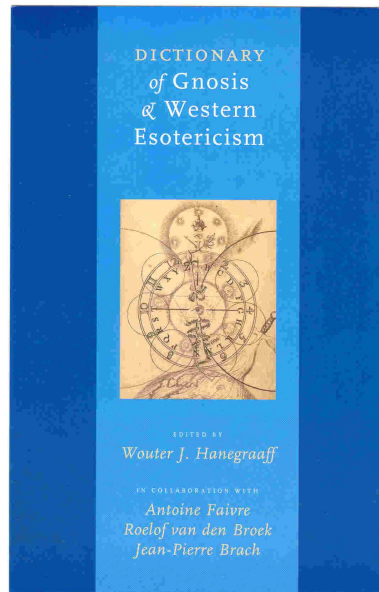


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Cryptography, ***EXCERPT only***

1. Introduction.

Cryptography in the context of Western esotericism can be understood simply as a means to preserve the confidentiality of a message (as in 18th-century Freemasonry, which used ciphers deprived of any specific magical meanings as a means of communication). In its more specific sense, however, it aims at establishing a contact between the earthly realm and the heavenly one. Angels and men are supposed to use cryptography, understood in this sense, as a medium enabling them to achieve such contact or communication, especially since the physical and the spiritual worlds are different by nature. Therefore, cryptography has been considered the instrument as well as the necessary foundation for establishing connections between these two realms.

The methods used to encrypt or decrypt are always simple. They are usually based on mono-alphabetical substitution, i.e. the replacement of each letter within a message by a sign or symbol, while the order of the letters remains the same (as in the International Morse Code, for instance). This may be done by using either a simple list (as in e.g. Martinez de Pasqually's list of the 2.400 names of angels and archangels, see below), or a double entry chart (as in John Dee's so-called "Enochian alphabet": the spirits, by means of a medium, indicate a cell in a matrix containing the

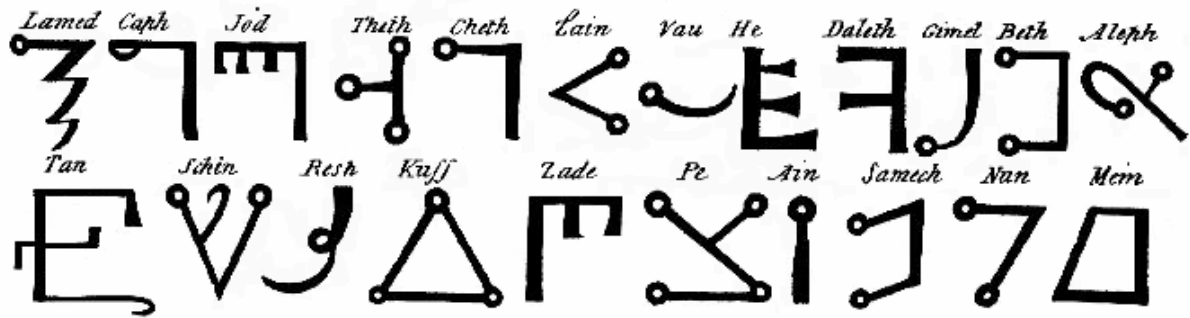
letters of this alphabet). Such systems need to be simple in order to enable an instantaneous decipherment of the signs.

Cryptographic writings fall under the heading of magic, inasmuch as they are rooted in the unifying system of the *philosophia occulta* as understood from the end of the 15th to the 17th century : a universe comprised of analogical mirrors in which all things endlessly reflect one another in a wide array of interrelations. In such a context, the sign drawn by the magus is intrinsically linked to the celestial entity invoked, or to the heavenly body of which it is the receptacle. The sign is considered to be, as it were, a written manifestation, or the direct expression, of an angel. For example, in Martinez de Pasqually's system (18th cent.), the theurgist, in his "chamber of operations", drew on a linen carpet a sign or, as it is called in Martinezian parlance, a "hieroglyph", which was supposed to "correspond" to an angel and which was chosen among the 2.400 hieroglyphs of a list provided by Martinez (this list is still extant in the legacy "Prunelle de Lière" at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon). If the operation was correctly performed, this hieroglyph or another one was expected to appear a moment later within the chamber, in a luminous form, to the eyes of the theurgist. If another hieroglyph appeared, this meant that, later on, the theurgist would have to consult the list in order to find in it the hieroglyph which had appeared to him. During his next operation he would then use this second hieroglyph, because the latter apparently corresponded to the angel who had actually manifested himself to the theurgist in the chamber of operations. In sum, such glyphs are understood - in Pasqually's system as well as in other, similar ones - as signs to be drawn and used by the theurgist during the ritual, and as signs sent out by the angels invoked during that ritual.

The perspective under discussion might be called holographic, in the sense that the entire correspondences network in question has a multi-dimensional character. A sign becomes the graph of a spiritual entity, that is, the latter's projection or coagulation into matter. Much prior to Pasqually, Paracelsus, while describing a *magia characterialis* in his *Astronomia Magna* (1571), claimed that engraved signs or characters have the same power as speech. The names or words formed by such cryptographic procedures are themselves considered to be vectors inseparable from the essence of the entities or the angels they refer to, and possessed of the latter's magical virtues and properties. In keeping with the concepts of *magia naturalis*, such cryptographic writings may be considered, therefore, as an application, among others, of the theory of signatures and universal correspondences.

One of the most commonly shared ideas in such contexts is that the words (figures and characters) used in magic are all the more efficacious if they are drawn from the original divine language spoken by Adam in paradise. Commentators and magi alike, inspired by the belief in a

philosophia perennis, have lavishly written about this perfect language - a language capable of reflecting the very essence of things, and purported to be the genuine, true mirror of the innermost reality of our multilayered universe. Along this line, the history of cryptography appears to have been closely bound up, particularly since the beginning of the medieval period, with that of the quest for a perfect and secret language. Here is a typical sample of this writing, the magic alphabet “Passing the River”, based on the twenty-two Hebrew letters, included by Agrippa in book III of his *De Occulta Philosophia*, (chapter XXX) :



2. Historical Backgrounds.

A proposal for tracing the development of various forms and manifestations of cryptography in the West has been presented by Le Pape (1999) From the 10th to the 12th century, due to the numerous translations of hermetic and related writings from Arab into Latin, a domain for mutual fertilization between the three Scriptural Religions was created, which was instrumental in fostering esoteric and scientific ideas in general and, by the same token, the emergence of a *philosophia occulta* in particular (see e.g. the numerous Arabic magical alphabets reproduced in Hammer [1806]). The most interesting type of cryptographic writings to be found in this literature, and undoubtedly the most typical one, is known and referred to, in English, as the “ring-letter writing(s)” (or ring-writing, ring-alphabet[s]; in French, *écriture[s] à lunettes*), since their baroque characters are partly made of tiny balls or rings. Such writings already appear in some Greek papyri of the 3th-5th centuries (see Ruelle [1913], in which few of the alphabets are complete, and Kenyon [1893], Nrs. CXXI-CXXV) but their sources might well be more ancient. They were widely disseminated during the Middle Ages, but occasionally at the expense of their actual purpose, since they came to be used without restraint in the fashioning of objects such as talismans. A series of small books, frequently ascribed to Albertus Magnus (1206-1280), have punctuated their historical development. They are known as *Claviculae Salomonis* (see many examples in Thorndike [1923-

1958] II, 279 ff), and have remained popular throughout the centuries. We find echoes of them in Cornelius Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* (1533), where planetary magic and demonic magic meet up again. In modern times this abundant heritage has undergone several modifications, and has been, as it were, polished and refined: the medieval "formulas" were, for the most part, rejected in favour of a more "noble" theurgy. For instance, Pasqually's cryptographic signs appear to be used mostly as instruments for attaining a redeeming personal gnosis, based on communication with angelic beings.

3. Classification.

Within the esoteric context that interests us here, it is not so much the formal characteristics of cryptographic writings which matters, but rather their actual purpose, the needs they are supposed to meet. Hence the following classification is based upon a distinction between three main types of magical communication. It still remains, however, that a sharp borderline between such categories is not possible (as will become particularly clear in the case of the first category).

A. Talismanic communication. This category implies a communication with the celestial world from the perspective of the terrestrial, i.e., a communication based upon and subject to man's initiative. This appears to be the most frequently used type. For example, the signs engraved in talismans are closely linked to the nature of the celestial influences that one seeks to attract. The talisman, therefore, acts as a catalysator or receptacle for the radiance of the stars or of the angels. It is supposed to operate by means of identification, i.e. by assuming the characteristics of the celestial things to which it corresponds. This entails the necessity to know the affinities (patterns of sympathy and antipathy) which govern the relations between all parts of the universe, i.e. the ability to decipher the book of Nature. Moreover, signs usually have to be engraved, and the talisman has to be prepared under the correct astrological constellation. The use of alphabets is here limited to selecting some of the signs necessary to a given magical operation; therefore, we rarely find, in this context, a whole group of words or sentences. Alphabets used for this first type of communication are a common component of the so-called Salomonian literature (the numerous writings going under the name of *Claviculae Salomonis*, comprised, *inter alia*, of a number of small works attributed to Honorius or to Albert the Great). Likewise, the ring-alphabets known as those of Jupiter, Salomon, Syrianos or Brachmanicum (as documented in the writings of Joseph Hammer, Blaise de Vigenère, Cornelius Agrippa, Athanasius Kircher) are typical of this means of communication; but many other alphabets used in the context of the other two types of communication occasionally appear here as well, since talismanic practitioners have erratically borrowed from various systems. Quite widespread in the Middle Ages, the golden age of

“talismania”, the ring-alphabets and the other alphabets mentioned here did not fall into oblivion but were still in use far beyond the 15th century.

B) *Natural communication*. This category involves communication from the celestial world to the terrestrial world. It is unilateral, not being the response to a request. The intermediate beings use, as it were, the supposed symbolic characteristics of the heavenly bodies, like comets, stars or planets, to build up words and messages that only the human beings in possession of a given secret alphabet will be able to decrypt, so that ‘the Great Book of Nature be open for all to see though only a few can read it or understand it’ (J.V. Andreae, *Confessio*, 29). These messages, usually assumed to have been directly inspired by God, are mostly supposed to be the bearers of news concerning political events to come, but they can also refer to serious epidemics, such as the plague. Alphabets belonging to this type are called “Celestial writing” (*Scriptura Coelestis*, cf. Agrippa, *Occ.Phil.* III, 30), “Writing & Language of Heaven” (Ms Harley 6482 fol. 75), or *Malachim* (“Alphabet of Angels or Kings”, as again in Agrippa, *Occ. Phil.* III, 30). The characters of these alphabets have sometimes the form of stars and are generally similar to the square Hebrew alphabet, but the extremities of these characters usually have the shape of rings. The relation between Celestial writing and stars is somewhat obscure in the *De Occulta Philosophia*, but two maps by J. Gaffarel (in his *Curiositez inouyes...*) indicate how to find the correspondence between each letter and each star (or constellation of stars, similar to the constellation of zodiac) in the northern and southern hemispheres. Other authors have also reproduced the forms of these alphabets with great clarity. Among them are J.B. Hepburn (in his *Virga Aurea* [1616] he calls them *Super caeleste* and *Enochaeum*), Jacques Gaffarel, Athanasius Kircher or T. Bangius (*Caelum orientis et prisici mundi*, 1657). This group of alphabets is frequent in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, that is, in a period when the idea of a connection between the stars and their signs was rarely called into question. The ecclesiastical authorities sometimes took up arms against cryptographic views and practices, but could not deny that the star of Bethlehem bore witness to the role of a celestial object in helping humanity.

C) *Theurgic communication*. This type of communication is bilateral and therefore makes a dialogue possible. It left its mark in the 17th century in western Europe with a theurgy that turned out to be, so it seems, the most accomplished example of communication between angels and man. Here, the angel, representative of the “subtle” realm, and Man, or part of the “gross” one, cooperates with a view to ‘working out the miracles of one thing’ (if it is permissible to make use here of the oft-quoted formulations of the *Tabula Smaragdina*) and establishing a kind of theurgical union in tune with heaven’s harmony. Pasqually’s system is a typical example of this form of “co-

operative” theurgy in which the signs and hieroglyphs are used, as seen above, to invoke (and/or identify) each angel by his name. Further examples of this category are the alphabets called *Seraphicum* (in J.B. Hepburn, *Virga aurea* [1616], pl. I), *De transitu fluminis* (in Agrippa, *Occ.Phil.* III, 30); Guillaume Postel, *Linguarum Duodecim Characteribus*, 1538 etc.) or the series of alphabets referred to as “of Raphaël” (in Ms Harley 1921 fol. 56). Writings of this third type often appeared together in one single treatise (as is the case in books by A. de Balmis, 1523; Blaise de Vigenère, 1586; Julius Bartolucci, 1675-1694; Geoffroy Tory, 1529 or Athanasius Kircher, 1652-1654). An exceptionally long text, written in the *De transitu fluminis* alphabet, has been analysed and transliterated by M. Danon (1910). The alphabets that belong to this category enjoyed a broad success as early as the beginning of the Renaissance, and flourished at least as far as Martinez de Pasqually’s time.

4. An Example

To illustrate the nature of cryptographic writings,...

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