3*) (MS A);
- *Parisinus Graecus* 2325 (f. 88v: *Lesson 1.1*) (MS B);
- *Laurentianus Graecus* 86.16 (f. 90v-95v: *Lessons 1, 2, and 3*) (MS L);
- *Marcianus Graecus* 299 (f. 92v-95r: *Lesson 1*) (MS M); (f. 115v: *Lesson 1.1*) (MS M').

Berthelot and Ruelle present MSS A, B, and M as the most useful manuscripts which they used to edit Zosimos' entire corpus, to which Mertens adds MS L.

MS A, dated to the 15th century, contains the entire text of *The Visions* (i.e. *Lessons 1, 2, and 3*). A colophon gives the exact provenance of this codex: it was copied in Khandak, Crete, during June 1478 by a Corfiot scribe, Theodoros Pelecanos, and – having been later owned by a Corcyrean collector, Antonius Eparchus – was soon acquired by the Bibliothèque Royale in Fontainebleau, where it was

⁷² *LSJ*, s.v. πράξις (p.1459). Interestingly, *LSJ* also offers 'magical spell' as a possible alternative, as the term is used in this sense at e.g., *P. Mag. Par.* 1.227 and *P. Mag. Lond.* 125.40. See *Omega 4* for the distinction which Zosimos draws between magic and religion.

listed on an inventory in 1545.⁷³ This extremely well-preserved codex is now held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

MS B, dated to the 13th century, contains only the introductory section to *Lesson 1* (section 1.1). That this manuscript does not contain the more ‘narrative-driven’ sections of *The Visions*, but only the technical opening, ought not be a surprise; the scribe clearly prioritises technical aspects of alchemical operations and alchemical theory throughout the manuscript, to the extent that Mertens suggests it must have been a ‘manuel d’atelier’.⁷⁴ The manuscript is relatively poorly preserved, though the page containing the introduction to Zosimos’ text remains largely legible (save for some faded ink near the spine). Although no details of the history of the manuscript’s ownership are given in MS B, Mertens has attempted to reconstruct a tradition of possession based on a colophon in *Parisinus Graecus 2275* (a copy of MS B) and concludes that the manuscript was held in Venice, where it was copied, in 1465. The manuscript is now held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

MS L, dated to the 15th century, contains the entirety of *The Visions*. Again owing to a colophon, it is known that the scribe of MS L was a certain Antonius Dranganas, who completed his transcription in December 1492. The manuscript is in good condition. There is some debate as to whether MS L is a copy of MS A; in their texts of *The Visions*, however, there are several textual discrepancies, and it seems possible that they may instead have had a common source, hence the use of MS L in this edition.⁷⁵ The manuscript is now held at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

MS M, dated to the 10th or 11th century, is not only the earliest surviving copy of Zosimos’ text, but the earliest surviving copy of any manuscript containing copies of Graeco-Egyptian alchemical treatises. It contains only *Lesson 1* of Zosimos’ text. MS M is known to have been in the possession of Cardinal Bessarion before its acquisition by the Marciana. Although the text is in good condition, it has clearly been taken apart and reordered over the years. Based on the table of contents, one can see that several texts are in the wrong place / order, and several folios are missing entirely.⁷⁶ Another oddity is that another copy solely of the introduction to *Lesson 1* (MS M’) is contained within the M codex. The manuscript is now held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

The difference in style between *Lesson 1* and *Lessons 2* and *3* – as well as their relative distribution in the manuscripts – is a peculiarity of the text. The latter two sections are considerably shorter and

⁷³ Mert. xxxii; Wolters 2006: 68.

⁷⁴ Mert. xxx.

⁷⁵ Mert. xlii, with additional bibliography.

⁷⁶ Mert. xxii-xxiii; Saffrey 1995.

considerably more direct than *Lesson 1*, as well as having a different tone: they seem far less concerned with Nature and alchemical theory and far more interested in the oneiric narrative. It is for this reason that one might suspect that *Lessons 2* and *3* are summaries – abridged by Byzantine scribes – of a longer and more theoretical tractate which was originally penned by Zosimos.⁷⁷ Their language and grammar, however, do not obviously suggest a different author, and there is certainly thematic and narratological continuity. Ultimately, it is impossible to be certain. This edition treats the latter two *Lessons* as summaries of an authentic text, but acknowledges the problems and limitations with such an assumption.

Given the abrupt ending of Zosimos' narrative, and the punctuation marks which appear at the end of *Lesson 3* in MS A, it has also been suggested that the text as we have it is incomplete.⁷⁸ Whilst this is discussed in greater detail in the comment on this final line, it is worth stating that I see no reason to assume that it is incomplete: such punctuation (: - -) appears at the end of almost every text in MS A; the narrative reaches a logical conclusion of Zosimos' achieving *gnōsis* and the work being said to be complete (ἡ τέχνη πεπλήρωται, 3.14); and the summarised nature of the final sections would account for the admitted relative abruptness of the ending.

The earliest modern edition of *The Visions* is in Berthelot and Ruelle's 1888 *Collection des Anciens Alchimistes Grecs (Seconde Livraison)*. This source-book – a collaboration between chemist Marcellin Berthelot and Classicist Charles-Émile Ruelle – contains all of the texts they deemed to constitute the Zosimean corpus, though several are now considered not in fact to have been written by Zosimos himself, but rather by later alchemical exegetes working from Zosimos' treatises.⁷⁹ These texts are accompanied by a French translation. A particular peculiarity about Berthelot and Ruelle's edition of *The Visions* specifically is that it has three other texts in between *Lessons 1* and *2*: *On Quicklime*; *Agathodaemon*; and *Hermes*.⁸⁰ Whilst these are three fascinating texts, amounting to 45 lines in total, they do not appear, based on a holistic view of the manuscripts and their individual subjects, to make up part of *The Visions*. All editors of the text after Berthelot and Ruelle have also rejected their inclusion.

⁷⁷ Whilst, to my knowledge, the theory that *Lessons 2* and *3* are abridged summaries does not appear elsewhere in Zosimean scholarship, the theory that these sections are not authentic and have a different author is certainly not new (see e.g., Lopes da Silveira 2020: 194).

⁷⁸ See e.g., Mert. 230.

⁷⁹ In her edition of Zosimos' *Authentic Memoirs*, Mertens (263-7) has produced a concordance of the texts from Berthelot and Ruelle's edition which can or cannot be attributed to Zosimos. The present edition follows Mertens's concordance, with the exception of her attribution to Zosimos' corpus of *On the Same Divine Water* (CAAG 3.8), which Dufault (2017: 77-83) has demonstrated must have a *terminus post quem* in the early 7th century AD.

⁸⁰ CAAG 3.2-4.

The second major attempt to standardise Zosimos' text comes in Bernhard Karle's 1925 doctoral thesis from the University of Freiburg, *Der Alchemistentraum des Zosimus*. Karle's thesis includes a brief introduction, a Greek text, and a lengthy interpretation in light of dream and vision literature elsewhere in the various traditions which influenced Zosimos. Karle's interpretation is largely sound, but his edition falters because he never saw any of the manuscripts himself; rather, his thesis is simply educated guesswork to edit some of the oddities in Berthelot and Ruelle's edition.

The most sophisticated and most popular edition of *The Visions* to date is Michèle Mertens's 1995 *Les Alchimistes Grecs: Zosime de Panopolis, Mémoires Authentiques*. The edition includes a lengthy introduction (with a great deal of scientific context on alchemical theory, alchemical apparatus etc), Greek text, facing French translation, and commentary. Mertens does not edit *The Visions* alone, but rather all thirteen books of Zosimos' *Authentic Memoirs* (of which *The Visions* constitutes Books 10, 11, and 12). Mertens's commentary, limited in extent by the conventions of the Budé series in which it appeared, is sufficient to convey the major themes and motifs of the text, but not long enough to allow her to analyse *The Visions* in full detail, as the present commentary aims to do.

Scientific Context: *kerotakis* and *melanōsis*

In order to appreciate *The Visions* fully, it is first necessary to understand the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical processes which form its background and which Zosimos attempts to convey through the allegorical images and motifs in the text. Starting with the philosophical and theoretical bases of alchemy, this section will go on to explore a key alchemical substance (the aforementioned Divine Water), as well as ancient alchemical equipment, before presenting an attempted reconstruction of the ancient alchemical process and a consideration of the scientific operation(s) being allegorised in Zosimos' dream sequences.

Theoretical Basis of Alchemy

The fundamental alchemical process involves taking a base substance, reducing it to its most basic, adaptable state (the *prima materia*), and adding to it qualities taken from substances which are themselves imbued with that quality (ordinarily colour). The present subsection will examine the philosophical and theoretical frameworks within which the early alchemists believed that such a transmutative sequence was possible.

Monism

The first stage of the alchemical process seems to be the reduction of a material to its most basic state: the creation of a *prima materia*. This *prima materia* is the atomistic essence of the cosmos itself; it is the singular substance out of which all things are made, into which all things can be reduced, and from which all things can be formed.⁸¹ The basic theory of alchemical transmutation is that all matter can be reduced to this formless, primordial substance before qualities are eventually added to it.⁸² This theory can be traced far beyond the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists in the history of Greek philosophical thought; for example, Plato, in his *Timaeus* – a crucial text in shaping the theories of the early alchemists – describes the early cosmos as some formless (ἄμορφον) material

⁸¹ Although the atomistic implications of the early alchemists' monistic framework rendered Democritus of Abdera an authoritative figure for them, Edmonds (2019: 272) has noted that the philosophical and scientific ideas ascribed to Democritus by Graeco-Egyptian alchemists are largely unrelated to the ideas which are preserved in authentic extant fragments of his work. See further Hershbell 1987. On Democritus' pluralistic atomism, see Schaffer 2010: 53-4.

⁸² Pereira 2000: 120.

which is to be shaped (given qualities) by the Demiurge.⁸³ In the same text, Plato also suggested that objects should be without any form (πάντων ἐκτὸς εἰδῶν) before the four primary qualities (which later came to be known as Aristotelian) – hot, dry, wet, cold – are applied to them in different quantities to create different substances.⁸⁴ The alchemists believed that all matter needed to be reduced to this formless state before anything could be imbued with the desired qualities.⁸⁵

This idea of monism is crucial to *The Visions*. That this philosophical school will be of paramount importance to the text is indicated by the preface, where Zosimos suggests that totally opposite processes – namely, physical dissolution and physical restitution, the separation of soul from body and the coming-together of soul and body – are not processes with different or foreign natures (ξένων ἢ ἐπεισάκτων φύσεων, 1.3), but rather have a singular nature (μόνον...ἢ μονοειδῆς φύσις). In the following sentence, Zosimos describes alchemy as a polychromatic endeavour (πολυχρώμω), but one which is nonetheless fundamentally monistic and based in identical natures (τῷ μονοειδεῖ). Thus, for Zosimos, difference in the cosmos is a mere illusion. Two substances can have varying proportions of certain outward qualities, but are still fundamentally constituted of a single matter. That all substances are essentially composed of the same *prima materia* is a crucial theoretical basis for belief in transmutability between those substances.

Sōma, Pneūma, Psychē

With the *prima materia* created, the alchemist would next imbue the substance with the desired colouration. Viano describes the fundamental *modus operandi* of ancient alchemical practice as the “synthèse entre matière première métallique et qualités tinctoriales”, while Edmonds defines ancient alchemy as the transmutation of quality, rather than as the transmutation of matter, which certainly seems to be the *magnum opus* of later medieval and Renaissance alchemical traditions.⁸⁶ This is a subtle, but important, difference; ancient alchemists seem to have been aware of the fact that they

⁸³ Pl. *Ti.* 50d. On the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists’ use of the *Timaeus*, see Viano 2005. On the ancient reception of the *Timaeus*’s atomistic theory more generally, see Sattler 2021. There are also obvious connections here with Aristotle’s notion of the πρώτη ὕλη (see further Robinson 1974; Byrne 1995; cf. Dufault 2015 (esp. 222)), or the Presocratic philosophers’ quest to identify the ἀρχή (see further Sheppard 1962; Wright 2009).

⁸⁴ Pl. *Ti.* 50e.

⁸⁵ Similarly, when dyeing cloth, the alchemists would first bleach the fabric by dipping it into a mordant bath: it must be reduced to a material totally without form before the application of colour change (see Hopkins 1918).

⁸⁶ Viano 2005: 93; Edmonds 2019: 269.

were not transmuting one metal into another, but rather one colour into another.⁸⁷ Indeed, the anonymous author of the *Leiden Papyrus* notes at the end of a recipe for the manufacturing of a gold-silver alloy that it will be so like the finest quality *asem* (ὡς πρῶτον ἄσημον) that it will fool even the artisans (ὥστε καὶ τοὺς τεχνίτας λαθεῖν).⁸⁸ In this way, the author acknowledges that *asem* is not being created, but rather a product with the appearance of *asem* – there is a crucial awareness of the limitations of the art – and also that deceit and fraud are part of the alchemical process. In his *Natural History*, Pliny even refers to those who gild metals (*inaurare*) – a reference to those engaging in alchemical processes – as committing fraud (*fraus*) and creating an inferior product (*viliorem excogitavit materiam*), inferior, that is, to the original metal created by Nature.⁸⁹ It is difficult to know to what extent the alchemists considered themselves to be committing any fraudulent act. Zosimos certainly does not appear to view himself as creating a ‘lesser’ gold than natural gold; indeed, he views his own work as tapping into and imitating the harmonious processes of Nature itself.⁹⁰

In order to understand these processes by which qualities were thought to be imparted to metals, it is important to recognise that the alchemists believed that each substance could be divided into three parts: *sōma* (body); *pneūma* (spirit); and *psychē* (soul).⁹¹ These three parts come together to form what an anonymous commenter on Zosimos’ work calls the trisubstantial composition of matter (τῆς τρισυποστάτου ταύτης συνθέσεως).⁹² For our purposes, the least important of these is the soul; it is, in fact, not entirely clear what role the soul plays in Zosimos’ alchemical worldview. The term appears only once in *The Visions*, as Zosimos’ soul desires to climb the heavenly staircase again (πάλιν ἐπεθύμησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τοῦ ἀναβῆναι, 2.16). It seems as though *psychē* signifies the latent potentiality and capacity of a human or inanimate object, possibly to strive for perfection; this is, however, rather speculative, being based on limited literary evidence.

That the relationship between *sōma* and *pneūma* will be a key dynamic throughout *The Visions* can be gleaned from the opening line of the preface, in which Zosimos refers to the separation of the spirit from the body and the coming together of the spirit and the body (ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος

⁸⁷ See Needham (1974: 10) for what he terms the Graeco-Egyptian conflict between aurefaction (creating gold) and aureficion (imitating gold). Note that the difference between the transmutation of matter and the transmutation of quality may be meaningless if one considers matter to be a resultant of quality (as in e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hom. Op.* 24.1); see further Wessel 2009. Zosimos’ insistence on fundamental differences between *sōma* and *pneūma*, however, seems to preclude this interpretation.

⁸⁸ *P. Leid.* X.39.

⁸⁹ Pliny, *HN* 33.42.

⁹⁰ See subsection on *physis* in Scientific Context, below.

⁹¹ See e.g., Forbes 1953. On this division in the Christian tradition, see *1 Thess.* 5:23.

⁹² *On Virtue and Interpretation* 20 (CAAG 3.6).

ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος, 1.2-3).⁹³ Whilst the *sōma* refers to the tangible substance of the metal, the *pneūma* seems to refer both to the divine spirit within a substance and the essential qualities of that substance.⁹⁴ In alchemical terms, the most useful way to imagine the *pneūma* of a material is as its colour.⁹⁵ When a substance is volatilised – by either sublimation or evaporation – its spirit becomes vaporous: τὸ πνεῦμα τουτέστιν ἡ νεφέλη ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ ἀναδιδομένη εἰς φυγὴν.⁹⁶ This gaseous *pneūma* is then able to penetrate a qualityless *prima materia*, supposedly imbuing it with the colour it once had (on a chemical level, probably through the creation of a metallic alloy).⁹⁷ That the volatilised *pneūma* contains the tinctorial power is emphasised by Zosimos on several occasions. In his *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus*, for example, he states that all alchemical gases contain *pneūma*, and that these spirits *are* the qualities of colouring other metals (πᾶσα γὰρ αἰθάλη πνεῦμα καὶ αὐταὶ αἰ ποιότητες αἰ βαπτικά).⁹⁸

The fact that Graeco-Egyptian alchemists used the religious, ‘humanised’ terms ‘body’, ‘spirit’, and ‘soul’ suggests the ease with which they deemed that the mystical and scientific elements of the practice could seamlessly map onto one another. From the standpoint of the alchemists’ alchemical theory, though, it seems clear that they believed that the vapours which escaped one substance, later to bathe another substance, were essentially transporting the quality of colouration between materials. When these substances were reunited in the formed alloy, as Comarius notes, they become one and the mystery (of transubstantiation) is completed:

τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ γεγόνασιν ἓν ἐν ᾧ κέκρυπται τὸ μυστήριον ἕν δὲ τῷ συνεισελθεῖν αὐτά, ἐτελειώθη τὸ μυστήριον.

Body and soul and spirit become one, in which the mystery was hidden; but in their coming together, the mystery is made complete.⁹⁹

⁹³ See further Fowden 1986 (esp. 90). This interplay between the corporeal *sōma* and the incorporeal *pneūma* is also summarised as being fundamental to alchemical change in a sentence attributed to Hermes himself: ἐὰν μὴ τὰ σώματα ἀσωματώσης καὶ τὰ ἀσώματα σωματώσης, οὐδὲν τὸ προσδοκώμενον ἔσται (*Hermes* 1 (CAAG 3.4)).

⁹⁴ On the Stoic notion of *pneūma* as essence and the possible impact of this school of philosophy on the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists, see Rinotas 2018.

⁹⁵ Grimes 2018: 51.

⁹⁶ *On Round Alum* 3 (CAAG 3.20).

⁹⁷ See Taylor 1930. Dufault (2015) notes that ἐκτροφή is one of the terms most frequently used for ancient alchemical transmutation (see further, note at 1.53-4).

⁹⁸ *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus* 4 (CAAG 3.12).

⁹⁹ CAAG 4.20.15.

Physis and Natural Sympathies

It is also worth considering how Zosimos and his peers believed it possible for them to bring about transmutation in the first place. To understand this, it is important to explore the philosophical notion of *physis*, Nature / nature. In ancient alchemical thought, *physis* can simultaneously refer to Nature itself and to the 'nature' of individual substances. This dual sense reflects the sympathetic link which several Late Antique religio-philosophical schools believed to have existed between the microcosmic properties and tendencies of certain materials (their nature) and the macrocosmic generative, guiding universal order (Nature).¹⁰⁰ This association between the microcosmic and the macrocosmic is known as cosmic sympathy. The early alchemists sought to understand the inner workings of Nature and to tap into its transformative properties by manipulating (and in order to manipulate) the individual natures of material substances, mostly through transformations in colour and states of matter. The alchemists believed that each substance had its own nature, which determined its qualities, as well as its transformative potential. Philo – a key figure in the syncretism between Greek philosophy and Judaeo-Christian religion, which came to be so key to Zosimos' worldview – presents a comparable view, expressing *physis* in terms of a seed.¹⁰¹ The seed is naturally imbued by God with the capacity for growth, just as metals are naturally imbued with the capacity for transmutation towards perfection in the alchemical imagination.¹⁰² In order to guide these natural tendencies towards perfection, however, alchemists needed to replicate the workings of Nature, which was deemed to be fundamentally perfectionist, desiring and bringing about its own transformations towards perfection, almost as though guided (or rather imbued) with divine rationality. Indeed, Nature was thought (i) to desire its own movement towards a state of perfection, and (ii) to have the power to bring about these perfecting transformations upon itself. This notion is well-summarised in the most famous, most repeated alchemical maxim from the period:

ἡ φύσις τῆ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ

Nature delights in Nature, and Nature conquers Nature, and Nature masters Nature.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ On such a sympathetic relationship in an alchemical context, see Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.14. The same idea is recognised as being related to Mithraic doctrine by Origen at *Contr. Cels.* 6.22.

¹⁰¹ Philo, *Quis Rer. Div. Her.* 121. See Zachhuber (2021) for a summary of the history of the term *physis* from the Presocratics, through Plato and Aristotle, to the Patristic period.

¹⁰² The Hermetic tradition similarly treats Nature as the force by which God works in the material world (*CH* 3.1).

¹⁰³ E.g., *On the Four Bodies Being the Food of the Tinctures* 2 (*CAAG* 3.19). See Fest. 1.433.

According to Synesius, this maxim was first written by Democritus, who formulated it using principles taught to him by Ostanes.¹⁰⁴ These three interactions between Nature and itself can be explained in the following ways: Nature delights in Nature as it finds harmony within itself and the self-sustaining processes and desires for its own perfection; Nature conquers Nature in that there is a destructive element to its transformations, as matter must be destroyed and reduced to a basic state before it can be made perfect (this is the only interaction to which Zosimos explicitly refers in *The Visions*: νικῶσα φύσις τὰς φύσεις, 1.70); and finally, Nature masters Nature in that it has the ability to transform itself into a perfected state – things, in other words, can and do become gold.¹⁰⁵

In this way, Nature was thought to seek actively to perfect itself, and the alchemists sought to tap into this transformative, perfecting potentiality. That the alchemists sought to imitate Nature in this way can be seen from Proclus' scathing comment in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, in which he claims that alchemists create a lesser gold than Nature, because theirs is made from a mixture of substances, rather than the pure gold which Nature has the power to create (καὶ οἱ χρυσὸν ποιεῖν φάσκοντες ἐκ μίξεώς τινων εἰδῶν).¹⁰⁶ Whilst Proclus' statement is most certainly a criticism of early alchemists, it showcases the effort to replicate Nature's creative impulse by which it inherently seeks and effects self-perfection. Overall, alchemists identified themselves as agents of transformation who, by working parallel to and in harmony with Nature's own self-perfecting impulse, sought to replicate these processes and ultimately transmute substances into their most perfected forms.¹⁰⁷

Alchemical Apparatus

Throughout his corpus, Zosimos describes a large number of pieces of alchemical equipment, from the *dibikos* and *tribikos*, to the *phanos* and the *kerotakis*.¹⁰⁸ Whilst the mystical nature of several of his texts may lead one to conclude that Zosimos was little concerned with practical alchemical operations, this is simply untrue. The very existence of his alchemical treatise entitled *On Appliances and Furnaces* (Ζωσίμου περὶ ὀργάνων καὶ καμίνων), which involves careful description of the construction, preparation, and use of apparatus, as well as a brief anecdote about his visiting

¹⁰⁴ CAAG 2.3.1.

¹⁰⁵ Viano 1995: 99. See also Pl. *Ti.* 56e for the reciprocal relations between substances being described in similarly combative terms (νικηθῆν, κρατηθέντος etc).

¹⁰⁶ Proclus, *In Rep.* 2.234. See Dufault 2021: 196.

¹⁰⁷ Dufault 2015: 242. It is clear that Zosimos considered his tapping into natural processes as a religious, rather than magical, act because a true philosopher must not force Nature, but let Nature act as it will (*Omega 4*).

¹⁰⁸ The present edition focuses on the piece of apparatus most relevant to *The Visions*: the *kerotakis*. For detailed exploration of several pieces of Zosimean alchemical equipment, see Mert. cxxxix-clii.

Memphis to examine the condition of a furnace, demonstrates Zosimos' keen interest in physical alchemical practice.¹⁰⁹

A large number of appliances used in ancient alchemy were hijacked for transmutative processes from various other domains. It is well-known that ancient alchemists utilised apparatus from metallurgy, medicine, art, and cooking, among others.¹¹⁰ For example, Zosimos recounts seeing a culinary instrument in the house of Theosebeia which he swiftly incorporated into in his own alchemical practice.¹¹¹

Maria's *kerotakis*

The most important piece of alchemical apparatus which Zosimos mentions – and the one which is the most pertinent to an understanding of the scientific allusions throughout the narrative of *The Visions* – is the *kerotakis*.¹¹² Zosimos' own use of the *kerotakis* is said to stem from his engagement with Maria the Jewess, whom he regarded as authoritative on the Jewish alchemical tradition, especially on technical matters of scientific apparatus, stating that she had described the construction of several pieces of equipment: πολλὰ μὲν οὖν ὀργάνων κατασκευαὶ γεγραμμένα εἰσὶν τῇ Μαρίας.¹¹³ The Graeco-Egyptian alchemical tradition credited Maria with the invention of many pieces of apparatus: most notably, the *bain-marie* (the double-boiling water-bath which bears her name to this day) and the *kerotakis*. It is not certain whether Maria invented, improved upon, or simply championed the *kerotakis* method; Olympiodorus hints at her as having named it, and it certainly seems as though Zosimos traces use of the apparatus back to her, and no further.¹¹⁴

Figs. 1 and 2 are artistic interpretations of different styles of *kerotakis* found in MS M, the oldest extant alchemical manuscript, dating to the 10th or 11th century. As Mertens notes, fig. 1 appears to be more realistic, in line with Zosimos' descriptions, while fig. 2 is clearly more stylised. According to the several descriptions for setting up the apparatus given throughout Zosimos' corpus, and the

¹⁰⁹ *On Appliances and Furnaces* 1-2 (Mert. 23). BeRu (216) suggests the Temple of Ptah as the exact location in Memphis, where indeed a well-preserved furnace has been discovered (Krol 2007). Beyond Memphis, the Syriac tradition preserves accounts of Zosimos' travels to Syria, Cyprus, Lemnos, Macedonia, Thrace, and even Rome. Berthelot (1895: 383), however, has demonstrated that these passages merely repeat accounts of the travels of Galen, which have been erroneously attributed to the Panopolite alchemist. See further, Mert. lxxvii.

¹¹⁰ See e.g., Mert. cxiii.

¹¹¹ *On the Evaporation of Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.7). *LSJ*, s.v. ἐκθειάζω (p.506). See further Mert. 197.

¹¹² See Mert. cxxxix-clii; Hopkins 1938b.

¹¹³ *On Appliances and Furnaces* 2 (Mert. 23). On Zosimos' interest in Marian techniques, Jewish alchemy more widely, and Jewish mysticism in relation to his Egyptian (Alexandrian) context, see Fraser 2004: 126. The Marian alchemical tradition seems to have been focused primarily on distillation, sublimation, and the importance of vapours (see further Martelli 2013: 29-31).

¹¹⁴ CAAG 2.4.54.

images below, the *kerotakis* seems to have consisted of four major parts: the furnace; the lower receptacle; the *kerotakis* itself; and a reflux chamber.¹¹⁵ In fig. 1, these are labelled, bottom to top, as: φῶτα; ἄγγος ὀστράκινον ('clay vessel'); κηροτακίς; and φιάλη ἐπίπωμας ('alembic as a covering lid'). In fig. 2, the constituent parts of the apparatus are labelled, bottom to top, as: παλαιστιαῖον ('a broad little furnace'); φάρμακον κηροτακίς; κυμβάνη; and φιάλη. The terms φάρμακον and κυμβάνη require further elaboration. The first, φάρμακον, seems to have had an obscure alchemical meaning for a prepared substance which is dyed by Divine Water: τὸ γὰρ θεῖον ὕδωρ...τὰ φάρμακα βάπτει.¹¹⁶ Fig. 2 is thus labelled to demonstrate the position of the substance to be transmuted. The term κυμβάνη is not attested outside of this label; it is presumably an error for or obscure variation of κύμβη, a bowl. As Mertens has noted, this diagram more clearly shows the two bowls at the top of the *kerotakis* apparatus: the first is made from terracotta and creates the reflux chamber in which gaseous vapours condense; the second is made from glass, so that the alchemist could observe, through a hole in the terracotta bowl, the whitening or yellowing of the material on the *kerotakis* platform (ἵνα περιβλέπων εἰ λευκανθῆ, ἢ ξανθωθῆ).¹¹⁷

Fig. 3 seems to show the *kerotakis* piece by itself, with circular hooks on either side, presumably to attach it to the large alembic, suggesting that the exaggerated length of this platform in figs. 1 and 2 may be stylistic, or (as Mertens suggests) a 'bird's eye view' of that individual piece. The triangular (or rectangular, according to figs. 1 and 2) shape of the *kerotakis* fits into the cylindrical alembic, leaving room around it for vapours to ascend into the reflux system above.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ See e.g., *On the Tribicos and the Tube 4* (CAAG 3.50). Labels on the available depictions of the *kerotakis* seem to suggest that the term specifically referred to the 'upper platform' on which experimental materials were placed. It appears that, by means of synecdoche, however, Zosimos refers to the entire apparatus as the *kerotakis*; Graeco-Egyptian alchemical scholarship has followed suit.

¹¹⁶ *On the Detailed Presentation of the Work 6* (CAAG 3.16).

¹¹⁷ See Mert. cxxxv-cxxxvii. *On the Evaporation of Divine Water 5* (CAAG 3.7).

¹¹⁸ See CAAG 4.6.2 for the original use of a *kerotakis* by painters: the heat from the furnace would have melted wax placed onto the *kerotakis* platform itself, such that the shelf would have acted as a paint palette for the artist.

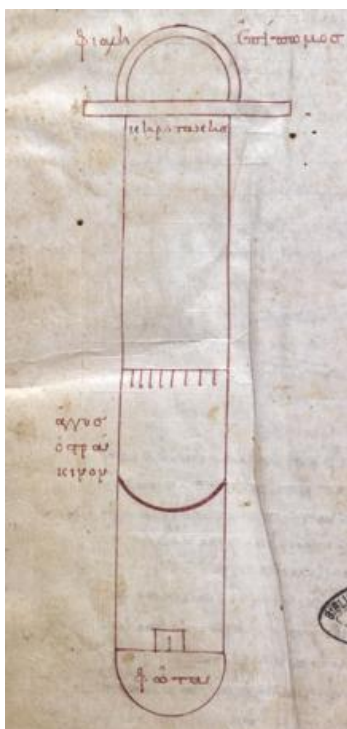


Fig. 1:
MS M : 196v. Depiction of a *kerotakis*.

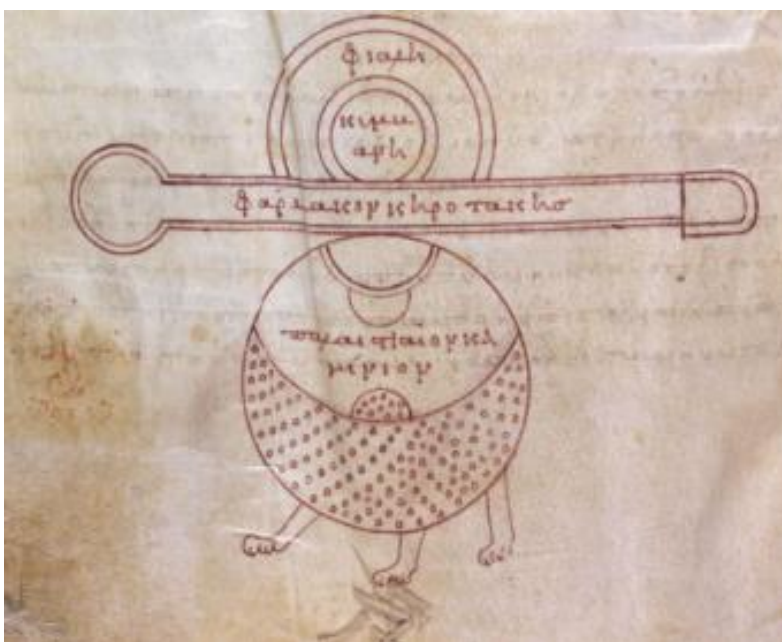


Fig. 2:
MS M : 195v. Highly stylised depiction of a *kerotakis*.

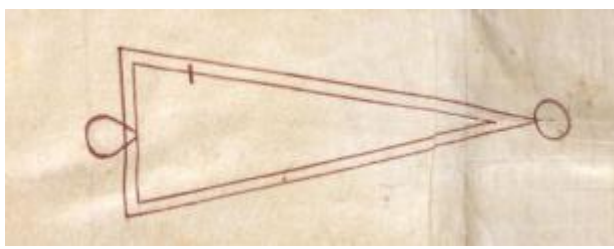


Fig. 3:
MS M : 196r. The *kerotakis* itself (a platform on which to-be-reacted material is placed).

Although the substances used and the products sought in the *kerotakis* are not particularly well understood, there is consensus about the basic operation of the apparatus.¹¹⁹ The most important substance used in the process seems to have been Divine Water, θεῖον ὕδωρ. It is clear that Zosimos considered this substance to be a crucial element in the transmutation of metals.¹²⁰ To give just one of the many examples, in a Zosimean treatise named after the liquid, Zosimos claims that it is the sought-after substance (τὸ ζητούμενον), that it is everything (τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ πᾶν), that from it comes everything (καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ πᾶν), and that by it everything exists (καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ τὸ πᾶν).¹²¹ In *The Visions*, Zosimos opens with the phrase θεσίς ὑδάτων ('the composition of the waters', 1.2), which might well be an immediate reference to Divine Water. In any case, Zosimos' later reference to the transformative power of the water which is white, yellow, boiling, and divine (τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ λευκόν τε καὶ ξανθὸν τὸ καχλάζον τὸ θεῖον, 1.42) – in which countless people undergo torture which resembles scientific operation – doubtless refers to this crucial liquid. It is not entirely clear what exactly Divine Water is or indeed why it was so important to the alchemical process, but, based on evidence discussed in detail below, one can be fairly sure that it was a volatile liquid whose vapours brought about or catalysed chemical reaction and subsequent colour change.¹²²

It seems as though Divine Water (sulphuric water) was placed into the lower receptacle and heated from below with a furnace, while the base metal which was to be purified and transmuted was placed onto the *kerotakis* platform. As the Divine Water boiled and volatilised, its caustic vapours ascended through the main alembic, around the *kerotakis*, and into the reflux chamber. At this stage, the vapours condensed and the resulting liquids bathed the base metal, causing the substance to oxidise, and form on its surface a black layer of metal sulphides and oxides. The rest of the liquid drained back into the lower boiling pan, where it would again be subjected to the heat of the furnace and again evaporate. This process continued either until the sulphur had entirely reacted, or until the alchemist deemed that sufficient 'blackening' of the material had taken place.¹²³ The blackened

¹¹⁹ See e.g., Taylor 1930; Hopkins 1938b; Lindsay 1970 (esp. 112-7); Mert. (esp. cxxx-clii); Fraser 2007 (esp. 40-1); Burns 2015 (esp. 88).

¹²⁰ Recipes for the production of Divine Water abound in the ancient alchemical tradition. One of the earliest comes in the *Leiden Papyrus* (10.89), in which the alchemist is instructed to combine quicklime, powdered sulphur, and vinegar.

¹²¹ *On Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.9). On the importance of the phrase τὸ ζητούμενον in ancient alchemical literature, see Lopes da Silveira 2020.

¹²² Mert. 162-7; Martelli 2009; Dufault 2019: 105. At *On Round Alum* 6 (CAAG 3.20), Zosimos says that it would be worth investigating the mechanisms by which vapours actually penetrate and are absorbed into bodies. No such description is given; rather, a reference to Divine Water appears.

¹²³ Hopkins (1938b: 328) refers to the blackening – the absence of colour – as the *sine qua non* of alchemical transmutation. It is noteworthy that Pliny the Elder refers to black as a sacred colour in Egypt because of its association with the Anubis (HN 33.131).

product of the *kerotakis* is known as *xēria*.¹²⁴ In this way, the *kerotakis* operates similarly to any modern reflux system, such as a Soxhlet extractor.

Zosimos' interest in the *kerotakis* and the importance which he assigns to it can hardly be overstated. The *kerotakis* is by far the most cited piece of alchemical equipment in Zosimos' corpus and is the one most closely aligned with *chrysopoeia*. Zosimos was not alone in assigning such importance to the apparatus. A text preserved under the name *On the Philosopher's Stone* includes a claim that unless a substance is attenuated by fire and unless the sublimated vapour rises – two processes clearly referring to the application of this crucial piece of Marian equipment – nothing will be brought to fruition: καὶ ἐὰν μὴ τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ πυρὶ ἐκλεπυνθῆ, καὶ ἡ αἰθάλη πνευματωθεῖσα βασταχθῆ, οὐδὲν εἰς πέρας βασταχθήσεται.¹²⁵ Later in the same text, in a discussion of the colour changes inherent in alchemical operations, the anonymous author reiterates that, without the use of this apparatus, it is impossible for transmutation to take place (ἀδύνατον δὲ ταῦτα γενέσθαι).¹²⁶ Overall, for a host of ancient alchemical practitioners, Zosimos included, the *kerotakis* seems to have been a fundamental piece of operative hardware in bringing about alchemical change.

As a text ascribed to the legendary alchemist Agathodaemon (see p.205) makes clear, after the blackening stage (*melanōsis*), the substance is whitened and then yellowed, undergoing the stages of *leukōsis* and *xanthōsis*: μετὰ τὴν τοῦ χαλκοῦ ἐξίωσιν καὶ μέλανσιν καὶ ἐς ὕστερον λεύκωσιν, τότε ἔσται βεβαία ξάνθωσις.¹²⁷ Far less confidence can be assigned to these latter stages in the alchemical process. In fact, very few attempts have been made to reconstruct the exact processes of alchemical operations with chemical explanations mapped onto each step, and this is for good reason. Zosimos' explicit instructions regarding operations are often seemingly contradictory, and it appears that *Decknamen* are frequently used in place of the substances used in experimentation (for example, Hopkins speculates that 'mercury' was the name generally used for a series of chemical reagents, including arsenic, antimony, and sulphur).¹²⁸ The lack of clear available evidence means that the reconstruction of a valid alchemical recipe is unfortunately not possible. Chemically, the blackening of a substance must have involved a reaction with sulphur to create a metal sulphide; the whitening of a substance must have involved a reaction with arsenic or mercury compounds to create a silvery sheen on the surface of the metal; and the yellowing of a substance must have involved a reaction with additional sulphuric compounds to induce a golden tint. Ultimately, one can only conclude that, following the primary stage of the *kerotakis*, the blackened *xēria* were subjected to further vapours

¹²⁴ Hopkins 1938b explores these *xēria* in great depth.

¹²⁵ *On the Philosopher's Stone* 1 (CAAG 3.29).

¹²⁶ *ibid.* 2.

¹²⁷ *Agathodaemon* 1 (CAAG 3.3).

¹²⁸ Hopkins 1938b: 332. On alchemical *Decknamen*, see Principe 2012.

(at some stage involving the vapours of Divine Water) to bring about a silvery-white colouration, and eventually to transmute the metallic substance into 'gold'.

Melanōsis

Given the allegorical nature of the text, it is exceedingly difficult to map certain stages of the alchemical theories, apparatus, and operations discussed above onto the images and allusions which appear throughout *The Visions*. In her edition of Zosimos' *Mémoires Authentiques*, Mertens demonstrates that Zosimos hints at the *kerotakis* through allegorical references on several occasions.¹²⁹ Whilst many references to the *kerotakis* are identified in individual comments later in the present edition, there are two particularly key examples which suggest that the *kerotakis* is part of the imagery at the heart of the text; these are: the separation of body and soul, and the upward and downward steps. From the outset of the text, Zosimos states that the separation of body and soul (ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος, 1.2-3) will be a fundamental theme in his work; as I have previously suggested, the separation of body and soul presumably refers to the vapours released during the evaporation of Divine Water, or indeed the sublimation of any other solid material placed into the lower receptacle of the *kerotakis*. Further, in the first dream sequence, an anonymous priest states that, in his being reborn, he cast away the weight of his body and became a spirit (ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα...πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι, 1.12-3). These images are both reminiscent of the process of evaporation or sublimation in the *kerotakis*: the initial step of volatilisation to produce sulphuric vapours. Another allegorical evocation of the *kerotakis* process in *Lesson 1* is that same priest's reference to the steps which lead up to the *Crucibaltar*. Before saying that he became a spirit, the priest recounts that he completed a descent of fifteen steps which radiate darkness and an ascent of fifteen steps which shine brightly: πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας καὶ ἀνιέναι με τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας (1.10-1). As Mertens has noted, the process of descending and ascending the steps mirrors the process of vapours ascending and descending inside the alembic and reflux chamber of the *kerotakis*.¹³⁰ The continuous upward and downward movement within the *kerotakis* also seems to resemble the circular image of the ouroboros, the serpent eating its own tail, which became such an iconic and important alchemical symbol. Particularly noteworthy here is the ouroboros image associated with the alchemist Cleopatra (fig. 4), which depicts the serpent as dark on the way down and light on the

¹²⁹ Mert. 35.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

way up, just as the stairs in *Lesson 1*.¹³¹ Overall, it seems highly likely that Zosimos refers to operations within the *kerotakis* throughout his text.



Fig. 4:

MS M : 188v. Ouroboros surrounding the words ἐν τὸ πᾶν.

This, however, raises a further question: to which operations does Zosimos refer? I suggest that *The Visions* specifically allegorises the stage of *melanōsis* within the *kerotakis*. *Melanōsis* – the stage by which the *prima materia* is produced – is inextricably linked to the alchemical motifs of monism and destruction, both of which are key themes throughout Zosimos' text. In fact, all of the many theoretical digressions in *Lesson 1* are related to monism: for example, Zosimos claims that the separation of spirit from body and the coming together of spirit and body are not different processes, but have the same nature (ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος οὐ ξένων ἢ ἐπεισάκτων φύσεων, 1.2-3). Further, at the end of *Lesson 1* – and thus book-ending the first section in ouroboric fashion – Zosimos says that correct alchemical technique leads to the alchemist receiving the one thing which comes from many things (τὸ μονόειδον τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν, 1.83-4). *The Visions'* more abstract discourse highlights the importance of monism in alchemical theory; and it seems that the narrative elements of Zosimos' text are stylised allegories of this monistic theme. More than monism, destruction is also a key motif throughout the entirety of the text. From Ion in *Lesson 1*, to the snake surrounding the imaginary temple and Agathodaemon in *Lesson 2*, and the sacrificial victim in *Lesson 3*, many characters are killed in order to be reborn. This purificatory destruction – ordinarily involving alchemically significant means of torture, like fire or boiling water – is a direct allusion to *melanōsis*, the process

¹³¹ Also note that the scales of the ouroboros' lower half are oddly reminiscent of the holes at the bottom of the *kerotakis* in fig. 2. These holes presumably feed oxygen to the inner furnace and allow for fumes to be released.

by which matter must be ‘killed’ and reduced to its most basic form, before it is redeemed.¹³² Further, Zosimos’ *homunculi* – those aides who oversee destruction within the *kerotakis*-like forms of torture – are referred to as the ‘handlers of *xēria*’ (ξηπουργοί). In other words, they handle the product which marks the completion of the stage of *melanōsis*.¹³³ Several other allusions to *melanōsis* are identified in individual comments throughout the present edition, but these key examples suggest that Zosimos allegorises the fundamental principles of this alchemical stage throughout his text, interweaving the themes of monism and destruction, as well as giving *xēria* a key place in the narrative.

¹³² This process remained important throughout the history of alchemy, forming the basis of the well-known Latin maxim, *solve et coagula*.

¹³³ The *kerotakis* is allegorised as a form of torture in several other alchemical texts, including CAAG 4.20.8-9, in which the alchemical process is said to consist of descent into Hades, the spirit of light replacing the spirit of darkness in the body, the soul calling the body to wake up and be resurrected from Hades, and the triune composition of matter – body, soul, and spirit – being ‘thrust together in love’ (ήνώθησαν πάντες έν άγάπη).

Religious Context: Gnostic Baptism and Spiritual Ascent

Scientific operations are encoded and allegorised into the textual fabric of *The Visions*. This alchemical messaging is allegorised under the veil of a series of religious motifs: alchemical vessels are replaced with altars; alchemical utensils are replaced with sacrificial knives; alchemical operations are replaced with hellish torture; alchemical transmutation is replaced with spiritual rebirth; and the alchemical metals themselves become priests sat in temples of the mind.¹³⁴ In short, religious imagery is key to *The Visions*. Beyond aesthetic window-dressing, though, religious motifs seem to play a key role in Zosimos' text, as the fantastical narrative allegorises religious instruction which engages with the Hermetic and Gnostic currents by which Zosimos himself was so heavily influenced.

Instruction to Theosebeia at *Final Account 8*

In order to identify the religious message which Zosimos allegorises and conveys throughout *The Visions*, it would be useful to examine the religious instruction which he imparts elsewhere in his corpus. From instructions to calm one's passions, to perform apotropaic sacrifices, and even to practice astrology, Zosimean literature – particularly the epistles addressed to Theosebeia – is filled with advice on proper religious and theurgic practices.¹³⁵ There is, however, one particular instruction to Theosebeia which is exceedingly relevant for the present discussion on religious guidance allegorised throughout *The Visions*. In his *Final Account*, Zosimos guides Theosebeia towards achieving alchemical tinctures, a process which he aligns with her salvation:

καὶ οὕτως ἐνεργοῦσα, ἐπιτεύξει τῶν γνησίων καὶ φυσικῶν καιρικῶν ἄλλα δὲ ποίει ἕως παντελειωθῆς τὴν ψυχὴν. ὅταν δὲ ἐπιγνοῦσα αὐτὴν τελειωθεῖσας, τότε καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν τῆς ὕλης κατάπτησον, καὶ καταδραμοῦσα ἐπὶ τὸν Ποιμένανδρα καὶ βαπτισθεῖσα τῷ κρατῆρι, ἀνάδραμε ἐπὶ τὸ γένος τὸ σόν.

By operating in this way, you will achieve the genuine, natural tinctures; do these things until you have been perfected in your soul. Whenever you recognise that you have become

¹³⁴ Mertens 2002: 168; Principe 2013: 19.

¹³⁵ On Zosimos' astrological instruction, see Werrett 2023.

spiritually perfect, then cower away from the material world, and, having hurried to *Poimenandra* (*sic.*) and having been baptised in the basin, run up to your own people.¹³⁶

There seem to be four levels to Zosimos' plan for redemption. Firstly, one must achieve the natural tinctures; secondly, one must be made spiritually perfect; thirdly, one must be baptised with *Poimandres*; and fourthly, one must ascend to the heavenly race of the spiritually pure, one's divine origins. The ways in which Zosimos allegorises the process of alchemical transmutation (through the motifs of the *kerotakis* and *melanōsis*) have been discussed in the previous section; the present section explores Zosimos' allusions to spiritual transformation and perfection, baptism, and spiritual ascent throughout *The Visions*, highlighting the many overlaps with Hermetic, Gnostic, and Neo-Platonic doctrines.

Spiritual Purification

Just as Zosimos' terminology of *sōma* and *pneūma* is crucial to the scientific messaging of *The Visions*, so too is it crucial – perhaps more obviously so – to the text's religio-philosophical ethic. Whilst the scientific interpretation of an opening sentiment of Zosimos' text – ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος (1.2-3) – involves the volatilisation of a substance and its vapours ascending through the body of the *kerotakis*, the religious interpretation of this involves the liberation of the spirit from the body through suffering.¹³⁷ Indeed, this is a crucial theme in *The Visions*, as several characters undergo intense degrees of torture in order to become spirits. Whilst several instances will be treated in greater depth throughout the present commentary, Ion's becoming a spirit stands as a singular instance which is constantly mirrored and reworked throughout Zosimos' text. Having been tortured, dismembered, and burned, Ion says that he was transformed in the substance of his body (μετασσωματούμενος, 1.18), and that he then became a spirit (πνεῦμα γενέσθαι, 1.18). Ion's transformation mirrors that of the anonymous priest before him, who cast away the weight of his *sōma* (ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα, 1.12), was made holy (ιερατευόμενος, 1.12), and also became a spirit (πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι, 1.12-3). The idea that the body must be destroyed in order for the spirit to be liberated from its materialistic confines echoes the principle that a metallic

¹³⁶ FC 8. Fraser (2007: 43) translates καταδραμοῦσα as 'take refuge', following a suggestion in *LSJ*, s.v. κατατρέχω (p.917).

¹³⁷ Fowden 1986: 90. For the theories regarding ensoulment of several third-century Christian theologians (Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Origen), who may have influenced the religio-philosophical ideas of Zosimos and his contemporaries, see Blosser 2018: 211-4.

substance must be reduced to vapours and *prima materia* before alchemical transmutation can take place.¹³⁸ Indeed, for Zosimos, alchemy is a symbol, taken from Genesis itself, for the redemption and purification of the spirit away from the elements of the material world: χημείας σύμβολον φέρεται <ἐκ> κοσμοποιίας, τοῖς τε σώζουσιν καὶ καθαροῦσιν τὴν ἐν τοῖς στοιχείοις συνδεθεῖσαν θεῖαν ψυχὴν....¹³⁹

The notion that the self can only be transformed through the destruction of the body and the release of the spirit overlaps with the Hermetic, Neo-Platonic, and Gnostic traditions.¹⁴⁰ In the *Poimandres*, for example, the first step of cosmic ascent to a higher realm is said to be the dissolution of the material body (ἐν τῇ ἀναλύσει τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ὑλικοῦ).¹⁴¹ Further, the Chaldaean Oracles also mention angels preparing the body of a theurgist for cosmic ascent by making the soul light (πνεύματι...κουφίζουσα) through a process of removing the weight of the body (language which is strikingly similar to that used by Zosimos at 1.12: ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα).¹⁴² Nowhere else, however, is this theme more pronounced or clearly presented than in early Gnostic literature. A key example of this appears in the *Gospel of Judas*, in which Judas is praised for his understanding that Christ wishes to be free of the ‘flesh that clothes him’.¹⁴³ Judas, in fact, becomes the protagonist of the Passion narrative, as he brings about Christ’s death and the release of his spirit from the sensible world. This liberation of the spirit from its corporeal prison is clearly echoed throughout Zosimos’ narrative.

The aforementioned scene in the *Gospel of Judas* serves as a useful point of entry into another important theme related to the suffering characters throughout *The Visions*. Before praising Judas’ inclination towards *gnōsis*, Christ berates the other disciples, claiming that those who offer animal

¹³⁸ Fraser 2007: 49. Fire and boiling water are two means of torture and spiritual purification which appear repeatedly throughout *The Visions*, both of which echo alchemical operations. These are, of course, important means of religious purification too: see e.g., *Gospel of Philip* 25, ‘by fire and water everywhere is cleansed’ (see further Charron 2005: 442).

¹³⁹ *True Book of Sophe* 1 (CAAG 3.42).

¹⁴⁰ Edwards 2015: 137. In a strikingly similar fashion to Zosimos’ syncretistic approach, Iamblichus – a Neo-Platonic philosopher and rough contemporary of Zosimos – synthesises various philosophical and religious doctrines (combining Chaldaean, Egyptian, and Greek theurgic practices) to form a universal way to liberate the soul, *animae liberandae universalem viam* (Augustine, *De civ. D.* 10.32, quoting a lost text of Porphyry, a response against whom is the basis of Iamblichus’ theurgic treatises).

¹⁴¹ *CH* 1.24.

¹⁴² *Chaldean Oracles* 122-3. See further Johnston 1997: 181.

¹⁴³ *Gospel of Judas* 56. Whilst the necessity of bodily destruction appears solely in the more marginal texts of the Late Antique period (Hermetic, *apocrypha* etc.), this notion of Christ being ‘clothed’ by flesh is perfectly orthodox. In his *On the Incarnation of the Word* (44.6), Athanasias even discusses Christ ‘putting on’ a body, before exchanging this outer garment and ‘putting on’ immortality in his ascension: ἐνεδύσατο σῶμα ὁ Σωτὴρ...ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐνδυσάμενον τὴν ἀθανασίαν. See also *Heb.* 10:20, where Christ’s flesh is described as a καταπέτασμα, and *1 Cor.* 15:53-5, where the resurrected body is described as having ‘put on’ incorruptibility and immortality.

sacrifices to Saklas (the evil / foolish / incompetent god of the *Old Testament*) will be performing evil acts; Christ, however, tells Judas that he will be saved because he will sacrifice only the flesh which ties Christ to the material world.¹⁴⁴ The growing popularity of the belief in the ultimate sacrificial act of Christ, as well as questions about the legitimacy, efficacy, and morality of pagan sacrificial rituals, culminated in a culture of debate about the role of sacrifice in the Graeco-Roman world around the time of Zosimos, all of which led to Constantius II reportedly exclaiming ‘*sacrificiorum aboleatur insania*’ and prohibiting sacrifice on penalty of death in 353.¹⁴⁵ It would be worth exploring these debates in greater depth before analysing the theme of sacrifice throughout the Zosimean corpus.¹⁴⁶ Although the place of sacrifice in society was debated by many Late Antique philosophers, both sides of the argument are best demonstrated in the disagreements between Porphyry (who adopts an anti-sacrificial stance in his *Letter to Anebo* and *On Abstinence*) and Iamblichus (who adopts a pro-sacrificial stance in his *On Egyptian Mysteries*), both of whom were contemporaries of Zosimos. Iamblichus claimed that theurgic ritual does not drag daemons deeper into the material world, but rather elevates the spirit of the practitioner to the world of the divine.¹⁴⁷ Porphyry, on the other hand, argued that theurgy would be ineffective because immaterial divinities could not be attracted to or satiated by material sacrifices, meaning that sacrifices were instead being made to lesser spiritual beings who were tied to the sensible world; this was a concern shared by Augustine, who claimed that theurgists were instead attracting daemons, themselves under the guise of angels, with their sacrifices (*ritibus fallacibus daemonum obstricti sub nominibus angelorum*).¹⁴⁸ This is a present anxiety in Zosimos’ corpus too: as previously discussed, Zosimos advises only one form of literal sacrifice – those of an apotropaic nature, aimed at repelling unwanted, sacrilegious daemonic influences.

The Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* succinctly suggests the theurgic replacement for the pagan practice of animal sacrifice: “God is a man-eater. Therefore the man is sacrificed to him. Before the man was sacrificed, wild beasts were sacrificed because the recipients of the sacrifices were not gods”.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Porphyry claims that a man’s union with God through pure intellect and an impassive spirit

¹⁴⁴ *Gospel of Judas* 56.

¹⁴⁵ *Theodosian Code* 16.10.6. See further Stroumsa 2015: 35.

¹⁴⁶ It is interesting that the unsuitability of pagan sacrifice was not a criticism launched at pagans by early Christians; rather, it was a matter of genuine theological debate amongst Late Antique pagans who were beginning to identify with monotheistic theologies and philosophies, and who naturally abandoned a number of practices which they began to consider illegitimate forms of theurgy (see further Fraser 2009 (esp. 131)).

¹⁴⁷ Iamblichus, *De Myst.* 1.12-4.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* 211.19-212.3; Augustine, *De civ. D.* 10.9. On the Platonic idea that God is beyond ritual action, see Fraser 2009: 131.

¹⁴⁹ *Gospel of Philip* 50.

is the ultimate form of sacrifice (θεοῖς δὲ ἀρίστη μὲν ἀπαρχὴ νοῦς καθαρὸς καὶ ψυχὴ ἀπαθής).¹⁵⁰ It is not the literal sacrifice of animal flesh which will please God, but rather the metaphorical sacrifice of the self. Similarly, the Hermetic tradition – whilst not abandoning ritual practice when aimed specifically at daemons – does have a general preference for intellectual sacrifices (λογικαὶ θυσίαι).¹⁵¹ Given the prevalence of this theme in Gnostic, Hermetic, and Neo-Platonic circles, this surely is the interpretation of sacrifice which Zosimos himself would have held. Indeed, Zosimos' suffering characters – many of whom suffer in distinctly sacrificial ways – are reborn and spiritually purified by their ordeal. In this way, as Knipe has argued, Zosimos' text may be engaging with a larger debate about sacrifice, one in which Zosimos himself would have been immersed.¹⁵² The death of Ion can serve as representative of all sacrificial scenes in *The Visions*. In the first dream, Ion recounts that he was overpowered, dismembered, flayed, had his bones crushed, and burned, until he became a spirit:

ἦλθε γάρ τις περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον δρομαίως καὶ ἐχειρώσατο με μαχαίρα διελών με, διασπάσας κατὰ σύστασιν ἀρμονίας, καὶ ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου τῷ ξίφει τῷ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κρατουμένῳ. τὰ ὁστέα ταῖς σαρκὶ συνέπλεξε καὶ τῷ πυρὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς κατέκαιεν ἕως ἂν ἔμαθον μετὰ σώματος πνεῦμα γενέσθαι.

Around dawn, a man came towards me at full speed and took me prisoner, dismembering me with his sword, and he ripped me apart according to the rigour of harmony. And, having flayed my head with the sword wielded by him, he crushed up my bones together with my flesh, and he burned it in the fire, which was close at hand, until, transforming in my body, I learned to become a spirit, 1.15-8.

The image of Ion being flayed, carefully dismembered, and burned is clearly reminiscent of ritualistic pagan sacrifice, possibly prompting association with the like of stock Homeric sacrificial scenes.¹⁵³ Despite the appearance of literal sacrifice in *The Visions*, Zosimos inveighs against such practices throughout his corpus. As stated, the only sacrifices which he advises Theosebeia to carry out are of an apotropaic nature, those which are neither suitable, nor nourishing, nor pleasing, but which drive away and destroy daemonic forces (πρόσφερε θυσίας τοῖς <signa incognita> μὴ τὰς θρεπτικὰς

¹⁵⁰ Porph. *Abst.* 2.61.

¹⁵¹ *CH* 1.31; *Asclepius* 41.

¹⁵² Knipe 2011.

¹⁵³ E.g., *Od.* 3.65-6, 20.279-80.

αὐτῶν, καὶ προσηνεῖς, ἀλλὰ τὰς ἀποθρεπτικὰς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἀναίρετικὰς).¹⁵⁴ In this same instruction, he tells Theosebeia to offer thoughts and prayers to God by calming her own senses and passions (καθεζομένη δὲ τῷ σώματι, καθέζου καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν), suggesting alignment with the transition towards metaphysical sacrifices, alongside many Christians and Neo-Platonists of the 3rd century.¹⁵⁵ In other words, the sacrifice presented throughout Zosimos' corpus is an internal one; it is one which has been recast in the light of Late Antique debates surrounding the place of sacrificial rites in society.¹⁵⁶ In this way, the imagery of 'old sacrifice' in *The Visions* is aesthetic rather than in any way instructive, playing into the physical operations which must be performed on metals in the *kerotakis*, as well as perhaps betraying something of Zosimos' anti-corporeal Gnostic stance.

Imitatio Christi

Zosimos does, however, explicitly engage with a tradition of literal, physical sacrifice. Indeed, I would like to suggest that Zosimos' suffering characters imitate the suffering of Christian martyrs throughout the various martyrdom narratives which flourished in Egypt in the centuries around the period of Zosimos' life. In this way, it seems that those suffering in Zosimos' text are not simply suffering for purposes of redemption; rather, they join a self-sacrificial line, imitating the early Christian martyrs, who are themselves imitating the ultimate act of sacrifice, that of Christ himself.¹⁵⁷ There are several examples of shared motifs between *The Visions* and early Christian martyrological literature, many of which are explored in individual comments throughout the present edition: both involve dismemberment and decapitation as primary modes of punishment; both involve scenes of people being burned alive, but not dying; both even involve a snake / dragon being used as a first step to enter a divine space.¹⁵⁸ Beyond these themes and images, there are also terminological similarities between *The Visions* and some common phrases in contemporary Christian literature which discusses martyrdom as a means of imitating Christ. The three most telling terms are κόλασις ('punishment'), βία ἀφόρητος ('unendurable force'), and the verb ἀκολουθεῖν ('to follow'). The first of these – the term used throughout *The Visions* of the space in which Zosimos' characters suffer – is by far the more frequent of two terms (alongside ἀγών) used in Christian martyrdom narratives to

¹⁵⁴ FC 8. On religious orthopraxy in Zosimos' corpus (particularly FC), see Werrett 2023 (esp. 180-91).

¹⁵⁵ FC 8.

¹⁵⁶ Knipe 2011: 69.

¹⁵⁷ On *imitatio Christi* as one of the most important commands and methods of demonstrating discipleship in the early church, see Capes 1999. Zosimos elsewhere adopts a docetic stance on the Passion narrative, claiming that Christ suffered nothing, ἄνθρωπος γεγονώς παθητός...μηδὲν παθῶν (*Omega* 8).

¹⁵⁸ 1.16 and Ignatius, *Ad Rom.* 5; 1.27-8 and *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16; 1.61-3 and *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4. Note that Zosimos and Eusebius of Caesarea – an early compiler of martyrological literature – are roughly contemporaneous. On the ancient *draco*, see Ogden 2013.

describe a martyr's struggles, suffering, and death. Pionius, for example, is said to be punished with punishment (κολάσει κολάζομαι); it is a term which not only implies a punishment, but more specifically the suffering which early Christian martyrs undergo in the process of their death and eventual rebirth in the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁵⁹ The second phrase (βία ἀφόρητος) is the way in which both Ion and Agathodaemon describe their suffering in *The Visions* (1.15, 1.18, 2.27). This expression appears several times throughout early Christian martyrological literature: for example, Basil of Caesarea describes the Turkish martyr Gordius as being fixed on his own death, as fixed as a house unaffected by the unbearable force of the winds (ἀνέμων ἀφόρητοι βία), while John Chrysostom describes Egyptian martyrs as setting themselves up staunchly and powerfully against the force of the devil, which is itself described as violent and unendurable (τὴν ῥαγδαίαν καὶ ἀφόρητον τοῦ διαβόλου βίαν).¹⁶⁰ Finally, as Zosimos gets lost in *Lesson 2*, the *homunculus* who eventually immolates himself says 'follow me' (ἀκολουθεῖ μοι, 2.9) to the wandering alchemist; this phrase appears a total of ninety times throughout the Synoptic Gospels, as Christ also instructs people to follow him (an exhortation eventually understood as 'to imitate' him, a Pauline reinterpretation of Christ's message seemingly in the light of Platonic philosophy: for example, μμηταί μου γίνεσθε, καθὼς κἀγὼ Χριστοῦ).¹⁶¹

If any of these points were taken in isolation, they could easily be deemed coincidental, but together they suggest a theme: just as the martyrs explicitly died in imitation of Christ's suffering, so we are to understand Zosimos' characters as implicitly dying in the same imitative pattern. In short, those being reborn as spirits throughout Zosimos' text are not being reborn in a vacuum; rather, Zosimos suggests that, in being reborn, they follow in the footsteps of alchemists and Christian martyrs before them, in a long imitative line of suffering and transformation, which ultimately starts with Christ. Overall, the theme of suffering to achieve the separation of the body and soul, as well as for subsequent spiritual growth, is key to Zosimos' text, as he emphasises the necessity of following in the self-sacrificial footsteps of Christ and intellectually sacrificing oneself to God.

Baptismal Rebirth

After a sacrifice has taken place, the metaphorical redemptive rebirth of the spirit – the pneumatic man – is presented in the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions through a particular motif: a baptism in

¹⁵⁹ *Martyrdom of Pionius* 12.

¹⁶⁰ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Gordius* 31; John Chrysostom, *On the Egyptian Martyrs* 1.62.

¹⁶¹ *1 Cor.* 11:1.

gnōsis (knowledge).¹⁶² The notion of the baptismal font as a vessel for rebirth dates far back in the Christian tradition: in the Gospel of John, Christ informs Nicodemus that a man must be born again in water and the Holy Spirit (ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ Πνεύματος) in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁶³ This theme is made all the more prominent in the Pauline tradition:

ἢ ἀγνοεῖτε ὅτι ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν; συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ Πατρὸς, οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν.

Or do you not know that as many as who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Through this baptism into death, we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too might we walk in new life.¹⁶⁴

Indeed, baptism was considered by early Christians as a key means of participating in the death, but also the rebirth, of Christ.¹⁶⁵

For Zosimos and the alchemists, the notion of rebirth through baptism may have been particularly significant due to its analogical relationship with the tincturing of metals; both the action of dyeing (βάπτω) and the action of baptising (its intensive form, βαπτίζω) involve immersion into liquid which leads ultimately to a purifying transformation.¹⁶⁶ In the work of the alchemist Comarius, there is preserved an analogy attributed to Cleopatra, in which the alchemical vessel is both the tomb of the metals being transmuted in the *kerotakis* and the womb of the scientific product being born: ὅταν δὲ ἀνεωχθῆ ἡ τάφος, ἀναβήσονται αὐτὰ ἐξ Ἄδου ὡς οἶα βρέφος ἐκ γαστρὸς.¹⁶⁷ The image of the fused alembic and baptismal font also appears in *The Visions* in the motif of the *Crucibaltar* (the φιαλοβωμός), the very name of which conveys such an amalgamation. As Zosimos falls into his second dream, he claims to see the *Crucibaltar* filled with boiling water, and with countless people submerged in the vessel (εἶδον τὸν αὐτὸν φιαλοβωμὸν καὶ ἐπάνω ὕδωρ κοχλάζον καὶ πολὺν λαὸν εἰς αὐτὸν ἄπειρον ὄντα, 1.24-5). The image clearly resembles a baptismal scene, with the boiling water rendering it an alchemised version of baptismal rebirth.

¹⁶² See Fraser 2007.

¹⁶³ *John* 3:5.

¹⁶⁴ *Rom.* 6:3-4.

¹⁶⁵ Edwards 2015: 155.

¹⁶⁶ Fraser 2007: 39.

¹⁶⁷ *CAAG* 4.20.10.

The motif of baptismal rebirth also appears in the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions which so heavily influenced Zosimos' thought. Interestingly, this analogy between baptism and rebirth is clearly expressed through alchemical motifs in the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*, perhaps continuing to demonstrate the syncretistic relationship between these Late Antique esoteric currents.¹⁶⁸ On two occasions throughout this text, God and the Son of Man are described as dyers.¹⁶⁹ The former example explicitly relates the dyer's dipping a cloth in water to impart the quality of colour to God – described as a dyer – dipping a human in baptismal water to impart the quality of divinity. Just as the cloth is reborn with new quality from its 'baptism', so too is the human.

In the Gnostic and Hermetic accounts, it is not a physical baptism in water which is expressed – as it is in, for example, the Pauline tradition – but a metaphysical baptism which imparts salvific knowledge.¹⁷⁰ It seems, in fact, that a physical baptism would have been considered by many Gnostic sects simply to further tie the baptised individual to the sensible world, away from God; Turner has suggested that this metaphysical baptism was instead an act of “mental transformation, conceptual refinement, and abstraction from the world of psychic and sensible experience”.¹⁷¹ In the *Zostrianos* – a Sethian Gnostic ascent narrative dated to the early 3rd century – Zostrianos undergoes a series of baptisms which are said to strip away his attachment to the sensible world, imparting to him increasing amounts of knowledge as he ascends.¹⁷² This idea of a metaphysical, 'gnostic' baptism is taken to its extreme in the Hermetic tradition, as the initiate is literally baptised in the waters of Mind (ἐβαπτίσαντο τοῦ νοῦς).¹⁷³ In *CH 4*, entitled *The Basin*, Hermes Trismegistos explains to Tat that God sent a basin filled with *gnōsis* as a prize (ὡσπερ ἄθλον), in which those who wished could be baptised, thus acquiring knowledge of the divine world.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Hermes recounts the instruction to men to baptise themselves in this vessel which God sent to the sensible world (βάπτισον

¹⁶⁸ Although it is not necessary to demonstrate that Zosimos had read the *Gospel of Philip* to suggest that the connection between baptism and dyeing would have been particularly significant for him, it is worth noting that the non-canonical gospel was preserved in Coptic in a manuscript from the Nag Hammadi Library. On the alchemical allusions in the *Gospel of Philip*, see Charron and Painchaud 2001.

¹⁶⁹ *Gospel of Philip* 43, 63.

¹⁷⁰ On the Gnostic theory that knowledge of the truth of the divine world and one's own place in the cosmos is the key to salvation, see van den Broek 1996: 3. *CH 13* – on παλιγγενεσία – describes the attainment of knowledge as an experience of rebirth. On rebirth in the Hermetic tradition, see Bull 2018: 244-315.

¹⁷¹ Turner 2000: 89. Turner refers specifically to the Sethian Gnostic tradition, but this idea can be extended and applied to a range of Gnostic and Hermetic philosophies. See e.g., *CH 1.14* and *25.8*, where baptism is both a punishment which embodies humans, trapping them in flesh and the material world, as well as a means of understanding reality and achieving salvation. On some level, the rebirth through metaphysical baptism seems to negate and replace one's literal birth (see further *John 3:5*; Fowden 1986: 106).

¹⁷² *Zostrianos 25*. Jonas (1958: 34-7) describes the acquired knowledge as knowledge of God, knowledge of the unknowability of God, knowledge of one's relationship to God, and knowledge of the salvific power of knowledge itself.

¹⁷³ *CH 4.4*. Whilst the knowledge-imparting baptismal font is best expressed in Gnostic and Hermetic literature, it also appears in Neo-Platonic and Mithraic traditions (see Edwards 1992: 56).

¹⁷⁴ *CH 4.3*.

σεαυτήν...εἰς τοῦτον τὸν κρατῆρα), so that they might become perfect (τέλειοι ἐγένοντο ἄνθρωποι).¹⁷⁵ Similarly, in *The Visions*, Zosimos presents people as undergoing a baptismal rite to transform themselves into spirits (γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα, 1.31), thus also becoming perfect. Whilst the idea of baptism conferring *gnōsis* is never explicitly referenced throughout Zosimos' text, the theme of acquiring knowledge is a constant framework in which the text sits. One can easily imagine that this is the mystical baptismal rite through which Zosimos' characters are reborn into a state of perfection, on both a spiritual and alchemical level.

Spiritual Ascent

In addition to baptism in *gnōsis*, the Hermetic and Gnostic traditions also treat spiritual ascent as a part of redemption from the sensible world. Just as suffering and baptism involve an individual transcending the material body, ascent involve their transcending the material world. Indeed, considering Zosimos' aforementioned instruction to Theosebeia that she ought to rush up (ἀνάδραμε) after her baptism, it is certain that Zosimos also viewed ascent as part of this same soteriological process.¹⁷⁶ In fact, in the *Poimandres* – the text to which Zosimos clearly refers in *FC* 8 – *Poimandres* describes ascending to the divine realm and becoming one with God as the ultimate good of receiving the knowledge conferred in the mystical, metaphorical baptismal rite (τοῦτο ἔστι τὸ ἀγαθόν).¹⁷⁷ The theurgic practice of attempting to bring about one's ascent into the divine realm was widespread across a series of Late Antique currents, including Mithraism and the *Chaldaean Oracles* (in which ἀναγωγή was a principal means of purifying the soul).¹⁷⁸ Once again, however, it is with the Hermetic tradition that Zosimos' process of ascent seems to have the most in common. This mystical ascent – as is the case with one's self-sacrifice and baptism – is internal. During a discourse on rebirth directed towards Tat, Hermes describes ascent as something which occurs while the theurgist is still alive: it is an inward intellectual ascent which prefaces an upward cosmic ascent.¹⁷⁹ In his discussion of the theme of spiritual ascension in the Gnostic tradition, Jonas considers that cosmic ascent might be a visionary experience which one undergoes while in a brief state of ecstasy.¹⁸⁰ This suggestion becomes all the more appealing when one considers that the *Mithras*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* 4.4.

¹⁷⁶ *FC* 8.

¹⁷⁷ *CH* 1.26a. See also *ibid.* 4.11b for the spiritual ἄνω ὁδόν. Some texts – like the *Poimandres* – treat spiritual ascent as something which happens after a metaphorical baptism, while others – like the *Zostrianos* – treat it as something which happens at the same time as baptism. On Hermetic ascent, see Bull 2018: 316-71.

¹⁷⁸ On Mithraic ascent, see Merkelbach 1981: 59 (esp. fig. 22). On ἀναγωγή in the Chaldaean tradition, see Lewy (1956: 177).

¹⁷⁹ *CH* 13.3. See further Jonas 1958 (esp. 165).

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* 167.

Liturgy discusses the theurgic ritual of cosmic ascent immediately after instruction on bringing about a visionary experience.¹⁸¹ This is, however, not explicitly referenced in the Hermetic or Zosimean traditions; rather, in these, the process seems to be spiritual and meditative, reflecting Zosimos' instruction to his reader that several salvific processes must be discovered, understood, and enacted intellectually (ἐν τούτοις τοῖς νοήμασι, 1.75).¹⁸²

In the opening lines of *Lesson 2*, Zosimos says that it is his desire to climb the seven steps (ἀναβῆναι τὰς ἑπτὰ κλίμακας, 2.2) so that he might see the places of punishment. The fact that the number of steps is explicitly given as seven suggests that this spiritual ascent is more specifically a planetary ascent; that is, an ascent which uses the seven Classical planets as a stairway to Heaven (Earth to the Moon, to Mercury, to Venus, to the Sun, to Mars, to Jupiter, to Saturn). Having expressed this desire and having started his ascent, Zosimos eventually finds himself on the third step (τρίτην κλίμακα, 2.16), and later still finds himself on the fourth step (τετάρτην κλίμακα, 3.6). There are two particularly important ascents in the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions which also involve steady increments in spiritual growth at each stage of the cosmic ascent across the planetary spheres.¹⁸³ In the Gnostic *Zostrianos*, the titular character, writing a first-person narrative account, is baptised six times across the six planets as he ascends to the *Ogdoad*; each baptism renders him an increasingly perfected spiritual being, transforming him from a 'root-seeing angel', to an 'angel of the male race', to a 'holy angel', to a 'perfect angel'.¹⁸⁴ A similar concept of gradual perfection across each planet as one ascends to God appears in the *Poimandres*. As Poimandres himself tells Hermes, those undergoing upward spiritual journeys discard vices as they ascend. On each planet, the ascending spirit gives away something 'human' about them: that is, something which ties them to the material world.¹⁸⁵ For example, to use the steps which Zosimos mentions explicitly in *Lessons 2 and 3*, Poimandres states that spirits lose lust on the third step (presumably Venus) and arrogance on the fourth step (presumably the Sun). The final step, once all vices have been cast away, is to become a spirit, and ultimately to enter into God (ἐν θεῷ γίνονται).¹⁸⁶ Thus, Zosimos' text depicts spiritual ascent in a way that synthesises Late Antique traditions of internal purification, cosmic ascent, and the soteriological power of *gnōsis*.

¹⁸¹ *Mithras Liturgy* 620-5.

¹⁸² Grimes 2018: 119.

¹⁸³ See Johnston 1997 (esp. 176) for a discussion of the fact that the majority of apocalyptic journeys do not seem to improve gradually the condition of the traveller's soul; rather, they are perfect at the outset, hence their being chosen to ascend. This is clearly not the case in *The Visions*, nor indeed in the *Zostrianos* and *Poimandres*.

¹⁸⁴ *Zostrianos* 5-7.

¹⁸⁵ *CH* 1.24-6.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.* 1.26a.

The Temple of Dendera

Zosimos' text, in fact, contains several stairways. Although the stairway to Heaven in *Lessons* 2 and 3 is interesting for the role it appears to play in Zosimos' increasing level of both spiritual purification and alchemical initiation, it is the fifteen-stepped stairways in *Lesson* 1 – those which the anonymous priest both descended and ascended (πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας καὶ ἀνιέναι με τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας, 1.10-1) – which may have had a more interesting iconographical influence. It has been argued that, in his literary construction of this stairway, Zosimos drew on more than the aforementioned stairways that appear in a wide range of Late-Antique religio-philosophical texts, from Hermeticism to Mithraism; rather, Zosimos may also have been influenced by iconography which he himself saw at the Dendera temple complex.

The Dendera temple complex, located in modern-day Qena, is one of the best-preserved temple complexes in Egypt. Although there is no direct evidence that Zosimos visited Dendera, it is worth noting that Qena lies on the route along the Nile between Akhmim and Memphis, a city where it is known that Zosimos visited in order to inspect a furnace (possibly at the Temple of Ptah).¹⁸⁷ If Zosimos travelled along the Nile, which seems likely, he would have passed the Dendera. Although archaeological evidence suggests that the extant complex was built atop structures which date as far back as the latter centuries of the Old Kingdom (c.2250 BC), the earliest extant part of the complex is the *mammisi* (birth-house) of Nectanebo II, the last native pharaoh of ancient Egypt. Beyond this building, the compound includes (among other things) a Temple of Hathor, a sacred lake, gateways to both Domitian and Trajan, and a Temple of Isis. It is the first two of these things which are of particular interest in the interpretation of Zosimos' *Visions*.

As discussed on pp.101-2, the ceiling of the *pronaos* (the columned vestibule before the inner sanctum) of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera is richly adorned with elaborate astral iconography, including a stairway which ascends through the heavens (fig. 5, p.102). Egyptian gods line the fifteen steps of this stairway (which may well be mirrored in the δεκαπέντε κλίμακες mentioned by the priest in Zosimos' first dream sequence), seemingly climbing towards the top step, on which Thoth (the god of, among other things, the Moon and magic) looks towards the Eye of Horus (representative of, among other things, wisdom and unity). In addition to the ceiling at the Temple of Hathor, the sacred lake may also have influenced some of the prominent imagery which appears throughout Zosimos' text: namely, the πηγή ὕδατος καθαρωτάτου in the imaginary temple in *Lesson* 1.5. As discussed on pp.153-4, while these waters may simultaneously represent the waters of heavenly temples in the Gnostic tradition, or indeed Divine Water (a key alchemical substance), the

¹⁸⁷ *On Appliances and Furnaces* 2 (Mert. 23). BeRu 216.

waters of Zosimos' temple may also mirror the sacred, purifying waters of real temple complexes, such as those at Dendera. This association may be bolstered by Zosimos' comment that the priest sits in the waters (1.64), possibly recalling priests washing and purifying themselves in sacred lakes before performing cultic activity.¹⁸⁸ In sum, both the instance of the fifteen steps being reminiscent of the ceiling at the Temple of Hathor and the instance of the waters of the noetic temple being reminiscent of the sacred lake at the Dendera complex suggests a plausible symbolic borrowing by Zosimos, integrating features of a significant temple with which he was familiar into the fabric of his visionary accounts.

Again, although there is no direct textual evidence which demonstrates Zosimos' familiarity with the temple complex at Dendera, its convenient location, its prominence as a key cultic space, its rich Egyptian religious iconography, and the fact that Zosimos' text includes features which were present (and notable) at the complex increase the likelihood that Zosimos may have been familiar with the site, and also inspired by it.

¹⁸⁸ On purification rituals in the sacred waters of Egyptian temples (with specific reference to the Temple of Bastet at Bubastis), see Lange-Athinodorou *et al.* 2019: 1.

Literary Context

The present thesis attempts to draw parallels between *The Visions* and several key pieces of literature from a wide range of Late Antique religio-philosophical trends. It is helpful to examine Zosimos' own reading culture and the literary context in which he composed his alchemical treatises and to demonstrate the likelihood that he would indeed have been familiar with the texts which this edition most frequently presents as *comparanda* and sources of allusion.

Literary Culture in Panopolis

Panopolis was famous in Late Antiquity for its Greek literary culture.¹⁸⁹ Smith's detailed analysis of the preservation and transmission of traditions (with a focus on indigenous Egyptian traditions) in Panopolis leads to a suggestion that the region may have been an area where wisdom literature was widely copied and circulated.¹⁹⁰ The city's thriving religious institutions housed a vibrant scribal culture which likely included the transcription of Biblical scriptures, Judaeo-Christian apocrypha, Classical philosophical work, and Egyptian religious / wisdom texts. This was likely a product of Panopolis' rare position as a city which remained pagan well into the Late Antique period, but which was also deeply Hellenised, under the rule of Imperial Rome, and home to influential Christian monastic communities. This would render Zosimos' home-town a dynamic hub of Classical, Egyptian, and Judaeo-Christian intellectualism. Given Zosimos' education and interests in religion and philosophy – in particular, the syncretism between different religio-philosophical frameworks – it seems likely that he would have been familiar with a wide range of texts in the Greek literary tradition.

It is also significant that Nag Hammadi is just 100 km south of Panopolis along the Nile. The thirteen codices of the Nag Hammadi Library discovered in 1945 consist largely of Gnostic texts (including multiple copies of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, texts also found in the *Berlin codex*, discovered in Akhmim and dated to the 5th century), but also contained the Hermetic *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (a text which was possibly highly influential on *The Visions* given its ascent narrative), as well as the Hermetic *Asclepius* and some fragments of Plato's *Republic*.¹⁹¹ The

¹⁸⁹ See Fowden 1986 (esp. 174); Orlandi 2002 (on the library of the monastery founded by the Panopolite hermit Shenoute); Smith 2002. Beyond Greek, see Thissen 2002 for the circulation of and traditions concerning Demotic literature in Panopolis.

¹⁹⁰ Smith 2002: 237. Smith notes that almost all works found in Akhmim (modern Panopolis) are also known from manuscripts found elsewhere in Egypt.

¹⁹¹ *Apocryphon of John*: NHC 1, 2, 3, 4; *Sophia of Jesus Christ*: NHC 3; *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*: NHC 6; *Asclepius*: NHC 6; *Republic* (frag.): NHC 6.

proximity of this enormous cache of texts, which presumably would have been of great interest to Zosimos, may lead one to suspect that the alchemist not only lived among Gnostics, Hermeticists, and Neo-Platonic philosophers in Panopolis, but had the opportunity to develop an intimate understanding of these texts.¹⁹²

Zosimos' Library

Whilst I take as granted Zosimos' familiarity with several texts cited throughout the present work – for example, the Book of Revelation and the *Timaeus* – it is worth independently establishing the likelihood of his familiarity with the texts which I have cited most frequently as sources of allusion throughout *The Visions: the Poimandres; Corpus Hermeticum 4*; and the Enochian apocrypha.

Poimandres

Zosimos' familiarity with the *Poimandres* is evident through a direct reference to the text in his treatise *Final Account*:

ὅταν δὲ ἐπιγνοῦσα αὐτὴν τελειωθεῖσαν, τότε καὶ τῶν φυσικῶν τῆς ὕλης κατάπτησον, καὶ καταδραμοῦσα ἐπὶ τὸν Ποιμένανδρα (*sic*) καὶ βαπτισθεῖσα τῷ κρατῆρι, ἀνάδραμε ἐπὶ τὸ γένος τὸ σόν.

Whenever you recognise that you have become spiritually perfect, cower away from the material world, and, having hurried to *Poimenandra (sic)* and having been baptised in the basin, run up to your own people.¹⁹³

¹⁹² The Nag Hammadi Library seems to demonstrate cultural (especially philosophical and literary) interaction between Hermeticists and Gnostics. Zosimos himself even talks about shared traditions between οἱ Ἑβραῖοι καὶ αἱ ἱερὰ Ἑρμοῦ βίβλοι ('the Hebrews and the Sacred Books of Hermes', *Omega 15*); this, however, may simply betray Zosimos' belief that these traditions can be coherently synthesised to reveal eternal truths, and may reveal little about historical interaction between the Judaeo-Christian (that is to say, Gnostic) and Hermetic traditions.

¹⁹³ FC 8.

Despite the misspelling of Poimandres' name, the reference, coupled with the shared motifs between the *Poimandres* and *The Visions* – oneiric revelation, purification, and heavenly ascent – makes Zosimos' knowledge of this text a sure fact.¹⁹⁴

Zosimos' familiarity with Hermetic literature more generally – though not necessarily the entire Hermetic corpus – seems also to be extremely likely. It is worth noting that proof that Zosimos was familiar with the *Poimandres* – i.e. *Corpus Hermeticum* 1 – does not equal proof that he was familiar with the remainder of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The treatment of the Hermetic texts as a corpus is a possibly somewhat anachronistic convention of modern scholarship; the Hermetic texts appear to have been written by several authors across the first few centuries AD and there is no evidence that the seventeen texts of the modern corpus were treated as such historically, let alone evidence that Zosimos would have encountered the Hermetic texts as part of a wider collection.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the importance of Hermetic literature to Zosimos ought also be obvious from the key role which Hermes Trismegistos – the central figure of the Hermetic worldview – plays in Zosimos' *Omega*.¹⁹⁶ In this treatise, Zosimos presents Hermes as a guide to mankind, who encourages people to seek themselves, to know God, and to dominate the ineffable triad (ζητεῖν ἑαυτόν, καὶ θεὸν ἐπιγνόντα κρατεῖν τὴν ἀκατονόμαστον τριάδα).¹⁹⁷ Elsewhere in the text, Zosimos refers to Hermes as μυριάμεγας ('thousand times great'), a possible exaggeration of the ordinary epithet τρισμέγιστος ('thrice greatest'), and even mentions the truth of man's divine spark as being revealed in αἱ ἱεραὶ Ἑρμοῦ βίβλοι ('the sacred books of Hermes'), presumably a reference to Hermetic literature itself.¹⁹⁸ In short, it seems highly likely that Zosimos was intimately familiar with a great deal of the literature which now comprises the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Corpus Hermeticum 4, *The Basin*

The fourth book of the Hermetic corpus, *The Basin* (ὁ κρατήρ) – alternatively known as *The Mixing Bowl* or *The Monad* – presents a discourse from Hermes to his son, Tat. Hermes explains that God did not imbue mankind with knowledge of the divine from birth; rather, he sent a basin filled with Mind as a prize after which certain people would be able to strive.¹⁹⁹ Hermes describes the process of a

¹⁹⁴ On the Egyptian context of the *Poimandres* (and the Hermetic corpus more widely), see Kingsley 1993.

¹⁹⁵ See further Scott 1985: 29.

¹⁹⁶ As further evidence of Zosimos' likely familiarity with Hermetic literature, Mertens (2002: 172) points out a 3rd-century dedication to Hermes Trismegistos found at Panopolis (SBV 8917).

¹⁹⁷ *Omega* 7.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.* 8; 15.

¹⁹⁹ *CH* 4.3.

human reaching understanding of the semi-divine nature of mankind as a process of being baptised in this basin:

ὅσοι μὲν οὖν συνῆκαν τοῦ κηρύγματος, καὶ ἐβαπτίσαντο τοῦ νοός, οὗτοι μετέσχον τῆς γνώσεως, καὶ τέλειοι ἐγένοντο ἄνθρωποι, τὸν νοῦν δεξάμενοι.

Those who pay heed to this declaration, baptising themselves in Mind, get their share of knowledge (*gnōsis*), and they become perfected humans, having received Mind.²⁰⁰

The language of baptism in the *gnōsis*-filled basin seems to be replicated in the section of *Final Account* quoted above. Having instructed Theosebeia to run down to *Poimenandra*, Zosimos further instructs her to be baptised in the basin (βαπτισθεῖσα τῷ κρατῆρι) before she eventually joins her own people – that is, people she is able to join because she has been initiated into the mysteries of *gnōsis* and become spiritually perfected (τελειωθεῖσαν).²⁰¹ The similarity of motif and even phraseology, coupled with the aforementioned seeming popularity of Hermetic texts in Panopolis and surrounding areas, suggests beyond a reasonable doubt that Zosimos was indeed familiar with *Corpus Hermeticum 4*.

Enochian Apocrypha

The Enochian apocrypha are three books which espouse an Enochian apocalyptic tradition based on a reference in the Biblical account of the lineage from Adam to Noah that Enoch (Adam’s great-great-great-great grandson) ‘walked with God’ before his death.²⁰² Although the tradition is made up of three books, only two (*1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch*) are likely to have been written before Zosimos’ time at the beginning of the 4th century.²⁰³ Both books recount the visions, ascent, and revelations afforded to Enoch, highlighting motifs which are clearly also of great importance to *The Visions*.

No explicit references to the Enochian literature appear in Zosimos’ extant corpus. Fraser, however, points to a passage preserved by a 9th-century Byzantine chronicler, George Synkellos, which is

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* 4.4. For this theme in Zosimos’ corpus, see further Fraser 2007: 40-3.

²⁰¹ *FC* 8.

²⁰² *Gen.* 5:22-4.

²⁰³ For the dating of the Enochian texts, see Orlov 2012. See also a possible reference to *2 Enoch* at Origen, *On First Principles* 1.3.3.

supposedly a fragment of Zosimos which is no longer extant in the Greek tradition.²⁰⁴ The fragment describes mankind's discovery of alchemy, stating that 'ancient and divine scriptures' (αἱ ἀρχαῖαι καὶ θεῖαι γραφαί) describe lustful angels descending from Heaven and teaching divine techniques to humanity in exchange for sexual favours.²⁰⁵ This aetiology of the alchemical tradition also appears in the *Book of Enoch*, leading Fraser to conclude that the 'ancient and divine scriptures' are the ancient Hebrew religious texts, including the *Book of Enoch*.²⁰⁶ In *1 Enoch*, the (fallen) angel Azazel is said to teach humans about metallurgy, precious stones, and colouring dyes in exchange for sexual relations with the women on Earth, as a horde of other angels also revealed other divine secrets to mankind, including astrology and incantation.²⁰⁷ Olson goes further than Fraser regarding Zosimos' familiarity with the Enochian tradition, plausibly suggesting that glosses in the Greek text of *1 Enoch* in the *codex Panopolitanus* (P. Cair. 10759) might be traced to Zosimos himself, or perhaps to his students.²⁰⁸ Thus, once can be certain that Zosimos was intimately familiar with the Enochian tradition, with which he seems to engage frequently.

²⁰⁴ Fraser 2004: 125.

²⁰⁵ George Synkellos, *Ecloga Chronographica* 14.4-11. Zosimos gives a similar story about the introduction of alchemy to mankind at *CMA Syr.* 2.8.

²⁰⁶ Although the *Book of Enoch* is non-canonical – except in the canon of certain Ethiopian communities of diasporic Jews, in which it is part of their Ge'ez scriptures – it is considered a highly influential text in Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity (Fraser 2004: 125). A number of Enochian fragments were also found in Qumran amongst the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, further suggesting the prominent position which it enjoyed in Antiquity.

²⁰⁷ *1 Enoch* 8.

²⁰⁸ Olson 2013.

Style

The Visions is unique among the other treatises in the Zosimean corpus in that it is the only text which is largely narrative-driven.²⁰⁹ This section explores the style of Zosimos' text, from the widest narratological frameworks to the most minute lexical choices, examining the places where *The Visions* fits into the literary, religio-philosophical, or scientific traditions which formed the context in which it was composed, and indeed the places where a host of distinctive elements converge to create the unique style of *The Visions*.

Apocalypseis and Dreams

Over the course of the narrative, *The Visions* clearly presents sacred knowledge being in some way imparted to Zosimos, as the alchemist grows in his *gnōsis*. This revelatory motif was common-place in the apocalyptic literature which so heavily influenced Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian communities. Texts such as the Enochian apocrypha, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the Book of Revelation were widely circulated and of paramount importance.²¹⁰ These texts all include divine knowledge being revealed to a human, often through a vision or dream, and usually as part of that individual's ascent to Heaven, interaction with angels, and eventual contact with the divine.²¹¹ Collins defines the genre as:

[One] of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.²¹²

The Visions, however, falls into a specific subcategory of visionary / revelatory literature: dream literature. In fact, the text's being split into a series of dream sequences is the broadest stylistic

²⁰⁹ There are brief snippets of narratives in other Zosimean texts (e.g., the story of *Phōs-Adam* in *Omega 11*), but *The Visions* is the only work in the Zosimean oeuvre which is narrative-driven in its entirety.

²¹⁰ Flannery (2014: 109) points to three postexilic visions in the *Old Testament* which seem to have most heavily influenced revelatory literature in this period: *Ezek.* 1-3; *Zech.* 1-8; and *Dan.* 7-12.

²¹¹ Flannery (2014: 110) has subdivided the purposes of the visions of Jewish and Christian revelatory texts into three categories: to offer divine knowledge; to offer physical healing; or to offer psychological consolation. Zosimos' *Visions* clearly fit into the first category.

²¹² Collins 1979: 9.

framework of Zosimos' work. Any reader of *The Visions* must therefore ask themselves: why exactly is Zosimos' text styled as a series of dreams? Either the dreams literally happened, or they serve some other, literary function. The champion of the first option – in his foray into the psychoanalytical power of alchemical literature in his later life – was Carl Gustav Jung. As Jung writes:

Psychologically at least, there is no ground for supposing that it is an allegorical invention. Its salient features seem to indicate that for Zosimos it was a highly significant experience which he wished to communicate to others. Although alchemical literature contains a number of allegories which without doubt are merely didactic fables and are not based on direct experience, the vision of Zosimos may well have been an actual happening.²¹³

Indeed, a tremendous boost to an argument for the historical reality of Zosimos' dreams is the startlingly dream-like nature of the narrative, through the implementation of 'dream logic'. Of all literary dreams in Antiquity, Zosimos' is arguably the one which aligns the most closely with real dreams: there is no obvious plot; the identity of characters is confused; things seem to morph; the dream is not spatially consistent; the text is full of seeming non-sequiturs; and the narrative is repetitive.²¹⁴ Zosimos' narrative might well record real dreams. On the other hand, however, Zosimos' dreams contain a great deal of artifice, engaging with a wide range of literary traditions, tantalising the reader throughout, all with a careful use of imagery and vocabulary.²¹⁵ It may well be that Zosimos did have an alchemically charged dream, but recorded it with a level of artistic freedom afforded by poetic license. This seems the most likely explanation of both the literary and stylistic quality of *The Visions*, as well as the sheer unprecedented realism of his oneiric experiences.

If one supposes that Zosimos' dreams are not an autobiographical account of his real experiences, the framework must have some literary function. That dreams provided a liminal space between sensible reality and some higher plane, and were therefore a space ripe for divine revelation (especially in the apocalyptic genre), was an established theory in the ancient world, dating back as far as Penelope's dream of Odysseus as an eagle (which also has an interesting allegorical style, not unlike Zosimos' dreams).²¹⁶ The Greek cataloguer and codifier of dreams, Artemidorus, in the opening sections of his *Oneirocritica*, defines two types of dreams: one, the ὄνειρος, which is

²¹³ Jung 1967: 66.

²¹⁴ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 212.

²¹⁵ *ibid.* 213.

²¹⁶ *Od.* 19.536-43. See further discussion at Lopes da Silveira 2020: 210-2.

indicative of what will happen in the future; and the other, the ἐνύπνιον, which is indicative of present concerns.²¹⁷ Whether about one's concerns for the present or future, however, dreams were considered semi-divine spaces where revelations could occur.²¹⁸ The notion of the dream as a revelatory realm was not only a literary phenomenon, but a practical one too. Even into the 5th century, Shenoute of Atripe – an eremitic Christian leader and abbot of the White Monastery, just across the Nile from Panopolis (at a distance of 12km) – complained about (as he deemed, heretical) Christians who 'sleep in the tombs of the dead to gain visions'.²¹⁹ This is a clear reference to the Egyptian practice of incubation, wherein people would sleep in places of worship (many of which built dormitories specifically for this purpose) with the hope of receiving some kind of divine revelation.²²⁰ Although originally an Egyptian divinatory custom, Shenoute's criticism demonstrates that it continued to be practised by Christians in Egypt throughout, and beyond, Zosimos' time.

As suggested above, the Biblical corpus contains a host of revelatory dream sequences which seem to have been influential on the apocalyptic traditions which abounded in the few centuries before Zosimos' life. Of the many dreams which appear throughout the Biblical corpus, however, that of Jacob (*Gen.* 28:10-9) seems the most closely related to those of Zosimos. As Lopes da Silveira has noted, there are a range of similarities between Jacob's dream and the narrative of *Lesson* 1.2: just as Zosimos sees Ion standing atop steps, so too does Jacob see God standing atop a ladder; just as the priest ascended and descended the steps in Zosimos' first dream, so too do angels ascend and descend the ladder in Jacob's dream; just as Ion introduces himself with the famous ἐγώ εἰμι formula (see 1.14), so too does God introduce himself similarly (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ τοῦ πατρὸς σου); just as Zosimos, having woken up, considers the meaning of his dream and its allegorical nature, so too does Jacob; and just as Zosimos is afraid, so too is Jacob.²²¹

A second oneiric *apocalypsis* which seems to have been very influential on Zosimos' composition of *The Visions* is, once again, the *Poimandres*.²²² Just as Zosimos falls asleep while considering Nature

²¹⁷ ταύτη γὰρ ὄνειρος ἐνύπνιον διαφέρει, ἧ συμβέβηκε τῷ μὲν εἶναι σημαντικῶ τῶν μελλόντων, τῷ δὲ τῶν ὄντων (*Artem. On.* 1.1). See further Lopes da Silveira 2020: 243-4.

²¹⁸ See further Neil (2020); Vitek (2017). The divinely inspired dream is also a crucial theme in Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*.

²¹⁹ Shenoute, *Those Who Work Evil* 103 (*ap.* Amelineau 1907: 220). See further Frankfurter 2010: 32.

²²⁰ On incubation in Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 2012; Renberg 2016; Renberg 2017.

²²¹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 205. 1.9 and *Gen.* 28:13; 1.10-1 and *Gen.* 28:12; 1.14 and *Gen.* 28:13; 1.21-3 and *Gen.* 28:16; 1.21 and *Gen.* 28:17. Lopes da Silveira (2020: 206-7) highlights the similar allegorical nature of the dreams of both Jacob and Zosimos, referencing an early allegorical interpretation of Jacob's dream from the rabbinic *Midrash Rabbah* (*Gen.* 624-5). See pp.64-9 on the allegorical nature of Zosimos' oneiric narrative. See also Origen, *Contr. Cels.* 6.21, who critiques Plato's supposedly plagiarising Jacob's vision of the ladder to Heaven in the eschatology of his *Phaedrus*.

²²² Other dream visions which are cited throughout the commentary include *The Book of Enoch* 13.8 and *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4. Both of these seem also to have been important sources for Zosimos.

and alchemical theory, so too does Hermes fall asleep while pondering ‘the things that are’ (περὶ τῶν ὄντων).²²³ Further, Ion and Poimandres both introduce themselves with the famous ‘ἐγώ εἰμι’ formula before some cryptic revelation is given which Zosimos and Hermes must attempt to understand (see further 1.14). The revelation given to Hermes reads thus:

καὶ μετ’ ὀλίγον σκότος κατωφερὲς ἦν, ἐν μέρει γεγενημένον, φοβερόν τε καὶ στυγνόν...εἶδον μεταβαλλόμενον τὸ σκότος εἰς ὑγρᾶν τινα φύσιν...

After a short while, there was in one part a darkness moving downwards, which was terrifying and gloomy...and I saw the darkness transformed into some watery substance...²²⁴

Between the imagery of darkness moving downwards and of material transformation into water – both key motifs in Zosimos’ text – as well as the multitude of images shared with *Gen. 28*, it seems certain that Zosimos’ dreamy revelations self-consciously fit into an apocalyptic tradition. It is even possible that Zosimos read the *Poimandres* as an alchemical allegory itself – or, perhaps more likely, as a revelation with what he deemed to be alchemical potentiality – and that *The Visions* is something of an expansion of a kernel which Zosimos identified in the first text of the Hermetic corpus. This seems to be a reasonable hypothesis based on the available evidence, but is admittedly speculative.²²⁵ There is a sense, then, in which Zosimos may have chosen dreams as the vessel for his narrative because of well-known traditions which held that divine revelations and associated transformative experiences simply belong in the dreamscape.²²⁶ This both places Zosimos in a literary tradition of dream *apocalypses*, as well as possibly acting as something of an authentication strategy to Zosimos’ work. By presenting his narrative as a realistic dream, the revelation within may have taken on a new layer of truth, or even sanctity, for Zosimos’ ancient readership. The layers of artifice and allusivity in Zosimos’ dreams – seemingly engaging both with the Hermetic tradition through the dream of Hermes in the *Poimandres* and with the Biblical tradition through the dream of Jacob in Genesis – further suggest that, though possibly based on real experiences, Zosimos’ dreams ought largely be considered literary inventions.

²²³ *CH* 1.1.

²²⁴ *ibid.* 1.4.

²²⁵ Cf. Lopes da Silveira 2020: 249. She argues that, although Zosimos did almost certainly read the *Poimandres*, the similarities between the texts likely stem from their ‘sharing a larger cultural backdrop of revealed knowledge’.

²²⁶ Flannery 2014: 111.

There is, however, a crucial association with sleep in both the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions which ought also be considered, and which, to my knowledge, has not been examined in Zosimean scholarship: the association of sleep with ignorance. In a seemingly contradictory fashion, whilst dreams are often considered sources of divine revelation, the motif of sleep is also often metaphorically linked to sluggish ignorance of God. Following his revelatory dream in the *Poimandres*, Hermes pleads for people to wake up from their state of ignorance, comparing it to them giving themselves to sleep (ὕπνω ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδεδωκότες...τῆ ἀγνωσίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ); this sleep is later referred to as totally without reason (ὕπνω ἀλόγῳ).²²⁷ In this way, ignorance of any higher reality is aligned with sleep (and eventually death) in the Hermetic texts, while revelation through *gnōsis* is likened to the process of waking up from that sleep. An identical motif can be found in Gnostic literature. In the *Gospel of Truth*, ignorance is again metaphorised as sleep:

Up until the time when those who go about in all these things wake up, those in the thick of all these disturbances see nothing, because these things are nothing. So it is for those who have cast off ignorance like sleep, and do not think of it as anything, nor do they think of its events as events which are solid...Just as each person who was asleep acted in this way at the time when he was unknowing, so, conversely, he comes to know as if he has woken up.²²⁸

Given Zosimos' interest in religious initiation, as well as the vocabulary of knowledge used throughout *The Visions* (see below), it seems reasonable to suggest that the framework of a sequence of dreams, from which Zosimos wakes and carefully considers religio-philosophical matters until he understands them well, might highlight the process of acquiring knowledge of higher realities. Just as Zosimos wakes from his literal sleep and deeply ponders these matters, so too must Zosimos' reader wake from their metaphorical sleep and ponder what they have read.

One final aspect of the dream framework of *The Visions* – which, again, has not been explored in scholarship – is the flexibility of Zosimos' boundary between dreams and reality. Throughout *Lesson 1*, little is stable: characters are confused, objects and people transform, and the cryptic allegory

²²⁷ CH 1.27.

²²⁸ *Gospel of Truth* 22. The *Gospel of Truth* later describes being without *gnōsis* as being asleep and afraid in disturbing dreams, perhaps engaging in a tradition of nightmares ascribed to ignorance to which Zosimos also alludes (*Gospel of Truth* 29). On sleep as a Gnostic metaphor, see Jonas 1958: 68. Flannery (2014: 110) notes that the majority of Gnostic apocalypses involve waking visions, likely related to this traditional metaphor by which sleep equates to ignorance.

does little to help the reader's sanity. The firmest boundary in *Lesson 1* is indeed that between sleep and wakefulness. For Zosimos, the dreams are a space of fantastical confusion, while the waking world is a space of sober contemplation. This liminality, however, begins to lose shape in *Lessons 2* and *3*. Each section in the latter two *Lessons* opens with Zosimos' desire to ascend to the place of punishment or even his seeing a priest over the *Crucibaltar* (all landmarks in the dream space). When the reader is firm in their knowledge that Zosimos must be dreaming, however, the alchemist then falls asleep, implying that he had just been awake (2.5, 2.18, 3.5). By the end of the final dream, in fact, the once concrete barrier between sleep and wakefulness has totally disintegrated: Zosimos wakes up and is followed from his dream by the characters with whom he had just interacted (the sacrificial priest holding a knife and the man who followed him, 3.12-4). In the 'real world', the characters even speak to Zosimos, telling him that his work is completed (ἡ τέχνη πεπλήρωται, 3.14). By the end of the text, dream and reality, the conscious and the unconscious, the mystical and the scientific, seem totally to have fused. There is no longer a barrier separating them. It seems to me that this motif of the dissolving boundary between sleep and wakefulness – especially as dream characters follow Zosimos into the real world – represents Zosimos' attainment of *gnōsis* from the revelatory dreamscape, and his application of it in reality. He integrates the knowledge he has gained into his everyday life. There is certainly a level at which Zosimos' unification of mystical knowledge with sober reality mirrors the message at the heart of his text.

Alchemical Allegory

More than just a dream narrative, *The Visions* presents an allegorical dream. Indeed, whilst the narrative is replete with altars, stairways, temples, sacrificial priests, suffering, and rebirth – both the motifs of a fictional, literary temple and potentially the motifs of historical temples (for example, the lunar staircase of the Temple of Dendera) – these seem to be largely aesthetic, having little to do with the core interpretation which Zosimos wants his reader to take from the text. Indeed, Lopes da Silveira – the first scholar truly to explore the literary potential of Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature – notes that Zosimos himself indicates the allegorical nature of his work when, after the first dream sequence, he considers the altar, the steps, and Ion's transformations, and ultimately concludes that his dream was about the composition of the waters (μη οὕτως ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ὑδάτων θέσις; 1.22).²²⁹ Given that the composition of waters makes no appearance in this first dream, the allegorical framework of the narrative becomes evident. Further, towards the end of *Lesson 1*, Zosimos mentions the reader opening up flowers of words (ἄνθη λόγων, 1.67), a perfect

²²⁹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 199.

image to represent a surface allegorical reading being opened up by the reader, revealing that which is hidden beneath layers of meaning. This, then, poses two crucial questions. Why did Zosimos choose to style his text as an allegory? And what exactly is being allegorised?

The most basic answer to Zosimos' motivations behind allegorising his message might be that the allegorical framework is simply a product of his unconscious mind, and that the alchemist's text faithfully records a set of dreams which he did indeed literally have.²³⁰ This would imply that the allegory has no specific function, but is instead a by-product of Zosimos' active imagination. There are, however, practical and literary functions of allegory. Firstly, another relatively straightforward answer reflects the fact that the narrative is presented as a dream; as Artemidorus himself notes, one of the most common types of ὄνειροι (dreams about future concerns) is the allegorical dream. Artemidorus describes allegorical dreams as those which show men various things through different images (ἀλληγορικοί δὲ οἱ δι' ἄλλων ἄλλα σημαίνοντες) and are a result of the soul speaking in riddles (αἰνισσομένης...τῆς ψυχῆς).²³¹ In other words, Zosimos' allegorical style could be a result of the fact that dream narratives and allegorical writing were thought to complement each other very well in the ancient imagination.

A second interpretation is that Zosimos may be playing into a literary tradition; after all, allegory, code, and obscurity define alchemical treatises. This may not be as anachronistic a statement as first it seems. Whilst *The Visions* is the first extant alchemical text which employs the kind of coded, symbolic language which came to define alchemy in later centuries, Zosimos himself refers to allegorical alchemical treatises which predate him: for example, Ps.-Democritus is said to have spoken in riddles (δι' αἰνιγμάτων), such that he created a mystery (μυστήριον).²³² This tradition of obscuring alchemical knowledge dates back even before the time of Ps.-Democritus; Zosimos mentions secrets being engraved onto the walls of sanctuaries in symbolic characters (συμβολικοῖς χαρακτῆρσιν), such that even those who dared to investigate them would still be unable to perform alchemical operations, and also comments on the fact that Democritus himself presented his work in the form of riddles (αἰνιγματοειδοῦς), wanting to make everything enigmatic in this way (τὰ πάντα αἰνίξασθαι ἠθέλησεν).²³³ The reason for the secretive nature of alchemical communication is the protection of the trade secrets of a certain guild, either from rival guilds or, possibly more relevant in Zosimos' case, from those in power who did not approve of privatised / non-regulated alchemical

²³⁰ See above for debates over the historicity of Zosimos' dreams.

²³¹ Artem. *On.* 1.2.

²³² Principe 2013: 2. *Four Bodies According to Democritus* 4 (CAAG 3.12). The use of αἰνιγμα is ironic, given Quintilian's claim that it is a fault of allegory to be too obscure (*vitium meo quidem iudicio*), such that it may no longer reasonably be called allegory, but rather a riddle (*aenigma*) (Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.52).

²³³ FC 4-5.

practice.²³⁴ Zosimos explains to Theosebeia that the creative power of alchemy belongs to the kings of Egypt (ἡ δημιουργικὴ μένη βασιλέων), and that they control how much alchemical knowledge is transmitted, as well as ensuring that alchemists practised their art only for the kings, and that any alchemist performing operations for his own benefit would have been punished (έτιμωρεῖτο).²³⁵ Indeed, in *The Visions*, Zosimos talks about the need for secrecy concerning alchemical matters, lest any loose-lipped initiate destroy themselves (μήπως καὶ λέγων ἑαυτὸν ἀνέλης, 1.77). It seems clear, then, that Zosimos was aware that a certain degree of secrecy was necessary when writing alchemical texts. If this is the reason for *The Visions*' allegorical style, it does seem odd that it is the only Zosimean text to be written in this way. Indeed, the majority of Zosimos' corpus transmits alchemical recipes a little more clearly, with step-by-step instructions, albeit using a range of mystifying *Decknamen*: possibly not what one would expect from a practitioner attempting to conceal his work. Perhaps *The Visions* contains some particularly important (or indeed dangerous) alchemical or religious secret; unfortunately, given that interpretations of the text are so inherently speculative, this cannot be known for sure.²³⁶ It is possible, however, that Zosimos' allegorical style throughout *The Visions* places the text within a no longer extant alchemical tradition of cryptic, coded writing.²³⁷ This style could represent Zosimos' engagement with a literary tradition which now exists only in ancient references and the imagination of the scholar of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy.

The second question, as stated, is: what exactly is being allegorised throughout *The Visions*? This is arguably the most difficult question in all Zosimean scholarship. How is the reader to interpret Zosimos' allegorical dreams? Owing to the fact that *The Visions* is one of the most cryptic and complicated texts extant from antiquity, its interpretation has been a point of debate since it was

²³⁴ Principe 2013: 18; Vickers 1989: 22. There is a reference in the *Suda* to Diocletian banning alchemical books entirely in 296 (*Suda*, s.v. Διοκλητιανός – Δ 1156 Adler), and a further reference to the same in John of Antioch, so that a surplus of wealth might not embolden the Egyptians in rebellion against the Romans (χρημάτων αὐτοῦς θαρροῦντας περισσοῖα τοῦ λοιποῦ Ῥωμαίοις ἀνταίρειν, *Frag.* 191). Beyond Diocletian's ban, it makes sense that the Egyptian kings would want to limit unrestricted alchemical practice: firstly, so that no citizen might be 'emboldened' in the way John of Antioch describes, but also because of the devaluing of silver and gold – it is worth noting that a 3rd century ban on the creation of precious metals (whether they believed this creation to be literal or apparent) would have coincided with pre-existent concern over the monetary debasement which led to the economic crisis of the 3rd century. On secrecy in Late Antique alchemical traditions, see Long 2001: 63-70.

²³⁵ FC 1.

²³⁶ See further Viano 2018b: 479.

²³⁷ Lopes da Silveira (2020: 205-8) argues that Zosimos may be consciously attempting to place himself into a literary tradition of allegory beyond the alchemical, taking Jacob's climbing the ladder to Heaven (*Gen.* 28:10-9) as a springboard (see n.221). The story of Jacob's ladder seems clearly to be a source of allusion for Zosimos' first dream (*Lesson* 1.2; see above), but I see no evidence to suggest that a 'tradition of allegorical literature' was conceived in antiquity; Quintilian points to individual allegorical lines in e.g., Horace, Lucretius, and Virgil, but nothing which seems to indicate the existence of a generic tradition which would have been recognisable to a reader of *The Visions* (that is, of course, outside of the alchemical tradition of allegorising to conceal or protect a guild's trade practices) (Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.44-6).

written, from Graeco-Egyptian alchemical exegetes to scholars of the modern day. On a basic level, the key aspect of allegorical writing is the instigation of a challenge to the reader; to what extent are they able to ‘decode’ the explicit narrative and internalise some implicit message? In this case, to what extent is the reader able to find the religious and scientific *praxeis* amidst the tales which allegorise torture, sacrifice, death, and rebirth? It would be worth providing a brief overview of the interpretative history of Zosimos’ text in recent scholarship, as well as stating the interpretative framework which will be employed throughout the present edition.

Given Zosimos’ belief that alchemy is simultaneously a scientific and religious matter – simultaneously aimed at the perfection of matter and at the perfection of the soul – it ought not be surprising that readers have often attempted to find two layers to any interpretation of *The Visions*: one technical; the other mystical. Previous scholarship – including Mertens’s 1995 commentary on the entirety of Zosimos’ *Authentic Memoirs* – has tended to prioritise a scientific reading. Historically, however, few scholars have attempted to deduce exactly which procedures are hidden in Zosimos’ narrative. This is of course for the good reason that such a task is highly speculative and fraught with difficulty. Some scholarship has, however, attempted to ‘decode’ Zosimos’ text in this way, deriving recognisable alchemical operations out of its cryptic metaphors and allusions.²³⁸ One such attempt to derive a full alchemical recipe comes from Grimes’s *Becoming Gold: Zosimos of Panopolis and the Alchemical Arts in Roman Egypt*. Grimes attempts to map the many colours which appear throughout the text – from the red clothes of the *homunculus* in *Lesson 2* (στολήν ἐρυθράν, 2.6), to the white hair of Agathodaemon (πεπολιωμένον γηραιὸν λευκὸν, 2.18) – onto a sequence of alchemical colour transmutations, and thus a series of technical operations: namely, the stages of *melanōsis*, *leukōsis*, *xanthōsis*, and *iōsis*. As has been noted, however, these colours appear throughout the text in a seemingly random order, and certainly not in the order of the polychromatic transmutations above, which would be necessary to uphold Grimes’s theory.²³⁹ The suggestion simply does not match up to the text. The most successful attempt to derive alchemical operations from *The Visions* to date is Mertens’s realisation that the *Crucibaltar* is representative of the *kerotakis*, and that several images (for example, the upward and downward staircases at 1.10-1) represent alchemical operations taking place within the *kerotakis*. Whilst I hope to go further in the present edition, identifying the alchemical step which is alluded to throughout *The Visions*, Mertens’s suggestion has been invaluable for scholarship’s scientific interpretation of the text.

²³⁸ See e.g., Grimes 2018: 135.

²³⁹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 202. Indeed, I suggest that the colours which appear throughout *The Visions* ought to be considered either as purely aesthetic – developing an alchemical atmosphere filled with colours recognisable to Zosimos’ reader – or, ironically, as something of an interpretative red herring.

Whilst the alchemical, (proto-) scientific level of Zosimos' text is clearly crucial, it is certainly not the only layer of interpretation; indeed, a religio-philosophical reading of the text is also possible. Zosimos did not himself seem to draw a distinction between the religious and scientific sides of alchemy as scholars anachronistically have for over a century. In this way, whilst they will frequently be discussed separately for the sake of clarity and ease of explanation, the religious and scientific interpretations of *The Visions* must be considered simultaneously as part of a broader interpretative web. Further, one other layer of interpretation which this edition hopes to present is one of literary appreciation. Indeed, Zosimos' text allegorises spiritual ascension and alchemical operations in a religious and scientific bricolage, but *The Visions* is also a fascinating text full of emotion, shock, and suspenseful drama, and it ought to be recognised as such. To give just one example, one might consider the case of Ion's recounting his own death and rebirth as a spirit (1.15-8). Ion's death and rebirth can be interpreted in alchemical terms (as material being transformed after undergoing the alchemical operation of *melanōsis*), in religious terms (as Ion being released from his bodily cage and reborn in his understanding of the truth of the cosmos), and indeed in literary terms (playing into a generic tradition of body horror surrounding the *sparagmos*). This edition attempts to cover all interpretative frameworks, presenting them as equally important and as part of a cohesive Zosimean worldview about the role of alchemy, written in a text with huge literary potential. Ultimately, as has been made clear throughout this introduction, it is my view that the text allegorises the meditative process of spiritual purification and ascent to the divine realm, as well as allegorising the application of Divine Water in the initial stage of the alchemical process, *melanōsis*.

Beyond these, interpretative differences within the text have also been a product of the backgrounds of those studying and analysing *The Visions*. In other words, Classicists studying the text have historically had a tendency to shoehorn Classical motifs into parts of the narrative which are ambiguous and primed for interpretative debate, while Egyptologists, for example, have had a tendency to do the same with Egyptian motifs.²⁴⁰ There is a middle ground to be found here. My Classical education likely skews my own interpretation, but, to the best of my abilities, I have attempted to present the text as equally allusive to Classical, Egyptian, and Judaeo-Christian literature and literary motifs.

For the correct approach to a commentary on Zosimos, perhaps it is best to look no further than the Panopolite alchemist himself. Speaking about his interpretation of and writings on earlier alchemical texts – especially those of Ps.-Democritus – Zosimos states that he could do nothing but attempt to synthesise and interpret the enigmatic writing to the best of his abilities:

²⁴⁰ These tendencies are discussed by Escolano-Poveda (2022).

οὔτε μὴν τοῦτο προσεθέμην ὅπερ οὐδὲ τοσοῦτος, εἰ μὴ μόνον καθὼς δυνατὸν ὡς εἰκότα τὰ σκορπισθέντα συνάξαι, καὶ τὰ ἀλληγορικὰ εἶναι ἐρμηνεῦσαι...

I could do nothing but bring scattered ideas together with a degree of plausibility and interpret allegorical sections...²⁴¹

Indeed, this is how the present edition aims to analyse Zosimos' text, by bringing the religious, the scientific, and the literary together into a coherent narrative, bridging gaps between the Classical, the Judaeo-Christian, and the Egyptian, while interpreting *The Visions'* allegorical sections in light of these scattered interpretative frameworks. Overall, my interpretation of *The Visions* renders the text a *tour-de-force* of the context in which it was written; it is an intricate bricolage of allusivity: Christian and Classical; Jewish and Egyptian; Gnostic and Hermetic; literary and philosophical; religious and scientific.

Language

Despite a handful of grammatical oddities (for example, a genitive absolute with the same subject as its main clause at 2.5), Zosimos' Greek is largely unremarkable and rather standard for his milieu. There are, however, a series of specific words which are worthy of particular attention because of the implications which these lexical choices have not only on Zosimos' text, but on his entire worldview: compound terms, often forming *hapax legomena*, and the (Platonic and Hermetic) language of knowledge.

Compound Terms and *hapax legomena*

One interesting feature of Zosimos' Greek is the frequency with which he creates compound terms. There are no less than eleven compound nouns and adjectives throughout the text, most of which are *hapax legomena*, while the others are seemingly only used by later authors in reference back to Zosimos.²⁴² These compounds are: στερεόστρακα ('solid parts', 1.4); ὑγρόδρυα ('liquid extracts', 1.5); πολυύλικτος ('of many materials', 1.6); φιαλοβωμός ('*Crucibaltar*', 1.13); ξηρουργός ('handling the ashes', 1.26); χαλκάνθρωπος ('copper man', 1.38); ὑγρόλιθος ('liquid rock', 1.45); ἀλαβαστροειδής

²⁴¹ *On the Composition of Raw Materials* 1 (CAAG 3.30).

²⁴² E.g., Zosimos creates the term φιαλοβωμός (*Crucibaltar*), but it is also used by the fourth-century alchemist Pelagius, himself quoting Zosimos (CAAG 4.1.12).

(‘with the appearance of alabaster’, 1.57); ἀργυράνθρωπος (‘silver man’, 1.65); χρυσάνθρωπος (‘gold man’, 1.66); and μολυβδάνθρωπος (‘lead man’, 2.27).²⁴³ All of Zosimos’ compound terms are alchemical in some way, relating either to a substance itself or to the materiality of a substance. In this way, there is something of a ‘linguistic alchemy’ running throughout *The Visions*: a text about the manufacturing of alchemical compounds, which is itself a compounded synthesis of disparate religious-philosophical and literary traditions, is full of compound terms which have a reflective narratological function.

The Vocabulary of Knowledge

To be sure, Zosimos’ dreams are full of confusion. When he emerges from sleep, however, and begins to consider the meaning behind his allegorical dreams, the reader is offered brief glimpses into the true meaning of *The Visions*. All of these glimpses – though also in need of thoughtful interpretation and thus often rather useless to the reader – reveal Zosimos’ own growing understanding across the text. After every dream, the alchemist considers what he has just seen and each time concludes that he has understood well: νενοηκέναι καλῶς (1.22); καλῶς ἐνόησα (1.42); καλῶς ἐπενόησα (2.14, 2.29, 3.12). Although other terms in the vocabulary of knowledge do appear elsewhere in *The Visions*, Zosimos wakes from each dream and uses some derivation of νοέω – importantly, etymologically related to νοῦς – to describe his understanding.²⁴⁴ In this, Zosimos is not using a random term in the Greek epistemological vocabulary; rather, he specifically uses a term which is replete with Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and Hermetic significance.²⁴⁵ In these traditions – particularly the Neo-Platonic and Hermetic – νοῦς and νοέω adopt a spiritual essence. It is not just about knowledge; it is about the application of one’s divinely-inspired intellect to the understanding of a higher level of reality. In the Neo-Platonic tradition, νοῦς is the divine principle which connects the intelligible world and The One. Indeed, Plotinus states that being itself derives from *Nous* (οὐσα οὖν ἀπὸ νοῦ) and that the perfection of the soul must come from *Nous* (καὶ ἡ τελείωσις ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ), with the ultimate motive of ascending to God (ἀνάβαινε πρὸς ἐκεῖνον).²⁴⁶ The perfection of the soul – a key Zosimean theme – requires the use and attainment of this knowledge. In the Hermetic tradition, the term similarly

²⁴³ References are to the first appearance of a certain word in the text only.

²⁴⁴ Another term which Zosimos uses is ἐπίσταμαι (1.74), etymologically related to ἐπιστήμη, another key word in the Platonic vocabulary of knowledge (see Hulme 2022).

²⁴⁵ *Nous* is also crucial in the Platonic tradition, particularly in middle and later treatises (the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* etc). In the *Timaeus*, *Nous* is presented simultaneously as the World-Soul and as the Demiurgic principle responsible for the ordering of the cosmos (*Ti.* 30b). Whilst clearly *Nous* holds divine status in these texts, it is not an accessible knowledge in quite the same way that it is presented in the Neo-Platonic and Hermetic traditions, nor indeed in Zosimos’ treatises. See further, Mason 2013.

²⁴⁶ Plot. *Enn.* 5.1.3.

represents the thought processes which lead to the attainment of *gnōsis*. This is clear from the first line which Poimandres speaks to Hermes Trismegistos:

τί βούλει ἀκοῦσαι καὶ θεάσασθαι, καὶ νοήσας μαθεῖν καὶ γνῶναι;

What do you wish to hear and see and, having perceived them in your mind (νοήσας), to learn and know?²⁴⁷

It is only by using his mind – employing the verb νοέω – that Hermes can come to know higher levels of reality beyond his own ordinary experience. The verb νοέω embodies intellectual activity aimed at the spirit's ascent to a divine realm. In short, then, Zosimos' use of νενοηκέναι καλῶς (1.22), καλῶς ἐνόησα (1.42), and καλῶς ἐπενόησα (2.14, 2.29, 3.12) situates him in a Neo-Platonic and Hermetic tradition of knowledge: specifically, aiming one's intellect towards the knowledge of divine truths, towards the attainment of *gnōsis*, on the route to salvation.²⁴⁸ This is, of course, Zosimos' aim throughout *The Visions*.

Genre

Given the odd nature of *The Visions*' narrative, as well as its layered complexity, it is difficult to determine what exactly the genre of the text may be.²⁴⁹ Given all of the information conveyed in this stylistic analysis of Zosimos' work, it might be concluded that *The Visions* is an alchemical treatise, presented in the guise of an autobiographical apocalyptic text, with large sections of philosophical allegory.²⁵⁰ This, however, may well prioritise the technical, alchemical nature of Zosimos' work in a manner that he did not intend. Rather, an equally appropriate conclusion might be that *The Visions* is an apocalyptic text, full of alchemical symbolism, presented in a standard autobiographical guise,

²⁴⁷ CH 1.1. Hermes' reply is that he wishes to learn about things that are, understand their nature, and come to know God (μαθεῖν θέλω τὰ ὄντα καὶ νοῆσαι τὴν τοῦ τῶν φύσιν καὶ γνῶναι τὸν θεόν, CH 1.2).

²⁴⁸ See 1.43 for the significance of καλός within Zosimos' philosophical milieu.

²⁴⁹ I thank Prof. Hutchinson for the suggestion that *The Visions* may be a technical epistle, with a missing introduction. Zosimos' corpus is indeed full of epistles, ordinarily addressed to Theosebeia. Langslow (2007: 228), however, writes that technical letters are intended as 'a form of scientific communication to instruct with a low level of technicality any rules and principles regarded as fundamental' (Langslow's arguments are largely based on Boscherini 2000). Zosimos' other letters are certainly far easier to follow; the cryptic obscurity which defines *The Visions*, suggests that it may not fit the criteria of a technical epistle.

²⁵⁰ See above; allegory does not seem to be considered a literary genre in its own right in antiquity, but rather a style which might pervade sections of a piece within its own distinct genre. An example might be Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, which makes up just a small section of a wider philosophical treatise, the *Republic*.

with large sections of philosophical allegory. Although these are both rather clunky, they seem to be the most appropriate generic definitions of Zosimos' text. This difficulty in determining a single genre may not be coincidental. Just as texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* self-consciously engage in generic experimentation and meta-literarily evade generic categorisation, as their genre transforms from story to story, it is possible that Zosimos' *Visions* also self-consciously and meta-literarily evades easy categorisation into a single genre, being instead a compounded amalgamation of many literary types and styles, constantly transmuting from one to another.

Edition Notes

All textual variations are given in the *apparatus criticus*. Note that the *apparatus* only gives textual variations; in the event that a certain variation deserves further exploration, or in the event that this edition offers a new interpretation of the text, such a discussion takes place *ad loc.* in the notes of the commentary itself.

As is common in alchemical manuscripts, several symbols appear in place of specific technical terminology throughout the manuscripts of *The Visions*. Such symbols are resolved and printed as words in the text, but all symbols are discussed within the notes of the commentary.

Ζωσίμου τοῦ Θεοῦ περὶ ἀρετῆς ἢ περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων ἢ πρᾶξις α΄ :-

[1.1] θέσις ὑδάτων καὶ κίνησις καὶ αὔξεισις καὶ ἀποσωμάτωσις καὶ ἐπισωμάτωσις καὶ ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος οὐ ξένων ἢ ἐπεισάκτων φύσεων ἀλλ' αὐτὴ καὶ μόνον εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἢ μονοειδῆς φύσις κέκτηται τὰ τε στερεόστρακα τῶν μετάλλων καὶ
5 τὰ ὑγρόδρυα τῶν βοτανῶν. καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ μονοειδεῖ καὶ πολυχρῶμῳ σχηματίζεται ἡ τῶν πάντων πολυύλικτος καὶ παμποϊκίλος ζήτησις ἢ ὅθεν καὶ σεληνιαζομένης τῆς φύσεως τῷ μέτρῳ τῷ χρονικῷ ὑποβάλλεται τὴν λῆξιν καὶ τὴν αὔξεισιν δι' ἧς ὑποφεύγει ἡ φύσις.

[1.2] καὶ ταῦτα λαλῶν ἀπεκοιμήθην ἢ καὶ ὁρῶ ἱερουργόν τινα ἐστῶτα ἔμπροσθεν μοῦ ἐπάνω βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς. ἔνθα δεκαπέντε κλίμακας πρὸς ἀνάβασιν εἶχεν ὁ αὐτὸς βωμὸς ἢ ἔνθα ὁ ἱερεὺς ἴστατο,
10 καὶ φωνῆς ἄνωθεν ἤκουσα λεγούσης μοι, "πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφειγῆς κλίμακας καὶ ἀνιέναι με τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας. καὶ ἔστι ὁ ἱερουργῶν καὶ καινουργῶν με ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα ἢ καὶ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἱερατευόμενος πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι". καὶ ἀκούσας τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φιαλοβωμῷ ἐστῶτος, ἠρώτουν μαθεῖν παρ' αὐτοῦ τίς ὑπάρχει ἢ ὁ δὲ ἰσχυρόφωνος ἀπεκρίνατό μοι λέγων, "ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ Ἰων, ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων, καὶ
15 βίαν ἀφόρητον ὑπομένω. ἤλθε γάρ τις περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον δρομαίως καὶ ἐχειρώσατό με μαχαίρα διελὼν με, διασπάσας κατὰ σύστασιν ἀρμονίας, καὶ ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου τῷ ξίφει τῷ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κρατουμένῳ. τὰ ὅστέα ταῖς σαρκὶ συνέπλεξε καὶ τῷ πυρὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς κατέκαιεν ἕως ἂν ἔμαθον μετασματούμενος πνεῦμα γενέσθαι. καὶ αὕτη μοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀφόρητος βία". καὶ ὡς ἔτι ταῦτά μοι διελέγετο καὶ ἐξεβιαζόμεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ λέγειν, ὡσπερ αἷμα γεγόνασιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ

Tit. Mert : Ζωσίμου ἀρετῆς περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων α¹ AL; περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων BM'; Ζωσίμου τοῦ Θεοῦ περὶ ἀρετῆς M 3 ἐπὶ AL : ἀπὸ B; μετὰ MM' φύσεων ABLM : φύσεως M' 4 μόνον ABLM' : μόνη M τε om. ABLM' στερεόστρακα M : στερεὰ ὄστρακα ABLM' 5 μονοειδεῖ ABLMM' : μονοειδῆ BeRu μονοειδεῖ καὶ M : μονοειδεῖ τῷ ABLM' σχηματίζεται ABLM' : σχήματι σῶζεται M τῶν πάντων M : τοῦ παντὸς ABLM' 6 πολυύλικτος Mert. : πολυύλικτος ABL; πολυύλεκτος M; πολυύληκτος M' καὶ παμποϊκίλος M : παμποϊκίλια καὶ ABLM' 7 ὑποβάλλεται M : ὑποβάλλει ABLM' post ὑποβάλλεται add. καὶ M δι' ἧς ABLM' : δις M ὑποφεύγει ABLM' : ἱπεύει M; ἱπεύει Mert. 8 ante ταῦτα om. καὶ AL μοῦ M : τοῦ AL 8-9 ἐπάνω βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς del. Karle 9 φιαλοειδοῦς M : φιαλοειδοῦς AL δεκαπέντε M : αἱ AL κλίμακας M : κλήμακας AL 10 φωνῆς M : φωνῆ AL ἄνωθεν om. AL ἤκουσα M : εἴκουσα AL λεγούσης M : λεγούσεις A; λειούσεις L post μοι add. ἄνωθεν AL πεπλήρωκα M : πεπλήρωκαται AL τὸ Karle : τοῦ ALM 11 κλίμακας M : κλήμακας AL (utrumque) post φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας add. duo sigla incognita L post ἔστι add. καὶ M post ἱερουργῶν om. καὶ M 12 καινουργῶν LM : καινοργῶν A; ἱερουργούμενος Karle με del. Karle παχύτητα AM : παχύτηταν L 13 τελοῦμαι M : τολειούμενος AL φιαλοβωμῷ M : φιαλοβωμῷ AL ἐστῶτος BeRu : ἐστῶτι M; ἔστι τὴν δὲ AL ἠρώτουν M : ἠρώτον AL; ἠρώτων BeRu post ἠρώτουν add. μοι AL; add. βουλόμενος BeRu; add. αὐτὸν τοῦ Karle 14 ὁ δὲ M : ὦδε AL; ὁ δὲ Mert. ἰσχυρόφωνος M : ἰσχυρόφωνος AL Ἰων M : Οἴων A; Οἴων L; Αἴων Karle; Ἰών Mert. 15 δρομαίως om. AL με M : μοι AL μαχαίρα Mert. : μάχαιραν AL; μαχαίρη M; μαχαίρη BeRu 16 post με add. καὶ BeRu σύστασιν M : σησασίαν AL πᾶσαν om. M 16-7 τῷ ξίφει τῷ M : τὸ ξίφη τὸ AL 17 κρατουμένῳ M : κρατούμενων AL post τὰ ὅστέα add. τῶν σαρκῶν ἐχώρισε καὶ πάλιν τὰ ὅστέα Karle ταῖς M : τοῖς AL καὶ om. A τῷ πυρὶ τῷ M : τὸ πυρὶ τὸ AL διὰ χειρὸς AL : διαχείρως M 18 μετασματούμενος M : μετὰ σώματος AL post βία indic. lac. Karle 19 ἔτι om. AL διελέγετο M : δεῖ ἔλεγεν AL

20 αὐτοῦ καὶ ἤμεσεν πάσας τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶδον αὐτὸν ὡς τούναντιον ἀνθρωπάριον κολοβὸν καὶ τοῖς ὁδοῦσιν ἑαυτοῦ ἑαυτὸν μασσώμενον καὶ συμπύπτοντα. καὶ φοβηθεὶς διυπνίσθη καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη, "μὴ οὕτως ἄρα ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ὑδάτων θέσις;". καὶ ἔδοξα πείθειν ἑαυτὸν νενοηκέναι καλῶς.

[1.3] καὶ πάλιν ἀπεκοιμήθη καὶ εἶδον τὸν αὐτὸν φιαλοβωμὸν καὶ ἐπάνω ὕδωρ κοχλάζον καὶ πολὺν
25 λαὸν εἰς αὐτὸν ἄπειρον ὄντα. καὶ οὐκ ἦν τις ἵνα ἐρωτήσω αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ βωμοῦ. καὶ ἀνέρχομαι ἐπὶ τὸ ἰδέσθαι τὴν θεάν τοῦ βωμοῦ · καὶ ὁρῶ πεπολιωμένον ξηρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον λέγοντά μοι, "τί σκοπεῖς;". καὶ ἀπεκρινάμην αὐτῷ ὅτι θαυμάζω τοῦ ὕδατος τὸν βρασμὸν καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους συγκαιομένους καὶ ζώντας. καὶ ἀπεκρίνατό μοι λέγων, "αὕτη ἡ θέα ἦν ὁρᾶς εἰσοδός ἐστὶν καὶ ἔξοδος καὶ μεταβολή". ἐπηρώτησα οὖν αὐτὸν πάλιν, "ποία μεταβολή;". καὶ ἀπεκρίνατό μοι λέγων, "τόπος
30 ἀσκήσεως τῆς λεγομένης ταριχείας · οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν ὧδε εἰσέρχονται καὶ γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα". ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῷ, "καὶ σὺ πνεῦμα εἶ;". καὶ ἀπεκρίνατό μοι λέγων, "καὶ πνεῦμα καὶ φύλαξ πνευμάτων". καὶ ἐν τῷ ὁμιλεῖν ἡμᾶς ταῦτα καὶ προστιθεμένου τοῦ βρασμοῦ καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ ὀλολύζοντος, εἶδον ἄνθρωπον χαλκοῦν δέλτον μολυβδίνην κατέχοντα ἐν τῇ
35 χειρὶ αὐτοῦ · καὶ ἐξεῖπεν τῇ φωνῇ βλέπων τὴν δέλτον, "τοῖς ἐν ταῖς κολάσεσι πᾶσιν ἐπιτρέπω καθεσθῆναι καὶ ἕκαστον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ λαβεῖν δέλτον μολυβδίνην καὶ τῇ χειρὶ γράφειν καὶ τὰς ὄψεις ἄνω καὶ τὰ στόματα ὑμῶν ἀνεωγμένα ἕως ἂν αὐξήσῃ ἡ σταφυλὴ ὑμῶν". καὶ τῷ λόγῳ τὸ ἔργον ἠκολούθει. καὶ λέγει μοι ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης, "ἐθεώρησας; ἐξέτεινας τὸν αὐχένα σου ἄνω καὶ εἶδες τὸ πραχθέν;". καὶ εἶπον ὅτι εἶδον καὶ λέγει μοι ὅτι, "τοῦτον ὃν εἶδες χαλκάνθρωπον καὶ τὰς ἰδίας

20 ἤμεσεν M : αἶμισεν A; ἔμισεν L post τούναντιον add. αὐτὸν A ἀνθρωπάριον κολοβὸν LM : κολοβὸν ἀνθρωπάριον A 21 τοῖς M : τῆς AL ἑαυτοῦ om. AL μασσώμενον M : μασσωμένην AL; μασσόμενον Karle συμπύπτοντα M : συμπύπτον AL διυπνίσθη M : δ' ὑπνίσθη AL 22 μὴ M : εἰ AL ἄρα ἐστὶν M : ἐστὶν ἄρα AL ἡ M : οἱ AL post θέσις om. καὶ M ἔδοξα πείθειν M : ἐδοξάσθη AL 24 ἀπεκοιμήθη M : ὑπεκοιμήθη AL εἶδον M : ἰδον AL φιαλοβωμὸν M : φυαλοβωμὸν AL κοχλάζον M : κοχλάζων AL πολὺν M : πολλὴν AL 25 post λαὸν add. ἀνερχόμενον Karle ἀνέρχομαι M : ἀνερχόμενος AL 25-6 ἐπὶ τὸ ἰδέσθαι M : ἐπιτειδεύεσθαι AL 26 post θεάν add. εἰς M τοῦ βωμοῦ AL : τὸν βωμὸν M ξηρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον M : ἀνθρωπάριον ξυρουργὸν AL; χειρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον Karle; ξυρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον Mert. λέγοντά M : καὶ λέγει AL 27 post σκοπεῖς om. καὶ M 27-8 τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ζώντας συγκαιομένους ego : τῶν ἀνθρώπων συγκαιομένων καὶ ζώντων M 28 συγκαιομένους ego : συνκαιομένους AL ἡ θέα M : θεωρεῖα AL 29 ἐπηρώτησα BeRu : ἐπιρώτησα AL : ἐπερώτησα M πάλιν om. M μοι om. AL τόπος M : τό πως AL 31 γίνονται M : γέγονται AL ἔλεγον M : λέγω AL οὖν om. AL μοι om. M 33 βρασμοῦ M : βωμοῦ AL ὀλολύζοντος M : ὀλολήξαντος AL μολυβδίνην LM : μολυδίνην A 34 τῇ M : μοι AL βλέπων M : βλέπε AL τοῖς M : τῆς AL ταῖς M : τοῖς A; τῆς L post πᾶσιν add. ὑμῖν Karle ἐπιτρέπω M : ἐπιτρέπων AL 35 καθεσθῆναι M : καθεστήναι AL; καθευθῆναι BeRu λαβεῖν M : λαβῶν AL μολυβδίνην BeRu : μολυδίνην ALM post μολυβδίνην καὶ om. τῇ M γράφειν M : γράφων AL 35-6 τὰς ὄψεις ἄνω καὶ τὰ στόματα ὑμῶν ἀνεωγμένα M : τὰ στόματα γὰρ ἀνεωγμένα καὶ τὰς ὄψεις γράφων AL 36 post ὄψεις add. ἔχειν BeRu post ἄνω add. ἔχειν τετραμμένας Karle ἡ σταφυλὴ M : εἰς ταφυλλεῖ AL σταφυλὴ ὑμῶν M : σταφυλὴ αὐτῶν AL τὸ ἔργον M : ἔργω A; τὸ ἔργω L 37 ὁ om. AL σου om. AL 38 εἶδον M : ἴδων AL 38-9 καὶ τὰς ἰδίας σάρκας...ἱερουργούμενος AL : οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἱερουργῶν καὶ ἱερουργούμενος, καὶ τὰς ἰδίας σάρκας ἐξεμοῦντα M

σάρκας ἐξεμοῦντα, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἱερούργων καὶ ἱεουργούμενος, καὶ αὐτῷ ἐδόθη ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ
40 ὕδατος τούτου καὶ τῶν τιμωρουμένων”.

[1.4] καὶ ταῦτα ἐμφαντασθεὶς διυπνίσθη πάλιν καὶ εἶπον πρὸς ἑαυτόν, "τίς ἡ αἰτία τῆς ὀπτασίας
ταύτης; μὴ ἄρα τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ λευκόν, τὸ ξανθόν, τὸ κοχλάζον, τὸ θεῖον;". καὶ ἠῦρον ὅτι
μᾶλλον καλῶς ἐνόησα ταῦτα, καὶ εἶπον ὅτι καλὸν τὸ λέγειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ ἀκούειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ
45 διδόναι καὶ καλὸν τὸ λαμβάνειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ πενητεῦειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ πλουτεῖν. καὶ πῶς ἡ φύσις
μανθάνει διδόναι καὶ λαμβάνειν; δίδωσι ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος καὶ λαμβάνει ὁ ὑγρόλιθος. δίδωσι τὸ
μέταλλον καὶ λαμβάνει ἡ βοτάνη. διδοῦσιν οἱ ἀστέρες καὶ λαμβάνει τὰ ἄνθη. δίδωσιν ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ
λαμβάνει ἡ γῆ. διδοῦσιν αἱ βρονταὶ ἐκ τοῦ τροχίζοντος πυρός. καὶ συμπλέκονται τὰ πάντα καὶ
ἀποπλέκονται τὰ πάντα. καὶ μίσγονται τὰ πάντα καὶ συντίθενται τὰ πάντα. καὶ κινῶνται τὰ πάντα καὶ
ἀποκινῶνται τὰ πάντα. καὶ βρέχει τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀποβρέχει τὰ πάντα. καὶ ἀνθεῖ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐξανθεῖ
50 τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ φιαλοβωμῷ. ἕκαστον γὰρ μεθόδω καὶ σηκώματι καὶ οὐγκιασμῷ τετραστοίχῳ. ἡ τῶν
ὄλων συμπλοκὴ καὶ ἀποπλοκὴ καὶ ὁ πᾶς σύνδεσμος ἄνευ μεθόδου οὐ γίνεται. ἡ μέθοδος φυσικὴ
ἐστὶν καὶ φυσῶσα καὶ ἐκφυσῶσα καὶ τὰς τάξεις τηροῦσα [τῆς μεθόδου] αὔξουσα καὶ λήγουσα. καὶ
τὰ πάντα ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ σύμφωνα τῇ διαίρεσει καὶ τῇ ἐνώσει τῆς μεθόδου μηδὲν ὑπολειφθείσης
ἐκστρέφει τὴν φύσιν. ἡ γὰρ φύσις στρεφομένη εἰς ἑαυτὴν στρέφεται. καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ παντός
55 κόσμου τῆς ἀρετῆς φύσις καὶ σύνδεσμος.

[1.5] καὶ ἵνα μὴ διὰ πολλῶν σοὶ γράφω, φίλτατε, κτίσαι σοὶ ναὸν μονόλιθον ψιμυθοειδῆ

39 ἐξεμοῦντα M : ἐξιοῦντα AL 40 τῶν τιμωρουμένων M : ἐστὶν τῇ μορούμενος AL 41 ἐμφαντασθεὶς
M : ἐμφαντάσθη A; ἐμφαντάσθη L ἐαυτόν M : αὐτόν AL τίς om. AL αἰτία M : ἔτοια AL
42 post ταύτης add. τί τοῦτο εἶναι AL ἄρα AM : ἄρα L ἐστὶν τὸ AL : ἐστὶν τὸ καὶ M; ἐστὶν τε καὶ BeRu;
ἐστὶν καὶ Karle κοχλάζον M : κοχλάζων AL ἠῦρον M : εὔρον AL 43 μᾶλλον om. AL ταῦτα om.
M ante τὸ λέγειν, τὸ ἀκούειν, τὸ διδόναι, τὸ λαμβάνειν, et τὸ πενητεῦειν habet καλὸν M : καλῶς AL
post λέγειν om. καὶ AL post ἀκούειν om. καὶ M 44 post λαμβάνειν om. καὶ M φύσις LM : φύσεις
A 45 μανθάνει M : μανθάνην AL δίδωσι ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος καὶ λαμβάνει om. AL 45-6 δίδωσι τὸ
μέταλλον καὶ λαμβάνει ἡ βοτάνη om. AL 46 διδοῦσιν BeRu : δίδωσιν ALM λαμβάνει M :
λαμβάνουσιν AL δίδωσιν M : δίδει AL 47 διδοῦσιν M : δίδωσιν AL ἐκ τοῦ τροχίζοντος AL : τοῦ
ἐκτροχίζοντος M 48 καὶ μίσγονται τὰ πάντα om. AL συντίθενται M : συντίθονται AL κινῶνται M :
κυβερνάτε A; κυρνάτε L 48-9 καὶ ἀποκινῶνται τὰ πάντα om. AL 49 βρέχει AL : βρέξει M
ἀποβρέχει Mert. : ἀποβρέξει M καὶ ἀποβρέχει τὰ πάντα om. AL 50 ἕκαστον γὰρ M : ἐκκόπον ἄριστον
AL σηκώματι M : συγκώματι AL οὐγκιασμῷ M : συγκερασματι AL; οὐγκιασμῷ BeRu τετραστοίχῳ
BeRu : τετραστίχῳ AM; τετραστίχον L ἡ LM : εἰ A 51-2 καὶ ἀποπλοκὴ...ἐκφυσῶσα M : ἐστὶν καὶ
φυσίματι AL 52 τάξεις M : τάξις AL τῆς μεθόδου AL : τὴν μέθοδον M αὔξουσα AL : αὔξουσιν M
λήγουσα BeRu : ὀλίγουσα AL; λήγουσαν M 53 τὰ πάντα M : πάντα A; πάλιν τὰ L ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ M :
ἄρεν συντόμος AL σύμφωνα om. AL τῇ ἐνώσει M : ἡ ἐνωσις AL 54 ἐκστρέφει M : ἐκστρέφην AL
στρέφεται AM : στρέφετε L 55 τῆς ἀρετῆς φύσις M : φύσεις τῆς ἀρετῆς AL 56 post πολλῶν σοὶ add.
λέγω ἢ AL κτίσαι BeRu : κέκτεισα AL; κτήσαι M post κτίσαι om. σοὶ AL ψιμυθοειδῆ M :
ψιμιθωιδεῖν AL

ἀλαβαστροειδῆ Προκοννήσιον, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα μήτε τέλος ἐν τῇ οἰκοδομῇ, πηγὴν δὲ ἔσωθεν ἔχοντα ὕδατος καθαρωτάτου καὶ φῶς ἐξαστράπττον ἡλιακόν. περιέργασαι δὲ πόθεν ἢ εἴσοδος τοῦ ναοῦ, καὶ λαβὲ ἐπὶ χεῖράς σου ξίφος καὶ οὕτως ζῆτει τὴν εἴσοδον. στενόστομος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ τόπος
60 ὅθεν ἐστιν ἢ ἀνοιξις τῆς εἰσόδου καὶ δράκων παράκειται τῇ εἰσόδῳ φυλάττων τὸν ναόν. καὶ τοῦτον χειρωσάμενος πρῶτον θῦσον καὶ ἀποδερματώσας αὐτὸν καὶ λαβὼν τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ὀστέων διελέης μέλη μέλη ἄ καὶ συνθεῖς μέλος μέλος μετὰ τῶν ὀστέων πρὸς τὸ στόμιον τοῦ ναοῦ ποίησον ἑαυτῷ βᾶσιν καὶ ἀνάβηθι καὶ εἴσσελθε καὶ εὐρήσεις ἐκεῖ τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα. τὸν γὰρ ἱερέα τὸν χαλκάνθρωπον ὃν ὄρας ἐν τῇ πηγῇ καθήμενον καὶ τὸ χρῆμα συνάγοντα, ἐκεῖνον δὲ οὐχ
65 ὄρας χαλκάνθρωπον ἄ μετέβη γὰρ τοῦ χρώματος τῆς φύσεως καὶ γέγονεν ἀργυράνθρωπος ἄ ὃν μετ' ὀλίγον ἔαν θελήσης, εὐρήσεις χρυσάνθρωπον.

[1.6] τοῦτο τὸ προοίμιόν ἐστιν εἴσοδος τοῦ ἀνοίγεσθαί σοι τὰ παρακάτω ἄνθη λόγων ἄ καὶ ζητήσεις ἀρετῶν καὶ σοφίας καὶ φρονήσεως καὶ νοῦ δόγματα καὶ μέθοδοι δραστικά καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κεκρυμμένων ῥήσεων εἰς φανερόν γινομένων ἄ καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς μεθοδεύει χρόνος. καὶ τί
70 ἐστιν "νικῶσα φύσις τὰς φύσεις"; καὶ "ἀποτελεῖται καὶ γίνεται ἰλιγγιώσα καὶ ἐκθλιβομένη πρὸς τὴν ζήτησιν κοινὸν πρόσωπον τοῦ παντὸς τῆς ἐργασίας ἐρωμένης ἀναλαμβάνει καὶ τὴν οἰκείαν ὕλην τοῦ εἴδους κατεσθίει". καὶ "εἴθ' οὕτως πεσοῦσα τοῦ προτέρου σχήματος θνήσκων οἶται καὶ ὅταν βαρβαρίζουσα μιμῆται οἶον ἰουδαϊκὴν ἐκόντως, τότε διεκδικήσασα ἑαυτὴν ἢ τάλαινα κουφοτέρα ἑαυτῆς γίνεται, μίξιν ἔχουσα τῶν ἰδίων μελῶν καὶ τὸ ὑγρὸν ἄμα πυρὶ καὶ τελεσφορεῖται".

75 **[1.7]** ἐν τούτοις τοῖς νοήμασι τοῦ νοῦ σαφῶς ἐκστρέψας τὴν φύσιν ἐπίστηθι καὶ τὴν πολυῦλον ὡς

57 ἀλαβαστροειδῆ BeRu : ἀλλὰ βαστρωιδεῖν AL; ἀλοβαστροειδῆ M Προκοννήσιον M : πρικοννήσιον AL πηγὴν M : πηγῇ AL 58 ἔχοντα AL : ἔχουσαν M ἐξαστράπττον M : ἐξαστράπτουσα AL περιέργασαι M : περιέγυμε AL *post* δὲ *add.* ζητῶν Karle ἢ *om.* AL 59 λαβὲ M : λαβῶν AL τὴν *om.* AL στενόστομος M : στενός AL *post* γάρ *add.* μοι AL 60 ὅθεν M : ἐνθα AL εἰσόδου M : ὁδοῦ AL 61 ἀποδερματώσας M : ἀποδερμάτσον AL αὐτὸν *om.* AL 62 διελέης BeRu : διέλε εἰς AL; διέλεις M μέλη μέλη Karle : ἐν μέρος καὶ βάλε AL; μέλει μέλει M; μέλη BeRu συνθεῖς M : σύνθημα AL μέλος μέλος M : μέρος ἐν AL; μέλος BeRu 63 ἑαυτῷ M : ἑαυτὸν AL 64 ἱερέα M : ἱερέαν AL τὸν M : ὄντα AL ὃν *del.* Karle 65 ὄρας AL : ὡς M; εὐρήσεις ὡς Karle μετέβη M : μετέθη A; μετετέθη L γὰρ M : τὰ AL 66 εὐρήσεις AL : ἔξεις M *post* εὐρήσεις *add.* αὐτὸν A 67 εἴσοδος τοῦ *om.* AL ἀνοίγεσθαί M : ἀνοίγετέ AL λόγων M : λόγον AL *post* ζητήσεις *add.* καὶ A 68 μέθοδοι M : μέθοδος AL 69 ῥήσεων M : ῥύσεων A; ῥείσεων L φανερόν M : φανερῶν AL τὸ πᾶν ὁ M : τὰ πάντα AL 70 φύσις *om.* AL 71 κοινὸν M : κοινοῦ AL ἐρωμένης AL : ὀρωμένη M; ὀρωμένης BeRu καὶ *om.* AL 71-2 τοῦ εἴδους M : ἰοῦ δὲ AL 72 κατεσθίει M : κατεστῖον AL *post* κατεσθίει *om.* καὶ AL πεσοῦσα M : πέτουσαι A; παῖτουσε L οἶται M : ἢ ἦτε AL ὅταν LM : ὅτε A 73 βαρβαρίζουσα M : βαρβαρίζειν A; βαρβαρίζιν L μιμῆται Mert. : μιμύται A; μὴ μύτε L; μιμῆται M ἐκόντως *ego* : ἔχωντος A; ἔχοντος LM; *del.* Mert. τότε M : ποτέ AL διεκδικήσασα M : δὲ ἐκδικήσαντα AL ἢ τάλαινα M : τὴν τάλαινα AL κουφοτέρα LM : κουφοτέραν A 74 ἑαυτῆς M : ἑαυτὴν AL τῶν ἰδίων μελῶν M : τὸν ἴδιον μελῶν AL ἄμα M : νάμα AL τελεσφορεῖται AM : τελεσφορήτε L 75 τοῖς *om.* L ἐπίστηθι M : ἐπίστῶθην A; ἐπίστωθι L πολυῦλον AL : πολλύλον M

μονόυλον λογίζου. μηδενί σαφῶς κατάλεγε τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρετὴν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἀρκέσθητι, μήπως καὶ λέγων ἑαυτὸν ἀνέλῃς. ἢ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετὴν. καλὸν ἰδεῖν τῶν τεσσάρων μετάλλων τὰς μεταβολὰς τοῦ μολύβδου, τοῦ χαλκοῦ, τοῦ ἀργύρου, τοῦ κασσιτέρου εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι τέλειον χρυσόν.

- 80 **[1.8]** λαβὼν ἄλας, νότισον θεῖον τὸ ἀγλαίζον, τὸ κηρομελές. δῆσον ὁποτέρων τὴν ἰσχύν καὶ χάλκανθον μεσίτευσε καὶ ποιήσον ὄξος ἐξ αὐτῶν πρωτοζώμιον ἔργου [καὶ χάλκανθον]. κατὰ βαθμὸν δὲ ἐν τούτοις τὸν λευκοειδῆ δαμάσεις χαλκὸν ἀνάγκη καὶ εὐρήσεις μετὰ πέμπτην μέθοδον ἢ ὑπὸ τὰς τρεῖς αἰθάλας ἐξῆς γίνεται ὁ λεγόμενος χρυσός. ἰδοὺ καὶ τὴν ὕλην δαμάζων ἀπέχεις τὸ μονοειδὸν τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν.

76 μηδενί M : μηδέν νοεῖς A; μηδέν νοεῖ L κατάλεγε L : κατάλεγει A; κατάλεγων M ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἀρκέσθητι *om.* AL 77 μήπως ALM; μή πως BeRu ἢ γὰρ σιωπὴ M : οἱ γὰρ σιωποῖ AL καλὸν M : μάλλων AL 78 *ante* μολύβδου, χαλκοῦ, ἀργύρου, *et* κασσιτέρου *om.* τοῦ M *post* χαλκοῦ *add.* ἀσίμου M; ἀσίμου BeRu 79 τέλειον *om.* M 80 νότισον M : πότισον AL *post* νότισον *add.* τὸ AL ὁποτέρων τὴν ἰσχύν M : ὅτι τὴν ἰσχύν ἔχων AL 81 αὐτῶν M : αὐτόν AL πρωτοζώμιον AL : πρωτοζύμιον M ἔργου Mert. : ἀργούς ALM καὶ χάλκανθον *del.* Mert. χάλκανθον AM : χάλκαθον L βαθμὸν M : βαθμῶν AL 82 δὲ M : καὶ AL; δὲ καὶ BeRu τὸν λευκοειδῆ M : τὴν λευκωιδεῖν A; τὴν λευκοιδεῖν L ἀνάγκη M : ἀνάγαγε AL 83 ἰδοὺ M : εἰ δὲ AL δαμάζων ἀπέχεις Mert. : ἀπέχεις δαμάζων ALM 83-4 τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν AL : ὡς πολυειδὸν M

Ζωσίμου πρᾶξις β' :-

[2.1] μόλις ποτὲ εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἔλθων τοῦ ἀναβῆναι τὰς ἑπτὰ κλίμακας καὶ θεάσασθαι τὰς ἑπτὰ
κολάσεις, καὶ δὴ ὡς ἔχει ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἤνυσσα τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ ἀναβῆναι. διελθὼν δὲ πολλάκις
ἀνῆλθον ἔπειτα εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν ἰδὼν καὶ δὴ ἐν τῷ ἐπανέρχεσθαι με ἀπέτυχον πάσης ὁδοῦ, καὶ ἐν ἀθυμίᾳ
5 πολλῇ γενόμενος, μὴ ἰδόντος μου πόθεν ἀπελθεῖν, ἀθυμοῦντος δὲ μου, ἐτράπην εἰς ὕπνον. καὶ
θεωρῶ κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον μου ξηρουργόν τινα ἀνθρωπάριον ἡμφιεσμένον στολὴν ἐρυθρὰν καὶ
βασιλικὴν ἐσθῆτα, καὶ ἰστάμενον ἔξω τῶν κολάσεων καὶ λέγει μοι, “τί ποιεῖς ἀνθρωπε;”. ἐγὼ δὲ πρὸς
αὐτὸν ἔφην, “ἴσταμαι ὧδε ὅτι πάσης ὁδοῦ ἀστοχήσας ὑπάρχω πλανώμενος”. ὁ δὲ λέγει μοι,
“ἀκολούθει μοι”. ὧδε ἐξελθὼν, ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ ἰδὼν καὶ πλησίον δὲ γενόμενος τῶν κολάσεων, θεωρῶ
10 τὸν ὁδηγοῦντά με ἐκεῖνον ξηρουργὸν ἀνθρωπάριον ἰδὼν καὶ ἰδοῦν, ἐνεβλήθη ἐν τῇ κολάσει, καὶ ὄλον
αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα ἐδαπανήθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρός. ἰδὼν ἐγὼ ἐξέστην καὶ ἐτρόμαξα ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου καὶ
διυπνίσθη καὶ λέγω ἐν ἑαυτῷ, “ἄρα τί ἐστί τὸ ὀρώμενον;”. καὶ πάλιν διεσάφησα τὸν λόγον καὶ
διέκρινον ὅτι ὁ ξηρουργὸς ἐκεῖνος ἀνθρωπὸς ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος ἐστὶν ἐρυθρὰν ἐσθῆτα ἐνδεδυμένος,
καὶ εἶπον, “καλῶς ἐπενόησα, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος ἰδὼν καὶ εἶπεν, “καλῶς ἐπενόησα, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος ἰδὼν καὶ εἶπεν,
15 κολάσεις”.

[2.2] πάλιν ἐπεθύμησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου τοῦ ἀναβῆναι καὶ τὴν τρίτην κλίμακα ἰδὼν καὶ πάλιν ἰδὼν καὶ πάλιν ἰδὼν
ἐπορευόμενον, καὶ ὡς ἐγενόμενον τῶν κολάσεων πλησίον, πάλιν ἐπλανήθη, μὴ εἰδὼς τὴν ὁδὸν
ἰστάμενος ἀπονενοημένος. καὶ πάλιν τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρόπῳ θεωρῶ πεπολιωμένον γηραιὸν λευκὸν πάνυ
ὥστε ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς λευκότητος αὐτοῦ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἀπεμαυρώθησαν. τὸ δὲ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἑκαλεῖτο
20 Ἀγαθοδαίμων. καὶ στραφεὶς ὁ πεπολιωμένος ἐκεῖνος θεωρεῖ με ἐπὶ πλείστην ὥραν. ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον
ἐπεμελούμην δεῖξαί μοι εὐθεῖαν ὁδὸν. ὁ δὲ πρὸς με οὐκ ἀνεστράφη, ἀλλ' ἤνυσεν τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ
σπουδαίως. καὶ διερχόμενος δὲ ἔνθεν κάκεῖθεν ἤνυσεν σπουδαίως τὸν βωμόν ἰδὼν καὶ πάλιν ἰδὼν
ὡς οὖν ἤνυσσα

3 καὶ δὴ *del.* Karle ἤνυσσα BeRu : ἤνυσσα AL 4 δὴ BeRu : δι AL 5 πολλῇ BeRu : πολὺ AL
γενόμενος AL : γενόμενον BeRu ἀθυμοῦντος δὲ μου *del.* BeRu 6 τὸν ὕπνον BeRu : τοῦ ὕπνου AL
ξηρουργόν *ego* : ξυρουργόν AL; χειρουργόν Karle ἡμφιεσμένον BeRu : ἡμφιεσμένος AL 7 ἐσθῆτα
BeRu : ἐσθήτα AL 8 ἔφην BeRu : ἔφη AL 9 ὧδε Mert. : ὁ δὲ AL; ἐγὼ δὲ BeRu ἐξελθὼν BeRu :
ἐξῆλθον AL αὐτῷ BeRu : αὐτόν AL γενόμενος Mert. : γενομένων AL 10 ξηρουργόν *ego* :
ξηρουργόν AL; χειρουργόν Karle ἐνεβλήθη BeRu : ἐνευλήθη AL 11 ἐδαπανήθη BeRu : ἐδαπανίσθη
AL; ἐδαπανίσθη Karle ἰδὼν BeRu : ἰδὸν AL 13 διέκρινον *ego* : διακρίνον AL; διακρίνων BeRu
ξηρουργὸς *ego* : ξυρουργοῦντος AL; ξυρουργὸς BeRu; χειρουργός Karle *post* ἐστὶν *add.* ἔχων AL
ἐρυθρὰν ἐσθῆτα Mert. : ἐρυθρὰν ἐσθήταν AL; ἐσθῆτα ἐρυθρὰν BeRu 14 καὶ *del.* Karle ἐπενόησα
BeRu : ἐπινόησα AL 16 *ante* πάλιν ἐπεθύμησεν *add.* καὶ BeRu ἐπεθύμησεν BeRu : ὑπεθύμησεν AL
17 ἐπλανήθη BeRu : ἐπλανίσθη AL εἰδὼς BeRu : ἰδὸς AL 18 τῷ BeRu : τὸ AL πεπολιωμένον
BeRu : πεπολυομένον AL 19 λευκότητος BeRu : λευκώτητος AL ἀπεμαυρώθησαν AL :
ἀπημαυρώθησαν Mert. 20 πεπολιωμένος BeRu : πεπολυομένον AL πλείστην BeRu : πλήσθη AL
τοῦτον AL : τούτου Karle 21 ἐπεμελούμην BeRu : ἐπιμελούμην AL; ἐπεδεόμην Karle δεῖξαί Mert. :
δεῖξε AL; δεῖξόν BeRu μοι BeRu : με AL ἀνεστράφη BeRu : ἀνεστράφην AL ἀλλ' ἤνυσεν BeRu :
ἀλλή ἤνυσεν AL αὐτοῦ BeRu : αὐτοῦ AL 22 δὲ AL : δὴ Karle κάκεῖθεν BeRu : κακῆνθεν AL
ἤνυσεν BeRu : ἤνυσον AL ἤνυσσα BeRu : ἤνυσσα AL

ἄνω ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ, θεωρῶ τὸν πεπολιωμένον γηραιὸν καὶ ἐνεβλήθη ἐν τῇ κολάσει. ὧ οὐρανίων
 φύσεων δημιουργοὶ, εὐθύς ὄλος ὑπὸ τῆς φλογὸς πυρίφλεκτος γέγονεν. ὧν καὶ τὸ διήγημα, ἀδελφοί,
 25 φρικτόν· ἐκ γὰρ τῆς πολλῆς βίας τῆς κολάσεως οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ πλήρεις αἱμάτων γέγονασιν.
 ἐπηρώτησα δὲ λέγων αὐτὸν, “τί ἐνταῦθα κατάκεισαι;”. ὁ δὲ μόλις ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ ἔφη μοι,
 “ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ μολυβδάνθρωπος καὶ βίαν ὑπομένω ἀφόρητον”. καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ πολλοῦ φόβου
 διωπνίσθη καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ τὴν αἰτίαν ἠρεύνουν τοῦ πράγματος. καὶ πάλιν διέκρινα καθ’ ἑαυτὸν καὶ
 εἶπον, “καλῶς ἐπενόησα ὅτι οὕτως δεῖ ἐκβαλλεῖν τὸν μόλυβδον καὶ ἀληθῶς τὸ ὄραμά ἐστιν περὶ τῆς
 30 συνθέσεως τῶν ὑγρῶν”.

23 πεπολιωμένον BeRu : πεπολυόμενον AL ἐνεβλήθη L : ἐνευλήθη A 24 ὧν Mert. : ὄν AL; ὄν BeRu;
 οὔ Karle 25 πλήρεις BeRu : πλήρεις AL αἱμάτων AL : αἵματος BeRu 26 ἐπηρώτησα BeRu :
 ἐπιρώτησα AL 27 *post* ἐκ *del.* τοῦ Mert. 28 ἠρεύνουν AL : ἠρεύνων BeRu 29 καλῶς A : καλὸς L
 δεῖ Mert. : δὴ AL ἐκβαλλεῖν AL : ἐκβαλεῖν BeRu; ἐμβαλεῖν Karle 29-30 καὶ ἀληθῶς...ὑγρῶν *del.* Mert.

ποίημα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ζωσίμου πράξις γ' :-

[3.1] καὶ πάλιν κατενόησα τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἱερὸν φιαλοβωμόν, καὶ εἶδόν τινα ἱεροπρεπῆ λευκοποδῆρη
ένδεδυμένον ἱερουγοῦντα τὰ φοβερά ἐκεῖνα μυστήρια καὶ εἶπον, “ἄρα τίς ἐστὶν οὗτος;”. καὶ
ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπε μοι, “οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων. οὗτος βούλεται αἱματῶσαι τὰ σώματα καὶ
5 ὀμματῶσαι τὰ ὀμματα, καὶ τὰ νεκρωμένα ἀναστῆσαι”. καὶ οὕτως πάλιν πεσὼν ἐκοιμήθην ἄλλον
ὀλίγον, καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ ἐν τῷ ἐπανερχεσθαι με ἐπὶ τὴν τετάρτην κλίμακα, εἶδον κατὰ ἀνατολὰς
ἐρχόμενον, κατέχοντα ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ μάχαιραν. καὶ ἄλλος ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ φέρων
περιηγκωνισμένον τινὰ λευκοφόρον καὶ ὠραῖον τὴν ὄψιν, οὗ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκαλεῖτο
μεσουράνισμα κινναβάρεως, καὶ ὡς πλησίον ἦλθον τῶν κολάσεων, λέγει ὁ τὴν μάχαιραν κρατῶν,
10 “περίτεμε αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν, καὶ τὰ κρέατα αὐτοῦ θῦσον ἀνὰ μέρος, καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ ἀνὰ
μέρος, ὅπως αἱ σαρκες αὐτοῦ πρῶτον ἐψηθῶσιν ὀργανικῶς, καὶ τότε τῇ κολάσει παραπορευθῶσιν”.
καὶ οὕτως πάλιν ἔξυπνος γενόμενος εἶπον, “καλῶς ἐπενόησα καὶ οἱ περὶ ταῦτά εἰσιν τὰ ὑγρά τῆς
μεταλλικῆς”. καὶ πάλιν ὁ βαστάζων τὴν μάχαιραν ἔφη, “πεπληρώκατε τὴν κάτω ἐπτακλίμακα”. ὁ δὲ
ἕτερος ἔφη, “ἅμα τῷ ἐκβαλεῖν τοὺς μολύβδους δι' ὑγρῶν πάντων, ἢ τέχνη πεπλήρωται”.

2 τὸν BeRu : τὸ AL φιαλοβωμόν BeRu : φυαλωβομῶ AL ἱεροπρεπῆ BeRu : ἱεροπρεπήν AL
λευκοποδῆρη Mert. : λευκοποδεῖρι AL; λευκοποδῆρη BeRu 2-3 λευκοποδῆρη ένδεδυμένον AL :
ένδεδυμένον λευκοποδῆρη Karle 4 εἶπε BeRu : εἶπεν AL αἱματῶσαι AL : ἀποσωματῶσαι Karle
5 ὀμματα Mert. : ὀματα AL; ὀμματα BeRu post ἀναστῆσαι *indic. lac.* Karle οὕτως AL : οὕτω BeRu
post οὕτως *add.* λέγων Karle πεσὼν *del.* Karle ἄλλον AL : ἄλλο Karle 6 αὐτὸ *del.* Karle αὐτὸ
δὴ BeRu : αὐτὸ δι' AL; αὐτόθι Mert. post ἀνατολὰς *conj.* τινα Karle 7 κατέχοντα BeRu : κατέχον AL
post ἐν *conj.* αὐτῷ Karle 8 περιηγκωνισμένον *conj.* LSJ : περιηκωνισμένον AL post περιηγκωνισμένον
conj. πέλεκυν Karle post περιηγκωνισμένον *indic. lac.* Karle αὐτοῦ : *om.* BeRu 9 λέγει Mert. :
λέγων A ὁ τὴν Mert. : ὅτι AL 10 περίτεμε Mert. : περιίτε με AL; περιέτεμε BeRu θῦσον Mert. :
θῆσον AL; θήσων BeRu; θές Karle 11 ὅπως BeRu : ὅπου AL ὀργανικῶς BeRu : ὀργανικός AL; *del.* Karle
post παραπορευθῶσιν *indic. lac.* Karle 12 οἱ Mert. : ὁ AL; ὅτι BeRu περὶ *del.* Karle εἰσιν AL : ἐστὶν
BeRu 13 post μεταλλικῆς *conj.* φύσεως Karle post μεταλλικῆς *indic. lac.* Karle πεπληρώκατε
BeRu : πεπληρώκαται AL; πεπλήρωκας Karle post κάτω *conj.* καὶ ἄνω ὁδὸν τὴν κατὰ τὰς Karle
ἐπτακλίμακα Mert. : ἐπτὰ κλήμακα AL; ἐπτὰ κλίμακας BeRu 14 ἕτερος AL : ἱερεὺς Karle
μολύβδους Mert. : κρόνους AL; κρουνοὺς BeRu; χρόνους Karle.

The Visions

On Excellence by the Divine Zosimos. On the Composition of the Waters. Lesson 1 :-

[1.1] The composition of the waters, and their movement, and growth, and physical dissolution, and physical restitution, and the separation of soul from body, and the coming-together of soul and body are not processes which are all of different and foreign natures to each other, but are actually one process, of one single nature, acting only on itself, which includes both the firm husks of metals and the sappy fluids of plants. And in this process, which has one nature, but which is polychromatic, is arranged an investigation, of much matter and of every pigment, into all things; for which reason, with nature under the influence of the Moon according to the measure of time, this investigation is dictated by the Moon's waxing and waning, through which Nature escapes.

[1.2] And, saying these things, I took a nap, and I saw a certain sacrificial priest standing in front of me and over an altar, shaped like an alembic. That altar had fifteen steps leading up to it. The priest stood there, and I heard a voice from above which said to me: "I have completed my descent of the fifteen steps which radiate darkness, and my ascent of the steps which shine brightly. And this here priest is the one who has made me new, throwing away the great heaviness of my body; and I, having been made holy by force, have finally become a spirit". Having heard the voice of the man who stood in the *Crucibaltar*, I interrogated him, wishing to know who he might be. And he, speaking with a weary voice, replied to me: "I am Ion, priest of the inner sanctuaries, and I have endured an unbearable act of violence. Around dawn, a man came towards me at full speed and took me prisoner, dismembering me with his sword, and he ripped me apart according to the rigour of harmony. And, having flayed my head with the sword wielded by him, he crushed up my bones together with my flesh, and he burned it in the fire, which was close at hand, until, transforming in my body, I learned to become a spirit. And this was that unbearable act of violence". While he was saying these things to me, and while I compelled him to speak, it seemed that his eyes turned to blood and he vomited forth all of his own flesh. I saw him become the opposite of himself, as a disfigured *homunculus*; and I saw him gnawing away at himself with his own teeth, and I saw him falling away. Afraid, I woke up and considered these things in my mind: "Is this not the composition of the waters?". I persuaded myself that I had correctly recognised this.

[1.3] And I fell asleep again, and I saw that same *Crucibaltar*, filled with water boiling above me, and I saw a great number, a countless number, of people in the water. But there was nobody stood outside of the altar to whom I might address my questions. I went up to see the spectacle of the altar for myself. And I saw a white-haired *homunculus*, the one who handles the dry substances, who spoke to me: "What are you looking at?". I replied to him that I was marvelling at the boiling water and the

people who were burning within it, but who remained alive. And he replied to me, saying: “This thing that you see is the entrance, the exit, and the transformation”. And so I questioned him again: “What is the nature of the transformation?”. And he replied to me, saying: “This is the place of the process which is called preservation. For those men who wish to obtain virtue come into this place, and they become spirits, fleeing their bodily form”. And so I said to him: “Are you a spirit too?”. And he replied to me, saying: “I am a spirit, and I am also a guardian of spirits”. While he was saying these things to me, the boiling intensified and the people cried out, and I saw a copper man holding a writing tablet made of lead in his hands. And, looking at his tablet, he spoke out: “I enable all of these people in these places of punishment to be still, and for each of them to take into his hand a tablet made of lead, and to write with his own hand, and to direct his eyes upwards, and to open your mouths, until your grapes are grown”. And action followed his words. The master of the house said to me: “Have you considered this? Have you stretched your neck upwards and have you seen this thing?”. I said that I had seen, and he said to me: “This copper man whom you saw is the one who vomited forth his own flesh – he is the one who performs sacred rites and also the object of those sacred rites – and to this man was given power over the waters and over those who are being punished”.

[1.4] And, having seen these dreams, I woke up again, and I said to myself: “What is the cause of this vision? Is this not the water, which is white, yellow, boiling, and divine?”. And I found that I understood these things very well. And I said that it is good to speak, and good to listen, and good to give, and good to take, and good to be poor, and good to be rich. How does Nature learn to give and to take? The copper man gives, and the wet stone takes. The metal gives, and the plant takes. The stars give, and the flowers takes. Heaven gives, and earth takes. And thunder from the spinning fire gives. All things are woven together, and all things become unravelled. And all things are mixed together, and all things gather together. And all things are compounded, and all things are scattered. And all things make wet, and all things soak thoroughly. And all things grow, and all things bloom in the *Crucibaltar*. In each case, it is by a process and by careful weighing in a measurement of ounces of the four elements. Without method, there is no coming together or breaking apart, and there is no unity at all. This technique is natural, breathing in and breathing out, adhering to its own natural processes, as it both grows and diminishes. And all things, to put it briefly, as they go between division and union, with no part of the technique being forgotten, change their very nature. For Nature, twisting in on itself, is transformed; and this is the nature of virtue and the whole cosmos, and the bond between them.

[1.5] And so that I might not need to write to you about many things, my dearest friend, build yourself a temple out of a single stone, of Proconnesian marble, which looks like white lead, and looks like alabaster, and which has neither a beginning nor an end in its building, and which has

within it a spring of the purest water, which twinkles in the light of the sun. Look carefully at where the entrance to the temple is, and take a sword in your hands, and seek out the entrance. The mouth of the entrance is thin, and a snake lies across that entrance, guarding the temple. Once you have taken the snake into your hands, firstly sacrifice it; then, having flayed it and taken the flesh off of its bones, separate it piece by piece. And once you have brought the parts back together piece by piece with the bones at the mouth of the temple, create a step for yourself, and climb it, and go inside, and find there the thing which you seek. You will see a priest, a copper man, sitting in the river and gathering this thing; but this man is not a copper man: for he has changed the nature of his colour, and he has become a man of silver, and, if you wish, after a short time, you will find a man of gold.

[1.6] This introduction is an entrance to open up the flowers of words which follow. It is also the searches for virtues – of both wisdom and prudence – and the doctrines of the mind, and active techniques, and revelations of hidden messages which come into the light; for the time of virtue treats all. What is the meaning of: “Nature is the one who conquers Natures?”. And “It is completed, and she becomes overwhelmed with dizziness, and, pressed into her search, but with that work being loved, she takes up a face common to all, and consumes the familiar matter of her appearance”. And “In this way, fallen from her previous form, she believes that she is dead, and each time she willingly imitates the Jewish style, speaking in a foreign language, punishing herself, that wretched woman becomes lighter than herself, having a mixture of her own limbs and a mixture of liquid with fire at the same time, and it is made complete”.

[1.7] Having clearly transformed Nature in these thoughts, pay attention and understand that Nature, which is made up of many things, is actually made up of one thing. Reveal such an excellent thing to nobody, but be satisfied with yourself, lest you speak and destroy yourself. For silence teaches excellence. It is beautiful to see the transformations of the four metals – of lead, copper, silver, and tin – as they become complete, as gold.

[1.8] Taking salt, moisten the sulphur, which is honourable and the colour of a honeycomb. Bind together the force of them both, bring them together with vitriol, and out of them make an acid, which is the first little bath of the process. Gradually, you will tame the white appearance of the copper by force in these things; and, after the fifth repetition of this process, you will find: under three smokes, what is called gold has now formed. See that, by controlling matter, you receive that one thing which has come from many things.

The Second Lesson of Zosimos :-

[2.1] Later, just about feeling a desire to climb the seven steps and to see the seven places of punishment, as it happened, on a propitious day, I began my upward journey. Having gone through many times, I thereupon ascended on this journey, and, in my going back on myself, I lost the path entirely. Coming into a state of great dismay, not seeing from where I might return, in my dismay I went to sleep. In my sleep, I saw a *homunculus*, the one who handles the ashes, wearing a red robe and royal clothes, standing outside of the places of punishment; he said to me: "Friend, what are you doing?". And I said to him: "I am stood here because I lost my path entirely and I started to wander". And he said to me: "Follow me". And thus going forth, I followed him. And, getting near to the places of punishment, I saw that *homunculus*, the one who handles the ashes, who was leading me on the path, and behold: he was thrown into one of the places of punishment and his entire body was devoured by the fire. Seeing this, I was beside myself and I trembled with fear, and I woke up and I said to myself: "What is this that I have seen?". And again I clarified the sense of what I had seen, and I began to understand that the man who handles the ashes is the copper man, the one wearing red clothes, and I said: "I have understood well; this is the copper man. It is, first and foremost, necessary to throw him into the places of punishment".

[2.2] Again, my soul desired the upward journey also to the third step. And again I took to the path alone, and, as I got near to the place of punishments, again I got lost, not knowing the path, and I stood there, out of my mind. And again, in the same way, I saw a white-haired old man, so exceedingly white that my eyes were blinded from the intensity of his whiteness. His name was Agathodaemon. And that white-haired man, turning around, looked at me for a long time. And I charged him with showing me the direct path. He did not turn towards me, but he completed his journey with haste; and, going along this way and that, I quickly arrived at the altar. And just as I arrived above the altar, I saw the white-haired old man, and he was thrown into one of the places of punishment. O creators of celestial natures, immediately he became totally ablaze with flame from the fire. Even the narration of these things, brothers, is horrifying. For, from the great force of the punishment, his eyes became full of blood. And I questioned him, saying: "Why do you lie there?". He, barely opening his mouth, said to me: "I am the man of lead and I am enduring an unbearable act of violence". And, out of great fear at this, I woke up, and searched in myself for the meaning of this thing. Again I thought it over and I said: "I know well that it is necessary to cast lead aside; this vision is truly about the composition of the liquids".

The Work of that Same Zosimos. The Third Lesson :-

[3.1] And again I understood the *Crucibaltar* to be divine and sacred, and I saw a certain holy man, dressed head-to-toe in white, officiating those terrifying mysteries, and I said: "Who is this man?". Answering me, he said: "This man is the priest of the inner sanctuaries. He wishes to make bodies bloody, to give eyes to those without them, and to raise those who have died". And, falling away again in the same way, I slept for another short moment, and again, in my ascending onto the fourth step, I saw a man coming from the East, holding a knife in his hand. And there was another behind him who was carrying a certain man whose hands had been tied behind his back, who was brilliantly white and had a timelessly beautiful face, and whose name was 'the vapours of cinnabar', and, as I came near to the place of punishments, the man holding the knife said, "Cut around his head, and sacrifice both his meat portion by portion, and his flesh portion by portion, so that his flesh might firstly boil in the *kerotakis*, and then might pass through the one of the places of punishment". And, coming to be awake again, I said: "I understand well: the people concerned with these matters are the liquids of alchemy". And again the one carrying the knife said: "You have completed the seven-stepped downward staircase". And the other said: "At the same time as you throw lead into all of the waters, the art is completed".

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.1

Lesson 1 is transmitted via MS A (84v-87r), MS M (92v-95r), MS L (90v-93v). *Lesson 1.1* is transmitted via MS B (88r) and MS M' (115r).

Zosimos' text opens with a series of musings on alchemical theory and the philosophical notions which underlay it.¹ He says that a variety of actions (for example, the separation of body and soul, and the union of body and soul – images which the reader will encounter time and time again throughout *The Visions*, most notably in the figures of Ion and the snake which guards Zosimos' noetic temple), though seemingly antithetical, are in fact of a singular nature (μονοειδῆς φύσις). In this way, the singular theory which is most clearly expressed in Zosimos' introduction is that of material monism, the theory which states that the variety of things in the sensible world is merely illusory and the result of different proportions of various qualities inherent in objects. In other words, monism posits that all things are fundamentally composed of the same matter. As discussed at pp.29-30, this is a crucial pillar in the doctrines of ancient natural philosophy which underpinned alchemical practice: in order for an object to be transmuted into another, they must logically be composed of the same fundamental matter. Zosimos highlights this most clearly in his comment that alchemy itself is a polychromatic endeavour (πολυχρώμω), but one which is nevertheless fundamentally monistic and based on the concept of a singular nature (τῷ μονοειδεῖ).

Zosimos goes on to describe alchemy as a practice which is influenced by the Moon and the measure of time. Timeliness – especially astrological timing – is a key initial step in Zosimos' alchemical practice, guiding the alchemist to the most opportune moments to perform certain experiments and to create tinctures which are both natural and timely (see 1.6).²

All in all, *Lesson 1.1* introduces the reader to a fundamental philosophical feature of Zosimos' alchemical practice: material monism. The purpose of the introduction, especially with its fleetingly brief references to ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος and σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος seems to be that of forcing the reader to anticipate the fact that the images and motifs which they will encounter throughout the text have an alchemical basis, and are fundamentally unified, complementary alchemical operations.

¹ See pp.29-34 and Viano 2005.

² Werrett 2023. Cf. Stolzenberg 1999.

Commentary

1.2 θέσις ὑδάτων: Fittingly, *The Visions* opens with an obscure reference, the meaning of which has been the subject of much debate in Zosimean scholarship. Mertens has interpreted θέσις as stillness, translating as ‘repos’, in opposition to the terms κίνησις and αὔξησις which follow it, constituting the three actions involved in the boiling of a substance in the *kerotakis*.³ Whilst this is an attractive interpretation, this translation does not seem to align with the use of θέσις throughout Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature; rather, it has the sense of the composition and arrangement of matter.⁴ This also seems to be the sense of the term and its cognates elsewhere in *The Visions* itself: Zosimos wakes from his first dream and concludes that it was about the composition of the waters (ἡ τῶν ὑδάτων θέσις) (see 1.22; regardless of interpretation, this is an obscure phrase, but far more seems to be ‘composed’ in *Lesson 1.2* than is ‘at rest’). Further, this opening word surely plays off of the Greek title of the text, περὶ συνθέσεως ὑδάτων, which has been translated universally with this sense of composition.⁵ Thus, this edition translates the opening phrase, θέσις ὑδάτων, as ‘the composition of the waters’. It is not clear to what exactly ὑδάτων refers, but one might reasonably suspect Divine Water as an explanation, given the fundamental role which this liquid plays in Zosimos’ alchemical practice (see pp.37-9 and Martelli 2009).

1.2 κίνησις καὶ αὔξησις: Although this edition interprets θέσις as ‘composition’, rather than Mertens’s ‘stillness’, of the waters, it seems that κίνησις καὶ αὔξησις can still reasonably refer to the movement and growth of a boiling liquid, as she suggests.⁶

In addition to Mertens’s scientific interpretation of these technical terms, there is also a religio-philosophical element which is worth exploring. The terms κίνησις and αὔξησις appear in conjunction with one another in texts by a wide array of authors who may have influenced Zosimos or indeed been influenced by the same traditions as the alchemist, ranging from Plato to Gregory of Nazianzus.⁷ In these texts, movement and growth are referred to as the two primary facets of life for which the soul is directly responsible. Zosimos’ use of these words, then, conjures ideas of the spiritual and the role of the soul in the reader, which are expanded upon in the following lines, but

³ Mert. 34.

⁴ CAAG 1.20.1; 2.4.30; 5.7.10. See also, Pl. *Tht.* 206a. *LSJ*, s.v. θέσις (pp.794-5).

⁵ See pp.22-5 for an exploration of the title of *The Visions* in Greek.

⁶ Mert. 34.

⁷ See e.g., Pl. *Leg.* 897a; Arist. *De An.* 415b; Greg. Naz. *De Filio* 8.

which also continue to form this dualistic analogy by which the scientific mingles seamlessly with the religious.

1.2 ἀποσωμάτωσις καὶ ἐπισωμάτωσις: As further actions which are in some sense related to alchemy, Zosimos lists physical dissolution and physical restitution, both of which are *hapax legomena* (see Zosimos' use of compound terms and *hapax legomena* in his alchemisation of language on p.69). The tearing apart of bodies, followed by their reconstitution, is a recurring motif in *The Visions*, describing the sacrificial rites / scientific operations which happen to both Ion and the snake (1.16-8 and 1.61-3 respectively). These terms seem clearly to be expanded upon by ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος and σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος in the following line.

1.2-3 ἀποσπασμὸς πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος: MSS M and M' offer πνεύματος μετὰ σώματος; although μετὰ seems the more likely reading, this edition prefers ἐπὶ to maintain the parallel with the preceding ἐπισωμάτωσις. This antithetical pairing introduces the notion that the relationship between *pneūma* and *sōma* will be integral to the narrative of *The Visions*, as indeed it is integral to Zosimos' alchemical practice and religious worldview. As explored in greater depth at pp.30-2, a fundamental feature of Graeco-Egyptian alchemical theory is that all matter contains both body and spirit, and that enacting transmutation involves removing the *pneūma* – the qualities – of one substance, before putting it into the *sōma* – the tangible material – of another substance.⁸ These complementary, but intrinsically antithetical, operations are the cornerstone of alchemical practice. This notion is encapsulated into an ancient alchemical maxim, usually attributed to Hermes: εἰ μὴ τὰ σώματα ἀσωματωθῆ, καὶ τὰ ἀσώματα σωματωθῆ, οὐδὲν τῶν προσδοκωμένων ἔσται ('unless you make incorporeal the corporeal, and unless you make corporeal the incorporeal, nothing that is expected will come to be').⁹

1.4 μόνον...μονοειδῆς φύσις: Zosimos claims that the antithetical actions he lists are in fact not of different and foreign natures to one another (οὐ ξένων ἢ ἐπεισάκτων φύσεων), but rather share a single nature. The term μονοειδῆς both begins and ends *Lesson 1*, giving the text itself something of an ouroboric structure. At the end of the first *praxis*, Zosimos, having offered an alchemical recipe, says that the reader, in finding gold, will have the one thing which comes from many things (ἀπέχεις

⁸ See further Viano 2005: 93; Edmonds 2019: 269.

⁹ *On the Body of Magnesia and its Treatment* 8 (CAAG 3.28).

τὸ μονόειδον τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν, 1.83-4). In this way, although μονοειδής translates to something unique and singularly natured, it is possible that implied in this is the most uniquely precious substance of all, especially for the alchemist: gold. Indeed, in his *Timaeus* (a crucial text for the philosophical basis of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy), Plato also refers to μονοειδές...χρυσός, describing this as the most precious possession (τιμαλφέστατον κτῆμα) because of its pure and unique nature.¹⁰ Thus, as Zosimos introduces the shocking notion that all things – even totally opposite actions – are in fact of one nature (see further discussion in the introduction to *Lesson 1.1*), he seems also to hint at the alchemical *magnum opus*, on account of which he is so interested in the monistic nature of the material world.

1.4 εἰς ἑαυτήν: For the theory of Nature acting upon itself and enacting perfecting transformations upon itself – transformations which the alchemists attempt to imitate in their practice – see pp.32-4.

1.4-5 στερεόστρακα τῶν μετάλλων καὶ τὰ ὑγρόδρα τῶν βοτανῶν: After Zosimos' claim that things as logically diametrically opposed as the separation of soul and body and the coming-together of soul and body are actually the same process, he continues to say that Nature contains both the firm husks of metals and the sappy fluids of plants.¹¹ Both στερεόστρακα and ὑγρόδρα are *hapax legomena*. It is difficult to determine what word the second part of the compound ὑγρόδρα might be; the most obvious explanation is surely a relation to δρυς, but one struggles to see the relevance here beyond a vegetal connection to τῶν βοτανῶν. The present edition thus translates as 'sappy fluids'. A comparison of firm metals with wet plants presents a juxtaposition of radically different things – continuing the preceding litany of juxtapositions – in order to illuminate the notion that variety in material quality is merely an illusion of the monistic nature underlying the sensible world. The reference to metallurgy and botany is also key, as these are both disciplines which fall under the umbrella of alchemical practice; thus, monism is indicated as existing within the seemingly radically different operations which Zosimos and his readers performed. Whether one's experimentation aims to transmute copper or petals, the theoretical bases which buttress alchemy remain the same (see pp.29-34).

¹⁰ Pl. *Ti.* 59b.

¹¹ Zosimos usually uses ὄστρακον in reference to earthenware alchemical vessels or stops for those vessels (see e.g., *On Sulphur* 3 (CAAG 3.21) and *On the Measurement of Yellowing* 6 (CAAG 3.24)), and employs ὑγρός elsewhere in *The Visions* (1.74; 2.30; 3.12; 3.14) as seemingly synonymous with ὕδωρ.

1.5 μονοειδεί και πολυχρώμω: From 1.5 until the end of *Lesson* 1.1, the text of MS M diverges significantly from the remainder of the manuscripts, such that Mertens has printed two versions of 1.5-7 in her edition. The present edition prints a single text, considering major MS variations in individual comments.

Zosimos continues to describe the list of actions which open the text – which seem to summarise the fundamental actions in the alchemical enterprise – as μονοειδής, highlighting the fundamental importance that the monistic worldview has on Zosimos' thought; see 1.4 for the significance of this term. This singular, monistic nature, however, is sharply contrasted with Zosimos' claim that that which is singularly natured is also polychromatic (πολύχρωμος). The transformation of colour is clearly a foundational part of alchemical practice, being an obvious effect of material transmutation; several colours appear throughout *The Visions* (most notably, red at 2.6 and white at 2.18-9), adding to the alchemical atmosphere of the piece.¹² Although Zosimos does not use the term πολύχρωμος again, it is used frequently in the work of the alchemist Stephanus, who employs the adjective in relation to a range of objects, from an iris, to a revelatory vision, to matter in general.¹³

1.5 σχηματίζεται: This edition prints the variant which appears in MSS ABLM', translating that the alchemical quest 'is formed' – which seems to mirror the formation of products in alchemy itself – in this singularly natured but polychromatic way; by contrast, the MS M variation can be translated as the quest 'being preserved in this form' (σχήματι σώζεται) which is singularly natured but polychromatic. Both variants are plausible and have an almost identical meaning; the former variant is preferred in the present edition because Zosimos uses σχηματίζω in an almost identical manner elsewhere in his corpus.¹⁴ Given the reference to the Moon at the end of *Lesson* 1.1 (1.6-7), it is also worth noting that σχηματίζω has deep astrological significance, as a term used for the configurations of heavenly bodies: Manetho discusses Mars configuring its course in due order (σχηματίση κατὰ κόσμον), and the effects that this might have on mankind.¹⁵

1.5-6 ή τῶν πάντων...ζήτησις: As Lopes da Silveira has explored at length, Zosimos and the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists often employ the language of 'the search' (ζήτησις, ζητέω etc) in reference to

¹² See pp.35-9, pp.66-7, and Hopkins 1925 (esp. 65-6) on colour change in alchemy.

¹³ *On the Great and Sacred Art* (Ideler 1842: 200, 201, 235).

¹⁴ *Omega* 2.

¹⁵ *LSJ*, s.v. σχηματίζω (p.1745). Manetho, *Apotel.* 4.500. On Zosimos' use of astrology, see 1.6 and Werrett 2023, the latter of which includes further bibliography.

alchemical inquiry and the products of alchemical practice, whether material or spiritual.¹⁶ Elsewhere within *The Visions* itself, Zosimos refers to finding ‘the sought-after thing’ (τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα, 1.63) in the noetic temple of alchemy in *Lesson* 1.5, while also referring to those reading his text as embarking upon a quest for virtue (ζητήσεις ἀρετῶν, 1.67-8). The alchemist’s quest, ultimately, is to imitate the self-perfecting processes of Nature (see pp.32-4). The addition that this search is one ‘into all things’ (τῶν πάντων) suggests the universality of alchemical theory and practice.

1.6 πολυύλικτος καὶ παμποίκιλος: Zosimos describes the alchemical quest into all things as one which consists of much matter and is multi-coloured. MS M has πολυέλεκτος (‘requiring much discussion’) and Lopes da Silveira suggests πολυέλικτος (‘much-twisting’), presumably as a reference to the convoluted nature of alchemy, but – especially given the focus on material monism in *Lesson* 1.1 – Mertens’s πολυύλικτος seems surely to be the correct emendation.¹⁷ The term παμποίκιλος (‘coloured with every pigment’) seems to echo Zosimos’ description of Nature as πολύχρωμος at 1.5, further emphasising both the importance of colour transmutation in alchemical experimentation, and continuing to describe the apparent variety of the cosmos as illusory, since all things are in fact of a single, monistic nature.¹⁸

1.6 σεληνιαζομένης τῆς φύσεως τῷ μέτρῳ τῷ χρονικῷ: Although *LSJ* translates σεληνιάζομαι in this context as ‘to be sublunar’, it seems that a more appropriate translation might be ‘under the influence of the Moon’; this is how the term is used in *On Virtue and Interpretation* by the early Zosimean commentator, and is more akin to its ordinary use of being ‘Moon-struck’ (conveying lunacy and epilepsy under the influence of the Moon).¹⁹ Zosimos thus states that Nature is subject to the influence of the Moon in its proportions of time; the appeal to this lunar influence seems to be an unmistakable reference to the role of astrology within ancient alchemy.²⁰ Given that Zosimos referred to alchemical tinctures – the fundamental goal of his practice – as φυσικαὶ καιρικαὶ καταβαφαὶ (natural, *timely* tinctures), the importance of katarchic astrology and opportune timing is evident.²¹ He in fact claims to have heard an alchemist say that a tincture could be made at any

¹⁶ Lopes da Silveira 2020 (see esp. 193-255 on Zosimos’ *Visions*). On this material-spiritual dichotomy throughout Zosimos’ corpus, see pp.11-7.

¹⁷ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 215.

¹⁸ *LSJ*, s.v. παμποίκιλος (p.1294).

¹⁹ *LSJ*, s.v. σεληνιάζομαι (p.1590). *On Virtue and Interpretation* 9 (CAAG 3.6).

²⁰ See Werrett 2023. On the role of the Moon in ancient astrology, see Barton 1994: 81.

²¹ See e.g., *Omega* 2. On katarchic astrology in the ancient world, see Gordon 2013 and Addey 2021.

moment, but Zosimos firmly declares his lack of belief: ἤκουσα δέ τινων ὅτι ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ γίνεται ἡ ἡμῶν ἐργασία, καὶ ἀμφιβάλλω.²²

1.7 ὑποβάλλεται τὴν λῆξιν καὶ τὴν αὔξησιν: It seems, as Mertens proposes, that the aforementioned ζήτησις – the quest into alchemy – must be the implied subject of this phrase, i.e. the investigation into all things is dictated by λῆξις and αὔξησις, cessation and growth. Whilst this seems primarily to refer to the cessation and growth of all things – in other words, the changes to all things which Nature enacts (mirrored at 1.52) – it is worth noting that the waxing and waning of the Moon is surely the ‘growth’ and ‘cessation’ within the natural world with which the ancients would have been most familiar, thus echoing the previous statement which suggests lunar influence over the sensible world, and perhaps in particular over alchemical practice.²³

1.7 δι' ἧς ὑποφεύγει ἡ φύσις: Whilst MSS ABLM' read ὑποφεύγει, MS M has ἱπεύει (corrected to ἱπεύει by Mertens). Thus, this phrase can be translated either as ‘through which Nature flees (from below)’ or ‘through which Nature gallops’. Neither interpretation makes particular sense, or indeed is obviously better.²⁴ Although neither ὑποφεύγω nor ἱπεύω appear elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus, Zosimos frequently uses the verb φεύγω in relation to the separation of *pneūma* and *sōma*, as the former flees from the latter: this is even the case within *The Visions* itself, as those suffering in the boiling water of the *Crucibaltar* are said to become spirits fleeing the body (πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα, 1.31).²⁵ It is not clear why Nature would flee in quite the way that pneumatic qualities might leave a material body, but it is possible that this line simply reiterates the process of transmutations of *pneūma* which is the framework of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy.

²² *On the Choice of a Favourable Moment* 4 (CAAG 3.15).

²³ Mert. 216. On λῆξις as a technical term for the waning of the moon, see Lightfoot's (2020: 892) note in relation to *Apotel.* 6.552; on αὔξησις as a technical term for the waxing of the moon, see Lightfoot's (2023: 495) note in relation to *Apotel.* 5.189.

²⁴ Lopes da Silveira (2020: 215) even suggests that the sentence is likely incomplete.

²⁵ The verb φεύγω is also used in this way at e.g., *On the Evaporation of Divine Water* 3 (CAAG 3.7); *Authentic Memoirs on Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.9); *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus* 1, 3 (CAAG 3.12).

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.2

Pondering the nature of alchemy, Zosimos falls asleep. Thus begins the first dream sequence. As discussed at pp.59-64, the narrative of *The Visions* being shaped as a series of dreams situates the text within a wider tradition of revelatory dreams in ancient literature.²⁶ In his dream, Zosimos immediately sees a sacrificial priest and an altar in the shape of an alchemical alembic (βωμοῦ φαλοειδοῦς). This object – the *Crucibaltar* – is the key image of Zosimos' text, as well as being the central space around which the oneiric narrative unfolds. The *Crucibaltar* has sparked a great deal of discussion in Zosimean scholarship about its meaning and the role which it plays within both *The Visions* and Zosimos' wider spiritual and scientific worldviews. On a scientific level, the *Crucibaltar* clearly represents the alchemical apparatus; more specifically, given the imagery of movement up and down the steps before the *Crucibaltar*, and given the huge amount of significance which Zosimos attaches to this piece of equipment, Mertens has suggested that the *Crucibaltar* mirrors the *kerotakis* (explored in detail on pp.35-9).²⁷ An alchemical space of material transformation, the *Crucibaltar* is also a religious space of spiritual transformation. Edwards lists a great number of similar κρατήρ-like vessels found in ancient literary purification rituals, positing a tradition which can be traced back to Dionysiac and Orphic eschatologies, but concludes that the vessel to which Zosimos most clearly alludes is the baptismal font filled with *gnōsis* of CH 4.²⁸ As both an alchemical vessel and baptismal font, then, the *Crucibaltar* is displayed as the ultimate space for material and spiritual transformation.²⁹

As Zosimos admires the *Crucibaltar*, he sees a priest and hears a voice. It is difficult to determine whether this priest is the same whom Zosimos encountered at the start of the dream, and it is further difficult to determine to which of these characters (or perhaps even a third character) the voice belongs. Such confusion around the identities of those appearing throughout Zosimos' dreams adds to the oneiric reality – just as in a real dream, nothing is ever quite what it seems (see pp.59-61). The priest informs Zosimos that, after some difficulty and purification, he was able to cast off the weight of his body (ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα) and become a spirit (πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι). The language of *sōma* and *pneūma* is integral to Zosimos' worldview, representing simultaneously the transfer of pneumatic qualities between alchemical material in the *kerotakis*, as

²⁶ The ancient revelatory dream is discussed at length in Flannery 2014.

²⁷ On the *kerotakis* method, which Zosimos inherited from Maria and the Jewish alchemical tradition, see pp.35-42.

²⁸ Edwards 1992: 55-64. See pp.49-52 and pp.56-7. On the motif of rebirth through baptism, see *John* 3:5 and *Rom.* 6:3-4. On baptismal imagery in early Christian thought, see Jensen 2010.

²⁹ On the analogy between dyeing and baptising through the etymological connection between βαπτίζω and βαφή, see p.13.

well as the purification of the spirit through the dissolution of the material body.³⁰ These ideas are discussed in detail at pp.39-42 and pp.44-8 respectively.

Zosimos hears another voice, and is introduced to Ion, the man standing inside the *Crucibaltar*, who describes himself as the priest of the inner sanctuaries (ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων). As discussed below, this title positions Ion as a man with access to the secret knowledge which was ordinarily hidden away in the ἄδυτα of Greek and Egyptian temple complexes, accessible only to those initiated into the sacred mysteries which they hid.³¹ Ion describes a similar process to the priest, saying that he was also rid of his body and that he also became a spirit; Ion's story, however, is significantly more graphic. Shockingly, Ion relates the story of his own torture, death, and rebirth. He says that his head was flayed; he was dismembered; his flesh was cut up; and he was burned on a nearby fire, but that on account of this process he became a spirit. As discussed at pp.45-8 (and as Knipe 2011 has explored at length), sacrificial imagery is key to Zosimos' text, as he engages with contemporary debates about the utility and place of sacrifice in monotheistic society, and thus recasts sacrifice as something which is internal and metaphorical: the sacrifice of one's own material bodily weight is reimagined as an intellectual sacrifice which frees the spirit from its corporeal confines.³²

In his explanation of his death and its significance to Zosimos, Ion seems to take on the role of something of an *angelus interpres*: the guide who accompanies the mortal into the divine realm in ancient apocalyptic literature, explaining the secrets of what they see (for example, the angel Yahoel who visits and guides Abraham in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, or the Sibyl in the *Aeneid*).³³ Zosimos' characters, however, seem to be something of a humorous recasting of the *angelus interpres* in light of Zosimos' allegorical text: rather than providing clear explanation, they often add to the confusion, imparting obscure riddles to Zosimos which must be interpreted once the alchemist has woken up.³⁴ Nevertheless, Zosimos presses Ion to say more; but this is short-lived, as Ion undergoes another grotesque transformation. His eyes turn to blood; he gnaws away at his own body; and he vomits forth his own flesh. The graphic detail is beyond the realm of sacrificial imagery; Zosimos engages in full-blown body horror. As a result of this transformation, Ion is said to become the total opposite of himself (ὡς τοῦναντίον): he has become a *homunculus* (ἄνθρωπάριον). As explored below, the *homunculus* became a key symbol in later alchemical traditions, representative of the alchemist's ability to create artificial life; this, however, does not seem to be the case for Zosimos' *homunculus*.

³⁰ For the importance of the destruction of the material body in the Gnostic and Hermetic religio-philosophical trends which deeply shaped Zosimos' personal religious convictions, see *Gospel of Judas* 56 and *CH* 1.24.

³¹ See Hollinshead 1999.

³² On the end of sacrifice in the Late Antique period, see Stroumsa 2009.

³³ On the *angelus interpres*, see Bremmer 2014: 343-53.

³⁴ On the narratological relationship between sleep and wakefulness, see pp.59-64.

Rather, he is the purified, spiritual ‘inner man’; in this transformation, then, Ion seems to become a cleansed, initiated being. Afraid of this transformation, Zosimos wakes up and concludes that his dream was about ἡ τῶν ὑδάτων θέσις. The fact that waters are nowhere discussed in this dream suggests the allegorical nature of the narrative: Zosimos interprets it with ease, but the reader must read and reread to understand the secrets hidden within the text (see pp.59-69 on the stylistic framework of the allegorical dream).³⁵

All in all, *Lesson 1.2* is the start of Zosimos’ fictional narrative. It provides the alchemical and religious allegory – that of Ion’s death and transformation into a *pneūma* in the *Crucibaltar* – which the reader must attempt to interpret and decode over the course of the remainder of the text.

Commentary

1.8 ταῦτα λαλῶν ἀπεκοιμήθην: Zosimos’ falling asleep while musing on nature and alchemical theory mirrors the opening line of the *Poimandres*, in which Hermes falls asleep while contemplating the things that are (ἐννοίας μοί ποτε γενομένης περὶ τῶν ὄντων).³⁶ That the Hermetic dream tradition will be a key source of allusivity for Zosimos’ text is thus indicated from the outset of the narrative.³⁷ Whilst, as discussed at pp.62-3, the dreamscape is often discussed in Gnostic and Hermetic literature as a space of ignorance and lack of *gnōsis* – made especially clear as Hermes compares those who are unaware of God’s nature to those who give themselves to sleep (ὑπνώ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδεδωκότες) – Zosimos seems to alter this interpretation by styling his dream on the basis of the likes of the *Poimandres*.³⁸ Hermes explicitly states that his sleep was not one brought about by excessive food or bodily fatigue (ἐκ κόρου τροφῆς ἢ ἐκ κόπου σώματος); rather, it is a sleep of the body (ὁ τοῦ σώματος ὕπνος), which entails wakefulness for the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς νῆψις) (on dreams undertaken for a specific purpose of receiving revelation, see p.61 on incubation, with further bibliography).³⁹ Zosimos’ constant interlay with the *Poimandres* may suggest that his dream is also a source of divine revelation in the same way.

The question of the historicity of Zosimos’ dreams has long intrigued scholars. As discussed at pp.59-60, Jung certainly considered Zosimos’ narrative to be a record of a series of literal experiences. Those who have argued for the historical reality of Zosimos’ dreams have often pointed to the

³⁵ See further Lopes da Silveira 2020: 198-213.

³⁶ *CH* 1.1.

³⁷ See pp.59-64 and Flannery 2014 for ancient revelatory dream literature, including Biblical, Classical, Hellenistic Jewish, and Christian literature.

³⁸ *CH* 1.27. On sleep as a Gnostic motif, see Jonas 1958: 68.

³⁹ *CH* 1.1; 1.30.

realism of dreaming of one's own condition in a time of uncertainty: Zosimos is concerned with matters of alchemical theory as he falls asleep, and his dream is most certainly shaped by these matters.⁴⁰

1.8 ἱερουργόν: A ἱερουργός (ἱερός + ἔργον) is specifically a priest who performs sacred rituals, including sacrifices.⁴¹ Given the major doubts about the efficacy of sacrifice and other practical theurgic rituals which were circulating in Zosimos' time, the priest – the first character whom the reader encounters – being a ἱερουργός surely emphasises the theme of sacrifice which runs through the text (see pp.45-8 and Knipe 2011).⁴² On the role of characters throughout *The Visions* as both sacrificial priests and sacrificial victims, see discussion of the figure described as ὁ ἱερουργῶν καὶ ἱερουργούμενος at 1.38.

1.8 τινα: The use of τινα, the indefinite pronoun suggesting uncertainty, adds to the anonymity and confusion about the identity of characters – mixed into the oneiric atmosphere – which is to be a prevalent theme in Zosimos' dream sequences.⁴³

1.8-9 βωμοῦ φιαλοειδοῦς: The most important object in the entirety of Zosimos' text is the *Crucibaltar*, the altar in the shape of an alchemical alembic (see full discussion in the introduction to this section). This object's dual purpose as simultaneously an altar (βωμός) (styled on the baptismal *krater* filled with *gnōsis* of CH 4 – discussed on pp.49-52) and an experimental vessel (φιάλη) (styled on the *kerotakis*) mirrors Zosimos' own view that alchemy is a *praxis* aimed simultaneously at the purification of matter into gold and at the purification of a human into a purely spiritual entity (see pp.44-8).⁴⁴ Further, Lopes da Silveira has suggested that the assimilation of the crucible and the altar, particularly with the suffix -ειδής, is the result of a dream-based cognitive disjunction – a phenomenon by which a dreamer sees an amalgamation of two separate objects as a single entity –

⁴⁰ See especially Jung 1967: 66. See further Willard 2017: 131. Zosimos confirms that his dreams are related to alchemical practices at the end of each dream sequence (1.22-3; 1.42; 2.14; 2.29; 3.12); on a related note, see the vocabulary of knowledge throughout *The Visions* at pp.70-1.

⁴¹ *LSJ*, s.v. ἱερουργός (p.823).

⁴² On the 'end of sacrifice', see Stroumsa 2015.

⁴³ *LSJ*, s.v. τις (pp.1796-8).

⁴⁴ On the fact that φιάλη can refer either to the top of the alembic or to the body of the alembic (in terms of the *kerotakis*, both the reflux chamber and the central vessel), see Mert. 35.

that is, a result of ‘dream logic’, setting up the lack of clarity which is to be a permanent theme throughout Zosimos’ text.⁴⁵

1.9 δεκαπέντε κλίμακας πρὸς ἀνάβασιν: Although it is a slightly loose translation of κλίμαξ (ordinarily translated as ‘ladder’ or ‘staircase’), all editions of *The Visions* agree that this must imply a staircase of fifteen steps, rather than fifteen staircases (both Mertens and Berthelot and Ruelle translate as ‘quinze marches’). Dufault is more hesitant to take this interpretative leap, even suggesting that κλίμακας may best be interpreted as racks for torture.⁴⁶ The immediate appearance of ἀνάβασιν, however, as well as κατιέναι...ἀνιέναι at 1.10-1 below, seems to confirm that Zosimos uses κλίμακας as a general term for a mode of ascent. Further, κλίμακες in the sense of steps leading to Heaven is attested both elsewhere within *The Visions* (see, for example, 2.2) and indeed outside of the text (see, for example, Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 566). The fact that the *Crucibaltar* stands atop steps may be a realistic arrangement of alchemical equipment; in his treatise on the nature of different sulphuric compounds, including Divine Water, Zosimos describes heating an alchemical vessel shaped like steps (τῷ χωνίῳ τῷ βαθμοειδεῖ) in which gold is produced (γίνεται χρυσός).⁴⁷ On the nature of these fifteen steps leading to the *Crucibaltar* – conveying a myriad of scientific and religious connotations – see full discussion at 1.10-1 below.

1.9 ἔνθα ὁ ἱερεὺς ἴστατο: The image of the priest standing at the top of the staircase is reminiscent of God standing at the top of a ladder to Heaven in Jacob’s revelatory dream (ἰδοὺ κλίμαξ...ὁ δὲ κύριος ἐπεστήρικτο ἐπ’ αὐτῆς).⁴⁸ On the similarities between Zosimos’ narrative and the dream of Jacob in Genesis, see p.62 and Lopes da Silveira 2020: 205-7.⁴⁹

1.10 καὶ φωνῆς ἄνωθεν ἤκουσα λεγούσης μοι: Although the ἱερουργός is the only character whom the reader has encountered thus far, it is not clear that he is the source of the voice from above. This is further complicated by the reference to ὁ ἱερουργῶν within the direct speech, which may or may not refer back to this initial priest, and also the addition of another character, Ion, at 1.13-4. In a

⁴⁵ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 217. On the structure of Zosimos’ narrative as a series of dreams (and on its oneiric verisimilitude) see pp.59-64.

⁴⁶ Dufault 2019: 109. *CGL*, s.v. κλίμαξ (p.810).

⁴⁷ *On Sulphurs* 4 (*CAAG* 3.21).

⁴⁸ *Gen.* 28:12-3.

⁴⁹ Cf. pp.66-7.

fashion which resembles the oneiric framework of the text, the identities of Zosimos' characters – and the identity of this seemingly disembodied voice – are far from clear.

1.10-1 πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας καὶ ἀνιέναι με τὰς φωτολαμπεῖς κλίμακας: The unnamed speaker tells Zosimos that he has completed a descent of the fifteen steps which radiate darkness and an ascent of the steps which shine brightly.⁵⁰ The phrase πεπλήρωκα τὸ κατιέναι με (literally, 'I have completed the descending of me', but translated as, 'I have completed my descent') is syntactically rather unusual. Zosimos is fond of articular infinitives (see esp. 1.43-4), but this is the only instance in *The Visions* of that infinitive taking a direct object, με. The adjective σκοτοφεγγής is a *hapax legomenon*, but note that a similar juxtaposition is found in a fragment of Simonides' *Danae*, as Perseus is described as νυκτὶ λάμπεις.⁵¹

The image of these steps has caught the imagination of Zosimean scholars more than any other in the text, leading to a wide range of scientific and religio-philosophical interpretations. As discussed at pp.35-9, Mertens has proposed an explanation of the upward and downward steps as allegorical of the sublimation (thus, gaseous ascent) and subsequent condensation (thus, liquid descent) of a certain alchemical substance in a *kerotakis* during the initial alchemical process of *melanōsis*.⁵² This is a highly tempting proposition. It is also interesting that the depiction of the *ouroboros* at fig. 4 – with the *ouroboros* also representing the upward and downward cycle of vapours within the *kerotakis* – seems to be coloured dark on the way down and light on the way up, possibly related to Zosimos' description of the steps as σκοτοφεγγεῖς and φωτολαμπεῖς.

The religious connotations of the steps also lead to interesting interpretations. Whilst steps are a frequently recurring motif in ancient religious thought and iconography (see pp.52-3 and the introduction to *Lesson 2.1*), the distinction between steps which are specifically reserved for descent and steps which are specifically reserved for ascent is rare.⁵³ Given that the imagery is crucial to the text, as well as Zosimos' alchemical-religious analogy, especially in *Lesson 1.3*, the motif of ascent and descent into a baptismal immersion pool may have been a source of inspiration for Zosimos' steps, but this is not a particularly obvious reference.⁵⁴ In a Neo-Platonic context, unidirectional divine steps appear in Porphyry's *On the Cave of the Nymphs* – a mystical exegesis of the cave

⁵⁰ MSS A and L depict δεκαπέντε as ιη, in line with Byzantine numeral convention.

⁵¹ Simon. *Frag.* 543.11 (see further Rosenmeyer 1991: 21). See Lopes da Silveira (2020: 217) for a purposeful juxtaposition here enhancing the incoherent oneiric narrative.

⁵² The appeal to *melanōsis* also explains the σκοτοφεγγεῖς nature of the steps.

⁵³ See further, with special reference to Porphyry, Akçay 2019: 70.

⁵⁴ On baptismal immersion pools in early Christian practice, see Guy 2004: 224-5.

described by Homer at *Od.* 13.102-12 – as Porphyry writes that the cave is symbolic of the cosmos, and that the descent into and ascent from the cave exist as part of the same tradition of ascents to divine realms in the ancient tradition.⁵⁵ In his exegesis, Porphyry also explains the importance of the cave’s murkiness as emblematic of its role as the entrance for ignorant mortals (he reads Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* in the *Republic* as a *comparandum*, as it also has darkness as an allegory for ignorance as a primary theme).⁵⁶ It is not evident in what ways exactly Zosimos text might engage with this mystical Neo-Platonic tradition described by Porphyry, but the notion of negatively descending through darkness and positively ascending through light to some divine space associated with the revelation of divine knowledge is clearly relevant. Further κλίμακες (of seven steps) of course also appear during *Lessons* 2 and 3, but these seem to depict a cosmic ascent to Heaven across the planetary spheres and thus seem to be unrelated to the steps leading to the *Crucibaltar*.

Beyond these interpretations, Escolano-Poveda also suggests that this staircase may mirror a motif seen by Zosimos in an historical temple.⁵⁷ Fig. 5 shows the depiction of a staircase of fifteen steps on the ceiling of the *pronaos* at the Temple of Hathor in the Dendera temple complex (a little over 100km from Panopolis).⁵⁸ Gods climb to the fifteenth and top step, on which sits the Eye of Horus, seemingly being revered by Thoth, the Egyptian god of (among other things) the Moon and magic, and a key syncretistic figure in Hermetic thought. This arrangement mirrors the Moon’s phases, with the Moon taking fifteen days to transform from a waning to a waxing state (see 1.7); such symbolism of fifteen days of dark and fifteen days of light is also a tempting interpretation of Zosimos’ staircase.⁵⁹ Ultimately, the steps leading to the *Crucibaltar* likely stand as a motif which amalgamates alchemical, baptismal, eschatological, and astrological elements.

⁵⁵ Porph. *De Antr. Nymph.* 21. On this text, see further Akçay 2019.

⁵⁶ Porph. *De Antr. Nymph.* 5-6, 11.

⁵⁷ Escolano-Poveda 2022: 89.

⁵⁸ On the relationship between Hathor and alchemy, see Roberts 2019. On craft instructions found at the ‘House of Gold’ at the same temple complex in Dendera, see Fraser 2007: 36.

⁵⁹ Even if not these steps at Dendera, Escolano-Poveda (2022: 117) proposes that Zosimos may have seen a now lost lunar staircase in Panopolis, with Min – a key deity in the region – himself being a lunar god. On lunar staircases in Egyptian temple iconography, see Altmann-Wendling 2018. See also Smith 2002: 242 for a related discussion on the importance of astrological symbolism in Panopolis.



Fig. 5:

Depiction of a lunar staircase on the ceiling of the *pronaos* of the Temple of Hathor at the Dendera temple complex, Egypt.

Escolano Poveda 2022: 118.

1.11-2 ὁ ἱερουργῶν καὶ καινουργῶν με: The one performing the sacrificial rites is said also to be the one ‘renewing’ the speaker. The transformation implied in the term καινουργῶν is later revealed to be the speaker’s becoming a perfect spirit (πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι), discussed at 1.12-3 below. Zosimos’ placement together of the participles ἱερουργῶν and καινουργῶν continues to emphasise that physical purification and transformation can only take place after material has been sacrificed (see 1.12 and pp.45-8).

1.12 ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα: The speaker’s transformation (πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι, 1.12-3) is said first to require the rejection of the weight of the body. On an alchemical reading, this surely refers to the sublimation and rejection of matter in the creation of an alchemical vapour in the alchemical stage of *melanōsis* (see pp.39-42 and 1.12-3). Zosimos’ other uses of the verb ἀποβάλλω all align with this context of rejecting substances or alchemical products which are not useful to his practice: Zosimos mentions throwing away oil, the wooden bits of planets, and even ‘that which is useless’ (ἄχρηστα).⁶⁰ Pelagius, in an exegesis of a Zosimean recipe, also refers to copper before it is treated as παχύτητα τοῦ σώματος.⁶¹

As discussed at pp.44-8, the rejection of the material body in the creation of a purified spirit was a significant idea which seems to have greatly impacted Zosimos’ personal religio-philosophical convictions. This motif in Gnostic and Hermetic literature, such as the *Gospel of Judas* and *Poimandres*, is considered in the introduction to this section, but there is a crucial *comparandum* in

⁶⁰ *On Quicklime* 2 (CAAG 3.2); *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus* 3, 2 (CAAG 3.12).

⁶¹ CAAG 4.1.6.

the Neo-Platonic *Chaldean Oracles* which seems particularly significant here: it is stated that angels prepare a theurgist for spiritual ascent by lightening the load of the body (πνεύματι...κουφίζουσα), in language which seems to mirror Zosimos' disparaging mention of the παχύτης of the body.⁶² In short, the casting off of the weight of the body – with παχύτης being a loaded negative term which can connote both fatness and dullness – was widely understood to be a key step in spiritual purification in ancient religion.⁶³

1.12 ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἱερατευόμενος: The speaker claims that he was made holy by compulsion. The term ἀνάγκη could be considered somewhat polyvalent in this context, referring both to the 'power' used by the sacrificial priest to renew the speaker by casting off his material body – the violent, forceful nature of this transformation is eventually revealed in full during Ion's speech at 1.15-8 – but also the 'bodily pain' felt by Ion, employing a rarer sense of ἀνάγκη, but one found elsewhere in early Christian literature dealing with the theme of bodily suffering.⁶⁴

The term ἱερατεύω is rare in the passive. The verb does appear in this voice a handful of times in the literature of Zosimos' time, meaning either 'to be made a priest' or 'to be revered' (of Christ, as God).⁶⁵ These interpretations, however, make little sense in the present context. Mertens's suggestion – to translate as 'to be made holy' – is clearly the best solution and translation of ἱερατευόμενος.⁶⁶

1.12-3 πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι: The end goal of the speaker's transformation is revealed to be his becoming a πνεῦμα. For the significance of becoming a *pneūma* in an alchemical context, see pp.30-2. For its significance in a religious context, see pp.52-3.

The verb τελέω is replete with religio-philosophical significance, particularly in connection with ancient mystery cults, in which the initiatory rites into the mysteries are referred to as τελεταί, while the initiates themselves are referred to as τέλειοι.⁶⁷ These terms continued to be used in the Christian tradition: Christ himself instructs others to be τέλειοι (just as, Christ says, God himself is

⁶² *Chaldean Oracles* 122-3.

⁶³ *LSJ*, s.v. παχύτης (p.1351).

⁶⁴ See e.g., *Job* 15:24; *2 Cor.* 6:4. *LSJ*, s.v. ἀνάγκη (p.101). This is a long-standing interpretation, also appearing at e.g., *Eur. Bacch.* 89.

⁶⁵ For the former translation, *Joseph. AJ* 3.189; *Paus.* 4.12.6; *Euseb. Dem. Evang.* 4.15.18. For the latter, *Hippol. In Noet.* 18.3.

⁶⁶ *Mert.* 217.

⁶⁷ E.g., *Hdt.* 2.171; *Eur. Bacch.* 22. On this language, see *Burkert* 1987.

τέλειος), while the *Book of James* opens with an elaborate metaphor concerning perseverance through trials and suffering, which results in those of the twelve tribes also becoming τέλειοι.⁶⁸ Such terms are also used in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, as those who are baptised in *gnōsis* are said to become ‘complete’ (ἐβαπτίσαντο τοῦ νοός...τέλειοι ἐγένετο ἄνθρωποι), as well as elsewhere by Zosimos himself, who tells Theosebeia that she will be able to ascend to Heaven once she has become totally perfect in her soul (παντελειωθῆς τὴν ψυχὴν).⁶⁹ In short, the verb τελοῦμαι highlights that the speaker has completed a process of initiation into some secret knowledge, and is now a purified *pneūma* because of that knowledge.

1.13 ἠρώτων μαθεῖν: Zosimos’ directing questions towards Ion seems to indicate his role as something of an *angelus interpres*, in line with the frequency of this role in especially Classical and Hellenistic Jewish apocalyptic literature; see further the introduction to *Lesson 1.2*.⁷⁰ It is also significant that Zosimos must learn (μανθάνω) and undergo something of an initiatory process himself for *gnōsis* during his dreams; as discussed at pp.51-2 the acquisition of some sacred knowledge is the key to salvation as it is presented in Hermetic and especially Gnostic literature. Zosimos’ oneiric experiences are thus a quest for this sacred knowledge, which will lead to alchemical mastery and religious salvation.⁷¹ Although the language of learning is employed here within the dream itself, see p.70 for the language of knowledge as it is employed during Zosimos’ waking moments (Zosimos *learns* during his dream, but does not *understand* until he has pondered the vision in a waking state).

1.14 ἰσχυρόφῶνως: In this adverbial form, ἰσχυρόφῶνως is a *hapax legomenon*. Mertens suggests that Ion’s voice is not necessarily weaker, but rather quieter on account of his being inside the alchemical apparatus which doubles as an altar (‘par le fait qu’il se trouve à l’intérieur de l’appareil’).⁷² Whilst this is an interesting interpretation, it seems that ἰσχυρόφῶνος applies to a thinness or weakness in the voice itself, and can even mean that one speaks with a speech impediment (for example, Arist. *Pr.* 903a), rather than referring to a weakness imposed on the voice by external factors.⁷³ The reason for Ion’s vocal weakness is surely his exhaustion from his violent transformation from body to spirit,

⁶⁸ *Matt.* 5:48; *Jas.* 1:1-4. On mystery terminology in the Christian tradition, see Bouyer 1989.

⁶⁹ *CH* 4.4; *FC* 8.

⁷⁰ On the *angelus interpres*, see Bremmer 2014: 343-53.

⁷¹ Alchemy is widely presented in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature as a quest (ζήτησις) (see 1.6).

⁷² *Mert.* 36.

⁷³ *LSJ*, s.v. ἰσχυρόφῶνος (p.843).

which he discusses in the following speech (1.15-8). This mirrors Agathodaemon's barely being able to open his mouth (μόλις ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ) at 2.26, the reason for which is also presumably the pain of his own torturous transformation in a vat of fire. Although it does not seem obviously relevant, Plutarch describes certain materials, including gold, as ἰσχνόφωνος because of the dull, relatively muted sound produced by hitting them, which he attributes to their having a densely compact internal structure (χρυσὸς μὲν καὶ λίθος ὑπὸ πληρότητος ἰσχνόφωνα).⁷⁴ It is also interesting that God is said to speak to Elijah on Mount Horeb in a weak voice, as weak as a gentle breeze (φωνὴ αὔρας λεπτῆς).⁷⁵ The motif of the quiet voice of a divine revelatory figure is unusual. Although the theme of revelation is consistent, and although Zosimos seems to make explicit reference to the apocryphal tradition concerning the figure of Elijah in Ion's transformation (1.16, 1.19), it is difficult to see why Zosimos might refer to this Biblical account.

1.14 ἐγὼ εἰμι: The priest introduces himself as Ion through the famously significant words ἐγὼ εἰμι. This introductory formula seems to have been known best in the Greek world through the *Septuagint* translation of God's revealing his identity to Moses: I am that I am (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν).⁷⁶ This formula, which Lightfoot refers to as the 'ἐγὼ εἰμι style of self-revelation', is also significantly used by Poimandres during the opening moments of Hermes' dream: ἐγὼ...εἰμι ὁ Ποιμάνδρης, ὁ τῆς ἀύθεντίας νοῦς.⁷⁷ Zosimos' introducing Ion in this style thus picks up on a tradition of identical introductions before revelations of secret, sacred wisdom; the information which Ion imparts is no different.⁷⁸ Plutarch also tells of a statue of Athena (which the locals believed to be Isis) in Saïs – fewer than 100km from Alexandria, where Zosimos may have worked – which read: 'I am all that has been, that is, and that shall be' (ἐγὼ εἰμι πᾶν τὸ γεγονὸς καὶ ὄν καὶ ἐσόμενον).⁷⁹

1.14 Ἴων: Amidst the confused characterisation of the first dream sequence, the reader is finally offered a name. As one might expect from Zosimos' text, however, the name elicits far more questions than it answers. Ion's name has been one of the most widely discussed elements of *The Visions*. Karle emends the name to Αἰὼν (Aion), the personification of cosmic power in Hermetic literature.⁸⁰ This change, however, is unnecessary; the form provided in MS M – Ἴων – is sufficiently

⁷⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 721c.

⁷⁵ 1 *Kgs.* 19:12.

⁷⁶ *Ex.* 3:14.

⁷⁷ Lightfoot 2007: 386. *CH* 1.2. On the ἐγὼ εἰμι formula, see further Lopes da Silveira 2020: 249-52.

⁷⁸ See also *The Thunder* (NHC 6.2).

⁷⁹ Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 354c.

⁸⁰ See e.g., *CH* 12.8. On this figure of *Aion*, see Fest. 4.152-99.

meaningful. In her edition of *The Visions*, Mertens alters the accentuation to ἰῶν, forming a present participle of ἰώω, itself a verb formed from ἰός. According to Mertens, then, Ion's name is 'the one who creates the rust'.⁸¹ The rust – this ἰός – seems to have been a crucial substance in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical theory; in *On the Same Divine Water*, an anonymous author even goes as far as saying that the alchemist who makes the ἰός knows what he is doing, while the alchemist who does not make this substance makes nothing: ὁ γὰρ ἰὸν ποιῶν οἶδεν τί ποιεῖ, καὶ ὁ μὴ ποιῶν οὐδὲν ποιεῖ.⁸² This would presumably render Ion an initiated, masterful alchemist. Beyond rust, the term ἰός has significant alternative senses.⁸³ One such alternative is 'venom', related to the motif of the serpentine ouroboros which is such a key alchemical symbol. This interpretation seems to be the one favoured by the early exegete of *The Visions* in *On Virtue and Interpretation*, who claims that *ios* signifies *pneūma* because of the snake (κατὰ τὸν ὄφιν).⁸⁴ A related alternative sense of ἰός which has been neglected by scholarship on the text is as a variation of εἶς (one, identical), clearly linking back to the motif of the monistic ouroboros (on monism in Zosimos' worldview, see pp.29-30).⁸⁵ These interpretations – rust, venom, unity – also coalesce in an image found in manuscripts alongside Zosimean tractates (fig. 6). The centre of this diagram reads: εἶς ἐστὶν ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἔχων...τὸν ἰὸν. Ion's name seems almost to be a personification of this line.⁸⁶ A final suggestion comes from Lopes da Silveira, who suggests that Zosimos' Ion may be to some extent based on Euripides' Ion, himself also a member of the temple hierarchy.⁸⁷ Whilst there are some interesting connections, and despite the likelihood that Zosimos was at least familiar with the story of Euripides' *Ion*, the force of the pun on ἰός seems too well-suited to the narrative of *Lesson 1.2* and *The Visions* not to be the source of Ion's name.⁸⁸ In sum then, it seems that Ion's name is a pun based on the polyvalence of the noun ἰός: Ion represents the alchemical process holistically, both as a product of experimentation and as a personification of its monistic principles, ordinarily emblematised in the ouroboros. If the name is indeed to be understood as a pun, Mertens's emendation of the accent to produce a participle is unnecessary: the name ἰων is sufficient.

⁸¹ Mert. 36.

⁸² *On the Same Divine Water 3* (CAAG 3.8). On the dating and authenticity of this text, see Dufault 2017. On the role of ἰός in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical theory, see Edmonds 2019: 294.

⁸³ *LSJ*, s.v. ἰός (p.832).

⁸⁴ *On Virtue and Interpretation 2* (CAAG 3.6).

⁸⁵ *LSJ*, s.v. ἰός (p.832).

⁸⁶ See also Mert. 183.

⁸⁷ For further similarities between Zosimos' Ion and Euripides' Ion, see Lopes da Silveira 2020: 228-9.

⁸⁸ Zosimos makes frequent references to Greek authors and Greek mythology throughout his corpus (see e.g., *Omega 3*, where Zosimos mentions Hesiod, Prometheus, and Olympian Zeus).



Fig. 6:

MS M : 188v. Stylised ouroboros containing the text: ἐν τὸ πᾶν καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ τὸ πᾶν καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πᾶν καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔχοι τὸ πᾶν, οὐδὲν ἔστιν τὸ πᾶν. εἷς ἔστιν ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἔχων μετὰ τὰ δύο συνθέματα τὸν ἰόν. (Mert. 22).

1.14 ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων: Given that he resides within the *Crucibaltar* itself, Mertens suggests that Ion's being a priest of the 'inner sanctuaries' is a reference to him being in this not-to-be-entered space. Although ἄδυτος can be applied metaphorically to a range of inaccessible spaces, ranging from the sea to caves, its most common meaning as the innermost, most sacred sanctuaries of a temple clearly relates to the atmosphere of the present episode.⁸⁹ In her detailed investigation of temples in the Greek world with ἄδυτα, Hollinshead writes that the inner sanctuary likely had one of two functions: it was either a store for temple treasures (including secret / sacred knowledge), or was a separate space for mantic, or other mystical, activity – both of which were only to be entered by a select few people with the appropriate initiatory knowledge.⁹⁰ This is reflected in the literary tradition: Achilles Tatius depicts an Egyptian priest carrying a mystical book taken from the inner sanctuaries, while Proclus refers to a particularly wise priest from the *Timaeus* as the sort to speak divinely inspired accounts from the inner sanctuaries.⁹¹ The comment that Ion is a priest with such access may be primarily indicative of his initiatory status and his detailed knowledge of the rites and processes which Zosimos is working to interpret.

The suggestion that the ἄδυτα refer to the inner sanctuaries of a temple and Mertens's suggestion that they refer to the chemical alembic itself can be reconciled, if one imagines that – given the presence of the priest, the *Crucibaltar*, the sacrificial imagery, and the possibly not-so-subtle hint at *Lesson 1.5* – the setting of Zosimos' dream is itself a temple.⁹² If this episode is based in a temple of alchemical secrets, the crucible itself would become the most sacred inner space for hidden

⁸⁹ For the ἄδυτον...θαλάσσης, see Oppian, *Hal.* 1.49; for the ἐνὶ σπήλυγι...ἀδύτων, see *Hymn to Isis* 152 (Cougny 1890). *LSJ*, s.v. ἄδυτος (p.25).

⁹⁰ Hollinshead 1999: 214.

⁹¹ Ach. Tat. 3.25.6. Proclus, *In Ti.* 1.133.

⁹² See p.19 for speculation over the setting of Zosimos' dream.

knowledge and hidden theurgic practices; hence, the ‘inner sanctuaries’ seem plausibly to refer to the alembic within the oneiric temple.⁹³

1.15 βίαν ἀφόρητον ὑπομένω: As discussed at pp.48-9, the phrase βία ἀφόρητος seems to have been relatively significant in early Christian literature, conveying the suffering of early Christians, particularly in reference to martyrdom. Basil of Caesarea discusses Christians standing against the full weight of suffering which is imposed upon them as grains of sand standing against the unbearable force of the weight of the sea (τῷ ἀσθενεστάτῳ πάντων τῆ ψάμμῳ ἢ θάλασσα ταῖς βίαις ἀφορήτοις χαλινοῦται).⁹⁴ In more obviously martyrological terms, Basil of Caesarea also refers to the martyr Gordius’ surety of his desire to be martyred as a house unmoved by the unbearable forces of the winds (ἀνέμων ἀφόρητοι βίαι), while John Chrysostom describes the Egyptian martyrs as standing staunchly and powerfully against the violent and unbearable force of the devil himself (καρτερῶς καὶ εὐτόνως ἐνέστησαν πρὸς τὴν ῥαγδαίαν καὶ ἀφόρητον τοῦ διαβόλου βίαν).⁹⁵ In a final example involving similarly dualistic language and imagery to Zosimos’ text, Ephrem the Syrian refers to the weight of the wretched body which must be carried as an unbearable force, asking for his soul to be separated from it (τέλος παράστηθί μοι ἐν τῷ χωρισμῷ τῆς ταπεινῆς μου ψυχῆς ἐκ τοῦ ἀθλίου τούτου σώματος, τὴν ἀφόρητον ἐκείνην ἐλαφρύνουσα βίαν).⁹⁶ The phrase βία ἀφόρητος seems to place Zosimos within a tradition of Christian suffering, particularly in terms of suffering through martyrdom, which revolved around this crucial phraseology.⁹⁷

1.15 ἦλθε γὰρ τις περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον: The use of the indefinite pronoun τις, as at 1.8, highlights the continued anonymity which runs throughout the text. Ion’s attacker, who arrives περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον with a μάχαιρα, is surely the same figure who arrives in the final dream sequence in *Lesson 3* to offer Zosimos sacrificial instructions: this figure arrives κατὰ ἀνατολὰς, also wielding a μάχαιρα (3.6-7). The fact that Ion’s attacker arrives περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον (‘around daybreak’) – at the time when light illuminates and clears the darkness – has huge religio-philosophical significance. In the Platonic tradition, the motif of Plato’s characters leaving the cave and truly seeing reality as they see the light of the sun is the most obvious example of this notion, while Christ’s description of himself as the light of the world, leading his followers from darkness to the ‘light of life’ also highlights this theme:

⁹³ On alchemy as Gnostic theurgy, see Stolzenberg 1999: 29-31; Grimes 2018: 218-28; Werrett 2023: 177-8.

⁹⁴ Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies* 4.3

⁹⁵ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Gordius* 31; John Chrysostom, *On the Egyptian Martyrs* 1.62.

⁹⁶ Ephrem the Syrian, *Homilies* 10.

⁹⁷ On early Christian martyrological traditions in North Africa and especially Alexandria, see Moss 2012: 122-62.

ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου· ὁ ἀκολουθῶν μοι οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς.⁹⁸ The anonymous figure's arrival at daybreak, then, may indicate the revelatory experience which Ion undergoes through his transformation; he is literally led from the darkness of materiality, ignorance, and night, into the light of spirituality, *gnōsis*, and day. See further, with additional bibliography, Zosimos' statement that his text brings unknown things into the light (εἰς φανερόν) at 1.69. As well as indicating the appearance of light, the sun's rising also indicates the appearance of the planet which regulates gold in the alchemical imagination; just as Ion's transformation at daybreak indicates the revelation of sacred knowledge, it also seems to indicate the arrival of gold, of perfected matter.

Given the alchemical significance of ascent discussed in detail in connection with the ascending steps of light at 1.10-1, it is also possible that the figure's arrival at daybreak – as the sun rises – indicates his own rising through the *kerotakis*, likely as the caustic vapours of Divine Water which 'attack' the alchemical substances placed on the upper platform of the alembic (see pp.35-9 for the arrangement and use of the *kerotakis* in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical practice). This association of daybreak with rising is bolstered at 3.6, as Zosimos refers to this (seemingly) same sacrificial figure as appearing κατὰ ἀνατολὰς. Ion's killer, then, seems simultaneously to represent the Divine Water which brings about material change, especially into gold, as well as the acquisition of sacred knowledge by Ion, the one being initiated.

1.15 ἐχειρώσατο με: Given that the sacrificial victim in the final dream sequence in *Lesson 3*, whose narrative is very similar to that of Ion, is presented as 'a certain man with his hands bound behind his back' (περιηγκωνισμένον τινα), it seems that, for the sake of consistency, 'taken prisoner' may be the most appropriate translation of χειρώω in the middle voice, as is offered in *LSJ*.⁹⁹

1.15 μαχάιρα: Ion recounts that he was cut apart with a μάχαιρα, a highly significant term. In some contexts, this word can refer specifically to a sacrificial knife, possibly highlighting the aesthetics of sacrifice which dominate *The Visions* (see pp.45-8). The term also only appears once elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus, so it does not seem to be a word which would have struck Zosimos' readers as imbued with scientific connotations.¹⁰⁰ The term's significance comes rather from its use in the *New Testament*, as Christ frequently proclaims that he has not come to Earth to

⁹⁸ Pl. *Rep.* 515c-d; *John* 8:12. See further Jonas 1958: 57-8.

⁹⁹ *LSJ*, s.v. χειρώω (p.1986).

¹⁰⁰ *CAAG* 5.3.1.

bring peace, but a sword (a μάχαιρα).¹⁰¹ Hippolytus discusses the Sethian Gnostic interpretation of this line: Christ comes to divide and separate that which has been fused together (τουτέστι [τὸ] διχάσαι καὶ χωρίσαι τὰ συγκεκραμένα) – that is, body and soul.¹⁰² Indeed, Hippolytus goes on to describe the Gnostic belief that Christ’s μάχαιρα will send those spiritual people who have been reborn to Heaven, but exclude those obsessed with the flesh: οἱ ἀναγεννώμενοι πνευματικοί, οὐ σαρκικοί, ὧν ἔστι τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἄνω.¹⁰³ It is possible, then, that a Gnostic would have understood μάχαιρα not simply as a knife, but as a knife with which to separate *sōma* from *pneūma* through the eschatological force of Christ. Further, Dufault suggests that the μάχαιρα may also have an epistemological element.¹⁰⁴ At 1.17, the weapon is mastered (κρατουμένῳ) as Ion is cut apart and transformed, employing the same verb which Zosimos uses in his *Omega*, as he states the duty of the philosopher to master the ineffable triad in his intellect (κρατεῖν τὴν ἀκατονόμαστον τριάδα).¹⁰⁵ In this way, the μάχαιρα becomes simultaneously an alchemical tool, a sacrificial tool, a soteriological tool, and an intellectual tool, designed to cleave the pure from the impure and to allow for the depths of reality to be shown both to the attacker and to the attacked.

1.16 διελὼν με, διασπάσας: So begins Ion’s graphic account of the mutilation he suffered as part of his transformation into a spirit. On the violent, sacrificial aesthetics of *The Visions*, see pp.45-8; on the need to destroy the material body before one can be purified into a spiritual status, especially in the Gnostic, Hermetic, and Neo-Platonic traditions, see pp.44-8. The motif of a character being torn apart, but in the knowledge that they will be reconstituted and reborn (see 1.16), seems clearly to engage with the ancient tradition of the *sparagmos* of certain gods: the two figures most often cited in scholarship here are Dionysus and Osiris.¹⁰⁶ Dionysus (or Zagreus-Dionysus in an Orphic context) was torn apart and cooked by the Titans, his flesh even being consumed in some accounts of the myth, before being reassembled and resurrected by Apollo (according, at least, to later Orphic sources).¹⁰⁷ As for Osiris, he was killed and dismembered by his brother, Seth, before being reassembled by Isis and Anubis, and subsequently being reborn.¹⁰⁸ Whilst Zosimos’ account of Ion may simply be engaging with literary tropes within the *sparagmos* tradition, it seems also to

¹⁰¹ E.g., *Matt.* 10:34: οὐκ ἤλθον εἰρήνην βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν.

¹⁰² Hippolytus, *Ref. Haer.* 5.21.

¹⁰³ On σάρξ, see 1.17.

¹⁰⁴ Dufault 2019: 107.

¹⁰⁵ *Omega* 7.

¹⁰⁶ Karle 1925: 45; Edwards 1992: 56; Mert. 217.

¹⁰⁷ On the myth of Zagreus, see Edmonds 1999: 37-49. *Orphicorum Frag.* 34-5 (Kern 1922).

¹⁰⁸ On the myth of Osiris’ death and rebirth, see Smith 2017. See further, Fraser (2007: 36), who links Osiris’ rebirth with the symbolism of gold through *Pyramid Texts* 723.

emphasise the importance of rebirth as part of this process of suffering: Ion's lower, corporeal form is destroyed, and he is reborn as pure soul, just as a base substance might be destroyed and undergo transubstantiation into gold.

1.16 κατὰ σύστασιν ἁρμονίας: The present edition translates as 'according to the rigour of harmony', lifted from Taylor's 1937 translation, which provided the standard translation of this line which has been used in English scholarship.¹⁰⁹ It seems, however, that 'rigour of harmony' misses several connotations of the terms σύστασις and ἁρμονία which are crucial to how Ion's death ought to be interpreted within the wider context of *The Visions*. Whilst the notions of harmony and order are doubtless important to Zosimos' alchemical *praxis* – seen especially clearly during the discussion of alchemical method at 1.51-3 – the fact that Ion's dismemberment not only necessitates order but anticipates his reconstitution is highly significant. Indeed, both σύστασις and ἁρμονία – deriving from συνίστημι ('I set together') and ἁρμόζω ('I join together') – connote the reconstitution which comes immediately after the separation of Ion's body.¹¹⁰ In this way, Zosimos indicates that Ion's dismemberment not only entails his death but is part of a process which ends in his reformation and renewal; it is a process at the end of which he is reborn as a purified, initiated *pneūma*.

The term ἁρμονία, along with several other terms employed in Ion's speech (σάρξ, *pneūma* etc), appear also in the *Septuagint* translation of Ezekiel 37, leading Dufault to suggest that Zosimos must have borrowed language from this text.¹¹¹ In the Valley of Dry Bones, the Son of Man sees bones form into bodies, take on flesh and skin, and eventually return to life.¹¹² Although this episode is a metaphor for the rejuvenation of the Israelites, Origen, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, interprets the bones' reconstitution and resurrection as the resurrection of Christ, claiming that he came together bone by bone, and ἁρμονία πρὸς ἁρμονίαν, into a more true and perfect body.¹¹³ Whilst this may well strengthen the theme of Ion's reconfiguration and rebirth as a perfected *pneūma*, as Dufault argues, it is surely too subtle a reference to have been obvious to Zosimos' readers.

¹⁰⁹ Taylor 1937: 89.

¹¹⁰ *LSJ*, s.v. σύστασις (pp.1734-5); s.v. ἁρμονία (p.244). On rebirth as purification, see *CH* 13 and pp.49-52.

¹¹¹ Dufault 2021: 210.

¹¹² *Ezek.* 37:7-10.

¹¹³ Origen, *Comm. John* 10.20.

1.16 ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν: The action of removing the skin – the outermost layer of the material body – may be an indication of the casting off of what is outside to reveal that which is internally trapped. Such imagery would be consistent with Zosimos’ Gnostic belief about the ensoulment of mankind at the fall of man: in his *Omega*, Zosimos describes maleficent daemons trapping *Phōs*, the spiritual man, ‘in Adam’ (ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν παρ’ αὐτοῦ Ἀδάμ), thus tying mankind to the sensible world. The motif of removing the skin may imitate the action of removing the ‘clothes’ which trap *Phōs* in the material world.¹¹⁴ Similar to this peeling action, Mertens suggests that the verb ἀποδερματόω could be used of ‘l’action d’enlever une pellicule d’ios à la surface d’un métal’. Again, this double meaning continues to accentuate the analogy between Ion and an alchemical substance.¹¹⁵

The verb ἀποδερματόομαι is used only once elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus, in reference to removing the skin (presumably the shell) from an egg; whilst the egg is a crucial motif in ancient alchemical literature, it seems only relevant in the sense that something is being manipulated and ‘tortured’ for a purificatory, transmutative *telos*.¹¹⁶

A further *comparandum*, however, can be found in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, with which it can be said that Zosimos was likely familiar, based on the discovery at Akhmim of an early version of the text in Coptic (*P.Chester Beatty* 2018), the *terminus ante quem* of which is the 4th century.¹¹⁷ In this text, the Anti-Christ, having lost a battle with Elijah and Enoch in the streets of Jerusalem, tortures saints in Hell by, among other things, removing the skin from their heads, before those saints who undergo such torture ascend to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God.¹¹⁸ Ion’s head being flayed, therefore, may add him to a literary tradition of those who have undergone such a diabolical torture, but with the end-goal of an ultimate reward (for Ion, becoming a spirit).

1.16-7 τῷ ξίφει τῷ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ κρατουμένῳ: See discussion of μάχαρα at 1.15 above.

¹¹⁴ *Omega* 7. For the mystical interpretation of Adam’s name as the material elements within which the spirit becomes trapped, see 1.50.

¹¹⁵ Mert. 217.

¹¹⁶ CAAG 4.23.2.

¹¹⁷ Jung 1967a: 71. On the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in its Egyptian context, see Frankfurter 1993. It is not certain whether Zosimos understood Coptic; regardless, the existence of Coptic fragments of the text in Akhmim suggests that they may have been copied there from a Greek original (on the apocalyptic source text being Greek, see Frankfurter 1993: 23; on Panopolis as a city where a culture of literary transmission thrived, see p.7).

¹¹⁸ *Apocalypse of Elijah* 4.23.

1.17 τὰ ὀστέα ταῖς σαρκί: Zosimos uses the nouns ὀστέα and σὰρξ (bones and flesh) to represent the entirety of Ion's material body. This is not an uncommon merism in ancient literature, appearing frequently in the *Septuagint* (e.g., of Adam and Eve at *Gen. 2:23*). A particularly interesting example appears in *Luke*, as Christ, during his appearance to the disciples, says that he must have returned in his material body because a spirit would have neither flesh nor bones (ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα οὐκ ἔχει); note the opposition between σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα, the material body of both Christ and Ion, and πνεῦμα, the spiritual form of both.¹¹⁹ Ion's language seems to reflect the mixture of his *entire* body, while highlighting the element of base materiality.

The term σὰρξ is particularly interesting, being rife with Gnostic significance as the lowest, most base part of a human. In the Gnostic imagination, the πνευματικός human – the one ruled by *pneūma* – was the highest status of mankind, denoting one who knows himself, having achieved *gnōsis*; the opposite of this is the σαρκικός man – the one ruled by σὰρξ – who occupies the lowest level of thought about spiritual matters.¹²⁰ The transformation of Ion's σὰρξ in particular into *pneūma*, then, highlights the extent of this purificatory shift.

1.17 συνέπλεξε: The term which Zosimos uses for Ion's reconstitution after his torturous dismemberment is laden with philosophical significance; as Mertens comments, the cognate noun συμπλοκή was used by the Presocratics in reference to the arrangement of atoms within matter.¹²¹ See pp.29-30 for the relationship between Presocratic (especially Democritean) atomism and Zosimos' fundamental belief in material monism.¹²² This may, thus, represent Ion's reconfiguration at a fundamental – that is to say, atomic – level. Although Zosimos does not use the verb συμπλέκω outside of *The Visions*, he once uses συμπλοκή (in his *On Quicklime*), while this noun appears on several occasions elsewhere in ancient alchemical literature to represent the unification of matter in alchemical practice, thus furthering the identification of Ion as experimental matter himself.¹²³

1.17 τῷ πυρὶ τῷ διὰ χειρὸς κατέκαιεν: In the context of sacrifices, κατακαίω has the sense of 'burn completely'.¹²⁴ Ion's physical rebirth as a spirit seems to take place in the fire. The alchemical

¹¹⁹ *Luke* 24:39.

¹²⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.1.10-2. See Zosimos' use of πνευματικός as the one who knows himself (τὸν ἐπιγνώωντα ἑαυτὸν) at *Omega* 4.

¹²¹ Mert. 217-8. See also Arist. *Cael.* 303a.

¹²² See Martelli 2013:1 for Democritus' atomism in both Zosimos' and Synesius' writings.

¹²³ *On Quicklime* 3 (CAAG 3.2); *On the Philosopher's Stone* 20 (CAAG 3.29); *Aerial Water* 3 (CAAG 3.39), where the συμπλοκή is described as ἐναρμόνιος (see 1.16).

¹²⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. κατακαίω (p.892).

symbolism is clear – fire is the most significant means of transmutation in a scientist’s laboratory – but the notion of rebirth in fire is also apparent in the Christian tradition. As discussed at pp.49-52, a major theme of Zosimos’ text is baptism in *gnōsis* and baptismal rebirth as a purified spirit; reading Matthew 3:11 or Luke 3:16 in these terms, the baptism in fire (αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν...πυρὶ) becomes a glorious rebirth in fire.¹²⁵ Indeed, for Zosimos, fire seems to be one of the key media not just for material change, but also for spiritual change (see 2.24).

1.18 ἔμαθον...πνεῦμα γενέσθαι: On the alchemical and religio-philosophical connotations of becoming a *pneūma*, see 1.12-3, pp.30-2, and pp.44-8. It is significant that Ion does not state that he became a spirit, but rather that he learned (ἔμαθον) to become one, aligning with the Hermetic and especially the Gnostic conceptions that the key to salvation is not necessarily action, but rather sacred knowledge (*gnōsis*).

1.18 μετασωματούμενος: Although the verb μετασωματόομαι is a *hapax legomenon*, there are a handful of similar terms which may serve as useful interpretative *comparanda*: ἀποσωμάτωσις (1.2), ἐπισωμάτωσις (1.2), and ἐκσωματίζομαι (CAAG 4.22.15, 4.22.31). Given that the nouns refer to the dissolution (ἀπο-) and restitution (ἐπι-) of the body, and given that Moses uses the verb in terms of metal sheets and copper being stripped of (ἐκ-) their bodies, it seems that the prefix μετα- must refer to a change in the *sōma*.¹²⁶

1.18 αὕτη μου ἐστὶν ἡ ἀφόρητος βία: On the significance of the phrase ἀφόρητος βία, see pp.48-9 and 1.15.

1.19-20 αἷμα γέγονασιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ: Ion’s eyes turning into blood is yet another violent image, compounding the visceral reaction a reader is likely to have when encountering this passage. This is, however, an uncommon motif in the ancient literature with which Zosimos is likely to have been familiar. There is a scene in the *Iliad* in which Idomeneus stabs Erymas through the head, resulting in his eyes becoming filled with blood (ἐνέπλησθεν δέ οἱ ἄμφω αἵματος ὀφθαλμοί);

¹²⁵ See further Fraser 2007; Nel 2016.

¹²⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. μετά (pp.1108-9).

Zosimos then may simply be using a general motif of extreme gore.¹²⁷ Further, there is a fragment of the aforementioned *Apocalypse of Elijah* – in the same scene in which the Anti-Christ flays the heads of saints – in which the right eye of each saint being tortured in Hell is said to mix with blood (ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ δεξιὸς κέκραται αἵματος).¹²⁸ It is difficult to see how the double use of imagery from the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in Ion’s suffering (see also 1.16) might be a coincidence. It is possible that this allusion to hellish punishment in both instances is symbolic of the most violent and visceral torture imaginable. Whilst it may be tempting to suggest that some reddening stage of the alchemical process is the inspiration for this motif, the colours throughout *The Visions*, as discussed at pp.66-7, seem to be nothing more than a red-herring, simply adding to the atmosphere of alchemical transformations. See also 2.25, in which Agathodaemon’s eyes also turn to blood as he is tortured and transformed in the fires of the crucible.

1.20 ἤμεσεν πάσας τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ: Dufault suggests that the digestion and regurgitation of the self may be an allegory for self-examination.¹²⁹ Whilst this is a plausible interpretation given the clear similarity to Ion’s initiatory transformation during *Lesson 1.2*, it does not strike one as the most natural or obvious explanation. Rather, it is most likely that this grotesque, visceral imagery simply represents Ion’s total rejection and abandoning of his own flesh, just as the anonymous speaker at 1.12 was said to have been transformed, having thrown off the weight of the body (ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα).¹³⁰ For the clearly related image of Ion eating himself, see 1.21 below.

1.20 ὡς τούναντίον: In their translations of this line, both Mertens and Berthelot and Ruelle omit ὡς τούναντίον, interpreting it as Zosimos seeing Ion transform ‘opposite him’, and thus considering translation of it redundant. This is a plausible interpretation, but it is not the only possibility; indeed, it seems preferable to conclude not that Ion stands opposite Zosimos as he transforms, but that Ion, in his transformation, becomes the opposite of himself. This use of ὡς τούναντίον, as implying a contradiction, rather than spatial opposition, is well evidenced in Imperial Greek literature: the phrase is frequently used in Plutarch to convey an opposition between the ignoble and the honourable, life and death, and truth and falsehood (respectively, *Plut. An Seni* 794c; *Plut. Frag.* 177;

¹²⁷ *Il.* 16.348-9.

¹²⁸ *Apocalypse of Elijah frag.* C (Denis 1970). See further Jung 1967a: 71.

¹²⁹ Dufault 2021: 206.

¹³⁰ On the rejection of the body in especially Gnostic thought, see pp.44-8. See *CH* 7.1a for the interesting image of a man vomiting forth ignorance (τῆς ἀγνωσίας...ἐμεῖτε); this, however, is a result of literally overflowing with ignorance, rather than being rid of it.

Plut. *Frag.* 216f).¹³¹ This is also the sense of ὡς τούναντίον in its other uses in the Zosimean corpus, related to Nature acquiring qualities which are opposite to itself.¹³² Given the nature of Ion's transformation from *sōma* / σάρξ into *pneūma* – and especially given the focus on transition and unity between opposites throughout the text (particularly *Lessons* 1.1 and 1.4) – the present edition favours this latter interpretation.

1.20 ἀνθρωπάριον κολοβόν: Although in Greek literature outside of Zosimos the term ἀνθρωπάριον is used with a largely derogatory sense, that does not seem to be how the term is used here.¹³³ Rather, this reference to a 'little man' seems to be the first recorded instance of the *homunculus*, a recurring motif in medieval alchemical imagery (particularly that of Paracelsus, 1493-1541).¹³⁴ In this later symbolism, the *homunculus* is, as a magical being, representative of the alchemist's ability to create artificial life.¹³⁵ This, however, does not seem to be the case with Zosimos' ἀνθρωπάριον, who instead appears to represent some 'inner man'.¹³⁶ This 'inner man' is a frequently occurring motif in early Christian literature: the *New Testament* often refers to the spiritually pure ἔσω ἄνθρωπος, while Augustine and Tertullian both refer to the *interior homo* as an inner replica of the outer man.¹³⁷ Augustine even explicitly refers to this spiritual replica as the better part of that man (*pars melior hominis anima est*).¹³⁸ Ion's becoming an ἀνθρωπάριον, then, may be an indication of his becoming a spiritually pure being, a *pneūma*.¹³⁹

1.21 καὶ τοῖς ὀδοῦσιν ἑαυτοῦ ἑαυτὸν μασσώμενον: The motif of gnawing at and chewing one's own body can be connected with several similar images in the *New Testament*, as Revelation depicts the gnawing of tongues (ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν) in a post-apocalyptic world, and Matthew frequently depicts the gnashing of teeth (βρυγμός τῶν ὀδόντων) in dark, fiery places, to be understood as Hell, both of which employ similar language as well as imagery.¹⁴⁰ Given the allusions

¹³¹ For Plutarch's fragments, see Sandbach 1967.

¹³² *On What is and What is Not Substance According to the Art 2* (CAAG 3.17).

¹³³ *CGL*, s.v. ἀνθρωπάριον (p.128). See e.g., *Ar. Plut.* 416.

¹³⁴ Jung 1967b: 60.

¹³⁵ On the Paracelsan *homunculus*, see Ball 2006.

¹³⁶ Jung 1967a: 102. On this basis, see Newman (2004: 171) who refers to Ion in this context as a *pseudohomunculus*.

¹³⁷ *Rom.* 7:22; *2 Cor.* 4:16; *Eph.* 3:16. August. *De Civ. D.* 13.24; Tert. *De Anim.* 9. On Tertullian's theory of ensoulment, see Blosser 2018 (esp. 212).

¹³⁸ August. *De Civ. D.* 13.24.

¹³⁹ Ion's transformation involves a literal inversion (ἐκτροπή); on the importance of this term, see 1.54 and Dufault 2015.

¹⁴⁰ *Rev.* 16:10. *Mat.* 8:12, 13:42, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30.

to flayed heads (1.16) and bloody eyes (1.19-20) which seem to be means of torture from Hell as represented in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it is possible that this at least alludes to the same theme. A similar notion, related to the potential allusion to the darker images of Christian literature, is that Ion's becoming spiritually perfect and eating himself is a grotesque distortion of the Christian Eucharist. The theme of *imitatio Christi*, as discussed at pp.48-9, is a crucial underlying theme in *The Visions*, and this may be a violent, diabolical reinterpretation of a salvific image, as is thematic throughout the text, but particularly in *Lesson 1.2*. This is not the only gruesome, cannibalistic distortion of the Eucharist in early Christian literature; Abba Daniel recounts an early Christian ascetic who, not believing the literal truth of transubstantiation, received a vision from God: while a priest cut apart the Eucharistic bread, the old man saw an angel cut apart a young child. The monk was given a piece of the child's bloody flesh and became convinced that the Eucharist was not merely symbolic.¹⁴¹ Another interpretation, based on Ion's name being a pun on ἰός (1.14), is that Ion devours himself in an ouroboric fashion; as it were, he fulfils the cycle of the ouroboros, and, in his own rebirth, must first die by eating himself. Given the strong ouroboric imagery in this episode, especially surrounding the character and name of Ion, this final interpretation seems to be the most immediately obvious.

1.21-2 διωπνίσθην καὶ ἐνεθυμήθην: On the connotations of Zosimos' narrative being split between sleepy confusion and moments of wakeful clarity, see p.60 and Jonas 1958: 68-71.

1.22 ἡ τῶν ὑδάτων θέσις: As discussed at pp.64-9, Zosimos' realisation that his dream concerns 'the composition of the waters', despite the fact that no waters were mentioned during *Lesson 1.2*, indicates the interpretative journey the alchemist – and, by extension, the reader – must undertake to understand the obscure allegories. On the meaning of θέσις ὑδάτων, see 1.2.

1.22 ἔδοξα: As Lopes da Silveira points out, in addition to meaning 'think', as it must here, δοκέω can also be translated as 'have a dream / vision'.¹⁴² Indeed, this verb is used particularly frequently by Artemidorus in reference to dreaming in his *Oneirocritica*.¹⁴³ There may be a suggestion that the

¹⁴¹ *Abba Daniel* 7.

¹⁴² Lopes da Silveira 2020: 218. *LSJ*, s.v. δοκέω (pp.441-2). See further discussion of δοκέω in these terms in Heilen (2011: 43-4) in relation to Vettius Valens' quoting the legendary astrologer Nechepso.

¹⁴³ Harris-McCoy 2012: 11-2.

revelatory nature of the dream itself, and the subsequent interpretation, is key to Zosimos' growth in knowledge.

1.22-3 νενοηκέναι καλῶς: See pp.70-1 for the language of knowledge throughout Zosimos' *Visions*.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.3

Lesson 1.3 opens with Zosimos falling asleep: καὶ πάλιν ἀπεκοιμήθην. The use of καὶ πάλιν suggests the continuity between the previous episode, the first dream sequence, and this *praxis*, the second dream sequence. Indeed, the narratives are similar on a number of levels.¹⁴⁴ Once again Zosimos sees the *Crucibaltar* in his dream, but this dream styles it slightly differently: it is full of boiling water, in which a countless number of people burn, but do not die. Asking a nearby *homunculus* about what he sees, Zosimos is told that the *Crucibaltar* is the entrance, the exit, and the transformation (εἴσοδος...καὶ ἔξοδος καὶ μεταβολή), and more specifically, that this transformation is one of preservation (ταριχεία). As the reader can now see, the narrative is no less obscure than it was in *Lesson 1.2*. This preservation, as is explored below, seems simultaneously to be a scientific process involving maceration and a religious process involving a human transforming into something pure and immutable.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, this duality reflects that which was evident in the previous dream: just as the priest and Ion both cast off their bodies to become spirits, so too are those suffering in the boiling water in a process of fleeing the body (φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα), in order to attain excellence (ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν) and to become *pneūmata* (γίνονται πνεύματα).¹⁴⁶ They too, on both an alchemical and spiritual level, are being purified.

Zosimos is then introduced to another character: a man made of copper. The fact that this priest, described elsewhere as the master of the house (οἰκοδεσπότης, employing significant astrological terminology), is composed of metal renders him both the active agent and passive object of alchemical operation.¹⁴⁷ He both performs experiments and has experiments performed upon him. This idea is perfectly encapsulated as Zosimos is told that this copper man, suggested to be Ion, is both the sacrificial priest and the one being sacrificed (ὁ ἱεουργῶν καὶ ἱεουργούμενος). This copper man explains to Zosimos the operations which he performs on those in the boiling water: he seats them, hands them a lead tablet, forces them to write, has them look upwards, and has them open their mouths ‘until your grapes are grown’ (ἕως ἂν αὐξήσῃ ἡ σταφυλὴ ὑμῶν). These cryptic actions are explored individually below, but the fact that they stand for purificatory techniques within the *kerotakis* is evident. Those in the *Crucibaltar* are becoming spirits.

¹⁴⁴ The notion of falling back asleep into a similar dream to the last possibly adds to the historical realism of the oneiric framework; see pp.59-61.

¹⁴⁵ See 1.30 and further Escolano-Poveda 2021 on the relationship between ταριχεία and Egyptian mummification rituals.

¹⁴⁶ See pp.22-5 for the importance of the titular term ἀρετή in the text.

¹⁴⁷ See 1.65-6 for further metallic men in *The Visions*: the ἀργυράνθρωπος and the χρυσάνθρωπος.

All in all, *Lesson* 1.3 largely continues the themes of *Lesson* 1.2, the opening dream episode: in allegorical imagery, Zosimos is told that the processes and transformations which take place in the *Crucibaltar* are both alchemical and spiritual in nature.

Commentary

1.24 ἐπάνω ὕδωρ κοχλάζον: Falling asleep back into the same dream and seeing the same *Crucibaltar*, Zosimos states that this time it is full of ὕδωρ κοχλάζον, doubtlessly a reference to the fact that the water is boiling. The alchemically initiated reader might suspect that ὕδωρ refers more specifically to Divine Water, the substance which is alluded to in *Lessons* 1.1 and 1.2, but confirmed as the liquid in the *Crucibaltar* at 1.42, as Zosimos writes: τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ λευκόν, τὸ ξανθόν, τὸ κοχλάζον, τὸ θεῖον.¹⁴⁸ The boiling of Divine Water surely relates to the first stage of the *kerotakis* method (see pp.35-9). Mertens suggests that the boiling of this water may refer back to the κίνησις καὶ αὔξησις of the waters in the opening line of the text (see 1.2).

1.24-5 πολὺν λαὸν εἰς αὐτὸν ἄπειρον ὄντα: The image of people submerged in the waters of an altar is clearly reminiscent of the motif of baptism. As discussed at length on pp.49-52, baptism is a crucial motif within *The Visions* and within Zosimos' own world-view. In keeping with the motifs of violence and suffering which dominate the text, however, this baptismal ritual has taken a rather dark turn: these initiates are baptised in boiling water.¹⁴⁹ As discussed in the introduction to this section, this seems to prioritise the purificatory role of baptism, before the transmutative role is revealed later in *Lesson* 1.3.¹⁵⁰ This is reminiscent of the aforementioned line from the apocryphal *Gospel of Philip*: by water and fire everywhere is cleansed.¹⁵¹ Grimes also points to an image in the *Book of Caverns* (an Egyptian collection of funerary texts and images dated to the 13th century BC) which includes people being sent into cauldrons of boiling water, alongside scenes of decapitation and dismemberment, akin to Ion's suffering.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ On the role of Divine Water in alchemical practice, see pp.37-9 and Martelli 2009.

¹⁴⁹ See also the possible distortion of the Eucharist at 1.20-1.

¹⁵⁰ On purification through baptism in early Christian literature, see Blidstein 2017: 107-34.

¹⁵¹ *Gospel of Philip* 25. Whilst water is the source of cleansing here, its heat makes it somewhat akin to fire; fire is explicitly mentioned as a means of torture / purification at 1.17, 2.10-11, and 2.23-4

¹⁵² Grimes 2018: 136. Whilst boiling water is not specifically mentioned, Roberts (2019: 168) points to a tomb in Panopolis which contains an image of a man in a cauldron as part of a scene of judgement.

The term ἄπειρος has much philosophical significance, particularly with respect to the philosophical system of Anaximander, but it is difficult to see how that might apply to this situation.¹⁵³ Rather, it could be argued that Zosimos' mention of so many people is intended to imply either the universality of alchemy's religio-philosophical doctrine or simply the pure fictionality of the oneiric setting.

1.25 καὶ οὐκ ἦν τις ἵνα ἐρωτήσω αὐτὸν ἔξω τοῦ βωμοῦ: This strikes one as an almost humorous meta-literary note: given that divine guides who explain punishments are an integral part of katabatic and apocalyptic narratives – ranging from the Sibyl in the *Aeneid* to Uriel in *1 Enoch*, and even to Agathodaemon himself in *Lesson 2.2* – both Zosimos and the reader, when confronted with the vat of boiling water, expect an *angelus interpres*, who is simply not there.¹⁵⁴

1.26 πεπολιωμένον...ἄνθρωπάριον: Zosimos soon sees a second *homunculus*, described as white-haired. The additional description implies that this is not the ἄνθρωπάριον which Ion became at the end of *Lesson 1.2* – a suspicion which is seemingly confirmed at 1.38-9 – but the anonymity and similarity of characters' descriptions adds to the confusing, dream-like nature of the narrative (see p.60).

Mertens and Grimes have both attempted to assign alchemical relevance to πεπολιωμένον, the former tentatively suggesting a vague connection to iron (citing πολίων...σίδηρον as a Homeric *comparandum*), the latter claiming that the white colour suggests that this *homunculus* has undergone the alchemical stage of *leukōsis* (on the difficulty of attributing alchemical stages to colours in *The Visions*, see pp.66-7).¹⁵⁵ Ultimately, a more sure conclusion can be drawn from the various thematic connotations of the participle πεπολιωμένος: namely, the connection between age and wisdom.¹⁵⁶ It is possible that the presentation of the *homunculus* as old is intended as a prompt to veneration and as something of an authentication strategy, emphasising his authority on the matters of the purification of the bodies and protection of the spirits (1.31).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Diog. Laert. 2.1. On Anaximander's ἄπειρος, see Robinson 2009: 486-7.

¹⁵⁴ On the role of those explaining punishments in apocalyptic narratives, see Himmelfarb 1983: 50-60; Bremmer 2014: 343-53.

¹⁵⁵ Mert. 220; Grimes 2018: 134. // 9.366.

¹⁵⁶ The connection between πολιώω and age is evident in the figure of Agathodaemon, the πεπολιωμένον γηραιόν, at 2.18.

¹⁵⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. πολιός (p.1433). Such a connection between age and wisdom with this term is also evident at e.g., Pl. *Ti.* 22b and Julian. *Or.* 2.82. On the veneration of elders as wise in ancient literature, see e.g., Cic. *Sen.* 15 and Richardson 1933: 48-52.

1.26 ξηρουργόν: MSS A and L read ξυρουργόν, the variant which is preferred in all modern editions of the text, and translated to ‘the one who wields a razor’. The connection between a barber using tools to manipulate matter and the alchemist using their own instruments to bring about material change is clear.¹⁵⁸ More specifically, Mertens suggests that ξυρουργόν indicates one who shaves the *ιός* – the alchemical tincture – from the treated metal, citing references to *ιόν...ξυστόν* in Dioscorides’ *On Medical Materials* and Pliny’s description of *aerugo* as being scraped (*deradere*) from the stone on which copper is smelted (*...lapidi, ex quo coquitur aes, deraditur...*).¹⁵⁹ This is an attractive proposition, but it should be noted that ξυρόν does not appear elsewhere in the Zosimean corpus. MS M, on the other hand, reads ξηρουργόν, to be translated as ‘the one who handles the *xēria*’ (on *xēria*, see pp.38-42).¹⁶⁰ By contrast, ξηρίον is used by Zosimos in reference to the alchemical products of *melanōsis*.¹⁶¹ If one imagines that the suffering of Zosimos’ characters reflects alchemical operations within the *kerotakis*, the *homunculus* himself becomes an alchemist dealing with the products of these reactions (on the *homunculi* as alchemists, see especially 1.39).

1.27 θαυμάζω τοῦ ὕδατος τὸν βρασμόν: The motif of wonder and awe is naturally commonplace in revelatory literature – for example, *Rev.* 13:3 and 17:6-8 – and literature which deals with divine spectacles – for example, *CH* 1.16, 4.2, and 14.4. The term θαυμάζω is also frequently used in ancient alchemical literature, indicating the awe which is felt when observing alchemical change or discovering an alchemical secret.¹⁶² Zosimos’ amazement at the boiling water within the *Crucibaltar* seems to encapsulate all of these ideas.

1.27-8 τοὺς ἀνθρώπους συγκαιομένους καὶ ζώντας: MS M has this phrase entirely in the genitive (τῶν ἀνθρώπων συγκαιομένων καὶ ζώντων) with βρασμόν at 1.26. This edition prefers the accusative, as this reading better fits the word order of the sentence.¹⁶³ The sense of συγκαίω is ‘burn up’ or ‘burn entirely’ – *LSJ* even offers ‘be calcined’ – further suggesting that those burning in the *Crucibaltar* imitate the burning of alchemical substances. The suggestion that a material burns,

¹⁵⁸ On the ancient role of the barber, see Brain 1986. Grimes (2018: 139) points out that a Late Antique Egyptian barber would have performed bloodletting surgeries, somewhat parallel to the theme of purification present in this episode.

¹⁵⁹ Dioscorides, *De Mat.* 5.79; Pliny, *HN* 34.110.

¹⁶⁰ Incidentally, note that both ξυρουργόν and ξηρουργόν are *hapax legomena*.

¹⁶¹ Zosimos refers to the spirit of a metal as acting only by the power of the *xēria* (τῆ δυνάμει τοῦ ξηρίου, *On Quicklime* 2 (CAAG 3.2)).

¹⁶² See e.g., *On Quicklime* 1 (CAAG 3.2); *On the Evaporation of Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.7).

¹⁶³ Although βρασμός is best translated in this instance as ‘boiling’, it can refer to non-liquid material (*LSJ*, s.v. βρασμός (p.328)).

but continues to live (καὶ ζώντας), is presumably related to the fact that its *pneūma* (its colour) is not totally gone (on material in the *kerotakis* as ‘dead’ when burned, see 1.72 and 3.5; on *pneūma* as the life of a substance, see pp.30-2).¹⁶⁴ The emphasis on the fact that the burning people remain alive highlights the fact that their hellish environment is indeed a means of purification (see pp.49-52 for the theme of purificatory baptism within Zosimos’ text). The motif of being burned alive but not dying can also be found in martyrological literature, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*: Polycarp is placed on a burning pyre, and the flames encircle him, but they do not harm him: πέρασ γοῦν ἰδόντες οἱ ἄνομοι μὴ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ τὸ σῶμα ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς δαπανηθῆναι.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly enough, when encircled with fire, Polycarp is said to be ὡς χρυσὸς καὶ ἄργυρος ἐν καμίνῳ πυρῦμενος, a metallurgical metaphor which perhaps would have particularly resonated with the alchemists.¹⁶⁶ For the motif of Christian martyrdom in *The Visions*, see pp.48-9.

1.28-9 ὄρῳς εἴσοδος ἐστὶν καὶ ἔξοδος καὶ μεταβολή: The *homunculus* describes the scene of suffering within the *Crucibaltar* in characteristically obscure terms as ‘the entrance, the exit, and the transformation’. Mertens takes a rather literal approach: the entrance is the part of the alembic through which metallic substances are introduced, the exit is the process of the *pneūma* leaving the *sōma*, and this procedure of isolating the soul is, in its totality, the transformation. Somewhat more metaphorically, εἴσοδος and ἔξοδος may contrast with each other to represent ‘the whole’ – much like *alpha* and *omega* in the Christian imagination – emphasising the universality of alchemical practice and the fact that the whole cosmos is to be considered a series of transformations (μεταβολή).¹⁶⁷ The term ἔξοδος certainly seems to imply the spirit exiting from the body, while μεταβολή certainly seems to imply the transformation inherent in this action; μεταβολή, in fact, is used elsewhere in the Zosimean corpus for material transformation – for example, τῶν τεσσάρων μετάλλων τὰς μεταβολὰς at 1.77-8 – thus further highlighting that, for Zosimos, spiritual and material change are fundamentally connected.¹⁶⁸ The term εἴσοδος is used twice elsewhere in *The*

¹⁶⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. συγκαίω (p.1662). For συγκαίω elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical tradition, see *On Virtue and Interpretation* 15 (CAAG 3.6) and CAAG 4.23.3. See also, Pl. *Ti.* 49c. On the motif of the baptism of fire, see (esp.) *Matt.* 3:11 and *Luke* 3:16. On this motif in the *Synoptic Gospels*, see Nel 2016.

¹⁶⁵ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16. For the image of people burning alive in cauldrons in an Egyptian context, see Grimes 2018: 136.

¹⁶⁶ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 15.

¹⁶⁷ The notion of constant flux in the universe aligns with the philosophical thought of Heraclitus (famous for his maxim, πάντα ῥεῖ) (see further Graham 2008). Heraclitean philosophy does not seem to have been particularly directly influential on the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists; his name appears only once, as Olympiodorus claims that Heraclitus believed that fire was the origin of all things (τὸ πῦρ...εἶναι ἀρχὴν πάντων τῶν ὄντων, CAAG 2.4.23).

¹⁶⁸ On μεταβολή as related to spiritual change, see *CH* 10.7, where Hermes discusses ψυχῆς...μεταβολαί.

Visions, in relation to the entrance into the imaginary temple at 1.58 and of entrance into the interpretation of the text itself at 1.67; it seems, then, to refer generally to an entrance into alchemical matters, either literally and metaphorically. However this section is to be interpreted, the fact that this one scene is said to constitute three processes, two of which are antithetical, seems to echo the monistic philosophy espoused throughout Zosimos' text (see 1.4 and pp.29-30).

1.29-30 τόπος άσκήσεως τής λεγουμένης ταριχείας: It is interesting that Zosimos asks after the nature of the μεταβολή, but the *homunculus'* answer concerns the τόπος of the actions before him: once again, attention is on the *Crucibaltar*, the key space which combines the scientific and religious elements of Zosimos' text. This duality may also extend to άσκήσεως and ταριχείας. Although the term άσκησις often has a non-religious sense – as in 'exercise', or even 'operation' elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus – it would be impossible to divorce its interpretation from the religio-philosophical practices of the ascetics, who deny the body for spiritual growth in a manner which aligns with Zosimos' Gnostic and Hermetic tendencies (see pp.44-8).¹⁶⁹ By contrast, for the alchemists, ταριχεία has a distinct sense as the scientific operation of maceration, a process by which materials are softened and broken down in Divine Water, their qualities being extracted, often before further operations in the *kerotakis*.¹⁷⁰ This vital process appears throughout Zosimos' work – see, for example, *On the Detailed Presentation of the Work* 6 (CAAG 3.16) – as well as in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus more broadly – see, for example, Comarius' dialogue to Cleopatra (CAAG 4.20.6) and *On the Philosopher's Stone* 4 (CAAG 3.29).

As Mertens notes, beyond alchemical jargon, ταριχεία also refers to a method of preservation, as in the pickling of food or, in an Egyptian context, the embalming of bodies before mummification.¹⁷¹ Preservation makes a substance incorruptible and not subject to change or decay; this, surely, is the same outcome of the process of becoming a *pneūma*. Humans are subject to change and death, while purely spiritual entities enjoy immortal, unchanging existence. Thus, it is possible that, when Zosimos refers to the 'pickling' of humans, he implies that they are entering a state of immutability, as embalmed bodies.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *CGL*, s.v. άσκησις (p.229); *On the Philosopher's Stone* 23 (CAAG 3.29). On asceticism in Late Antique Christianity, see Clark 1999 (esp. 14-44); Krawiec 2009.

¹⁷⁰ See Latin *macerare* (*LS*, s.v. *macero* (p.1092)). Although Zosimos' *Visions* is only mentioned in passing, see Viano (2018a) for the operation of ταριχεία in the work of the alchemist Olympiodorus.

¹⁷¹ Arist. *Hist. An.* 607b. For the sense of mummification, see *P.Oxy.* 40.9. On mummification practices in Roman Egypt, see Gessler-Löhr 2012.

¹⁷² Escolano-Poveda (2022: 101) links ταριχεία here to the mummification of Osiris, after his Ion-style dismemberment.

1.30 οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν: See pp.22-5 for detailed discussion of the use of ἀρετή throughout *The Visions*. The participle θέλοντες implies that desire to achieve ἀρετή – to achieve the ability both to perfect matter and to perfect one’s own spirit – is a key part of the process (this is an idea which is confirmed elsewhere in the text, for example at 1.66 and 2.2). See pp.44-8 for the motif of desiring the death of the material body in the Gnostic and Hermetic literary traditions.

1.31 γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα: On the use of *pneūma* and *sōma* (and the third element of matter in the alchemical imagination, *psychē*) in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical writing, see pp.30-2. The notion of abandoning the body in order to become a religiously pure spirit is one which appears throughout the literature which influenced Zosimos – for example, the Gnostic *Gospel of Judas* 56 and the Hermetic *CH* 1.24, where one can only ascend to Heaven at the dissolution of the material body (τῆ ἀναλύσει τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ὑλικοῦ). This line also echoes the words of the first dream, where Ion became a spirit, having cast off the weight of his body (ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα...πνεῦμα τελοῦμαι, 1.12-3).¹⁷³

1.32 καὶ πνεῦμα καὶ φύλαξ πνευμάτων: The *homunculus* to whom Zosimos speaks describes himself as both a spirit and a guardian of spirits: that is, one who has undergone spiritual purification / become an alchemical vapour, and one who safeguards and guides those undergoing the same processes. Karle cites the fourth-century *London Magical Papyri*, an Egyptian magical handbook, which refers to *Aion* – a possibly important figure in the naming of Ion (see 1.14) – as ὁ κύριος τῶν πνευμάτων, suggesting that the protection and leadership of initiates was a key part of the invocation of supernatural powers in Late Antique Egypt.¹⁷⁴ Further, it is possible that this description adds to the duality between alchemist and alchemical material which dominates *Lessons* 1.2 and 1.3. As a *pneūma*, the *homunculus* is the product of alchemical experimentation, while, as the guardian of *pneūmata*, he is the one whose domain is those products and the one who keeps those products, just as Zosimos refers to alchemists as the guards of alchemical secrets (θεία τέχνη...τοῖς ὄν φύλαξιν ἐδόθη) in the only other use of the term φύλαξ in his corpus.¹⁷⁵ This is a speculative association, but is certainly in keeping with the themes of the present episode. A final interpretation comes from the early exegete in *On Virtue and Interpretation*, who claims that the *homunculus*’ being a πνεῦμα

¹⁷³ On spiritual purification in Gnostic literature, see Jonas 1958: 44-6.

¹⁷⁴ Karle 1925: 43; Kenyon 1893: 80 (l. 467).

¹⁷⁵ FC 1.

renders him an alchemical vapour, while his being a φύλαξ πνευμάτων renders him also the metallic body into which the *pneūmata* are imbued: πνεῦμα οὔσα...ἀναλαμβάνει τὸ σῶμα τῶν συγκραθέντων στερεῶν.¹⁷⁶

1.33 τοῦ λαοῦ ὀλολύζοντος: The emphasis on the crying out of those in the *Crucibaltar* emphasises the theme of spiritual and material purification by means of suffering (see pp.45-8).¹⁷⁷ Mertens notes an interesting suggestion that ὀλολύζω may relate to the hissing of metals being heated within the *kerotakis*.¹⁷⁸

1.33-4 εἶδον ἄνθρωπον χαλκοῦν δέλτον μολυβδίνην κατέχοντα ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ: Mertens suggests that the copper man (ἄνθρωπον χαλκοῦν) holding a lead writing tablet (δέλτον μολυβδίνην) may imply that lead is to be alchemically added to copper in the alembic, creating a leaded copper alloy.¹⁷⁹ As discussed at pp.39-42, however, it is difficult to be certain about the exact scientific processes about which Zosimos talks.¹⁸⁰ It is also worth noting the importance of lead tablets in ancient esoteric practices through their use in the form of curse tablets.¹⁸¹ This notion is discussed in depth at 1.34 below, as Zosimos' characters begin to write on these lead tablets.

1.34 τοῖς ἐν ταῖς κολάσεσι πᾶσιν ἐπιτρέπω: This is the first appearance of the term κόλασις in *The Visions* (a term which becomes deeply significant throughout *Lessons* 2 and 3, as punishment seems to become the *raison d'être* of the *Crucibaltar*, and as Zosimos continually attempts to climb to the κολάσεις (see, for example, 2.2-3)). In general, the designation of the *Crucibaltar* as a place of punishment highlights the fact that Zosimos' characters must suffer for their ultimate material and spiritual purification (see pp.45-8). The 'place of punishment', as suggested, is the way in which Zosimos views the *Crucibaltar* throughout the majority of the text, only realising at 3.2 that it can be recast in a spiritual light and viewed as divine and sacred (τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἱερὸν φιαλοβωμόν), and thus only then realising that suffering is the route to purification. More than general punishment,

¹⁷⁶ On *Virtue and Interpretation* 8 (CAAG 3.6).

¹⁷⁷ The terms λαός and ὀλολύζω appear together frequently in Patristic literature – in the works of Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius, and John Chrysostom – owing to their appearance together in the *Septuagint* translation of *Isa.* 52:5; this, however, does not seem relevant to the present context.

¹⁷⁸ Mert. 37.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ On the creation of metallic alloys in the *kerotakis*, see Taylor 1930; Keyser 1990.

¹⁸¹ On the materiality of curse tablets, see Gager 1999: 3-4. On curses and curse tablets in Roman Egypt, see Frankfurter 2005; Faraone 2021.

however, κόλασις may have had more specific connotations for Zosimos' readers. In the *New Testament*, κόλασις appears as a term used for torture in Hell, not insignificantly given the diabolical nature of Zosimos' narrative space, but it seems to have developed a different nuance over the course of the first few centuries AD.¹⁸² In early Christian martyrological literature, the term is used in reference to the struggles, suffering, and death of a martyr; for example, as Pionius is tortured, he exclaims: κολάσει κολάζομαι.¹⁸³ See pp.48-9 for discussion of the martyrological motif within Zosimos' text, including further exploration of the connotations of κόλασις.

1.35 καθεσθῆναι: Whilst MSS A and L read καθεστῆναι (passive infinitive of κάθημαι) and Berthelot and Ruelle print the misreading καθευθῆναι (passive infinitive of καθεύδω), this edition favours the reading of MS M: καθεσθῆναι (passive infinitive of καθέζομαι or καθίζω).¹⁸⁴ This preference is largely related to Zosimos' instruction to Theosebeia at FC 8 (...καθεζομένη δὲ τῷ σώματι, καθέζου καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν...); just as Zosimos taught Theosebeia to be still in her body and to calm her passions so that she might become spiritually pure and ascend to Heaven (see p.43), so too does the copper man teach those in the punishment of boiling water to be still so that they might also become spirits (γίνονται πνεύματα φυγόντες τὸ σῶμα, 1.31).

1.35 τῇ χειρὶ γράφειν: The copper man explains to Zosimos that he commands those suffering to write on their own lead tablets. Even if these lead tablets are indeed to be understood as curse tablets (see also 1.33-4, with additional bibliography), it is difficult to see the relevance of these people writing curses. Gager, however, points to a crucial change in curse tablets from the second century onwards: the appearance of *charaktēres*.¹⁸⁵ Although these encoded words and symbols are largely uninterpretable, Gager's proposition is that they speak vaguely of celestial forces and the zodiac. If the origin and subject of these *charaktēres* is indeed astrological, it would certainly make sense for Zosimos' initiates to look to the sky before writing them. Further, *charaktēres*, according to Iamblichus, played a generally vital role in Late Antique Egyptian theurgy, as they were thought to

¹⁸² Christ explains that the unjust will suffer eternal punishment (κόλασιν αἰώνιον, *Mat.* 25:46). See 1.16, 1.19, and Jung 1967a: 71 for Zosimos' characters as suffering distinctly hellish forms of torture.

¹⁸³ *Martyrdom of Pionius* 12. The term ἀγών is also frequently used throughout ancient martyrological literature as an alternative to κόλασις.

¹⁸⁴ Dufault (2019: 107-8) interestingly defends Berthelot and Ruelle's καθευθῆναι, noting that it is the passive infinitive of the *hapax legomenon*, καθ - εὔω ('to burn completely'), with a similar sense to συγκαιομένους at 1.28.

¹⁸⁵ Gager 1999: 5.

imbue the theurgist with some divine power.¹⁸⁶ Recording astrological patterns or partaking in theurgic rituals both align with the motifs of Zosimos' text and are certainly reasonable suggestions for the actions of those in the *Crucibaltar*.¹⁸⁷

A further suggestion may be made based on the apocalyptic nature of Zosimos' text. It is possible that those suffering look upwards and simply record that which is revealed to them from the heavens. There is famous ancient precedent for this: Revelation – the apocalyptic text *par excellence* – opens with its own aetiology, as John claims that he was instructed to write what he saw in an apocalyptic vision sent by Christ, and to send what he had written to the various ancient churches: ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον.¹⁸⁸ These writings, according to John, became the Book of Revelation itself. Given that Zosimos himself also writes of his own apocalyptic visions, perhaps this is a self-contained aetiology of the text itself.¹⁸⁹

1.35-6 τὰς ὄψεις ἄνω: The act of turning one's eyes to the heavens before speaking is reminiscent of one of the many postures for prayer which are described in the *New Testament*; on several occasions, Christ himself turns his eyes upwards in prayer, as he does before raising Lazarus from the dead: Ἰησοῦς ᾤρεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἄνω.¹⁹⁰ The spiritual ramifications of looking upward, as one might expect, date far back beyond Zosimos' time: Plato, for example, says that looking upward can result in a pure mind (τὸν καθαρὸν νοῦν), while the Neo-Platonic *Chaldean Oracles* state that the soul is opened when one stretches their eyes upward (ὄμματα πάντα ἄρδην ἐκπέτασον ἄνω).¹⁹¹ It is possible, then, that Zosimos' characters look upwards towards God as part of their spiritual journey towards purification.

An alternative suggestion is that those in the *Crucibaltar* are looking upwards to the ascent that they must make. This can be taken in both a literary and meta-literary sense. For the former, spiritual ascent along the planetary spheres is a major part of the soteriological eschatology of a series of Late Antique texts which influenced Zosimos' thought; in *The Visions* itself, such an ascent is the framework of the narrative throughout *Lessons 2 and 3* (see (esp.) 2.2 and pp.52-3). It is possible that those suffering look ahead to this upward journey (both along the planets and through the

¹⁸⁶ Iamblichus, *De Myst.* 3.14.

¹⁸⁷ On written magic in Late Antique Egypt, see van der Vliet 2020.

¹⁸⁸ *Rev.* 1:11. On this feature of Revelation, see Reddish 2020.

¹⁸⁹ To combine both of these interpretations, it is interesting that Zosimos refers to the written alchemical secrets which he inherits from past generations as τοῖς συμβολικοῖς χαρακτήρσιν (*FC* 5).

¹⁹⁰ *John* 11:41. See further e.g., *Mark* 6:41, *John* 17:1. On posture in early Christian prayer, see Stewart 2009.

¹⁹¹ Pl. *Cra.* 396b-c; *Chaldean Oracles* 112.

kerotakis), to be taken after they have been made free of the material body.¹⁹² On a meta-literary level, if the suggestion at 1.10-1 is correct, and Zosimos' imagery is largely based on the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, the action of looking upwards may hint at the fact that the staircase discussed in *Lesson 1*, as well as the Eye of Horus to which it leads, appear on the ceiling of the *pronaos*.¹⁹³ The characters casting their eyes upwards may be some kind of acknowledgement of this image which seems to have impacted Zosimos' narrative so greatly.

1.36 τὰ στόματα ὑμῶν ἀνεωγμένα ἕως ἂν αὐξήσῃ ἡ σταφυλὴ ὑμῶν: The sudden shift to the second person plural is striking; it is possible that the copper man starts to address those boiling in the place of punishment, perhaps even subsuming Zosimos himself alongside them under ὑμῶν. Although Mertens prints ὑμῶν, her translation ('la bouche...sa lurette...') ignores this oddity.¹⁹⁴ The copper man relates to Zosimos his instruction that those suffering open 'your mouths until your grapes are grown'. Jung suggests that this obscure phrase may best be translated as 'until their uvula swell', signifying some particularly forceful scream, and possibly linking to τοῦ λαοῦ ὀλολύζοντος at 1.33.¹⁹⁵ This certainly seems to align with the suffering and body horror which underscores Zosimos' oneiric narrative. It seems to align also with a parallel scene at 2.26, as Agathodaemon, in his own fiery place of punishment, is said barely to be able to open his mouth (μόλις ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ). The pain of those suffering in the *Crucibaltar* is viscerally felt as Agathodaemon is almost unable to speak, and the characters in this episode scream so forcefully that their uvula become swollen.

A second interpretation, suggested by Grimes and supported with further Egyptological context by Escolano-Poveda, is that this phrase may recall the Egyptian *Opening of the Mouth* ceremony, in which a priest opens the mouth of the recently deceased so that they might be able to communicate in the afterlife; further, the priest offers the deceased grapes, representative of the eye of Horus.¹⁹⁶ This Egyptian religious context certainly seems to be in keeping with the backdrop of the text, but it is difficult to ascertain just how obvious this connection would have been to Zosimos' early readers. Note, however, that the *Opening of the Mouth* ceremony is depicted in a chapel dedicated to Osiris at the Dendera temple complex, possibly reinforcing this association.¹⁹⁷ This is an attractive

¹⁹² On the need to become a *pneūma* before a cosmic ascent, see pp.44-8.

¹⁹³ Escolano-Poveda 2022: 89.

¹⁹⁴ Mert. 37-8.

¹⁹⁵ Jung 1967a: 61. On σταφυλή as an inflamed uvula, see Arist. *Hist. An.* 493a (*LSJ*, s.v. σταφυλή (p.1635)).

¹⁹⁶ Grimes 2018: 137-8; Escolano-Poveda 2022: 97-104. On the *Opening of the Mouth*, see Assmann and Lorton 2005: 315-6.

¹⁹⁷ Escolano-Poveda 2022: 98.

interpretation, but Grimes's further chain of connections – the grapes representing the Eye of Horus, which represents the Moon, which represents silver, which represents *leukōsis* – seems to take too many leaps of logic to be a reasonable suggestion.

1.37 ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης: Zosimos refers to a character as the 'master of the house'; it is not clear if this is a new figure, or perhaps the white-haired *homunculus* who dealt with the *xēria* at the start of *Lesson 1.3* (given that the οἰκοδεσπότης makes reference to the copper man at 1.38, it is certainly not him).¹⁹⁸ On a fundamental level, the name 'master of the house' signifies the importance of this character who eventually reveals the secrets of the second dream to Zosimos: that the copper man is Ion, and that he holds power over the waters of the *Crucibaltar* and those suffering within them (1.38-40). Much as πεπολιωμένον may have granted the unnamed *homunculus* at 1.26 an air of authority and reliability, the same may be said about the οἰκοδεσπότης. Further, it is important to note the astrological connotations of this term. In ancient astrological thought, the οἰκοδεσπότης is the figure with rule over a certain zodiacal house or sign, as well as over daemons.¹⁹⁹ In this way, the Hellenistic astrological οἰκοδεσπότης shares a great deal in common with the Gnostic archon, a hugely important figure in Zosimos' practice and world-view, as the figure who controlled daemonic activity on Earth, and thus could aid or interfere with the success of alchemical operations (see pp.15-7 and Werrett 2023).²⁰⁰

1.38 τοῦτον ὃν εἶδες χαλκάνθρωπον: The figure described at 1.32 as the ἄνθρωπον χαλκοῦν is now described as the χαλκάνθρωπος, his name being compounded into one, just as Zosimos and his colleagues compound substances into singular products (see p.69 for 'alchemical language' in *The Visions*).²⁰¹ Beyond the χαλκάνθρωπος, Zosimos also speaks of an ἀργυράνθρωπος and a χρυσάνθρωπος at 1.65-6.

1.38-9 τὰς ἰδίας σάρκας ἐξεμοῦντα: The χαλκάνθρωπος is revealed to be Ion, the one who vomited forth his own flesh at the end of the first dream sequence (ἤμεσεν πάσας τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ, 1.20).

¹⁹⁸ On the confusion of characters throughout *The Visions*, see p.60.

¹⁹⁹ Iamb. *De Myst.* 9.2.274. On the role of the οἰκοδεσπότης in Hellenistic astrology, see Greenbaum 2015: 255-7.

²⁰⁰ See Smith 2002: 242 for the importance of astrology in Panopolis (more zodiac symbolism has been found in Akhmim than anywhere else in Egypt).

²⁰¹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 225.

See *ad loc.* for the significance of a character being rid of their own flesh in such a violent, visceral manner.

1.39 οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἱερούργων καὶ ἱερουρούμενος: This single line seems best to summarise not only the role of the metallic men throughout *The Visions*, but also Zosimos' dualistic spiritual-scientific view of alchemical procedures. The copper man is described simultaneously as the sacrificial priest and as the one being sacrificed – he takes on both an active and passive role in the sacrificial imagery which pervades *The Visions*. This highlights the Zosimean notion that, through alchemical practice, both metal and the alchemist's soul are purified.²⁰² There are clear parallels between this figure and Christ, himself the 'self-sacrificial sacrificer'.²⁰³ On the theme of *imitatio Christi* in Zosimos' text, see pp.48-9.

1.39 ἐδόθη ἡ ἐξουσία: Phrases involving both the verb δίδωμι and the noun ἐξουσία appear frequently together in Revelation, in reference either to the power which will be given to those who remain spiritually pure and faithful to Christ (*Rev.* 2:26), to the power given to specific figures to wreak havoc during the apocalypse (*Rev.* 6:8, 9:3), or to the power given to the beast over the Earth and even over God's holy people (*Rev.* 13:4, 13:5, 13:7, 17:3).²⁰⁴ It is possible, then, that this phrase being used of the copper man's power over the water and those suffering within it emphasises his own spiritual purity (for which this duty was assigned to him) or indeed emphasises the suffering of those in the place of punishment (parallel to the apocalyptic nature of this suffering, see 1.16, 1.19-20, and 1.21 for the suffering and transformation of Ion as plausibly influenced by scenes in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* and elsewhere in Revelation).

1.40 τῶν τιμωρουμένων: The final words of *Lesson* 1.3 emphasise the fact that those in the *Crucibaltar* – that space also designated a κόλασις – are being punished as part of the process of material and spiritual purification (see pp.44-8). The verb τιμωρέω is not used elsewhere of metals in the Zosimean corpus, but is used of the threat of punishment which alchemists face for practicing

²⁰² See (esp.) *FC* 8.

²⁰³ Christ as both sacrificial priest and sacrificial object is a profound theological theme which runs throughout the *New Testament*: e.g., in Paul's letter to the Hebrews, Christ is described as the high priest (ἀρχιερεὺς) who was redeemed by his own blood (τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος) (*Heb.* 9:11-2).

²⁰⁴ I am grateful to Prof. Lightfoot for drawing my attention to this parallel.

beyond governmental regulation, and the threat which daemons face when they are starved of sacrifices.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ *FC* 1, 7.

Zosimos, *The Visions: Lesson 1.4*

The opening of *Lesson 1.4* continues the previous narrative. Zosimos wakes up and considers that his dream was about the water which is white, yellow, boiling, and divine (τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ λευκόν, τὸ ξανθόν, τὸ κοχλάζον, τὸ θεῖον): that is, surely, Divine Water.²⁰⁶ Zosimos considers that he has understood well.

What follows is some of the most cryptic and difficult to interpret text of Zosimos' entire corpus. The alchemist lists a series of antithetical, but complementary, actions; to pick just three within this series which demonstrate the progression which runs throughout the whole, he states that it is good to speak and good to listen (καλὸν τὸ λέγειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ ἀκούειν), before saying that Heaven gives and Earth takes (δίδωσιν ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ λαμβάνει ἡ γῆ), and going on eventually to say that all things grow and bloom in the *Crucibaltar* (καὶ ἀνθεῖ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐξανθεῖ τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ φιαλοβωμῷ). Thus, the reader enters into a litany of obscure maxims, which clearly prioritise rhetoric over the sense of Zosimos' operations, employing various rhetorical techniques, anaphora and antithesis being the most obvious. As stated, all of the examples which Zosimos lists are simultaneously antithetical and complementary, all described as being part of the same natural process.²⁰⁷ This insistence on monism and the importance of harmony reminds the reader of the introductory *Lesson 1.1*, in which Zosimos stated firmly that totally opposing actions (for example, bodily dissolution and bodily restitution (ἀποσωμάτωσης καὶ ἐπισωμάτωσης, 1.2)) are not of different natures to one another, but are in fact a common process. *Lesson 1.4*, then, continues to demonstrate Zosimos' monistic view that the apparent multiplicity of the world is in fact unity, and that there is an almost ouroboric circularity to natural processes.²⁰⁸ In this series, however, this monistic motif is applied on a cosmic scale. Indeed, it is worth noting the progressive framework of the antitheses which Zosimos writes: the list moves from social oppositions in everyday life (to speak and to listen etc) to matters of universal significance (the sympathetic relationship between Heaven and Earth, and the growing of all things). The opposite processes start with small, specific human exchanges, but become increasingly lofty, abstract, and cosmic. In this way, Zosimos demonstrates the universality of the natural philosophical theories which underpin his alchemical practice, while continuing to highlight the monistic character of Nature's transformative processes.

At the end of this series, firmly brought to a halt by the claim that all of these things take place ἐν τῷ φιαλοβωμῷ, Zosimos' language becomes significantly more technical. The alchemist begins to insist

²⁰⁶ On Divine Water in Zosimos' alchemical practice, see pp.37-9.

²⁰⁷ On antithetical language in Zosimos (and Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature more broadly), see Salvaneschi 1991.

²⁰⁸ Dufault 2015: 241. See further Dufault 2019: 112.

on the importance of method, order, harmony, careful weighing, and diligence not to miss out any steps of an alchemical recipe.²⁰⁹ This is, in fact, the first appearance in the text of a crucial term within Zosimos' broader corpus: μέθοδος. In a single line, Zosimos encapsulates the process by which Nature enacts transformations:

καὶ τὰ πάντα ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ συμφωνῶν τῇ διαιρέσει καὶ τῇ ἐνώσει τῆς μεθόδου μηδὲν ὑπολειφθείσης ἐκστρέφει τὴν φύσιν

And all things, to put it briefly, as they go between division and union, with no part of the technique being forgotten, change their very nature.

The antithetical, yet harmonious, processes of division and union (τῇ διαιρέσει καὶ τῇ ἐνώσει) – seen repeatedly throughout the text in the actions at 1.2 and in the dismemberment, reconstitution, and resurrection of Ion in *Lesson 1.2* – are shown to be the fundamental processes by which one thing transmutes into another thing. In this way, Zosimos' characters (from Ion and those burning in the *Crucibaltar*, to the snake and the bound sacrificial victim later in the narrative) are shown to have purpose in their gruesome deaths: division and union is a prerequisite for transmutation, on both a material and spiritual level.

All in all, *Lesson 1.4* explains the manner by which Nature transforms objects in the material world (transformations which the alchemist attempts to replicate – see pp.32-4). These processes are shown to have cosmic significance, as they apply to the mixing, separation, and growth of *all* things, in order to bring about some kind of transformation. These same processes also apply to the dying and rising, the transforming, figures within *The Visions*.

Commentary

1.41 ταῦτα ἐμφαντασθεῖς: As Mertens notes, the verb ἐμφαντάζομαι has the sense of something imagined or appearing as a φαντασία.²¹⁰ The term appears on multiple occasions throughout Plotinus' *Enneads* with this sense, and often in explicit contradistinction to an object in the real world; for example, when discussing the nature of love, Plotinus explains that Poverty had intercourse with a nature perceptible to the mind (φύσεως νοητοῦ) in reality, not an image of or

²⁰⁹ For Zosimos' clear interest in alchemical apparatus and technique, see pp.34-9.

²¹⁰ Mert. 38. On the significance of φαντασία and its broad range of cognates, see Fattori and Bianchi 1988.

some imaginative construction derived from it (οὐκ εἰδώλου νοητοῦ οὐδ' ἐκεῖθεν ἐμφαντασθέντος).²¹¹ In this way, Zosimos' visions are expressed as existing distinctly in the world of illusory dreams; see pp.63-4 for the break-down of this divide between the real and the fictional throughout the remainder of the text.

1.41 τίς ἢ αἰτία: Zosimos seeks the cause, a logical explanation, of his dream; his reflections seem to answer the question of the content and interpretation of the dream, rather than its cause, but this may align with the ancient oneiric theory that certain dreams were caused by present concerns in the real world and offered cryptic interpretations or solutions to them (see 1.8).

1.41-2 τῆς ὄπτασίας ταύτης: It is notable that Zosimos uses the word ὄπτασία for his vision, given the distinctly religious connotations of this term. The term does not appear within Artemidorus' compilation and exploration of dream types in his *Oneirocritica*, but does appear many times throughout the *New Testament*, in reference to visions of angels, Paul's vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, and visions which contain revelations from God (ὄπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου).²¹² The term, then, seems to bear specifically religious connotation. Indeed, the *CGL* defines ὄπτασία as 'apparition (of a heavenly being)'.²¹³ Zosimos' use of this term highlights the divine nature of the revelation which he receives throughout his own visionary experiences.

1.42 τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ λευκόν, τὸ ξανθόν, τὸ κοχλάζον, τὸ θεῖον: The water which is 'white, yellow, boiling, and divine (or sulphurous)' is a clear reference to so-called Divine Water, a crucial ingredient in alchemical recipes involving the *kerotakis* (see pp.35-9). The fact that the substance is at first described as τὸ λευκόν, τὸ ξανθόν may seem to imply some contradiction, but Divine Water is referenced in these same terms elsewhere in ancient alchemical literature (τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ δίχρωμον, τὸ λευκὸν καὶ ξανθόν), where it is stated that by the power of this substance, the object on which operations are performed is dyed (βάπτεται).²¹⁴ The paradoxical dual colour of the substance must be related to its power to tint objects both white and yellow. Further, the reference

²¹¹ Plot. *Enn.* 3.5.7. See also e.g., *Enn.* 1.8.8, 3.6.7, 3.6.14.

²¹² *Luke* 24:23; *Acts* 26:19; *2 Cor.* 12:1.

²¹³ *CGL*, s.v. ὄπτασία (p.1019).

²¹⁴ *Advice for Those Who Practice the Art* 2 (CAAG 3.10).

to the water being κοχλάζον surely confirms that the boiling water at 1.24 was also Divine Water in the *Crucibaltar*.

1.43 καλῶς ἐνόησα ταῦτα: For the language of knowledge in *The Visions*, see pp.70-1.

1.43 καλὸν τὸ λέγειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ ἀκούειν: See the introduction to the present section for the nature of *Lesson* 1.4, including the antitheses and oppositional relationships which run throughout it. The first of Zosimos' obscure antitheses concerns speaking and listening. Throughout his corpus, Zosimos frequently uses terms like λέγω and ἀκούω in reference to the transmission of alchemical knowledge, but the phrase seems far too general to be alluding to any specific maxim about speaking and listening or any specific piece of alchemical information.²¹⁵ Perhaps this vague maxim introduces the tone of *Lesson* 1.4, in its attempt to transmit alchemical secrets in a more transparent manner than the oneiric narrative of the previous sections. It is worth noting an opposite antithetical maxim in the *Hermetic Key*, in which Hermes Trismegistos tells Tat that it is in fact bad to speak and bad to listen, given that knowledge of God can be acquired neither through speaking nor by listening (ὁ γὰρ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ...οὔτε λέγεται οὔτε ἀκούεται).²¹⁶

Further, it is worth examining Zosimos' use of the term καλός, the word which introduces all of the articular infinitives across 1.43-4, and a word replete with philosophical baggage. Although the most common translation of καλός is 'beautiful' in an aesthetic sense, the term has significant connotations in Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, where it represents philosophical excellence.²¹⁷ In the *Symposium*, τὸ καλόν is the virtue for which souls should strive and to which philosophers should devote their lives, while Plotinus views τὸ καλόν as a material reflection of the perfection of The One, the ultimate source of divinity in Neo-Platonic thought.²¹⁸ Given these connotations, it seems that Zosimos does not mean simply to imply that it is good to do these things, but that it is in some way spiritually edifying. In engaging in the antithetical yet complementary processes which Nature bestows onto the cosmos, and in understanding their significance, Zosimos seems to imply that spiritual progress can be made.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ See e.g., *Omega* 13; *On the Choice of a Favourable Moment* 1 (CAAG 3.15).

²¹⁶ CH 10.9.

²¹⁷ LSJ, s.v. καλός (p.870). Smith 2019: 23.

²¹⁸ Pl. *Symp.* 211d; Plot. *Enn.* 1.6-16.

²¹⁹ A similar idea can be found in the *New Testament*: see *Jas.* 4:17, where not doing τὸ καλόν is described as a sin (ἁμαρτία).

1.43-4 καλὸν τὸ διδόναι καὶ καλὸν τὸ λαμβάνειν: The next opposition concerns the virtue of both giving and taking. As above, no source of allusion is immediately obvious. Many of the following antitheses, in 1.44-7, however, engage in the discourse of giving and taking which is introduced here.

1.44 καλὸν τὸ πενητεύειν καὶ καλὸν τὸ πλουτεῖν: The notion that it is good to be poor and good to be rich seems to be the maxim which is the most connected to material objects in the sensible world; in this way, Zosimos presents himself as indifferent to material wealth, presumably prioritising spiritual wealth, mirroring Christ's instruction to sell one's possessions and to focus one's attentions on heavenly treasures (θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ).²²⁰ Although the sentiment of indifference towards material oppositions is clear, it is evident that Zosimos did not follow this advice in his own life. Indeed, in his *Omega*, Zosimos refers to poverty (πενίαν) as an incurable disease (τὴν ἀνίατον νόσον) which one hopes to conquer through alchemical practice.²²¹

1.44-5 καὶ πῶς ἡ φύσις μανθάνει διδόναι καὶ λαμβάνειν;: As discussed in the introduction to *Lesson 1.4*, the antitheses start with basic, quotidian interactions and earthly matters, before expanding in both universal scope and spiritual significance, as Zosimos discusses the unity of Nature in opposing cosmic forces.²²² Zosimos seems to present to the reader one of the ultimate questions of alchemical practice: how does Nature learn both to give and to take? See pp.32-4 for the alchemist's principal aim, to tap into natural processes to transmute material (an idea which is presented explicitly throughout the present section). In this sense of Nature's ability to change the nature of a substance, one assumes that λαμβάνειν refers to taking the colour, the *pneūma*, away from one substance, before it is imbued – διδόναι – into another substance, hence bringing about an alchemical change (see pp.30-2 for the alchemical theory that transformations in colour align with this process of *pneūma* being 'taken' and 'given' between metals). The principle of Nature learning (ἡ φύσις μανθάνει) is also worthy of note. For the alchemists, Nature is an active force which drives matter towards perfection; this sentiment seems to present Nature with a conscious agency which is not evident elsewhere in Zosimos' corpus (compare, however, the thoughts and actions of the personified Nature in *Lesson 1.6*).

²²⁰ *Mark* 10:21.

²²¹ *Omega* 12.

²²² Dufault 2015: 241.

1.45 δίδωσι ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος καὶ λαμβάνει ὁ ὑγρόλιθος: Zosimos confirms the relationship between the present antithetical statements and the narrative thus far by incorporating the copper-man who played a central role in *Lesson 1.3*. On the level of the narrative of *The Visions*, the χαλκάνθρωπος gave lead tablets to those suffering, but those in the boiling *Crucibaltar* surely cannot be implied in ὑγρόλιθος. Rather, as personified alchemical material, it seems likely that δίδωσι ὁ χαλκάνθρωπος refers to the copper-man giving away vaporous *pneūmata* in the *kerotakis*.²²³ This might also provide insight into the correct interpretation of the *hapax legomenon* ὑγρόλιθος; Mertens suggests that it may represent mercury, given this metal's power to amalgamate metals, though it may also refer to Divine Water (created by mixing the acidic ὑγρός with the sulphuric λίθος), given its caustic power to volatilise metallic substances on the upper platform of the *kerotakis*, and thus take *pneūma*.²²⁴ Thus, it seems that this line describes the chemical reaction of copper in Zosimos' own practice.

1.46 διδοῦσιν οἱ ἀστέρες καὶ λαμβάνει τὰ ἄνθη: In his astrological text, *Apotelesmatica*, a companion to the *Almagest*, Ptolemy refers to οἱ διδόντες ἀστέρες on multiple occasions in the context of horoscopy.²²⁵ He refers to the propensity of certain stars to impart different qualities onto siblings according to their astrological position, but it is difficult to see how that might relate to Zosimos' claim that the stars give and the flowers take, beyond the simple notion of the stars being able to exert influence over earthly matters by the process of cosmic sympathy (see pp.32-4). Zosimos certainly believed that the stars could influence alchemical practice, encouraging his readers to perform astrological calculations to determine the ideal time to undertake alchemical experimentation.²²⁶ It is possible that 'the stars give and the flowers take' implies the stars influencing alchemical practice (on discussions of alchemical change in terms of the rebirth, blossoming, and colour transformations of flowers, see 1.67). See Festugière on the relationship between flowers and stars, in the sense that stars project energy towards the Earth, which may be directed towards flowers.²²⁷ This is clearly related to the notion of cosmic sympathy.

1.46-7 δίδωσιν ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ λαμβάνει ἡ γῆ: If one is to interpret οὐρανὸς in secular terms as 'the sky', as it is used in the only other occurrence of this word in the Zosimean corpus, rainfall seems to

²²³ See pp.30-2 and pp.35-9.

²²⁴ Mert. 222. On Divine Water, see pp.37-9; Martelli 2009.

²²⁵ Ptolemy, *Apotel.* 3.6.3, 3.6.4.

²²⁶ Werrett 2023.

²²⁷ Fest. 1.137-86.

be the most obvious example of the Earth receiving what the sky gives.²²⁸ Indeed, similar language is used in, for example, *James*: ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.²²⁹ Whilst the appeal to natural processes like rain may be attractive, one struggles to see the connection to Zosimos' text with this secular interpretation of οὐρανὸς. Rather, the religious interpretation seems more fruitful: the religious connotations of Earth receiving the gifts of Heaven are clear.²³⁰ This may be interpreted as related to the fall of man – Heaven gives the spirit, but Earth takes away full spirituality – but the best understanding of this passage must surely be the transmission of divine skill or knowledge from Heaven to Earth.²³¹ Both the alchemical and religious secrets which Zosimos learns, and the alchemist's skill to imitate Nature, come from a divine source, but can be replicated by practitioners: hence, Heaven gives and Earth takes.

1.47 διδοῦσιν αἱ βρονταὶ ἐκ τοῦ τροχίζοντος πυρός: Mertens prints the MS M reading τοῦ ἐκτροχίζοντος; the present edition, however, prefers the MSS A and L reading ἐκ τοῦ τροχίζοντος, given the obscurity of ἐκτροχίζω and the fact that 'out of the spinning fire' seems to make more sense than 'of the out-spinning fire' (Mertens, in fact, translates ἐκτροχίζοντος as τροχίζοντος, as 'le feu tournoyant'). There are no other instances of τροχίζων (or indeed ἐκτροχίζων) πῦρ in Greek literature. The 'spinning fire' may be a reference to some alchemical apparatus, but this is impossible to confirm given that it is a *hapax phaenomenon*. *LSJ* offers an interesting alternative translation of τροχίζω: I torture (i.e. through breaking on the wheel).²³² Whilst the motif of gruesome, fire-based torture certainly fits with the imagery of *The Visions*, it is unclear how this might fit into the more theoretical *Lesson 1.4*, and indeed how βρονταὶ might come from fires of torture.²³³

1.47-8 καὶ συμπλέκονται τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀποπλέκονται τὰ πάντα: Following the antitheses which concerned trivial matters and the antitheses which placed in opposition the actions of giving and taking, *Lesson 1.4* hits what is likely its most rhetorically pleasing series: a collection of antitheses in

²²⁸ *CGL*, s.v. οὐρανὸς (p.1039); *True Book of Sophie 1* (CAAG 3.42), where Zosimos talks about the sun as being in the sky (ὁ ἥλιος ἐν οὐρανῶ).

²²⁹ *Jas* 5:18.

²³⁰ Although Zosimos never uses οὐρανὸς in this way, both the *New Testament* and the Hermetic corpus are replete with such examples, suggesting that Zosimos may have had this religious interpretation in mind.

²³¹ On the fall of man as the Earth taking what Heaven has sent, see *Omega 7* and *CH 1.14-5*. On divine knowledge being sent from Heaven to Earth, see *CH 4.4* on God sending down (κατέπεμψε) the *krater* of *gnōsis* from Heaven.

²³² *LSJ*, s.v. τροχίζω (pp.1828-9).

²³³ On the imagery of torture in the text, see pp.45-8.

which the verbs respond to one another.²³⁴ Zosimos says that all things are woven together, and that all things become unravelled. The notion of coming together and being pulled apart – especially with the prefixes *συν-* and *ἀπο-* – recalls the opening line of the text, in which Zosimos suggests that objects coming apart and coming together (*ἀποσπασμός...σύνδεσμος*, 1.2-3) will be a fundamental theme of the text. More specifically, as Dufault notes, *συμπλέκονται* relates back to Ion, whose bones and flesh were said to be woven together after his dismemberment and death (*τὰ ὅστέα ταῖς σαρκὶ συνέπλεξε*, 1.17) (on the connotations of the verb *συμπλέκω* in its philosophical context, see 1.17).²³⁵ In this way, Zosimos seems to confirm that Ion's death and rebirth engages with the natural processes of things being broken apart and reunited, as part of the alchemical process. As mentioned in the introduction to the present lesson, the repetition of *τὰ πάντα* here and throughout lines 1.47-50 seems to emphasise the universality of alchemical truths, just as Zosimos claimed that alchemy itself was an investigation into all things (*τῶν πάντων...ζήτησις*, 1.5-6).

1.48 καὶ μίσγονται τὰ πάντα καὶ συντίθενται τὰ πάντα: Zosimos states that all things mix together (*μίσγονται*) and all things are put together (*συντίθενται*). Whilst this seems at first to move away from the oppositional constructions which Zosimos composes throughout *Lesson 1.4*, Mertens points to an Aristotelian description of these two terms: that *μίξις* implies true combination, such that the constituent components cannot be identified, whilst *σύνθεσις* is a more crude combination.²³⁶ This may suggest an interesting opposition – concerning the efficacy of the method of mixture – but the terms seem to be used interchangeably throughout Zosimos' corpus.²³⁷ Regardless, the notion of alchemical combination as a natural process is evident, perhaps even accentuated by the sudden lack of an antithesis.

1.48-9 καὶ κινῶνται τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀποκινῶνται τὰ πάντα: The oppositional verbs which respond to one another through prefixes continue as Zosimos states that all things are mixed together and all things are scattered. The second verb *ἀποκινῶ* is a *hapax legomenon*, but given the context of the section presumably must stand for the opposite to *κινῶ* ('I mix together'), a term which does not appear elsewhere in the Zosimean corpus.²³⁸ In this way, this line continues to repeat the idea that

²³⁴ See Salvaneschi 1991.

²³⁵ Dufault 2015: 242.

²³⁶ Mert. 222. Arist. *De Gen. et Corr.* 328a.

²³⁷ They are, in fact, used seemingly interchangeably within *The Visions* itself: see cognates of *συντίθημι* at 1.62 and 2.30, and *μίξις* at 1.74.

²³⁸ *CGL*, s.v. *κινῶ* (p.805).

mixing and unmixing – actions which resemble alchemical operations – can be considered as a single action in the monistic cosmos; Lopes da Silveira notes a beautiful stylistic point, that “metaphors of interweaving are interwoven with one another”.²³⁹

1.49 καὶ βρέχει τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀποβρέχει τὰ πάντα: Although Mertens translates as ‘tout se trempe et tout s’assèche’, the verb ἀποβρέχω seems to mean imply ‘thoroughly soaked’, intensifying the sense of βρέχω.²⁴⁰ This is certainly the implication of ἀποβρέχω elsewhere in the corpus of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy: an anonymously written alchemical fragment contains an instruction to immerse copper in ‘sweet water’ (γλυκεῖ ὕδατι ἀπόβρεχε) for six days.²⁴¹

1.49-50 καὶ ἀνθεῖ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἐξανθεῖ τὰ πάντα: The final notion in this series concerns all things growing and blooming; as also with βρέχει...καὶ ἀποβρέχει above, the second verb intensifies the first, as opposed to being antithetical to it.²⁴² See 1.67 on the importance of the floral motif in alchemical imagery.

1.50 ἐν τῷ φιαλοβωμῷ: All of the balanced antitheses and complementary ideas which dominate lines 1.43-9 seem ultimately to lead to this conclusion, that all of the above matters, which began with the banal, but steadily grew to become more abstract, and which will eventually grow to encompass a cosmic scale of natural processes, take place in the *Crucibaltar*. This crescendo surely highlights the fact that all of these natural phenomena, which constitute the entire natural world, can be found inside the alchemical vessel – emphasising the alchemist’s manipulation of natural forces – and confirms the reader’s suspicions that the events of *Lessons* 1.2 and 1.3, themselves centred around the φιαλοβωμός, are indeed to be understood as alchemical allegories.²⁴³ In this way, with these secrets of the natural processes of alchemy placed into the *Crucibaltar*, another parallel might be drawn with the Hermetic *krater* filled with *gnōsis* about the reality of one’s relationship with the divine.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 225.

²⁴⁰ *LSJ*, s.v. ἀποβρέχω (pp.193-4).

²⁴¹ *Frag. Alch.* 6 (Halleux 1981).

²⁴² *CGL*, s.v. ἐξανθέω (p.510).

²⁴³ On the events inside the *Crucibaltar* replicating Nature’s operations, see pp.32-4 and Mert. 222.

²⁴⁴ *CH* 4.4. See pp.49-52.

1.50 ἕκαστον γὰρ μεθόδω καὶ σηκώματι: Moving away from cryptic musings on natural processes, Zosimos' text becomes more sober, technical, and focused on scientific operation, as he claims that in each case of the above actions (ἕκαστον), there is a need for method and weighing out proportions. This is the first appearance of the crucial term μέθοδος in *The Visions*. The latter term, σηκώματι, through the image of scales and proportion, seems to echo the balanced nature of the processes described above, as well as their rhetorical structure.

1.50 οὐγκιασμῶ τετραστοίχῳ: In addition to these natural processes requiring method and careful weighing (μεθόδω καὶ σηκώματι), Zosimos states that they also involve the measurement in ounces of the four elements. The term οὐγκιασμῶ refers to measurement in the unit of οὐγγία, adopted from the Roman *uncia*; in Latin, this *uncia* refers generally to one-twelfth of a greater whole, with this unit of measurement being one twelfth of a Roman pound, a *libra*.²⁴⁵ This unit remained in use into the Byzantine period, eventually becoming the basis for the modern ounce – with 1 *libra* equalling approximately 11.6 modern *oz* – hence the translation, 'measurement in ounces'.²⁴⁶ This is a unit to which Zosimos refers on several occasions throughout his technical treatises; for example: in *On Burning Bodies*, Zosimos refers to the amounts of different substances which must go into a mixture, in proportion to the number of ounces of the metals (πρὸς ἀνάλογον τούτων τῶν οὐγγιῶν).²⁴⁷ Again, careful weighing, method, and proportionality are suggested as key parts of the alchemical process.

Mertens interprets τετράστοιχος as a reference to 'des quatre éléments', the Aristotelian elements. Aristotle discusses these four elements – earth, water, air, and fire – and their Empedoclean origins, concluding that the properties of these elements can be combined in various ways to account for the diversity of the material world, with earth being cold and dry, water being cold and wet, air being hot and wet, and fire being hot and dry.²⁴⁸ Plato also discusses these elements, but, owing to their abilities to transmute into one another, suggests that the elements are rather four primary qualities of a single substance, a *prima materia*. Indeed, Plato states that matter must be without any form (πάντων ἐκτὸς εἰδῶν) before qualities can be imbued into it.²⁴⁹ Given Zosimos' theoretical bases for alchemical transmutation, one assumes that this would have been an appealing concept (see pp.29-

²⁴⁵ *LS*, s.v. *uncia* (p.1929); *LSJ*, s.v. οὐγγία (p.1268).

²⁴⁶ Zupko 1977: 7.

²⁴⁷ *On Burning Bodies* 3 (CAAG 3.23).

²⁴⁸ Arist. *De Gen. et. Corr.* 329a. See further, Robinson 1974: 168. A Neo-Platonic interpretation of this Aristotelian theory of matter is given at Proclus, *In. Tim.* 3.38-9, suggesting that the idea still held a great deal of traction in Zosimos' time, and that such ideas were circulating within Zosimos' milieu.

²⁴⁹ Pl. *Ti.* 50e.

30).²⁵⁰ Whilst the term τετράστοιχος does not appear elsewhere in Zosimos' writings, he does use the phrase τεσσάρων στοιχείων in a fascinating blend of Aristotelian and Gnostic elements. During the narrative of the fall of man in *Omega*, Zosimos claims that *Phōs*' becoming encased in and trapped inside flesh, becoming Adam, has a mystical layer connected with the name Adam, which is said to stand for the four elements (τεσσάρων στοιχείων).²⁵¹ Zosimos explains: the first Α stands for ἀνατολή, representative of ἀήρ (air); the Δ stands for δύσις, representative of γῆ (earth); the second Α is a lacuna, but logically must stand for ἄρκτος, in some way representative of water; and the Μ stands for μεσημβρία, representative of πῦρ (fire).²⁵²

Whilst the interpretation of τετράστοιχος as the Aristotelian elements is thus immediately attractive, it is worth noting that the term has a radically different meaning in several places in ancient alchemical literature; Olympiodorus, for example, in an exegetical passage related to Zosimean practice, employs τετράστοιχος to refer to the alchemical *tetrasomy*, the alloy on which Maria performed alchemical experiments in the *kerotakis*.²⁵³ Both interpretations of τετράστοιχος seem fitting in the context of *Lesson 1.4*, though the literal meaning of οὐγκιασμῶ – as in weighing in a specified unit – seems only to work with the latter explanation of the physical substances of the *tetrasomy*. Regardless of which of these interpretations is correct, however, translating τετράστοιχος as 'four elements' – whether those be Aristotelian elements or elements of the *tetrasomy* – seems appropriate.

1.50-1 ἡ τῶν ὄλων συμπλοκή καὶ ἀποπλοκή: See analogous terms at 1.47-8.

1.51 ὁ πᾶς σύνδεσμος ἄνευ μεθόδου οὐ γίνεται: This line is missing from MSS A and L, but its presence in MS M and its coherence with the narrative make it worthy of inclusion. Zosimos claims disbelief that an alchemical bond (σύνδεσμος) might form without the use of a proper method, further suggesting the emphasis which he places on alchemical orthopraxy.

²⁵⁰ τετράστοιχος also appears with this sense several times throughout the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical corpus (e.g., CAAG 1.4.1).

²⁵¹ *Omega* 6.

²⁵² *ibid.* A similar notion appears in the Hermetic corpus, as Isis explains to Horus that human souls are weighed down and oppressed by the four elements which make up the body: πᾶσα οὖν ψυχὴ, ἐν τῷ σώματι οὔσα, βαρεῖται καὶ θλίβεται τοῖς τέτταρσι τούτοις (CH 24.19).

²⁵³ CAAG 2.4.44. See further, Keyser 1990: 362; Hopkins 1938b. The metals of the *tetrasomy* are seen at 1.78.

1.51-2 ἡ μέθοδος φυσική ἐστιν: This line is also missing from MSS A and L, but its presence in MS M and its coherence with the narrative again make it worthy of inclusion. Zosimos describes the method as natural, a crucial adjective within Zosimos' alchemical practice, as he describes the tinctures which are the *telos* of his experimentation as φυσικαὶ (καιρικαὶ) καταβαφαί.²⁵⁴ That the alchemists are tapping into a process of the cosmic power of Nature is emphasised.

1.52 καὶ φυσῶσα καὶ ἐκφυσῶσα: As above, this line is also missing from MSS A and L, but its presence in MS M and its coherence with the narrative again make it worthy of inclusion. Zosimos refers to the method as inhaling and exhaling, clearly playing on the term φυσική earlier in the sentence.²⁵⁵ Nature's method is somewhat brought to life as a breathing entity, seemingly depicting Zosimos' point of antithetical, yet harmonious, actions in the most intuitive way yet: when one inhales, one must exhale, and when one exhales, one must inhale. Such is Zosimos' analogy for natural processes. It is important to note that both φυσάω and ἐκφυσάω are verbs employed to describe alchemical processes throughout Zosimos' corpus. *LSJ* offers 'sublimate volatile elements' for ἐκφυσάω, but this strikes one as inaccurate; *pneūma* is the root term for any vapours involved in sublimation in the *kerotakis* throughout Graeco-Egyptian alchemical writings.²⁵⁶ Rather, Zosimos' use of both φυσάω and ἐκφυσάω seems to involve a process of insufflation as a method of controlling combustion within the furnace of the *kerotakis*.²⁵⁷

1.52 τὰς τάξεις τηροῦσα [τῆς μεθόδου]: This edition follows the example of Mertens in secluding τῆς μεθόδου from the text. The combination of τάξις and τηρέω appears in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*; Proclus discusses the distinctly ouroboric nature of natural cycles, wherein the end of one cycle becomes the beginning of another (νῦν δὲ τὸ πέρας αὐτῶν ἀρχὴ ἄλλης γίνεται περιόδου), and that by this process, their convergence adheres to the cosmic order (ἡ συναποκατάστασις...τηρεῖ τὴν κοσμικὴν τάξιν).²⁵⁸ Plutarch also discusses the preservation of the natural order (τὴν κατὰ φύσιν...ἐτήρησαν τάξιν) in the relationship between musical ratios and the positioning of the planets in his work on Plato's *Timaeus*, while Plotinus says that only *psychē* itself can preserve sequence and order in the cosmos: ἀκολουθίαν τε τηρήσει καὶ τάξιν.²⁵⁹ In short, these

²⁵⁴ *FC* 4. See further pp.15-7.

²⁵⁵ Mert. 39.

²⁵⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. ἐκφυσάω (p.526).

²⁵⁷ See this use of φυσάω at *FC* 10, and of ἐκφυσάω at *On the Evaporation of Divine Water* 3 (*CAAG* 3.7).

²⁵⁸ Proclus, *In Rep.* 2.24.

²⁵⁹ Plutarch, *De An. Procr. In Ti.* 1029c; Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.1.8.

terms are used in a wide range of texts around Zosimos' areas of interest in reference to the natural order and harmony of the cosmos; the alchemical method itself preserves and adheres to the ordered nature of cosmic processes, and so must the alchemist.

1.52 αὔξουσα καὶ λήγουσα: One of the final harmonious antitheses of *Lesson 1.4* recalls the introduction of *The Visions*, in which Zosimos claimed that his alchemical quest into all things was dictated by the waxing and waning of the Moon (τὴν λήξιν καὶ τὴν αὔξησιν, 1.7).

1.53-4 τὰ πάντα ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ συμφωνὰ τῇ διαιρέσει καὶ τῇ ἐνώσει τῆς μεθόδου μηδὲν ὑπολειφθεῖσης ἐκστρέφει τὴν φύσιν: As suggested by Zosimos' desire to summarise (ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ), this sentence captures the essence of the natural processes which alchemists study and aim to replicate in their own practice: all things, as they go between division and union, with no part of the technique being forgotten, change their very nature. Thus, Zosimos emphasises the universality of alchemical theory, the importance of method and order, and the harmony of opposites, all elements which characterise the cosmic processes of Nature (see pp.32-4). The term διαιρέσει may pick up διελών at 1.15, the term used for Ion's dismemberment by the sword of his anonymous attacker.

As Dufault has usefully noted, ἐκστρέφειν and its various cognates are the terms most commonly used in the ancient Greek alchemical corpus to denote material transformation.²⁶⁰ Literally, ἐκστρέφειν can be translated as 'to turn out'; this may be interpreted as the inversion of a substance during alchemical transmutation, revealing the sense of the (golden) divine which is hidden within some base material. This would mirror the theory of ensoulment which served as a bedrock for the religio-philosophical traditions most significant to Zosimos (the Gnostic, Hermetic, and Neo-Platonic): that the soul is a divine spark – imbued by God himself – which came to be trapped in the material world.²⁶¹ Just as there is a spark of spiritual perfection within a human, the term ἐκστρέφειν for alchemical transmutation implies that there is also a spark of material perfection within each metal; in both cases, the body needs to be destroyed to reveal the inner core (consider Ion vomiting forth his own body to reveal the spiritual, homuncular 'inner man' at 1.20). This, however, does not seem to align with the transmutation theory of *pneūmata* penetrating a metal and imbuing a *prima*

²⁶⁰ Dufault 2015: 215.

²⁶¹ On ensoulment in early Christian thought, see Blosser 2018. Zosimos himself recounts the story of the divine *Phōs* being trapped in the material world, becoming *Phōs-Adam*, at *Omega 7*, while the Hermetic story of Nature and the human soul falling in love and creating the dualistic nature of mankind appears at *CH 1.14*.

materia with colour (on Zosimos' transmutation theory and the philosophical principles which underscore it, see pp.29-34). Indeed, it is possible that Dufault's interpretation simply takes ἐκστρέφειν too literally; it is also worth noting that ἐκστροφή need not imply literal inversion, but rather a drastic transformation (as in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, wherein Strepsiades tells his son, Pheidippides, to change his habits as quickly as possible: ἐκστρεψον ὡς τάχιστα τοὺς σαυτοῦ τρόπους).²⁶²

1.54 ἢ γὰρ φύσις στρεφομένη εἰς ἑαυτὴν στρέφεται: Similar to ἐκστρέφει above, στρέφω is also a term which Zosimos frequently uses for alchemical transformations.²⁶³ This sentence rhetorically plays on the fact that στρέφω can be translated both as 'to twist' and 'to convert': Nature twists so greatly that it converts into (twists into) something else.²⁶⁴ There is, however, another interesting possible translation of στρέφω which does not appear explicitly throughout Zosimos' corpus, but which may be consistently present as a thematic undertone: that is, to torture.²⁶⁵ The motif of torture as akin to alchemical operation and transformation is a constant throughout *The Visions*, and may well be adjoined in the use of στρεφομένη...στρέφεται here: just like Ion, Nature is tortured into change.

1.54-5 καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου τῆς ἀρετῆς φύσις καὶ σύνδεσμος: The antithetical phrases in *Lesson 1.4* began with banal interactions in everyday life – speaking and listening, giving and taking, being poor and being rich – but the section has now grown into a universal scale: Zosimos says that these transformations are the nature of excellence, the nature of the entire cosmos, and the nature of the bond between them.²⁶⁶ As discussed at pp.22-5, for Zosimos, ἀρετή can best be translated as the perfection which Nature effects during the transformation of matter, as well as the quest for and achievement of this power of perfection by the initiated alchemist; the aforementioned processes and reciprocities of Nature constitute this alchemical change, which is also said to be part of the nature of the whole cosmos. The universality of the transformative power of nature and the cosmic significance of alchemical truths could not be clearer.

²⁶² Ar. *Nub.* 88.

²⁶³ E.g., *On the Sacred and Divine Art of Gold and Silver Making* 3 (CAAG 3.11).

²⁶⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. στρέφω (p.1654).

²⁶⁵ See e.g., *Pl. Rep.* 330e.

²⁶⁶ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 224.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.5

Lesson 1.5 takes the reader into a miniaturised narrative of sorts. This is one, however, where the reader must actively participate and engage with the text. Indeed, they must build a temple in their imagination: a temple made of a single stone, with neither beginning nor end, and with a stream of the purest water glistening within it. The motif of this noetic temple has been discussed widely in Zosimean scholarship. Mertens has suggested that the temple may be a reference to the alchemical vessel, the *kerotakis*.²⁶⁷ The *kerotakis* is never clearly compared to a temple in Zosimos' corpus, but is often shrouded in religious imagery (most notably in its compounded appearance as the φαλοβωμός). Further, the fact that the first explicit mention of transmutation into gold in *The Visions* takes place in this imaginary temple suggests that it certainly has some connection with the alchemical alembic. Beyond this, the temple also bears clear spiritual connotations. Given that entry into the temple seems to symbolise the spiritual ascension of the alchemist, Fraser suggests that parallels may be drawn between Zosimos' ναός and the conception of a celestial temple in the Valentinian Gnostic tradition.²⁶⁸ As explored in depth by De Conick, the Valentinians, drawing heavily on the motif of the heavenly temple in Jewish apocalyptic and *Hekhalot* literature, imagined their *Pleroma* as such a temple space, in which the initiated gained some secret ritualistic knowledge and were transformed into quasi-angelic figures.²⁶⁹ The parallels with Zosimos' purpose are evident: like the Valentinian temple, the noetic temple is an ethereal, celestial place of spiritual transformation and Gnostic ascension.²⁷⁰ It is possible to synthesise these interpretations: the temple functions as a polyvalent symbol which represents both the site of alchemical transformation and the noetic space where the initiated alchemist comprehends the nature of this transformation, thus advancing on their path of spiritual ascension. Such a reading integrates the material and metaphysical dimensions of Zosimos' alchemical practice.²⁷¹

Around this temple, Zosimos explains, lies a snake. Beyond the ouroboric imagery explored at 1.60, Jung, in his own commentary on *The Visions*, expounds a unique interpretation of the serpentine imagery: that it is representative of the lack of conscious understanding on the part of the alchemist, which must be conquered before one can enter the space of sacred, secret knowledge.²⁷² The snake, Jung posits, being a creature which dwells in the darkness of caves, is Platonically associated with an

²⁶⁷ Mert. 223.

²⁶⁸ Fraser 2007: 50.

²⁶⁹ See, with additional bibliography, De Conick 1999.

²⁷⁰ This also aligns with Hermetic thought about heavenly transformation; see pp.52-3.

²⁷¹ See also Escolano-Poveda (2022: 106) on the temple representing a crypt or bath for figurines of Egyptian deities.

²⁷² Jung 1967a: 89.

ignorance of true reality; it is this ignorance which the alchemist must overcome before they can reach a higher level of spiritual understanding, represented by entry into the temple. Similarly, Fraser has suggested that the snake represents not the ignorance which must be overcome, but the recalcitrant nature of matter which must be overcome.²⁷³ In other words, the materials with which the alchemist works must be conquered so that transmutation can take place, and so that matter can eventually be repurposed (in this case, into something which will aid in the practitioner's religious growth: a step into the temple (ποίησον ἑαυτῷ βάσιν καὶ ἀνάβηθι)). It seems to me that these two possibilities can be reconciled into a single theory for the interpretation of the snake: that ignorance of matter and nature must be overcome and repurposed, so that the initiate alchemist might enter the temple and achieve some level of spiritual progression. Overcoming the snake is the alchemist's quest, for which he will be rewarded with ἀρετή (see pp.22-5).²⁷⁴

Within the temple, Zosimos' reader is said to be able to find the 'sought-after thing' (τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα): that is, a copper man sitting in a river of the purest water.²⁷⁵ When the reader has barely even had time to process this thought, however, Zosimos says that the man has transformed into silver, and promises that – if the reader desires (ἐὰν θελήσῃς) – he will become a man of gold. The alchemical motif of the perfecting transmutation of matter is clear.

All in all, Zosimos uses *Lesson* 1.5 to induct the reader into the 'space for alchemy', a temple space which seems simultaneously to represent an alchemical crucible and the heavenly temples found across a range of Late Antique religious traditions, especially Valentinian Gnosticism. Entry into this space involves a quest against matter, but the transmutative and soteriological power which one finds within the temple makes the challenge worthwhile.

Commentary

1.56 ἵνα μὴ διὰ πολλῶν σοι γράφω: In a similar sense to ὡς ἐν συντόμῳ at 1.53, Zosimos seems to be attempting to summarise his alchemical practice and worldview into a miniature narrative. Whereas the first summary encapsulated the notion of nature changing itself, oscillating between the fundamentally monistic processes of division and union (τῆ διαίρεσει καὶ τῆ ἐνώσει), this summary is much longer and shifts from theory to practice, seemingly encapsulating the alchemist's

²⁷³ Fraser 2007: 50.

²⁷⁴ On the symbolism of overcoming a snake as a mythological quest, see 1.60.

²⁷⁵ On ζητέω and cognates throughout *The Visions*, see 1.6; on these throughout Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature more broadly, see Lopes da Silveira 2020.

duty to seek the entrance to the art, to control matter, to achieve *gnōsis*, and to observe the transmutation of metals into gold.

1.56 φίλτατε: Zosimos' tone suddenly becomes more conversational, as he addresses the reader directly for the first time in *The Visions*. This is certainly not uncommon within Zosimos' oeuvre, which is itself full of letters, addressed most usually to the enigmatic figure of Theosebeia (see p.9). Given the generality of the term φίλτατε, it is difficult to determine exactly who the addressee might be; it seems likely that Zosimos has no specific person in mind, but is addressing the general reader. It is difficult to square the singular form of φίλτατε with the plural form of address, ἀδελφοί, at 2.24. As discussed below, however, κτίσαι σοι suggests a deeply personal instruction from Zosimos; indeed, an instruction to construct a temple in the imagination is naturally personal and individualistic.

As Dickey notes in her compendium, φίλε is one of the most common forms of singular address in Greek literature.²⁷⁶ Its superlative, φίλτατε, is common in Imperial Greek prose, appearing frequently in epistolary works and texts with some didactic element.²⁷⁷ It seems that φίλτατε conveys genuine and deep affection for the addressee, suggesting that the reader – who clearly would need to be an educated alchemical initiate in order to understand the overwhelmingly obscure references and allegories – may be a fellow within Zosimos' metallurgical guild or temple practice.²⁷⁸

1.56 κτίσαι σοι ναόν: Zosimos instructs the reader to build a temple for themselves. The motif of the noetic temple, as explored in the introduction to the present section, is one of the most widely discussed in Zosimean studies, often interpreted as a symbol with a dual meaning: one alchemical, in the sense that the temple represents an alchemical vessel; and another spiritual, in the sense that the temple represents a celestial temple, as one finds in a range of traditions around Zosimos' milieu, especially that of the Sethian Gnostics. Being, then, at once the space for both scientific and spiritual purification, the temple represents the ultimate destination for the Zosimean initiate's transformative journey. In this sense, the term σοι is interesting. Just as the Gnostic and Neo-Platonic traditions emphasised a metaphorical temple, Zosimos also would have been familiar with the tradition of an internal temple; indeed, Paul asks the Corinthians: οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν οἰκεῖ; ('Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the

²⁷⁶ Dickey 1996: 134.

²⁷⁷ See e.g., Libanius, *Ep.* 221.3; *CH* 11.8b.

²⁷⁸ See further Escolano-Poveda 2022.

Spirit of God lives inside you?').²⁷⁹ This seems to reinforce the internal and personal nature of the noetic temple, aligning with the notion of an inward *locus* for worship and transformation, as Zosimos instructs Theosebeia to observe in *FC* 8, and especially in light of Zosimos' taking umbrage with physical temple worship and sacrifice (see pp.45-8).²⁸⁰ The temple is thus an ethereal, internalised space of scientific and spiritual enlightenment.

1.56 μονόλιθον: This term is one of the many compounds of *μόνος* which appear in Zosimos' text. As with these other examples (most notably *μονοειδής* at 1.4), it seems likely that this interest in singularity is a reference to the monistic tendencies and emphasis on unity which dominate Zosimos' own religio-philosophical system and the religio-philosophical tone of *The Visions*.

It is possible that, by the Imperial period, Egypt had long been well-known for monolithic structures. In his *Geographica*, Strabo mentions Egyptian obelisks, statues, and pillars, as well as parts of the Egyptian Labyrinth and *Memnonium*, as being monolithic.²⁸¹ Centuries earlier, Herodotus, in his discussion of the most impressive feats of Egyptian architecture, states his admiration for a monolithic temple chamber which had been moved from Elephantine to Saïs under Pharaoh Amasis II (580-526 BC).²⁸² Egyptian religious architecture, then, seems frequently to have impressed due to its monolithic nature. As Escolano-Poveda notes, the temple imagery within *The Visions* seems to have been influenced by temples which Zosimos may have visited and admired (especially the Temple of Dendera); if this is indeed the case, it is logical to assume that the instruction to create a monolithic temple is based on an historical practice of shaping religious chambers of a singular stone.

1.56-7 ψιμυθοειδῆ, ἀλαβαστροειδῆ, Προκοννήσιον: Zosimos states that the monolithic rock from which the temple is to be made should be Proconnesian marble, while resembling white lead and alabaster. The piling-up of adjectives adds to the splendour with which the reader imagines the temple, implicitly highlighting the importance of the sacred knowledge which is to be imparted within the temple itself (perhaps similar to the crystalline temple at *1 Enoch* 14). It is possible that the statement that the structure ought to resemble lead and alabaster, while actually being made of marble, mirrors the allegorical nature of the text, in which things seem one way but are in fact

²⁷⁹ *1 Cor.* 3:16.

²⁸⁰ Knipe 2011: 68.

²⁸¹ Strabo, *Geog.* 17.1.31, 17.1.37, 17.1.42, 17.1.46.

²⁸² Hdt. 2.175.

another; it is more likely, however, that this is simply a comment on the fact that these three substances share many physical properties and visual similarities.

This white and grey marble – extracted in enormous quantities from quarries on the island of Proconnesus – was famous in antiquity, being used in religious art and architecture from the Ephesian Temple of Artemis in the 6th century BC, to the Roman Herculean Sarcophagus of Genzano in the 2nd century AD, to the Hagia Sophia in Byzantine Constantinople.²⁸³ The most famous structure to incorporate Proconnesian marble, though, was surely the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, a tomb for the Achaemenid satrap Mausolus.²⁸⁴ It is possible that Zosimos had a real structure in mind – indeed, most of the marble imported into Egypt in the Roman period came from Proconnesus – but it is equally possible that the temple being constructed of solid Proconnesian marble exaggerates its grandiosity. After all, Strabo himself stated that the most beautiful features in cities around the Mediterranean were made of Proconnesian marble (τὰ γοῦν κάλλιστα τῶν ταύτη πόλεων ἔργα...ἔστι τῆς λίθου).²⁸⁵

1.57 μήτε ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα μήτε τέλος: Mertens interprets the noetic temple's having neither beginning nor end rather literally as it being a circular building.²⁸⁶ Whilst this is certainly possible, the property of having neither beginning nor end was highly significant in Zosimos' milieu. The most obvious parallel is the ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail, which therefore loops around on itself, having neither a beginning nor an end. With the temple said to be guarded by a snake, the symbol of the ouroboros is fundamental to the present episode (see further the introduction to *Lesson 1.5*). In early Christian literature, however, a person or thing bearing neither beginning nor end rendered that person or thing divine. Paul describes the priest Melchizedek to the Hebrews as having neither a start to his days, nor an end to his life (μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων), while Gregory of Nyssa refers to Christ as having neither beginning nor end (μήτε ἀρχὴν μήτε τέλος ἔχοντα) and Clement of Alexandria refers to divine power itself (τὸ θεῖον) as having neither beginning nor end (τὸ μήτε ἀρχὴν...μήτε τέλος ἔχον).²⁸⁷ This association becomes even more significant in light of the noetic temple representing some metaphysical, ethereal temple, as is especially common in Gnostic thought. In this way, Zosimos' imaginary temple is explicitly indicated as being divine in its lack of

²⁸³ On Proconnesian marble, Pliny, *HN* 36.6-7. See further, Ward-Perkins 1992; Al-Naddaf *et al.* 2010.

²⁸⁴ Note that both the Temple of Artemis and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus were labelled by Antipater of Sidon as two of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world (Antip. Sid. 9.58).

²⁸⁵ Strabo, *Geog.* 13.1.16.

²⁸⁶ Mert. 223.

²⁸⁷ *Heb.* 7:3; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contr. Eunom. praef.*8; Clem. Al., *Strom.* 5.14.

both architectural and temporal limitation; it is a sacred space in which belong timeless truths about the nature of matter and the secrets of alchemical transmutation.

1.57-8 πηγὴν δὲ ἔσωθεν ἔχοντα ὕδατος καθαρωτάτου: The temple is said to contain a spring of the clearest water. As with the majority of images in *The Visions*, interpretation of this spring has followed two paths: a religious interpretation and a scientific interpretation. Indeed, it seems that the spring represents a complex interplay of both the religious, representing a divine font of purification, and the scientific, representing the transformative waters of the alchemical vessel.²⁸⁸

On the former, the religious motif of the spring (πηγή) was widespread in Zosimos' milieu. Whilst there is no mention of water, there is a fascinating line in the Hermetic corpus which describes God himself as the source of all things (πηγή μὲν οὖν πάντων ὁ θεός).²⁸⁹ Further, Plotinus refers to divinity itself as the source of all that is beautiful (τοῦ θείου, ὅθεν ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ καλοῦ), while Gregory of Nyssa states that the divine spring is the source of all excellences of the soul (τῆς θείας πηγῆς, δι' ἧς αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκφύονται), employing language which clearly would have struck a deeper chord with a reader of Zosimos' corpus.²⁹⁰ Merely employing the term, then, engages with a discourse of divine springs which seems to have been wide-spread across multiple disciplines – the Hermetic, the Neo-Platonic, and the Christian – around Zosimos' time.

More specifically to the present example, however, there are also a series of traditions which associated springs and celestial temples, with which Zosimos also would have been familiar.²⁹¹ Again in his *Enneads*, Plotinus mentions an ethereal temple to which the spiritually initiated arrive after death – a temple which is specifically referred to as an ἄδυτον (as Ion's territory at 1.14).²⁹² This temple is itself described as the source and principle (καὶ πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν) of all things. Edwards relates this Plotinian passage to the Zosimean temple through the inspiration and *gnōsis* which come from these celestial πηγαί.²⁹³ As discussed above, the Valentinian Gnostics also pictured their entire Pleroma stylistically as a celestial temple to which the initiated sojourn after death.²⁹⁴ Three specific

²⁸⁸ A third option, of course, is that Zosimos is basing his noetic temple on a real temple which he visited. Whilst many temples contained baptismal fonts (see 1.9), the πηγὴ seems to be more than this. It is worth noting that several ancient Egyptian temples – including the Temple of Karnak and, more importantly for the context of *The Visions*, the Temple of Dendera – contained sacred lakes which was used for ritual purification (see further, Berg 1987). On Zosimos' frequent possible allusion to the Temple of Dendera, see p.54.

²⁸⁹ CH 11.3.

²⁹⁰ Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6.6; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Eccl.* (ap. Alexander 1962: 333).

²⁹¹ On Zosimos' reading culture and literary context, see pp.54-8.

²⁹² Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.11.

²⁹³ Edwards 1992: 64.

²⁹⁴ *Gospel of Philip* 69. See further Fraser 2007: 50.

rituals were imagined to take place within this temple: the mystery of baptism; the mystery of redemption; and the mystery of the bridal chamber.²⁹⁵ Based on this information, Fraser speculates that the spring of Zosimos' noetic temple may resemble the baptismal waters of the Gnostic celestial temple, as the Gnostic initiate is baptised as part of a celestial ascent, much like Zostrianos.²⁹⁶ In both cases, the ethereal waters of the temple seem both to purify and to baptise, in a process of rebirth in *gnōsis*, that is *gnōsis* of both alchemical and religious mysteries.²⁹⁷

Mertens has also suggested a scientific interpretation of the spring.²⁹⁸ In this sense, the water of the spring must stand for Divine Water, the alchemical catalyst which Zosimos holds in such high esteem (see pp.37-9) and which is one of the key components of the *kerotakis* method inherited from Maria. If the temple can indeed be interpreted as the stylised alchemical vessel itself, this reading becomes highly attractive, especially in light of the priest within the temple undergoing transmutation while sat in these transformative waters. As with the majority of Zosimos' references, it seems that the πηγή ὕδατος καθαρωτάτου is to be understood as purificatory water, simultaneously purifying the soul through baptism and purifying metals through alchemical operations. The superlative καθαρωτάτου certainly highlights the exceeding purity of the spring.

1.58 φῶς ἑξαστράπτων ἡλιακόν: The term φῶς is highly significant in Zosimos' worldview, often bearing the meaning of the divine light of the soul with which God imbued humans and which existed in Eden (φῶς ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ διαπνεόμενος), but which was later trapped in the material world by maleficent daemons, constituting the fall of man.²⁹⁹ Indeed, the first human in Zosimos' Gnostic aetiology of mankind is named *Phōs*, becoming Adam only when he becomes encased in the body. Zosimos seems in this instance simply to mean light, but the reader cannot help but make this mental connection. Even if this is the case, it is significant that the light is said to be ἡλιακόν: solar. That the spring shines with the light of the Sun, the planet associated with gold in the ancient alchemical imagination, seems both to highlight the divine aura of the temple space, while also

²⁹⁵ It is not known exactly what is meant by the 'mystery of the bridal chamber'. *Gospel of Philip* 71 discusses God and Mary as engaging in this mystery, so one is presumably able to make an educated guess. See further, with additional bibliography, DeConick 2001.

²⁹⁶ On Zostrianos' baptisms, see p.51.

²⁹⁷ On the theme of Gnostic rebirth throughout Zosimos' corpus (particularly *Lesson* 1.2 and *FC* 8), see pp.49-52. Whilst no celestial temple is mentioned, another example worth noting is Philo's account of Moses purifying his brother, Aaron, in a spring of the purest water (ὕδατι πηγῆς τῷ καθαρωτάτῳ) as he is becoming an Israelite high priest (ἀρχιερέα) (Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2.28).

²⁹⁸ Mert. 223.

²⁹⁹ *FC* 7.

foreshadowing that this is the space where alchemical secrets are learned and matter is transmuted into gold (compare the priest becoming a χρυσάνθρωπον at 1.66).³⁰⁰

1.59 λαβὲ ἐπὶ χεῖράς σου ξίφος: Whilst MSS A and L read λαβῶν, and this is indeed a crucial participle in Zosimos' corpus (see 1.61 and 1.80), this form does not fit the grammar of the sentence, so the imperative λαβὲ is preferred. Further, ἐπὶ χεῖρας seems to be a rare construction for 'into [your] hands', but is given as a variant sense in *LSJ*.³⁰¹ The motif of seizing a sword, with the aim of dismembering a body in a process leading to transformative rebirth (1.61-3), is clearly reminiscent of the dismemberment and subsequent rebirth of Ion in the first dream.

1.59-60 στενόστομος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ τόπος ὅθεν ἐστιν ἡ ἀνοιξις τῆς εἰσόδου: Throughout the opening lines of *Lesson* 1.5, Zosimos describes the reader's approach to the temple – the approach to *gnōsis*, alchemical initiation, and alchemical transmutation – as a quest, with significant challenges to be overcome. The snake which guards the temple is the most obvious of these challenges (see 1.60, below), but the fact that Zosimos describes the entrance to the temple as στενόστομος (narrow-mouthed) clearly continues to suggest the difficulty of entry. It is as though the alchemical secrets themselves are resistant to being understood; such is certainly the impression the reader gets both from the allegorical nature of Zosimos' text and the allegorical images themselves.

The term στενόστομος appears only once elsewhere in Zosimos' corpus, in reference to the narrow mouth of an ἄγγος (some kind of alchemical vessel).³⁰² This bolsters Mertens's suggestion, discussed above, that the noetic temple itself resembles an alchemical vessel, in which runs a stream of the purest water (to be understood as Divine Water, 1.57-8) and in which the metallic priest himself changes from copper, to silver, and finally to gold (to be understood as the transmutation of metals in alchemical practice, 1.65-6).³⁰³ On the theme of narrowness in a martyrological text – the *Martyrdom of Perpetua* – from which Zosimos seems obviously to be drawing inspiration, see 1.63.

1.60 δράκων παράκειται τῇ εἰσόδῳ φυλάττων τὸν ναόν: The reader's journey to attain alchemical knowledge, styled by Zosimos as a quest, meets its greatest obstacle yet: a snake guards the temple,

³⁰⁰ Mert. 223.

³⁰¹ *LSJ*, s.v. χεῖρ (pp.1983-4).

³⁰² *Omega* 14.

³⁰³ Mert. 223.

lying across the entrance.³⁰⁴ The role which the snake plays in the narrative of *Lesson 1.5* – as the blockade of matter to be controlled by the reader in an alchemical fashion, as well as the blockade of ignorance to be intellectually overcome – is discussed in the introduction to this section; the present comment instead deals with the tradition of the serpent in ancient literary culture, alchemical and beyond. The motif of the snake is one which crops up repeatedly in the history of alchemical iconography, most notably in the form of the ouroboros, the snake which eats its own tail, representative of unity, regeneration, and the infinite.³⁰⁵ These themes surrounding the ouroboros are best recognised in the text inside the stylised diagram of the ouroboros attributed to Cleopatra in fig. 7; the text reads:

ἔν τὸ πᾶν καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ τὸ πᾶν καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πᾶν· καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔχοι τὸ πᾶν, οὐδέν ἐστιν τὸ πᾶν.
εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἔχων τὸν ἴον μετὰ (τὰ) δύο συνθέματα.

One is the all and from it comes the all and to it goes the all; and unless it has the all, nothing is the all. One is the snake which has the *ios* after (the) two treatments.³⁰⁶

Whilst the ouroboros is not explicitly mentioned in the present episode, one cannot help but make such an obvious connection, especially in light of the temple itself being said to have neither beginning nor end (μήτε ἀρχὴν ἔχοντα μήτε τέλος, 1.57), and thus being associated with the infinite unity which the ouroboros symbolised in the ancient alchemical imagination.

A more widely-known tradition involving the serpent, however, is the role of the δράκων as a guardian in ancient Greek and Egyptian thought, an idea which Mertens discusses at length.³⁰⁷ The motif of a snake guarding a sacred space or object appears to have been relatively widespread in ancient literature. The two most notable examples of this in the Classical tradition include Herodotus' reference to an Athenian legend of a great snake which guards the Acropolis (ὄφιν μέγαν φύλακα τῆς ἀκροπόλιος) and Jason's challenge of retrieving the Golden Fleece, which was guarded by the Colchian Dragon.³⁰⁸ The latter example may be particularly relevant to Zosimos' example, given that Jason's slaughtering the δράκων is styled as the ultimate quest; Pindar even suggests that

³⁰⁴ Hippolytus of Rome suggests that an intricate relationship between temples and snakes has a long-standing tradition, even claiming that the Greek ναός derives from the Hebrew word for snake נָחַשׁ (*nahas*), whence the Gnostic Naassenes supposedly acquired their name (*Ref. Haer.* 5.4).

³⁰⁵ On the ouroboros, see Sheppard 1962; Reemes 2015.

³⁰⁶ MS M : 188v.

³⁰⁷ Mertens 1988: 13-5; Mert. 40.

³⁰⁸ Hdt. 8.41; Ogden 2013: 58-63. See *ibid.* for the polyvalence of δράκων as snake or dragon.

there was doubt over Jason's ability to perform this task because of the threatening obstacle which the serpent posed (ἔλπετο δ' οὐκέτι οἱ κείνόν γε πράξασθαι πόνον. / κείτο γὰρ λόχμα, δράκοντος δ' εἶχετο λαβροταῶν γενύων).³⁰⁹ The notion of snakes guarding temples is similarly common in Egyptian thought.³¹⁰ This is an idea which can also be seen in the icon of the *uraeus*, the reared cobra which adorned the crowns of both pharaohs and gods in ancient Egyptian iconography.³¹¹ In sum, the imagery of the snake as a religious guardian seems to have been prevalent in ancient Graeco-Egyptian thought, as well as representing the ouroboros in the alchemical imagination and serving as a barrier-to-entry for the reader's attempt to acquire the forbidden secrets of the alchemical and religio-philosophical mysteries.



Fig. 7:

MS M : 188v. Stylised ouroboros containing the text: ἔν τὸ πᾶν καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ τὸ πᾶν καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πᾶν' καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔχοι τὸ πᾶν, οὐδέν ἔστιν τὸ πᾶν. εἷς ἔστιν ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἔχων τὸν ἰὸν μετὰ τὰ δύο συνθέματα. (Mert. 22).

1.60-1 τοῦτον χειρωσάμενος πρῶτον θῦσον: Zosimos instructs his reader to tackle the snake head-on, taking it into their hands and sacrificing it. The participle *χειρωσάμενος* seems clearly to recall Ion's comment that his killer – the man who came from the East with a knife – overpowered him (ἔχειρώσατο με, 1.15), before dismembering the priest and flaying his head. Whilst the imagery of dismembering and burning resembled something of a sacrificial scene, this association was only implied in the case of Ion; here, however, Zosimos instructs his reader explicitly to sacrifice the snake (θῦσον). On the theme of sacrifice in Zosimos' text and the place of sacrifice in Zosimos' historical context, see pp.45-8 and Knipe 2011.

³⁰⁹ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.243-4.

³¹⁰ Goyon 1985: 124-7.

³¹¹ Grimes 2018: 143.

1.61 ἀποδερματώσας αὐτόν: As with χειρωσάμενος above, Zosimos again recycles the terminology of Ion's death in the sacrificial instructions which he offers to the reader; just as Ion was flayed about his whole head (ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν, 1.16), so too must the reader flay the serpent. As suggested on p.47, this repetition is reminiscent of the repeated stock sacrificial scenes which one finds in the Homeric corpus. These linguistic similarities suggest that the sacrificial processes – to be understood as the alchemical operations – between Ion and the snake are the same; thus, Zosimos prepares the reader for the fact that the spiritual and material perfection which Ion enjoyed in *Lesson 1.2* will also appear in *Lesson 1.5*.

1.61-2 καὶ λαβῶν τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ὀστέων: Once again, Zosimos' language mirrors that of Ion's death. Just as the man wielding the μάχαιρα in *Lesson 1.2* engaged with Ion's flesh and bones (τὰ ὀστέα ταῖς σαρκί συνέπλεξε, 1.17), so too is the reader to deal with the snake's flesh and bones (see 1.17 for the interpretation that speaking of flesh and bones entails a holistic rendering of the entirety of the material body, especially interesting in light of Luke 24:39).

Instructing the reader to take the flesh and bones of the snake, Zosimos employs the participle λαβῶν. In the texts of Zosimos' corpus which contain technical recipes, λαβῶν frequently appears as the first word of a particular set of instructions, potentially indicating the nature of the following passage to the reader. To specify just a few, λαβῶν is the opening word in a particular set of alchemical instructions in *On Quicklime* (λαβῶν...τὸν ἀλαβάστρινον λίθον...) and *On the Sacred and Divine Art of Gold and Silver Making* (λαβῶν τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ χαλκοῦ...), while, beyond Zosimos' corpus, this convention appears in, for example, *On the Same Divine Water* (λαβῶν ὡὰ...), *Washing Cadmia* (λαβῶν καδμίαν...), and *The Creation of Quicksilver* (λαβῶν ψιμίθιον...).³¹² The term in this context thus potentially confirms that the sacrificial operations which the reader mentally performs on the snake mirror physical alchemical operations. On the snake's destruction and transformative recomposition at the hands of the reader being representative of the alchemical process, see Dufault 2015 (esp. 242).

1.62 διέλης μέλη μέλη: The rather odd doubling of μέλη μέλη seems to have been a grammatical feature of New Testament and Late Antique Greek. Mertens points to the *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, which treats this feature, suggesting that the immediate repetition of

³¹² *On Quicklime* 1 (CAAG 3.2); *On the Sacred and Divine Art of Gold and Silver Making* 1 (CAAG 3.11); *On the Same Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.8); *Washing Cadmia* 1 (CAAG 3.36); *The Creation of Quicksilver* 1 (CAAG 3.45).

a word can be understood with the sense of κατά + accusative.³¹³ This is similar to the Biblical Hebrew ‘*quivis* construction’, by which a noun doubles to indicate that each part of a given group is to be considered separately.³¹⁴ Indeed, a Hellenised version of this can be seen in a range of Imperial and Byzantine Greek texts, including the *Martyrdom of St James the Persian*, in which the martyr is said to be cut apart limb by limb (κοπή μῆλη μῆλη) before being decapitated with a μάχαιρα (ἡ κεφαλή αὐτοῦ περιτέμνεται μαχαίρα), employing language which is strikingly similar to Zosimos’ own linguistic choices (see 3.10).³¹⁵

1.62 καὶ συνθεῖς μέλος μέλος μετὰ τῶν ὀστεῶν: The late linguistic convention which applied to μέλη μῆλη above applies also to μέλος μέλος in this context.³¹⁶ The slightly extended phrase (μετὰ τῶν ὀστεῶν διέλης μῆλη μῆλη· καὶ συνθεῖς μέλος μέλος μετὰ τῶν ὀστεῶν) also contains a chiasmic structure, possibly mimicking the interweaving and bonding of the snake’s constituent parts, and indeed of the various substances in the alchemical vessel. The reunification of the snake’s limbs and bones mirrors the reunification of Ion’s bones and flesh in *Lesson 1* (τὰ ὀστέα ταῖς σαρκὶ συνέπλεξε, 1.17).³¹⁷

1.63 ποιήσον ἑαυτῷ βᾶσιν καὶ ἀνάβηθι καὶ εἴσελθε: The imperatives seem to become more *staccato* and direct, seeming to build the reader’s anticipation of what will be found inside the temple once the narrative ventures inside. It is not insignificant that Zosimos instructs the reader to repurpose the matter of the snake to construct a step (βάσιν) to facilitate entry into the temple. Firstly, the step is the necessary aid upon which the temple might be entered; this may be interpreted as the alchemist’s need to master matter so that they can enter the temple, receiving philosophical *gnōsis* and achieving alchemical tinctures as they do so.³¹⁸ Secondly, the notion of climbing a step as part of a spiritual ascent is key to the later portions of *The Visions* (see 2.2), indeed the same verb ἀναβαίνω is employed at 2.2, 2.3, and 2.16.³¹⁹ It is possible that stepping up into the

³¹³ Mert. 223; Blass and Debrunner 1976: 423.

³¹⁴ E.g., *יִשְׁׁרְאֵל לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יְכַלְסֵם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (‘Whosoever (שׂי אֱלֹהֵי) curseth his God shall bear his sin’, *Lev.* 24:15). See further, Samet and Mastey 2023: 767-9.

³¹⁵ *Martyrdom of St James the Persian* 6.12. See also *Mark* 6:39 and *Acts of Thomas* 8.7.

³¹⁶ For this convention elsewhere with the nominative, see *Mark* 6:40.

³¹⁷ See 1.16 for a discussion of the interpretation that the reconstitution and rebirth of Ion borrows language from *Ezek.* 37:6-8, which Origen interpreted as related to the transformative rebirth of Christ (see further Dufault 2021: 210).

³¹⁸ Fraser 2007: 50. See further 1.60.

³¹⁹ Whilst the verb used is slightly different, it should be noted that Zosimos instructs Theosebeia to run up (ἀνάδραμε) to the heavens at *FC* 8.

temple mirrors this same spiritual ascent for purification and forbidden knowledge; the singular step in βάσιν, however, may make such a connection unlikely.³²⁰ Thirdly, there is a notable *comparandum* for the motif of a δράκων being used as a step.³²¹ In the *Martyrdom of Perpetua*, the imprisoned Perpetua sees a vision from God: a narrow (compare στενόστομος, 1.59) golden ladder reaching to the heavens, with a dragon lying at the bottom. Perpetua uses the dragon's head as the first step in her ascent (*et quasi primum gradum calcarem, calcavi illi caput et ascendi*), ultimately meeting with God himself, who tells her that she is welcome; Perpetua understands her dream as a confirmation that her salvation is secure and that she will be reborn in the Kingdom of Heaven.³²² It is possible that Zosimos' reader likewise understands entry into the temple as entering into the space for transformative rebirth after suffering, in a grand line of imitation which includes alchemists and Christian martyrs, going back through Zosimos, Ion, and Perpetua, but which ultimately starts with Christ (on the theme of martyrdom throughout *The Visions*, see pp.48-9).

1.63 εὐρήσεις ἐκεῖ τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα: This sought-after thing presumably refers to the sacred, forbidden secrets of alchemical transmutation, or perhaps (with the following lines in mind) the transformation itself. This transformation may refer to the alchemical *magnum opus* – transformation into gold – or the religious *telos* – transformation into a spirit.³²³ In her examination of early alchemical texts, Lopes da Silveira highlights the importance of the phrase τὸ ζητούμενον, referring to the *magnum opus*, in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature. In the Hermetic tractate *Isis to Horus*, Isis describes the revelation of alchemical secrets as the τὴν τῶν ζητουμένων μυστηρίων παράδοσιν ('the transmission of sought-after mysteries'), while Olympiodorus states explicitly that Divine Water is the sought-after thing: τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ θεῖον ὕδωρ ἐστὶ τὸ ζητούμενον.³²⁴ At the same time, in *Omega*, Zosimos himself refers to the quest of the philosopher: to seek oneself, to know God, and to dominate the ineffable triad (ζητεῖν ἑαυτὸν, καὶ θεὸν ἐπιγνόντα κρατεῖν τὴν ἀκατονόμαστον τριάδα).³²⁵ In this way, Graeco-Egyptian alchemists seem to have understood ζητέω and ζήτησις as polyvalent terms, referring simultaneously to the quest for the power to enact alchemical transmutation and the quest for *gnōsis* and subsequent salvation. As with *The Visions* as a whole, there seems to be a great deal of overlap between the material and spiritual senses of a phrase.

³²⁰ On the motif of the spiritual ascent in *The Visions* and its literary and religio-philosophical context, see pp.52-3.

³²¹ *LSJ*, s.v. δράκων (p.448). See further Ogden 2013.

³²² *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 4.

³²³ See pp.11-7 on the interplay between these key aspects of Zosimos' text.

³²⁴ *CAAG* 1.13.4; *ibid.* 2.4.18.

³²⁵ *Omega* 4.

1.64 ιερέα τὸν χαλκάνθρωπον ὄν ὄρας: On metallic men in Zosimos' narrative, see 1.37.

1.64 ἐν τῇ πηγῇ καθήμενον καὶ τὸ χρῆμα συνάγοντα: The imaginary metallic priest is said to be sat in the waters of the river, drawing 'the thing' (τὸ χρῆμα) into himself. It seems clear that τὸ χρῆμα relates back to τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα in the previous line. Whatever the thing with such transformative power of alchemical transmutation might be, the copper priest collects it.³²⁶ These two actions seem to reflect the nature of Zosimos' metallic men: in his action of being sat in the waters of alchemical transmutation and Gnostic baptism, the priest seems to be the recipient of the transformation, while in his action of collecting the sought-after thing, the priest seems to be the one about to enact the transformation. As discussed at 1.38, this is the inherent duality of the χαλκάνθρωπος: being made of metal, he is the object of alchemical experimentation, but as a man, he is the alchemist himself. This duality is brilliantly displayed in the active and passive descriptions of the metallic man at 1.39: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ιερουργῶν καὶ ιερουργούμενος. The same duality seems to apply to the priest of the noetic temple.

1.65 μετέβη γὰρ τοῦ χρώματος τῆς φύσεως: Mertens translates as 'il a quitté sa couleur naturelle', which seems to miss the force of the two nouns: 'he changed [literally, from] the colour of his nature'. This is not a trivial or insignificant difference, especially given the importance of the term *physis* in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical theory. As discussed at pp.32-4, *physis* represents simultaneously the macrocosmic transformative power of Nature and also, more relevantly to the present example, the divinely-imbued microcosmic qualities and tendencies – the nature – of a substance. A transmutation to a substance's *physis* suggests a change on a fundamental level.³²⁷

1.65-6 γέγονεν ἀργυράνθρωπος...ἐὰν θελήσης, ἔξεις χρυσάνθρωπον: Finally, the transmutation of metals is explicitly laid out. The priest, formerly made of copper, is said to become a man made of silver, and is foreshadowed as eventually becoming a man made of gold. It is interesting, however, that Zosimos says that this will only happen 'if you want' (ἐὰν θελήσης). This phrase may represent the necessary desire on the part of the alchemist. The journey into alchemical knowledge – inside the alchemically charged space of the temple – has thus far been presented as a quest, and Zosimos'

³²⁶ See CAAG 2.4.18 for Olympiodorus' suggestion that τὸ ζητούμενον is the Divine Water itself (that is, the waters in which the priest is sat).

³²⁷ For Zosimos' theory of alchemical transmutation, see Dufault 2015.

later ascent across the planetary spheres in *Lessons* 2 and 3 depict a journey which one must tackle with vigour and ἐπιθυμία (2.2). In this way, Zosimos stresses the availability of alchemical knowledge only to those who crave it deeply enough (see this theme of desire also at 1.30).

Becoming gold represents the *telos* of the copper-man's transformative journey; in other words, he has now been made perfect. This transformation bears deep symbolic resonances. If the interpretation of Zosimos' noetic temple as a replica of Gnostic celestial temples is correct, the gold-man, as the priest of this temple, would be equated with the archetype of the priest of the heavenly temple: a role fulfilled in the Gnostic tradition by Christ himself.³²⁸ Thus, the transformation of the gold man within the noetic temple represents the perfection of matter which is possible through alchemical initiation, and also the perfection of the self through salvific *gnōsis*.

³²⁸ De Conick 1999: 339.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.6

Sharply cutting away from the narrative of the noetic temple, Zosimos continues to muse on general alchemical principles. In this way, *Lesson 1.6* seems to resemble, more than any other section, the introductory *Lesson 1.1*, throughout which Zosimos considered religio-philosophical truths relevant to the practice of alchemy, especially materialistic monism, in relatively cryptic terms.

Zosimos claims that all of the previous chapters have been a prologue (προοίμιον) which allowed readers to enter into the practice of decoding the allegorical mysteries of the text. It seems odd that such a large and varied portion of the text is considered a prologue, especially given that so little is left of *Lesson 1*, and *Lessons 2* and *3* continue the oneiric narrative started in *Lesson 1.2*. It seems equally plausible that the text has been corrupted and reordered, and that *Lesson 1.6* originally followed the introduction in *Lesson 1.1*, which did indeed offer clues as to the interpretation of the remainder of the text. Equally plausibly, Mertens suggests that *Lesson 1* is unfinished, and that the remainder of the text to be interpreted is no longer extant. These are, however, speculative.³²⁹ Nevertheless, Zosimos also states that the introductory sections have been searches for virtue (a phrase discussed at length at pp.22-5), as well as being doctrines of the mind, active techniques, and the revelation of hidden knowledge. Zosimos seems clearly to be referring to both the religio-philosophical and alchemical initiation which constitutes the reader's journey through *The Visions*, playing into a duality which frames the entire narrative.

Zosimos then presents three alchemical maxims, inviting the reader to interpret their meaning: one maxim is part of the most famous and popular saying of the Graeco-Egyptian tradition, while he invents the other two. The first saying is: νικῶσα φύσις τὰς φύσεις ('Nature is the one who conquers Natures'). This is the second of three similar phrases which constitute the famous alchemical maxim which Synesius attributes to Democritus, who supposedly formulated it on the basis of principles taught to him by Ostanos:

ἡ φύσις τῆ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ

Nature delights in Nature, and Nature conquers Nature, and Nature masters Nature.³³⁰

³²⁹ See Mert. xxii-xxiii for the contents of the earliest alchemical manuscript (MS M) being reordered. Zosimos' text itself is (seemingly) correctly ordered in this codex, but this is not to say that it may not have been previously reordered and then copied by the MS M scribe.

³³⁰ E.g., *On the Four Bodies Being the Food of the Tinctures 2* (CAAG 3.19); CAAG 2.3.1.

Interpretation of this well-known maxim is explored at pp.32-4. Zosimos' other maxims are significantly more complex and esoteric. They involve a personification of Nature who, among other bizarre actions, becomes dizzy, consumes her own face, believes that she is dead, speaks with a Hebrew accent, and punishes herself.³³¹ These many parts are treated below within two comments, the full expressions themselves, in an attempt to preserve their unity as much as possible. It seems that the various odd actions ascribed by Zosimos to Nature mirror – as one might expect – a series of alchemical operations, playing heavily on material which appears in the dream sequences throughout *Lessons* 1.2 and 1.3. These are explored in detail below.

All in all, *Lesson* 1.6 invites the reader to decode the allegorical messaging behind Zosimos' text by reiterating in three cryptic aphorisms the same alchemical operations and religio-philosophical secrets which are baked into the previous sections of *The Visions*.

Commentary

1.67 τοῦτο τὸ προοίμιον: See the above introduction to this section for an analysis of which bits of the text might be considered the 'prologue' (προοίμιον).

1.67 εἴσοδος: The opening line of this section marks the third reference to an εἴσοδος in *The Visions*, following the vat of boiling water at 1.28 (which is also described as the ἔξοδος καὶ μεταβολή, 'exit and means of transformation') and the noetic temple at 1.60. The κόλασις of boiling water and the temple are both explicitly described as ideal locales for transformation and, by extension, the transmission of alchemical knowledge; by describing his text thus far as an εἴσοδος for opening up and revealing (ἀνοίγεσθαι) the messages below, Zosimos is explicitly indicating that one must actively enter into his text to uncover the secrets of alchemical transmutation. Lopes da Silveira even suggests that this is the first example of a cryptic term being made clear (see κεκρυμμένων ῥήσεων εἰς φανερόν γινομένων, 1.69); in other words, it is at this stage that the earlier entrances are revealed firmly to be entrances into alchemical understanding and initiation.³³²

³³¹ On *physis* in alchemical theory, see pp.32-4. The personification of Nature is a key motif in the *Hermetica*, which relates the story of mankind being born because Nature and the human soul fell in love (*CH* 1.14).

³³² Lopes da Silveira 2020: 231.

1.67 τοῦ ἀνοίγεσθαί σοι τὰ παρακάτω ἄνθη λόγων: The imagery of the flower is certainly interesting; one can certainly picture a flower opening up into bloom and gradually revealing that which is hidden within, just as Zosimos’ tantalisingly cryptic messages gradually reveal themselves to the reader who slowly acquires the knowledge to understand them. To what exactly ἄνθη λόγων might refer is discussed in the introduction to the present section, but it seems most plausible to suggest that it might refer to the three alchemical maxims within this section: the reader is to use the narrative of Zosimos’ dreams, through the lens of three alchemical aphorisms, to understand the nature of alchemical change.

Further, owing to their ability apparently to die, be reborn, and transform – very often changing colour – flowers are a key motif in ancient alchemical literature, often representative of the art itself. Indeed, Comarius recounts Maria saying exactly this about flowers: κατὰ μικρὸν ἐμφύονται καὶ ἀναβαίνουσι καὶ ἐνδύονται ποικίλα χρώματα, καὶ ἐνδοξα καθάπερ τὰ ἄνθη ἐν τῷ ἔαρι.³³³ Given this alchemical parallel between flowers and metals – or, at the very least, the transformative potentiality of these – there may be a level on which Zosimos claims that opening up the flowers of words (ἄνθη λόγων) is equivalent to opening up the words which describe the transmutations which Nature effects on matter.

1.67-8 ζητήσεις ἀρετῶν καὶ σοφίας καὶ φρονήσεως: Given the title which is ascribed to Zosimos’ work – περὶ ἀρετῆς – it could be said that the reader’s endeavour to engage with the text is itself a ‘search for virtue’. A parallel could be drawn between the reader’s search – the reader’s active quest without a definitive end – in the pursuit of virtue, and those being burned alive in the vat of boiling water in Zosimos’ second dream sequence, who are themselves described as seeking virtue (οἱ γὰρ θέλοντες ἄνθρωποι ἀρετῆς τυχεῖν, 1.29). See pp.22-5 for a discussion of the term ἀρετή in Zosimean literature and the wider intellectual and literary milieu.

The plural ἀρετῶν is certainly worthy of note; this is, in fact, the only time in Zosimos’ corpus that the term is given in a pluralised form. Lopes da Silveira has suggested that the plural mirrors the multiple possible interpretations of Zosimos’ text and the multiple ways by which perfection might be achieved.³³⁴ Whilst this is an attractive interpretation given the tantalisingly cryptic yet polyvalent nature of many terms within *The Visions*, this edition interprets the plural ἀρετῶν as standing in apposition with καὶ σοφίας καὶ φρονήσεως: ‘the searches for virtues, both wisdom and prudence’. The notion of σοφία and φρόνησις being subsumed under the title of ἀρεταὶ as qualities needed by

³³³ CAAG 4.20.9.

³³⁴ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 231.

a philosopher occurs several times throughout Neo-Platonic literature. Plotinus, a rough contemporary of Zosimos, states that wisdom and prudence are the virtues which orient the soul towards the Divine Intelligence (έν ψυχῇ τοίνυν πρὸς νοῦν ἡ ὄρασις σοφία καὶ φρόνησις, ἀρεταὶ αὐτῆς); further, Proclus, in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, asserts mankind's understanding that wisdom and prudence are virtuous (ἅπαντες γὰρ τὴν φρόνησιν καὶ τὴν σοφίαν ἀρετὴν ὑπειλήφασιν).³³⁵ Ultimately, Zosimos too affirms the philosopher's duty to seek certain qualities. These qualities, it must also be noted, are both intellectual (σοφία) and practical (φρόνησις), echoing the importance of both of alchemy's goals, the internal perfection of the spirit and the materialistic perfection of metals.³³⁶ This foreshadows the dichotomy, drawn between the intellectual νοῦ δόγματα and the practical μέθοδοι δραστικάι (doctrines of the mind and active techniques, 1.68), discussed below.

1.68 νοῦ δόγματα καὶ μέθοδοι δραστικάι: In addition to the searches for various virtues which befit the philosopher, Zosimos also claims that his work reveals both doctrines of the mind (νοῦ δόγματα) and active techniques (μέθοδοι δραστικάι). This acknowledgement of the two aspects of alchemy – intellectual contemplation and practical technique – lies at the heart of Zosimos' scientific practice. See the discussion at pp.34-9 and the introduction to *Lesson 1.4* for Zosimos' interest in alchemical technique, method, and apparatus.³³⁷

To what exactly νοῦ δόγματα refer, what exactly is being meditated upon, may be answered by the *Poimandres*, in which Hermes Trismegistos tells Poimandres – the personification of divine *Nous* itself – that he wishes to learn about the things that are, understand their nature, and acquire knowledge of God (μαθεῖν θέλω τὰ ὄντα καὶ νοῆσαι τὴν τούτων φύσιν, καὶ γνῶναι τὸν θεόν).³³⁸ One might also point to *CH 11* – entitled νοῦ πρὸς Ἑρμῆν (*Discourse to Hermes about Mind*) – in which the divine *Nous* explains to Hermes both the nature of God – τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ...οὐσία – and also secrets about God and the cosmos – ὡς ἔχει ὁ θεὸς καὶ τὸ πᾶν.³³⁹ It seems highly plausible that the intellectual considerations which Zosimos encourages concern the nature of the individual, the nature of God, and the relationship between these disparate entities.

³³⁵ Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.2.7; Proclus, *In Rep.* 3.26.

³³⁶ *CGL*, s.v. σοφία (p.1277); s.v. φρόνησις (p.1479).

³³⁷ The term μέθοδος appears in *The Visions* at 1.49, 1.50, 1.50, 1.51, 1.52, 1.67, 1.81.

³³⁸ *CH* 1.3.

³³⁹ *ibid.* 11.2, 11.6a.

1.68-9 ἀποκαλύψεις κεκρυμμένων ῥήσεων εἰς φανερόν γινομένων: The term ἀποκάλυψις in this context may be somewhat polysemous: the secrets of alchemy are simultaneously being revealed by the correct interpretation of cryptic phrases, just as alchemical operations are revealed by the alchemist uncovering the vessel. Although Zosimos never uses ἀποκάλυψις in this sense of literally uncovering an alchemical vessel to reveal the products of some scientific process, it surely would have been a fairly standard association, and, to be sure, the term is employed by the later (7th-11th century) author of *On the Same Divine Water* in this way.³⁴⁰

The association of knowledge with light (εἰς φανερόν γινομένων) is common in the ancient philosophical imagination, appearing in both the Gnostic and Hermetic literature with which Zosimos would have been familiar, but dating back as far as Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, in which people can only be freed when they turn and experience the true light of day (περιάγειν τὸν αὐχένα...καὶ πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἀναβλέπειν).³⁴¹ A key example in the Hermetic tradition appears in the *Poimandres*; as the heavens are revealed to Hermes, he states that he beheld a boundless view and that, taking in these secret mysteries of reality, everything became light (φῶς [δὲ] πάντα γεγεννημένα).³⁴²

1.69 καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς μεθοδεύει χρόνος: It is unclear what exactly is meant by the 'time of virtue'; the phrase ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς...χρόνος appears nowhere else in the alchemical tradition, nor indeed in the religio-philosophical traditions with which Zosimos would have been familiar. Timeliness and the search for opportune timing (καιροί) are certainly important themes in Zosimos' practice, but are not obviously referenced here.³⁴³ Rather, the 'time of virtue' may refer to the time when the alchemist – the practitioner who seeks ἀρετή – finally finds it, through successful transmutation, spiritual enlightenment, or indeed both. On this interpretation, the verb μεθοδεύει becomes particularly interesting. The sensory world, 'the all' (τὸ πᾶν) – a phrase with a huge amount of alchemical significance – is metaphorically treated (μεθοδεύει) by *gnōsis* and transformed from a state of 'the unknown' to a state of 'the known', with the same vocabulary employed as is used in literal alchemical treatments and transformations (i.e. μεθοδεύω). Just as matter is treated and changed at the time of scientific experimentation, so too is reality treated and changed at the time of Gnostic enlightenment, when previously hidden ideas (κεκρυμμένων ῥήσεων) are made clear by the

³⁴⁰ *On the Same Divine Water* 2 (CAAG 3.8). On the dating of this text, see Dufault 2017.

³⁴¹ On light as a Gnostic motif of enlightenment, see Jonas 1958: 57-8. Plato, *Republic* 515c-d. Leigh (2010: 207-210) gives a detailed analysis of the philosophical resonance of light as being associated with truth and knowledge.

³⁴² CH 1.4.

³⁴³ Werrett 2023.

light of revelation (ἀποκαλύψεις...εἰς φανερόν, 1.67-8). See the interpretation of the term ἀρετή in *The Visions*, in light of the Greek title of the work, at pp.22-5.

1.69-70 τί ἐστὶν "νικῶσα φύσις τὰς φύσεις";: In the first of Zosimos' three cryptic maxims in this section, he reforms into a question part of the most common alchemical maxim in Graeco-Egyptian Antiquity: ἡ φύσις τῇ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ.³⁴⁴ This saying is discussed at pp.32-4. Thus, it will suffice at this moment to note that Nature's conquering natures reflects the power of φύσις to transform and perfect itself through natural processes; such processes are exactly what the alchemist attempts to manipulate and to replicate. The exact features of Nature's perfecting transformation of itself are the subsequent maxims, both of which answer this initial question. It is also interesting that the singular φύσις conquers the plural φύσεις; whilst the most logical interpretation of this is surely 'Nature defeating natures' (the capitalisation indicating that the macrocosmic is influencing the microcosmic), this line can also be read on a monistic level: unity conquers multiplicity.³⁴⁵

1.70-2 "ἀποτελεῖται καὶ γίνεται ἰλιγγιώσα καὶ ἐκθλιβομένη πρὸς τὴν ζήτησιν κοινὸν πρόσωπον τοῦ παντός τῆς ἐργασίας ἐρωμένης ἀναλαμβάνει καὶ τὴν οἰκείαν ὕλην τοῦ εἴδους κατεσθίει": In Zosimos' second cryptic phrase, Nature – seemingly both personified as an alchemist engaging with the process of transformation, and also represented as an alchemical product in the process of being transformed – is said to become dizzy, to be forced into work which she loves, and finally to devour her own face, a face which is described as common to all. This – and indeed the following aphorism at 1.72.4 – could be interpreted as a response to the question above which draws on the story of Ion's death and transformation in *Lesson 1.2*. The interesting phrase that Nature becomes dizzy (γίνεται ἰλιγγιώσα) may be a complex reference to Ion's destruction into an amorphous *prima materia*: Viano cites a parallel in Plato's *Timaeus* – a key text in the interpretation of Zosimos' *Visions* – in which Plato describes the cosmos, in an amorphous state before unity is imposed upon it by the Demiurge, as being in a state of dizziness, swaying back and forth, unable to stay balanced (οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἰσορροπεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀνωμάλως πάντη ταλαντουμένην σειεσθαι).³⁴⁶ Another interesting Platonic *comparandum* occurs in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates describes the body as leading the soul towards

³⁴⁴ *On the Four Bodies Being the Food of the Tinctures 2* (CAAG 3.19). See further Viano 1995: 99.

³⁴⁵ Salvaneschi 1991: 7.

³⁴⁶ Pl. *Ti.* 52e; Viano 2005: 100.

dizziness as though drunk (εἰλιγγιᾷ ὥσπερ μεθύουσα) and away from that which is good.³⁴⁷ Nature's dizziness, then, in Zosimos' second maxim, seems plausibly to represent the destruction of the body (or the need thereof) to create, as it were, a clean slate for transformation.

Just as Ion is taken and transformed by force, so too is Nature passively pressed (ἐκθλιβομένη) into the search for material and spiritual perfection. This term ζήτησις – or cognates, such as ζητέω – are common in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature, representing the quest for perfection and the alchemical *magnum opus*; indeed Zosimos even claims that inside the noetic temple of *Lesson 1.5*, one will find τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα. Although pressed into this task, however, Nature is in love with her work (τῆς ἐργασίας ἐρωμένης); Nature is desirous of change through alchemy because Nature is ultimately desirous of perfection (recalling Nature's transformation of itself into a more perfected state at 1.70). Nature's taking on a new face recalls the outward transformation inherent in alchemical practice, and which was seen in Ion's death and rebirth. This face is importantly said to be a κοινὸν πρόσωπον; it is a common face. In other words, Nature's appearance has been reduced to the fundamental, unified matter from which all substance and diversity arises.³⁴⁸ Nature's 'common face' is the appearance of the *prima materia* (see pp.29-30). Finally, Nature is said to consume her own appearance (τὴν...ὑλὴν τοῦ εἴδους κατεσθίει) in a scene which recalls Ion's consumption of his own flesh: ἡμεσεν πάσας τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ (1.20). Ultimately, as suggested, it seems that this maxim answers the above question, cryptically describing the process by which Nature conquers itself, while drawing on Zosimos' interaction with Ion earlier in the text, possibly tantalising the reader with a cypher for decoding *The Visions*, while keeping that solution accessible only to the initiated and enlightened.

1.72-4 “εἶθ' οὕτως πεσοῦσα τοῦ προτέρου σχήματος θνήσκειν οἶεται καὶ ὅταν βαρβαρίζουσα μιμῆται οἶον ἰουδαϊκὴν ἐκόντως, τότε διεκδικήσασα ἑαυτὴν ἢ τάλαινα κουφοτέρα ἑαυτῆς γίνεται, μίξιν ἔχουσα τῶν ἰδίων μελῶν καὶ τὸ ὑγρὸν ἅμα πυρὶ καὶ τελεσφορεῖται”: Zosimos' third, and equally cryptic, maxim continues the miniaturised narrative of the second (1.70-2), in which Nature – both personified as an alchemist and presented as an alchemical substance – undergoes further transformation, in which she has fallen away from her former appearance (having eaten it) and believes that she is dead, but imitating a Hebrew accent and becoming lighter than herself, punishes

³⁴⁷ Pl. *Phd.* 79c.

³⁴⁸ The term κοινὸς appears several times throughout ancient alchemical literature, but appears in relation to a wide range of materials from silver (*On the Complexity of Divine Water* 3 (CAAG 3.14)), to lead (*On the Philosopher's Stone* 1 (CAAG 3.29)), and to eggs (*Interpretations on All Things and on Fires* 4 (CAAG 3.52)), so it does not seem to refer to any kind of specific substance.

herself and has her limbs mixed together, as well as having a mixture of liquid and fire. Similarly to the second maxim, it seems that these lines continue to engage with the stories of death and transformation which appeared particularly in *Lesson 1.2*. Nature, having lost her former appearance, believes that she is dead (θνήσκειν οἶεται). This presumably refers to the fact that she has been reduced to a *prima materia*; she is in an amorphous, transformative state, having undergone *melanōsis*, prepared for the next stage of the alchemical process, just as Ion seemed to be dead, but was soon reborn as a spirit. Apparent death is a prerequisite for purificatory rebirth, and materials reduced to such a primordial state are, throughout the alchemical corpus, frequently described as dead, until resurrected by the insertion of pneumatic quality – that is to say, colour.³⁴⁹ Nature is then said to imitate a Jewish style (οἶον ἰουδαϊκὴν) (Mertens suggests a Hebrew accent) when speaking a foreign language. Zosimos only mentions Jewish style on two other occasions throughout his corpus, both in reference to Jewish texts in which useful alchemical apparatus can be found.³⁵⁰ Thus, the ‘Jewish style’ may refer to Nature stepping into Maria the Jewess’s *kerotakis* (discussed extensively at pp.35-9). Nature is undertaking the Jewish, rather than Egyptian, style of alchemy.³⁵¹

Although Mertens prints ἔχοντος (albeit marked as a textual *locus desperatus*) in her text, with an unclear meaning, I suggest ἐκόντως – with understandable copyist errors of χ for κ and ο for ω – implying that Nature (in love with her work: τῆς ἐργασίας ἐρωμένης, 1.71) willingly takes part in the alchemical process happening in the *kerotakis*, regardless of the fact that she is said to be punishing herself (διεκδικήσασα ἑαυτήν) through this action.³⁵² Self-imposed suffering, after all, is another prerequisite to purificatory rebirth, and the theme of willingness to partake in suffering has already appeared at 1.30. Next, Zosimos describes Nature as having become lighter than herself (κουφοτέρα ἑαυτῆς γίνεται), presumably a reference to her ‘throwing off the weight of her body’ and revealing the spirit beneath, just as in the experience of the priest in *Lesson 1*: ἀποβαλλόμενος τὴν τοῦ σώματος παχύτητα (1.12) and echoed in other religious texts of Zosimos’ milieu, such as the *Chaldean Oracles*.³⁵³ Still sharing similarities with the story of Ion, but instead lifting vocabulary from

³⁴⁹ *On the Same Divine Water 2* (CAAG 3.8); *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus 6* (CAAG 3.12).

³⁵⁰ *On the Evaporation of Divine Water 1* (CAAG 3.7); *Chapters from Zosimos to Theosebeia 6* (CAAG 3.43). Zosimos also mentions the Hebrews (Ἑβραῖοι, the Jewish people) extensively in *Omega* and *True Book of Sophe*, almost always drawing a distinction between Hebrew and Egyptian religious beliefs and, indeed, alchemical practices.

³⁵¹ For a speculative discussion of the differences between the alchemical traditions passed down in Egyptian and Jewish tradition, see Grimes 2018: 161.

³⁵² See Saffrey (2005: 110-1) for further considerations on ἐκόντως (though with a conclusion that ἀκόντως may be the correct reading).

³⁵³ *Chaldean Oracles* 122-3. This may also recall Zosimos’ prefatory claim that ἀποσωμάτως (1.2) is a major theme in his work.

the similar episode of the snake's dismemberment and death, Nature is said to have a mixture of her own limbs, μίξιν ἔχουσα τῶν ἰδίων μελῶν, echoing the snake's being taken apart limb by limb (μέλη μέλη, 1.62) before being brought together and reconstituted. Nature is also said to have a mixture of liquid with fire, possibly drawing on the fact that water and fire are the two means of torture throughout the text which – mirroring scientific procedures – lead to spiritual and alchemical purification, and thus suggesting Nature's continued suffering in the *kerotakis*. It is also an attractive interpretation that the mixture of ὑγρός and πῦρ may be an Aristotelian nod to the unification of opposing forces as central to the transformative process (recalling the dichotomies which constitute the bulk of *Lessons* 1.1 and (esp.) 1.4).³⁵⁴ Finally, the work is said to be made complete (τελεσφορεῖται), using a term which echoes the τελοῦμαι of the nameless priest at 1.13, and completes the almost ouroboric structure of these cryptic maxims, which started with ἀποτελεῖται at 1.70. Ultimately, this maxim continues the work of the one which precedes it: it cryptically describes further alchemical processes and operations, recalling the earlier narratives of Ion, the priest, and the snake, and potentially offering a cypher for a correct interpretation of *The Visions*.

³⁵⁴ Mert. 224-5. See further Lloyd 1964.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.7

Following the miniature narrative about a personified Nature undergoing a series of physical transformations, Zosimos tells the reader to pay attention to the nature of the transformations which they have just mentally constructed. Whilst *The Visions* is generally a cryptic allegorical text which tantalisingly invites its reader to attempt to interpret its images and motifs at each stage, Zosimos here explicitly states what ought to be understood: that Nature, though diverse in appearance, is in reality just one singular substance (πολύϋλον ὡς μονούϋλον λογίζου).³⁵⁵ This picks up on one of the fundamental themes which Zosimos encodes into his text: material monism, the notion that all matter can be reduced to the same fundamental building-blocks (the *prima materia*) (see pp.29-30). This seems to confirm the interpretation of *Lesson 1.6* – perhaps even the interpretation of every episode thus far – that monism (and, by extension, *melanōsis*) can act as a cypher to understand the allegorical dreams and considerations which constitute Zosimos’ puzzling text.

With this knowledge, however, Zosimos implores the reader to remain silent, telling them to be satisfied with themselves having such knowledge and not explaining it to anyone else, lest they destroy themselves. He further explains that silence teaches excellence: ἡ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετὴν. Silence and secrecy shrouded the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical mysteries. Indeed, throughout his corpus, Zosimos frequently mentions the clandestine nature of the art.³⁵⁶ Much like the vow of a religious initiate, the alchemist needed to keep technical operations as guarded as possible; the consequences for the loose-lipped alchemist could have included personal, financial, professional, or spiritual ruin, as is discussed both at pp.65-6 and below.

Zosimos concludes *Lesson 1.7* by exalting the beauty of watching the transformation of metals – specifically, lead, copper, silver, and tin – into pure gold. This is only the second explicit reference to the physical alchemical practice of the transmutation of metals into gold in *The Visions* thus far, after the copper-man in the noetic temple became a silver-man, and was set eventually to become a gold-man (1.65-6). Thus, this short section of the text seems also to confirm that Zosimos’ waking interpretations that his dreams symbolise alchemical substances and operations, which doubtlessly reflect the reader’s interpretative ideas, are indeed accurate.

All in all, *Lesson 1.7* seems to answer the interpretative questions which have been stimulated for the reader since the outset of the text, confirming the suspicions of both the waking Zosimos outside the sections of dream narrative, and indeed the suspicions of the reader. It is finally made perfectly clear

³⁵⁵ On monism in alchemical transmutation theory, see Pereira 2000. For the philosophical ideology of monism and its development throughout antiquity, see Schaffer 2010.

³⁵⁶ See e.g., *FC* 3. See further Long 2001 (esp. 46-71).

that alchemical transmutation into gold, via a process of first reducing a substance to the fundamental building blocks common to all things, is the basis of Zosimos' *Visions*, but that the reader ought to keep such sacred, potentially dangerous, knowledge to themselves.

Commentary

1.75 ἐν τούτοις τοῖς νοήμασι τοῦ νοῦ: The tautological νοήμασι τοῦ νοῦ (literally, 'thoughts of the mind') seems to confirm that Zosimos views alchemical and religious initiation and growth largely as mental exercises and abstracted intellectual activity, not as solely based in physical *praxis*. Similar ideas can be found in the Pauline epistles, as Paul informs the Romans that spiritual transformation occurs by the renewal of the mind (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός), as well as widely in the Neo-Platonic tradition, as both Iamblichus and Porphyry describe the soul as governing the body, such that all spiritual or material growth must take place in one's *psychē*.³⁵⁷ This is also reflected in the other Zosimean treatises which prioritise spiritual activity and illustrate a profoundly sophisticated set of religio-philosophical principles to Zosimos' alchemical practice, as well as its place in his wider worldview. In his *Final Account*, Zosimos explicitly describes alchemy as an internal exercise, informing Theosebeia that she can bring about alchemical tinctures through resting the body and calming the passions in a meditative process of unification with God: καθεζομένη δὲ τῷ σώματι, καθέζου καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν.³⁵⁸ The importance of intellectual activity should, in fact, be obvious from the very fact that Zosimos refers to himself and others in his profession as philosophers.³⁵⁹ See pp.70-1 for the importance of νόος and cognates – the language of knowledge – in Zosimos' text.

1.75 ἐκτρέψας τὴν φύσιν: Given the duality of the term φύσις in Zosimos' milieu, it is possible that it refers either to the transformation of Nature, the macrocosmic power, in *Lesson 1.6*, or to the transformation of the natures of individual substances, their microcosmic potentialities and qualities, throughout the text.³⁶⁰ See 1.53-4, which mirrors this line, on the significance of the term ἐκτρέφειν in the transmutative theories of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ *Rom.* 12:2; Iamblichus, *De Myst.* 5.2; Porph. *Sent.* 30.

³⁵⁸ *FC* 8.

³⁵⁹ See e.g., *Omega* 3.

³⁶⁰ See pp.32-4 for this layered use of *physis*.

³⁶¹ See further Dufault 2015.

1.75-6 πολύυλον ως μονούλον λογίζου: Zosimos' insistence that the apparent pluralism in the cosmos is actually to be understood as monism clearly recalls the text's introduction, in which it is stated that processes which seem antithetical (ἀποσπασμός πνεύματος ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ σύνδεσμος πνεύματος ἐπὶ σώματος, 1.2-3) are actually a singular process; that is, a process which, although it seems diverse in its polychromy, has a singular, monistic nature: τούτω τῷ μονοειδεῖ καὶ πολυχρώμῳ (1.5). Whilst the term μονούλος is extraordinarily rare, not appearing elsewhere in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical literature, πολύυλος is more common. A relevant *comparandum* to this section, which utilises this term, is Synesius' engagement with a quote ascribed to Democritus, which the former deems useful for helping a learned alchemist to escape from the delusional fantasy that the world contains diversity: ὥστε ἀπαλλαγῆναι ἡμᾶς τῆς πολύυλου φαντασίας.³⁶² Synesius, in fact, refers to any belief system which maintains the fantasy of diversity as idle wandering (τῆς ματαίας πλάνης).³⁶³ The ancient alchemical tradition held firmly that material monism was the fundamental framework of reality, a framework which Zosimos here implores his reader to recognise. This monistic unity, as Lopes da Silveira has noted, seems to be woven into the very fabric of this phrase, with words like πολύυλον and μονούλον themselves being compounded unifications (on this kind of 'alchemical language' in *The Visions*, see pp.70-1).³⁶⁴

1.76 μηδενὶ σαφῶς κατάλεγε: As explored at pp.65-6, Graeco-Egyptian alchemical operations were shrouded in mystery and secrecy.³⁶⁵ Trade information being revealed to a rival guild could bring about professional and financial ruin, while information getting into the hands of governing powers could bring about personal ruin, given the illegality of alchemical books under the rule of Diocletian. It is for this reason that alchemical literature is so full of instruction to remain silent, as well as references to codes, symbols, and allegories.³⁶⁶ Indeed, the traditions which surrounded Zosimos demanded secrecy of its initiates concerning certain knowledge, in a manner reminiscent of the Graeco-Roman and Egyptian mystery cults, on the basis that revealing it may also bring about spiritual ruin.³⁶⁷ In the Hermetic tractate concerning spiritual rebirth (παλιγγενεσία), Hermes tells his son to stay silent and not to repeat to anyone the *gnōsis* he has acquired, lest they be considered

³⁶² CAAG 2.3.4.

³⁶³ *ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 232.

³⁶⁵ In her 2001 monograph, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship: Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Long dedicates a section to alchemical secrets (pp.63-70). Whilst the best analysis in this section concerns the *Stockholm* and *Leiden Papyri*, there is some discussion of Zosimos' instructing Theosebeia not to reveal too much about their art. See also, Fest. 1.147-9.

³⁶⁶ See e.g., FC 1, 3, 5.

³⁶⁷ The term μυστήριον itself derives from μύω, a verb connoting silence. See further Bromiley 1995: 451.

slanderers (even devils) of all things: ἵνα μὴ ὡς διάβολοι <τοῦ παντός> λογισθῶμεν.³⁶⁸ The ancients seem to have considered certain levels of divine knowledge forbidden to those who have not worked to achieve them; even in the *New Testament*, Paul claims to have known a man who ascended to the third heaven, learning things which are not to be repeated among men because of the divine nature of their revelations (ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι).³⁶⁹ For Zosimos, alchemy certainly seems to fall under this category.³⁷⁰

1.76 τὴν τοιαύτην ἀρετὴν: For a discussion of this use of ἀρετή as the power to effect a purifying material or spiritual transformation, see pp.22-5.

1.77 μὴ πως καὶ λέγων ἑαυτὸν ἀνέλης: Zosimos warns his reader not to spread the secrets of alchemical transformation, specifically lest they destroy themselves. The personal, professional, and spiritual dangers of sharing such knowledge with rival guilds, governing powers, or the uninitiated is discussed above at 1.76 and at pp.65-6. If one takes the active mood of the verb ἀνέλης literally, it is interesting to note that Zosimos suggests not that alchemists will *be* destroyed by betraying such information, but rather that they will destroy themselves. In this sense, the onus seems to fall on the initiated – those with secret knowledge – not simply to acquire such knowledge, but to protect it from falling into the wrong hands. This notion is certainly evident in the opening section of his *Final Account*, addressed to Theosebeia, in which Zosimos refers to alchemy as a divine art (θεία τέχνη) which has been handed to alchemists who act as guards (τοῖς...φύλαξι) over the knowledge they receive.³⁷¹

1.77 ἢ γὰρ σιωπὴ διδάσκει τὴν ἀρετὴν: Zosimos presents his reader with yet another maxim, one which is not found in any other ancient text: that silence teaches excellence. For a consideration of the meaning of ἀρετή in these terms, see pp.22-5. If ἀρετή is indeed considered the power to bring about a purificatory transformation, one must understand Zosimos' statement that this is taught by

³⁶⁸ CH 13.22b.

³⁶⁹ 2 Cor. 12:2-4.

³⁷⁰ It is for this reason that one can square the apparent contradiction between Zosimos' insistence on alchemical secrecy and his assertion that 'if the mysteries are necessary [that is, for salvation], this is even more reason for everyone to possess a book of alchemy' (*CMA Syr.* 2.239). Soteriological *gnōsis* is only to be afforded to those who work for it in a slow process of initiation (possibly mirrored in Zosimos' slow ascent through the heavens in *Lessons* 2 and 3).

³⁷¹ FC 1.

silence as a claim that excellence (both in the alchemical sense of creating gold and the spiritual sense of self-perfection) is achieved through meditation, self-reflection, and an isolated practice, whether intellectual or practical. See 1.75 above for Zosimos' holistic alchemical-spiritual *praxis* as a largely internal ritual, echoing its presentation in his other treatises, namely *On the Letter Omega* and *Final Account*.

1.77-8 καλὸν ἰδεῖν...τὰς μεταβολάς: This is just the second explicit mention in *The Visions* of the transformations (τὰς μεταβολάς) of metals into gold, following the copper-man becoming a silver-man and subsequently a gold-man in Zosimos' noetic temple in *Lesson 1.5*, and the first time that transmutation is mentioned, as it were, outside of the realm of the fictional. Given the allegorical nature of the text as a whole, one might suspect that the frank nature of Zosimos' reference to transmutation here suggests that this section reveals the correct interpretation of the coded, allegorical messaging which precedes it (see the introduction to the present section).

Zosimos seems actively to be inviting his reader to perform the experiments which he has described, or is at least tantalising them with the beauty of the transformations which they could observe in the *kerotakis*.³⁷² The observation of these transformations is an experience which Zosimos describes as καλόν. The Panopolite alchemist could hardly have chosen a more philosophically loaded term. As discussed at 1.43, the term καλός is highly significant in Hermetic and especially Platonic and Neo-Platonic parlance: Poimandres uses the term solely to describe the divine or the divinely inspired; Plato, in his *Republic*, suggests that beauty (τό καλόν) is determined by, or indeed caused by, the ultimate Form of the good (τό ἀγαθόν); and Plotinus, in his own treatise on beauty, states that beauty can be seen in all things which are created by divine reason (θεῖος λόγος).³⁷³ In other words, the term καλόν is fraught with religio-philosophical resonances, possibly suggesting that the observation of these changes in colour is not only aesthetically pleasing, but spiritually purifying and edifying.

1.77-8 τῶν τεσσάρων μετάλλων... τοῦ μολύβδου, τοῦ χαλκοῦ, τοῦ ἀργύρου, τοῦ κασιτέρου: MSS A and L both depict τεσσάρων as δ, the conventional Graeco-Byzantine numeral for four. Further, MSS A, L, and M read ἥ (resolved to μολύβδου), ♀ (resolved to χαλκοῦ), and ϝ (resolved to

³⁷² Observing colour change is a major theme in ancient alchemical texts, such that Zosimos describes a hole at the top of the reflux system of the *kerotakis*, allowing alchemists to peer inside and observe the transmutation of colour (*On the Evaporation of Divine Water* 5 (CAAG 3.7)).

³⁷³ CH 1.8, 1.14; Pl. *Rep.* 509b; Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6.2.

κασιτέρου), while MSS A and L read \mathbb{C} (resolved to ἀργύρου). MS M inserts ἀσίμου (*asem*) between copper and silver, but this is rejected given the explicit reference to four metals.

Reference to ‘the four metals’ occurs in just one other text, an anonymously authored alchemical lexicon which defines σῶματα in terms of lead, copper, tin, and iron (σίδηρος), which are themselves described as the four incomplete metals (τὰ τέσσαρα ἀτελῆ μέταλλα).³⁷⁴ These four metals compose the so-called *tetrasomy*, the alloy on which Maria performed alchemical experiments in the *kerotakis* (see further 1.50).³⁷⁵ Zosimos’ substitution of silver for iron in the list of metals in the *tetrasomy* may speak to his own practice.

1.78-9 εἰς τὸ γενέσθαι τέλειον χρυσόν: MSS A, L, and M all show the *signum* at the top of fig. 9 (p.223) in place of χρυσόν. The reader is reminded, following the promise of the creation of the χρυσάνθρωπον at 1.66, that material transmutation into gold is the ultimate goal of Zosimos’ alchemical practice. The term τέλειος is interesting, bearing a range of possible translations, from ‘complete’, to ‘perfect’, to ‘powerful’.³⁷⁶ Zosimos, and indeed the anonymous early exegete on *The Visions*, employ τέλειος in reference to a wide array of things – perfect gold, but also perfect whitening, and even a non-specific reference to perfect colour – such that there is no clear picture of the term’s precise interpretation in alchemical terms.³⁷⁷ In this sense, it seems that τέλειος ought to be interpreted as something along the lines of ‘complete’. A crucially important use of the word, however, appears in one of the Hermetic texts with which Zosimos was doubtlessly extremely familiar, *The Basin*.³⁷⁸ Hermes Trismegistos describes those who have been baptised in the divine intellectual *krater* as taking their share of *gnōsis*, receiving mind, and becoming perfect men (μετέσχον τῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέλειοι ἐγένοντο ἄνθρωποι, τὸν νοῦν δεξάμενοι).³⁷⁹ In this way, τέλειος indicates simultaneously the completeness of the men, having fulfilled their own salvation, as well as the perfection of the men, having achieved *gnōsis*. This dual use is also apparent in the language of Graeco-Roman mysteries, whose initiates were described as τέλειοι, and continued into the Christian tradition, with Christ instructing that people be perfect before God (ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι).³⁸⁰ It

³⁷⁴ *Lexicon Alchemicum*, s.v. σῶματά (CAAG 1.2). See 1.78-9 below for what Zosimos terms τέλειον χρυσόν, drawing a sharp distinction from these four metals as ἀτελῆ.

³⁷⁵ Keyser 1990: 362. See further Hopkins 1938b.

³⁷⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. τέλειος (pp.1769-70).

³⁷⁷ See e.g., *On Virtue and Interpretation* 13 (CAAG 3.6), *On the Four Bodies According to Democritus* 3 (CAAG 3.12).

³⁷⁸ On Zosimos’ familiarity with *CH* 4 (*The Basin*), see pp.56-7.

³⁷⁹ *CH* 4.4.

³⁸⁰ Burkert 1987. *Matt.* 5:48.

seems likely, then, that Zosimos' use of the term is a complex polysemy of these variants: gold is the pure, divine *magnum opus*, which marks the end of alchemical experimentation.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 1.8

In a startling change of tone from the remainder of the text, which perhaps builds on the final note in *Lesson 1.7* that it is beautiful to observe the transmutation of metals into gold, Zosimos offers something of a recipe for such a transmutation.

Lesson 1.8 opens with Zosimos' instruction to the reader to take salt (λαβὼν ἄλας). As discussed at 1.61, the introductory participle λαβὼν is frequently used as the opening word of the technical tractates and recipes within Zosimos' corpus; its use here indicates firmly to the reader that the tone of the text has changed and that Zosimos is now in, as Lopes da Silveira puts it, "recipe mode".³⁸¹ The recipe broadly entails the following steps: combining salt (ἄλας), sulphur (θεῖον), and vitriol (χάλκανθον); producing an acid; using that acid as a bath into which whitened copper is to be dipped; repeating this process five times; creating vapours; revealing gold. As is evident, the recipe is not particularly detailed; unfortunately, it is impossible to reconstruct a series of operations onto which verifiable chemical reactions could be mapped.³⁸² Indeed, no extant recipe in the Zosimean corpus can serve as an obvious *comparandum* to aid in interpretation. Nevertheless, the reference to a bath in acid (πρωτοζώμιον) and the creation of vapours (τὰς τρεῖς αἰθάλας) heavily suggests the use of the *kerotakis*, the most important piece of equipment in Zosimos' arsenal and the one which is clearly allegorised throughout *The Visions* (see pp.35-9).

Despite the technical nature of these lines, there is still a clear engagement with the fundamental themes and motifs of *The Visions* thus far. Zosimos speaks of controlling copper, controlling nature, and bringing about alchemical change by force (δαμάσεις χαλκὸν ἀνάγκη...καὶ τὴν ὕλην δαμάζων). In this way, the reader is reminded of the anonymous priest in *Lesson 1.2*, who is himself made holy by compulsion (ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἱερατευόμενος, 1.12), as well as the snake which guarded the noetic temple, which is also seized and dismembered (1.61-2).

Further, Zosimos speaks of the reader, having found gold at the end of their experiment – and at the end of *Lesson 1* – as having received the one thing which comes from many things (ἀπέχεις τὸ μονόειδον τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν). As discussed below, the consistency of emphasis on monism – the notion that all matter is made of the same fundamental building-blocks of reality, into which it can be reduced, and from which anything can be created – is plain to see.

All in all, *Lesson 1.8* attempts to take the narrative into the real world; Zosimos abandons code and allegory almost entirely, offering a recognisable recipe – while maintaining the importance of *The*

³⁸¹ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 233.

³⁸² On the inherent difficulty of recreating Graeco-Egyptian alchemical recipes, see pp.37-42.

Visions' key themes of monism and torture in the *kerotakis* – which his readers may either employ in their own practice, or indeed attempt to use as a cypher to unlock the tale thus far. Unfortunately, the recipe is not particularly clear to the uninitiated.

Commentary

1.80 λαβών: The participle λαβών indicates a shift in Zosimos' tone towards technical alchemical instruction, as this is the manner in which recipes throughout the alchemist's corpus are usually sign-posted (see discussion at 1.61).

1.80 τὸ κηρομελές: This compound in its adjectival form is a *hapax legomenon*. The noun τὸ κηρόμελι is found in a scholion to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, in which it is an explanation of μελιτοῦτταν; this seems to imply that κηρομελές might refer to something sweet-tasting, which is not useful when considering the term in an alchemical context.³⁸³ Presumably, then, the term must refer to the colour of the sulphurous liquid. This is potentially bolstered by Zosimos' statement in *On Divine Water* that the famous 'sulphurous liquid' – τὸ ὕδωρ τοῦ θείου, Divine Water – is known by a wide range of different *Decknamen*, including 'the water of honey' (μέλιτος...ὔδατος).³⁸⁴

1.80 δῆσον ὀποτέρων τὴν ἰσχύν: Zosimos' instruction to the reader to bind the strength of the substances recalls the instances of allegorical binding earlier in the text, at which points both Ion and the snake had their flesh and bones put back together after they had been destroyed (1.17 and 1.62 respectively). The term ἰσχός does not appear elsewhere in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemical tradition, but presumably refers to the power of these substances to bring about alchemical change. This is, at least, the sense of Zosimos' use of δύναμις, a synonym of ἰσχός.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ *Sch. Ar. Nub.* 507a.

³⁸⁴ *On Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.25).

³⁸⁵ This use of δύναμις appears at e.g., *On Quicklime* 1 (CAAG 3.2), where this power is also cryptically referred to as the Mithraic mystery (τὸ μθριακὸν μυστήριον).

1.81 χάλκανθον μεσίτευε: χάλκανθον refers to vitriol (copper sulphate), a substance which Pliny mentions in his *Natural History*, stating that no other substance has an equally wondrous nature (*chalcanthon, nec ullius aequae mira natura est*).³⁸⁶

This is a very unusual use of the term μεσιτεύω, which usually means mediation, in the sense of a cessation of hostilities.³⁸⁷ This possibly adds some clarity to the use of ἰσχύν at 1.80 above: the separate ingredients of the experiment are characterised as warring factions, coming against each other with strength, before they are brought together by a catalytic agent which combines them. This would most certainly not be the first time that violent imagery has been used to describe alchemical reactions in *The Visions*. *LSJ*, however, offers a specialised translation in this context: ‘add as a third constituent’.³⁸⁸

1.81 ὄξος: Whilst ὄξος has the general sense of vinegar, Zosimos confirms elsewhere in his corpus that it is a name which can stand for Divine Water, just like μέλι (see note at 1.80): καλεῖται ὕδωρ θεῖον...δι' ὄξους.³⁸⁹ Given the ambiguity of both the term and the recipe as a whole, it is not clear whether or not this is the correct interpretation in this context.

1.81 πρωτοζύμιον: MSS A and L read the *hapax legomenon* πρωτοζύμιον (the first bath), while MS M reads the *hapax* πρωτοζύμιον (the first fermented thing). Given that the acidic whitening agent (ὄξος) could be understood either as the bath into which further substances will be dipped or as a fermented product of the reaction thus far, either interpretation seems to fit reasonably well into the context of the sentence. The term ζύμιον does not appear elsewhere in Zosimos’ corpus; there is, however, a reference to ζυμίωσις as one of the steps for creating Divine Water.³⁹⁰ As for ζώμιον, this also does not appear elsewhere in Zosimos, but there are many references to a ζωμός, including a bath in white sulphur (ζωμοῦ λευκοῦ θείου).³⁹¹ Again, both wider resonances seem to fit the present context well. A crucial reference occurs in *On Virtue and Interpretation*, where the Zosimean exegetical author quotes the alchemist: “καὶ λαβὼν ἄλας, τὸ θεῖον τὸ λευκὸν ἐξιὸν νότισον ὄξει

³⁸⁶ Pliny, *HN* 34.32.

³⁸⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. μεσιτεύω (p.1106).

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

³⁸⁹ *On Divine Water* 1 (CAAG 3.25).

³⁹⁰ *Chapters to Theodorus* 6 (CAAG 3.43).

³⁹¹ *On the Detailed Presentation of the Work* 8 (CAAG 3.16).

ζώμω”.³⁹² The exegete is clearly citing this section of *The Visions*, and it is for this reason that the present edition prefers πρωτοζώμιον.

1.81 καὶ χάλκανθον: The present edition follows the example of Mertens, who secludes this phrase, claiming that it may be an erroneous addition.³⁹³ Indeed, one struggles to imagine how vitriol (χάλκανθον) might be a useful product in an experiment which has vitriol as an ingredient.

1.81 κατὰ βαθμὸν: This phrase appears frequently in Imperial Greek prose in reference to gradations, either in terms of a procession of increments over time, ranks of people, incremental degrees of a zodiac, or even steps.³⁹⁴ The first interpretation here seems the most appropriate, but it is worth noting the possibility that Zosimos’ using the noun βαθμός (literally, a step) hints at steps of an alchemical procedure, or even the steps toward spiritual purification and ascent which can be seen throughout *Lessons 2 and 3*.³⁹⁵

1.82 δαμάσεις...ἀνάγκη: Zosimos states that the white appearance of the substance(s) (τὸν λευκοειδῆ) must be overcome with force. The absolute physical control over matter which is required in alchemical experimentation is encapsulated in the use of δαμάζω, a forceful verb which has meanings which can range from tame, subdue, and control, to kill and rape.³⁹⁶ In this, Zosimos continues to use the vocabulary and imagery of violence and domination to describe the alchemical process, just as he instructs his reader to manipulate the snake’s flesh at 1.61-2, controlling matter to enter the temple and figuratively complete the alchemical process, and just as Ion and the unnamed priest were transformed by force (even employing the same terminology in the case of the latter, as he was ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἱερατευόμενος, 1.12).

1.82 εὐρήσεις: Through terms like ζήτησις and cognates at 1.63 and 1.71, Zosimos has thus far presented alchemy and the interpretation of allegorised alchemical secrets throughout *The Visions* as

³⁹² *On Virtue and Interpretation 23* (CAAG 3.6).

³⁹³ Mert. 225.

³⁹⁴ E.g., CH 18.8; Basil, *De Spir. S.* 17.43; Vett. Val. 31.2.

³⁹⁵ On κατὰ βαθμὸν as steps along a planetary staircase between the sensible world and the heavens, see CH 18.8.

³⁹⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. δαμάζω (p.368).

a quest for forbidden knowledge.³⁹⁷ In the temple, Zosimos explained that the reader would finally have found the sought-after thing (εὐρήσεις ἐκεῖ τὸ ζητούμενον χρῆμα, 1.63), a discovery which is echoed here through the use of the verb, εὐρίσκω. If the reader thinks that gold is now at hand, however, they would be wrong: confirmation through the phrase γίνεται ὁ...χρυσός (1.83) does not materialise until significantly later in the sentence. It is possible that this terminal position of χρυσός mirrors the fact that *aurefaction* is the ultimate goal of alchemy, while the suspenseful pause after εὐρήσεις mirrors the length and difficulty of the alchemical process.

1.82 μετὰ πέμπτην μέθοδον: For a discussion of steady stages in an alchemical recipe, see κατὰ βαθμὸν above at 1.81, and especially the analysis of μέθοδος in the introduction to *Lesson* 1.4. There does not appear to be a reference to ‘the fifth step’ elsewhere in Zosimos’ corpus.

1.82-3 ὑπὸ τὰς τρεῖς αἰθάλας: The three vapours which form may be the gaseous by-products of the three ingredients which were initially the constituent parts of the recipe (ἀλας, θεῖον, and χάλκανθον), or are perhaps related to vapours formed at each of the three stages of transmutation (*melanōsis*, *leukōsis*, *xanthōsis*). There is only one other reference to αἰ τρεῖς αἰθάλαι in the alchemical corpus, which comes as part of a description of the ouroboros, whose three ears are said to represent the three vapours: τὰ δὲ τρία ὦτα αὐτοῦ εἰσιν αἰ τρεῖς αἰθάλαι.³⁹⁸ Such a three-eared ouroboros can be seen in fig. 8, an illustration from MS A, a 15th century alchemical treatise (see p.26). The meaning, however, of the three ears – or indeed the three smokes – is unclear.

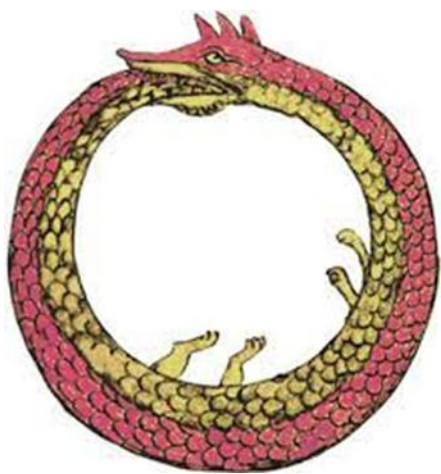


Fig. 8:

MS A : 279r. A depiction of an ouroboros.

³⁹⁷ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 230.

³⁹⁸ *The Ouroboric Snake* 2 (CAAG 1.5)

1.83 ὁ λεγόμενος χρυσός: See 1.79 for the only other plain mention of χρυσός in the text. Zosimos refers to this substance as ὁ λεγόμενος χρυσός (the so-called gold). This translation is relatively loaded in English; ‘so-called’ gold seems to imply that it is, in reality, not gold. Whilst the notion that Graeco-Egyptian alchemists were aware that they were not literally transmuting metals (see pp.30-2) is certainly interesting, this sceptical tone is not echoed in the Greek: see, for example, 1.30; *Omega* 1; *Matt.* 1:16. The phrase ὁ λεγόμενος appears many times in Greek magical papyri, suggesting that it may be a common phrase or rhetorical trope in literature which is naturally brimming with *Decknamen*.³⁹⁹ See also 1.82 on the structure of this sentence.

1.83 ἰδοῦ: This marks an exclamation, rather than a literal imperative (as also at 2.10). It seems that the expressive ἰδοῦ is a trope in revelatory, visionary literature; it appears once in the *Poimandres* (*CH* 1.16) and nineteen times throughout Revelation (1.18, 2:10, 2:22, 3:9 twice, 3:20, 4:1, 4:2, 6:2, 6:5, 6:8, 7:9, 9:12, 11:14, 12:3, 14:1, 14:14, 19:11, 21:5).

1.83 τὴν ὕλην δαμάζων ἀπέχεις: On the force of the verb δαμάζω, see 1.82 above. The term ὕλη appears throughout Zosimos’ corpus in reference to base, sensible materiality; it is something to be rejected. Consider Zosimos’ instruction to Theosebeia, as part of her spiritual purification and henotheistic ascent, to cower away from the material world (τῶν φυσικῶν τῆς ὕλης κατάπτησον).⁴⁰⁰ This negative view of the material ὕλη explains why it ought to be controlled and destroyed, explaining the force of the participle. The present edition follows the suggestion of Mertens that the participle and verb be inverted from their order in the manuscript tradition; it is clear that this inverted order (presented above) makes greater sense.⁴⁰¹

1.83-4 τὸ μονόειδον τὸ ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν: The noun μονόειδον is a *hapax legomenon*, but is clearly related to the adjective μονοειδής, which appears twice in the introductory *Lesson* 1.1 (see discussion at 1.4). Zosimos clearly reiterates the fact that the seeming multiplicity in the world is illusory, that the acquired gold is one thing (τὸ μονόειδον) which comes from many things (ἐκ πολλῶν εἰδῶν). See the discussion at pp.30-2 for the notion that, given the existence of a fundamental *prima materia* and the alchemist’s ability to add and subtract tinctorial qualities at will,

³⁹⁹ Weinstock 1953: 154. On *Decknamen*, see Principe 2012.

⁴⁰⁰ *FC* 8.

⁴⁰¹ Mert. 42.

any substance can be transmuted into any other substance. The balance between notions of *μόνος* and *πολύς* seen here appears throughout *Lesson 1* (1.5, 1.75-6); indeed, it seems to be the key underlying theme of *Lesson 1* (see discussion on monism at pp.29-30). Assuming that the extant text is complete, the first lesson both opens and closes with explicit statements that material monism is a fundamental part of reality. In this way the text seems to resemble the structure of the ouroboros, the alchemical symbol which itself represents the structural unity and singularity of nature.

Zosimos, *The Visions: Lesson 2.1*

Lesson 2 is transmitted via MS A (87v-88r) and MS L (93v-95r).

After several sections of obscure musings on nature, spiritual orthopraxy, and alchemical experimentation, *Lesson 2.1* takes the reader back into Zosimos' sequence of dream narratives, as the alchemist states that he had just about mustered a desire to climb the seven steps and to see the seven punishments. The mention of climbing stairs and overlooking punishments clearly reminds the reader of the first dream sequence, tying the narratives back together in a circular, ouroboric fashion, but Zosimos soon indicates that this is different: this time, he is learning to ascend alone. The notion of an ascent of seven steps is doubtlessly related to the ascent of the seven planets in the ancient religious imagination, an idea which is well articulated in Mithraic iconography (see pp.52-3).⁴⁰² Although Zosimos was certainly familiar with Mithraism, his use of the image surely comes from the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions with which he so closely engages, as a journey along seven planets to Heaven also appears in (for example) *Poimandres*, *Zostrianos*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah* (see further 2.2).⁴⁰³ The staircase is representative of Zosimos' growth, both in terms of his spiritual purification and ascent, and in terms of his growing alchemical understanding. He is now in a position to climb these steps himself.

Zosimos seems somehow already to have knowledge of the path and where to start. After a complicated journey in which he seems repeatedly to go back and forth on himself, he finds himself on an undisclosed step of the staircase (the reader is told that he is on the third and fourth steps at later stages in his journey, at 2.16 and 3.9 respectively, but this detail is not indicated here).

Whatever the step, Zosimos' dream sequence throughout *Lesson 2.1* involves a copper man and the ultimate realisation that copper must be destroyed – the key first step of the alchemical enterprise, *melanōsis*; one might assume, then, that this is the step of his ascent through alchemical knowledge associated with the transformation of copper.⁴⁰⁴

On this journey, Zosimos gets lost and becomes disheartened at his inability to find his way again. Zosimos' getting lost is indicative of his lowly initiatory status. In future sections (2.17 and 3.9-10), he

⁴⁰² Merkelbach 1981: 59 (fig. 22).

⁴⁰³ On Zosimos' familiarity with Mithraism, see *On Quicklime 1* (CAAG 3.2).

⁴⁰⁴ The planet associated with copper in the ancient imagination is Venus. In the Ptolemaic system of the Classical planets, Venus is the third planet, but Zosimos states at 2.16 (i.e. in the next dream) that he is on the third step in a sequence involving the casting out of lead. It is possible that Zosimos is using a non-standard order for the planets in his cosmic arrangement. It is also possible that this third step is associated with copper, but Zosimos' musings on lead at the end of *Lesson 2* merely imply that he is close to the end of his initiation (see 3.23). For ancient considerations of the association between metals and planets, see Proclus, *in. Tim.* 1.43 and Origen, *Contr. Cels.* 6.22 (who ascribes the tradition to the Mithraic Mysteries).

is able to navigate the steps independently with increasing levels of success, but, with this seemingly being his first lone journey, his lack of knowledge shows and he wanders totally off course (ἀπέτυχον πάσης ὁδοῦ). There is a bizarre twist as Zosimos says that, in his dismayed state, he fell asleep. The implication is that Zosimos was awake as he initially climbed the steps and came to be lost. This leaves two possible explanations: either spiritual ascent is a meditative process which one does while conscious; or, the generally confused and obscure narratives which make up *The Visions* here take on a new dimension, in that the only solid boundary of *Lesson 1* – the one between sleep and wakefulness – becomes blurred and ultimately breaks down (see pp.63-4 and 2.5 for further discussion). Ultimately, it seems likely that these are simultaneously true.

In his dream, Zosimos sees another *homunculus*, described as the one who handles the *xēria*, and who wears a red robe and royal clothes. The simultaneous description of this figure as both a *homunculus* and as a ξηπουργός recalls the unnamed *homunculus* at 1.26, though this can hardly be the same figure (see p.60 for the confused characterisation of the figures within *The Visions*). Eventually, this *homunculus* helps Zosimos back onto the path and takes him to the places of punishment. The *homunculus* acts as a guide for one step of Zosimos' journey through the planetary spheres, just as the ancients believed that daemonic figures would guide them through each step of their journey to the divine realm.⁴⁰⁵ This is most clearly laid out in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, as Isaiah is taken on an angel-assisted journey through the 'seven heavens', as part of a visionary, revelatory experience. The overlaps with Zosimos' text are clear.

The unnamed figure in *Lesson 2.1* guides the uninitiated Zosimos towards the punishments, where the former is thrown into the fire and totally devoured by the flames. In fear, Zosimos wakes up and deliberates over the meaning of this dream, ultimately concluding that the *homunculus* is a copper man, and that copper must first be thrown into the fiery places of punishment (πρῶτον ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς κολάσεις). This seems to be a realisation on Zosimos' behalf that copper must be burned in a *kerotakis* and reduced to a *prima materia* before further alchemical operations can be performed upon it, which doubles as a realisation that the body must be destroyed before spiritual ascent can take place (as in *CH 1.24*). This realisation follows the progression of Zosimos' understanding of the importance of the first step – *melanōsis* – in the alchemical process: his first waking realisation is a vague association between his dream and alchemy (1.22); his second waking realisation is the understanding of the importance of Divine Water, the acidic vapour of the *kerotakis* (1.42); and his third waking realisation here is the necessity of this first step. The narrative of *The*

⁴⁰⁵ See discussion of the role of the *angelus interpretis* in ancient apocalyptic literature at the introduction to *Lesson 1.2*.

Visions is fundamentally an allegorical defence of the *kerotakis* method for *melanōsis*, and this section is Zosimos' initial firm grasp of its importance.

All in all, the unnamed *homunculus* guides the uninitiated Zosimos through the first steps of his journey along the planetary spheres, a journey which mimics the purifying ascent to Heaven which many ancient people believed lay ahead of them after death. This purifying ascent is mirrored for Zosimos in his growing alchemical knowledge. Whilst in earlier dreams, Zosimos merely woke up and understood that his dream had some vague alchemical meaning, he wakes up from *Lesson 2.1* with the knowledge that copper must be cast into the fires as part of the process of aurefaction. *Lesson 2.1*, then, depicts the clumsy first step of Zosimos' ascent through the strata of alchemical knowledge and spiritual purification, ending with gained understanding about the necessity of destruction before transformation: that is, both the transformation of copper and of the spiritual self.

Commentary

2.1 Ζωσίμου πράξις β': For the non-literal translation of πράξις as 'lesson', see pp.22-5. Also, see p.27 for an exploration of the question of authenticity surrounding *Lesson 2* (and *Lesson 3*).

2.2 μόλις: It is curious that Zosimos says that he was scarcely able to muster the motivation to climb the seven steps; one would imagine that he would be extremely motivated, especially given the emphasis he places on desire for *gnōsis* throughout the text (for example, 1.30, 1.66). There are examples throughout the text of characters barely being able to perform a certain task – most notably 1.14 and 2.26, as Ion and Agathodaemon are scarcely able to speak as they are tortured – but this weakness occurs on account of pain and suffering. Zosimos has certainly made no mention of his own suffering yet. It seems, then, that the narrator's attitude of only just feeling prepared to make this ascent reflects the difficulty of attaining knowledge and spiritual perfection.

2.2 ποτέ: Although the narrative of *Lesson 2.1* shares several features with the initial dream sequences of *Lesson 1* – the presence of metallic *homunculi*, the presence of the *Crucibaltar*, the places of punishment, and a series of obscure dreams followed by interpretations – the term ποτέ implies some kind of temporal and thematic break from the previous narrative. Indeed, *Lesson 2* begins Zosimos' personal ascent and initiation, and thus should be considered a different stage of *The Visions*.

2.2 εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἔλθων: This phrasing appears in the *Poimandres*, as Hermes states his great desire (εἰς μεγάλην γὰρ νῦν ἐπιθυμίαν ἤλθον) to hear the secrets of the cosmos after he deems that Poimandres is starting to digress.⁴⁰⁶ There may, in this way, be some engagement with Hermetic literature, but it should also be noted that the expression ‘εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἔλθεῖν’ is widely attested in Imperial Greek prose (for example, Arr. *Anab.* 4.19.6).

Zosimos only uses the word ἐπιθυμία on one other occasion in his corpus: at *FC* 8, as he instructs Theosebeia to calm herself, resist all emotion (including desire), and to seek God through a process of internal prayer and contemplation. It is interesting, then, that Zosimos mentions this emotion only as something which needs to be quashed and resisted, but states here that he feels a desire to ascend the planetary spheres. Perhaps, the only desire one is permitted to have is the desire for spiritual purification, on account of which all other desires are suppressed. If this is the case, although the term ἐπιθυμία can have connotations of greed and carnal desire, it seems here to imply a pure desire for religious growth.⁴⁰⁷ Zosimos’ statement about this desire also implies that will and intent are important initial stages in the alchemical / spiritual process. This may harken back to the aforementioned examples at 1.30 and 1.66.

2.2 τὰς ἐπτὰ κλίμακας: Zosimos’ ascent along seven steps is doubtlessly related to the ancient notion of ascent along the seven Classical planets as part of a spiritually purifying journey to Heaven. Such a journey is found in a plethora of ancient ascent narratives with which Zosimos would have been familiar: *Mithras Liturgy* 621; *Ascension of Isaiah* 4.12; *CH* 1.24-5; 2 *Enoch* 20.3.⁴⁰⁸ That the κλίμακες make up a recognisable journey would also possibly explain the inclusion of the definite article τὰς; given that *seven* steps have not been mentioned before this point, it would be odd to include this unless the reader is expected to know already to which set of steps Zosimos refers.⁴⁰⁹

2.2-3 θεάσασθαι τὰς ἐπτὰ κολάσεις: This second mention of the place of punishments harkens back to 1.34, at which stage Zosimos sees countless people burning alive in boiling water. Here, however, the reader receives the further detail that there are seven punishments; given their proximity, it seems likely that the seven punishments and the seven steps are related, perhaps in the sense that

⁴⁰⁶ *CH* 1.16.

⁴⁰⁷ *CGL*, s.v. ἐπιθυμία (p.555).

⁴⁰⁸ See pp.55-8 for the latter two of these texts and for a justification of Zosimos’ familiarity with them.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Escolano-Poveda (2022: 96) who suggests that the definite article can be explained by the fact that the text is incomplete.

each step requires a different form of bodily purification to allow for continued ascent. Indeed, this is the case in, for example, Hermetic ascent literature (*CH* 1.24-6), where Poimandres states that men relinquish a sin – relinquish that which ties them to the material world – on each planetary step, and also in some Gnostic ascent literature, as Zostrianos undergoes a baptism at each stage along his journey to the *Ogdoad*, becoming an increasingly pure angel on each planet (*Zostrianos* 5-7) (see pp.51-2).

2.3 ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν: MS A presents a shorthand for ἡμερῶν which resembles two lowercase sigmas; that this represents ἡμέραι is stated explicitly in a gloss of symbols at the start of the codex.⁴¹⁰ The odd use of the article τῶν implies that Zosimos began his upward journey on one of a set number of days. Indeed, both Berthelot and Ruelle and Mertens acknowledge this in their translations, offering ‘un seul des jour fixés’ and ‘un seul des jours prescrits’, respectively. It is difficult to know, however, what exactly is meant by these ‘fixed’, ‘prescribed’ days. The phrase is actually used several times throughout Luke (5:17, 20:1), but often in clear reference to an already designated day or number of days, which does not seem to be the case here. An appearance of ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν prior to Christ’s calming the storm, however, with no clear reference to a specific set of days (translated in the *KJV* as ‘on a certain day’), suggests that this may be idiomatic.⁴¹¹ Bovon, in his commentary on Luke, refers to this phrase as an introductory formula, but gives no further evidence to support this assertion.⁴¹² In any case, this certainly reinforces the notion of a temporal break between *Lessons* 1 and 2 which is also suggested through ποτὲ (2.2).

Explanation may be found in the fact that Zosimos’ entire alchemical practice is contingent upon precise, opportune timings: he frequently acknowledges the importance of undertaking an experiment at the *καρπός*; refers to successful alchemical tinctures as *καρικαὶ καταβαφαί*; and even has an entire treatise entitled *On the Choice of a Favourable Moment*. Given that Zosimos has not previously indicated any set of fixed days, it seems reasonable to suggest that he may be referring to his ascent happening on one of any number of propitious days – the favourability of which is calculated astrologically – hence my translation. See Werrett 2023 for Zosimos’ calculation of propitious days as having an astrological basis, potentially reigniting the notion from the preface to *The Visions* that alchemy is a practice under the control of the movement of the Moon and the measure of time (1.6-7).

⁴¹⁰ MS A : 16v.

⁴¹¹ *Luke* 8:22.

⁴¹² Bovon 2002: 317.

2.3 ἦνυσα: Whilst MS A reads ἦνυσα with a rough breathing on the initial *eta*, and this is indeed attested elsewhere, the unaspirated ἦνυσα is far more common, hence my suggested change.⁴¹³ Similarly, this edition softens the breathing on ἦνυον and ἦνυσα at 2.22.

Literally, ‘I accomplished the road of going up’. The verb ἀνύω ordinarily has the sense of the completion of a task, hence Mertens’s translation, ‘j’effectuai tout le trajet de la montée’. Zosimos, however, has just started his journey through the planetary spheres and, from an initiatory point of view, is at the lowest rung. In addition to this sense of completion, the *CGL* offers ‘make progress on a journey’ as an alternative translation, even in the aorist, which makes more sense in this context, given that Zosimos seems to be starting his ascent here.⁴¹⁴ Hence my translation, ‘I began my upward journey’. It is possible that ἀνύω is used with a sense of completion as anticipating Zosimos’ completion of his journey in *Lesson 3* – as indeed it has a sense of completion on both occasions of the use of the verb at 2.22 – but I find the former translation of beginning the journey preferable in this instance.

2.3 τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ ἀναβῆναι: Whilst τὴν ὁδὸν may simply refer to the pathway between planets, it is noteworthy that the term may have religious significance related to Zosimos’ upward journey of growing initiation. In the century before Zosimos, Origen had reflected upon the use of ὁδός in Christ’s famous aphorism – ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ – and had suggested that it ought to be afforded a mystical interpretation of an intellectual path towards Christ (mapped onto an intellectual path towards *gnōsis* in the Gnostic and Hermetic traditions), suggesting that Christians, following the apostles, must walk in the intellectual road of Christ: τοὺς διὰ τῆς νοητῆς ὁδοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ βαδίζοντας.⁴¹⁵ Similarly, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to his own lifestyle – which he implores the Corinthians to imitate – as a series of paths towards Christ (τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τὰς ἐν Χριστῷ).⁴¹⁶ Whilst Zosimos’ ascent doubtlessly involves a literal path across the planetary spheres, it seems likely that he is also engaging in the religio-philosophical discourse of an intellectual path to *gnōsis* or as an imitative path, both of which were originally founded by Christ himself.⁴¹⁷ Such are the deep theological connotations of the term ὁδός.

⁴¹³ A rough breathing on ἦνυσα also appears at e.g., Pl. *Symp.* 217c.

⁴¹⁴ *CGL*, s.v. ἀνύω (p.152).

⁴¹⁵ *John* 14: 6; Origen, *In Jn.* 1.8.51.

⁴¹⁶ *1 Cor.* 4:17.

⁴¹⁷ See pp.48-9 for the theme of *imitatio Christi* throughout *The Visions*.

2.3-4 διελθὼν δὲ πολλάκις...ἀνήλθον...ἐπανέρχεσθαι: As Lopes da Silveira notes, the redundancy of verbs of motion here may echo the apparent redundancy of Zosimos' several journeys along the steps.⁴¹⁸ It is not the case, however, that Zosimos is purposefully going back on himself and completing unnecessary journeys; rather, he is lost. His complex journey – littered with changes of direction, emphasised in the series of changing prefixes, as he goes back on himself several times (πολλάκις) – is a result of his lack of knowledge about his route. This lack of knowledge is also evident in the vagueness of Zosimos' description of his journey: there are no markers of location; διελθὼν is ambiguous and does not refer to what exactly it is through which he passes; and he does not explain why or how he has started to go back on himself (ἐπανέρχεσθαι). Mertens's translation assumes various directions and locations along the journey, translating with more specificity: 'l'ayant parcouru jusqu'au bout, c'est à plusieurs reprises que, dans la suite, je revins vers ce chemin et voilà que, en recommençant à monter'.⁴¹⁹ The translation of the present edition retains what I deem to be the intentional ambiguity of Zosimos' text.

2.4-5 ἄθυμια πολλῆ γενόμενος...ἄθυμοῦντος δέ μου: The genitive absolute (ἄθυμοῦντος δέ μου) is omitted in Berthelot and Ruelle's edition of *The Visions*, but one assumes that this may be a simple oversight. The presence of the phrase in all extant manuscripts makes this likely; hence, the phrase is included in this edition. Whilst my translation of this phrase does not make for a particularly fluent English sentence, it retains the emphatic repetition, as well as the verbal and nominal variations of ἄθυμια. The use of such repetition in this sentence may mirror the apparent repetition of Zosimos' toing and froing in the previous few lines.

2.5 ἐτρέπην εἰς ὕπνον: Shockingly, Zosimos' description of his repeated ascents and descents of the steps, before his eventually getting lost, is here shown to have happened in a waking state. On the most basic level, this adds to the ever-compounding confusion which underscores *The Visions*. More specifically, though, the overlap between wakefulness and sleep shows a breaking down in these boundaries over the course of the text. *The Visions* started with a relatively clear distinction between the absurdity and confusion of dreams and the clarity and lucidity of waking life (for example, 1.21-3); here, however, this boundary has slipped: there is a confusion as to whether certain events are

⁴¹⁸ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 234.

⁴¹⁹ Mert. 43.

taking place during the dream or in reality. Ultimately, the boundary will continue to falter until it is totally dissolved, as figures from Zosimos' dream follows him into his waking life at 3.21.⁴²⁰

2.6 κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον: Mertens's edition retains the MS A reading of τοῦ ὕπνου. Whilst κατὰ and the genitive (τοῦ) ὕπνου is attested, it is rare.⁴²¹ A correction to the accusative (κατὰ) τὸν ὕπνον makes far greater grammatical sense, with the accusative appearing far more frequently, from Pl. *Ti.* 71e to Philo, *De Jos.* 125.6, and into Imperial Greek prose with Artem. *On.* 4.*praeef.* and Porph. *Ad Anebo* 2.2a.

2.6-7 ξηρουργόν τινα ἀνθρωπάριον ἡμφιεσμένον στολήν ἐρυθρὰν καὶ βασιλικὴν ἐσθῆτα: As in his earlier dream sequence, Zosimos is guided through the dream world by a *homunculus* who handles the alchemical ashes, the *xēria*. For the significance of ξηρουργόν, see note at 1.26. The figure in this instance wears a 'red robe' and 'royal clothing'. As Mertens has suggested, this may be something of a tautology and the redness of the *homunculus*' garb may evoke the shades of purple which were associated with status, wealth, and royalty in the ancient world (see Jensen 1963; Pliny, *NH* 9.60; *Theodosian Code* 14.10.2 – which prohibited anyone but the Emperor from wearing purple). This is certainly an appealing proposition.⁴²² This does, however, raise the question: what is so regal about this figure in particular? The answer may lie in the very fact that he is wearing red clothes in the first place. In addition to subtly evoking the idea of royalty which is more explicitly raised by the term βασιλικήν, the red clothes may suggest that this figure is representative of the alchemical stage of *iōsis*, the final stage of aurefaction (though infrequently mentioned by Zosimos), rendering it a colour transformation associated with gold, the philosopher's stone, and, on a more fundamental level, alchemical success. It would be, however, difficult to consolidate this theory with the fact that this figure is revealed to be a man of copper who must be thrown into the fire at 2.14-5.⁴²³ Ultimately, as discussed at pp.66-7, the colours of alchemy appear seemingly randomly throughout Zosimos' text – the only stage which seems to merit full elucidation is *melanōsis*.

⁴²⁰ See pp.63-4 for the dissolution of boundaries between waking and sleeping states in Zosimos' text, as well as an exploration of ancient dream literature and theory more generally.

⁴²¹ Gregory of Nyssa contemplates a cause of the things which happen during sleep (τῶν καθ' ὕπνου γενομένων αἰτίαν) at *De Hom.* 172.

⁴²² Mert. 227.

⁴²³ Cf. Grimes 2018: 135, who argues that the colours throughout *The Visions* form a coherent, chronological palette which reflects the colours of the stages of alchemical transmutation (black, white, yellow, red). This suggestion is widely disputed (see (esp.) Lopes da Silveira 2020: 202), as is discussed at pp.66-7.

2.7 τί ποιεῖς, ἄνθρωπε; The *homunculus* addresses Zosimos directly as ἄνθρωπε. As Dickey notes, ἄνθρωπε is one of the most commonly occurring forms of address for a male non-relative, mirroring the female form ὦ γυναῖκα, with which Zosimos frequently addresses Theosebeia as the recipient of the letters throughout his corpus (see, for example, *Omega 2*).⁴²⁴ It is possible that this explicit mention of Zosimos as a man highlights the fact that he has not (yet) ascended to a higher level of *gnōsis* and has consequently not yet become a *pneūma*. To this end, ἄνθρωπε may be better translated as ‘mortal’, to convey this sense of Zosimos being specifically addressed as a non-initiated, non-spiritual being. Dickey does indeed remark that ἄνθρωπε is frequently used as part of an insult, but ordinarily when in apposition with an adjective which bears the weight of the derogatory sense.⁴²⁵ The interpretation that ἄνθρωπε constitutes a plain address is more likely.

2.8 πλανώμενος: Given that Zosimos’ ascent is likely a journey through the planetary spheres, one wonders if his use of πλανώμενος for his wandering may be a pun based on an etymological relation to πλανητός, an adjective often used of the planets.

The use of the verb πλανάω in the *Poimandres* is also an attractive parallel here. Poimandres tells Hermes that, whilst those who know themselves attract the divine, those who love the body remain wandering in the darkness of ignorance, suffering a metaphorical death in their senses: ἔρωτος σῶμα, οὗτος μένει ἐν τῷ σκότει πλανώμενος, αἰσθητῶς πάσχων τὰ τοῦ θανάτου.⁴²⁶ Given that Zosimos is still on his path to achieving *gnōsis*, he may use the verb here as a means of further engaging with a philosophical discourse which interprets a lack of understanding about the world as being lost.

2.9 ἀκολουθεῖ μοι: This particular phrase appears repeatedly throughout the *New Testament* as Christ instructs others to follow him.⁴²⁷ See pp.48-9 for the pervasiveness of the theme of *imitatio Christi* and the aesthetics of early Christian martyrdom throughout Zosimos’ text – just as many early Christians followed Christ in suffering and death through martyrdom, so too do Zosimos and other characters throughout the text follow Christ, as they suffer and die alchemical deaths in the places of punishment, eventually being reborn into spiritually purified beings.

⁴²⁴ Dickey 1996: 150. On γυναῖκα, *ibid.* 86.

⁴²⁵ *ibid.* 153.

⁴²⁶ *CH* 1.19.

⁴²⁷ The phrase appears at e.g., *Mat.* 8:22. As discussed at pp.48-9, the terminology of ἀκολουθεῖν is transformed in the Pauline Epistles into the terminology of μίμησις (see e.g., *1 Cor.* 11:1).

2.9 ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ: MS A reads αὐτόν; whilst ἀκολουθεῖν can on rare occasion take an accusative (for example, Aesop, *Fab.* 300.7), the dative is much more common, especially with the sense of following a person, as here, hence my adoption of the emendation of Berthelot and Ruelle. It would also be odd for Zosimos to use the dative μοι at 2.9 above, but an accusative later in the same sentence, when both pronouns follow ἀκολουθεῖν.

2.9 πλησίον δὲ γενόμενος τῶν κολάσεων: Although MS A has the grammatically possible γενομένων, meaning ‘when the places of punishment came to be near’, this reading seems rather clunky and awkward. This edition, therefore, follows Mertens’s emendation to γενόμενος, referring to Zosimos himself. A parallel which supports this reading is ὡς ἐγενόμην τῶν κολάσεων πλησίον at the start of *Lesson 2.2* (2.17).

2.10 καὶ ἰδοῦ: This marks an exclamation, rather than a literal imperative; see 1.82.

2.10 ἐνεβλήθη ἐν τῇ κολάσει: The singular κολάσει – hence my interpretative translation as ‘one of the places of punishment’ – is worth noting, especially given Zosimos’ insistence at 2.2-3 that there are in fact seven forms of punishment, as well as the plural κολάσει at 1.34. It seems that there are several places of punishment with varying means of purification: fire and boiling water among them. Whilst a religious interpretation of *The Visions* would acknowledge these as forms of physical purification – aimed at releasing the soul from its corporeal confines – the scientific interpretation is also key. The application of heat as part of the destruction of matter in the first step of the alchemical process – aimed at releasing the alchemical *pneūma* from the alchemical *sōma* – is also clearly being evoked here. The *homunculus* is being spiritually purified in the fire, at the same time as he is being chemically reduced to a *prima materia*.

It is also interesting that, as the passive ἐνεβλήθη suggests, the *homunculus* is thrown into the place of punishment, posing the question: who threw him? The best answer which we might glean from the text is the possibility that he was thrown by the white-haired *homunculus* at 1.26, the one who was described as the οἰκοδεσπότης (1.37) and who facilitated people being purified in the place of punishment which involved boiling water. Whether the *homunculus* with red clothes from the present dream was thrown by this white-haired *homunculus*, or another *homunculus* with a similar function over a different place of punishment, or perhaps another individual altogether, is not clear.

Ultimately, the ambiguity and confusion are likely intentional; Zosimos does not deem this a question worth answering.

2.11 τὸ σῶμα ἔδαπανήθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρός: See pp.30-2 for the alchemical significance of the term *sōma* – the physical substance which is reduced to a *prima materia* in the *melanōsis* stage. Mertens rightly corrects the MS reading of ἔδαπανίσθην (unattested elsewhere) to ἔδαπανήθη.

2.12 διωπνίσθην: For the Gnostic ramifications of waking up from a place of confusion – and the dichotomy between sleep, filled with ignorance, and wakefulness, filled with *gnōsis* – see p.63.⁴²⁸

2.12 καὶ πάλιν διεσάφησα τὸν λόγον: Zosimos goes on to assert that he has ‘clarified the sense’ of what he had seen. In other words, he has interpreted his dream in alchemical terms which he can understand. See pp.70-1 for the language of knowledge and understanding in *The Visions*; whilst this discussion focuses primarily on forms of the verb νοέω, it is clear that διεσάφησα τὸν λόγον is relevant. It is also worth noting that πάλιν seems to suggest that the dreams are all to be understood in the same terms and interpreted in conjunction with one another.

2.13 διέκρινον: Whilst MS A reads διακρίνον, both Berthelot and Ruelle and Mertens correct to the participial form διακρίνων in their editions. This interpretation of the text, however, would leave a redundant καὶ either immediately before διακρίνων at 2.12 or on the following line ahead of εἶπτον at 2.14 (unless καὶ is treated adverbially, as Mertens *ad loc.*). The present edition, however, offers a conjectural imperfect in διέκρινον, translated as an inchoative imperfect: ‘I began to understand’. This sense of the verb also makes greater sense within the wider narrative, as Zosimos is in the early stages of his initiation and is just now beginning to understand the alchemical meanings and ramifications of the dreams he has experienced both here and earlier in *Lesson 1*.

2.13 ὁ ξηρουργὸς ἐκεῖνος ἄνθρωπος ὁ χαλκάνθρωπός ἐστιν: Throughout *Lesson 1*, the first set of dreams, it seemed clear that the *homunculus* who handles the *xēria* and the copper man were different entities: while Zosimos looked over the place of punishment which involved boiling water,

⁴²⁸ See also 1.21-3; Jonas 1963: 68-71.

he was guided first by the ξηρουργός (at 1.26, who explained that men can purify themselves in these places and become spirits), and secondly by the copper man (at 1.33 and 1.38, who explained that he helped those in the punishments to be seated, to write on tablets, and ultimately to become spirits). In this section, however, these separate figures become merged into a single being, possibly reflecting the oneiric atmosphere of the piece, in which reality can take all sorts of twists and turns.

It is also interesting that, if one considers that this figure's being a ξηρουργός implies that he will be the one who handles the alchemical products, and if one also considers that his being made of copper and being inside the fires of the alembic align him with the object of alchemy, then the present *homunculus* would be both practitioner and material, both the one enacting alchemical experimentation and the one upon whom alchemical experimentation is being enacted, echoing the dualistic theme of active and passive alchemical roles which has appeared repeatedly throughout Zosimos' text.⁴²⁹

2.13 ὁ χαλκάνθρωπός ἐστιν ἐρυθράν ἐσθῆτα ἐνδεδυμένος: Before ἐρυθράν, MS A has ἔχων in place of ἐστιν, though it is hard to see how ἔχων and ἐνδεδυμένος might both be retained.

2.14-5 δεῖ δὲ πρῶτον ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς κολάσεις: Zosimos insists on the necessity (δεῖ) that the copper man first (πρῶτον) be thrown into the place of punishment – into the fire. This section reveals Zosimos' comprehension on the necessity of the first step in alchemy: *melanōsis*. Just as Ion needed to be torn apart (1.15-8) and just as the snake needed to be sacrificed and destroyed (1.61-2), so too does this *homunculus* need to be burned into a primordial *prima materia* as part of the alchemical process, as well as his spiritual purification.

⁴²⁹ See further 1.39.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 2.2

The events of *Lesson 2.2* are almost identical to those of *Lesson 2.1*. Once again, Zosimos' soul urges him to climb the planetary staircase, though this time he is specifically interested in reaching the third step (τὴν τρίτην κλίμακα). In the Ptolemaic arrangement of the Classical planets, the third planet (Venus) is associated with copper; this section, however, seems far more interested in lead and ultimately concludes with Zosimos' realisation that lead must be cast out. This third step, then, is the one associated with the transformation of lead. As Zosimos journeys alone up the staircase, he approaches the place of punishments, getting close to it (τῶν κολάσεων πλησίον), but he ultimately gets lost once again. Taking the entire narrative of *The Visions* into consideration, Zosimos' ability to get closer to the place of punishments without a guide seems to suggest his increasing level of initiation: he is introduced to the punishments in his earlier dreams in *Lesson 1.3*; he is unable to find them at all in *Lesson 2.1*; he gets close but eventually gets lost here in *Lesson 2.2*; and he ultimately gets there of his own accord in *Lesson 3*. Zosimos' ascent – up the staircase, as well as in initiation and *gnōsis* – is steady, but sure.

While lost, Zosimos sees a man with white hair; this white hair is said to be so exceedingly brilliant that it actually causes Zosimos to be temporarily blinded. Zosimos recognises the man and writes that his name is Agathodaemon, the 'good spirit'. Agathodaemon is a name with huge religious and alchemical significance for Zosimos and his milieu. Usually represented as a snake in Graeco-Roman and Egyptian iconography, Agathodaemon was a household god of fertility and health, who eventually became the civic deity of Alexandria.⁴³⁰ This association renders him a mascot of the multi-cultural learning which defined Roman Egypt, particularly in cities such as Panopolis and Alexandria, and indeed defined Zosimos' own worldview.⁴³¹ This learning makes an identification with Zosimos' Agathodaemon an attractive proposition. Perhaps more importantly for *The Visions*, however, Agathodaemon is also the name of a (possibly pseudo-historical) alchemist to whom Zosimos grants a great deal of authority and prestige.⁴³² An extant phrase attributed to Agathodaemon (but erroneously attributed to Zosimos by Berthelot and Ruelle) reads that copper, having been cleared of oxidised impurities, and having been blackened and whitened, will become yellow (μετὰ τὴν τοῦ χαλκοῦ ἐξίωσιν καὶ μέλανσιν καὶ ἐς ὕστερον λεύκωσιν, τότε ἔσται βεβαία ξάνθωσις).⁴³³ Linked to his alchemical persona, Agathodaemon was also the name of a key figure in Hermetic thought: related to the ouroboros; the ruler of the cosmos; the son of Hermes; the father

⁴³⁰ On Agathodaemon in an Alexandrian context, see Fraser 1972: 209.

⁴³¹ Recall the *Suda's* description of Zosimos as an Alexandrian (*Suda*, s.v. Ζώσιμος) (p.6-7). This is likely related to Zosimos' field of interest or place of learning or residence, rather than his heritage.

⁴³² For Agathodaemon the alchemical author, see CAAG 2.4.18. See also Fowden 1986: 30.

⁴³³ *Agathodaemon 1* (CAAG 3.3).

of Hermes Trismegistos; and a translator of some sacred Hermetic texts into Greek.⁴³⁴ Zosimos' use of this name would certainly have stirred a web of associations in the mind of his reader.

Agathodaemon is far less forthcoming than the other daemonic guides who jump to Zosimos' aid in other dreams. He stares at Zosimos for a long time, before refusing to look at him at all, in an uneasy scene which builds the tension of the narrative. Eventually, Agathodaemon leads him to the *Crucibaltar*, from which the places of punishment can be seen. Just as Zosimos arrives, Agathodaemon meets the same fate as the unnamed *homunculus* in the previous section, as he is thrown into the fire. After an invocation to the creators of heavenly natures (ὦ οὐρανίων φύσεων δημιουργοί), Zosimos goes on to invoke his brothers (ἀδελφοί – possibly a reference to the fellow members of Zosimos' alchemical guild – see 2.24, below), describing the spectacle as horrifying to see (τὸ διήγημα...φρικτόν). Notably, this is the first time Zosimos has seen a terrifying spectacle in one of his dreams and not immediately woken up out of fear. This seems to suggest two possible interpretations: firstly, that Zosimos is becoming more acclimatised to seeing men burning in the vats of fire and boiling water and is thus more calm; or secondly, that he is putting into practice the realisations he made at the end of both dreams in *Lesson 1* – that the men are mere personifications of metals and that his visions are elaborations upon alchemical processes – and thus deems that he has no reason to be afraid. In either instance, it seems clear that Zosimos has reached a greater level of initiation. This growing initiatory status seems to be the key theme of *Lesson 2.2*.

Still asleep, Zosimos asks Agathodaemon why he is lying in the vat of fire; to which the guide replies, “I am a man of lead and I am enduring an unbearable act of violence”. This phrase (βίαν ὑπομένω ἀφόρητον) is the same used by Ion in Zosimos' first dream in *Lesson 1.2*. As discussed at 1.15, this highly layered phrase – often used in martyrological literature – denotes the destructive suffering one undergoes as part of a process of purification. Zosimos realises that the man of lead must be destroyed so that he can ultimately be purified: on a spiritual level, become a *pneūma*; on an alchemical level, become a man of gold.

Finally, Zosimos wakes up and, as per usual, considers his vision, pondering its possible meanings. He ultimately concludes that his dream was about alchemy, having made the realisation that lead must be cast out (δεῖ ἐκβαλεῖν τὸν μόλυβδον). Zosimos' realisation that lead must be destroyed and reduced to a *prima materia* as part of its transformation into the *magnum opus* is his key realisation in this section, and a realisation which brings him one step closer to his ultimate *telos* of spiritual and alchemical purification. Just as Zosimos realised at the end of *Lesson 2.1* that copper must undergo the stage of *melanōsis*, so too does he realise here that lead must undergo the same process; these

⁴³⁴ Fest. 3.clxiv-clxviii; Copenhaver 1992: 165.

are the crucial lessons which he learns throughout *The Visions* (as he is told in the next section that his work is complete).

All in all, *Lesson 2.2* demonstrates Zosimos' growing *gnōsis* and familiarity with his subject matter, while also introducing the highly significant figure of Agathodaemon, and solidifying Zosimos' understanding that *all* substances must undergo the process of *melanōsis* in a *kerotakis* to be reduced to a *prima materia*, upon which further alchemical practices can be carried out.

Commentary

2.16-8 πάλιν... καὶ πάλιν...πάλιν...καὶ πάλιν: The term πάλιν ('again') dominates the first few lines of *Lesson 2.2*. As suggested above, Zosimos indicates that this dream narrative will have major overlaps and similarities with the one which immediately precedes it. On a narratological level, the experience of waking up and immediately falling asleep into the same dream, or indeed having repeated dreams on several occasions, is certainly something with which Zosimos' readers can relate; this may well hint at the previously explored possibility that Zosimos' dreams were real experiences (see pp.59-61). With a technical interpretation of *The Visions* in mind, however, one might also suggest that this repetition – to which Zosimos is clearly drawing attention – mirrors the iterative alchemical process.⁴³⁵ See 2.18 for πάλιν τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρόπῳ, which seems to reinforce this understanding. The repetition of πάλιν to indicate a repetitive process appears elsewhere in technical literature (Arist. *Gen. An.* 784a; Gal. *De Typ.* 5), suggesting that it may be an expected feature of the genre.

2.16 ἐπεθύμησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου: Although MS A reads ὑπεθύμησεν – and ὑποθυμέω is indeed attested (once) in the Greek canon – this is almost certainly an error for ἐπεθύμησεν (with root verb ἐπιθυμέω), which is printed in the present edition, following the examples of both Berthelot and Ruelle and Mertens.⁴³⁶ This interpretation also forms a link with the ἐπιθυμία which overwhelmed Zosimos and led him to begin his lone ascent of the steps in the first place at 2.2.

See pp.30-2 for general discussion of *psychē*, *pneūma*, and *sōma* in contemporary scientific and religious thought: the term *psychē* is a significant word in ancient alchemy, though this is surprisingly the only use of it in *The Visions*. Whilst translations of *psychē* and *pneūma* into English are often

⁴³⁵ See 1.82 for the necessity of iteration in alchemical procedures, as Zosimos states that a specific stage in distillation only becomes efficacious after being repeated five times (πέμπτην μέθοδον).

⁴³⁶ *Catena to 1 Corinthians* 511 (Cramer 1841: 464). ὑποθυμέομαι is also attested once, in the work of Leo of Synada, a 10th century Byzantine cleric, in his *Letter to the Bishop of Antioch*.

interchangeable and indistinguishable, their difference is key to Zosimos' text; becoming a *pneūma* is the ultimate goal of spiritual purification, whereas *psychē* seems rather to refer to an individual's or object's desire or propensity for transformation and purification. In this way, there is perhaps something of a tautology in Zosimos' use of both ἐπιθυμέω and ψυχή, particularly given that ἐπιθυμέω picks up on ἐπιθυμία in the preceding section, which highlights the fact that ascent is a deeply internal process; it is a process requiring desire from both one's θυμός and one's ψυχή. This is certainly a shift from the desire which he could barely (μόλις) manage at the outset of his ascent in *Lesson 2.1*. See 2.2 for the importance of the term ἐπιθυμία (and hence ἐπιθυμέω) in Zosimos' practice, with particular reference to *FC 8*.

2.16 τὴν τρίτην κλίμακα: Whereas Zosimos previously had a general desire to climb the seven steps, he now more specifically claims that it is his intention to climb to the τρίτην κλίμακα, the third step. Climbing to the third step of the cosmic staircase through the planetary spheres may be considered equivalent to some stage of the alchemical process, or perhaps related in some way to copper – linked to Venus, the third planet in the Ptolemaic system of Classical planets – but this is difficult to determine, especially given that *Lesson 2.2* is ultimately about the transformation of lead.

Beyond its possible cosmological significance, the 'third step' is crucially a key stage in Gnostic ascents to Heaven. In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the titular figure only begins to notice his own bodily transformations when he is on the third step, not previously realising that he – planet by planet, stage by stage – is becoming an angel.⁴³⁷ Further, Enoch's third heaven is also one of transformation; more specifically, it is a space for sinners to be tortured and purified in fire.⁴³⁸ Given that Agathodaemon will soon himself be purified in fire as part of a transformation into a spiritual being – a *pneūma* – it seems plausible that Zosimos is engaging with the Gnostic idea that the third step through the heavens is the space for purificatory change. It is also interesting that Paul states that he knew of a man who was caught up into the third heaven (ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ), where he heard things that are not to be told, and that no mortal is allowed to repeat (ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι).⁴³⁹ Perhaps Zosimos is recalling such a revelatory experience in his insistence that he access the third planetary stratum, on which he will gain mystical knowledge about purification and transformation which is strictly not to be repeated (on Zosimos' insisting on secrecy and silence surrounding alchemical secrets, see 1.76).

⁴³⁷ *Ascension of Isaiah* 7.25.

⁴³⁸ 2 *Enoch* 10.

⁴³⁹ 2 *Cor.* 12 2-4.

2.17 ἐπλανήθην: See note at 2.8 for the significance of the verb πλανάω and its cognates in the context of Zosimos' ascent through the heavens and quest for *gnōsis*.

2.18 ἀπονενοημένος: At the event of his getting lost at 2.4-5, Zosimos says that he became disheartened (ἐν ἀθυμίᾳ...ἀθυμοῦντος δέ μου); this emotion seems to be intensified in this second instance of his getting lost, as Zosimos is said to be totally out of his senses (ἀπονενοημένος). Zosimos' use of ἀπονενοημένος – from ἀπονοέομαι – is noteworthy given the language of knowledge which permeates *The Visions*. As discussed at pp.70-1, Zosimos employs forms of νοέω to demonstrate his growing understanding of his own dreams: that is, his growing *gnōsis*. In this way, it is possible that the use of its antithesis in ἀπονοέομαι highlights the extent of Zosimos' ignorance and dismay here.

2.18 καὶ πάλιν τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρόπῳ: As discussed at 2.16-8, Zosimos indicates from the outset of this section that it will have huge thematic overlaps with and a similar narrative to *Lesson 2.1*. This is reiterated both in πάλιν and in the phrase τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρόπῳ; Zosimos states that he sees Agathodaemon 'in the same manner' as he saw the *homunculus* in his last dream. More specifically, Mertens proposes that τῷ ὁμοίῳ τρόπῳ is connected with κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον μου at 2.6, in that Zosimos sees Agathodaemon in a dream, as with the encounter in *Lesson 2.1*.⁴⁴⁰ This is an attractive interpretation, particularly given that Zosimos never explicitly states that he fell asleep in this section.

2.18 πεπολιωμένον γηραιόν: Agathodaemon becomes the second figure in *The Visions* to be described as πεπολιωμένος, after the unnamed elderly *homunculus* at 1.26. As discussed at the first instance of the term, the use of πεπολιωμένος may be a point of style – perhaps an authentication strategy, bolstered by the command and wisdom typical of an elder – or it may be demonstrative of a whitening stage of the alchemical process (*leukōsis*), though this seems unlikely (see pp.66-7). The former interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Agathodaemon here is also described as γηραιός, in contrast to the unnamed *homunculus* at 1.48, who was simply described as πεπολιωμένον...ἀνθρωπάριον. Whether or not the term for whitening is intended to imply expertise and authority – in the mode of figures like Nestor, Tiresias, and Anchises – this certainly comes across

⁴⁴⁰ Mert. 228.

in his being described as an old man.⁴⁴¹ See the introduction to this section for the ancient consideration of Agathodaemon as a figure of authority in alchemy and Hermeticism dating to the time before Hermes Trismegistos, to which these suggestions of his old age may be alluding. Also note that Agathodaemon is the only figure in the text (beyond Zosimos himself) not to be described as an ἀνθρωπάριον; one assumes that he is in some way different to the other characters in *The Visions*, though it is difficult to know what exactly these differences are.

2.18-9 λευκὸν πάνυ ὥστε ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς λευκότητος αὐτοῦ: A result clause in πάνυ...ὥστε... is a relatively uncommon turn of phrase – particularly in comparison to much more common variations with the same meaning, such as οὕτως... ὥστε or τοσοῦτος...ὥστε – but it is not unattested. This edition translates ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς λευκότητος somewhat loosely as ‘by the intensity of whiteness’ in an attempt to convey both the sense of the phrase and also the clear emphasis which Zosimos places on the colour in this section (both in the repetition of the λευκ- stem and in the strength of whiteness causing blindness). On the whiteness of a character suggesting that they may have undergone the alchemical stage of *leukōsis*, see 1.26; as discussed at pp.66-7, however, the alchemical colours seem to appear randomly throughout *The Visions*.⁴⁴²

An interesting parallel with the colour white may be drawn between this section and Plutarch’s visionary ascent of Thespesius in *On the Delays in Divine Vengeance*. Like Zosimos, Thespesius sees a κρατήρα μέγαν, described as the source of dreams for all mankind; this *krater* is said to be full of many colours, which represent deceptive visions, whilst the waters tinted white are representative of true dreams and visions (τὸ ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀληθές).⁴⁴³ This alignment with truth may further the notion that Agathodaemon is a figure of great authority and that Zosimos is receiving true information about reality throughout his dream sequences. Even if it seems unlikely that Zosimos is engaging with Plutarch, there seems a logical connection between whiteness and truth, which may be a point of consideration for Zosimos’ text.

2.19 οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἀπεμαυρώθησαν: MS A has the ☉☉ symbol as representative of the term ὀφθαλμοὶ. It is impossible to know whether these alchemical symbols resemble anything written by

⁴⁴¹ Richardson 1933: 48-52.

⁴⁴² Cf. Grimes 2018: 135.

⁴⁴³ Plut. *De Sera*. 566b.

Zosimos himself or whether they are simply additions in the convention of Byzantine copyist culture for alchemical texts.

MS A reads ἀπεμαυρώθησαν. It is worth noting that the compound ἀπο + μαυρώ is unattested outside of Zosimos' corpus, while ἀμαυρώ and μαυρώ are both attested elsewhere with identical meaning, with the former being more common. Based on this relative frequency, Mertens opts for ἀμαυρώ as the root verb here, rendering an aorist ἤμαύρωσα, and necessitating a vowel contraction with the prefix ἀπό; hence, Mertens corrects to ἀπημαυρώθησαν. However, based on the fact that μαυρώ is attested, and is even the root term for the other instance of the word elsewhere in Zosimos' writings, I suggest that Mertens's correction is unnecessary.⁴⁴⁴ Rather, ἀπεμαυρώθησαν is a valid inflection of the root verb μαυρώ.

The theme of blindness in the presence of divine beings is certainly one with which Zosimos and his reader would have been familiar. With precedent in Classical literature (Callim. *Hymn* 5 53-4 on blindness after seeing Athena), the theme continued into the Christian tradition: Paul, for example, during his vision on the road to Damascus, sees Christ and is said not to be able to see for three days afterwards (ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων).⁴⁴⁵ Given Zosimos' Christian convictions, one would hesitate to assert that Agathodaemon is presented as strictly divine in the narrative of *The Visions*, but he certainly seems to be a more important figure than the *homunculi*, both within the text and within Zosimos' milieu. Overall, it is possible that Zosimos' being blinded by the strength of Agathodaemon's whiteness (ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς λευκότητος) could indicate the superior divinity which Agathodaemon has in comparison to the other daemonic figures throughout the text.

Whilst the passive ἀπεμαυρώθησαν has the sense of blindness, a translation of which one can be fairly certain based on the context provided by ὀφθαλμοῖ, translations of (ἀ)μαυρώ are typically related to darkness and obscurity.⁴⁴⁶ These are key themes in both Gnostic and Hermetic thought. For the Gnostics, darkness is symbolic of the material world and one's ignorance about the relationship between the material and the spiritual.⁴⁴⁷ In the *Hermetica*, darkness is again related to spiritual erring: it is considered to be in opposition to the power of God; the *Poimandres* describes those with wrong desires as wandering in darkness (ἐν τῷ σκότει πλανώμενος); and there is a

⁴⁴⁴ ἀπομαυρώ appears once elsewhere in Zosimos' writings: in the context of gold, which is originally a charm for the eyes (ὀμμάτων τέρψιν), but which loses its lustre and becomes dimmer (ἀπομαυρούσθω) over time (*On the Sacred and Divine Art of Gold and Silver Making* 1 (CAAG 3.11)). The repetition of such an obscure term suggests the possibility that some step of an alchemical process is being referenced here, but it is difficult to determine what this might mean.

⁴⁴⁵ Acts 9:9.

⁴⁴⁶ *LSJ*, s.v. ἀμαυρώ (p.78).

⁴⁴⁷ This dialectic is well exposed by Jonas 1958: 57-8.

reference to time obscuring the names of many people in darkness after their deaths, in opposition to the light of being reborn into a divine kingdom (πολλῶν [τὰ] ὀνόματα [ὁ] χρόνος ἀμαυρώσει).⁴⁴⁸ All in all, it is possible that Zosimos' blindness is thematically linked to his being on the wrong path (see his being lost at 2.17, and his eventual correction onto the straight – and morally proper – path at 2.21).

2.19-20 τὸ δὲ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκαλεῖτο Ἄγαθοδαίμων: Agathodaemon becomes the second figure in *The Visions* to be given a name (see the introduction to this section for the connotations of the name Agathodaemon in its religious and alchemical contexts). It is interesting that Zosimos never asks for Agathodaemon's name, nor does the figure explicitly introduce himself; Zosimos simply already knows. It is possible that his introduction is implied, or perhaps that Zosimos is able to recognise Agathodaemon given his position as a crucial figure in Alexandrian and alchemical intellectual culture. It is, however, also possible that the name was added by a Byzantine scribe.⁴⁴⁹ In *On Virtue and Interpretation*, the early exegete connects Agathodaemon to the waning of the Moon and magnesia (an unknown ore or metallic alloy) which has been affected by lunar influence (σεληνιάζεται ἢ φύσις τῆς μαγνησίας σεληνοειδῆς).⁴⁵⁰ There are clear thematic and lexical similarities with 1.6, but this reference is too obscure to be useful.

2.20 θεωρεῖ με ἐπὶ πλείστην ὥραν: Although ἐπὶ πλείστην ὥραν literally translates to 'for a long hour' / 'to the greatest extent of an hour', it is likely that it idiomatically means simply 'for a long time'. Although the phrase ἐπὶ πλείστην ὥραν is uncommon, the similar ἐπὶ πλείστον χρόνον is far better attested, with the meaning 'for a long time'.⁴⁵¹

Grimes usefully points out a parallel in the *Poimandres*.⁴⁵² As Poimandres – the personification of the mind of God (ὁ τῆς ἀύθεντίας νοῦς) – offers revelation about the nature of the cosmos to Hermes Trismegistos, it is said that he stared at him for a long time (ἐπὶ πλείονα χρόνον ἀντώπησέ μοι), such that Hermes became frightened.⁴⁵³ Zosimos may have used the same image here to convey the idea

⁴⁴⁸ CH 1.19; CH 3.4. Van den Broek 1996: 14. Note the use of πλανώμενος, the term which Zosimos uses at 2.8.

⁴⁴⁹ On additions and omissions as part of the copying conventions and traditions of Byzantine scholars, see Pontani 2015: 373.

⁴⁵⁰ *On Virtue and Interpretation* 9 (CAAG 3.6). LSJ, s.v. μαγνησία (p.1071).

⁴⁵¹ The phrase ἐπὶ πλείστον χρόνον appears with this meaning at e.g., Philo, *De Jos.* 5.7; Plut. *De Vit. Pud.* 536c; Ath. *Deipn.* 8.47.

⁴⁵² Grimes 2018: 147.

⁴⁵³ CH 1.2, 1.7.

that he, throughout the text, is receiving an equally important revelation about the universe and spiritual salvation.

2.21 τοῦτον ἐπεμελούμην δεῖξαι μοι: As Mertens has suggested, it seems obvious that με should be corrected to μοι, being the secondary object of δείκνυμι after εὐθεῖαν ὁδόν.⁴⁵⁴ Greater editorial uncertainty, however, has been linked to δεῖξαι. With MS A reading δέϊξε, Berthelot and Ruelle correct to δεῖξόν – an aorist imperative – rendering this sentence direct speech. This edition prefers Mertens’s correction to the infinitive δεῖξαι. This correction also explains the fact that τοῦτον is in the accusative – it is the accusative of a clause of indirect speech – rather than the genitive τούτου, as one would ordinarily expect after ἐπιμελέομαι. This use of indirect speech here has the sense of ‘take care...that someone should do something’.⁴⁵⁵ Zosimos’ use of ἐπιμελέομαι, which has connotations of taking great care over a matter, seems a more intense manner of inquiry than those which he has had with the *homunculi* beforehand (ἐρωτάω at 1.25; ἐπερωτάω at 1.29). This increased level of interest and care may be related to the sense of the necessity of an increased internal desire which has already been expressed terms like ἐπιθυμία (2.2).

2.21 εὐθεῖαν ὁδόν: It is perhaps unsurprising that the term εὐθεῖα ὁδός (‘straight path’) is an enduring idiom with great moral significance, which is attested as far back as the first of Pindar’s *Nemean Odes*, in which he states that men have their own different talents, but it is nevertheless necessary to stay on straight paths and to strive according to one’s own nature (τέχνη δ’ ἐτέρων ἕτεραι: χρῆ δ’ ἐν εὐθείαις ὁδοῖς στείχοντα μάρνασθαι φυᾶ).⁴⁵⁶ The exact phraseology – εὐθεῖα ὁδός – survived into the Christian tradition. It is used repeatedly in the *New Testament* (*Matt.* 3:3; *Mark* 1:3; *Luke* 3:4), with perhaps the most salient example coming in Acts, as Paul accuses a sorcerer, Elymas, of corrupting the straight paths of the Lord (διαστρέφω τὰς ὁδοὺς τοῦ Κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας).⁴⁵⁷ One can also find the phrase εὐθεῖα...αἱ ὁδοὶ τοῦ Κυρίου in the works of Basil of Caesarea.⁴⁵⁸ Considering the moralistic connotations of the idiom, one can read Zosimos as not only being set on the correct path by which he might arrive at the places of punishment, but also as being set on a morally correct course which will lead to his purification and eventual spiritual ascent. See

⁴⁵⁴ Mert. 44.

⁴⁵⁵ CGL, s.v. ἐπιμελέομαι (p.564).

⁴⁵⁶ Pind. *Nem.* 1.25-6.

⁴⁵⁷ Acts 13:10.

⁴⁵⁸ Basil, *Contr. Eunom.* 29.

2.3 for further discussion of the term ὁδός, including a mystical Origenist reading of the ‘spiritual path of Christ’.

2.21 ὁ δὲ πρὸς με οὐκ ἀνεστράφη: Until the present interaction, Zosimos seems only to have interacted with characters who are readily willing to help and guide him; this changes, however, with the figure of Agathodaemon, who does not seem to give much help at all. The archetype of an unwilling spiritual guide does not appear in the religio-philosophical literature with which Zosimos would have been closely familiar, but does have something of a precedent in the Classical tradition. As Aeneas prepares for his *katabasis*, the Sibyl seems initially reluctant that he venture into the Underworld, explaining the sheer difficulty of such a journey, which very few are able to complete.⁴⁵⁹ Although it seems unlikely that Zosimos is drawing an intentional parallel between Agathodaemon and the Virgilian Sibyl, there is certainly an attractive thematic similarity. Perhaps Agathodaemon’s reluctance to act as Zosimos’ chaperone indicates the difficulty of the task ahead; for Zosimos, the difficulty of acquiring *gnōsis* and spiritually ascending to the divine, *hoc opus hic labor est*.⁴⁶⁰

If the interpretation at 2.19-20 is correct – that this Agathodaemon is representative of the mythical figure of Hermetic and alchemical acclaim – one might interpret his seeming resistance to Zosimos following him as Zosimos’ expression of the difficulty of following on from the obscure alchemical texts from which he is working (see pp.11-2 for Zosimos’ place in alchemical history as an interpreter of the texts by semi-mythical authors who predate him). Just as Zosimos can look at these texts endlessly, as the cryptic treatises offer little aid to one imitating their recipes, so too does Agathodaemon look blankly at Zosimos for an extended period of time before not turning to face him at all.

2.22 καὶ διερχόμενος δὲ ἔνθεν κάκεϊθεν: Zosimos says that his path to the punishments in pursuit of Agathodaemon took him ἔνθεν κάκεϊθεν. It is odd that the journey is thus emphasised as being so complicated and meandering, given that Zosimos asked Agathodaemon to take him on the direct path (εὐθεῖαν ὁδόν, 11.20). This surely emphasises the complexity of both the alchemical process and the pathway through the planetary spheres.

Within the wider phrase – ὁ δὲ πρὸς με οὐκ ἀνεστράφην ἀλλ' ἤνυσεν τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ σπουδαίως. καὶ διερχόμενος δὲ ἔνθεν κάκεϊθεν ἤνυσον σπουδαίως τὸν βωμόν (2.21-2) – Mertens does not situate

⁴⁵⁹ Virg. *Aen.* 6.125-40.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.* 6.129.

the full-stop between σπουδαίως and καὶ as in the present edition, but rather between κάκειθεν and ἦνυον, rendering διερχόμενος a participle governed by Agathodaemon, not by Zosimos. Whilst δὲ is a postpositive particle, almost always appearing as the second word in a sentence, it can sometimes appear in third or fourth position, which makes the punctuation of the present edition more likely. It also makes thematic sense that Agathodaemon, as a figure of authority, is able to arrive at the altar σπουδαίως, while Zosimos first wanders ἔνθεν κάκειθεν (see 2.16-8 for Zosimos' wandering).

2.22 ἦνυον...τὸν βωμόν: Whilst the verb ἀνύω took the direct object τὴν ὁδὸν at 2.21, both here and in the following sentence at 2.22-3 it takes βωμός as its object (note *CGL*, s.v. ἀνύω (p.152) which offers ἀνύω as taking an accusative of the place reached).

2.23 ἄνω ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ: Although it is not as common as the composite ἐπάνω (as we find for this phrase at 1.8 when Zosimos sees Ion stood atop the altar: ἐπάνω βωμοῦ), the separate adverb and preposition (ἄνω ἐπὶ) is not particularly unusual. It is possible that the adverbial ἄνω as an independent word highlights Zosimos' movement as the one going upwards and onto the altar, whereas he had just seen Ion already standing there (ἔστωτα, 1.8) previously.

2.23 ἐνεβλήθη ἐν τῇ κολάσει: In exactly the same wording as the death of the unnamed *homunculus* at 2.10, Agathodaemon meets the same fate, as he is thrown into the fire of punishment. See 2.10 for the significance of the passive ἐνεβλήθη and the singular κολάσει.

See also 2.14-5 for Zosimos' realisation about the necessity of casting the man of copper into the fire, as this mirrors the first stage of the alchemical process – *melanōsis* – in which matter is destroyed and reduced to its most basic *prima materia* so that it can be manipulated. It is insignificant that the *homunculus* in *Lesson 2.1* is a man of copper (χαλκάνθρωπος, 2.14) while Agathodaemon is a man of lead (μολυβδάνθρωπος, 2.27); Zosimos' fundamental realisation through his dreams is that all matter must be destroyed in the fire as part of the *magnum opus* (see also 2.29).

2.23-4 ὦ οὐρανίων φύσεων δημιουργοί: Zosimos suddenly invokes the 'creators of celestial natures', possibly performing a similar exclamatory function to ἰδοῦ at 2.10, though with significantly less precedent. As has been well noted, this exclamation is reminiscent of a similar phrase in the

work of Ps.-Democritus: ἼΩ φύσεις φύσεων δημιουργοί ('O Natures which are the creators of natures').⁴⁶¹ A similar passage, however, which has been neglected in Zosimean scholarship, but which sheds further light on the meaning of this obscure invocation can be found in the work of Pelagius. After also calling upon ἼΩ φύσεις οὐρανίαι φύσεων δημιουργοί, Pelagius discusses the dual nature of sulphur, consisting of both earthly natures which can be transformed and celestial natures which cannot be removed (οὐρανίαι γὰρ αἱ φύσεις τῶν θείων τούτων οὐχ ἐρμηνεύονται ὡς δυνάμεναι αἰρεῖσθαι).⁴⁶² This seems to align with the Gnostic worldview that one's true nature involves a divine spark which is immutable, and that initiation into true salvific *gnōsis* is simply the realisation of this fact.⁴⁶³ Presumably Zosimos calls upon the creators of this immutable divine nature as Agathodaemon is thrown into the vat of fire because this internal divine substance is exactly what is being drawn out.

Although Mertens translates δημιουργοί as *démiurges*, it seems to me that a more appropriate translation might be 'creators', so as to distance this invocation from the Demiurge of Gnostic and Hermetic thought. Firstly, the plural δημιουργοί seems to disprove a reference to the Demiurge: although the Gnostic Demiurge has a selection of Archons and daemonic beings associated with the material world, the Demiurge itself is a singular figure.⁴⁶⁴ Secondly, and possibly more significantly, the invocation to the creators of celestial natures (οὐρανίων φύσεων) also seems to sever any ties between Zosimos' δημιουργοί and the Demiurge, given the latter's distinct associations with the material world, in opposition to heavenly matters. In sum, then, this reference to δημιουργοί appears to be to the various members of the Gnostic *Pleroma* associated with divine *physis*.⁴⁶⁵

2.24 εὐθύς ὄλος ὑπὸ τῆς φλογὸς πυρίφλεκτος γέγονεν: Having been thrown into the place of punishments, Agathodaemon's body becomes wholly 'ablaze with flame from the fire' (φλογὸς

⁴⁶¹ CAAG 2.46.22-4. The full quote reads: ἼΩ φύσεις φύσεων δημιουργοί, ἴω φύσεις παμμεγέθεις ταῖς μεταβολαῖς νικῶσαι τὰς φύσεις, ἴω φύσεις ὑπὲρ φύσιν τέρπουσαι τὰς φύσεις. This phrase comes at the culmination of a long reflection on the famous axiom, ἡ φύσις τῆ φύσει τέρπεται, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν νικᾷ, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὴν φύσιν κρατεῖ (see discussion at pp.32-4 and 1.70).

⁴⁶² CAAG 2.260.14-9.

⁴⁶³ See further discussion on *physis* at pp.32-4.

⁴⁶⁴ In the works of contemporaries of Zosimos – Porphyry and Iamblichus – the term δημιουργοί is only ever used in the plural in reference to human craftsmen. A belief in several demiurges seems to have appeared among some Middle and Neo-Platonists, based on their exegesis of Pl. *Ti.* 39e; Proclus, writing a history of the interpretation of the Platonic demiurgic figure, admonishes Numenius for his belief in several creators of the cosmos (*In Ti.* 1.303). Later, Plotinus is reported also to have held a belief in two demiurges – a view deemed to be highly controversial by the likes of Porphyry and Iamblichus (Opsomer 2005a). On the deeply provocative tradition of more than one demiurge in early Imperial Platonism, see Opsomer 2005b.

⁴⁶⁵ Despite its general meaning as 'craftsman' (*LSJ*, s.v. δημιουργός (p.386)), note that neither Zosimos nor any other of the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists in the CAAG refer to alchemists themselves as δημιουργοί, nor do they refer to their actions with the verb δημιουργέω.

πυρίφλεκτος). The power of the purificatory fire is intensified by the three consecutive terms related to fire: φλόξ (flame); πῦρ (fire); and φλέγειν (to burn).

2.24-5 ὧν καὶ τὸ διήγημα...φρικτόν: Given the fear he has demonstrated thus far at the sight of various scenes of suffering and punishment, it is hardly surprising that Zosimos refers to Agathodaemon being devoured by flames as horrifying to recount (διήγημα φρικτόν, with a similar force as *horribile dictu*). It is interesting that, whilst Zosimos normally wakes up in fear when he sees some terrifying sight (1.21, 2.12), he remains asleep here. Perhaps Zosimos is starting to grow accustomed to horrifying sights and is thus becoming less fearful, demonstrative of his growing maturity in his subject.

The phrase διήγημα φρικτόν appears several times across Late Antique Christian literature, most notably in the work of John Chrysostom, a rough contemporary of Zosimos. John Chrysostom addresses his brothers (ἀδελφοί) and states that it is a horrifying and mystical (/secret) tale that no man can be alleviated of sin without the holy priesthood (ὅτι ἄνευ τῆς σεμνῆς ἱερωσύνης ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν βροτοῖς οὐ δίδοται).⁴⁶⁶ It seems to be the case that διήγημα φρικτόν, though it is certainly a rather obscure phrase, is connected in the Christian tradition to the terrible suffering which people must undergo in a process of purification; if this is the case, the idea is clearly present in Zosimos' text.

2.24 ἀδελφοί: Dickey notes that ἀδελφε is a common term of address (especially of endearment) in early Christian literature, as well as in letters in the papyrological corpus, though this is the only occurrence of it throughout Zosimos' *oeuvre*.⁴⁶⁷ Zosimos seems to be referring to fellow members of an alchemical guild with whom *The Visions* has been shared. Mertens prints ἀδελφοί, but offers ἀδελφή as an alternative, in line with the fact that Theosebeia is often the sole recipient of Zosimos' epistolary treatises.⁴⁶⁸ It should be noted, however, that Zosimos does not refer to Theosebeia in these terms at any other point in his corpus; rather, he seems almost exclusively to address her directly as γύναι. It is difficult to square the plural form of address, ἀδελφοί, here with the singular form of address, φίλτατε, at 1.56.

⁴⁶⁶ John Chrysostom, *De Sac.* 48.

⁴⁶⁷ Dickey 1996: 88-9.

⁴⁶⁸ Mert. 228. See p.9 for the role of Theosebeia in Zosimos' corpus. See p.71 for the suggestion that *The Visions* may be a letter.

2.24-5 οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ πλήρεις αἱμάτων γεγόνασιν: As at 2.18, MS A reads the symbolic ☉☉, which the present edition prints as its resolution, ὀφθαλμοὶ. The image of eyes filling with blood during a process of purification echoes Ion's transformation into a *homunculus* at 1.19. There is a difference in the fact that Agathodaemon's eyes become filled with blood (πλήρεις αἱμάτων γεγόνασιν), whilst Ion's eyes turned to blood (αἷμα γεγόνασιν), but both occur while the figures are in some way undergoing a purificatory, transformative procedure. The plural genitive αἱμάτων (literally, '[full] of bloods') seems odd; this, however, although rare, is attested elsewhere in Greek literature.⁴⁶⁹ See 1.19 for the significance of the image of eyes becoming blood in ancient literature, particularly in light of a comparable image in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, as well as the significance of the colour red in the practical alchemical tradition.

2.25-6 ὁ δὲ μόλις ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα: There may be a connection between Agathodaemon opening his mouth and the figures in boiling water who had to hold their mouths open (τὰ στόματα ὑμῶν ἀνεωγμένα) at 1.36, but this seems unlikely; it appears that Agathodaemon is simply opening his mouth to speak. In this way, a parallel may be drawn with Ion, who, after his transformation, is said to speak with a weak voice (ἰσχυροφώνως, 1.14). The difficulty in speaking which both Ion and Agathodaemon face surely emphasises the extent of their suffering as part of their purificatory transformations.

2.26 ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ μολυβδάνθρωπος: Agathodaemon is the first man of lead to appear in *The Visions* (there have, however, been several mentions of other metallic men: a χαλκάνθρωπος at 1.33, 1.38, 1.45, 1.64, 1.65, 2.13, 2.14; an ἀργυράνθρωπος at 1.65; and a χρυσάνθρωπος at 1.66). The only other mentions of lead in general come in relation to lead tablets at 1.35 – which is presumably insignificant to this section – and in relation to the general alchemical process at 1.78, where Zosimos describes the pleasure of looking upon the transformations of the four metals (τῶν τεσσάρων μετάλλων τὰς μεταβολάς) – lead, copper, silver, and tin – into gold. The copper man in *Lesson 2.1* and the lead man in *Lesson 2.2* simply indicate to Zosimos that all metals must be destroyed and returned to a *prima materia* before they can be turned into gold (see relevant discussion at 2.29; see also an attempted reconstruction of the alchemical process at pp.35-9).

⁴⁶⁹ Gregory Nazianzus, *Orat.* 4.86.

2.26 βίαν ὑπομένω ἀφόρητον: This is the exact phrase which Ion used to describe the torture he underwent during his dismemberment (1.15; see pp.48-9 for a discussion of this expression as a Christian idiom for suffering). The fact that the modes of suffering are different for Ion and Agathodaemon need not detract from this connection. Indeed, the phrase indicates the suffering which one undergoes on a purificatory journey towards spiritual ascent; this is a journey on which both Ion and Agathodaemon find themselves.

2.29 δεῖ ἐκβαλλεῖν τὸν μόλυβδον: In lieu of μόλυβδον, MS A prints ἦ. See 2.14-5 on Zosimos' realisation that copper ought to be cast out and thrown into the places of punishment; although Zosimos' present realisation concerns lead, the sentiment is the same: in order for material and spiritual purification to take place, one must first sacrifice and destroy the body.

2.29-30 ἀληθῶς τὸ ὄραμά ἐστιν περὶ τῆς συνθέσεως τῶν ὑγρῶν: In his *Oneirocritica*, Artemidorus claims that the vision (ὄραμά) falls into the same category of dream as the ὄνειρος (τῷ δὲ ὄνειρῳ ὄραμά), in that they relate to future events, have a tendency to be allegorical (τῶν ὄνειρων...εἰσι...οἱ δὲ ἀλληγορικοί), and are divinely inspired.⁴⁷⁰ The term ὄραμά is not used elsewhere throughout Artemidorus, but refers specifically to a divine revelation (often specifically through a dream) in other relevant texts (the *Septuagint* translates Abraham's vision of God revealing to him the future generations of Israelites as coming to him in such a vision: πρὸς Ἀβραμ ἐν ὄραματι).⁴⁷¹ This allegorical nature of the ὄραμά is certainly made clear; it is noteworthy that Zosimos understands rather clearly and quickly that this dream concerns the composition of liquids (περὶ τῆς συνθέσεως τῶν ὑγρῶν), given that no liquids are mentioned throughout this dream (see pp.64-9 for the allegorical nature of Zosimos' interpretations). Mertens suggests that this is without doubt a gloss which was moved from its original place before some other vision, though this suggestion is unnecessary if one considers that 'the composition of the liquids' may be a term which represents alchemy as a whole.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Artem. *On.* 1.2.

⁴⁷¹ *Gen.* 15:1.

⁴⁷² Mert. 45.

Zosimos, *The Visions*: Lesson 3.1

Lesson 3 is transmitted via MS A (*Par. gr.* 2327 : 88r – 88v) and MS L (*Laur. gr.* 86.16 : 95r – 95v).

Zosimos' final dream sequence seems almost to start *in medias res*, as the alchemist writes that he saw the *Crucibaltar*, which he now describes as divine and sacred (θεῖον καὶ ἱερόν), and a priest dressed in white standing over the altar. The scene is clearly reminiscent of the first dream. It is noteworthy that the *Crucibaltar* is in this way now considered by Zosimos less a place of punishment, and more a place of worship and divine transformation; this seems to be Zosimos' ultimate realisation that the φιαλοβωμός – the sacrificial altar, baptismal font, and *kerotakis* – is indeed a space of torture and destruction, but that this torture and destruction is necessary for both material and spiritual purification and transmutation. That this alembic-altar is still a space for torture is demonstrated as Zosimos claims that the priest performs 'those terrifying mysteries' (τὰ φοβερὰ ἐκεῖνα μυστήρια), which presumably refers to the purificatory punishment in fire and boiling water which has been suffered by characters in the *Crucibaltar* in the previous dream sequences. As is explored below, the phrase φοβερὰ μυστήρια appears several times throughout early Christian literature – particularly the work of John Chrysostom – to refer to unsettling religious rituals which have a greater soteriological purpose.

Zosimos asks after the identity of this priest. Given that no other characters have been mentioned yet, and Zosimos' last chaperone – Agathodaemon – threw himself into the vat of fire in *Lesson 2.2*, it is not clear to whom Zosimos is asking this question. An unknown voice responds that this man is the priest of the inner sanctuaries (ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων). The unknown characterisation, the disembodied voices, and the presence of a priest at the *Crucibaltar* who is described as a priest of the ἀδύτα clearly brings the reader back to the opening lines of *Lesson 1.2*, Zosimos' first dream, in which Ion introduces himself in this exact phrasing (1.14). Thus, the entire narrative of *The Visions* has an ouroboric structure, through which Zosimos can reapproach the themes and motifs of his initial dream, but with a newfound understanding of alchemical and religious procedures. The voice says that the priest in white wishes to make bodies bloody, to give eyes to those without them, and to raise those who have died; these three peculiar operations are discussed in detail below, as they seem to mirror stages of both spiritual and material purification.

Zosimos falls asleep again, thus entering his final dream. Again, as with *Lessons 2.1* and *2.2*, Zosimos' falling asleep at this stage suggests that the interactions with the unnamed speaker and the priest dressed in white above happened while Zosimos was awake. This continues the same theme of the vicarious and broken boundaries between sleep and wakefulness which are eventually totally destroyed later in this same dream (see pp.63-4). Asleep, Zosimos states that he ascended onto the

fourth step. In the ancient astrological imagination, the fourth step of the planetary staircase through the heavens is the Sun. It, of course, makes sense that Zosimos should end his journey at the Sun, the planet associated with gold and thus the *telos* of an alchemist's celestial ascent. There is, of course, a discrepancy between the fact that the aforementioned Gnostic and Hermetic ascents to Heaven required the initiate to cross *all* of the planetary spheres, while Zosimos' journey is said to be completed (πεπλήρωται, 3.14) on just the fourth step (ἐπὶ τὴν τετάρτην κλίμακα). It seems to me that the only way to remedy this oddity is, as suggested, to acknowledge that the Sun would be the appropriate destination of an alchemist's journey.

On this step, Zosimos sees three figures approaching him: a man holding a knife, and another behind him who carries a third man, a bound sacrificial victim who is said to have a beautiful face (ὠραῖον τὴν ὄψιν) and who is given an obscure name: the 'vapours of cinnabar'. There is almost zero detail to clarify the identities of these characters or indeed the roles they represent in Zosimos' religious and alchemical initiation. Nevertheless, Zosimos says that he spoke to these figures as he approached the places of punishment. Although it is not stated explicitly, the lack of a guide in the preceding lines implies that Zosimos finally reached this location alone. Having attempted to ascend without a guide in *Lesson 2.1* but getting lost after some wandering, and then getting close to the punishments in *Lesson 2.2* but eventually needing to be led by Agathodaemon, Zosimos finally arrives alone, suggesting that he has been fully initiated, can act of his own accord, and has achieved *gnōsis*.

The man holding the knife then offers instruction to Zosimos to "cut around his head, and sacrifice both his meat portion by portion, and his flesh portion by portion, so that his flesh might firstly boil by our apparatus, and then might pass through the place of punishment". The victim of these sacrificial operations is not stated explicitly but one might reasonably assume that the bound man is to be sacrificed. These instructions are reminiscent both of Ion's story of himself being imprisoned, dismembered, and burned, so that he might become a spirit, and Zosimos' instruction to the reader to overcome, cut up, and burn the snake, so that it might become a step into the noetic alchemical temple of *Lesson 1.5*. The notion of transformation as a product of sacrifice and destruction is clear, reflecting both the alchemical and religious messages encoded into Zosimos' enigmatic text.

Following these instructions, Zosimos wakes up and, not even pondering his dreams and considering their meaning as he does in other moments of waking lucidity, immediately affirms that these characters represent the liquids of alchemy (τὰ ὑγρά τῆς μεταλλικῆς). Again, it is unclear exactly how these connections work. As he says these things to himself, however, the man holding the knife confirms Zosimos' conclusion, saying that he has completed the seven downward steps, after which the other man – presumably the one who carried the bound sacrificial victim – informs Zosimos that as soon as he casts out lead, the art is completed (ἡ τέχνη πεπλήρωται). These oneiric characters

following Zosimos into the real world is the culmination of the steadily dissolving boundaries between fiction and reality which have permeated *The Visions*. It is fitting that the text ends with the unnamed figure's notice that Zosimos' task is complete.

All in all, *Lesson 3.1* – the final section of *The Visions* – recalls the themes and characters of the first vision, while demonstrating that Zosimos has finally reached a level of understanding, in terms of both religious and alchemical realities, such that he is able to complete his ascent alone to the Sun (the τόπος of gold), understand that his dreams allegorise alchemical techniques, and complete his task. Whilst τέχνη (3.14) ostensibly refers to the completion of alchemical procedures, it is here used in a polyvalent manner: the transformation of matter, the transformation of the self, Zosimos' alchemical understanding, Zosimos' ascent, and Zosimos' text are all said to be complete as a unified whole, mirroring the unification of scientific and religious allusion – and indeed possibly the unification of matter – which is the cornerstone of the narrative of Zosimos' alchemical *Visions*.

Commentary

3.1 ποίημα τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ζωσίμου πράξις γ': See p.27 for an exploration of the question of the authenticity of *Lesson 3*; see further pp.22-5 for the use of the term πράξις throughout the titling of Zosimos' text.

3.2 πάλιν: As with the opening lines of 2.2, Zosimos' final sequence begins with the term πάλιν, implying that the narrative will pick up on the same ideas and motifs which are found earlier in *The Visions* (see also 2.16-8). As suggested in the introduction to this section, *Lesson 3* is very similar in its motifs to Zosimos' first dream; perhaps πάλιν ought to take the reader back specifically to the beginning of the text in a decidedly ouroboric fashion.

3.2 κατενόησα: Lopes da Silveira notes the dual implication behind the compound verb κατανοέω, in the sense that it can refer to both a mental understanding and a visual observation, both of which seem to make sense in the context of the *Crucibaltar's* divinity.⁴⁷³ Throughout the text, the language of knowledge – the language of contemplation and understanding – ordinarily appears in Zosimos' waking moments of clarity. At 1.22, he understands (νενοηκέναί) that his first dream was about alchemy; at 1.43, he understands (ἐνόησα) that his second dream was about Divine Water; at 2.14,

⁴⁷³ Lopes da Silveira 2020: 238.

he understands (ἐπενόησα) that the anonymous guide was a copper man; and at 2.29, he understands (ἐπενόησα) the importance of casting out lead as part of the alchemical process.⁴⁷⁴ This type of cognizance seeping into Zosimos' dream continues to break down the distinctions between the text's internal worlds of reality and non-reality. Also, the fact that he recognises that the *Crucibaltar* is divine and sacred, as well as being a space for torture and sacrificial destruction, suggests the *gnōsis* which he has acquired: in both alchemical and spiritual matters, the *sōma* must be destroyed so that the *pneūma* can be purified (see 3.2 below).

3.2 τὸν θεῖον καὶ ἱερόν φιαλοβωμόν: In previous encounters with the *Crucibaltar*, Zosimos has observed it as a place of suffering: Ion violently transforms into the *homunculus* inside the *Crucibaltar*, with his eyes turning to blood as he devours himself (1.15-21); similarly, the *Crucibaltar* was transformed into a vessel for the punishment and purification of countless people in boiling water at 1.24-5. In this final dream sequence, however, Zosimos has come to understand the soteriological, purifying teleology of this suffering; as such, he now views the altar positively as divine and sacred. The baptismal altar is simultaneously the space of death and rebirth (in the Hermetic language of *Lesson 1.3*, simultaneously the entrance (εἴσοδος) and the exit (ἔξοδος) of the body); Zosimos' acknowledgement of the holy nature of the altar, and the eschatological necessity of material sacrifice, demonstrates his alchemical and religious *gnōsis* (see pp.44-8).

The two adjectives θεῖος and ἱερός appear together one other time in Zosimos' corpus, in the title of a treatise on the creation of gold and silver, entitled περὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς καὶ θείας τέχνης, τῆς τοῦ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου ποιήσεως.⁴⁷⁵ It is interesting that the *technē* – alchemy itself – and the *Crucibaltar* are discussed using this same terminology; this possibly suggests Zosimos' realisation that the *Crucibaltar* is a space for alchemical transmutation: it is a divine and sacred space for a divine and sacred art. These adjectives also appear together in the *Timaeus*, arguably the most formative philosophical treatise in the formation of Graeco-Egyptian alchemical theory.⁴⁷⁶ Plato refers to the human head as the chamber of the most divine and sacred part of a person (τὴν τοῦ θειοτάτου καὶ ἱερωτάτου φέρον οἴκησιν) – i.e. the rational soul / mind.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ On Zosimos' 'language of knowledge', see pp.70-1.

⁴⁷⁵ CAAG 3.11.

⁴⁷⁶ See further Viano 2005.

⁴⁷⁷ Pl. *Ti.* 45a. The adjectives also appear together frequently in the work of Philo, where they ordinarily refer to the 'divine and sacred' λόγοι of the *Old Testament* (e.g., *De Conf. Ling.* 28; *Quis Rer. Div. Her.* 225).

3.2-3 τινά ιεροπρεπή...ιερουγοῦντα: With the *Crucibaltar* having been identified as a distinctly religious prop in *Lesson 3*, Zosimos continues with a great deal of religious vocabulary, describing the first character of this dream as a holy figure who officiates over the mysteries. Mertens speculates that this sacrificial priest – the ιεροπρεπής – is the same sacrificial priest – the ιερουργών – who appears in the first dream sequence. *Lesson 3* is certainly reminiscent of *Lesson 1* in many ways, so this is certainly a plausible suggestion, but once again the distinctions between different characters in the text are hard to determine with any degree of reliability (see p.60).

3.2 λευκοποδήρη: The term λευκοποδήρης is a *hapax legomenon*, but interpretation as a white garment extending all the way to the feet seems to be obvious. White robes appear frequently in the religious and civic practices of the ancient Mediterranean, with the most obvious example being the *toga candida* of Romans holding positions of public office. Key examples for Zosimos' religious and literary context are the dazzling white garments which Mark recounts Christ as wearing at the moment of his transfiguration, and the white robes worn by early Christians following baptism. The former example – in which Christ's garments are said to become more brilliantly white than any dyer on Earth could make them (τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν ὅσα γναφεὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκᾶναι) – is one of the most important moments of transformation and *metamorphosis* in the Christian tradition; perhaps the priest's wearing white reflects the sacred nature of the transformation which occurs in the *Crucibaltar*.⁴⁷⁸ More in line with the themes of *The Visions*, white robes are also known to hold a significant place in Late Antique Christian baptismal rituals.⁴⁷⁹ White signified a shift in spiritual status, with newly baptised Christians donning white robes to signal this spiritual purification, a practice which is known to have happened among other religious initiates and priests, such as those of the Mysteries of Isis.⁴⁸⁰ Given the importance of baptismal purification and transformation throughout the text, it is perhaps no surprise that the priest officiating the mysteries is said to don white.

3.3 τὰ φοβερά ἐκεῖνα μυστήρια: This is the first appearance of the word μυστήριον in Zosimos' text. Given this term's association with initiatory religious traditions, it is perhaps unsurprising that it appears as Zosimos is closing in on the revelation which makes up this final dream sequence in

⁴⁷⁸ *Mark* 9:3. See also *Rev.* 7:14.

⁴⁷⁹ Batten 2021: 319.

⁴⁸⁰ *Apul. Met.* 11.10. Daniel-Hughes 2018.

*Lesson 3.*⁴⁸¹ That the term refers specifically to revealed sacred knowledge is evident from its use in Matthew, as Christ relates the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven allegorically, such that his disciples may know, but that others may not: ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν.⁴⁸² Both the alchemical and religious learning of this secret, sacred knowledge throughout the text has been itself a process of slow but sure initiation, and Zosimos is close to becoming a true initiate, a μύστης.

The full phrase φοβερὰ μυστήρια appears several times across early Christian literature, but most frequently and notably in the work of John Chrysostom, for whom the phrase appears to hold a great deal of eschatological significance. In his corpus, the ‘terrifying mysteries’ seem to refer in some way to the salvation of the soul. Indeed, in his *De Continentia*, John Chrysostom refers explicitly to the σωτηρία ψυχῆς (the salvation of the soul) as the divine and terrifying mysteries of Christ (θείους καὶ φοβεροῦς μυστηρίους τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).⁴⁸³ Similarly, in his Pauline commentary, *On the Letter to the Ephesians*, φρικτὰ καὶ φοβερὰ τὰ μυστήρια refer to the proper conduct of religious rites (eating the Passover meal while wearing shoes) to imitate the Jewish exodus from Egypt, in a ritual related to one’s commitment to a similar exodus from Earth and towards the ‘promised land’ of Heaven.⁴⁸⁴ Further, the eschatological nature of this phraseology is perhaps best demonstrated as John Chrysostom refers to Revelation as an apocalyptic text of unspeakable and terrifying mysteries (ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίων ἀρρήτων καὶ φοβερῶν).⁴⁸⁵ It is not particularly clear why these mysteries are described as φοβερὰ. Zosimos’ fear is certainly a key theme throughout *The Visions*, and these mysteries being described as ‘terrifying’ is certainly not unrelated to the violent torture and punishment associated with the mysteries which Zosimos has observed, but John Chrysostom’s use of the phrase suggests a deeper meaning. This term might perhaps be more appropriately translated as ‘awe-inspiring’ (akin to the translation of the Modern Greek φοβερός); it is more likely, however, that the term connotes the somewhat unsettling nature of these mysteries, as they are accessible only to the initiated, are shrouded in secrecy, and deal with profound theological matters in the ‘necromantic’ terms of death and rebirth. The destruction of the body in death is a crucial motif throughout Zosimos’ text, and – although presented as a vital step in

⁴⁸¹ For the evolution of the term μυστήριον from pagan religion to early Christian mysticism, see Bouyer (1998).

⁴⁸² *Matt.* 13:11.

⁴⁸³ John Chrysostom, *De Cont.* 3 (Haidacher 1906: 581).

⁴⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *In Epist. Eph.* 23.

⁴⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, *De John Theol.* 1. The phrase is used in a slightly different sense in John Chrysostom’s *Oration on the Hypapante* 2 (Bickersteth 1966), wherein the incarnation of Christ is referred to as a terrible and terrifying mystery about which people ought to be in awe (...ἔτεκεν αὐτὸν σαρκωθέντα. Ὁ τοῦ φοβεροῦ καὶ φρικτοῦ μυστηρίου τὸ θαῦμα· τίς ἀκούσας οὐκ ἐκπλάγεται;). This is clearly still related to the notion of birth, but is not as charged with eschatological meaning as previous examples.

one's salvation – is a naturally unnerving proposition. This proposition is bolstered by the fact that the term μυστήριον frequently refers to baptism in early Christian literature, a religious rite which is itself intimately connected to death and rebirth in *The Visions*.⁴⁸⁶

3.4 οὗτός ἐστιν: As in the first dream sequence, and indeed as is a common thread throughout *The Visions*, the identity of the speaker, and indeed the priest about whom he speaks, remains unknown. Mertens identifies the priest with the sacrificial priest at 1.9 (discussed at 3.2-3 above); this may suggest that the speaker is the one who spoke to Zosimos when he saw the sacrificial priest in the first dream (i.e. Ion). On the other hand, the voice remarks that the priest is the ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων ('the priest of the inner sanctuaries', 3.4), the title with which Ion himself was furnished at 1.14. In short, it seems that the priest can be convincingly identified both as Ion and as not Ion, and the anonymous sacrificial priest can also be convincingly identified both as Ion and as not Ion; ultimately, the anonymity and confusion between characters remains a key part of Zosimos' dream-like atmosphere (see p.60).

3.4 ὁ ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων: The 'priest of the inner sanctuaries' is the same phrase used to describe Ion in the first dream. As discussed at 1.14, this phrase is seemingly representative of an Egyptian priest's initiatory status and his ability to access secret knowledge which is stored in the inner chambers of a temple, as the term appears in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, as well as referring to the inaccessible *kerotakis* itself, in which alchemical secrets are hidden.⁴⁸⁷ This certainly seems to be the case in *Lesson 3*, as the ἱερεὺς τῶν ἀδύτων is designated as the individual who can resurrect the dead.

3.4 αἱματώσαι τὰ σώματα: The first of the three actions of the priest of the inner sanctuaries is the making bloody of bodies. In other words, his first task is to bring about death and destruction. If one assumes that the three actions fundamentally summarise the alchemical initiate's growth through *gnōsis* – metaphorical death, the acquisition of knowledge, and metaphorical rebirth – the priest's first step of bloodying bodies surely reflects the sacrifice of the initiate upon (or in) the *Crucibaltar*.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Bouyer 1989: 161. See e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Contr. Eunom.* 3. On Gregory's conception of the baptismal mystery, see Ramelli 2011: 1224-7. See also Tertullian, *De Bapt.* 5.

⁴⁸⁷ Ach. Tat. 3.25.6.

⁴⁸⁸ The *CGL* (s.v. αἱματώω, p.33) even suggests an altar becoming stained with blood as a specific translation for the term when used in the passive.

The making bloody of bodies certainly reflects the gory sacrificial scenes of Ion and the snake being torn apart in *Lessons* 1.2 and 1.5 respectively. In this way, the priest's action of sacrificing an initiate so that they may be reborn in *gnōsis* (see pp.49-52) mirrors the first stage of the alchemical process – *melanōsis* – by which matter is destroyed so that it might be transmuted into something more perfect. These dual themes of the spiritual and the alchemical seem to run through the priest's three tasks.

3.5 ὀμματῶσαι τὰ ἄόμματα: Though it is not a *hapax*, ἄόμματα is a very uncommon word.⁴⁸⁹ The anonymous speaker claims that the priest's second task is to give eyes to those who are blind. The notion of the priest opening the eyes of the blind to divine truths as *gnōsis* is imparted to them is a clear parallel. As discussed at 2.19, in both the Hermetic and Gnostic traditions, blindness is associated with ignorance, such that being given sight becomes a useful metaphor for breaking away from such a lack of knowledge about cosmic reality. The Platonic *Allegory of the Cave* is another relevant *comparandum*.⁴⁹⁰ Just as inhabitants of the cave were metaphorically blinded to reality until leaving the darkness, so too – according to Zosimos – are people metaphorically blinded to divine truth until receiving the revelatory *gnōsis* which Zosimos has acquired throughout his dreams.⁴⁹¹ Escolano-Poveda suggests that this may be connected to the *Opening of the Eyes* ceremony – intimately connected with the *Opening of the Mouth* ceremony, discussed at 1.36 – in which the eyes of the dead are opened so that they might see in the afterlife.⁴⁹² The Egyptian context of many images throughout *The Visions*, as well as the rebirth which is prevalent in this scene (with the raising of the dead being the third duty of the priest), makes this an attractive proposition.

3.5 τὰ νεκρωμένα ἀναστήσαι: The third and final role of the priest is to resurrect the dead. If the covering of bodies in blood and the giving of eyes to those without them (3.4-5, above) do indeed mirror the sacrifice of a human, followed by that human acquiring appropriate knowledge about the divine world, one might safely assume that the resurrection of that human reflects rebirth into a

⁴⁸⁹ ἄνόμματος is slightly more common, appearing at e.g., *Soph. Phil.* 856.

⁴⁹⁰ *Pl. Rep.* 51c-d. Plato's influence on Zosimean thought cannot be understated; the *Suda* (s.v. Ζώσιμος) even claims that Zosimos wrote a now-lost *Life of Plato* (see p.18).

⁴⁹¹ Zosimos seems to draw a distinction between blindness to matters in the tangible world and blindness to divine matters. In a letter to Theosebeia, *On the Treatment of the Body of Magnesia* 8 (CAAG 3.27), Zosimos claims that a rival alchemist, a certain Nilus, works without proper technique and is thus 'blind in his bodily eyes' (καὶ τυφλούμενος τοὺς σωματικούς ὀφθαλμούς) (this is discussed further at Martelli 2017: 212). The fact that these are not described as 'bodily eyes' may suggest that the blindness is metaphorical and beyond the bodily, connoting blindness to the divine.

⁴⁹² Escolano Poveda 2022: 102. On this ceremony, see 1.36, with additional bibliography.

more perfected – that is also to say, initiated – state. Rebirth after a purifying metaphorical death is a key theme in several of the texts and philosophies which heavily influenced Zosimos, especially *CH* 13 (see pp.49-52).⁴⁹³

On an alchemical level, to resurrect a dead metal equates to the process of imbuing a blackened, and subsequently bleached, substance with the colour-imbuing *pneūmata* of another substance. Indeed, in the cryptic aphorisms of *Lesson* 1.6, Zosimos claimed that Nature, having undergone the first stages of transmutation, believed that she was dead (θνήσκειν οἶεται, 1.72), but is soon to be imbued with colour and subsequently reborn. In other words, metals which have undergone the processes of *melanōsis* and *leukōsis* are transformed – reborn – as gold because of the tinctorial power of the golden *pneūma*.⁴⁹⁴ Overall, the priest's resurrection of corpses seems to mirror the rebirth of the dead into the perfected state: a transformation which is the fundamental aim of the alchemical endeavour.

3.5-6 ἐκοιμήθην ἄλλον ὀλίγον: Continuing the text's dissolution of the boundaries between reality and dream, Zosimos falling asleep at this stage implies that he was awake when seeing the *Crucibaltar* and the sacrificial priest, both of which were previously relegated to the non-reality of dreams in the first and second dream sequences of *Lesson* 1. See further discussion at pp.63-4.

3.6 ἐπὶ τὴν τετάρτην κλίμακα: Having reached the third step (τρίτην κλίμακα) in the previous dream sequence at 2.16, Zosimos now ascends to the fourth step of the cosmic staircase; by this stage, it is clear that Zosimos' literal ascent through the planetary spheres reflects and coincides with his metaphorical ascent through religious and alchemical *gnōsis*. If Zosimos' actions on the third step were difficult to reconcile with his position (the third step, Venus, is associated with copper, rather than lead, the metal with which Zosimos dealt in the last dream), the same certainly cannot be said about the fourth step. According to the Classical arrangement of planets, the Sun itself – representative of the golden alchemical *magnum opus* – is the fourth step along the celestial staircase. This is, therefore, the ideal space for Zosimos to reach the peak of revelation of alchemical secrets, and to be told that the art is completed (ἡ τέχνη πεπλήρωται, 3.14). See the introduction to

⁴⁹³ Escolano-Poveda (2022: 102) identifies the actions of the priest – ending with the resurrection of bodies – as reminiscent of scenes in the death and resurrection of Osiris. Whilst the Osiris myth and its themes of rebirth are doubtlessly crucial to *The Visions* in general, there do not seem to be any clear indications of a connection in this specific instance.

⁴⁹⁴ On a similar idea – the foolishness of believing a body to be dead, on account of the continued existence / rebirth of the soul – in a Hermetic context, see *CH* 8.

the present section for further significance of Zosimos' journey being completed on the fourth step of the cosmic stairway.

It is also worth noting that the 'fourth heaven' is a significant location in *2 Enoch*. Although Enoch eventually navigates ten heavenly spheres, it is in the fourth heaven that he discovers the secrets of the movements and sequences of celestial bodies – namely the Sun and Moon – and understands the harmonious measures and patterns between them.⁴⁹⁵ Given the fundamental importance of harmony and cosmic sympathies in the alchemical understanding of reality (see introduction to *Lesson 1.4*), it may be significant that Zosimos too fully realises these things on the fourth step; however, the interpretation that the fourth step is simply aligned with the Sun and alchemical success seems more immediately apparent.

3.6-7 εἶδον κατὰ ἀνατολὰς ἐρχόμενον, κατέχοντα ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ μάχαιραν: The unnamed figure who seems to take on the role of sacrificial instructor throughout *Lesson 3* is said to approach Zosimos from the East; in this way, he is presumably related to the figure who approached and tortured Ion in *Lesson 1*, having come *περὶ τὸν ὄρθρον*, also holding a *μάχαιρα* (1.15; see further discussion *ad loc.*). Whilst the notion of a figure coming from the East has much significance with respect to both Christianity and the appearance of the Sun / gold, it seems to me that the best explanation of this figure is as a personified representation of Divine Water: the figure comes from the East, signifying the rising of caustic vapours in the *kerotakis*, and is holding a knife, signifying the destruction and reduction to a *prima materia* which Divine Water enacts on the metallic material undergoing transmutation.⁴⁹⁶

3.7-8 φέρων περιηγκωνισμένον τινά: Whilst MS A reads *περιηκωνισμένον* (a *hapax legomenon* which Berthelot and Ruelle translate as 'un objet circulaire'), *LSJ* emends this to *περιηγκωνισμένον* (from the root verb *περιαγκωνίζω*), the form preferred in this edition. This correction, which implies that a person is being carried, rather than a circular disk, also explains the use of *τίνα* instead of the neuter *τί*.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ *2 Enoch* 11.

⁴⁹⁶ On the sacrificial figure as a personification of *θεῖον ὕδωρ*, see discussion of the character who torments Ion at 1.15.

⁴⁹⁷ If the correct reading were in fact *περιηκωνισμένον*, it seems logical – given the astrological reference at 3.9 – that the circular object refers to some kind of zodiacal disk.

A bound man being carried into the scene certainly implies that he is some kind of sacrificial victim, even before the direct sacrificial instructions at 3.10-1. Following the mention of the anonymous man coming from the East and wielding a μάχαρα (3.6-7), the reader cannot help but be reminded of Ion's story of himself being killed at 1.15-8; it seems, then, that this scene replays that sacrificial narrative from the opposite perspective (that of the one being told to sacrifice – Zosimos – as opposed to the one being sacrificed – Ion). In other words, Zosimos' reader anticipates similar sacrificial procedures as appeared in the first dream sequence. In a similar vein, if one is to imagine the dismemberment and reconfiguration of Ion in terms of the Osiris myth (as explored at 1.16), Escolano-Poveda suggests that the three figures in this scene (excluding Zosimos himself) represent Seth, Horus, and Osiris, in a similar arrangement to an image at the Temple of Dendera, in which Seth is a bound donkey and Horus holds a knife.⁴⁹⁸ Whilst Zosimos' use of imagery from Dendera is highly likely, including the lunar staircase found in the first dream (fig. 5, p.101), this does not seem to be a particularly obvious connection.

The verb περιγκωνίζω appears, as Mertens notes, in the *Septuagint* (4 *Maccabees* 6:3). It is interesting that the term appears as Eleazar, a philosopher and priest, is tortured and eventually martyred, though he is unmoved by his pain, as if he were being tortured in a dream (ὥσπερ ἐν ὄνειρῳ βασανιζόμενος).⁴⁹⁹ It is unlikely that Zosimos had the torture of Eleazar in mind when composing this section of his text, but the shared motifs of priesthood, torture, and martyrdom within a dream setting are certainly noteworthy.

3.8 λευκοφόρον: For the significance of whiteness in a similar context, see 2.20.

3.8 ώραῖον τὴν ὄψιν: Phraseology involving ώραῖος and ὄψις appears several times throughout the *Septuagint*, as Rebecca, Rachel, and Joseph are all described in this way.⁵⁰⁰ It seems unlikely that Zosimos intended to recall any particular character in his description of the unnamed sacrificial victim; if Zosimos did have a particular character in mind, it is not an obvious reference. Rather, it should be noted that the beauty of a sacrificial victim (for both humans and animals) is a common trope across Greek literature, and seems to have been accorded importance in ancient sacrificial

⁴⁹⁸ Escolano-Poveda 2022: 99-100. She also suggests that the bound character ought to be identified with the sacrificial priest dressed in white at 3.2-3, but there does not seem to be any clear evidence for this claim.

⁴⁹⁹ 4 *Macc.* 6:5.

⁵⁰⁰ *Gen.* 26:7, 29:17, 39:6. The term ώραῖος only appears on one other occasion in ancient alchemical literature, in the title to the anonymously authored *On the Creation of a Most Beautiful* [ώραιοτάτην] *Colour to Gilded Silver* (CAAG 6.30).

practices, with Plutarch stressing the necessity that a sacrificial victim (τὸ θύσιμον) be pure in both body and soul (τῷ τε σώματι καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ καθαρὸν εἶναι), as well as being unharmed and uncorrupted (καὶ ἀσινὲς καὶ ἀδιάφθορον).⁵⁰¹ It seems that this is the most obvious explanation for Zosimos' mentioning the bound man's appearance. His status as material to be sacrificed and alchemically transformed is thus emphasised.

3.8-9 οὗ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκαλεῖτο μεσουράνισμα κινναβάρεως: It is possible that μεσουράνισμα may be a copying error for the significantly more common μεσουράνημα. Given that μεσουράνισμα appears in both manuscripts and is attested outside of Zosimos' text, however, it is printed in this edition.⁵⁰² In both MSS A and L, the name of the bound sacrificial victim is 'μεσουράνισμα ☉'. This is a common astrological and alchemical symbol – a circumpunct – which represented the Sun in Egyptian hieroglyphics, and came to represent gold / the Sun in later alchemical and astrological traditions.⁵⁰³ Both relevant manuscripts contain identical glosses of alchemical symbols and their resolved meanings (MS A : 16v-18v; MS L : 2v-5v): gold and the Sun, however, are in no way explicitly equated to the circumpunct in this gloss. Rather, these are given a different symbol, shown as the first resolution in fig. 9, a gloss of alchemical iconography in MS M (6r).⁵⁰⁴ This same symbol is also used explicitly to represent gold at 1.79, when Zosimos acclaims the beauty of seeing the metallic *tetrasomy* become gold (τέλειον χρυσόν). In spite of this, the fact that it was such a common shorthand for the Sun in Egyptian iconography renders the resolution μεσουράνισμα ἡλίου (as Berthelot and Ruelle print) worthy of consideration. Zosimos receiving the height of alchemical knowledge in an episode which contains a figure named 'the zenith of the Sun' immediately strikes one as a salient parallel.⁵⁰⁵ Beyond this, μεσουράνισμα ἡλίου may be an astrological reference to a specified time: that is, to a time of alchemical revelation. A link between the time when the Sun reaches its zenith and the transmission of alchemical knowledge should hardly be surprising, given the ancient association of the Sun as the celestial body with dominion over gold. Further, in the *Letter from Isis to Horus*, Amnael is described as an angel of the Sun who appears when the celestial body has reached the middle of its course (ἡλίου μέσον δρόμον); it is at this point that Amnael

⁵⁰¹ Plutarch, *De Def. Or.* 437b; see also, Lucian, *De Sacr.* 12. The trope of the beauty of a human sacrificial victim is also evident at e.g., Eur. *IT* 21 (the κάλλιστον is to be sacrificed to Artemis). See further Bonnechere 2013: 21-60.

⁵⁰² There is just one attestation of μεσουράνισμα before Zosimos, appearing in Theon of Smyrna's *On Mathematics Useful for the Understanding of Plato* (Hiller 1878: 133).

⁵⁰³ Gardiner 1957: 485.

⁵⁰⁴ MS A : 16v. It is worth noting that MS M (7r) also equates the circumpunct to cinnabar.

⁵⁰⁵ Grimes (2018: 150) discusses the 'peak' of the sun in this section as representative of the 'peak' of revelation.

shares the secrets of alchemy with Isis.⁵⁰⁶ Zosimos certainly reaches the height of his alchemical understanding through the revelations which appear throughout *Lesson 3*, and this atmosphere may be highlighted by the reference to the Sun sitting at its zenith. Whilst these parallels are doubtlessly attractive, the use of the circumpunct in the Byzantine alchemical tradition suggests that the resolution ἡλίου is anachronistic, and thus incorrect.

The *signum* appears several times throughout the glosses of alchemical symbols of MSS A and L, but only appears alone twice, alongside the terms κιννάβαρις and προγγιλόν.⁵⁰⁷ Dealing first with the latter of the two possibilities given in the gloss, προγγιλόν is a *hapax legomenon*. Hesychius, however, preserves the term γιλός, which he translates as ἐτερόφθαλμος, one-eyed.⁵⁰⁸ This makes sense given the double circumpuncts at both 2.18 and 2.25, which were straightforwardly resolved to ὀφθαλμοί. It is possible that ‘one eye’ refers to the Sun – this is certainly an accepted parallel in the Egyptian iconographical *Eye of Ra* and is discussed at length in Plato’s *Republic*, where the eye is said to be most sun-like (ὄμμα ἡλιοειδέστατον) – possibly suggesting that προγγιλόν is some matter which is created just prior to the creation of gold itself.⁵⁰⁹ This interpretation, however, seems far too obscure and speculative.

Instead, it appears that the *signum* must represent cinnabar (mercury sulphide). The symbol may in fact not even be a circumpunct; the gloss offers an alternate *signum* used solely for cinnabar: a circle around a reversed lunate sigma.⁵¹⁰ These two symbols could perhaps look almost identical. In MS A (88v), the symbol appears to be a circumpunct, but the central point could easily be a smudged reversed lunate sigma, while in MS L (95r), the symbol is far more clearly a reversed lunate sigma. Indeed, as Mertens suggests, it seems that cinnabar is the correct resolution here. Cinnabar was clearly a very important substance: Pliny mentions the high rank it held among substances on account of its colour (*auctoritatem coloris*), while Zosimos mentions the substance repeatedly throughout his corpus.⁵¹¹ It is not entirely clear what is meant by the μεσουράνισμα of cinnabar. Mertens speculates that this may represent the mercury which is extracted from sublimated cinnabar (‘de désigner le mercure, que l’on extrayait du cinabre en sublimant celui-ci’).⁵¹² Whilst it is plausible that μεσουράνισμα refers to a midpoint, even the climax, of transformation involving

⁵⁰⁶ CAAG 1.13.3.

⁵⁰⁷ κιννάβαρις: MS A : 17r; MS L : 3v. προγγιλόν : MS A : 18r; MS L : 4v. The other appearances have the circumpunct as part of a wider series of characters, depicting some kind of coloured lead (MS A : 17r) and as some substance obscurely related to birds (MS A : 18v).

⁵⁰⁸ Hesychius, *Lexic.* 562.

⁵⁰⁹ On the significance of the *Eye of Ra*, see Lesko 1991: 118. Pl. *Rep.* 508b.

⁵¹⁰ MS A : 17v.

⁵¹¹ Pliny, *HN* 33.38. See e.g., the cloud (vapours) of cinnabar (ἡ τῆς κινναβάρεως νεφέλη) at *Four Bodies According to Democritus 4* (CAAG 3.12).

⁵¹² Mert. 47.

cinnabar, this strikes one as a slightly loose translation of the term, and further, does not align with the interpretation of the appearance of cinnabar in the early exegesis of *The Visions, On Virtue and Interpretation*. The anonymous author refers only once to cinnabar, claiming that its smoke is the only thing which can whiten copper (ἡ αἰθάλη ἐστὶν τῆς κινναβάρεως, καὶ αὕτη μόνη λευκαίνει τὸν χαλκόν).⁵¹³ This interpretation suggests that μεσουράνισμα ought to be translated more literally as ‘in mid-air’ – as vapours of cinnabar; this is the interpretation of the term in, for example, *Rev. 8:13* as an angel is said to fly in mid-air (ἐν μεσουρανήματι). Thus, the present edition interprets the enigmatic name of the sacrificial victim as ‘the vapours of cinnabar’; the man is about to be destroyed and burned, reduced to a *prima materia*, and the vapours which escape him (the vapours of cinnabar) are indicated as being useful for bringing about transformation.

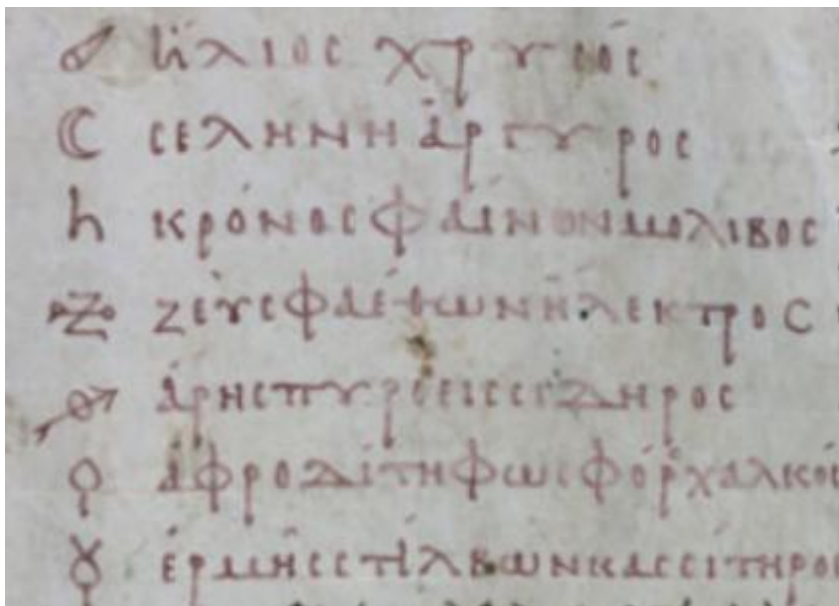


Fig. 9
MS M : 6r. The top line depicts the relevant *signum* with the resolution: ἥλιος χρυσός.

3.9 λέγει ὁ τὴν μάχαιραν κρατῶν: This edition follows the suggestion of Mertens – λέγει ὁ τὴν – over the MS A reading of λέγων ὅτι. Such a reading, however, requires several grammatical emendations throughout the following set of instructions, given the shift from direct to indirect speech. It seems odd that the man holding the knife (ὁ τὴν μάχαιραν κρατῶν) is the one who gives instructions to remove the victim’s head as part of a scene of sacrifice, but this interpretation is the

⁵¹³ *On Virtue and Interpretation* 6 (CAAG 3.6).

best grammatical fit, while necessitating the fewest revisions of the text. This is perhaps the ultimate confusion of character and role in a text where this kind of oneiric misunderstanding is common.

As discussed at 1.15 and 1.16-17, the terms μάχαира and κρατεῖν both hold a great deal of significance with respect to the themes of Zosimos' text. In the context of the present sacrificial scene in *Lesson 3*, as with Ion's account of his being sacrificed in *Lesson 1*, the μάχαира becomes simultaneously a sacrificial tool, an alchemical tool, a soteriological tool, and an intellectual tool for understanding the divine realm and ultimately achieving *gnōsis*.⁵¹⁴

3.10 περίεμε αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν: Despite MSS A and L reading περίττε με, this edition favours the correction of Mertens to περίεμε (aorist imperative of περιτέμνω).⁵¹⁵ The use of the imperative supports – indeed, proves – the suggestion of Mertens that the sacrificial instructions are written in direct speech.

Continuing the theme of a lack of defined characters throughout Zosimos' dreams, the term αὐτοῦ is appropriately vague and could refer to three characters present: the bound sacrificial victim; the one carrying the sacrificial victim; or Zosimos himself. Given the context of the scene, one might safely assume that αὐτοῦ refers to the sacrificial victim; he has been taken prisoner and is preparing to be dismembered and transformed, just as Ion was overcome, dismembered, and transformed in the first dream (1.15-8). Indeed, as suggested in the introduction to *Lesson 3*, the following set of sacrificial instructions are hugely reminiscent of Ion's tale of his own death. Ion suffered the skin being flayed from his whole head (ἀποδερματώσας πᾶσαν τὴν κεφαλὴν, 1.16), and it appears that this removal of skin is indeed the primary interpretation of περιτέμνω within Zosimos' context; the term, in fact, is most frequently attested as meaning circumcision.⁵¹⁶ Both Ion and the present sacrificial victim, then, appear to have their heads flayed as a primary form of torture. The combination of περιτέμνω and κεφαλὴ is unattested prior to *The Visions*, but does appear in the later *Martyrdom of St James the Persian* – with the weapon of choice also interestingly being a μάχαира – in which decapitation is implied.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁴ See further Dufault 2019: 107.

⁵¹⁵ The aorist imperative περίεμε can also be found in the *Septuagint* translation of *Josh. 5:2*, as part of an instruction to circumcise the sons of Israel (περίεμε τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ).

⁵¹⁶ *Luke 1:59, 2:21; John 7:22.*

⁵¹⁷ See Devos 1953.

3.10 καὶ τὰ κρέατα αὐτοῦ θῦσον...καὶ τὰς σάρκας αὐτοῦ: The sacrificial imagery of the dismemberment of the bound victim (see discussion above at 3.10) echoes the dismemberment and sacrifice of both Ion and the snake which guarded the noetic temple at 1.16 and 1.61-2 respectively. Mertens, however, notes an interesting distinction between these scenes: whilst Ion and the snake are discussed as having their flesh (σάρκες) and bones (ὀστέα) mixed together, the sacrificial priest in *Lesson 3* is solely concerned with the flesh (κρέατα and σάρκες alone are mentioned).⁵¹⁸ The connotations of σάρξ throughout the *New Testament* and Gnostic literature are discussed at 1.17, and it seems that κρέας has an identical meaning, albeit with less Christological significance (owing to the low frequency of the word throughout the *New Testament* in comparison to σάρξ), giving the scene a somewhat tautological characteristic.⁵¹⁹ The doubly fleshy nature of the sentence seems more viscerally aligned with the theme of body horror which permeates Zosimos' gruesome text.⁵²⁰

3.10-1 ἀνὰ μέρος...ἀνὰ μέρος: The term μέρος is used repeatedly throughout Zosimos' corpus, suggesting the ordered and methodical nature of Zosimos' alchemical process, which is so clearly emphasised throughout *The Visions* (see especially 1.50-5). Whilst ἀνὰ μέρος is not used elsewhere in Zosimos' work, κατὰ μέρος does appear with an identical implication of performing stages of a process in successive turn.⁵²¹ The phrase ἀνὰ μέρος is, however, repeatedly employed throughout Galen's medical treatises, highlighting the systematic method which is inextricably linked to scientific works of a technical nature.⁵²² If the sacrificial scene of *Lesson 3* is indeed a mirror of the sacrificial deaths which have appeared throughout Zosimos' text thus far, this notion of ordered method surely reflects the snake being dismembered and taken apart piece by piece (1.62).

3.11 ὅπως αἱ σαρκες αὐτοῦ πρῶτον ἐψηθῶσιν ὀργανικῶς: Whilst the term ὀργανικῶς does not appear elsewhere in the Zosimean corpus, its adjectival form – ὀργανικός – is discussed in the alchemical treatise *On Causes* in terms of the Aristotelian consideration of the αἰτία of an object, though this is clearly unrelated to its use in the sacrificial instructions.⁵²³ Rather, ὀργανικῶς presumably refers to the *kerotakis*, the alchemical apparatus discussed at length at pp.35-9. It is

⁵¹⁸ Mert. 230.

⁵¹⁹ It is difficult to ascertain whether Zosimos intended for σάρξ and κρέας to be considered as different parts of the body, especially given that this is the only appearance of κρέας in his entire corpus.

⁵²⁰ Cf. Mert.'s consideration that κρέατα may be a copying error for ὀστέα; whilst this is an attractive proposition given the sacrificial precedents in *The Visions*, this is purely speculative.

⁵²¹ E.g., *On the Composition of Raw Materials* 1 (CAAG 3.30); *True Book of Sophe* 2 (CAAG 3.41).

⁵²² See e.g., Galen, *De Nat. Fac.* 3.13.

⁵²³ On Aristotle's causes, see Falcon 2023.

interesting that Zosimos – an alchemist who is so interested in alchemical apparatus – mentions scientific equipment (explicitly) so infrequently throughout his text; in fact, aside from the *Crucibaltar*, which is presumably itself an oneiric reimagining of the *kerotakis*, this vague reference to equipment in ὀργανικῶς is the only reference to apparatus in *The Visions*.⁵²⁴ Admittedly, *The Visions* was not composed as a technical alchemical treatise such as much else of Zosimos' corpus, so a rare reference to the *kerotakis* near to the close of the text may simply highlight its importance in Graeco-Egyptian alchemical *practice*.

Zosimos' use of πρῶτον is also worthy of note. On the surface, it seems odd that he would describe the victim's flesh being burned in the *kerotakis* as the first step of the process, given the sacrificial steps which precede it (its later position is, in fact, emphasised by the result clause in ὅπως). There are, however, other actions throughout *The Visions* which Zosimos describes as needing to happen πρῶτον: sacrificing the snake at 1.61; throwing the χαλκάνθρωπος, the copper man, into the place of punishment at 2.14; and burning in the *kerotakis* in the present set of instructions. It seems that these emphasise the priority which Zosimos deems must be placed on the initial step of destroying matter – reducing it to a *prima materia* – in the fires and caustic vapours of the *kerotakis*: in other words, the importance which Zosimos places on the alchemical stage of *melanōsis*.⁵²⁵

3.11 τότε τῆ κολλάσει παραπορευθῶσιν: Although Zosimos refers to his own ascent to the third step of the planetary staircase at 2.16-7 with the verb πορεύομαι (πάλιν μόνος τὴν ὁδὸν ἐπορευόμεν), this verb with the prefix – παραπορευθῶσιν – does not appear elsewhere in the Zosimean corpus. Typically, παραπορεύομαι is to be translated as 'pass alongside', but it seems odd for Zosimos to suggest that the sacrificial victim, having been tortured, is to pass by the punishment.⁵²⁶ Rather, 'pass through' seems a more common-sense interpretation; indeed, this is how Mertens translates: 'passer par le châtiment'. *LSJ* offers 'pass through' as a rare translation of the verb in the context of stars passing through zodiacal houses (ἐν οἷς ἂν παραπορεύωνται ζωδίοις), taken from an astrological text which, interestingly enough, discusses dreams, entitled περὶ ὀνειρῶν.⁵²⁷ It seems unlikely that Zosimos wishes to allude to the movement of celestial bodies – even more so a specific astrological text – but the interpretation of the verb as 'passing through' is certainly possible, and is surely the correct translation here.

⁵²⁴ For Zosimos' interest in alchemical equipment, see pp.34-9.

⁵²⁵ See discussion of the importance of *melanōsis* throughout Zosimos' text at pp.39-42.

⁵²⁶ *CGL*, s.v. παραπορεύομαι (p.1075).

⁵²⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. παραπορεύομαι (p.1322). *Cat. Cod. Astr.* 8.4.210.

3.12-3 καὶ οἱ περὶ ταῦτά εἰσιν τὰ ὑγρά τῆς μεταλλικῆς: Despite slowly realising throughout the waking portions of his text that his dreams are alchemically charged, Zosimos only here, with his final spoken words in the text, becomes aware of the fact that the people concerned with these matters (οἱ περὶ ταῦτά) – that is to say, concerned with the matters of alchemy – throughout his dream are actually themselves representative of alchemical liquids. It is unclear whether Zosimos' realisation applies to all characters throughout his many dreams or just the characters in this final dream. If one assumes that this assertion relates only to the characters in *Lesson 3* (the man holding the knife, the bound man, and the one carrying the bound man), it may be possible – though largely speculative – to identify two characters with an alchemical liquid: the man holding the knife may be representative of Divine Water, and the bound man may be representative of mercury, the liquid metal formed following the sublimation of cinnabar and the effects of its vapours.⁵²⁸ In any case, this realisation and understanding of his allegorical dreams surely depicts Zosimos' achievement of *gnōsis* (an interpretation bolstered by the final words of the text at 3.14); he comprehends through oneiric exegesis the natural realities by which alchemical and religious purification are brought into effect.

3.13-4 ὁ βασιτάζων τὴν μάχαιραν...ὁ δὲ ἕτερος ἔφη...: In perhaps the biggest rupture of the slowly dissolving boundaries between sleep and wakefulness throughout *The Visions*, the two men follow Zosimos from his dream and into the real world. There is now no clear distinction between the real and the unreal; that sturdy barrier which was the reader's interpretative safety net – the only clear division in the text – has melted away entirely (see pp.63-4).

The situation is eerily similar to the scene of Enoch waking up in the Jewish apocalyptic text *2 Enoch*. In a dream, Enoch meets two exceedingly large characters who have shining visages, purple robes, golden wings, and bright white hands. These angels call to Enoch from the foot of his bed; in fear, he wakes up to see them still standing there, telling him that they have been sent by God to guide him on a cosmic ascent.⁵²⁹ The motif of two spiritual entities leaving a dream to enter reality before the spiritual ascent of the dreamer is notably shared by these two texts. As explored at pp.57-8, Zosimos seems to have been familiar with the Enochian tradition, perhaps drawing these parallels to emphasise that his full spiritual purification and ascent is imminent.

⁵²⁸ The substances proposed above have been interpreted as either liquid metal or substances dissolved into liquid form; this is based on Zosimos' description of them as τὰ ὑγρά τῆς μεταλλικῆς.

⁵²⁹ *2 Enoch* 1.8-10.

3.13 πεπληρώκατε τὴν κάτω ἑπτακλίμακα: Zosimos' being told that he has completed the seven downward steps is interesting; this seems to mix the fifteen downward steps which led to the purification of the unnamed speaker at 1.10-11 (κατιέναι με ταύτας τὰς δεκαπέντε σκοτοφεγγεῖς κλίμακας) and the seven upward steps which made up Zosimos' planetary ascent across *Lessons* 2 and 3 (ἀναβῆναι τὰς ἑπτα κλίμακας, 2.2). If the downward steps in *Lesson* 1.2 are correctly identified as resembling the condensation of vapours in a *kerotakis*, while the steps in *Lesson* 2 resemble the stages of a spiritual ascent to Heaven, it is difficult to reconcile these interpretations into 'seven downward steps'. It seems as though Zosimos' journey would be completed after, as it were, the 'ἄνω ἑπτακλίμακα', rather than the κάτω ἑπτακλίμακα. It seems plausible that these steps downwards refer to the metaphorical destruction of Zosimos' body, just as matter is destroyed in the *kerotakis*, and just as the destruction of the body is the first step in spiritual purification (see pp.44-8); in this way, Zosimos has learned to reject the material, to embrace the spiritual, and will soon be able to ascend as a purified spirit.

3.14 ἄμα τῷ ἐκβαλεῖν τοὺς μολύβδους δι' ὑγρῶν πάντων: Although both MSS A and L read κρόνους, Mertens has suggested that their scribes may have incorrectly resolved the *signum* which is both the alchemical symbol for lead and the astrological symbol for Saturn (a variant of the symbol used in later alchemical and astrological traditions – ħ – with a dot in the middle, which is indeed used elsewhere in MSS A and L). Indeed, both κρόνος and μόλυβδος appear as resolutions to this symbol in the gloss to alchemical *signa* at MS A.⁵³⁰ As a result of this, Mertens has plausibly corrected κρόνους to μολύβδους, a change which is retained in this edition.⁵³¹ Casting out lead is presumably another reference to the destruction of the material, i.e. to *melanōsis*.

3.14 ἡ τέχνη πεπλήρωται: Thus *The Visions* rather abruptly ends. The text of MS A ends with the following punctuation marks: πεπλήρωται: - - - . Mertens suggests that this is a form of ellipsis ('des traits de suspension'), indicating that the text is incomplete. *The Visions*, however, seems to have reached a natural conclusion, with Zosimos having achieved *gnōsis* and the operations said to have

⁵³⁰ MS A : 16v.

⁵³¹ On the pluralisation, Mert. usefully notes that this likely expresses a quantity – several pieces – of lead which are to be cast into the waters. There is also the possibility that two different types of lead are implied: the anonymous early exegete of Zosimos' work quotes Stephanus as referring to two types of lead: λαβῶν μολύβδον, οὐχ ἀπλῶς λέγω, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἡμέτερον (*On Virtue and Interpretation* 23 (CAAG 3.6)).

been completed. Further, as discussed on p.27, these punctuation marks appear at the end of many passages throughout MS A, and the abruptness of the ending – indeed the abruptness of *Lessons 2* and *3* – may be better explained by the extant text being a Byzantine summary of a Zosimean original.⁵³² Ultimately, Zosimos' journey, his text, his achieving *gnōsis*, and his alchemical experimentation all come to a neat and simultaneous end, but the interpretative work of the reader has only just begun.

⁵³² See e.g., MS A : 79v-80r.

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