



Anima Mundi  
William Lilly and the Soul of the World  
By Peter Stockinger





© Copyright 2011 Peter Stockinger and The Tradition Library.

**All rights reserved.**

Any unauthorised copying, distribution, or publication will constitute an infringement of copyright.

This copy is for personal study only, it may be printed once and may not be distributed in any way or for any reason, or published in any form without the permission of The Tradition Library.

For permission for any of the above or further information please contact The Tradition Library at [contact@traditionlibrary.com](mailto:contact@traditionlibrary.com)



# Anima Mundi

## William Lilly and the Soul of the World

By Peter Stockinger

On June 11<sup>th</sup> 1647, William Lilly concludes the second part of his epic textbook, *Christian Astrology*. Preparing himself and the reader for the third instalment, the judgment of nativities, he states:

*Assist me O glorious God, for my task is difficult, and thy servant is of little understanding! Few, nay none at all are the helps I expect from any man living (having hitherto had no assistance) but what thy pleasure is, by the universal Anima Mundi, to infuse into my obtuse intellective part that will I candidly deliver without deceit or fraud; (CA p486)*

By writing these lines and so sharing his hopes and prayers with the reader, William Lilly provides us with a deep insight into his world view and his belief system. From his point of view those two were intrinsically intertwined and inseparable. Born in 1602, Lilly lived on the threshold between the fading era of the Renaissance Magi, Alchemists and Rosicrucians and the first manifestations of the Age of Reason, which may be typified by the founding of the Royal Society in 1660. To gain a better understanding of his views and to be able to put them into a wider context, it seems appropriate to cast our eyes towards the roots of the tradition Lilly was steeped in. We may begin this by finding out more about the Anima Mundi.

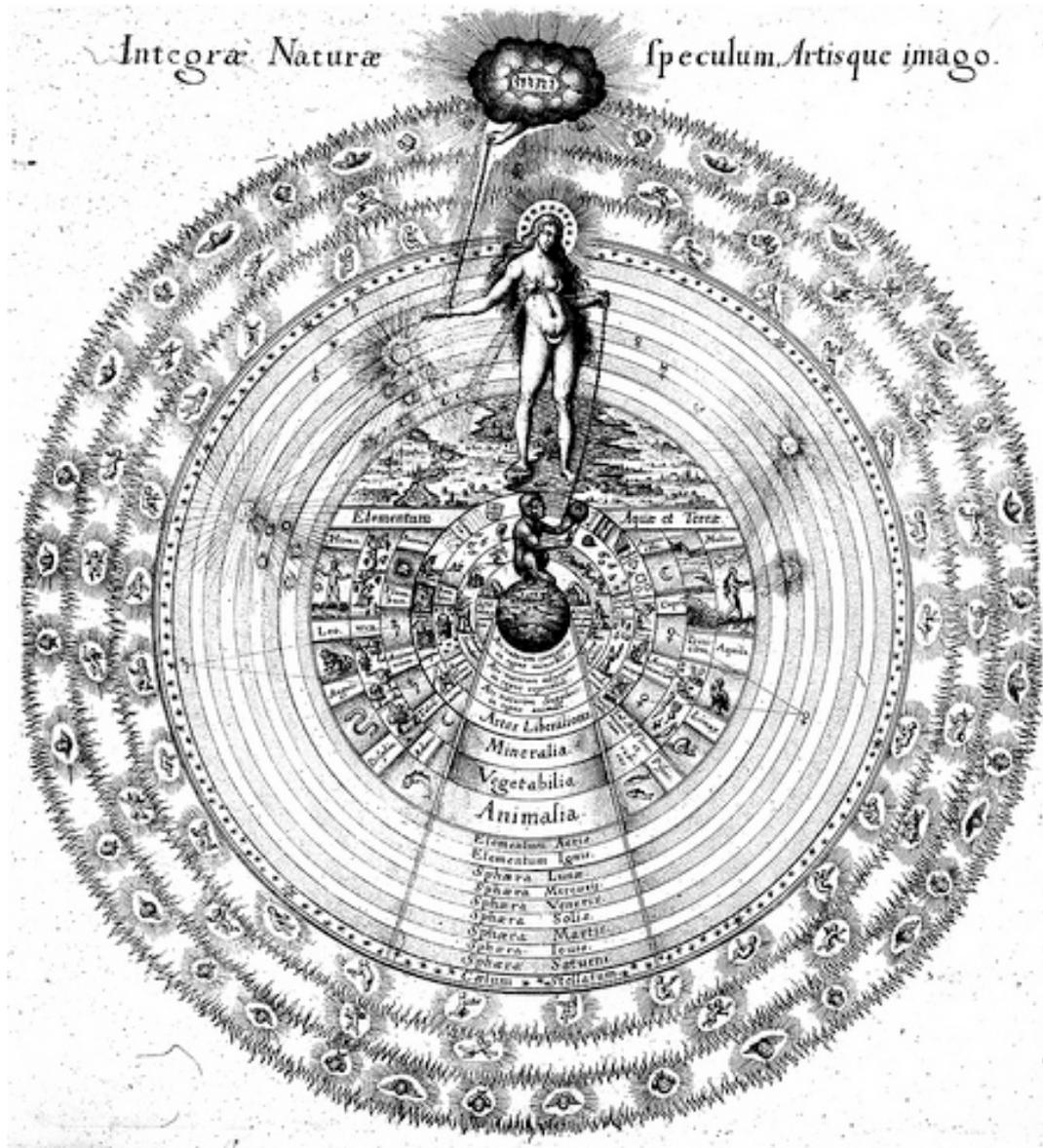
The Soul of the World, originally called *Psyche tou Kosmou*, came to be known in Europe as Anima Mundi. It was first described by Plato in his *Timaeus*, wherein he states that the Soul of the World would be inherent in the whole of the cosmos; the reason for this would be the fact that the Demiurge, Plato's creator-god, had placed it there. This indicates that the cosmos was seen as a living entity, with the Anima Mundi being both immanent and transcendent at the same time.

Marsilio Ficino, the famous physician and Platonizing philosopher of the Renaissance, wrote extensively about the Anima Mundi in the third part of his

*De vita triplici*, written in 1489. This part of his work, called *Liber De vita coelitus comparanda*, or, "On Obtaining Life from the Heavens", mainly describes ways of attracting benevolent celestial influences which, in most cases, are planetary. Therein Ficino states:

*For according to the more ancient Platonists, from her reasons, the World-soul constructed in the heavens, besides the stars, figures, and such parts of them as are also themselves figures of a sort, and she impressed properties on all these. (TBL p245)*

The frontispiece of Robert Fludd's *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris*, vol.1, Oppenheim 1617, provides us with a good example how this idea was envisaged:



Nature, the mother of all things, depicted as a nude virgin, connects the heavens and the elemental world. She is the Soul of the World, as Fludd explains:

*On her breast is the true sun, on her belly is the moon, ... her heart gives the stars their light and her womb, the spirit of the moon, is the filter through which the astral influences reach the earth.*

Robert Fludd, who lived between 1574 and 1637, was a respected London physician as well as a universal philosopher and prolific writer in the Neo-Platonist tradition. Fludd became involved in the search for Rosicrucians after the famous *Fama Fraternitatis* was published in 1614. He wrote in defence of their existence and wanted to be accepted into their brotherhood. William Lilly mentions him in his bibliography, appended to *Christian Astrology*:

*... and in several other pieces of his Works, has wrote much of Astrology, he may justly be accounted the mirror of our times, and of the Welsh Nation.*

Through his statement that he believes in the Anima Mundi, Lilly provides us with an important piece of information, enabling us to deliver proof of his Neo-Platonist view. This is further corroborated by the fact that he lists several important Neo-Platonic authors in his bibliography. Books on his library shelves included Ficino's *De Vita Triplici*, Paracelsus' *De Summis Naturae Mysteriis* and Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*. Although not included in the bibliography of *Christian Astrology*, we know that Lilly owned a copy of *Picatrix*, a work which was at the root of magical thinking in Western Europe. David Pingree provides interesting details in his critical Latin edition of *Picatrix*, stating\*:

*Manuscript M. London, British Library, Sloane 3679. 158 pp. Copied in the early seventeenth century. ... The manuscript is probably a copy of that acquired by Richard Napier (or Sandy) (1559-1634) of Great Linford. Buckinghamshire, from Simon Forman (1552-1611) in 1599 or shortly thereafter. It was inherited by his nephew, Sir Richard Napier (1607-1676), in 1634, and he, according to a note written by Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) on p. 158, gave it to William Lilly (1602-1681): 'This book was given to Mr Lilly by sr Richard Napier. & I exchanged with him for another of the same written in quarto. E. A.'* (*Picatrix*, pxix)

*Manuscript N. London. British Library, Sloane 1302. 153 ff. This is probably the manuscript in quarto that Ashmole gave to Lilly in exchange for M, and this gift is probably that recorded by Ashmole as having taken place on 5 January 1648. (Picatrix, pxx)*

Another work of interest is Johannes Trithemius' *De Septem Secundeis*, which was first printed in 1508. Lilly translated it and published it as part of his *The World's Catastrophe*, in 1647. We will hear more about this text later on.

Let us first return to Robert Fludd's statement that the "... heart [of the virgin, which is the Anima Mundi] gives the stars their light and her womb, the spirit of the moon, is the filter through which the astral influences reach the earth."

Here we enter the realm of celestial magic. This form of magic is situated between natural magic and ceremonial magic, but, as Shumaker explains in his *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: ... is not excluded from natural magic, since astrological forces could be construed as part of nature* (p 109). In the eyes of the Renaissance magician *magia naturalis*, or natural magic, consisted of astrology, alchemy and the work with natural forces. This was diametrically opposed to ceremonial magic. In this field particularly goëtic and theurgic practices were seen as morally unacceptable and it was thought that they could endanger the operator's soul through the engagement with bad demons. The term goëty stems from the Greek word *goeteia* for 'sorcery' and refers to the conjurations of angels and demons. The word became well known through the 17<sup>th</sup> century grimoire *Clavicula Salomonis* or *The Lesser Key of Solomon*. Written in five books, it contains descriptions of spirits and the conjurations needed to invoke them. The first book is called *Ars Goëtia*, containing the names of 72 demons and the formulae to call them up. The fifth book is called *Ars Notoria*, which will be discussed later.

That Lilly was familiar with the term 'natural magic' can be shown by a quote from the introductory chapter of *Christian Astrology*:

*... without exact knowledge hereof, one cannot attaine to any exactnesse in naturall Magick, viz. in gathering Hearbs, or perfecting many other rarities.* (CA, p93)

In his *De Vita Triplici*, Ficino gives explanation how the Anima Mundi is making it possible to work celestial or astral magic:

*... The World-soul possesses by divine powers precisely as many seminal reasons of things as there are Ideas in the Divine Mind. By these seminal reasons she fashions the same number of species in matter. That is why every single species corresponds through its own seminal reason to its own idea and oftentimes through this reason it can easily receive something from the idea – since indeed it was made through the reason from the idea.... And if in proper manner you bring to bear on a species, or on some individual in it, many things which are dispersed but which conform to the same idea, into this material suitably adapted you will soon draw a particular gift from the idea, through the seminal reason of the Soul.* (TBL p243)

This way of thinking is, of course, rooted in the Hermetic teachings. As G.R.S. Mead points out rightly in his groundbreaking work *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, it was Ficino who translated the Trismegistic Sermons as early as 1471.

An interesting point worth mentioning is that from this text we can recognise the roots of the underlying principle known to astrologers as the teaching of 'essence'. This concept finds its manifestation in Lilly's table of essential dignities.

**A table of the essential Dignities of the Planets according to Ptolemy**

Sign.	Hour of the Planets.	Exaltation.	Triplicity of the Planets.	The Terms of the Planets.	The Faces of the Planets.	Ascent.
♃	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌
♄	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍
♅	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎
♆	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏
♇	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐
♈	♑	♑	♑	♑	♑	♑
♉	♒	♒	♒	♒	♒	♒
♊	♓	♓	♓	♓	♓	♓
♋	♈	♈	♈	♈	♈	♈
♌	♉	♉	♉	♉	♉	♉
♍	♊	♊	♊	♊	♊	♊
♎	♋	♋	♋	♋	♋	♋
♏	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌
♐	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍
♑	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎
♒	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏
♓	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐
♈	♑	♑	♑	♑	♑	♑
♉	♒	♒	♒	♒	♒	♒
♊	♓	♓	♓	♓	♓	♓
♋	♈	♈	♈	♈	♈	♈
♌	♉	♉	♉	♉	♉	♉
♍	♊	♊	♊	♊	♊	♊
♎	♋	♋	♋	♋	♋	♋
♏	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌	♌
♐	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍	♍
♑	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎	♎
♒	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏	♏
♓	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐	♐

Practitioners of traditional astrology should be aware that the doctrine of essential dignities is in fact based on Hermetic and Neo-Platonic thinking. But let us look at Ficino’s interpretation, as he continues:

*Always remember, though, that just as the power of our soul is brought to bear on our members through the spirit, so the force of the World-soul is spread under the World-soul through all things through the quintessence, which is active everywhere, as the spirit inside the World’s Body, but that this power is instilled especially into those things which have absorbed the most of this kind of spirit. (TBL p247)*

Here we are reminded of another important author, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. We have already established that Lilly owned an English translation of *De Occulta Philosophia* and have shown elsewhere that he used some of its contents in his own work, *Christian Astrology*. Agrippa collected the wisdom of the wise ones and magicians and compiled this knowledge in unprecedented form in his magnum opus. A close study of his *Three Books on Occult Philosophy* reveals that his views are built on Neo-Platonic thinking. The world, according to Agrippa, is divided into three parts, namely the elemental, the celestial and the spiritual part, whereby the lower part is always ruled by the higher one. Consequently a system of steps or links in a chain is built whereby the forces or energies pour out from the higher, more pure, unto the lower. This is represented in the teaching of the correspondences and Lilly devotes chapters VIII to XIV of *Christian Astrology* to these. A typical Neo-Platonic chain of correspondences would include the appropriate angel, planet, element, animal, plant, metal and stone. For example the correspondences for Saturn are Cassiel – Saturn – air – cat, hare, mouse, dog, wolf, etc. – bearsfoot, wolf bane, hemlock, ferne, etc. – lead – loadstone, black stones.

This brings us to another interesting point which should be investigated. In his *Letter to the Student*, Lilly writes:

... How many pre-eminences, advantages has God bestowed on you? you range above the heavens by contemplation, conceive the motion and magnitude of the stars; you talk with Angels, yes with God himself;

If we look at this text in the light of Neo-Platonic doctrines, we can see that Lilly had taken on the idea of the steps or chains and applied it by creating an upwards leading chain, consisting of the stars, angels and God, being the highest instance. Lilly mentions angels and we find him writing about them in other places like his *Merlinus Anglicus* of 1676, where he states:

... Nor are the Secundian Intelligences, viz. what Angel then governs, to be omitted in consideration, for the judging of future Events, as to search when he began his Dominion, and how many years since his Government; for there is a very great Mystery in this, Trithemius his mensuration of time in those matters doth excel all that I have seen.

Trithemius' *De Septem Secundeis*, translated by Lilly, describes "the Seven Secondary Causes of the heavenly intelligences, governing the Orbes under God", calling them angels or spirits of the planets. These were originally called daemons of the planets as a quote from Ficino's *Three Books on Life* shows:

... if he employs things which pertain to such and such a star and daemon, he undergoes the peculiar influence of this star and daemon. ...And he undergoes this influence not only through the rays of the star and the daemon themselves, but also through the very Soul of the World. For the reason of any star and daemon flourishes in her. (TBL p245)

Agrippa, who was heavily influenced by Trithemius, recorded them under this name in his *Three Books on Occult Philosophy*. It has to be noted that these daemons have nothing to do with the demons of later popular lore although the debate about the difference between angels and daemons and their role was raging between occultists and clerics with such intensity that it would lead us too far astray if we were to try and wade into this discussion. In his *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*, Wayne Shumaker provides a clear if slightly simplistic definition stating:

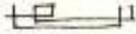
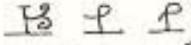
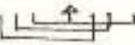
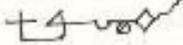
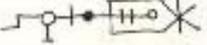
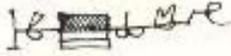
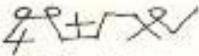
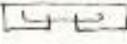
... These intelligences, as every contemporary reader would have known without explanation, are spiritual beings intermediate between God and men: In the Christian view angels, in the Neo-Platonic view daemons. (p113)

That Lilly saw them as intermediaries between God and men can be seen in this quote from *Christian Astrology*:

If attaine the Philosopher's Stone? ...but as it is all blessing beyond all blessings upon earth, so I hold, that it is given but to very few, and to those few rather by revelation of the good angels of God, than the proper industry of man. (CA, p442f)

In 1503, five years before he would publish *De Septem Secundeis*, Trithemius wrote a manuscript, *Calendarium naturale magicum*, which is kept in Vienna's

national library; therein he shows drawings of the sigils attached to the names of these intelligences. Fred Gettings lists them in his *Dictionary of Occult, Hermetic and Alchemical Sigils*:

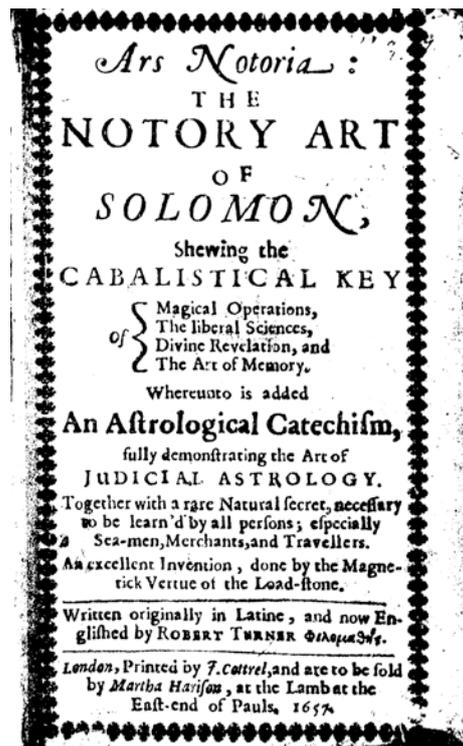
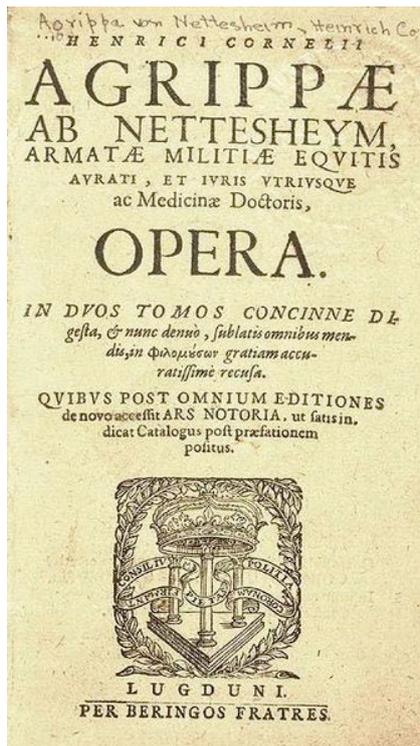
PLANET	PLANETARY SPIRIT	PLANETARY ANGEL
JUPITER	BETHOR 	ZACHARIEL 
MARS	PHALEG 	SAMUEL 
MERCURY	OPHIEL 	RAPHAEL 
MOON	PHUL 	GABRIEL 
SATURN	ARATRON 	ORIPHIEL 
SUN	OCH 	MICHAEL 
VENUS	HAGITH 	ANAEL 

One can see that the names of the planetary angels are identical to those later used in *De Septem Secundeis*.

But already in 1634 Lilly had an encounter with angels when he purchased a manuscript of the *Ars Notoria*. In his autobiography he writes:

... One whole year and more I continued a widdower and followed my studys very hard, during which tyme a Scholler pawned unto mee for 40s. *Ars Notoria*, a large Volumn wrote in Parchment, with the names of those Angells and their Pictures which are thought and believed by Wise men to teach and instruct in all the 7 Liberall Sciences, and this is attained by observing elected Tymes and those prayers appropriated unto the severall Angells. I do ingeniously acknowledge, I used those prayers according to the form and direction prescribed for some weeks, using the word *Astrologia* for *Astronomia*, but of this no more. That *Ars Notoria*, inserted in the latter end of *Cornelius Agrippa* signifyeth nothing, many of the prayers beeing not the same, nor is the Direction unto those prayers any thing considerable. (Autobiography, p41)

It has to be noted that Lilly is talking about Agrippa's *Opera Omnia*, published in two volumes, ca. 1620. Vol. 1 includes the spurious 4th book of *De occulta philosophia*, the *Ars Notoria* (by Apollonius, of Tyana), and other works by various authors. Later, in 1657, Robert Turner published his translation of *Ars Notoria*, apparently based on the version appended in *Opera Omnia*. But, as Lilly rightly states, both versions do not include the all important mystical drawings.



There has always been doubt over the authorship of the fourth book of Agrippa and textual analysis undertaken by Will Erich Peuckert has shown beyond doubt that the fourth book of Agrippa was indeed written by a pseudo-Agrippa, an impostor.

*Ars Notoria* is a grimoire of the so called "Salomonic Cycle" and closely related to *Liber Juratus*, sometimes called *Liber Sacratu*s, another mediaeval grimoire. In his *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Thorndike devotes a whole chapter to Solomon and the *Ars Notoria*, writing:

... This calls to mind the passage in *The City of God* where Augustine speaks of "incantations and formulae composed by an art of depraved curiosity which they either call magic or by the more detestable name goetia or by the honorable title theurgia. For they try to distinguish between these arts and condemn some men, whom the populace calls malefici, as devoted to illicit arts, for these, they say, are concerned with goetia; but others they want to make out praiseworthy as being engaged in theurgia. But they are both entangled in the deceptive rites of demons who masquerade under the names of angels." (vol2, p279ff)

Lilly experimented with the angels of the *Ars Notoria* and undertook several magical operations. The problems he encountered are mentioned in his autobiography where he states that he

... grew weary of such employments, and since have burned my bookes, which instructed those Curiositys: for after that, I became melancholly, very much afflicted with the Hypochondriack melancholly, growing lean and spare, and every day worse, so that in the year 1635, my infirmity continuing and my acquaintance increasing, I resolved to live in the country. (Autobiography, p43)

William Lilly might have burnt his books dealing with the darker, goëtic side of magic and turned his back on conjurations and necromancy. But as the evidence of the books kept in his library and quotes from his *Christian Astrology* and other publications show, he remained a firm believer in Hermetic and Neo-Platonic doctrines. Like many other Platonists before his time, he may have turned his daemons into angels but he still believed in the Anima Mundi. It has to be understood that without this foundation of natural magic the whole concept of his astrology would have collapsed. In his *Merlini Anglici ephemeris for 1651* we find a summary and fine amalgamation of his beliefs:

*... I feare not their bellowing or thundering against me or Astrology, I seek God in his own words, wherein I find no Envy, Malice, self-ends, domineering, rebellion against Superiors, or Lording it over tender Consciences commanded, or checking the spirit of any upon whom his holy spirit breaths: In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I find sweet perswasions, most heavenly directions, that all our Actions be performed with love, charity, meekness, submission and obedience to powers and Authority, sith they are ordained by God." (p A3)*

-..-

## Bibliography:

Autobiography: *The Life of William Lilly student in Astrology, wrote by himselfe in the 66th year of his age, at Hersham in the parish of Walton uppon Thames in the county of Surrey : propria manu.* Transcribed from the autograph by Sue Ward with annotations, commentaries and biographical notes, including Elias Ashmole's addenda, 1998 & 2009.

CA: William Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, Regulus edition, London 1985

TBL: Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, critical edition by Carol Kaske and John Clark, Arizona, 1998

Picatrix: *The Latin Version of Ghayat Al-Hakim*, edited by David Pingree, Warburg Institute, London, 1986

---

\*I am indebted to Sue Ward who has pointed out that Professor Josten in *Elias Ashmole, His Autobiographical Writings* gives another shelfmark for 1302. "There are no Picatrix texts among Ashmole's manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, a reference to Picatrix, not in Ashmole's hand, is found in MS. Ashm. 1437, p.46 and an extract from a Latin Picatrix text, which was copied by Ashmole, in MS Sloane 3822, f.20. See also the Index to the Sloane Manuscripts in the British Museum, by E.J.L. Scott, London, 1904, p.421, s.v. Picatrix, where several transcripts of Picatrix's treatise on magic are mentioned. The Picatrix text in MS. Sloane 3679, ff. 1-74v, was at one time in Ashmole's possession. At the end (f.74v) he has noted: 'This Booke was given to Mr: Lilly by Sir Rich. Napier, & I exchanged with him for another of the same, written in quarto. E:A:' The quarto volume which Ashmole gave Lilly may be MS. Sloane 1305, as part of the third and the entire fourth book of Picatrix's text therein are written in Ashmole's hand.