

The veil of Egypt: the constitution of the individual and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt as portrayed in *The Secret Doctrine* of H.P. Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society

by

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I declare that The veil of Egypt: the constitution of the individual and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt as portrayed in *The Secret Doctrine* of H.P. Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

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Summary

The Secret Doctrine is the *magnum opus* of H.P. Blavatsky and one of the foundation texts of the Theosophical Society. It represents her attempt to appropriate authority in a wide variety of fields, including, science, religion, and philosophy. This study examines H.P. Blavatsky's engagement with Ancient Egypt in relation to two specific themes, the constitution of the individual and the afterlife, as they are portrayed in this work. It locates Theosophy in its historical context, the late nineteenth century, in relation to various fields of knowledge. It reviews the sources that H.P. Blavatsky drew on in her work and discusses the various interpretive techniques she employed to insert Theosophical content into various world religions. Finally, it contrasts the Theosophical presentation of Ancient Egypt in *The Secret Doctrine* with that of mainstream modern Egyptology. The fundamental disconnect which is revealed highlights the challenges that the Theosophical perspective faces.

Key terms:

Theosophy; Theosophical Society; Blavatsky; Western esotericism; Occultism; Ancient Egypt; Comparative religion; Egyptology; Afterlife; Human constitution; Secret Doctrine;

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I dedicate this work to my Theosophical brother, CF. He could not write my Theosophical story, and I could not write his. His would be the grander tale, and I hope that one day it will be told.

PREFACE :

After some 14 years in the freight forwarding industry I decided to resume my studies in comparative religion at the academic level. I have a relatively long association with Theosophy having been a member of a Theosophical Society since the early 1990's. While searching for a suitable topic for my dissertation I chanced upon Erik Hornung's, *The secret lore of Egypt: its impact on the west*. This work is a study of 'esoteric' Egypt throughout history, including a chapter on Theosophy and Egypt. After reading what struck me as an unsatisfactory chapter on the presentation of Ancient Egypt in Theosophical thought I felt challenged to investigate the topic in more detail.

"But Breath needs a mind to embrace the Universe" - Stanzas of Dzyan

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1.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND

An encounter with Erik Hornung's *The secret lore of Egypt: its impact on the west*¹ prompted my investigation of Ancient Egypt as portrayed in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. Hornung's book is a study of 'esoteric' Ancient Egypt in the imagination of western society from antiquity to the present day. In this dissertation I shall examine in detail some of the issues raised by Hornung's study.

Wouter Hanegraaff has noted that the academic field of Western Esotericism is still comparatively new. (1999, pg. 1) Currently it is still in the process of assuming its legitimate place in the academic arena, although significant strides have been made. In the non-academic world, esoteric books, ideas, and themes are quite pervasive. At this popular level there is often a lack of critical evaluation of sources and ideas which can reinforce negative stereotypes of both adherents and core ideas. While it is incorrect to generalize, it seems that there can still be a lack of serious engagement with esoteric themes and literature at the academic level. (I refer, in part, to academic fields other than the new field of Western Esotericism.) This situation is, and has been, changing and 'esotericism' is coming under greater critical scrutiny and evaluation. Similarly, from the Theosophical side I have encountered a strain of research with greater emphasis on serious critical studies of Theosophical themes, for example in the works of David and Nancy Reigle, Henk J. Spierenberg, and David Pratt². Special mention should be made of the scholarly journal *Theosophical History* which is dedicated to the academic investigation of Theosophical topics.

¹ Erik Hornung, professor emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Basel, Switzerland, is one of the world's current leading Egyptologists.

² For David Reigle on Tibetan Buddhism and Theosophy see his website, www.easterntradition.org. Spierenberg has compiled a number of studies on the Theosophical presentation of various world religions, e.g. Vedanta, Gnosticism, Buddhism and other traditions. David Pratt maintains a website with articles comparing modern science and Theosophical thought. (www.davidpratt.info.)

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

This dissertation is intended to be a contribution to the field of western esoteric studies. The way in which H.P. Blavatsky engages with religion in general, and with any particular religion specifically, could be complete topics for dissertations in themselves. I intend to focus on a particular section of her statements in respect of Ancient Egypt as presented in *The Secret Doctrine*.³ I will specifically examine H.P. Blavatsky's statements in relation to Ancient Egypt which deal with the constitution of the individual and the afterlife. These are interrelated topics. Far more could be said concerning the way H.P. Blavatsky engages with Ancient Egypt as a whole, for example, the macrocosm, creation accounts, and the history and chronology of Ancient Egypt. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I have narrowed my focus to an aspect of her larger engagement with Ancient Egypt.

The object of my study, or the unit of analysis, is *The Secret Doctrine* of H.P. Blavatsky. My primary aim will be to state, examine, and assess her statements on the constitution of the person and the afterlife in relation to Ancient Egypt as advanced in this central work of hers. The main aim of my dissertation will be to state, in Theosophical terminology, her teachings on these topics. I will look to examining her work for internal consistency and/or inconsistency. The question of internal consistency is important as the foundation of the Theosophical endeavour is that of an Ancient Wisdom Tradition carried from the past and revealed again by H.P. Blavatsky. It is said to have a 'scientific', verifiable base, and as such should not be internally inconsistent. In addition, its origin is located in individuals who have unique access to 'truth' to the point where error is, from a Theosophical perspective, almost impossible. Notions of 'truth' and 'scientific' and how these are understood by H.P. Blavatsky in her writings will form aspects of my work.

I have identified two secondary aims. Firstly, I intend to examine H.P. Blavatsky's statements on these themes in the religion of Ancient Egypt in relation to the current mainstream views of Egyptology. Secondly, I will examine her use of her contemporary textual sources⁴ and the various strategies she invoked to draw these sources into her overarching Theosophical scheme.

³ For reasons to be explored in chapter three I will italicise when referring to the book *The Secret Doctrine*, and leave un-italicised when referring to 'the secret doctrine' in its sense of all possible esoteric truths.

⁴ By literary sources I refer to works she references in *The Secret Doctrine*, which would include both primary Egyptian texts (in translation) and secondary sources on Ancient Egypt.

A number of issues are raised in relation to my main objective. Firstly, can *The Secret Doctrine* be separated from H.P. Blavatsky's other writings? Secondly, why *The Secret Doctrine*? What place or status does this work have in the Theosophical *oeuvre*?

In response to the first point, I suggest that, while *The Secret Doctrine* is a discrete text, it is not possible to isolate it totally from the balance of her writings. *The Secret Doctrine* draws on her earlier work, and it is projected into the future by being referenced in later writings.

Particularly relevant are *volumes xii* and *xiv* of her *Collected Works*, and *Isis Unveiled*.

Portions of these volumes from her *Collected Works* are believed to have been intended to form a third and fourth volume of her *Secret Doctrine*.⁵ I will, therefore, draw on H.P.

Blavatsky's other writings quite frequently. *The Secret Doctrine* is, however, regarded as her *magnum opus* and defining work.⁶

In response to the second point, I will outline the place of *The Secret Doctrine*, not in the light of its place in any particular Theosophical Society (i.e. how any set or subset of members values the work), but rather in relation to H.P. Blavatsky's own referencing statements regarding this work. This is an important point as I have met many Theosophists who do not engage with *The Secret Doctrine* in any direct way. Despite this *The Secret Doctrine* has an authoritative place in the Theosophical Society which cannot be easily gainsaid. Any Theosophical work is valued according to its authorship or inspiration. The more directly a text is authored or inspired by the *mahatmas* (adept masters of Theosophy) the more authoritative the work is. Possibly the most authoritative work in Theosophy would then be the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. I will, however, outline in detail the place of *The Secret Doctrine* in the dissertation.

I will further suggest that there is a specific Theosophical 'meaning set', developed by H.P. Blavatsky and others, into which all imported religious terms and ideas need to be translated for them to be correctly understood in the Theosophical context. Many of these Theosophical terms were drawn from religions of the world (e.g. *atman*, *buddhi* etc.) and form part of the Theosophical language. However they take on specific meaning in the Theosophical context. This terminology was evolved by H.P. Blavatsky and others, and it includes terms and phrases such as root-races, rounds, 1st, 2nd and 3rd logos, *chohans*, seven

⁵ Reference to a third and fourth volume of *The Secret Doctrine* is made in *The Secret Doctrine* itself. See vol. II, pg. 798. A short discussion of these missing volumes can be found in Boris de Zirkoff's, *Rebirth of the occult tradition*.

⁶ This is generally stated by any scholar of Theosophy (and certainly by any Theosophist I can think of), for example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke notes, "[Blavatsky]...continued work on her major opus, *The Secret Doctrine*." (2004, pg. 14)

planes of existence, and any number of others. The specific terms can be reviewed in any standard Theosophical glossary. The Theosophical terminology must be carefully explained for it to be evaluated. This is important as the Theosophical endeavour involves an interpretation of world religions. In order to understand H.P. Blavatsky's intent one needs to understand the basic meanings associated with Theosophical words, many of which have alternate meanings in other contexts.

With regard to the first of my secondary aims, relating H.P. Blavatsky's ideas on the set topics in relation to the position of modern Egyptology, it is important to state that it is not my intent either to prove or disprove her position. I hope instead to make clear her stance in relation to modern mainstream Egyptology. Modern Egyptology is a wide field and I will locate H.P. Blavatsky's ideas in this broader field. In general certain 'esoteric' notions are rejected by the mainstream scholars such as Erik Hornung and Jan Assmann. There is, however, also a limited trend in Egyptology which does include some esoteric perspectives. A scholar in this field would be Jeremy Naydler. It is not my opinion that the 'esotericism', rather 'mysticism,' Naydler discusses mirrors the Theosophical position; I shall, however, review this briefly in the dissertation.

With the second of my secondary aims I will examine the ways in which H.P. Blavatsky injects new meaning into existing religious terms and ideas. Through a process of selection, appropriation, and rejection, she transforms existing concepts and draws them into her Theosophical structure. The way in which 'Egypt' as a concept and a set of religious doctrines is drawn into *The Secret Doctrine* will form a part of my dissertation. In terms of identifying the sources she drew on, Boris de Zirkoff, editor of H.P. Blavatsky's *Collected Works*, has done important research in this area, and I will make reference to this where it is applicable.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

The way in which I intend to accomplish the above is through a textual analysis of H.P. Blavatsky's *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*. The first three chapters present historical and background material. Chapters four and five deal specifically with the Theosophical Egyptian material. In chapters four and five I will address each theme in a basic three-fold pattern. Firstly, I will present the general Theosophical statement on the topic in its own terms. Secondly, I will extract selected readings on the chosen themes from the writings of H.P.

Blavatsky and add explanatory comments. Thirdly, I will present the mainstream perspective of modern Egyptology on the selected themes and briefly compare them to the Theosophical position.

I have deliberately made use of extensive quotations from the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. It is my intention to allow her works to speak directly for themselves. Some Theosophical writings can be complex and arcane to readers unfamiliar with them, and I, therefore, contextualise and comment on the selected passages where necessary.

The scope of the topics on Ancient Egypt covered will be guided by H.P. Blavatsky's references in *The Secret Doctrine*. In this dissertation I do not intend to examine Egypt beyond H.P. Blavatsky's own specific references. To clarify her ideas I will, where relevant, take the wider context of her writings on Ancient Egypt into account. The nature of the Theosophical engagement with many religions is sporadic and fragmented, so, therefore, my control over the content of the dissertation will be limited. I feel, however, that her statements are sufficiently linked to allow me to organise them into intelligible categories.

In chapter one, this chapter, I provide a general introduction to the scope, aim, and methodology that will be followed to examine the topic. I present a literature survey and comment on studies related to mine.

In chapter two, I place Theosophy in its general historical background, including the intellectual currents of the time and in the field of Egyptology. This chapter will include a sketch of sources drawn on by H.P. Blavatsky in her presentation of Ancient Egypt. I will specifically discuss the Egyptian *Book of the dead*, its place in the Egyptian religion, and translations used by H.P. Blavatsky in her writings. I will also outline the place of *The Secret Doctrine* in the Theosophical corpus.

Chapter three is a theoretical examination of how H.P. Blavatsky viewed and engaged with the religions of the world and with the concept of religion itself. I will outline Theosophy's own understanding of its place within these categories and examine how it inserts itself into world religions and appropriates them into its overarching scheme.

Chapter four begins with a study of how the human individual (the microcosm) is presented in Theosophy followed by a selection of extracts on this topic with specific relation to Ancient Egypt. It concludes with a comparison of the Theosophical presentation of the individual in Ancient Egypt in contrast to the current mainstream views in Egyptology.

Chapter five outlines and compares Egyptian and Theosophical concepts of the afterlife. This ties in neatly with the theme of chapter four as it is the individual who enters the afterlife. The way in which H.P. Blavatsky conceptualises these themes in the Egyptian religious tradition forms a basis for comparison with modern Egyptological studies.

Chapter six is a general summing up and conclusion.

The bibliography and reference section is a combined list of sources referenced in the dissertation and sources which I have consulted in preparation for this study. Some of the works listed will simply be bibliographical entries for works cited by H.P. Blavatsky.

The first appendix is a chronological table of the Egyptian dynasties.

The second appendix is a study of reincarnation in Ancient Egypt as presented by H.P. Blavatsky. I review this in relation to the mainstream conception in the modern field of Egyptology. Reincarnation is a fundamental teaching of Theosophy and must be located in any religion which is said to represent the Ancient Wisdom Tradition of Theosophy. It is my intent to review the extent to which reincarnation is seen as a part of the Egyptian religion by modern scholars of Egyptology, and what implications this has for the Theosophical mode of interpretation.

In appendix three I go into detail in an attempt to distinguish between the types of statements made in *The Secret Doctrine*. The measure of a statement is whether it is definitive or not. The question of authority and the nature of many Theosophical statements remove them from the realm of simple opinion and place them in the realm of indisputable truth claims. In this appendix I extract sample statements and review them in terms of authority.

Appendix four is a table drawn from de Zirkoff's *Divine plan* which shows the unfolding of the Theosophical human principles during the rounds.

In appendix five, Theosophical statements on mummification are briefly discussed and related to the mainstream contemporary ideas of Egyptology.

Appendix six presents a provisional table of correspondences of human principles drawn from various Theosophical authors.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

For the following brief discussion on methodology I draw extensively on Hanegraaff (1995)⁷. The general methodological background is that of empirical historical approach. This allows space for the texts to speak for themselves without reducing statements to epiphenomena subservient to larger theoretical agendas. It also avoids the pitfalls of perennialism and its purported unscientific approach to ideas. Hanegraaff outlines this empirical method as an alternative to what he calls reductionist and religionist approaches. This empirical approach is characterised by a number of assumptions:

- a) It does not accept any axiomatic beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality, (Hanegraaff 1995, pg. 2) – i.e. it is a methodological agnosticism. Preconceived assumptions as to the nature of reality colour the interpretations of both reductionist and religionist approaches.
- b) It involves a criticism of ideologies which limit the domain in which science may speak legitimately with authority. (Hanegraaff 1995, pg. 3)
- c) It implies that we have access to religions as human events only in space and time. (Hanegraaff 1995, pg. 3)

One of the chief criticisms of this empirical historical approach is its seeming inability to ‘explain’ religion. Its reflective and descriptive nature does not allow it to provide any fundamental explanation of religion, and it cannot, therefore, be regarded as a science. This criticism is in part accepted by Hanegraaff who counters that radical explanations have rooted metaphysical assumptions which are unscientific themselves. It is more constructive to admit we are unable to uncover what religion is really about than to impose metaphysical assumptions onto religious phenomena.

A further potential criticism is mentioned by Naydler when he refers to Henri Corbin’s notion of ‘agnostic reflex.’ This ‘agnostic’ approach does not allow the academic interpreter to do justice to the actual experienced reality of the cultural participants being examined. He argues that a ‘sympathetic engagement’ with religious texts based on a phenomenological approach provides a sounder perspective on these issues. (2005, pg. 321) This is a contested issue with merits for each perspective. For my purposes in this dissertation I note that Naydler is writing specifically on the Ancient Egyptian religion. He is concerned with how Egyptians experienced

⁷ Wouter J. Hanegraaff holds a specially endowed chair for the study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam.

their reality e.g. the underworld, the gods, etc. I, however, am not engaging directly with Ancient Egypt or with how Egyptians experienced their world. Nor am I specifically engaging with how Theosophists experience their afterlife concepts or their gods. My focus is on the Theosophical reading of Ancient Egypt. The Theosophical reading and appropriation of Ancient Egypt is an intellectual and literary process which poses questions different from those relating to experience. I will argue that a rational process of appropriation was undertaken by H.P. Blavatsky in bringing Ancient Egypt into the Theosophical scheme.

To this I would add that a clear expression of religious thought, in its own terms, is fundamental to its further evaluation, whether by social scientific reductionist methods or by perennialist approaches. The primary aim of this dissertation is to state H.P. Blavatsky's thoughts on the chosen themes of Ancient Egypt in the vocabulary developed by her (and others) in her major work, *The Secret Doctrine*. The historical descriptive method is well suited to this endeavour.

1.5 LITERATURE SURVEY

My topic is quite specific, so I would be primarily interested in works which engage with both Theosophy and Ancient Egypt. To assess H.P. Blavatsky's contribution sufficiently, however, I would need also to review works on Ancient Egypt and Theosophy as separate entities.

The ideal literature I hoped to engage in would have been studies which related to both Theosophy and Ancient Egypt. As concepts like 'objective' and 'scholarly' can be loaded terms I have provisionally divided the types of engagement with Theosophical Egypt into three categories. There are those works which very critically dispute Theosophical (and Theosophical type) statements on Ancient Egypt, those which, uncritically and sympathetically support, Theosophical statements, and those which are more reflective and objective in nature. Any particular study on the topic may reflect one or more of the above stances. Good or poor research may also characterize any of the above positions. For example, the fact that a study may be written by a professional academic may not necessarily mean it is any more thorough or objective than that penned by a member of the Theosophical Society. I think, however, it is fair to say that, in my experience, member-penned studies can fail to meet basic research criteria, for example, referencing, examination of sources, critical reflection, and attention to

studies critical of Theosophical teachings. (This does in part, however, reflect the context, audience, and intent of Theosophical writings.)

An example of a critical look at Theosophical statements on Ancient Egypt is Erik Hornung's, *The secret lore of Egypt: its impact on the west*. Erik Hornung has outlined the fascination the west has had with Ancient Egypt from classical times to the modern day. His orienting idea is a distinction he introduces between academic 'egyptology' and what he labels 'egyptosophy'. Egyptology would be understood as being the academic discipline engaging in the study of Ancient Egypt. It only began as a legitimate science in 1822 when Champollion, through the Rosetta Stone, deciphered hieroglyphics. Prior to this event no truly scientific study of Ancient Egypt had been possible. I am inclined to agree that the inability to decipher hieroglyphics would have been a serious, virtually insurmountable, obstacle to an examination of Egyptian beliefs.

By the neologism 'egyptosophy' Hornung refers to, "the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore." (Hornung 2001, pg. 3) This imaginary Egypt, according to Hornung, has no real relationship to Egypt proper. Hornung argues that these two disciplines are not to be mixed. One is the systematic, serious study of ancient sources, while the other is rooted in revelatory, intuitive, and non-rational processes. One is the objective study of its sources, while the other has unstated aims, namely relating to locating pre-existing esoteric themes in the texts, e.g. secret knowledge and initiations, and links to ancient cultures (Atlantis, Lemuria), etc. Important in this context is Hornung's view of 'esoteric matters', which he writes, "have to do with hidden, often deliberately concealed truths that can be grasped only through intuition or revelation and that elude any and all experimental verifications." (Hornung 2001, pg. 3)

Hornung deals with Theosophy in a short chapter, 14 pages long, entitled, 'Theosophy and Anthroposophy.' Of these 14 pages, 6 deal with Theosophy proper. The balance discusses the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. Of the six pages dealing with Theosophy, only three or so deal with Blavatsky's actual contribution to the topic. He then moves his attention to the later Theosophical Society under Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater. He includes a discussion of Krishnamurti, the point of which in relation to his main theme eludes me.

I feel three issues are raised by Hornung's chapter on Theosophy. Firstly, he does not actually directly engage in detail with any Theosophical text. (This can be gauged from his references.) Secondly, as H.P. Blavatsky was writing after the deciphering of hieroglyphics, and she had

access to reliable translations of Egyptian texts, it can only be an assumption to dismiss her works as ‘egyptosophical’ without a proper study of them.⁸ Thirdly, his notion of ‘esotericism’ as having only an irrational and revelatory base does not do full justice to the term as used in the academic field, nor to H.P. Blavatsky’s attempt to present her teachings in an rational, logical, and scientific fashion. His general distinction between ‘egyptology’ and ‘egyptosophy’ could perhaps also be problematical. I feel, however, that he has made a powerful point in relation to the decipherment of hieroglyphics and its necessity for an understanding of Egyptian thought.

There are a number of sympathetic member-written books and Theosophical journal articles from the time of H.P. Blavatsky to the present. I have come across a recent, representative work of this type of Theosophical engagement with Egypt, a work by John Gordon entitled, *Egypt child of Atlantis: a radical interpretation of the origins of civilization*, (2004)⁹. Gordon’s book falls neatly into the Theosophical tradition of interpreting religion. All the themes H.P. Blavatsky raised around Ancient Egypt are taken up in *Egypt child of Atlantis*. There is the concern with the age of Egyptian civilization, the notions of an esoteric knowledge revealed during initiations inside the great pyramid, Egypt’s relationship with Atlantis, and so on. Carrying on in the Blavatsky tradition is also Gordon’s ambivalent assessment of modern science and archaeology. For Gordon, the current archaeological position on the age of Egyptian civilization is ‘wilfully myopic’, (Gordon 2004, pg. 1). He is also appreciative of some amateur or alternative studies, by authors such as John Anthony West, Robert Bauval, and Graham Hancock, to the point where he can write,

“But if modern scientists and scholars do not clearly understand something, they should unashamedly admit the fact together with the shortcomings and limitations of their current stock of knowledge, rather than fudging the issue with technical and technological hocus-pocus while gratuitously deriding the considered thoughts of others outside or on the fringes of their own discipline.” (Gordon 2004, pg. 7)

⁸ Hornung, in fact, makes a brief reference to this in his work where he notes that Theosophists could “...make early borrowings from the discipline of Egyptology,...” (2001, pg. 140) He does not evidently feel that these ‘early borrowings’ from the legitimate field of Egyptology indicate an honest engagement with legitimate sources. In this dissertation I have suggested that fair use of legitimate source texts was made by H.P. Blavatsky in a number of instances.

⁹ John Gordon, according to the publisher’s blurb, is a ‘senior fellow of the Theosophical Society in England.’

Gordon's special contribution is the use of Theosophical and esoteric interpretations and teachings. He has drawn relatively uncritically from H.P. Blavatsky's (and other Theosophist's) works, interpreting the Egyptian gods in a Theosophical fashion, using her theme of earlier advanced civilizations preceding the Egyptian and retaining her seven-fold division of man. This work does share a certain amount in common with what I hope to achieve in this dissertation. Gordon has used H.P. Blavatsky's insights and teachings (among others) to come to his conclusions about Ancient Egypt. His, however, is not a systematic evaluation of H.P. Blavatsky's statements, which is what I intend to undertake. Gordon's 'theosophically' coloured work is precisely what Erik Hornung wishes to distinguish from academic Egyptology.

Both the works discussed above have a polemical nature about them. One is predisposed to accept Theosophical statements; the other to dismiss them.

An example of a type of study which falls somewhere between these two extremes is an article by Antonios Goyios entitled, *S.A. Mackey and the Dendera zodiacs* (2009). H.P. Blavatsky drew quite frequently on the works of Sampson Arnold Mackey (1765-1843), a self-taught scholar who penned various works on equinoctial precession, ancient history, and mythology. (Goyios 2009, pg. 1) Specifically, she adopts his conclusions concerning the Precessional Cycle and the Dendera Zodiacs to support her dating of Egyptian civilization. Goyios has examined Mackey's use of his sources and feels that Mackey has not correctly interpreted the works at hand. Mackey has drawn conclusions, which his sources do not support and which were subsequently drawn into *The Secret Doctrine* by H.P. Blavatsky. If indeed Mackey has misinterpreted his source material, and if these misinterpretations were drawn into *The Secret Doctrine*, it would have implications for the status of *The Secret Doctrine*.

The work of Goyios is closest to what I hope to achieve in this dissertation. He has, however, perhaps gone deeper into a particular topic than I am capable of here.

I would like to say I could multiply the examples of the three types of studies, but that is not the case with the exception of Theosophical based research. Hornung's work is the only mainstream academic writing from a recognized Egyptologist I have found on this topic. It does not, however, in my opinion engage sufficiently with Theosophical sources. The article by Goyios is the only article of which I am thus far aware that both honestly engages with Theosophical resources and critically assesses them. He does not appear to have entered the debate with pre-determined answers. Some of the articles found on David Pratt's website, for example, *The Great pyramid*, also approach objectivity and critical scholarship.

Theosophical studies on Ancient Egypt are to be found, although not perhaps in the quantity one may expect for so central an esoteric theme as Egypt. P.W. Bullock delivered two lectures, 'Hermetic philosophy' and 'Egyptian belief Theosophically considered', which were published respectively in 1892 in *The Theosophist* magazine and 1893/4 in *Theosophical Siftings*. An important early Theosophist, Alexander Wilder, published a series of articles on the history of Egypt by dynasty in 1899 in the Theosophical periodical, *Universal Brotherhood*. There is an important article by L. Whellams and I.M. Oderberg in *The Theosophical Forum* in 1941 entitled, 'Egyptian teachings in the light of Theosophy'. I have drawn on this article for a Theosophical perspective on Ancient Egypt. There are various articles by Boris de Zirkoff, Charles J. Ryan and F.J. Dick, on Ancient Egypt from a Theosophical perspective in *The Theosophical Path* magazine.¹⁰ A certain 'Abhinyano' wrote a two part article in the Theosophical journal *Fohat* entitled, 'The initiation procedure within the Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt: original Theosophy challenges the mausoleums - Dogma of the Egyptologists'. There are also a number of articles by the Theosophical authors I.M. Oderberg and Gerald J. Schueler to be found in the *Sunrise* magazine. An article entitled 'Septenary man in Ancient Egypt' by a 'Hetep-en-Neter' appeared in the *Theosophical Quarterly Magazine* in 1937. There is also a short book entitled *The faith of Ancient Egypt* by Sidney G.P. Coryn, published in 1913 by The Theosophical Publishing Company. For the sake of completeness mention can be made of Alvin Boyd Kuhn's (in part Theosophically inspired) *The lost light: an interpretation of ancient scriptures* (1940). This work is so startling in its idiosyncratic perspective on Ancient Egypt that if its positions were ever proven justified it would herald a true revolution in Egyptology. I do not believe more could be said on this work. There would be others, and this list is intended to be representative, not exhaustive.

The Theosophical-based articles are, in the main, characterised by attempts to support Theosophical statements, and they are relatively uncritical of statements by H.P. Blavatsky. They are rooted in the primary statements of H.P. Blavatsky and are concerned with elaborating them. They, like H.P. Blavatsky, drew on contemporary sources where they supported Theosophical statements and rejected those which did not support them. The themes remain the same as those found in *The Secret Doctrine*; that is, initiations, the great antiquity of Egypt, esoteric knowledge, astrological and zodiacal knowledge, and so on.

¹⁰ Many of the Theosophical magazines referred to here can be found online at www.theosociety.org.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

It should be mentioned that my research has been carried out in English. In the light of this language constraint, I have examined only the English language sources (and those sources which have been translated into English) of H.P. Blavatsky. This has not affected my chief objective of stating the Theosophical position and relating it to current views in Egyptology. H.P. Blavatsky wrote all her important works in English, and many of the works she used as resources have been translated. Some of the sources she used, however, were in various continental languages and have not been translated. A great deal of work in Egyptology has also been written about in German and French, and I am able to review this, where applicable, only in translation. I feel that the general, and scattered, presentation of Egypt in the *Secret Doctrine* makes English resources quite sufficient to cover any topics raised.

A second limitation relates to the supporting Theosophical literature which I shall draw on in explanation of the key concepts of H.P. Blavatsky. The Theosophical Society has split into three main divisions, the Theosophical Society Adyar, the Theosophical Society Pasadena, and the U.L.T, or United Lodge of Theosophists. These divisions are long standing and have resulted in each of the society's producing its own specific secondary literature. All three societies, however, accept the basic original literature of the movement, i.e. the works of the founders, the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, and so on.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review the explanatory literature on Egypt and Theosophy of each Society. In this dissertation I have relied mainly on the literature of the Pasadena Theosophical Society. I have, however drawn on at least one major work which is respected by each society and that is Barborka's *The divine plan*. My motivation for choosing Pasadena-based literature is personal preference and my assessment that the literature of that society remains closer in spirit and teaching to that of the original founders of the Theosophical Society. It is my intent, however, to root myself where possible in the statements of *The Secret Doctrine*, and I refer to later works only for clarity and explanation when necessary.

For the contemporary mainstream position of Egyptology, I have drawn primarily on the works of Erik Hornung, Jan Assmann, Salima Ikram, and John Taylor. Special mention should also be made of Louis V. Zabkar's work, *A study of the ba concept in Ancient Egyptian texts*, whose perspective on the Egyptian understanding of the individual I have adopted. Egyptology is a wide and specialised field, and I have relied on specific sources which may not reflect the entire range of positions available.

A third limitation, or perhaps omission, is that I have not located the position of H.P. Blavatsky on Ancient Egypt in her contemporary era. Egyptology as a field has evolved considerably from the nineteenth century, and some of the positions she held may have had a more solid basis when contextualised within the ambience of this early Egyptology. I believe there would be definite value in locating her statements on Egypt in their historical context. My interest in this dissertation, however, is how her statements compare to the views of modern Egyptology.

For the most part I will use anglicised forms for eastern and Egyptian terms.

1.7 CONCLUSION

I hope this dissertation will define the statements of H.P. Blavatsky in her *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*, on the themes of the constitution of the individual and the afterlife as they relate to Ancient Egypt.

Chapter two outlines a number of related issues which will contextualise H. P. Blavatsky's presentation of Ancient Egypt. I will locate the Theosophical Society in its 19th century context and outline the state of Egyptology in the same era. From the Theosophical side, I discuss the place of H.P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* in her *oeuvre*. This discussion will include identifying some of the possible sources of information on Egypt that H.P. Blavatsky drew on and a section on the Egyptian *Book of the dead*.

2.1 THE LATE 19TH CENTURY - ARCHAEOLOGY, SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

In this subsection I intend to outline the general historical context into which the Theosophical Society was born. I will sketch the various social, intellectual, and cultural forces and institutions with which Theosophy was in contact and conflict. It is not my intention to give a detailed account of the historical background of each element, but rather to mention a few general points which relate to the Theosophical Society. Goodrick-Clarke notes, and my dissertation will proceed on this basis, that,

“We should recall that the Theosophical Society had its intellectual and social origins in the English-speaking world. Irrespective of her own continental background in Russia and France, Blavatsky formulated her occult debut as a response to the Anglo-American interest in Mesmerism and spiritualism. She was neither influenced nor particularly aware of German *Naturphilosophie*.” (2003, pg. 17)

While not all developments in the sciences, religion and other fields of knowledge were being made in the English-speaking world, H.P. Blavatsky may have known of them through this English prism. In many cases the relationship was ambivalent, while, on the one hand, many of the intellectual currents appeared to be in basic opposition to Theosophy, on the other, such was their authority in society that they needed to be engaged with and appropriated by H.P. Blavatsky.

The late 19th century was a critical point in the history of the West. Judging from academic studies on Theosophy, the Theosophical Society is located securely in the milieu of late 19th

century Europe and America. The late 19th century contained no single theme, or strand, or cultural environment. The elements range from scientific and archaeological advances to an interest in occultism and exotic religions. The Theosophy of H.P. Blavatsky and in particular her *Secret Doctrine* present one focal point of these various competing and complementing strands. *The Secret Doctrine* is H.P. Blavatsky's attempt to integrate these larger strands into a unifying whole, one in which the strands are subordinated to her synthesizing presentation.

She was not alone in this attempt to integrate knowledge as it was unfolding in the 19th century. From science to philosophy to religion, all endeavours of human understanding were obliged to respond to the changes which were occurring. All were competing for cultural supremacy and authority, some were on the ascendant (science), some on the decline (traditional Christianity), and some, like the Theosophical Society, were marginal bodies looking for their place in the sun, for example, Spiritualism.

Some of the elements and institutions to which Theosophy stands in relation, and with which it engages in one way or another, are listed by H.P. Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled*. They are, 'Christians', 'scientists', 'pseudo-scientists', 'broad churchmen and freethinkers', 'mercenaries and parasites of the press', 'men of letters and various authorities' and 'spiritualists'. (1988, vol. I, pg. viii-x) To these one must add the occult tradition (non spiritualist) of Europe and America and the increasing exposure to eastern religions in the West. That she does not mention the latter two may give us a clue as to where she felt aligned.

2.1.1 THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The two chief founders of the Theosophical Society were H.P. Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (nee Hahn) was born between August 11th and 12th, 1831 in Ekaterinoslav, Russia. Following her mother's death in 1842, she was raised by her grandparents in Saratov and Tiflis. By all accounts she was exposed early on to esoteric literature through her grandmother's father, Prince Pavel Dolgorukov, who had a large library of esoteric books and links to Rosicrucian and Masonic circles. She had an abortive marriage to Nikifor Blavatsky in 1849, a marriage from which she fled almost immediately. She travelled throughout the world visiting, among others places, Egypt. In 1850, in Cairo, she reportedly studied with a Copt magician, Paolos Metamon, whom she met again between 1869

and 1872. (Goodrick-Clarke, 2004, pg. 2-3) It was in 1851 that she records her first meeting with one of the Theosophical *mahatmas*.¹ H.P. Blavatsky passed away on May 8th, 1891.

H.S. Olcott was born on August 2nd 1832 in New Jersey, USA. He had a background in agriculture, and he was made a colonel in the US Army following his work in investigating fraud. In 1868, he was admitted as a lawyer at the New York Bar Association. Throughout this time he maintained an interest in metaphysical and spiritualist issues, publishing articles in a Spiritualist journal the *Banner of Light* among others.

H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott met in October 1874 in Chittenden, Vermont. It was here that the Eddy mediums held sittings and where H.P. Blavatsky and Olcott became friends. They met, therefore, in the popular milieu of Spiritualism, Gomes suggesting that up to one fifth of the American population were Spiritualists. (Gomes, 1987, pg. 19) The Spiritualist movement formed one of the important background strands which informed and shaped the Theosophical Society.

The details of the actual founding of the Theosophical Society are often recorded in studies of Theosophy. In Theosophical histories it was under the instruction of H.P. Blavatsky's teachers that an attempt was made to form a society to 'tell the truth,'² and which would be philosophic, religious, and scientific. (Ryan, 1975, pg. 50) As Cranston relates, on September 7th, 1875 a number of people met in the quarters of H.P. Blavatsky in New York. The immediate reason for the meeting was to receive a lecture by George H. Felt entitled, "The lost canon of proportion of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans." Following this presentation an idea was floated among H.P. Blavatsky, H.S. Olcott and W.Q. Judge to form a society to study these types of knowledge. The official founding of the Theosophical Society is regarded as November 17th 1875 with its inaugural address. (Cranston, 1994, pg. 143 - 147)

The purpose of the Theosophical Society in internal histories is summed up by its three objectives: 1) to form the nucleus of universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour; 2) to promote the study of Aryan and other eastern literatures,

¹ This well-known term is defined in the *Theosophical Glossary* as, "Lit., 'great soul'. A *Mahatma* is an adept of a high order. Exalted being, who having attained to the mastery over their lower principles are thus living unimpeded by the 'man of flesh', and are in possession of knowledge and power commensurate with the stage they have reached in their spiritual evolution." (Blavatsky, 1990, pg. 201)

² I believe Theosophists felt a special link to 'science' and the scientific endeavour, limbed in their own manner. As an instance of this, H.S. Olcott noted, "'This Society', I said, 'was neither a religious nor a charitable but a scientific body.'" (1974, pg. 156)

religions, and sciences; and, 3) to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers in man.³ (Blavatsky, 1987, pg. 306) Modern research into the founding of the Theosophical Society now questions the original motivations and suggests a more practical occult agenda was intended.⁴

As Stephen Prothero has convincingly shown, the form the Theosophical Society took was shaped by the differing personalities of the two founders. H.P. Blavatsky represented an aristocratic, elitist, and esoteric stream, while H.S. Olcott represented a genteel, democratic, and liberal tradition. (1993, pg. 209) Campbell characterises this tension as a conflict between ‘mysticism’ and ‘established organization.’ (1980, pg. 97) This opposition does much to explain many of the inherent tensions in the structure and organisation of the Theosophical Society.

There have been a number of schisms in the Theosophical Society. There is the original society, The Adyar Theosophical Society (whose notable leaders were Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater), the Society formed by W.Q. Judge, the Pasadena Theosophical Society, and the United Lodge of Theosophists of Robert Crosbie. While each society has its distinctive feel and focus, and each is historically separate, my following comments will be based on a general impression.⁵ Within any lodge one may find a continuum of ‘experience potential’. A lodge may be orientated towards individual experience (mystical – for want of a better term) against a lodge environment focussed on intellectual inquiry. A lodge may encourage open enquiry by members, or it may be focussed more narrowly on imparting received Theosophical teachings. Related to this, a lodge may have a focus on general esoteric matters (e.g. astrology, healing etc.) with weak links only to Theosophical content, or it may be focussed more specifically on the Theosophical content.

³ There have been variations in the wording of these objectives over time.

⁴ See for example, Demarest’s article in the *Theosophical History* journal, ‘A school for sorcery: new light on the first Theosophical Society.’

⁵ In my experience, while each society has its own character, the experience one has of a particular lodge is also very much dependent on the dominant personalities in that lodge. It is, however, important that the distinction between the ‘Theosophy’ of H.P. Blavatsky and the so-called ‘Neo-Theosophy’ (‘second generation Theosophy’) of, for example C.W. Leadbeater and others be recognised. Gregory Tillett has discussed this in relation to Theosophy and magic in his article, ‘Modern western magic and Theosophy’ (2011) in the *Theosophical History* journal. My own Theosophical background is predominantly grounded in the Pasadena Theosophical Society, which, in my opinion, remained closer to the rational and intellectual foundation of original Theosophy than the others.

This 'open' versus 'closed' dichotomy is both a strength and weakness of the Theosophical Society. I have little doubt that it is one of the contributing factors to the gradual decline of the Society in terms of membership. The organisational openness gives the potential new member almost no sense of belonging, while the doctrinal, closed system (when actually presented in a lodge) is found to be too prescriptive.

2.1.2 SPIRITUALISM

The Hydesville 'rappings' of the Fox sisters in 1848 ignited an interest in spiritualism in the United States of America. While the phenomena were not new, Godwin notes that the publicity which surrounded these events allowed the Fox sisters to become professional mediums. (1994, pg. 188) This movement became very popular and widespread, while it retained its greatest influence in the United States.

H.P. Blavatsky had a history of involvement in the Spiritualist movement. She was herself a medium and had been involved in defending mediumistic phenomenon. Spiritualism was one of the battleground fronts between the engagement of religion and science. It was also one of the vehicles of the western esoteric tradition. She would eventually break with spiritualism both practically and philosophically.

Prothero divides the history of the Theosophical Society into an 'early' and 'late' period. The late period represents the more familiar Theosophical Society, engaging with Eastern religions and comparative study. It is the Theosophical Society as it now exists. This late period began with the arrival of founders in India in 1879. This is post the writing of *Isis unveiled* (1877) in which the western 'atmosphere' of the teachings was still predominant. The 'early' period of the Society reflects a greater concern with phenomena, spiritualism, and practical occultism. (1993, pg. 198) Prothero argues that the early Theosophical agenda was concerned with transforming gross spiritualism into a more philosophical, intellectual, and elitist movement. It retained its interest in the third objective of the Theosophical Society, but began to move towards more sophisticated explanations of the phenomena.

The Theosophical criticism of Spiritualism was based on a moral and intellectual shift which eventually led to the establishment of the *mahatmas* as the model of humanity in the Theosophical Society. The authority of passive (chiefly female) mediums in Spiritualism gave way to the 'adepts' of the Theosophical Society. Increasingly intellectual and scientific

explanations of phenomena were introduced by the Theosophical Society, and this was in tune with the larger process of appropriating the scientific discourse (and authority) into the Society.

2.1.3 SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE LATE 19TH-CENTURY

The advances in the sciences in the late 19th century demanded a response from all institutions with a stake in the cultural, religious, and intellectual life of that period. Responses could in theory range from complete acceptance of the new thoughts to a complete rejection. A variety of positions could be taken in-between. The Theosophical Society represents one type of response from the religious sphere. Science itself was not a uniform, un-ambivalent body of uncontested knowledge. Within the scientific field were competing views. Richard Tarnas notes two cultural streams. There was the Scientific Enlightenment and its shadow, Romanticism. (1999, pg. 366) The first was materialistic, characterised by ‘objectivism’, ‘positivism’, ‘reductionism’ and ‘determinism.’ (Lehmann, 1998, pg. 97) Romanticism projected a more holistic paradigm into which, intuitively, one would feel Theosophy would fit naturally. Tarnas, in fact, notes ‘theosophy’ as being one of the representatives of the Romantic spirit. (1999, pg. 372) As I review his description of the Romantic versus the Scientific Enlightenment attitudes, however, I feel struck by how Theosophy seems to straddle both perspectives. The rational presentation of Theosophy, the determined presentation of ‘truth’ and the view of nature as something to be understood and classified (the careful, ordered delineation of the planes and principles, for example), seems almost as much scientific as romantic in nature. These two perspectives permeated each other in various ways, and Theosophy reflects this in its expression.

Nor was the seeming ‘conflict between science and religion’ the only way in which these two institutionalised bodies of knowledge engaged each other. The instance of the Theosophical Society, for example, cannot simply be resolved into a single category of conflict with science. The adoption of scientific concepts, terms, and ideas into the Theosophical system suggests that other forces were also at play.

The traditional forms of Christianity were on the defensive in the face of scientific advances. The 1860 debate between T.H. Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce, along with the publication of Darwin’s theory of evolution, were seen to be turning points in the history of science and religion. Advances in biblical criticism had also diluted the past authority of the churches. In particular, three scientific theories challenged any traditional presentation of religion. These

were: 1) Dalton's atomic theory of matter⁶; 2) the theory of the conservation of energy; and 3) evolution. (Lightman, 2001, pg. 346) It has been suggested that it is the second idea which was the most challenging to a religious presentation of the world. In its materialistic form it did away with any space for 'divine' or 'supernatural' interference in nature.

The main version of science in the English speaking world was 'scientific naturalism'.

Lightman notes that scientific naturalism was, "...'naturalistic' in the sense that it would permit no recourse to causes not empirically observable in nature..." and 'scientific' as it was built on the three theories mentioned above, atomic theory, conservation of energy, and evolution. (2001, pg. 346) Scientific naturalists were determined to become the accepted voice of science in society and thereby wield its authority. They were aiming for science to be the guiding light of cultural authority, and they hoped that scientists would replace the clergy as the leaders in society.

Where would the Theosophical Society fit into this field of forces competing for authority and pre-eminence in the late 19th century? Santucci remarks, "The roots of the Theosophical Society may be found in the fascination with science and the increasingly popular view during the second half of the 19th century that the spiritual realm was scientifically verifiable and that its inhabitants – spirits – were in communication with the physical realm." (2012, pg. 2) It is important to note that science as a field was not a uniform body; it was divided amongst itself. Regardless of which faction or positions may finally have won the day, in the late 19th century, science, like archaeology, was in a process of development and self definition.

I will briefly focus on a book by one such group of scientists who were competing with the scientific naturalists, the "North British" physicists. Bernard Lightman in his illuminating article, *Victorian sciences and religions : discordant harmonies*, has brought this group into focus, and their relevance to my dissertation is that it was members of this group who published a work which has recently been found to have had an important influence on certain ideas of H.P. Blavatsky. The essence of the various disputes between these two groups is not especially relevant to my larger thesis, which is that there were during H.P. Blavatsky's time, competing

⁶ On this point, Theosophists are keen to quote *The Secret Doctrine* to the effect that, "It is on the doctrine of the illusive nature of matter, and the infinite divisibility of the atom, that the whole science of Occultism is built." (1988, vol. I, pg. 520)

views within the scientific community itself. North British⁷ group members, like, William Thomson, James Clerk Maxwell, Peter Guthrie Tait and others, had gained national and even international credibility in the field of energy science. Although their ideas were informed by religious sentiment, they were credible and legitimate scientists, even by the standards of scientific naturalists. They could not, therefore, simply be dismissed in the same way that ministers and the clergy could be.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has highlighted the fact that science was assimilated into the ‘occult’ discourse to produce a ‘scientific occultism’.⁸ (2003, pg. 5) This use of scientific works is more than just a facade through which esoteric ideas are simply restated in a new era. The ideas of science are drawn into, and inform, esoteric thought. There was a variety of scientific positions to choose from, and certainly pre-existing esoteric ideas⁹ would have, in part, guided which version of science was adopted.¹⁰ Goodrick-Clarke has drawn attention to a work by two “North British” Scottish physicists which H.P. Blavatsky made use of, viz. *The unseen universe: of physical speculations on a future state*, published in 1875. (2003, pg. 5)

This work, written by Balfour Stewart and P.G. Tait in 1875, was intended as a refutation of John Tyndall’s 1874 ‘Belfast Address’ where he proposed a strictly materialistic view of nature. Drawing on Victorian physics, including the ether, the conservation of energy, the vortex atom, and the second law of thermodynamics, they proposed a concept of nature which included an ‘invisible realm’ in addition to the visible. (Heimann, 1972, pg. 76) This ‘unseen universe’ was in communication with the visible order of nature, and they proposed a hierarchy of beings which connected these two realms. The realm of the ‘miraculous’ and ‘supernatural’ in this scheme could now be classified within the boundaries of science. Many of these ideas are reflected in Theosophical literature. As Goodrick-Clarke notes, “Helena Blavatsky’s interest in electricity as an animating soul-like force or fluid emerged from the notion of the “ether”, widely discussed by scientists at the time she founded the Theosophical Society.”¹¹ (2003, pg. 5)

⁷ The North British physicists were active between 1850 and 1870. By the 1880’s their authority had begun to wane. H.P. Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* was published in 1877, and her *Secret Doctrine* was published in 1888.

⁸ In his article, he is focussing on how H.P. Blavatsky drew on scientific ideas of electricity in her works.

⁹ In his article, Goodrick-Clarke surveys the teachings of mesmerism, Paracelsus, William Maxwell, Rosicrucian writers, and Swabian Pietists.

¹⁰ Some Theosophical ideas were, I would suggest, actually drawn from the sciences.

¹¹ See Asprem, E 2011, ‘Pondering imponderable: occultism in the mirror of late classical physics’, *Aries*, vol. 2, part 2, pg. 129-165. Asprem convincingly makes the point that some

Goodrick-Clarke argues that these ideas eventually found their way into *The Secret Doctrine* in the form of the Theosophical concept of '*fohat*'. Far from being a concept originating in the east, he has traced its origins in western esoteric and western scientific schools of thought.

In addition to engaging with contemporary streams of thought, H.P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* reveals an attempt to engage with, and appropriate, the scientific discourse. The source materials of this work are varied and include scientific works. The mode of presentation is that of a rational, argued approach to ideas. There is still the appeal to authority and special sources of knowledge; the ambiguity of the situation, therefore, cannot be ignored. My opinion remains, however, that H.P. Blavatsky's engagement with science is more than simply a facade covering unconventional (read 'esoteric') ideas.

I am not aware of any specific study of the early Theosophical presentation of Christianity, but I feel Kalnitsky has made a relevant general observation that H.P. Blavatsky presents a very 'generic' type of Christianity. (2003, pg. 105¹²) By this I mean that she does not present a sustained study of the various forms of Christianity current in the era. Forms of Christianity current in Victorian Britain would have included Anglicanism, Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, Methodists, and Roman Catholicism. Most dominant forms of Christianity would have been characterised by H.P. Blavatsky as dogmatic, unscientific, authoritarian, ritualistic, and un-philosophical (i.e. theistic).

2.1.4 EGYPTOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE LATE 19TH-CENTURY

William H. Stiebing has set out a four-step process of growth by which he characterises the development of archaeology. They are,

- Phase 1 – Exploration, antiquarianism, and early excavation (circa 1450-1860)
- Phase 2 – Archaeology comes of age (circa 1860-1925)
- Phase 3 – Systematizing and organizing the past (circa 1925-1960)
- Phase 4 – Towards a scientific archaeology (circa 1960-present) (1993, pg. 23-25)

esoteric/occult positions fell within the speculative framework of the field of physics in the late nineteenth century.

¹² This generic 19th century version of Christianity can still seem to be that which is represented in current Theosophical circles. In some sense the Theosophical Society is stuck in the thought-world of the 19th century. I have suggested that this is owing to the supreme importance of H.P. Blavatsky and *The Secret Doctrine* which are also, for obvious reasons, trapped in the 19th century and will not be able to escape it.

The first two stages he labels the 'heroic age'. It is into the second phase that the Theosophical Society falls. (*The Secret Doctrine* was published in 1888.) It is during this second phase that archaeology came to be seen as a potential source of information on the past, whereas, prior to this, activity in this field was characterised as 'antiquity collecting'. Stiebing notes that it was during this second phase that "stratigraphical excavation techniques, typological sequence dating and stratigraphically based pottery chronologies were developed." (1993, pg. 24) The science of archaeology (and Egyptology) was, therefore, still in an undeveloped state, only beginning to come into its own. This uncertainty (and lack of knowledge) was a fertile ground for many ideas which later scientific approaches would reject. Into this space H.P. Blavatsky would inject her Theosophical content. She was, however, not alone in this process; many interested parties would 'fill the gaps' according to invested interests. For example, other esoteric groups like the Golden Dawn had an interest in Egyptology, as did Christian groups engaged in debates with scientists.

Archaeology, like other sciences, had begun to undermine the accepted biblical chronology and dating of creation. A number of key events had occurred which contextualises the situation in which the Theosophical Society found itself. Firstly, in the 1830s, Charles Lyell published his *Principles of geology, being an attempt to explain the former changes of the earth's surface by references to causes now in action*. This work showed that 'supernatural catastrophes' were no longer needed to explain the geological shaping of the earth. Changes happening over immense periods of time (i.e. longer than a biblical 6000 years) could account for the geological record. The effect of this was to push back the time period of creation which again opened a space to be filled. For Theosophists, ancient, lost civilizations were read into the past. (It can begin to feel like a puzzle as the various 'pieces' seem to build a picture. The increased age of the earth, coupled with an Egypt which seemingly had no infancy, as pre-dynastic Egypt had not been discovered, almost makes pre-existing civilizations seem a logical solution.)

A second event was the publishing in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *Origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. The chronological space opened by Lyell's work could now be filled by Darwinian ideas of 'natural selection' and the 'struggle for existence'. (Stiebing, 1993, pg. 45) The evolution of life from simple to complex did not entirely fit Theosophical teachings, and H.P. Blavatsky was among those who could not accept the ideas in their entirety. In a move which has become almost expected she appropriated and rejected at the same time.

A third event of importance was the developing of the ‘Three Age’ concept. From 1836 to 1849 this concept had been developed by a Dane, Christian Jurgensen Thomsen. Objects found in archaeological sites began to be grouped according to three stages of development, the Stone age, the Bronze age and the Iron age. (Stiebing, 1993, pg. 47)

These three developments in the history of ideas pushed back the age of the earth and introduced an evolutionary process from simple to complex which did not require the input of any supernatural agency. It should not be thought that by this time, the late 19th century, agents of a biblical chronology had been defeated. In a very illuminating article, David Gange has shown how Egyptology of the time was informed by supporters of biblical worldviews. In a lengthy passage, which I quote in full, Gange outlines the scenario being played out,

“Besides Schliemann’s indication of the incisiveness of archaeology, the trigger for the sudden quest for biblical verification beginning in the 1880’s was the new view of prehistory proposed by evolutionary science and geology. Thus the Egyptologists in this period are suffused with attacks on both these disciplines, and the biblical criticism they informed.

“These sciences claimed man’s intellectual capacity had undergone a constant development from primitive origins, and in the late 19th century, when the earth was thought to be many times younger than we now know it to be, the timescale for this process had been drastically foreshortened. The argument employed by the vast majority of those who took an interest in ancient Egypt during this period was that this civilization – the oldest to have left substantial documentation behind – could settle the issue of origins. To some, Egyptian civilization was seen to betray remnants of man’s bestial state, revealing him coming down from the trees to begin the course of civilization. To others, including the biblical Egyptologists, Egypt revealed man reeling in the wake of the biblical fall, within memory of a glorious, more enlightened stage of civilization. *The fact that predynastic artefacts only began to be appreciated for what they were in the late 1890’s was of great importance here : before this it was widely noted that Egyptian civilization seemed to have come into existence as a fully formed complex culture, a major blow, it was felt, to evolution.* (My italics.)

“Part of the claim made by supporters of evolution and biblical criticism was that in the age of the Old Testament, when humanity was in a stage of evolution significantly less advanced than that of Victorian Britain, written language must have been relatively

undeveloped, that the Pentateuch must therefore be an unreliable – even barbaric – document based on centuries of distorting oral tradition before its eventual materialization in written form. Egyptologists therefore went to Egypt not just to find records of biblical events, but in search of the highly developed written culture that they were certain must exist, and that would offer a serious setback to the claims of evolutionists and biblical critics.

“Some Egyptologists even went so far as to resurrect the enlightenment idea – well-known from Newton’s writings – that all the world’s civilizations sprang from a single source in a glorious imperial super-civilization that had known divine knowledge but in its decadence had been destroyed by the Noachic deluge.” (Gange, 2006, pg. 1089-1090)

Gange continues by quoting from Peter le Page Renouf’s *Hibbert Lectures* of 1878,

“It is incontestably true that the sublime portions of the Egyptian religion are not the comparatively late result of a process of development or elimination from the grosser. The sublime portions are demonstrably ancient; and the last stage of the Egyptian religion, that known to the Greek and Latin writers, heathen or Christian, was by far the grossest and the most corrupt.” (2006, pg. 1090)

I quote this passage in detail as it touches on many themes relevant to the Theosophical perspective on Ancient Egypt.

The first point to note is that the birth of Egyptology as a science was not a strict movement from religious to secular knowledge. Many of the important Egyptologists had avowed biblical aims when embarking on their work. Gange notes that Flinders Petrie went to Egypt with the hope of confirming the biblical reading of the Great Pyramid of Giza by Charles Piazzi Smyth. (2006, pg. 1088) Theosophy, too, had a religious impulse, although not a biblical one.

The second point is that many well-known and important Egyptologists espoused ideas no longer regarded as viable. The quote by Peter le Page Renouf above shows a position also held by H.P. Blavatsky, namely that Egypt knew no infancy. The Theosophical value of this position, like the biblical, was to challenge Darwinism and a theory of progressive development. Each naturally suggested differing alternate readings of the past. H.P. Blavatsky notes on this theme,

“Donnelly has proved the fact from the clearest premises, but the Evolutionists will not listen. A *Miocene* civilization upsets the “universal stone-age” theory, and that of a *continuous* ascent of man from animalism. And yet Egypt, at least runs counter to current hypotheses. There is no stone-age visible there, but a more glorious culture is apparent, the further back we are able to carry our retrospect.” (Verb. Sap.) (1988, vol. II, pg. 786)

H.P. Blavatsky continues on this theme,

“Even the clever work of Donnelly, already mentioned, is put aside, notwithstanding that its statements are all confined within a frame of strictly scientific proofs. But we write for the future. Discoveries in this direction will vindicate the claims of the Asiatic philosophers, who maintain that Sciences – Geology, Ethnology, and History included – were pursued by the Antediluvian nations who lived an untold number of ages ago. Future finds will justify the correctness of the present observations of such acute minds as H. A. Taine and Renan. The former shows the civilizations of such archaic nations as the Egyptians, Aryans of India, Chaldeans, Chinese, and Assyrians are the result of preceding civilizations during “*myriads* of centuries”;* and the latter points to the fact that, ‘Egypt at the beginning appears mature, old, and entirely without mythical and heroic ages, as if the country had never known youth. Its civilization has no infancy, and its art no archaic period. The civilization of the Old Monarchy did not begin with infancy. It was already mature.’+ To this Professor R. Owen adds that, ‘Egypt is recorded to have been a civilized and governed community *before* the time of Menes’; and Winchell (‘Pre-Adamites,’ p. 120), that “at the epoch of Menes the Egyptians were already a civilized and numerous people.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 334)¹³

It is relevant to note that H.P. Blavatsky held some positions which could be supported by mainstream Egyptologists. It can also be noted that she expected vindication in the future from these scientific fields.

The third point to note is the section I have italicised in the reading from Gange above. This offers a convincing explanatory context for some of the Theosophical positions on Ancient Egypt. No doubt H.P. Blavatsky adopted certain positions on Egypt for polemical reasons which suited her grand scheme; however, she could draw on contemporary sources to support

¹³ In this passage H.P. Blavatsky is drawing very heavily on Ignatius Donnelly’s *Atlantis: the antediluvian world*, pg. 132. She has referenced this in *The Secret Doctrine*.

her general stance. The lack of development in the science of Egyptology/archaeology opened a space for a Theosophical insertion of content. H.P. Blavatsky was not alone in this; Egyptologist filled the gaps themselves.

It is William Matthew Flinders Petrie who is credited with introducing modern scientific methodology into Egyptian archaeology. It was Petrie who, in the mid to late 1890s, developed the technique of ‘typological sequence dating’ in Egyptian archaeology which opened the history of ‘predynastic’ and ‘early dynastic Egypt’. The Egyptologist Walter Emery notes,

“Before 1895, our knowledge of Egypt’s history did not extend back beyond the reign of the Pharaoh Senefru, first king of the Fourth Dynasty...” (1961, pg. 21)

In this context, it must be recalled that *The Secret Doctrine* was published in 1888, and H.P. Blavatsky passed away in 1891. Some of H.P. Blavatsky’s sources for the general idea of Egypt knowing no infancy are stated by her in the passages quoted above. These sources would all predate the events which effectively ‘discovered’ pre-dynastic and early dynastic Egypt. No authority could speak with any genuine certainty prior to the late 1890s on this issue and a gap was there to be filled. The sources referenced by H.P. Blavatsky reflect the confused state of Egyptology of her time, and one wonders what sources she would have referenced had *The Secret Doctrine* been written 15 or 20 years later when early Egypt was less of a mystery. Her sources are both mainstream and fringe (e.g. Donnelly), but, as the archaeological record could not at the time fill the gaps in the history of Egypt, they all seem legitimate. The spaces in the archaeological record of ancient Egypt in 1888 made it possible for various theories to be put forward explaining the advanced Egyptian culture of the third and fourth dynasties. Included in these theories were those of immigration into Egypt of alien, advanced races from both Atlantis and the East,¹⁴ these peoples bringing with them the arts and knowledge associated with advanced civilizations. H.P. Blavatsky included both Atlantis and the East in her Theosophical history of the origins of the Egyptian civilization.

It is my contention that H.P. Blavatsky’s statements, particularly in *The Secret Doctrine*, are, in the Theosophical world, essentially irrefutable and cannot be false. No later Theosophical

¹⁴ Martin Bernal reviews much of this material in his *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic roots of classical civilization*. In his opinion racism and a general unwillingness to accept black Africans as the forefathers of the Greek civilization led to various alternate positions on Ancient Egypt. Among them was that Egyptians were not African, and were not the generators of their own civilization. One current idea was that eastern invaders brought a high culture to Egypt. Theosophy seems to endorse this eastern invasion idea. It also, however, endorses an influence from Atlantis.

writer can present a theory which is in contradiction to statements in *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁵ An example of the Theosophical response to the progress made in archaeological methods can be found in John Gordon's *Egypt, child of Atlantis*. Published originally in 1997, and commenting specifically on the Flinders Petrie's contribution, he puts forward various reasons to reject the mainstream Egyptological stance that there was an evolution in ancient Egypt from less to more developed. These reasons include: 'wilful ignorance' on the part of Flinders Petrie of the true Egyptian religious ideas; positive references to what are regarded as 'fringe' writers on Egyptology for example, John Anthony West and Schwaller de Lubicz; and a suggestion that the pottery and art assessed by Flinders Petrie are not of an 'African type' and, therefore, indicate an immigration into Egypt. It is not my intention to discuss the merits of Gordon's position; my concern is to reveal the definitive nature of a statements made by H.P. Blavatsky. The extent to which Theosophists may go to defend statements made by H.P. Blavatsky in the 19th century can lead them to, in some cases, rejecting 100 years of advances in the sciences and archaeology.

H.P. Blavatsky, however, was writing during the confusing birth of a new science. She may be forgiven for, in some instances, reflecting the status of archaeology of her time. It is, perhaps, less forgivable for contemporary Theosophical writers to choose consciously to exist in the late 1880s instead of the 20th century. In very broad strokes, her general position on some issues in Egyptology can be located within the framework of thought of her era. For example, Bernal notes two movements during H.P. Blavatsky's time with which she could quite easily be identified. The first is the theory that Egypt was colonised from the East, and the second is the notion that the Great Pyramid was built by peoples with sophisticated mathematical and astronomical knowledge. (1991, pg. 226) At the level of specifics, however, the position becomes more complicated. When Theosophy begins to indicate timelines and the specific nature of the knowledge held by the ancients it can become increasingly difficult to justify her position.

It should also be noted that sometimes, where competing views were entertained by a specific science, Theosophy often seems to have backed the eventual loser in historical terms. I cite an

¹⁵ Where later Theosophists do endorse contradictory ideas, the concept of 'neo-theosophy,' and 'second generation theosophy' must come into play. Note Tillet, "It was Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934) who was probably the most significant Theosophical influence on modern magic, although the extent to which he can be described as "Theosophical", in the sense understood by Blavatsky, remains a matter of controversy, as does the extent to which he can, in any meaningful way, be described as a disciple of Blavatsky." (2011, pg. 30-31)

example from a work by Alfred Wiedemann published in 1895. (7 years following the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, and 4 years following her passing away.) In his short work, *The Ancient Egyptian doctrine of the immortality of the soul*, and referring to reincarnation, he notes,

“There is no doctrine of compulsory transmigration such as used to be freely ascribed to the Egyptians on the strength of the statements made by Herodotus+; there is no question here of souls being forced to assume fresh forms in which their purification is gradually worked out and their perfection achieved.” (1895, pg. 66-67)

This is a clear, near-contemporary rejection of reincarnation in the Egyptian religion.¹⁶

Reincarnation is a fundamental teaching of Theosophy (the Ancient Wisdom Tradition), and of necessity, therefore, of Ancient Egypt in its eyes.

2.1.5 THEOSOPHY AND THE EAST

In addition to its connection to Western esoteric streams of thought, Theosophy is intimately linked to Asia and Asian teachings. It has been pointed out that in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) the general atmosphere was that of a western, hermetic esotericism.¹⁷ There were certainly hints of the wisdom of the East, but this idea had not been developed in full as yet. (Nor had the specific Theosophical terminology been revealed at this point.) By 1888, however, in *The Secret Doctrine*, the psychological and doctrinal move to the East had been accomplished. (And the Theosophical vocabulary had been developed.)

Certainly by 1888 the source of the Theosophical Wisdom Tradition had been located in Tibet and the Gobi desert area. Tibetan Buddhism had become the chief representative of the Esoteric Schools in public form. The two chief Theosophical Masters were said to be Buddhists (Tibetan), and even those Theosophical Masters who were linked to Western esoteric schools deferred to those in the East. *The Secret Doctrine* itself is suffused with Eastern terms and Eastern teachings.

Mark Bevir has identified the various ingredients which H.P. Blavatsky consolidated in her Theosophical presentation. Rooted in the occult tradition of Europe, she engaged with

¹⁶ In indication of support of the Theosophical position, Zabkar can note “...transmigration...its origin has been denied by the majority of Egyptologists, except some early pantheistic interpreters...” (1963, pg. 59) There was, then, some basis for Theosophical opinion within early Egyptology.

¹⁷ See Godwin, 1994, pg. 277-278.

Victorian science and the Victorian interest in Asia, as well as the earlier Romantic vision of the East. He notes, “...she both incorporated a number of the doctrines of eastern religions into her occultism, and interpreted eastern religions in the light of her occultism.”¹⁸ (1994, pg. 23) This dual process of appropriation and interpretation, of incorporating and transforming, reveals also the extent of the rejection of the East which is apparent in her writings. I interpret ‘interpretation’ here as inferring in part a ‘rejection’ of the object.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has quite comprehensively contextualised the eastern influence on Theosophy in his article, *The Theosophical Society, orientalism, and the “Mystic East”: Western esotericism and eastern religion in Theosophy*. He outlines the developments through which the East began to be revealed to the West. These include the translations of texts into English, British colonization, an interest in Sanskrit, the works of Louis Jacolliot and Max Muller’s *Sacred Books of the East*. (2007, pg. 11–13) In addition to these western translations, special mention can be made of an early Vedantin scholar, T. Subba Row, of whom H.P. Blavatsky had a very high opinion. They were both said to have the same Theosophical Master, and she had hoped he would be an early editor of *The Secret Doctrine*.

This shift to the East in Theosophical thought has been challenged, however, on a number of fronts.¹⁹ The extent to which Eastern ideas were actually adopted, as opposed to Western themes being injected and read into the East, is a field of debate. Hanegraaff could write, “The analysis of both authors²⁰ led to the conclusion that Blavatsky’s shift from a ‘Hermetic’ to an ‘Oriental’ perspective is more apparent than real.” (1998, pg. 455) For Hanegraaff the facade of Eastern themes and teachings cannot hide the fundamental Western origin and bias of the Theosophical teachings. Dawson can suggest, “...what we have is more of a Westernization of Eastern themes than an Easternization of the Western paradigm.” (2006, pg. 3)

One chief value of these critical studies on the influence of the east on the west is that they reveal the complexity of the situation in the search for the sources of Theosophical ideas. Theosophical scholars have often simply engaged in a search for supporting eastern texts and

¹⁸ This idea was in the main part echoed by Hanegraaff in his *New age religion and western culture* in 1998. He notes, “...the fundamental contribution of modern theosophy to the history of occultism consists in its assimilation, by the early founders, of elements of Oriental religions and a perspective of ‘Comparative Religion’ in an already existing western occultist framework.” (1998, pg. 449)

¹⁹ See, Dawson, A 2006, ‘East is east, except when it’s west’, *Journal of Religion & Society*, vol. 8 and Hamilton, M 2002, ‘The easternisation thesis: critical reflections’, *Religion*, vol. 32, pg. 243-258.

²⁰ These authors are the two German scholars, Helmuth von Glasenapp and Jorg Wickmann.

teachings which will show source identity with the Theosophical statements. The academic community, by questioning the very process and nature of appropriation, suggests that the sources should be looked for not just in eastern traditions but in a ‘western paradigm’ of thought and self understanding. This unconscious directing and guiding influence may go some way to explaining the way in which Theosophy projected out, transformed, and even created its source material. The simple search for eastern texts supporting the Theosophical statement would essentially be a futile one. Obviously eastern ideas and texts were drawn on, but the manner in which they were manipulated, appropriated, and informed by the western viewer may have deformed them to the point that source identity is not possible.

2.2 EGYPT IN WESTERN ESOTERICISM

Ancient Egypt is an important theme in the history of western esotericism. While not the only element, it is certainly a central one. The attempt to appropriate the legitimizing authority of Ancient Egypt would be central to many western esoteric traditions. Theosophy is one of these esoteric traditions.²¹ It is the very authority of Egypt in the esoteric imagination which would have forced an engagement with the developing field of Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology.

Erik Hornung in his book *The secret lore of Egypt* (2001) has surveyed the western esoteric engagement with Ancient Egypt. The chapter headings of his book reveal its scope. In partial summary they include, Alchemy, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, Freemasons, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy. This esoteric perspective of Egypt is still extremely popular, witness the recent works by Hancock and Bauval, etc. (The esoteric/metaphysical section of any bookstore will have works making an appeal to Egyptian themes.) Hornung is basically sceptical of the esoteric themes which he has grouped under the label ‘Egyptosophy’.

Egyptosophy is most simply understood in relation to its opposite, Egyptology proper.

Egyptology is the scientific, academic study of ancient Egypt, while Egyptosophy is the Egypt of western imagination. Many of the key themes of Western esoteric Egypt are dismissed by Hornung as pure projection. These include Egypt being the source of esoteric lore, secret initiations, a separate Hermetic religion of Egypt, astrological lore, and esoteric teachings on

²¹ A useful ‘insiders’ overview of themes central to western esotericism written by an important figure in this tradition is Manly Palmer Hall’s, *The secret teachings of all ages: an encyclopaedic outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian symbolical philosophy: being an interpretation of the secret teachings concealed within the rituals, allegories and mysteries of all ages.* (1975.).

what would later become esoteric stances, e.g. reincarnation. All this could be summed up by the general term 'Egyptian Mysteries'.

Hornung is not alone in this dismissal of a 'mystery' tradition in Egypt in the likeness of those of, for example, Greece.²² Georges Nagel, in an article in the *Eranos* yearbook, *The 'Mysteries' of Osiris in Ancient Egypt*, can argue that the texts of Ancient Egypt do not meet the requirements by which the classic Mysteries are identified. (1955, pg. 132) Included in these shortcomings are the lack of (textual) evidence for elect 'initiates', the fact that the Egyptian rituals were often carried out in public and in daylight, and the lack of any identifiable structure in Egyptian temples indicative of mystery work. He also sees no evidence of 'living men' being initiated into any secret teachings.²³ (1955, pg. 132) Egyptian ceremonies were instead performed for the benefit of the deceased, and the Egyptian afterlife teachings were essentially funerary in nature. It is around this last point that much of the contemporary debate revolves.

Brass, in his short essay, suggests that the initial (19th century) de-contextualised approach to Ancient Egyptian studies left a space for competing occult and esoteric rooted explanations to be advanced. (2004, pg. 2) One might ask how the 'esoteric' perspective has survived the insights of more mainstream academic Egyptology. With the advent of Egyptology as a scientific discipline one might have expected a narrowing of the speculative approach. That this has not happened is something bemoaned by mainstream academic Egyptology. For one thing, as pointed out by Hornung, the esoteric themes have a long historical pedigree, and it is, perhaps too much to expect them to disappear in a century after being entrenched in the western mind for 2000 years. I do also believe that the strict division between Egyptology and Egyptosophy may not always be the most useful classification. Erik Hornung places Theosophy quite firmly in the Egyptosophy camp. Some Theosophical positions may, however, either be legitimate in their historical context or legitimate in any Egyptological context.

Esoteric and mainstream Egyptology both continued into the current era along separate lines. Egyptology as an academic science has evolved since the 19th century, and it has become more critical of alternative perspectives on Ancient Egypt. The 'esoteric' or 'mystical' perspective in Egyptian studies, however, while on the back foot, has never entirely disappeared from the academic field. It survives in what appears to me to be a relatively specific form. The

²² Jeremy Naydler in his *Shamanic wisdom in the Pyramid Texts* outlines the gradual elimination of the 'mystical' reading of Egypt from the field of Egyptology.

²³ This lack of evidence ironically allows for the insertion of various esoteric ideas.

fundamental debate is whether the Egyptian texts were reserved for the use of the deceased in the afterlife, or whether there were living initiates who entered the realms of the afterlife while alive. It is at this basic level that the similarity between Theosophy (and much esoteric thought) and the ‘insider’ perspectives of scholars like Naydler²⁴ end. It is only on the general level that Theosophy could draw on Naydler’s ideas for support. I feel that the content specific nature of the Theosophical presentation makes it very difficult for it to draw on what, on the general level, may seem supporting perspectives. From the Theosophical perspective, these general similarities may be viewed as initial steps in the eventual justification of Theosophical content.

The Theosophical Society does form a link in the chain of esoteric transmission. Hornung has good reason to place Theosophy in this stream. It has clear roots in Gnostic, hermetic, alchemical, Rosicrucian, and Masonic streams of thought. Many Theosophical perspectives on Ancient Egypt are rooted in this esoteric milieu. (For example, initiations, secret knowledge, etc.) An example of this in H.P. Blavatsky’s writings is her references to the *Crata Repoa*.²⁵

The *Crata Repoa, or initiations into the ancient secret society of the Egyptian priests*²⁶ was published initially anonymously in German in 1770. Its authors (later identified), Carl Friedrich Koppen and Johann Wilhelm Bernhard von Hymmen, came from the Masonic milieu in Germany. The authors based this work on details about Egypt drawn from the writings of classical authors. The work outlines a seven-fold system of initiation²⁷ which Hornung notes became the model for Egyptian initiations. (2001, pg. 120)

H.P. Blavatsky mentions the *Crata Repoa* in *Isis Unveiled*, but it is not directly referenced in *The Secret Doctrine*.²⁸ It is, therefore, difficult to assess her opinion on this work. *Isis Unveiled* is a different work from the *Secret Doctrine*. It lacks the definitive nature of the later work. The fact that mention of the *Crata Repoa* is dropped in the *Secret Doctrine* may be significant; however, it is also true that H.P. Blavatsky stated it was not her intention to repeat

²⁴ It may appear unusual to regard Naydler as an ‘insider’ in the field of Egyptology, but anyone who has assessed his work against esoteric or occult works will note that his work has more in common with Egyptology than Egyptosophy. That some of his root ideas may have resonance with esoteric streams of thought does not alter this.

²⁵ An English translation (from a French translation) of the *Crata Repoa* can be found in Manly Palmer Hall’s, *The lost keys of Freemasonry*. (2006)

²⁶ *Crata Repoa: Oder Einweihungen in der alten geheimen Gesellschaft der Egyptischen Priester*.

²⁷ The seven degrees being, Pastophoris, Neocoris, Melanophoris, Chistophoris, Balahate, Astronomus, and Prophet.

²⁸ There is also a brief reference the *Blavatsky Collected Works* vol. xiv. This short reference, however, appears to be an abridged version of that given in *Isis Unveiled*.

ground covered in *Isis Unveiled* in the *Secret Doctrine*. I have not read every Theosophical work which may reference the *Crata Repoa*. It is my prediction that, as it was not mentioned in *The Secret Doctrine*, it has not (and will not) acquire Theosophical sanction, and, while it may be mentioned by Theosophical writers, it will not be vigorously defended if criticised by internal or external sources.

In addition to its roots in esoteric streams of thought, it has been my contention that Theosophy is also rooted in more mainstream sources of knowledge. H.P. Blavatsky references standard works on Egyptology by well-known authorities. She held general positions which could be located in studies of her time, for example, that there was a difference in belief and understanding between educated priests and the general populace. Priests were held to hold superior /secret (read monotheistic) understandings to those of the layperson who embraced polytheism.²⁹ In this, then, Theosophy spans two worlds. It is a mistake in my opinion to ignore or downplay these appeals and references to mainstream sources of information in the formulation of Theosophy. Egyptology itself has undergone dramatic shifts since Champollion's work on the Rosetta stone. Prior to the translation of Egyptian texts, Egypt was considered a source of learning and wisdom. Currently, many scholars dismiss the notion that the Ancient Egyptians has special knowledge in almost any field. Jeremy Naydler discusses this gradual excising of 'Egyptian wisdom' from the academic field of Egyptology. Naydler points out that this process was accelerated from the 1880s onward. More and more translations were being made, and the wisdom imputed to the Egyptians was being challenged. (2005, pg. 25) We recall again that *The Secret Doctrine* was published in 1888, having been in preparation for some years.

It is important that the Theosophy of *The Secret Doctrine* be located in its historical context. The state of Egyptology at the time may in some ways explain some of the perspectives taken. Owing, however, to the developing nature of any science, it is also useful to compare the Theosophical perspective in relation to modern Egyptology. This latter comparison is what I have undertaken in this dissertation.

²⁹ As a further random example, Marc Demarest in a footnote in his annotated version of Emma Hardinge Britten's *Art Magic* notes, "The idea that high Egyptian culture was familiar with magnetism...appears to have passed into Victorian encyclopedia culture via John Gardner Wilkinson's *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (London : John Murray, 3 vols., 1837)," (Britten, 2011, pg. 242) Magnetism being an important part of nineteenth century esoteric thought. Franz Lambert, writing in a German Theosophical journal *The Sphinx*, penned an article entitled, "Three thousand years ago: hypnotism and electricity in Ancient Egypt."

2.3 THE SECRET DOCTRINE - THE MAGNUM OPUS OF H.P. BLAVATSKY

I have chosen to focus my dissertation around the major work of H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*. In this section I will discuss the place of *The Secret Doctrine* in the Theosophical library. Related to this are the themes of authority and the methods of accessing knowledge and how these relate to the experience of engaging with Theosophical texts, specifically *The Secret Doctrine*.

2.3.1. THE BOOKS OF H.P. BLAVATSKY

H.P. Blavatsky has left a large body of writings behind. Her *Collected Works* alone count more than 15 volumes, and this series does not include her major works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Her collected writings span the time frame from 1874 until her death in 1891. (There are also some works which were published posthumously.) While there are many important articles in her *Collected Works* she is principally known for her individual works. I list the works below, with a particular emphasis on *The Secret Doctrine*.

The work which brought H.P. Blavatsky to public attention was *Isis Unveiled: a master-key to the mysteries of ancient and modern science and theology*, published in 1877. Published in two volumes, entitled Science and Theology respectively, this is a wide-ranging work. I will not review the contents of *Isis Unveiled* here; a few points, however, could be made. Firstly, many of the basic themes she develops in later works are outlined in this work. In this sense, *The Secret Doctrine* can be seen as a continuation of *Isis Unveiled*. Secondly, in *Isis Unveiled* she had not yet developed the now familiar Theosophical vocabulary and terminology.

The next individual work of importance is *The Secret Doctrine: the synthesis of science, religion and philosophy*, published in 1888. This is, without doubt, the major work of H.P. Blavatsky. Goodrick-Clarke notes it is the “doctrinal statement of Blavatsky’s mature Theosophy...” which I do not feel can be doubted. (2004, pg. 14) It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine her statements on Ancient Egypt as found in this work. H.P. Blavatsky makes many relevant statements on Ancient Egypt in *Isis Unveiled* and in various articles throughout the *Collected Works*, but it is in *The Secret Doctrine* that her definitive ideas are found, and it is against these ideas that her work must be evaluated.

The first volume of two is subtitled Cosmogogenesis. It treats in general with the awakening of the universe, the solar system, the planetary chain, and the earth globe. (In Theosophical theory the general pattern of unfolding or incarnating would be similar for each system.) It is

divided into three basic sections. The first is a selection of stanzas from the *Book of Dzyan*, an esoteric work not available to the public.³⁰ H.P. Blavatsky had exclusive access to this secret work through the permission of the Theosophical masters. This section also contains commentaries by H.P. Blavatsky on the verses of the stanzas. The second section is a series of chapters on symbolism in world religions as explained by Theosophical teachings. The third section is a series of chapters where science and the teachings of *The Secret Doctrine* are contrasted. The second volume is entitled *Anthropogenesis* and outlines the awakening of life, specifically human life, on the earth chain and globe. It follows the same threefold pattern of volume one. The first section is a selection of stanzas with commentaries by H.P. Blavatsky. The second section is a series of chapters on symbolism in world religions. The third section is a series of chapters where science and the esoteric teachings are compared.

The story of the writing of *The Secret Doctrine* is told in de Zirkoff's *Rebirth of the occult tradition*. It was produced under some psychic and physical distress by H.P. Blavatsky. At one point, while ill, she was visited by a *mahatma* and given the choice either to die and to be freed from the burden of writing or to continue under this great distress. She chose to 'sacrifice' for the sake of Theosophical students. (Zirkoff 1977, pg. 39-40) This sense of duress, sacrifice, and *mahatmic* authority add to the charisma of *The Secret Doctrine*.

The sense of *mahatmic* authority and sanction is felt intensely around *The Secret Doctrine*. The work is regarded as a 'triple production' of H.P. Blavatsky, the *Mahatma* Morya, and the *Mahatma* Koot Hoomi.³¹ (Zirkoff 1977, pg. 16) Initially *The Secret Doctrine* was intended as an extension of *Isis Unveiled*; it evolved into something quite distinct, but, at that early point, H.P. Blavatsky writes, "MASTER orders and wills it [*Isis Unveiled*] be rewritten..." (Zirkoff 1977, pg. 6) In one of the *Letters from the Masters of Wisdom* the *Mahatma* Morya writes, "Be assured that what she [H.P. Blavatsky] has not *annotated* from scientific and other works, we have given or *suggested* to her. Every mistake or erroneous notion, corrected and explained by her from the works of other theosophists *was corrected by me, or under my instruction*." (Zirkoff 1977, pg. 54) *The Secret Doctrine* was ordered, inspired, and checked

³⁰ The *Book of Dzyan*, from which selected stanzas (commonly referred to as the 'stanzas of Dzyan') were drawn and revealed in the *Secret Doctrine*, is an occult text to which exclusive access is through H.P. Blavatsky. The search for this supposed source of Theosophical teachings continues in some Theosophical circles.

³¹ These being the two senior teachers of H.P. Blavatsky involved in the creation of the Theosophical Society.

by the Theosophical *mahatmas*. This appeal to authority is powerful, and the nature of the work, that it is essentially factual, makes it almost irrefutable and incapable of editing.

The Key to Theosophy was published in 1889. This work is a series of questions and answers on Theosophical teachings which is still a standard work in the Theosophical world.

Also published in 1889 was *The Voice of the silence and other chosen fragments from the Book of the Golden precepts*. The *Voice*, as it is popularly referred to in the Theosophical Society, is the main devotional work of H.P. Blavatsky. Said to be translated from hidden works in Tibet, it is the closest she comes to any sort of meditation manual or instruction.³²

A small work entitled *Gems from the east* was published in 1890. The *Gems from the east* is a selection of saying and quotes, one for each day of the year. It can be found in volume xii of the *Collected Works*.

The *Esoteric section instructions* were originally published in 1889-1890 in New York, and in 1891 in England. (Goodrick-Clarke, 2004, pg. 209) These texts were initially restricted to members of the Inner Group or Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. They can be found in volume xii of the *Collected Works*. This is an important collection of writings as, through them, H.P. Blavatsky introduces a number of teachings not contained in *The Secret Doctrine*, for example, those relating to the auric egg. There is also a collection of writings referred to as the *Inner group teachings*³³ where more select teachings were given to a few chosen students. These *Esoteric instructions* and *Inner group teachings* are also regarded as authoritative owing to their initially restricted nature.

The *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society* was published in 1890 and 1891. This is an important work where H.P. Blavatsky provides additional commentary on some of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*³⁴ revealed in *The Secret Doctrine*.

A more controversial work, *The Theosophical glossary*, was first published in 1892. The controversy surrounding this work is in relation to what extent H.P. Blavatsky was involved in,

³² Mabel Collin's *Light on the path* was the other early Theosophical devotional work. This small work was dictated by a Theosophical master, the Master Hilarion, through the mediumship of Mabel Collins.

³³ Spierenburg, H 1995, *The inner group teachings of H.P. Blavatsky: to her personal pupils (1890-91)*, Point Loma Publications, San Diego.

³⁴ I use the term "stanzas of Dzyan" and "*Book of Dzyan*" interchangeably. The stanzas are drawn from the book, and only select stanzas are revealed in *The Secret Doctrine*.

or sanctioned, its production. Many of the entries are not by her, and they are initialled by members of the early Theosophical Society.

The *Nightmare Tales* and *From the caves and jungles of Hindostan* were also both published for the first time in 1892. These can be found in the *Collected Works* and are stories and reminiscences.

In addition to these individual works are the numerous articles contained in her fifteen volume *Collected Works*.

I will discuss the question of the place and authority of Theosophical texts in the following section.

2.3.2 AUTHORITY AND THEOSOPHICAL TEXTS

In the Theosophical Society, authority is apportioned in accordance to proximity to the *mahatmas* of Theosophy. This would be true for either persons or texts. The authoritative source of knowledge resides with the “secret brotherhood of adepts”, with whom contact can in theory be made. There are a range of general sources of knowledge, for example, science, philosophy, psychic investigation, religion and myth, personal investigation, but in the Theosophical world all are passed through the template of teachings given out by the Theosophical *mahatmas*. The inherent nature of the *mahatmas*, and of the hidden texts and teachings they reveal, makes them essentially irrefutable. Witness the following statement concerning the ‘secret doctrine’, meant here in its entirety, of which *The Secret Doctrine* is said only to be a fragment,

“The Secret Doctrine is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages, ...facts which have occupied countless generations of initiated seers...the flashing gaze of those seers has penetrated into the very kernel of matter, and recorded the soul of things there...it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings.”(Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 272-273)

“...(The teachings were confirmed by) checking, testing, and verifying in every department of nature the traditions of old by the independent visions of great adepts; i.e., men who have developed and perfected their physical, mental, psychic, and

spiritual organisations to the utmost possible degree. No vision of one adept was accepted till it was checked and confirmed by the visions – so obtained as to stand as independent evidence – to other adepts, and by centuries of experiences.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 273)

In terms of doctrinal authority, works penned or directly inspired by the *mahatmas* would be difficult to question. Works, then, of unquestioned authority would be the *Mahatma letters to A.P. Sinnett*, and various letters the *mahatmas* penned to a wide variety of correspondents. It should be noted that the intention of the letters would be important. It is not always apparent that the intent of each letter is to reveal esoteric teachings.³⁵ Of similar authority are translations, basically exclusively by H.P. Blavatsky, of esoteric texts and catechisms. These would include the ‘Stanzas of Dzyan’ in *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Voice of the silence*, and scattered throughout the writings of H.P. Blavatsky, extracts from ‘esoteric catechisms’ which have been translated into English by her.³⁶

Next in terms of authority would be *The Secret Doctrine* as a whole. The *Stanzas* and extracts from the esoteric catechism have their own inherent authority. The balance of the work, though, is also characterised by authority and finality. (See Appendix three for examples of types of statements made in *The Secret Doctrine*.)

Following *The Secret Doctrine*, would be books written by persons thought to have had direct contact with, or been direct ‘*chelas*’ (students/pupils) of, the *mahatmas* – for example, W.Q. Judge. It can be noted that however definitive a statement may be in terms of its origin, it may yet be a provisional statement in terms of the notion of progressive revelation. An example of this is the teaching of the auric egg as outlined in the Esoteric Section writings of H.P. Blavatsky. Related to this is the amended presentation of the seven-fold structure of the human being.³⁷ While not always presented in popular works on Theosophy, these two teachings represent a ‘deeper’ understanding.

As I am discussing *The Secret Doctrine*, I will focus on the textual implications, and not directly on the figure of H.P. Blavatsky. The place of *The Secret Doctrine* is in some ways

³⁵ The irony of revealing esoteric teachings, i.e. that they are no longer esoteric, is not lost on H.P. Blavatsky. ‘Esoteric’ when used in relation to revealed teachings is sometimes a catchphrase for the ‘Ancient Wisdom’, portions of which are being revealed and portions of which are not. It has reference to content, i.e. the Ancient Wisdom ‘ideas’ and philosophy.

³⁶ Included here could be *Light on the path* by Mabel Collins.

³⁷ I outline some of the changes in the Theosophical presentation of the individual in chapter four.

ambiguous in the Theosophical Society. In written works, and even in personal discussion with members, the work is hailed as the most significant revelation of esoteric teachings for thousands of years. In actual practice the work is not necessarily widely studied by members. This is my personal observation made in local lodges and meetings of the two main sections of the Theosophical Society, the Adyar and Pasadena sections of the Theosophical Society. In the Adyar Section, the writings of Besant and Leadbeater are the chief means to access Theosophical teachings. In the Pasadena Theosophical Society the towering figure of Gottfried de Purucker is the prism through which Theosophical teachings are often accessed.³⁸ The general intellectual inaccessibility of *The Secret Doctrine*, coupled with readily available lucid commentaries, has ensured the book is approached warily, if at all, by some members.

It is my contention that *The Secret Doctrine* is to be understood as a set body of specific teachings. The specific nature of the presentation makes it difficult to evolve acceptably into a general abstract set of statements. For example, it is not just that ‘reincarnation’ in the abstract is a Theosophical teaching. By simply stating that reincarnation in general is teaching of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition, the universal nature of the teaching is stressed. Theosophy, however, rather than making general statements, presents a detailed teaching of reincarnation, which, through this detail, makes it difficult to generalize. To elaborate, it is the Theosophical contention that ‘once human always human’. Theosophy does not teach that human beings can reincarnate into lower life forms through which it has already evolved.³⁹ The Theosophical statement is odds with, for example, the Tibetan Buddhist teaching.⁴⁰ Bearing in mind the strong links supposed by Theosophists between Theosophy and Tibetan Buddhism this has resulted in internal doctrinal problems. This doctrinal discrepancy has led to various coping mechanisms within Theosophy. One coping strategy is that the Theosophical teaching becomes increasingly nuanced. Witness for example G. de Purucker’s refinement of this issue by teasing out differences in meaning between, pre-existence, reimpodiment, rebirth, palingenesis, transmigration, metempsychosis, reincarnation, and metempsychosis. (1973, vol.

³⁸ Having said this, I should state again that this is my personal experience in some few Theosophical centres. It should be taken as a provisional and personal impression.

³⁹ See G. de Purucker in *The esoteric tradition*, “The human soul can no more migrate over and incarnate in a beast-body than can the psychical apparatus of a beast incarnate upwards in human flesh.” (1973, pg. 597)

⁴⁰ For specific work on the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism and Theosophy the work of David and Nancy Reigle are particularly important. Their work revolves around the attempt to locate specific sources for the Theosophical teachings, which are said to have been retained in Tibet. This endeavour leads them into more obscure Buddhist works as the more general and well-known works begin to contradict Theosophical statements.

II, pg. 594) Through this refinement discrepancies can be explained away as being select statements on a varied theme. A second coping mechanism is the stressing of the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric presentation of a teaching. In this sense, the Tibetan Buddhists would be either deliberately withholding their knowledge of the ‘real’ esoteric teaching on reincarnation, or do not know it. Neither are entirely satisfactory conclusions.

2.3.3 ACCESSING KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENTISM

My chief concern in this section is to try to examine the way in which Theosophical texts, specifically *The Secret Doctrine*, are experienced by their readers. I am not aware of any study on this topic, nor obviously have I been able to interview every member who has ever read a Theosophical text. Much of what I argue here will, therefore, be my own opinion which I will try to support by reference to the texts themselves.⁴¹

I feel it is important to distinguish between three concepts at this point:

- The actual knowledge itself; the Theosophical content and teachings;
- The means of accessing this knowledge; and
- The form in which this knowledge is stored.

The teachings in *The Secret Doctrine* are rational, intellectual statements to be understood in like manner. They are not non-rational, ‘mystical’ truths which require altered states of mind to be comprehended. H.P. Blavatsky had hoped that the work would revolutionise the world and provide a solid basis on which science, philosophy, and religion could base themselves. The fact that scientists and philosophers were part of its intended audience suggests to me that the work was intended to be engaged by them on their terms, that is, in terms of rational, ordered, scientific thinking.⁴² I feel H.P. Blavatsky’s conception of ‘science’ has much in common with a ‘crude empiricism’. This method is simply projected by her into the ‘non-empirical’ realms.

⁴¹ This does raise the problem of the subjective nature of scholarship. It is conceivable that every individual experiences a text in a unique way. I have experienced *The Secret Doctrine* as primarily an intellectual and rational text. My study of it will follow from this. I must concede that it seems possible that another individual with a different mental perspective may experience the work in another way, for example, as a non-rational mystical work.

⁴² I differ here then with Hornung’s conception of the character of esotericism.

The Secret Doctrine is presented as a ‘scientific’ work of facts and truths. It is a body of knowledge.⁴³ H.P. Blavatsky writing to William Quan Judge states, “...I want you badly for the arrangement of *Secret Doctrine*. Such facts, *such facts*, Judge, as Masters are giving out will rejoice your old heart...” (quoted in Zirkoff 1977, pg. 27) Throughout her letters she often uses the word ‘fact’ in relation to the content of *The Secret Doctrine*. Even where the phrase ‘higher knowledge’ is used in relation to secret wisdom, this knowledge is understandable on a rational, intellectual level. Even when reference is made to the ‘intuition’ needed to understand the esoteric wisdom I suggest this is not some reference to supersensory mental states. For example, there is nothing more intrinsically ‘non-rational’, ‘mystical’ or ‘intuitive’ about a sevenfold division of a person than any other division. (A seven-fold division is the ‘esoteric’ division of H.P. Blavatsky’s ‘secret school’.) The Theosophical statements in *The Secret Doctrine* are primarily rational, intellectual, statements and they are to be engaged on this level.

How does H.P. Blavatsky access this knowledge? To answer this question one needs to distinguish between the types of knowledge contained in *The Secret Doctrine* and the form in which this knowledge exists. I propose three basic types of knowledge (or facts). Firstly, there are the esoteric commentaries and stanzas from the *Book of Dzyan*. Secondly, there are the occult interpretations of religions and their teachings. Thirdly, there are many quotes and ideas from contemporary scientific and other works of which H.P. Blavatsky makes use.

The third type of knowledge clearly exists in written form. It was often remarked that H.P. Blavatsky’s travelling library was small in comparison to the vast number of books referenced in *The Secret Doctrine*. One Theosophical answer to this quandary is given by Archibald Keightley, one of the compiling assistants of *The Secret Doctrine*. He notes, “Many of the quotations had to be verified, and here we should have been lost if it had not been for a hint from H.P. B. She told us one night that sometimes in writing down quotations, which for the purpose of the book had been impressed on the Astral Light before her, she forgot to reverse the figures – for instance page 123 would be allowed to remain 321 and so on.” (Quoted in Zirkoff 1977, pg. 43) Through clairvoyant means this ordinary book knowledge is accessed. Even to the point of the page numbers in the original work. Super-sensory means therefore were used to gain normal book knowledge from the book itself.

⁴³ This is in part endorsed by the ubiquitous ‘study group’ in Theosophical Societies. The study group forms the basic medium through which much Theosophical content is conveyed.

The second type of knowledge, the esoteric interpretations, is also experienced on an intellectual, rational level. In what I feel is a revealing passage H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“I live two lives again. Master finds that it is too difficult for me to be looking consciously into the astral light for my S.D. and so, it is now about a fortnight, I am made to see all I have to as though in my dream. I see large and long rolls of paper on which things are written and I recollect them. Thus all the Patriarchs from Adam to Noah were given to me to see – parallel with the Rishis; and in the middle between them, the meaning of their symbols – or personifications.” (Quoted in Zirkoff 1977, pg. 25-26)

While extrasensory means are used to access this knowledge, the knowledge itself is presented on ‘long rolls of paper on which things are written’. The rational and literary sense of the inspiration seems clear to me.

These two types of knowledge can immediately be understood for what they are. They are self explanatory, for example it is understood when H.P. Blavatsky writes there are seven principles. If she quotes from a work of a scientist it is simple to understand it.

I suggest that the first type of knowledge (content) in *The Secret Doctrine* is of a similar order as the other two outlined. The knowledge I refer to here is that in the *Stanzas of Dzyan* themselves and the extracts from the *Occult (Esoteric) Catechism*. These too, however, are literary works which H.P. Blavatsky has supposedly translated into English. She writes in *The Secret Doctrine*,

“The Stanzas which form the thesis of every section are given throughout in their modern translated version, as it would be worse than useless to make the subject still more difficult by introducing the archaic phraseology of the original, with its puzzling style and words. Extracts are given from the Chinese Thibetan and Sanskrit translations of the original Senzar Commentaries and Glosses on the Book of DZYAN – these being now rendered for the first time into a European language.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 23)

Possibly the original *Book of Dzyan* is a work of symbols and not in the form of a normal written language; H.P. Blavatsky has, however, drawn from written works and translated out of them into the English. Once the codes and explanation of the terminology are given the extracts become understandable on an intellectual, rational, and philosophic level.

I argue, then, that *The Secret Doctrine* is, and was intended to be, a rational, intellectual, and literary production. The primary experience of readers of this work is on this level. That some individuals may experience the work in another manner is certainly possible, but this is not the main intent of the work, nor would it, I suggest, be the primary response to it. While non-rational means may (or may not, depending on one's perspective) have been used by H.P. Blavatsky to access these rational sources of knowledge (often in actual written form), the result is a production of rational, philosophical, and scientific scope, and H.P. Blavatsky hoped it would be assessed on this level.

In relation to this presentation of *The Secret Doctrine* it is relevant to examine briefly Olav Hammer's⁴⁴ notion of 'scientism.' I believe the Theosophical engagement with science is of special importance in understanding its source texts, in particular *The Secret Doctrine*.

A few points could be noted at the outset. Firstly, the 'sciences' cover a variety of fields, many of which were in the process of establishing themselves in the latter half of the 19th century. 'Science' would include not just physics, but also biology, archaeology, geology, and so on. Any serious assessment of the Theosophical engagement with science would need to be in relation to each of these various fields. General impressions and partial studies may not do true justice to the text being scrutinised. I am not aware of any series of studies which locates the various sciences in their historical context as they are presented in *The Secret Doctrine*.

Secondly, H.P. Blavatsky was not a professional or practising scientist. She did not conduct experiments in a biology laboratory, she did not conduct archaeological digs, she did not study rock formations, and one would not regard her as a physicist. Her input, then, is on the level of a lay person. She was, however, aware of the debates of her time and of the leading scientists involved in them.

Thirdly, many of her works, and in particular *The Secret Doctrine*, drew on a wide variety of scientific works, words, and ideas. The type of engagement may range from covert adoption to overt rejection/confrontation. The attempt to present the work as 'scientific' and on rational terms is, however, quite clear to me. That for H.P. Blavatsky 'science' included a variety of

⁴⁴ If I have one hesitancy concerning Olav Hammer's *Claiming knowledge* it is that he manages to combine works like H.P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* and Shirley MacLaine's *Dancing in the light* in one book. The broadness of his methodological underpinnings may, perhaps, lose as much as it gains. I am not even convinced that a work like *The Secret Doctrine* and something much closer to it, like the works of Alice Bailey's (e.g. *A treatise on cosmic fire*) can be fruitfully compared in all aspects. There is hardly a single reference to any contemporary scientific work in the latter, while the former engages with science on many fronts.

metaphysical ‘speculations’ is not the immediate point. Even these are open to science, of a different nature.⁴⁵ Furthermore, and more importantly, some of these alternate ‘sciences’ and points of view were still a part of mainstream 19th century science, even if it they were on the fringe.

Olav Hammer offers the following definition of ‘scientism’,

“...Scientism is the active positioning of one’s own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features – without, however, the use of methods generally approved within the scientific community, and without subsequent social acceptance of these manifestations by the mainstream of the scientific community through e.g. peer reviewed publication in academic journals.” (2004, pg. 206)

I return to my three points above:

- 1) I suggest that a number of H.P. Blavatsky’s statement could be supported by reference to contemporary scientific works and ideas. I have mentioned two, Goodrick-Clarke’s discussion of electricity in part drawn from *The unseen universe*, and, in the archaeological field, the fact that ‘pre-dynastic’ Egypt was really discovered only in the late 1890s. H.P. Blavatsky has drawn on legitimate, central ideas of mainstream scientists.
- 2) H.P. Blavatsky is not a scientist in the usual sense of the word. She drew, however, on mainstream (among other) sources of science. I feel this could make her something of the type of a ‘popularizer’ of science. Lightman mentions a number of such popularizers in the late 19th century. H.P. Blavatsky could, perhaps, fit into this category. Popularizers made use of science for their own polemical purposes, but did not have to be ‘scientists’ to do so.
- 3) This is related to the first point. To speak of ‘science’ as a uniform field without categories and specialties is an oversight. H.P. Blavatsky’s statements, to be fairly assessed, need to be teased out into these categories and evaluated. A portion of H.P. Blavatsky’s work in relation to the science of her day has been discussed by Egil Asprem in his article, *Pondering imponderables: occultism in the mirror of late classical*

⁴⁵ The adoption of the scientific discourse is apparent; the Ancient Wisdom teachings have been “checked”, “tested” and “verified”. (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 273)

antiquity. He makes a number of important points: 1) the relation of esotericism to the nature of science during the period of *The Secret Doctrine* has not been fully researched; 2) he questions the ‘degree to which various occult systems were scientifically marginal’ (2011, pg. 133); and 3) he notes, “While her [H.P. Blavatsky] synthesis is obviously speculative and, in all its expansionist vigour, questionable from the scientific point of view, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that Blavatsky’s use of scientific references does not amount to simple cherry-picking. Even if the fictional *vril* force and Crookes’ psychic force were marginal, they existed within a realm of speculation where the possibility of discovering such exotic effects remained at least plausible in principle.” (2011, pg. 144)

Some, and I do not suggest all, Theosophical ideas and presentations of science (of which there are many branches) would be understandable in their historical context. What I argue against here is any blanket statement on her engagement with science, or any other field of enquiry. If Theosophy is presenting a “scientific occultism” it is a mistake to pin her too precisely to one half of this equation. Each of her statements should be evaluated in its full historical context. Only once this is done can a reliable opinion be presented. Theosophical ideas which have not stood the test of time may have been generated in a background of similar widespread ideas of her time, or they may have been inserted into the gaps left by still the developing sciences.

H.P. Blavatsky drew information, unconsciously or consciously, from the various fields of knowledge available to her. Some of this content informs the basic Theosophical concepts themselves. In addition to this, she did engage in *The Secret Doctrine* with various scientific works and fields of inquiry, not necessarily in any systematic way, but either as a foil for her own ideas, or when possible, as supporting literature.

The Secret Doctrine is an unusual work in that it engages with various fields of knowledge. The result of this is that, in addition to being a ‘body of knowledge’, Theosophy also implies a hermeneutic approach to religion. It has something in common with the ‘mythographies’ of, for example, Godfrey Higgins, Gerald Massey, Charles-Francois Dupuis, and Constantin Francois de Volney. H.P. Blavatsky debated, and was dismissed by, one of the founders of comparative religion, F. Max Muller. Theosophy, then, implies a method of interpretation, a rigorous perennial philosophy of identity. It is a rejected method, but is one which once formed part of the comparative study of religion.

2.3.4 THE SOURCES

The sources or origins of the teachings of *The Secret Doctrine* have not been specifically located. For many members Theosophical teachings are what they portray themselves to be, esoteric knowledge given out by advanced human beings. For scholars of religion, historical texts and contemporary thought trends would be likely sources when coupled with H.P. Blavatsky's own personal inspiration. I will review in this section some of the sources which H.P. Blavatsky references in her works, with a specific focus on Ancient Egypt.

2.3.4.1 GENERAL NOTE ON SOURCES

A few general points which are raised by H.P. Blavatsky's use of her sources can be noted.

Hundreds of works are either mentioned or referenced by H.P. Blavatsky in her writings. She refers to so many works that it is almost impossible for her to have engaged in any detail with many of them. This is indeed my impression of her use of sources in relation to Ancient Egypt. We do not find any systematic engagement with texts in their entirety; instead single sentences and paragraphs are drawn from a wide variety of texts to support an idea H.P. Blavatsky is presenting or for her to refute.

An example of this is found in *The Secret Doctrine* where she writes,

“As Bosuage [J.Basnage de Beauval] shows, the Egyptians themselves confessed that science flourished in their country only since Isis-Osiris, whom they continue to adore as gods, ‘though they had become Princes in human form.’ And he adds of Osiris-Isis (the divine androgyne):-‘It is said that this Prince (Isis-Osiris) built cities in Egypt, stopped the overflowing of the Nile, invented agriculture, the use of vine, music, astronomy, and geometry.’” (1988, vol. II, pg. 366)

This short extract is drawn from J. Basnage de Beauval's *Histoire des Juifs*.⁴⁶ It appears to be the sole extract from Basnage and is drawn on to support H.P. Blavatsky's larger theme of divine instructors teaching early humanity. There is no attempt to engage with this topic as expressed in this work; it is simply a sentence quoted as if authoritative.

Partially related to this is the accusation of plagiarism. A famous accusation was published by William Emmette Coleman in 1895 as an appendix to a work by Vsevolod Sergiyevich

⁴⁶ As identified in the Index to *The Secret Doctrine*.

Solovyoff entitled, *A modern priestess of Isis*.⁴⁷ Coleman's accusation, in his own words, is "...I have traced the sources whence she (H.P. Blavatsky) derived – and mostly without credit being given – nearly the whole of their (her writings) subject-matter." (2004, pg. 1) The basic accusation is two-fold, firstly, that her ideas have been taken from various authors, and, secondly, that no proper credit was given. A third accusation is also mentioned, viz. that H.P. Blavatsky gave the erroneous impression that she was quoting directly from many sources when, in fact, she drew the passages from a third party text. A false impression was thereby being given of 'vast erudition' on the part of H.P. Blavatsky. (There does appear to be some justification for this accusation.) Coleman's article is very wide ranging and cannot be assessed here. I will, however, mention two examples from H.P. Blavatsky's writings as they pertain to her use of sources on Ancient Egypt.

One example is found in *The Secret Doctrine* volume 1, page 311. H.P. Blavatsky extracts a lengthy passage which she attributes to M. Gaston Maspero by name, although she does not mention the work drawn from.⁴⁸ It is, therefore, a partial reference. The purpose of the passage being quoted appears to be solely that it can be disagreed with by H.P. Blavatsky. The thrust of the passage by Maspero is to suggest the Egyptian religion changed over time. Immediately following the quoted passage H.P. Blavatsky disagrees with almost every idea in it. For her, naturally, the esoteric teachings of the Egyptians have not changed and are incapable of change. It is difficult to say what idea she appropriated from this passage of Maspero. It is quoted for seemingly no other reason than to be contradicted. I have noticed this same pattern throughout *The Secret Doctrine*. A passage from an author will be quoted (with often a partial reference, or a reference in the vicinity of the passage), only to be either rejected or wholly reinterpreted in a Theosophical light.

Coleman suggested that most of the details on Egyptian mythology presented in the *Theosophical glossary* were drawn from Bonwick's *Egyptian belief and modern thought*. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine every entry. What I do note, however, is that Bonwick's work quotes from H.P. Blavatsky's own *Isis Unveiled*. Bonwick drew on *Isis Unveiled* in his work, and his own possible borrowings would need to be teased out before any absolute conclusion could be made, not perhaps in terms of whether H.P. Blavatsky drew passages from his work, but whether she drew *ideas* from his works. An example of the

⁴⁷ Solovyoff, VS 1895, *A modern priestess of Isis*, Longmans, Green and co, London.

⁴⁸ The work drawn on was identified by Boris de Zirkoff as: Maspero, G 1883, *Guide du visiteur au Musee de Boulaq*, Vienna.

complexity of this might be shown to be revealed in the following passage from *The Secret Doctrine*,

“The use of geometrical figures and the frequent allusions to figures in all ancient scriptures (see Puranas, Egyptian papyri, the ‘Book of the Dead’ and even the Bible) must be explained.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 66)

Bonwick notes in his *Egyptian belief and modern thought*,

“Geometrical figures had their significance.” (1956, pg. 213)

It could be that H.P. Blavatsky drew this idea into her *Secret Doctrine* and elaborated on and developed it. It might, however, also be that this idea was current in any number of circles at the time. We do know also that Bonwick’s work post dated *Isis Unveiled*, and one would need to investigate potential borrowings by Bonwick. My main point is that the situation seems complicated, and quick judgements may not be correct.

Plagiarism⁴⁹ is a complicated accusation which would take careful research to sustain or deny. While H.P. Blavatsky may quote from many contemporary and ancient sources, it is often to disagree with them or to reinterpret them in a totally new light. In such a case the passages may be said to be ‘plagiarised’, but the ideas they now express cannot. Scholars have not unanimously located the precise sources of the basic Theosophical ideas, and it is these basic ideas which need to be located in her contemporary sources for the charge of plagiarism to have any sting. To assess the accusations of Coleman one would need to follow through on his ideas virtually quotation by quotation and confirm whether each was not referenced in some way and whether the content was actually drawn on by H.P. Blavatsky or merely used as a foil for her own ideas.

2.3.4.2 SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS

Above I refer to a single passage H.P. Blavatsky drew from a work by J. Basnage de Beauval’s *Histoire des Juifs*. There are authors, however, from whom she drew more consistently when

⁴⁹ D. Erixson, in his article ‘Plagiarism and the *Secret Doctrine*’ discusses the charge of plagiarism against H.P. Blavatsky in some detail. He finds her not guilty on essentially legalistic grounds. H.P. Blavatsky had assumed United States citizenship, and the United States was not a signatory to any of the international conventions addressing plagiarism. It is also interesting to note from Erixson’s research that in the late 19th century plagiarism had not been definitively defined, as opposed to the situation today.

dealing with Ancient Egypt. I will sketch some basic bibliographical and biographical details of these writers in this section.

In relation to the specific topic of my dissertation two important writers stand out. The first is Gerald Massey, and the second is Franz Lambert.

The editor of the Blavatsky's collected works, Boris de Zirkoff, gives fairly thorough biographical and bibliographical information for Gerald Massey in the *Collected Works* volume viii. Massey, born in England in 1828, was a poet and self-taught Egyptologist. In terms of his work in the field of Egyptology he is chiefly known for three works, *A Book of the beginnings*, *The Natural genesis* and *Ancient Egypt: the light of the world*.⁵⁰ The last, being published in 1907, could form no part of H.P. Blavatsky's sources. Of especial relevance to H.P. Blavatsky is his series of *Lectures*. In terms of the topics of this dissertation his lecture entitled, *The seven souls of man, and their culmination in Christ*, is the most important.

Some of her quotations from the *Book of the dead* do appear to have been drawn from this article and not directly from the Egyptian text itself. For example, it is quite clear that H.P. Blavatsky has drawn from Massey's *Lectures* in *The Secret Doctrine* page 634-635. It is not concealed, and his name is mentioned in this context. Of more relevance to my dissertation is that H.P. Blavatsky had an ambivalent attitude towards his work. Following a basic pattern, she both appropriates and rejects at the same time. In many ways some of the extracts are quoted only to be reinterpreted by her in a Theosophical light. For example,

“What the Lecturer [Massey] takes for a ‘mode of expression’ – and nothing more, in the Egyptian Ritual, we take as having quite another and an important meaning. Here is one instance. Says the Ritual, the ‘Book of the Dead’ – ‘I am the mouse.’ ‘I am the hawk.’ ‘I am the ape.’... ‘I am the crocodile whose soul comes FROM MEN.’ ‘I am the Soul of the Gods.’ Of these last two sentences, one: ‘whose soul comes from men’ – is explained by the Lecturer, who says parenthetically, ‘that is, as a type of intelligence,’ and the other: ‘I am the Soul of the Gods,’ as meaning, ‘the Horus, or Christ, as the outcome of all.’ The occult teaching answers: ‘It means far more.’...” (1988, vol. II, pg. 634-635)

⁵⁰ Massey, G 1881, *A book of the beginnings*, Williams and Norgate, London. Massey, G 1883, *The natural genesis*, Williams and Norgate, London. Massey, G 1907, *Ancient Egypt: the light of the world*, T. Fisher Unwin, London. Details extracted from Blavatsky *Collected Works* vol. viii.

H.P. Blavatsky goes on to explain how these extracts actually corroborate certain Theosophical ideas relating to the root-races, rounds, and the cycling of the human monad through nature. None of these ideas are to be found in Massey's works.

In fact, Gerald Massey in this lecture⁵¹ quite specifically disagreed with basic Theosophical teachings as given out in *Esoteric Buddhism* of A.P. Sinnett. Massey was opposed to any 'esoteric' thought as expressed in Theosophical works, a point he continually makes in his lecture *The seven souls of man, and their culmination in Christ*. In 1891 H.P. Blavatsky addressed a letter to Gerald Massey on this issue in *The Agnostic Journal*. In this letter she lauds Massey as a great Egyptologist, praising him, but also distances herself from his work. She notes,

"I take your Egyptian aspect in toto, and only add to it the Aryan and what they would call the Turanian aspects..." (1891, pg. 2)

She is inserting the Theosophical (Aryan/Eastern, esoteric) content into the Egyptian texts and into Massey's writings. She goes on,

"Never mind that you differ from us and our views. What matters it that your conclusions are opposed to ours, when all your fundamental premises are identical and the same;..." (1891, pg. 2)

H.P. Blavatsky has quoted from a work, but has, at the same time rejected it on many Theosophical interpretive levels. This ambivalent stance toward contemporary authors was taken throughout many of her writings. Massey for his part appears to have essentially rejected any 'esoteric' or Theosophical content.

The writings of Franz Lambert appear also to be an important source used by H.P. Blavatsky in her writings. H.P. Blavatsky quoted from, and drew on, journal articles by Franz Lambert in *The Secret Doctrine* and in an article entitled "The psychology of Ancient Egypt" in her *Collected Works* vol. x. I have been unable to source any biographical details for this figure. The *Collected Works*, normally a reliable source, has an entry which shows only that Franz Lambert contributed articles to a metaphysical journal, the *Sphinx*. The *Sphinx* was a monthly metaphysical journal originally founded and edited by an important early Theosophist, Dr.

⁵¹ *The seven souls of man, and their culmination in Christ*.

William Hubbe-Schleiden. The journal ran from 1886 to 1896 with the article referred to by H.P. Blavatsky, 'Die altägyptische Seelenlehre'⁵², appearing in it in 1887.

The *Sphinx* is a difficult periodical to get hold of, and I have not been able to do so. The Library of Congress catalogue shows a complete microfilm copy. The Theosophical Society Pasadena library indicated they had some volumes in their collection, but the condition was such that they could not be scanned or faxed. A few of Lambert's articles have been translated in sister Theosophical periodicals. The above mentioned article was translated into French in the Theosophical journal *Le Lotus* in 1888. A second article, 'Three thousand years ago: hypnotism and electricity in Ancient Egypt' was translated into English in *The Theosophist* in 1892.

A scholar in the field Egyptology which H.P. Blavatsky quite frequently references was Baron Christian Charles Josiah von Bunsen (b. 1791 – d. 1860). This Prussian diplomat published an enormous work on Ancient Egypt entitled, *Aegypten's stele in der weltgeschichte*. This work was translated by C.H. Cottrel as *Egypt's place in universal history* from 1848 to 1867. This large work published in 5 volumes is important for Theosophical history for, among other things, containing the English translation of the *Book of the Dead* by Samuel Birch. It is this translation which was used by H.P. Blavatsky in her *Isis Unveiled*.

It is difficult to assess such a huge work in relation to its importance to H.P. Blavatsky. It would require a dissertation in itself to go through this work of 3500 pages and compare it to H.P. Blavatsky's position on various Egyptian themes. Following the references made in *The Secret Doctrine* to his work, my general impression remains that she used writers to backup her existing position where possible. H.P. Blavatsky, however, always seems to go a step further than any of her sources. In various places she quotes dates given by Bunsen on, for example, the age of the Pyramid, of Menes and of Egyptian civilization, but his dates are dwarfed by H.P. Blavatsky's own opinion on these issues.

In addition to the above (and to versions of the Egyptian *Book of the dead* discussed below), brief reference can be made to some of the other works on Egypt which H.P. Blavatsky

⁵²Translated as, 'The psychology of Ancient Egypt.'

referenced. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Instead I draw attention to some of the more frequently referenced works. I will focus on *The Secret Doctrine*.⁵³

In *The Secret Doctrine* reference is made to *The origin and significance of the great pyramid*⁵⁴ by C. Staniland Wake. It is difficult to assess H.P. Blavatsky's use of this work. She draws on only isolated passages from it. In some instances her Theosophical perspective matches that of Wake's (linking of the pyramid to the zodiac), while in others she differs from him (dating of the great pyramid). Complicating the issue is that by the time *The Secret Doctrine* was written the identifying Theosophical teachings were essentially in existence. The *Secret Doctrine* is involved in a secondary process of interpretation and appropriation to establish itself in the public arena. For example, Wake links the pyramid of Cheops with the figure of Set/Seth. In Theosophical thought Set/Seth, amongst other associations, is interpreted as signifying a stage of development of the entire human race – the later third race.

Other works deserving mention are, Maspero's *Guide du visiteur au Musee de Boulaq*⁵⁵, Mariette-Bey's *Abydos: description des fouilles executees sur l'emplacement de cette ville*⁵⁶, de Mirville's *Pneumatologie*⁵⁷, de Rouge's journal article "Etudes sur le Rituel funeraire des anciens Egyptiens" published in the *Revue Archeologique*⁵⁸, Lepsius's *Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*⁵⁹, Chabas's *Papyrus magique Harris*⁶⁰, Champollion's *Pantheon Egyptien*⁶¹, Jablonski's *Pantheon aegyptiorum*⁶², Skinner's *Source of measures*⁶³ and Mackay's *Mythological astronomy of the ancients demonstrated*⁶⁴. Other individual works could be

⁵³ I draw this information from the bibliography as compiled by Boris de Zirkoff in his edition of the *Secret Doctrine*. (1993.)

⁵⁴ Wake, CS 1882, *The origin and significance of the great pyramid*, London, Reeves & Turner.

⁵⁵ Maspero, G 1883, *Guide du visiteur au Musee de Boulaq*, Boulaq, Vienna.

⁵⁶ Mariette-Bey, FAF 1869, *Abydos: description des fouilles executees sur l'emplacement de cette ville*, Paris.

⁵⁷ De Mirville, JE 1863/4, *Pneumatologie: des esprits et de leurs manifestations diverses*, H. Vrayet de Surcy, Paris.

⁵⁸ De Rouge, J 1860, "Etudes sur le Rituel funeraire des anciens Egyptiens", *Revue Archeologique*, Nouvelle serie, Premiere annee (Jan-June.)

⁵⁹ Lepsius, CR 1849/50, *Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, Berlin.

⁶⁰ Chabas, FJ 1860, *Papyrus magique Harris*, J. Dejussieu, Chalon-sur-Saone.

⁶¹ Champollion, JF 1823-24, *Pantheon Egyptien*, L.J.J. Dubois, Paris.

⁶² Jablonski, PE 1750-1752, *Pantheon aegyptiorum, sive de diis eorum commentarius, cum Prolegomenis de Religione et Theologia Aegyptiorum*, Francofurti ad Viadrum.

⁶³ Skinner, JR 1972, *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian mystery in the source of measures originating the British inch and the ancient cubit, etc.*, Wizards Bookshelf, Minneapolis.

⁶⁴ Mackay, SA 1973, *The mythological astronomy of the ancients demonstrated, by restoring to their fables & symbols their original meanings*, Wizards Bookshelf, Minneapolis.

mentioned. H.P. Blavatsky's use of these works, however, much like those listed above, remained fragmentary.

H.P. Blavatsky drew from a wide variety of sources, whether directly or indirectly through third party references. She does not engage with any set work in detail. Instead she selects quotations and passages which support her general ideas. In some cases, the support is limited and extracts are quoted simply because they dispute accepted ideas which H.P. Blavatsky is also interested in challenging. She appropriates and rejects at the same time, always locating the 'esoteric' tradition as the centre of authority.⁶⁵ She is, however, concerned to present her ideas as scientific, objective, rational, and supported by other scholars. I do not feel this point should be minimised. The larger discourse of 'science' was the most challenging and powerful, and she sought to appropriate its power and authority. As this is the level at which she attempted to work, it is on this level that her works should be judged. By the time H.P. Blavatsky was writing *The Secret Doctrine*, however, her focus had turned from the West to the East. Egypt had assumed a smaller supporting role to the Eastern ideas which she now embraced.

2.4 THE EGYPTIAN *BOOK OF THE DEAD*

This important Egyptian text still captures the imagination. I examine it here in Theosophical and academic circles.

2.4.1 THE EGYPTIAN *BOOK OF THE DEAD* IN THE WRITINGS OF H.P. BLAVATSKY

The Egyptian *Book of the dead* is easily the most well-known Egyptian text in the popular imagination. It is the chief Egyptian text that H.P. Blavatsky (and virtually all later Theosophists) references in her works. This is true for her two major works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Erik Hornung observes that in esoteric circles The Egyptian *Book of the dead* remains the central Egyptian text referred to. He notes, however, that the emphasis in

⁶⁵ Until the actual sources of the original Theosophical teachings are located, and the dynamics by which they were brought into existence are understood, it will remain difficult to avoid a sentence like this one. The sentence suggests that Theosophy exists independently from its potential sources and the wider intellectual culture it must have drawn on. Theosophy could be seen as a re-orientation of knowledge (from any number of external and personal mental sources) harnessed, supplemented, and re-presented by the person of H.P. Blavatsky.

mainstream Egyptology moved from this work to the *Pyramid Texts* in the last 20 years of the 19th century.⁶⁶ The reason for the adjustment in emphasis was that the *Pyramid Texts* were regarded as much earlier and, therefore, more primary texts than the *Book of the dead*.

Under the reference for 'Book of the Dead' the *Theosophical Glossary* has the following entry, "An ancient Egyptian ritualistic and occult work attributed to Thot-Hermes. Found in the coffins of ancient mummies." (Blavatsky, 1990, pg. 61) For H.P. Blavatsky the *Book of the Dead* is certainly ancient and certainly occult.

In terms of the title of the work, H.P. Blavatsky in the main refers to the *Book of the Dead*. It can also be referenced in her works as *The Ritual*, or *The Egyptian Ritual*, or the *Funerary Ritual* or the 'bible of the Egyptians'. These titles refer to early conceptions of Egyptologists on this work, for example Champollion and de Rouge. She does not refer to the work by its more common modern translation of *The book of coming forth by day*. In this she does not differ dramatically from the Egyptology of her time.

Drawing on Bunsen⁶⁷, H.P. Blavatsky regards the *Book of the Dead* as ancient. It precedes the figure of Menes which, referencing Bunsen, is dated to either 3059BC or 4000BC.⁶⁸ (These are not her dates for Menes, which, following other references in her works, I would argue she places around 8000 - 11000 BC.) The *Book of the Dead* is, therefore, not specifically dated by her. In her understanding, the writings found in the pyramids (*Pyramid Texts*) and on coffins (*Coffin Texts*) draw from the *Book of the Dead*.⁶⁹ The *Book of the Dead* is seen by her as fully formed and complete. This is seen by her as proof of the antiquity of the Egyptian civilization. With this opinion she occupies the reverse position of the current conceptions of Egyptology, where The *Book of the Dead* is a later compilation which draws on the earlier inscriptions found in pyramids and on coffins.

For H.P. Blavatsky, the *Book of the Dead* is an esoteric work, or one which is open to esoteric interpretation. In various places she states the book is 'full of symbology', and she notes,

"In the Egyptian Papyri the whole Cosmogony of the Secret Doctrine is found scattered about in isolated sentences, even in the 'Book of Dead.'" (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 674)

⁶⁶ See Hornung, 1999, pg. xvii.

⁶⁷ See bibliography for Bunsen's, *Egypt's place in universal history*.

⁶⁸ See *Isis Unveiled* vol. II, pg. 361 and 548.

⁶⁹ See H.P. Blavatsky's *Collected Works* vol. iv, pg. 125, and *Isis Unveiled* vol. I, pg. 518.

Her later writings, however reveal, the place of the *Book of the Dead* and of Egyptian civilization. It has become subordinate to the East and its teachings. She notes in 1891,

“Now the main point of Volume III of *The Secret Doctrine* is to prove, by tracing and explaining the *blinds* in the works of ancient Indian, Greek, and other philosophers of note, and also in all the ancient Scriptures – the presence of an un-interrupted esoteric allegorical method and symbolism; to show, as far as lawful, that with the keys of interpretation as taught in the Eastern Hindo-Buddhistic Canon of Occultism, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the *Sutras*, the Epic poems of India and Greece, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*...all, from first to last, yield a meaning quite different from their dead letter texts.” (Blavatsky 1982, vol. xiii, pg. 146)

The esoteric teachings of the Egyptians are to be revealed by the keys of their own original founders, the secret teachings of the East.

The magical aspect of the *Book of the Dead* is commented on by H.P. Blavatsky. Seen in a positive light, as it would reveal the esoteric content, she expects Egyptologists to dismiss or misunderstand the magical element in the texts.⁷⁰ We might expect an esoteric organisation to have a positive perspective on magic and its attendant obscure ideas. This can function as a space of mystery open to interpretation and the insertion of Theosophical content.

Boris de Zirkoff has identified the translations of the *Book of the Dead* drawn on by H.P. Blavatsky.⁷¹ In *Isis Unveiled* she drew on Samuel Birch’s English translation which is contained in Bunsen’s *Egypt’s place in universal history*. In *The Secret Doctrine*, de Zirkoff identifies P. Pierret’s French translation, *Le Livre des Morts des Anciens Egyptiens*, published in 1882.⁷² Of interest to the English-speaking Theosophical world is that Pierret’s French translation has been, in turn, translated into English.⁷³ In 1894 Charles H. S. Davis published, *The Egyptian book of the dead: the most ancient and the most important of the extant religious texts of Ancient Egypt: edited with introduction, a complete translation and various chapters on its history symbolism, etc., etc.* The works by both Birch and Pierret works are translations of the so-called Turin Papyrus.

⁷⁰ See H.P. Blavatsky, *Collected Works*, vol. xiii, pg. 339.

⁷¹ In H.P. Blavatsky, *Collected Works*, vol. x, pg. 415.

⁷² Pierret, P 1882, *Le livre des morts des anciens Egyptiens: traduction complete d’apres le papyrus de Turin et les manuscrits du Louvre*, Paris.

⁷³ I thank Jim and Ina Belderis, librarians of the Theosophical Society, Pasadena, for this information.

2.4.2 THE EGYPTIAN *BOOK OF THE DEAD* IN EGYPTOLOGY

The earliest corpus of Egyptian texts is referred to as the *Pyramid Texts*. They are attested from the last king of dynasty 5 to about dynasty 8. These writings were carved in primarily royal pyramids in the burial chamber and antechamber. Erik Hornung notes that these texts came to light when Gaston Maspero conducted his excavations in 1881 – 1882. I feel that the point to note here is that the field of Egyptology was in its infancy in the late 19th century when H.P. Blavatsky was writing. Some of her positions reflect ideas of what was at that time mainstream Egyptology, but which were subsequently to evolve as new texts became translated.

The idea of an evolution in understanding and knowledge is important. In relation to Egyptology, and I suspect in many other fields of knowledge, Theosophy is stuck in a sort of time warp. Still referenced in current Theosophical works are 19th century ideas and prejudices. One potential reason for this is the authority of H.P. Blavatsky and her place in the Theosophical Society. Works she references, and ideas she engages with, are still those dealt with in current Theosophical texts.⁷⁴ Without ‘authoritative permission’ the Theosophical Society struggles to go beyond the ideas of the founder. It might also be noted that H.P. Blavatsky shows no special knowledge or special access to any known Egyptian text. Her means of inserting and displaying knowledge is through reference to ‘esoteric’ works not available to the general public and through symbolical interpretation of known works.

In chronological order the next corpus of Egyptian texts is referred to as the *Coffin Texts*. The name refers to the fact that the majority of these texts were inscribed on the coffins of the deceased. They began to supersede the *Pyramid Texts* from the beginning of the Old Kingdom. It was toward the end of the New Kingdom that the *Coffin Texts* were, in turn, superseded by the *Book of the dead* and other books of the underworld. These writings drew on the earlier *Pyramid Texts*, with the addition of new spells. A further democratisation occurred over this period as the texts begin to make clear that all deceased (and not just the king) would enjoy the afterlife. The king, however, did remain distinct from the private individual in both life and death. (Taylor, 2001, pg. 195) These texts also became more prominent, and better researched and understood, well after H.P. Blavatsky’s passing away.

⁷⁴ Another potential reason would be that older works on Egypt may leave more space for Theosophical content than more modern works which appear to have driven the ‘esoteric’ and ‘mystical’ from the Egyptian religion.

The *Egyptian book of the Dead* came into prominence in the New Kingdom, and continued through the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period. (Hornung, 1999, pg. 13) The *Book of the Dead* is not one single uniform work. It is a collection of spells which were mainly recorded on papyrus and placed in the grave with the deceased. The deceased in the tomb would ideally be buried with a copy of this work. Depending on what the deceased could afford, the size and quality of the text could differ. More complete versions may have had up to 200 spells, while for less grand versions a shorter selection of spells would be selected.

The *Book of the Dead* drew from the spells of the earlier *Pyramid Texts* and *Coffin Texts* and also added new material. H.P. Blavatsky appears to see this process in reverse. She suggests that the inscriptions on the pyramids and coffins are drawn from the *Book of the Dead* which preceded them. For mainstream Egyptology, the *Book of the Dead*, being a comparatively late production in comparison to the *Pyramid Texts*, absorbed many of the earlier inscriptions into its framework. As it is a later text, it may appear to be more evolved and complex than the earlier writings. H.P. Blavatsky, by placing the *Book of the Dead* at the beginning of the historical Egyptian period, needs to justify its completeness by looking still further into the past to unknown civilizations.

As noted above, H.P. Blavatsky drew on the translations of Birch and Pierret. Both these translations are based on the work of Karl Richard Lepsius. In 1842 Lepsius published a Ptolemaic manuscript from Turin – the papyrus of Iuefankh. (Taylor, 2010, pg. 289) His work, entitled *Das Todtenbuch der Aegypter nach dem hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin*, introduced the term ‘book of the dead’ (todtenbuch) into the field. His work also formed the basis for Birch’s English translation in 1867 incorporated in Bunsen’s *Egypt’s place in universal history*, and for Pierret’s French translation in 1882.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This second chapter is intended as a general background, contextualising statement. In relation to the various streams of thought the Theosophical Society existed in, I have sketched only an outline. Where possible I have used H.P. Blavatsky’s statements on Ancient Egypt to illustrate a point. This general background, however, does not exist only in relation to her statements on Ancient Egypt; it would instead have general applicability to the Theosophical presentation as a

whole. Theosophy's relationship with these other streams of thought may, however, reveal different characteristics to those shown in relation to Egypt.

The Theosophical teachings of H.P. Blavatsky are a child of their time. While the precise origins are unknown and possibly unknowable, the Theosophical Society and its teachings show sufficient links with various cultural, religious, philosophic, occult, and scientific trends in the late 19th century to be recognizable. It both drew on these institutions and confronted them on a variety of levels. Many of these institutions were in a developmental stage, and the quickly changing nature of, for example, the sciences allowed for competing ideas and left gaps to be filled.

While the sciences in H.P. Blavatsky time sometimes allowed for competing ideas, some of which are more in harmony with Theosophical ideas, it can seem that Theosophy often endorsed the losing side. Examples might be the concept of the 'ether' in physics, and how the individual was viewed in Ancient Egypt by academics of her day.

Rooted in the very structure of the Theosophical Society and the Theosophical teachings are counter-currents of a democratic and elitist emphasis. The origin of this tension may, to a large extent, be located in the differing personalities of the two founders of the Society. These tensions, as they are embodied in the written texts, show a leaning towards an authoritarian stance. This may in large part be because many of the important texts of the Society were penned by H.P. Blavatsky.

The Secret Doctrine, in particular, H.P. Blavatsky's defining work, is presented as a body of factual knowledge. This rational, literary text is content specific in the sense that many of its statements are not open to real refutation. The statements are too definite and defined to be contradicted. The aura of authority and charisma surrounding the texts removes it from the open democratic trends in the Society. The definitive character of many of the statements reflects the adoption of the scientific discourse into the *Secret Doctrine* by H.P. Blavatsky. The ambiguous relationship with science, however, and a wide variety of fields of knowledge need careful study to determine the actual relationship between them.

The literary sources (in a wide variety of fields) of H.P. Blavatsky are both mainstream and fringe (esoteric). The dominant ideas she engages with also reflect a wide variety of origins. She engages with them in various ways, and I intend to examine this engagement in more detail in the following chapter.

The Theosophical engagement with Ancient Egypt specifically is one instance of the larger Theosophical orientation to the concept ‘religion’ and to the religions of the world in general.

In this chapter I will examine:

- H.P. Blavatsky’s general Theosophical understanding of the concept ‘religion’ and her approach to world religions,
- The strategies evolved by H.P. Blavatsky to engage, interpret, and, thereby, appropriate world religions.

The emphasis will be in reference to Ancient Egypt.

3.1 THEOSOPHY AND RELIGION

I am interested here in H.P. Blavatsky’s understanding and presentation of Theosophy in relation to the concept ‘religion’ and to world religions in general. The word ‘religion’ is used frequently in Theosophical writings in various contexts. One example would be the Theosophical motto of ‘There is no religion higher than truth’; another would be the often met statement that “Theosophy is not a Religion”. (Blavatsky 1974, vol. x, pg. 161) Drawing on H.P. Blavatsky’s references to religion and religions, I will discuss various dimensions which are raised by her general position.

Before engaging with this topic, it is important to make a few distinctions among terms. It is possible to misread a Theosophical statement if the context is not known. To begin with there is the phrase ‘the secret doctrine’. This phrase can refer either to the book of the same name, or to the totality of esoteric knowledge, of which the named book is but a partial, modern revelation. To distinguish between the two I will italicise whenever I refer to the book *The Secret Doctrine*.¹ In a similar manner, the term ‘Theosophy’ can refer either to the teachings as revealed by H.P. Blavatsky, the *mahatmas*, and others, or it can refer to the complete

¹ An example of the broader use is, “...he knows indubitably that the Secret Doctrine of the East contains the Alpha and the Omega of Universal Science;...” (Blavatsky, 1985, vol. xiv, pg. 26)

wisdom teachings of the early races of humanity. The selection of truths revealed to humanity in the Theosophical instalment of the 19th century is, while not the complete ‘truth’, at least completely ‘true’. For Theosophists this latest, partial revealing was carried by the historical Theosophical Society founded in 1875. To distinguish between the two uses of the term, I will make the context clear when using them.

A further distinction needs to be made between the Outer Section of the Theosophical Society, the Esoteric Section, and the Inner Group. It is not strictly relevant to my dissertation to outline the history and politics behind these divisions. What is relevant to me is that a distinction was made and that members of the Inner Group, or Esoteric Section, were regarded as more committed to and accepting of Theosophical teachings.² This, in theory, happened after having found them to be true after due investigation. Members in this ‘second section’, being worthy, had access to privileged Theosophical teachings. My point in making this distinction is to emphasise that the Theosophical Society was not simply an open space where all members and beliefs were of equal status. The Society was hierarchical, as was its ranking of religions. One’s place in the Society could depend on the acceptance of Theosophical teachings among other things. (For example, proximity to the *mahatmas* - proximity itself implied a certain doctrinal acceptance.) H.P. Blavatsky notes in her *The Key to Theosophy*,

“THEO. What is meant by the Society having no tenets or doctrines of its own is, that no special doctrines or beliefs are *obligatory* on its members; but, of course, this applies only to the body as a whole. The Society, as you were told, is divided into an outer and an inner body. Those who belong to the latter have, of course, a philosophy, or – if you so prefer it – a religious system of their own.” (1987, pg. 59)

And again, from Blavatsky’s *Collected writings*,

“The Theosophical Society, indeed, as a body, is the *only* one which opens its arms *to all*, imposing on none its own special beliefs, strictly limited to the small *inner* group within it, called the Esoteric Section. It recognises and fosters no exclusiveness, no preconceptions. In the T.S. alone do men meet in the common search for truth, on a platform from which all dogmatism, all sectarianism, all mutual party hatred and condemnation are excluded;...But even this exception exists only so far as regards its

² In this dissertation I will, for convenience sake, collapse the Inner Group and Esoteric Section into one category, which is to be distinguished from the general outer membership of the Outer Society.

inner group, for reasons too apparent to need explanation.” (Blavatsky, 1973, pg. 338-339)³

H.P. Blavatsky also makes a distinction between the Theosophical Society and Theosophy. The teachings are the ‘divine Wisdom’, perfect and true, while the Society is an imperfect vessel carrying this knowledge as best it can. The Theosophical Society was envisioned as a democratic, open society where free investigation and self cultivation were promoted. This is true to the point that it was not even expected that members renounced their membership of other religions. It was suggested that a person could remain a Christian, Buddhist, etc. and be a member of the Society.⁴ The ‘truths’ learned in the Society would, in theory, allow greater appreciation of that member’s religion to unfold. In contrast to this, the Theosophical teachings themselves, (the ‘Theosophy’), was a closed doctrinal system, allowing limited access.⁵ Privileged access to the teachings through the medium of the *mahatmas* was confined almost to H.P. Blavatsky and a few others. Even if any individual member should produce independent knowledge which was ‘true’, it would need the endorsement of the *mahatmas* or their representatives to enable it to become part of the Theosophical instalment. The only way for the Theosophical instalment of teachings to grow is for any statement to be endorsed by *mahatmic* authority either in terms of the statement itself or of the individual making the statement. (In principle, the Theosophical teachings can still grow; however, I am not aware of any person’s publically claiming to be the mouthpiece of the *mahatmas* within any of the three main Societies.) This ambiguity is in part related to the personalities of the two founders, H.P.

³ It is of historical interest to note that the Pasadena Theosophical Society collapsed the esoteric and exoteric section of the Society in their well-known ‘Esoteric has become the Exoteric and Exoteric has become the Esoteric’ endeavour. The category confusion of this melding together persists in my opinion within this Society, and it has had far-reaching consequences. This event happened, however, in the mid 20th century and has no effect on my dissertation which deals with the initial form of the Society.

⁴ In the *Key to Theosophy*, H.P. Blavatsky notes, “the members of the Theosophical Society at large are free to profess whatever religion or philosophy they like, or none if they so prefer...The Fellows may be Christians or Mussulmen, Jews or Parsees, Buddhists or Brahmins, Spiritualists or Materialists...”(1987, pg. 1920) As laudable as this idea seems, it betrays a fundamental assumption of Theosophy that religion is about finding ‘truth’, whereas people are religious for a wide variety of reasons, the search for truth being only one potential(one is tempted to say marginal) motivating factor.

⁵ I have referred to the roots of this division, the conflicting personalities of H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott, in my previous chapter. This conflicting orientation can be found in the structure of the Theosophical Society, and in the orientation of the members to the Theosophical literature.

Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott, and, perhaps, in part related to the very nature of a small esoteric or religious body which is attempting to be simultaneously both unique and accessible.

Fundamental to my presentation is that I will offer a narrow view of the Theosophical teachings. I echo here Santucci⁶, who, as editor of the *Theosophical History* magazine, writes,

“Any discussion of a Theosophical teaching, especially one as important as this one, must include the role of Blavatsky in Theosophy. ...there is little doubt in my mind that most assumptions about Theosophy center on an ideology surrounding Blavatsky. She, as the prophet of the Master or Mahatma, is the sole source of Theosophical philosophy; all others who follow her are commentators at most. Because of her special relationship with the Masters, as claimed by Theosophists, and her unique insight, the underlying panoptic wisdom of the teachings that she had revealed can be substantiated by both Western and Eastern philosophy, religion and science. Or to paraphrase, the Ancient Wisdom is proclaimed *ex cathedra* by Blavatsky with proof located in the fossil remains of a vast empire of facts and data located in the athenaeums of West and East, all comprising Truth as it really is, not what it should be.”(2007, vol. xiii, no.4, pg. 1)

I suggest that H.P. Blavatsky presents a specific set of teachings and not a set of general principles to be interpreted legitimately on an individual basis.⁷ I believe the Theosophical statements, terms, and teachings are what I call ‘content specific.’ H.P. Blavatsky’s statements have specific, defined meanings. An example of what I mean would be for instance, ‘*prana*’, as the third principle of the human constitution. *Prana* has a specific set of meanings and associations attached to it. Were, for example, one Theosophical scholar to correlate *prana* with the Egyptian ‘*ka*’ and another with the Egyptian ‘*ba*’, there would be a definite contradiction. There can be only one correlation of the concept of *prana* with the anthropology of another tradition. Where seemingly contradicting statements are made in source texts, a choice would, therefore, need to be made between them as to which to present. This is a choice based on the interpreter’s bias, and I would suggest that, in the main, no interpreter of H.P. Blavatsky’s works has gained the same authority as she displays. In addition to detailed, specific teachings there are also overarching ideas, for example the three

⁶ Dr. James A. Santucci, Department of Comparative Religion, California State University, and editor of *Theosophical History* magazine.

⁷ There are counter presentations from within Theosophical circles in opposition to what I suggest here. I will discuss this separately later in this chapter.

fundamental propositions in *The Secret Doctrine*. These are, however, also presented in an indisputable way. By this I mean that they are presented as indisputably true by H.P.

Blavatsky, 'true' meaning that they reflect the actual processes of nature as understood by the 'Ancient Wisdom Tradition'.

The specific nature of the teachings makes them exclusive and often not open to interpretation. (This in an issue I have also reviewed in the section discussing *The Secret Doctrine*.) This is in partial contradiction of the general self-presentation of the Theosophical Society where, in theory, if a Theosophical statement or teaching were proven wrong it would be discarded. In this I also disagree with idea that H.P. Blavatsky presented a "...somewhat free-floating theology [which] may have inspired diversity". (Kraft 2002, pg. 158) It is true that the style of her writing suggests a lack of the codifying quality of some later Theosophical commentators, for example G. de Purucker, whose books are laborious attempts to clarify details.⁸ But this did not mean, in my opinion, that "members not only felt free to add their own contributions (or innovations); they were *expected to do so*." (Kraft 2002, pg. 158) The style of presentation may make it appear that ideas and teachings are fluid and not definitive, but I suggest that that is a perception only. In my opinion, the best representative of an organised expression of fundamental Theosophical teachings is Barborka's, *The Divine Plan*. This book arranges the root Theosophical teachings by compiling quotes from H.P. Blavatsky's writings. There will always be a subjective impetus in this type of secondary organising, but the reliance on extracts and quotes goes some way to minimising this. (My point here is that even works by well-known later Theosophists, i.e. Leadbeater, de Purucker, etc, can (should) be viewed as 'neo-theosophy', or 'second generation Theosophy'.)

The argumentative and corrective nature of *The Secret Doctrine* and H.P. Blavatsky's writing in general suggest to me that a closed system is being presented. I find the corrective nature quite pronounced. Not only is she correcting the views of scientists and scholars of religion, she is correcting the views of other Theosophists in terms of statements of the Ancient Wisdom. Her section on A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* is well-known.

I suggest that one can divide H.P. Blavatsky's statements into two types from the insider's perspective. Statements are either disputable or not disputable.⁹ The content could be doctrinal, historical, ethical, etc. Disputable statements are those which leave room for

⁸ I list a number of G. de Purucker's works in the bibliography.

⁹ I feel it would be interesting to divide her statements in *The Secret Doctrine* by topic along these two divisions.

discussion and possible disagreement.¹⁰ They are not definitive and closed statements. Indisputable statements would be those which cannot in Theosophical ‘reality’ be contradicted; they must be true. These latter would include statements reliant on the authority of the *mahatmas*, statements which cannot be ordinarily checked (e.g. extracts from books not available to the public) and statements which H.P. Blavatsky explicitly says are true. A specific aura of authority, however, surrounds the entire *Secret Doctrine* in the Theosophical context.¹¹

A legitimacy that is based on H.P. Blavatsky’s charisma and authority is also felt throughout the Theosophical Society.¹² It is true that membership (of the Outer Society) did not rely on acceptance of specific Theosophical teachings. By not accepting them, however, one would occupy a spiritually and intellectually inferior position to someone who had accepted the Theosophical statements. In this sense, all things were not equal in the Theosophical Society. We can take as an example the following statement, a footnote drawn from an article, ‘*Esotericism of Christian dogma*’, in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Collected Works*,

“Having drawn to Madame Blavatsky’s attention that, according to certain scholars, this assertion is erroneous, she answered as follows: ‘I say the scholars are either lying or talking nonsense. Our *Masters* affirm the statement. If the story of Jehoshua or Jesus Ben-Pandira is false, then the whole *Talmud*, the whole Jewish Canon is false. He was the disciple of Jehoshua Ben Perahiah, the fifth President of the Sanhedrin after Ezra who *re-wrote* the Bible. Compromised in the revolt of the Pharisees against Jannaeus in 105 B.C., he fled into Egypt carrying the young Jesus with him. This account is far

¹⁰ An example of one type of statement I would regard as disputable in *The Secret Doctrine* would be where she discusses/outlines the ideas of contemporary scientists or philosophers of her time. Whether she correctly represented the scientific or philosophic ideas of her time does not seem to be of direct importance to her larger aim in the work. Should it be found that she did not correctly represent a particular scientist’s idea in *The Secret Doctrine* I do not believe it would damage the work in the eyes of members.

¹¹ *The Secret Doctrine* is permeated by appeals to authority and ‘truth’; for example, after noting the contradictory positions of European scholars on the world’s religions, she writes, “This is the true reason, perhaps, why the outline of a few fundamental truths from the Secret Doctrine of the Archaic ages is now permitted to see the light, after long millenniums of the most profound silence and secrecy.” (1988, vol. I, pg. xxii)

¹² This legitimacy can be challenged or co-opted by members or later leaders in various ways. The sense of authority, however, remains: that a level of restricting authority exists in the Theosophical Society.

truer than that of the New Testament which has no record in History.”(Blavatsky, vol. viii, pg. 380)¹³

In this passage H.P. Blavatsky asserts, on the ultimate authority of the masters¹⁴, that the biblical figure of Jesus is identical with the figure of Jehoshua Ben-Pandira who lived 105BCE. It is not put forward as an opinion. It is stated as factually true. It is possible for members, or scholars, to differ with this assertion. If so, they are then described by H.P. Blavatsky as either ‘lying or talking nonsense’. What possible responses could a Christian member of the outer section of the Theosophical Society have to a statement like this? Compare this statement to one on the same theme,

“...besides it is almost certain that the real ‘Jesus’ of the gospels, whose name was ‘Jehoshua, the Nazarene,’ lived a hundred years before the Christian era.”(Blavatsky, *Collected Works*, vol. vi, pg. 238)

In this second extract, there is no appeal to authority, and the statement could be challenged and even potentially disproved. Her phrasing allows uncertainty. Once, however, a *mahatma* has made a statement on an issue it is effectively closed. Concerning the above theme, that of a figure on whom Jesus was modelled living 100BCE or so, the teaching is definitive. Being affirmed by the *mahatmas*, I am aware of no real challenge to this statement in later Theosophical writings. H.P. Blavatsky’s personal charisma, however, related to her contact to the *mahatmas* and her special occult place in Theosophical history, give most of her statements the aura of finality and authority.

While it is my belief that the statements of H.P. Blavatsky are basically closed or restricted, disagreement and difference is possible. This is possible only, however, if ‘explanatory’ mechanisms are invoked. For example, further appeals to the *mahatmas*, psychic investigations which are essentially unverifiable and, therefore, indisputable, concepts that certain statements are true for certain audiences, and the notion that there may be further revelations on a particular topic. There could be a variety of such mechanisms. If no disagreement, or enlargement of Theosophical statements were possible, no writer could ever effectively

¹³ The paragraph being commented on is, “...whether he [Jesus] actually lived during the Christian era or a century earlier, in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus and his wife Salome, at Lud, as stated in the *Sepher Toldoth Jeshu*.” (Blavatsky, 1960, vol. viii, pg. 380)

¹⁴ There is a brief reference to this topic in the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, where one of the *mahatmas* writes, “...John the Baptist having never heard of Jesus who is a spiritual abstraction and no living man of that epoch.” (1972, pg. 409)

produce anything after H.P. Blavatsky. They would be condemned simply to repeating her statements. It is, however, only by invoking a coping mechanism that additional teachings, or contrary teachings, can be introduced. Later or further teachings differing from early Theosophical statements cannot be presented in terms of simple continuity. New instalments must, in my opinion, inevitably fall into the categories of ‘neo-Theosophy’ or ‘second generation Theosophy’.

It is important to note that the content specific nature of H.P. Blavatsky’s statements does not mean that there are not contradictions, or vague (indefinite) statements, in her writings. It is possible for there to be internal contradictions in her writings; they need, however, to be noted as such and, from an insider’s perspective, explained. For example, if it could be shown that H.P. Blavatsky correlated an Egyptian human principle to two differing Theosophical human principles, this discrepancy would need to be explained somehow. Content specificity does not translate into uniform, non-contradictory statements.

Theosophists are confronted with a number of potential ‘problems’ with regard to statements in the *Secret Doctrine*. Firstly, if the *Secret Doctrine* did not reliably reflect the Ancient Wisdom teachings (which are the truths of nature), then, Theosophists have no textual link to this tradition. Once doubt creeps into the work and its authority, Theosophy will be undermined and become ineffectual. Once specific statements of H.P. Blavatsky or the *mahatmas* are challenged, Theosophy will cease to exist in its current form.¹⁵ Secondly, should contradictory statements be found in the work, members would be placed in an interpretive predicament. How could a decision be made between two contradictory statements? The responses by Theosophists I have noted are either to ignore the problem or to pick one option over the other. A third issue confronting Theosophists occurs when non-definite statements are made. A statement which leaves room for dispute, which is not backed by authority, is difficult to defend as the position of the Ancient Wisdom tradition. On this particular issue, Theosophists would have then no privileged access to the ‘truth’, and their voice can be one only of many competing voices on a set issue. If H.P. Blavatsky or the *mahatmas* were not specific on an issue, no later Theosophist can be. (An exception would be statements by people who claim privileged access to the *mahatmas*, and so on.)

¹⁵ One can see this dynamic at play in the “Theosophical Network” website where the founders attempt to locate a “Theosophy” which is beyond that of just H.P. Blavatsky’s. There is an endless circular discussion of what constitutes “Theosophy” and where authority lies.

[A simple test which has come to my mind is to approach any Theosophical idea by posing a basic question, “What is the Ancient Wisdom position/statement on (x)?” For ‘x’ one can insert any issue, for example, the dating of the Great Pyramid, reincarnation in Ancient Egypt, the age of the earth, etc. The first response of any Theosophist will be to turn to their own works, and specifically the writings of the *mahatmas* and H.P. Blavatsky. (I am excluding here the ‘neo-Theosophy’ of later Theosophists; the principle however remains.) This is the only point of access to the Ancient Wisdom for any Theosophist. If these writings are not clear on the set question, no defensible positive response would (or could) be forthcoming.]¹⁶

I have presented the Theosophical statements as scientific and rational, and it is on this level I believe it was hoped they would be evaluated. *The Secret Doctrine* statements are framed in the dominant discourse of the time, the scientific. Theosophy is, however, also undeniably rooted in a system of authority and privileged access which undermines the basic scientific process. There is, then, a tension between the scientific nature of statements and discourse and the appeals to hidden authority. Owing to this tension, Theosophy in reality occupies a place of almost ‘suspended animation’ between science and authority/revelation.

3.1.1 THERE IS NO RELIGION HIGHER THAN TRUTH

The motto of the Theosophical Society is, “There is no religion higher than truth”¹⁷. I read this as stating that ‘truth’ (here meaning any true statement), when in conflict with a particular religion, or religious teaching, must supersede it. Truth is held as the measure of religion and religious teachings. ‘True’ refers to nature/reality as it is (in the Theosophical conception), and this is expressed in Theosophy as a body of knowledge, the Theosophical teachings. This emphasis on truth is a central theme of Theosophy’s presentation of itself. The equating of Theosophy and ‘truth’ is common in Theosophical literature and is, in my opinion, understood as such by general membership. (I refer here, perhaps, to an ‘ideal’ member. Many members do not engage with Theosophical texts in any meaningful way.) I draw an example from an important Theosophist, Boris de Zirkoff, who can write, “It is well to remember this, and to keep constantly in mind that Theosophy is Truth, though expressed in human language, however inadequate it may be.” (1983, pg. 37)

¹⁶ Even in my opinion, a superb scholar like David Reigle only knows what to look for in Hindu and Tibetan texts because of statements in *The Secret Doctrine*. Had the content of the Ancient Wisdom not been revealed by H.P. Blavatsky and others, he would not know what to look for and have no way of gauging what he found.

¹⁷ ‘*Satyan nasti paro dharmah*’

The focus on the notion of truth as such also points to an emphasis on the ‘doctrinal’ or ‘philosophical’ dimension of religion. We will see that for H.P. Blavatsky, religions (and the sciences) are usually assessed as a body of teachings or knowledge, being either true or false in relation to Theosophical statements on like issues. Theosophy, as a body of doctrinal teachings, is the touchstone for many of her statements concerning religion. For H.P. Blavatsky, Theosophy (being the facts of nature) has been complete and known (by the *mahatmas*) for a very long time. Truth for Theosophists is viewed as essentially unchanging. From the insider’s perspective, any evolution in H.P. Blavatsky’s presentation of the teachings is explained away by the notion of doctrines being revealed only when the timing and audience is appropriately ready. The distinction made between ‘true’ and ‘false’ is sometimes disputed by Theosophists. Each statement needs to be contextualised, and the difference between true and esoteric and false and exoteric can be fluid. For Theosophists, as all religions are said to have their source in the Theosophical root wisdom tradition, this wisdom should still be there. It has become veiled and exoteric in the Theosophical sense of the word.¹⁸ Historical religions then are exoteric expressions of original esoteric truths. The esoteric truths, in varying degrees, lie hidden in the teachings of these religions, waiting to be unveiled by the tools of Theosophical interpretation.

3.1.2 THEOSOPHY IS NOT A RELIGION

The statement that ‘Theosophy is not a religion’, and many like it are scattered throughout the works of H.P. Blavatsky. This central statement is particularly revealing of the Theosophical understanding of itself, of its strategic critique of world religions, and of religion as such.

“ENQUIRER. Theosophy and its doctrines are often referred to as a newfangled religion. Is it a religion?

THEOSOPHIST. It is not. Theosophy is Divine Knowledge or Science.” (Blavatsky 1987, pg. 1)

What then is ‘Theosophy’ or ‘Divine Wisdom’?

“THEO. ‘Divine Wisdom,’ *Theosophia* or Wisdom of the gods, as *Theogonia*, genealogy of the gods. The word *Theos* means a god in Greek, one of the divine beings, certainly not ‘God’ in the sense attached in our day to the term. Therefore, it is

¹⁸ See de Purucker, “Exoteric. This word, when applied by Theosophists to the great philosophical and religious systems of belief, does not mean ‘false’. The word merely means teachings of which the keys have not been openly given.” (1969, pg. 59)

not ‘Wisdom of God,’ as translated by some, but *Divine Wisdom* such as that possessed by the gods. The term is many thousand years old.” (Blavatsky 1987, pg. 1)

H.P. Blavatsky begins by distinguishing Theosophy from the category ‘religion’. Theosophy is, instead, associated with divine truths and knowledge. To state it from the reverse perspective, ‘religion’ is not divine knowledge or the wisdom of the gods. This is another use of Theosophy and religion as being assessed in relation to the doctrinal or philosophical dimension, as a body of knowledge. Again we see the linking of Theosophy¹⁹ to a notion of ‘the truth’. It is not ordinary human knowledge.²⁰ It is rather something more complete and irrefutable, a ‘divine’ human knowledge. The ‘gods’ of the passage above can refer to the Theosophical *mahatmas*, ‘godlike’ human beings. The point of this passage from *The Key to Theosophy* is two-fold. It distinguishes Theosophical knowledge from ‘religious’ knowledge (under increasing criticism in the nineteenth century), and it attributes a ‘divine’ authority to Theosophical teachings.

This passage also reveals a curiosity of the Theosophical presentation. What appears to distinguish ‘divine’ human from ordinary human knowledge is simply that one is true and one is not. For example, human knowledge (finite, incomplete) may present a five-fold system of the human constitution. Esoteric knowledge (complete knowledge) presents a seven-fold division. Both can easily be grasped by any normal rational mind. One system is correct, while the other is limited. The basic polarity can depend on the context, it can resolve itself variously into, true/false or complete/incomplete, both of which are rooted in the esoteric/exoteric dichotomy. The distinction then is between ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’, not between any special ‘levels of knowledge’. (To expand, a religious tradition may well, to Theosophical satisfaction, present a seven-fold classification of the human individual, in which case it has presented the ‘esoteric’ classification. It will be easier to appropriate this tradition into the Theosophical scheme, and it would be regarded as a pure echo of the Ancient Wisdom.) One does not have to enter an altered state of consciousness to understand the Theosophical teachings. They are rational and intellectual in nature, presentation, and intent.

¹⁹ By ‘Theosophy’ I mean here the total wisdom teachings of which H.P. Blavatsky presented only a very small portion. (The difference between quantity and quality comes into play here. The revealed Theosophical teachings are quantitatively smaller than the complete ‘Theosophical truth’, but are qualitatively equal.)

²⁰ ‘Human,’ referring here to the ‘ordinary knowledge’ of humanity in its present state of evolution, the fourth round and fifth root race. The *mahatmas*, technically human, have, in Theosophical teachings evolved in advance of general humanity. The term ‘evolved’ being used in the sense of mental and spiritual development. Evolution in Theosophical thought is said to happen on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels or planes.

The following quotations come from an article in H.P. Blavatsky's *Collected Works* vol. x, "Is Theosophy a religion?"

"Theosophy, we say, is not *a* Religion. Yet there are, as everyone knows, certain beliefs, philosophical, religious and scientific, which have become so closely associated in recent years with the word 'Theosophy' that they have come to be taken by the general public for theosophy itself. Moreover, we shall be told these beliefs have been put forward, explained and defended by these very Founders who have declared that Theosophy is *not* a Religion. What is then the explanation of this *apparent* contradiction? How can a certain body of beliefs and teachings, an elaborate doctrine, in fact be labelled 'Theosophy' and be tacitly accepted as 'Theosophical' by nine tenths of the members of the T.S., if Theosophy is not a Religion? – we are asked.

"To explain this is the purpose of the present protest. It is perhaps necessary, first of all, to say, that the assertion that 'Theosophy is not *a* Religion,' by no means excludes the fact that 'Theosophy *is* Religion' itself. A Religion in the true and only correct sense, is a bond uniting men together – not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Now Religion, *per se*, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only *all* MEN, but also *all* BEINGS and all *things* in the entire Universe into one grand whole. This is our theosophical definition of religion;..."(1974, pg. 161)

"Thus Theosophy is not *a* Religion, we say, but RELIGION itself, the one bond of unity, which is so universal and all-embracing that no man, as no speck – from gods and mortal down to animals, the blade of grass and atom – can be outside its light. Therefore, any organization or body of that name must necessarily be a UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD." (1974, pg. 163)

Kalnitsky in his PhD thesis discusses these passages. I have found it difficult to agree with his thoughts through to their end. He notes that religion is a unitive bond, the bond is "...suggestive of spiritual immanence when applied to the extended universe." (2003, pg. 131) The passages hint "of a grand, spiritually grounded hierarchal view of the universe"(ibid.) Kalnitsky then sums up, "The 'grand whole' thus would transcend a mere worldly social form of unity or solidarity, and more properly suggests a mystical bond that bespeaks of enduring essences rather than transitory appearances. So 'religion' from the theosophical position would be defined by a mystical or quasi-mystical experience or revelation of this transcendent bond." (2003, pg. 131)

G. de Purucker gives a theosophical derivation of religion from the Latin verb, ‘*religare*’ – ‘to bind back’. (1969, pg. 151) H.P. Blavatsky has periodically used this definition of religion. That is, almost any ‘binding’ system of belief, actions and institutions could be viewed as religious.²¹ In general, however, I feel that when she refers to ‘religion’ she is referencing a body of teachings and doctrines; to content. What she is pointing to is that the bond uniting all being and humans is the Theosophical teachings, e.g. a ‘one substance’ teaching, etc. Theosophical teachings, being the ‘truth’ of things and nature, and encompassing in its philosophical and doctrinal statements a place for all types of manifestation from grains of sand to galaxies, from amoeba to gods, is a philosophical bond which includes all things. In this sense it is the ‘unitive’ bond. It (the Theosophical teachings) *may* be a ‘mystical’ or ‘quasi-mystical’ *revelation*, but the passage does not confine it to such an *experience*. H.P. Blavatsky’s use of ‘bond’ in this sense, as an encompassing doctrinal system, makes it difficult to understand her point in the context of a critique of other religions. Most religions would place beings and things in their system, implicitly at least. They may not specifically have a teaching on, for example, the evolution of the ‘mineral kingdom’, but they would locate, say, ‘matter’ to a place in its system.²² Theosophical ‘religion’ is not the *experience* of a transcendent and immanent unity; it is the *teaching* of such, the doctrinal and philosophical statements. Theosophy is a body of knowledge.

H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“Theosophy *is* RELIGION, and the SOCIETY its one Universal Church; the temple of Solomon’s wisdom,* in building which ‘there was neither hammer nor axe *nor* any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building’ (I *Kings*, vi. 7); for this “temple” is made by no human hand, nor built in any locality on earth – but, verily, is

²¹ She notes, “But if the term [religion] is to be defined as the binding together of the masses in one form of reverence paid to those we feel higher than ourselves, ...” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 272) Had she been able to stop conceptually after the word ‘masses’ this sentence would have another, more contemporary meaning. See also, however, her position in *Collected Works* vol. v where she notes “...whether people pursue a common idea with, of without, a deity in it, if they are bound together by the same and one belief in something, that belief is a *religion*.” (1984, pg. 99)

²² H.P. Blavatsky writes, “The radical unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature – from Star to mineral Atom, from the Highest Dhyān Chohan to the smallest infusoria, in the fullest acceptation of the term, and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual, or physical worlds – this is the one fundamental law in Occult Science. (1988, vol. I, pg. 120)

raised only in the inner sanctuary of man's heart wherein reigns alone the awakened soul." (1974, pg. 162-163)

In this extract, H.P. Blavatsky is referring to Theosophy (the totality of all possible truth) in its universal sense, not just the portion of teachings given out to humanity in the 19th century by her. The 'Society' referred to, not being made by 'human hand', does not refer to the historical Theosophical Society founded in 1875. Rather, it refers to the abstract Society which houses the universal Theosophical truths.

3.1.3 DOGMA

There are no dogmas in the Theosophical Society. This is a common statement found in Theosophical works and a common belief of members. It is often made in the context of the general Outer Society where membership is based not on accepting any particular belief, but on accepting one of the Three Theosophical Objectives. We have then an ambiguous situation, with, on the one hand, a democratic ('non-dogmatic') outer Society and, on the other hand, a closed set of teachings, controlled by authority and charisma.

An early example of the self presentation of the Theosophical Society as non-dogmatic can be found in H.P. Blavatsky's *Collected Works*, in an article published in 1878, entitled '*A Society without a dogma*', where H.P. Blavatsky writes,

"Dogma? Faith? These are the right and left pillars of every soul-crushing theology. Theosophists have no dogmas, exact no blind faith. Theosophists are ever ready to abandon every idea that is proved erroneous upon strictly logical deductions;...Dogmas are the...offspring of human speculation and prejudiced fancy." (1977, vol. 1, pg. 304)

This article was aimed at the spiritualist movement from which H.P. Blavatsky had begun to distance herself. Spiritualistic teachings were regarded by H.P. Blavatsky as having being founded on faith and non-rational dogmas. This is in opposition to the Theosophical Society and teachings which are portrayed as non-dogmatic, rational, and open to correction. As I will discuss below, the nuanced use of the term 'dogma' and the special authority of Theosophy make the Theosophical teachings almost immune to error and the criticism of being 'dogma' (here used in its negative sense of being an untruth proclaimed as a truth).

The word 'dogma' is, however, used in various, sometimes inconsistent or ambiguous, ways in H.P. Blavatsky's writings. There are for example, 'Christian' or 'scientific' dogmas, which are

untrue or incomplete teachings. ‘Untrue’ or incomplete teachings are those which do not reflect the actual workings of nature. There are, however, also references to ‘esoteric’ dogmas which are ‘truths’, that is, they accurately reflect nature and history. An example of a Theosophical dogma can be found in *The Secret Doctrine*,

“The Esoteric Doctrine teaches distinctly the *dogma* of the risings and falls of civilization;...” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 723)

In a second example, H.P. Blavatsky, referring to frog deities and symbols in Egypt, notes,

“She not only participated in the organization of the world, together with *Khnoom*, but was also connected with *the dogma of resurrection*.*

“*With the Egyptians it was the resurrection in rebirth after 3,000 years of purification, either in Devachan or ‘the fields of bliss.’”²³ (1988, vol. I, pg. 385-386)

I find one particular statement of H.P. Blavatsky revealing and defining, defining because it is the narrowest sense in which certain terms are used. In an article entitled “*Neo-Buddhism*” in her *Collected Works* she writes:

“The Theosophical Society has never been a ‘sect’ – another error of the critic. *It includes representatives of all the sects and religions*, and none has ever been required to renounce his religion upon becoming a Fellow of the Society.*

“*With the exception of a few agnostics, all the Fellows of the *outer* (exoteric) section of the Theosophical Society, continue to profess the respective religion in which they were born, remaining in it and following its dogmas and rituals, just as they did before becoming ‘Theosophists.’ Acquainted with our Society as he has been for many years, Mr. Solovyov should also know that ‘Theosophy’ is not ‘*a religion without definite dogmas*,’ as he expresses it, but is *a universal system of philosophy*, absolutely without any *man-made* dogmas. Therefore, the Society, as such, remains in its collective whole without participation in the dogmas of any religion, but respects both the beliefs and rites pertaining to the faith of each one of its members, belonging as they do to the various creeds.” (Blavatsky, 1980, pg. 341)

²³ A reference by H.P. Blavatsky to reincarnation in the Egyptian religion, which is a topic I take up later in my dissertation.

There is the distinction between the outer and inner sections of the Theosophical Society, here referred to in its 19th century incarnation. Members in the outer section can remain participants in any religion of their choice. It follows that members of the 2nd section, or inner section, have left the exoteric expressions of the historical religions, and have accepted the Theosophical wisdom teachings. These teachings do contain dogmas. What distinguishes the dogmas of the Theosophical teachings from the dogmas of the known religions is that its dogmas are not ‘man-made’.²⁴ The teachings, dogmas of Theosophy, have a unique origin. H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“The just published *Secret Doctrine* will show what were the ideas of all antiquity with regard to the *primeval instructors* of primitive man and his three earlier races. The genesis of that WISDOM-RELIGION, in which all theosophists believe, dates from that period. So-called ‘Occultism,’ or rather Esoteric Science, has to be traced in its origin to those Beings who, led by Karma, have incarnated in our humanity, and thus struck the key-note of that secret science which countless generations of subsequent adepts have expanded since then in every age, while they checked its doctrines by personal observation and experience. The bulk of this knowledge – which no man is able to possess in its fullness – constitutes that which we now call Theosophy or ‘divine knowledge.’ Beings from other and higher worlds may have it entire; we can have it only approximately.” (1974, pg. 166)

The origin of the Theosophical dogmas, and of Theosophy itself, is advanced and superior beings, beings superior to ‘man’ as now evolved. These ‘beings’ are more in harmony with the inner worlds and have direct access to the invisible workings of nature. The historical religions, while all having begun in harmony with the Theosophical foundation statements, gradually allowed human error to creep in and corrupt them.²⁵ In the Theosophical writings the term dogma is, therefore, often used to refer to man-made, false/incorrect/incomplete/exoteric teachings, believed in on the basis of blind faith. Blind faith is a necessary prerequisite, as the

²⁴ ‘Man made’ referring here to the production by ordinary human intellectual thinking, (the ‘lower mind’ of Theosophy) which is liable to error, and not directly connected to the inner realms.

²⁵ “There is not a religion worthy of the name which has not been started otherwise than in consequence of such *visits* from Beings on the higher planes.” (Blavatsky, 1974, pg. 169) The extent of one’s knowledge is dependent on one’s evolutionary place. Being more mentally and spiritually advanced would have a greater capacity for apprehending truth and nature. No being could really encompass the ‘entire’ truth, as the universe is infinite. The knowledge limit of even the *mahatmas* is said to be that of the solar system, which would be the limit of their consciousness.

teachings, being basically untrue/incomplete, could not be proved in any way. This is as opposed to the Theosophical teachings, which in the words of H.P. Blavatsky are:

“...the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another,... No vision of one adept was accepted till it was checked and confirmed by the visions – so obtained as to stand as independent evidence – of other adepts, and by centuries of experiences.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 272-273)

This last quotation points to the relation Theosophy pursues with the scientific endeavour. For Theosophists, Theosophy, like science, offers a verifiable, experiential process open to all, in principle.

H.P. Blavatsky, however, was not alone in resorting to dogmatic statements and adopting a dogmatic tone in her writings. Walter E. Houghton, in his work *The Victorian frame of mind*, has shown how appeals to dogma and a stance of authority characterised the Victorian era. Many of the public writers of the era wrote as if they *knew* the truth of things. True knowledge was thought to be attainable and rational, and opinions were presented as facts. There were a number of factors which contributed to the adoption of this attitude. The triumphant and successful nature of Victorian society resulted in a sense of superiority and accomplishment. People felt knowledge was attainable. Despite the expanding fields of knowledge in almost every direction, there was also great uncertainty in the age. The average person was relatively uninformed in any depth on any topic. Those who spoke authoritatively in public often ended up in contradictory positions, which led to uncertainty and more dogmatic statements. (This also opened a gap for alternate opinions.) While fields of knowledge were expanding, authority in these various fields had not been established or was in the process of being established. There was often not a central authority in a field against which statements could be evaluated.

Houghton's work spans the period 1830 to 1870. H.P. Blavatsky began writing in the early 1870's until her death in 1891. Her work, however, displays many of the characteristics of the Victorian age. It is dogmatic, regards knowledge as attainable, refers to authority, and knows itself to be the 'truth'. H.P. Blavatsky's writings display the additional appeals to '*mahatmic*' authority and secret, restricted knowledge. This knowledge and access to advanced beings was, however, in theory open to all who were committed and qualified. By the time she was writing, the sciences were beginning to establish themselves properly as professional authorities, and the

time of the semi-knowledgeable layperson was ending. H.P. Blavatsky's style of engagement and pronouncement of 'facts' was, perhaps, becoming something of an anachronism, but it was not out of date by many years.

3.1.4 THEOSOPHY AS A SYSTEM OF ETHICS

Theosophy does present an ethical aspect. As a system of moral principles and rules of conduct, Theosophical ethics are underpinned by the general admission requirement of accepting 'universal brotherhood', a fact rooted in nature according to Theosophical teachings. Flowing from this general principle are the various Theosophical concepts of Altruism, Duty, Self-sacrifice, and Charity.²⁶ Campbell in his *Ancient Wisdom Revived* suggests that the Theosophical Society lacks a system of prescriptive or official ethics. (1980, pg. 193) He roots this idea in the distinction he makes between 'doctrine' and binding 'dogma'. Without binding dogma (not present in the Theosophical Society according to him) there can be no prescriptive ethics. I feel Campbell has, however, misunderstood the relation of the Theosophical statements in relation to the idea of dogma. The distinction is not between doctrine and dogma, but rather between error and truth or incomplete and complete.²⁷ The Theosophical statements are, by virtue of their inherent authority, statements of truth (as they are not 'man made' dogmas). The Theosophical statements and teachings are authoritative and presented as being true. They are not put forward as opinions.

Campbell is correct that Theosophy has no specific ethical system which has been codified. For guidance, my experience is that members are referred to select books which relate to this dimension, for example the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Dhammapada*, the *Tao-te-king*, the Theosophical *Voice of the Silence*, and so on. The lack of a specific prescriptive ethical code set down in one place is, in part I suggest, a technique of appropriation. For example, writing in the *Key to Theosophy* the question is asked:

“ENQ. Have you any ethical system that you carry out in the Society?

THEO. The ethics are there, ready and clear enough for whomsoever would follow them. They are the essence and cream of the world's ethics, gathered from the

²⁶ The ideal figure of the 'bodhisattva' as presented in Theosophy is a constant referent in Theosophical thought.

²⁷ The most descriptive binary is esoteric/exoteric as it covers a variety of options. For example, it may sometimes refer to true/false, complete/incomplete etc. The context would determine the binary to be applied.

teachings of all the world's great reformers. Therefore, you will find represented therein Confucius and Zoroaster, Lao-tze and the Bhagavat-Gita, the precepts of Gautama Buddha and Jesus of Nazareth, of Hillel and his school, as of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and their schools." (1989, pg. 48)

This statement shows the underlying Theosophical assumption that ethics are universal throughout religions. It also makes space for members of various religions or traditions to join the Society yet seemingly retain their own set of beliefs. The sense to my mind is not that the Society has no set ethical system, but instead it is an attempt to universalise its presentation.

What is, however, relevant to me at this point is that standards of ethical behaviour are underlined by the doctrinal element of Theosophy. H.P. Blavatsky writes,

"...one of the three objects of its modern successor, the Theosophical Society, namely, to reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities." (Blavatsky 1987, pg. 3)

And,

"They are the most striking proof of the wisdom of those who have repeatedly urged Theosophists to devote their energies to mastering, at least, the outlines of the metaphysical system upon which our Ethics are based." (Blavatsky 1973, vol. xi, pg. 104)

Underlying and justifying Theosophical behaviour is a body of teachings, originating from divine beings, which are fundamentally true. These teachings are presented as verifiable and falsifiable, they are rational and logical, meaning they meet the qualifying criteria of 'science' as this category was limbed in the mind of H.P. Blavatsky.

3.1.5 THEOSOPHY AND RITUALS

There are many statements in Theosophical writings concerning 'ritualism' and rituals. H.P. Blavatsky will often refer to the "...dead letter of dogma and ritualism." (1989, pg. 12) Her concern is three-fold, firstly the ignorant repetition of rituals whose original purpose is no longer understood. Secondly, the performance of rituals which themselves have origins in a pre-historic materialistic worship. (This worship is based on an orientation toward 'low', 'earthly', 'material' spirits. One can read 'Atlantean' here.) (1988, vol. II, pg. 273) And, thirdly, on the routine performance of an act which becomes a crutch. The lack of 'official

ritual' is noted by Campbell. (1980, pg. 196) An anecdotal story can reveal one way this has manifested. In the Pasadena Section it was once common to open and close meetings with the sounding of a gong tuned to the note 'F'. (The note being based on a statement found in the *Voice of the Silence*.) At a certain point this was stopped as members apparently began insisting the gong be sounded before meetings could begin or end. This was seen as becoming routinized and ritualistic. In my own meetings with Pasadena members in the nineties, a gong was in the possession of the group leader but never sounded during meetings.

There may be differences between the various Theosophical Societies on the issue of rituals in their general practice (i.e. how they conduct their meetings, membership entrance, etc. I recall being initiated into the local Adyar Theosophical lodge in South Africa. However, on joining the Pasadena Theosophical Society, a letter was written to the Leader outlining one's motivation for joining, on acceptance of which one became a member.) It might also be noted that the avoidance of ritual can become a ritualistic stance itself.

3.1.6 SUMMARY

In summary, the term 'religion' is used in identifiable ways in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky and in Theosophical literature in general. The world religions are generally seen as deficient in some way and requiring of Theosophy to rehabilitate them. H.P. Blavatsky attempts to differentiate between the Theosophical Society and its teachings and the world religions. Theosophy itself though can also be identified as a 'religion' in the academic sense of the word. Presented primarily as a body of rational truths and knowledge, Theosophy has as a foundation a set of doctrinal teachings which are presented as scientific and verifiable.²⁸ It is from this doctrinal basis that all the related dimensions of the Theosophical perspective on religion flow. It is also this doctrinal presentation which gives the Theosophical teachings and Society a sense of operating on the intellectual level.²⁹

H.P. Blavatsky's Theosophical presentation, while perhaps scattered in terms of theme, is still a consistent whole. It is essentially definitive and closed. 'Key' ideas are presented and meant to be applied to various religions as interpretive tools. Rarely does she consistently interpret an

²⁸ No doubt 'verifiable' according to Theosophy's own methods, but still open to verification.

²⁹ This perception and experience has been a problem for the Theosophical Society from its inception. The emphasis on philosophical content over what was conceived as practical occult instruction has led to tension within and defections from the Society. This has been discussed by R.A. Gilbert in his short monograph, *The Golden Dawn and the Esoteric Section*. (1987), and by Godwin et al., 1995, pg. 7.

entire text. One exception is her 83 page, almost line by line, commentary on the first book of the *Pistis Sophia* in her *Collected Works* vol. xiii. It would, however, be more in keeping with her *modus operandi* for her to give key meanings to certain terms which are then used to read texts from the Theosophical interpretive perspective. For example, *Osiris* may be given a set of key Theosophical meanings, which are then read into an Egyptian text.

In the following section I examine how Theosophy interacts with other traditions.

3.2 TECHNIQUES OF APPROPRIATION

Theosophy involves an interpretation of world religions. On one level, Theosophy could be viewed as a hermeneutic method in itself. It makes no fundamental difference whether the tradition being engaged with is living or extinct. It also makes little difference to what extent the historical records of a particular religion are existent or available. Some ancient religions may have left few historical writings and records. From the Theosophical perspective, the gaps simply become available to be filled. Religions with a rich historical record can be engaged with by the appropriate interpretive methods of Theosophy. Depending on the state of the historical record, the methods may differ. (For example, a tradition with a thousand years of a well-recorded history of ideas will likely produce various presentations of itself. Those which more closely mirror Theosophy would be potentially the more favoured subject.) All interpretation involves, in a sense, a projection by the scholar (or Theosophical member) of meaning into the subject. This projection may be slightly more difficult with a rich historical record. The extent to which ideas are ‘read into’ as opposed to ‘read out’ of religious texts may distinguish the scholar from the new age student. The subjective nature of the endeavour should, however, be taken into account. It is also important to try to gauge the depth and seriousness of the engagement.

Before discussing the means by, and extent to which, H.P. Blavatsky goes about appropriating teachings or concepts, it is relevant to outline a broader issue. The issue revolves around the origin of the Theosophical teachings and the suggested process of ‘syncretism’. Fundamental to this enquiry is to locate *The Secret Doctrine* in this process. Kraft in a sentence highlights some of the issues,

“Blavatsky clearly had little in common with the ancient Egyptians, the Gnostics or the famous philosophers and mystics she quotes. Nor is it likely that these traditions placed limitations upon her Theosophy.” (2002, pg. 151)

Where, then, is H.P. Blavatsky’s system rooted? Hanegraaff writes,

“Her Theosophical synthesis is constituted of 3 basic components : esoteric traditions in general and the occult sciences in particular; 19th century science; and the new Mythography.”(1996, pg. 455)

“I will argue that the fundamental contribution of modern theosophy to the history of occultism consists in its assimilation, by the early founders, of elements of Oriental religions and a perspective of “Comparative Religion” in an already existing western occultist framework.” (1996, pg. 452)

I feel there are a number of issues and concepts raised here which need to be carefully examined. These include, if Theosophy is a ‘synthesis’ of various elements, or a syncretistic system, what are those elements? When did the synthesis/syncretism take place? What are the Theosophical teachings, by which I mean can the Theosophical teachings be stated in their own terms, and do these terms have meanings independent of their traditional historical usage? What is the place of *The Secret Doctrine* in these processes? I intend to deal with these issues separately.

What are the Theosophical teachings? Is there a body of teachings which can be identified as ‘Theosophical’? Are there set terms, with specific Theosophical meanings attached? I suggest that there is set of teachings which might be considered as distinctly ‘Theosophical’.

Macrocosmically they relate to the unfolding of the cosmos and solar system. In terms of human history, there are set teachings relating to the origin, evolution, and destiny of humankind. Microcosmically there are specific teachings on the constitution of the person and on the after death states.

These Theosophical concepts and teachings are embodied in a number of terms, which are associated with the Theosophical Society. These terms can be found in Theosophical glossaries, and include terms like root-races, rounds, principles, three logoi, life-atoms, reincarnation, planes, etc. There are many of these terms. We might say that a Theosophical system exists on its own terms. One distinct challenge is to separate the Theosophical *concepts* from the *terms* used to name them. For example, if Theosophy says ‘*Osiris*’, what does it

mean? Is it the same as Egyptian usage?³⁰ If Theosophy teaches ‘*karma*’ does this match any traditional Buddhist or Hindu use of the term? Does the Theosophical use of the term ‘logos’ match any accepted use? One could ask this question of virtually any religious or philosophical Theosophical term, for example, *skandha*, *manu*, *manvantara*, *devachan*, *jivatman*, *nirmanakaya*, *parabrahman*, etc. Does the Theosophical use of these terms match the potential sources from where these terms may have been drawn? (There are almost uniquely Theosophical terms, for example, root-race, round, planetary chain, etc. As they have no previous religious meaning I exclude them from consideration here.)

Two questions are raised by this. Firstly, where did this system come from? Secondly, when did it come into existence?

In response to the first question, the origin of the Theosophical teachings, a few points can be made. The Theosophical system is a set of concepts on cosmology, anthropology, history, and so forth, embodied to a large extent in borrowed terms, terms borrowed from science, history, eastern religions, western esotericism, etc. Many of these terms are distanced and de-contextualised from their existing framework. Many borrowed terms are imbued with specific Theosophical content, distinct from their original context. H.P. Blavatsky is fairly transparent about this. She is revealing esoteric understandings of existing teachings. The borrowing is, therefore, complicated. It is not simply a synthesis of existing concepts, which become ‘Theosophical’. The synthesising and syncretism happens on various levels. Sometimes a term, empty of content, is adopted. Sometimes a concept, divorced from its contextual term, is adopted. I discuss later in this chapter the ways in which Theosophical meaning is inserted into religions, and how concepts are appropriated into the Theosophical system. The manner in which, and extent to which, content was appropriated by H.P. Blavatsky needs to be carefully investigated. In answer to the question, the origin of the Theosophical system, I have little to add. The exact origins are unknown, and perhaps unknowable. As all the ideas passed through the prism of H.P. Blavatsky’s mind, essentially unknowable, the origins may not be recoverable.

³⁰ One could ask a similar question of modern Egyptological explanations of terms. The Theosophical method, however, involves a deliberate translation of term and ideas into Theosophical language and concepts. There is no attempt by Theosophy to keep the ideas of Ancient Egypt, for example, within its cultural setting. It is deliberately comparative and expansive.

The second question is when did the Theosophical teachings come into being? Garry W. Trompf in his article, *Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from Isis Unveiled (1877) to The Secret Doctrine (1888)* has answered this question. He notes, “...the fact that the most systematic and ‘scientized’ account of the Theosophist’ cosmology is not first found in Blavatsky at all, but in a series of transcribed messages (dated 1880-4) purporting to be from two Masters (Morya and Koot Hoomi, the latter being Blavatsky’s own ‘Christ’ Master) to Alfred Sinnett, her very new acquaintance in India.” (2011, pg. 57) The *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* and Sinnett’s book *Esoteric Buddhism* (published 1883)³¹ reveal much of what will become identifiably Theosophical.³²

Trompf highlights the political dimension of the production of *The Secret Doctrine*. H.P. Blavatsky, needing to reassert authority and control over the Theosophical Society, writes a book ‘correcting’ *Esoteric Buddhism* and appealing to the mysterious *Stanzas of Dzyan*. As Trompf notes, “Madame had to play a trump card; and the poetic revelations of an arcane Akashic document, with the inspiration to pen a commentary on the “stanzas” of this Book of Dzyan in her massive *Secret Doctrine*, enabled her both to supersede Sinnett’s systemizations and claim much behind the *Mahatma Letters* as her own teaching.” (Trompf, 2011, pg. 60)

Almost any identifiable Theosophical term or concept can be found in the *Mahatma Letters* or *Esoteric Buddhism*. Certainly, though, *The Secret Doctrine* is (or has become) the authoritative presentation of these teachings, a presentation that corrects, adapts, and amplifies what is in these earlier works, but still works only on what basically already exists. Much of the Theosophical system existed prior to *The Secret Doctrine*, suggesting that this system did not come into existence with that work.

What then is the place of *The Secret Doctrine* in the history of Theosophical ideas? If it is not the originator³³, where is it to be located?

I feel it may be useful to distinguish between two processes. The first is the process of creating a system of beliefs. H.P. Blavatsky and others were involved in the formation of a complete system of beliefs and teachings, in essence, a religion. In the case of the Theosophical Society, for believers, the system was fully existent, kept in the hands of adept masters, and revealed in

³¹ *The Secret Doctrine* was finally published in 1888, after being years in preparation.

³² Ironically it may be suggested that H.P. Blavatsky was the author of the letters to Sinnett.

³³ I do not suggest that absolutely no original idea or concept is introduced in *The Secret Doctrine*, but I do contend that the framework of what is identifiably Theosophical existed prior to that work.

stages by H.P. Blavatsky and others. For academics the Theosophical system as a body of teachings evolved over time as H.P. Blavatsky's vision matured and developed. The attempt to identify the precise elements which went into the creation and formation of the Theosophical teachings is ongoing. (This is true for both Theosophists and academics, although obviously along different lines. My own work here is not concerned with origins, but with the way in which Theosophy engages with an aspect of a specific tradition.)

The second process is the establishing and legitimising of the Theosophical teachings in the world. In order to exist, Theosophy (and the Theosophical Society) would need to carve out a place for itself in the public arena. This process of establishing itself may involve various claims of legitimacy, supremacy, and authority. These could be achieved by, among other techniques, interpretation. It is primarily with this second process that this dissertation is concerned. Theosophy's attempt to locate itself in society involved a massive attempt to appropriate texts, religions, modern institutions, sciences, and almost any existing cultural authority. Theosophy, once in existence, then proceeded to find itself in these texts and institutions through reinterpretation and the appropriation of authority. It is with this secondary movement that *The Secret Doctrine* can most ideally be linked.

The difference between a work like *Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Secret Doctrine* is quite marked. *Esoteric Buddhism*³⁴ is a bare bones statement of Theosophical thought. It is stripped of almost any interpretive function (of other world traditions), and any attempt to relate to modern science. *The Secret Doctrine*, on the other hand, is permeated with attempts to interpret world religions, and with the attempt to compare the Theosophical concepts against scientific thought. This is H.P. Blavatsky's, and Theosophy's, grand attempt to appropriate authority to itself. It is the move to place itself at the centre of both the Theosophical world, and the world at large. All forms of knowledge are appropriated and legitimacy is conferred by Theosophical content.

Clues for the origin of the Theosophical system may be found in *The Secret Doctrine*, but the search must begin earlier with works like *Isis unveiled*, the *Mahatma Letters* and *Esoteric Buddhism*. *The Secret Doctrine* represents, in the main, the culmination of a process, not the beginning.

³⁴ *Esoteric Buddhism* is a work of some 250 pages compared to the 1500 pages of *The Secret Doctrine*.

In terms of this dissertation, I am reviewing the Theosophical engagement with Ancient Egypt (as presented primarily in *The Secret Doctrine*) in relation to a number of set themes. To gain authority and legitimacy, space to exist and to dominate, Theosophy looks for itself in Ancient Egypt and finds itself. Through this manoeuvre it takes the centre stage. There are naturally competing forces (other intellectual programmes of interpretation), and, in terms of its presumed intent, the Theosophical Society has not succeeded. This seeming failure invokes, and has invoked, any number of explanatory mechanisms. This dissertation examines this secondary move of appropriation.

It is possible that the two processes I mention above are not as distinct as I make them out to be. They may, perhaps, grow by feeding off each other. It does, however, seem to me that for Theosophy to 'find' itself in any religion or text it must first exist itself. There would also potentially be a circular movement. For example, H.P. Blavatsky may have drawn into her Theosophical presentation elements of Freemasonry, it being one of the many potential sources of inspiration. Once the Theosophical text was established, it would revisit Freemasonry and reinterpret and appropriate it according to the new perspective. This circular process would not be true for all religions or institutions in the same way. For example, Theosophy may well interpret Inuit beliefs, while they probably played little role in the formation of the Theosophical system.

The situation is quite complicated with regard to Ancient Egypt. Egypt has existed in the western imagination continuously since the Greeks. It is a central element of the western esoteric tradition, and, in the nineteenth century was a growing field of academic investigation and research. We might, however, suspect that whatever element is drawn into the first process of tradition formation is most likely changed by that process (as it is one of many competing elements) and its re-reading by the new entity is a different process altogether.

Once the process of tradition formation and tradition establishment is separated, one can begin asking questions appropriate to each phase. I am dealing with the second phase, as this is where I, in the main, locate *The Secret Doctrine*.

In reference to *The Secret Doctrine* the basic question then is not to what extent Ancient Egypt may inform Theosophical ideas, that is, to what extent Egyptian concepts were basic elements of the synthesising/syncretistic origin of Theosophical teachings. Instead we might ask to what extent existent Theosophy has inserted itself into Ancient Egypt. In what ways is Theosophy inserting itself into Ancient Egypt and what exactly is Theosophy attempting to appropriate?

Theosophy may appropriate the prestige and authority of ‘Egypt’, and through reinterpretation appropriate even actual concepts in abstract. It may also, however, not actually be informed by any real Egyptian idea or concept.

There are a number of issues raised, for example, the “Egypt” being engaged with. It cannot be the Egypt of modern 20th century scholarship. Is it then the Egypt of 19th century Egyptology, or is it the Egypt of the Western Esoteric tradition? Or is it, perhaps, a totally or partially fabricated Egypt being read into historical Egypt? The contested nature of Egyptology as a field of study may add to this complexity. There may not be one mainstream academic presentation of Egypt, although there is a dominant stream of interpretation.

3.2.1 THEOSOPHY AND INTERPRETATION

H.P Blavatsky presents a template of religious knowledge and teachings, and, by means of this structure, a hierarchy of religions is formed. This is not to say that H.P Blavatsky has presented the hierarchy in full in any set place. It can, however, clearly be inferred. At the apex of this hierarchy of religions are Hinduism and Buddhism, which, from the Theosophical perspective, are the closest to the original wisdom teaching.³⁵ Once the template is presented a process of comparison becomes inevitable, and, from the Theosophical perspective, desirable. I will suggest that the chief tools (that is, means of relating one thing to another) of comparison are two basic approaches. The first method of relating a religion against the Theosophical template is that of a ‘structural’ placement of that religion, or religious concept, against the template. The second is a ‘functional’ comparison of a religious teaching, deity, etc, against the Theosophical template. In essence then, the place or function of a particular object within its own tradition locates it in the Theosophical structure. The process of ‘placing’ is an interpretive approach which results in dominating and owning and is an essential step in the move to appropriate knowledge.

Olav Hammer in his *Claiming Knowledge* points to the importance of outlining the actual means by which an ‘Esoteric position’ is constructed. He lists some of the key elements which would need to be examined; they include “analogic reasoning”, “cognitive and social processes leading to the rise and maintenance of Esoteric belief”, and “the actual mechanisms of schism

³⁵ “We say it again: archaic Occultism would remain incomprehensible to all, if it were rendered otherwise than through the more familiar channels of Buddhism and Hinduism. The former is the emanation of the latter; and both are children of one mother – ancient *Lemuro-Atlantean Wisdom*.” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 668). This general ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Hinduism’ can often be narrowed to Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

and continuity that engender new positions and separate them from their historical roots.”(2004, p. 16) It is the first and third point which are of most interest to me, and this dissertation will focus more specifically on this ‘nuts and bolts’ work of appropriation. I am less concerned with the ‘why’ and more with the ‘how’ in relation to the way in which a specific religion, idea, or concept is absorbed into the Theosophical narrative. By Hammer’s own admittance this is not the focus of his book; however, he has described many key techniques in his work. I will mention in brief his insights, and then outline my presentation.

In the fourth chapter of his book, Hammer discusses the processes by which a tradition is constructed. The processes of transformation and legitimatizing have some related, identifying elements.

Reduction: by this is meant, “...several related techniques of reducing the complexity, variety and contextuality of the traditions from which elements are taken.”(Hammer 2004, pg. 159)

This process allows complex concepts to be simplified to the point of general applicability.

The essential, or ‘root’ idea, once identified can be seen in various traditions and concepts, and local particular variants can be understood as such, that is as divergent from the underlying, original and fundamental idea. Pattern recognition: I will discuss the similar technique from a Theosophical perspective below. I suggest a functional and structural evaluation of ideas and concepts which locate them on the Theosophical template. The emic process of engaging with a religious text does involve the search for certain root concepts, e.g. the number seven, orders of colours etc. Once a pattern is located, it opens the way for an insertion of Theosophical content into a text. Types of pattern recognition would include a ‘search for parallels’, a ‘construction of correspondences’ and ‘synonymization’.

In the following section I examine how Theosophy interprets and conducts comparisons between its own teachings and those of other world traditions. Comparisons, and Hammer’s synonymization, are basic tools of Theosophy. For example, H.P. Blavatsky may note that *Osiris* = *Atman*, or ‘Jehovah = 3rd Logos’. How are statements such as these to be evaluated? Not only are unrelated terms equated, but the understanding of each term may differ among various parties. For example, ‘*Osiris*’ may have a set of related meanings for Egyptologists which have no relation to the Theosophical usage of the term.³⁶ This is similar for almost any

³⁶ This is, however, not inevitably the case. Theosophical definitions may reflect mainstream definitions, in part or in full. I have in Chapter Two suggested that some Theosophical opinions can be located within the ambit of mainstream research if viewed within its historical context.

Theosophical term. In Theosophical literature the terms and ideas of third party religions may take on new meanings often bearing only a loose connection to indigenous meanings.

The process of evaluating Theosophical comparisons needs to be facilitated by two things.

The first is a common language of expression. I am writing in English.³⁷ The second is the use of explanatory definitions. Each term of any comparison equation needs to be expanded into its explanatory form and translated into a common language. It is at the level of definition that ideas can be evaluated. Owing to this, I will spend some time defining Theosophical and Egyptian terms in this dissertation.

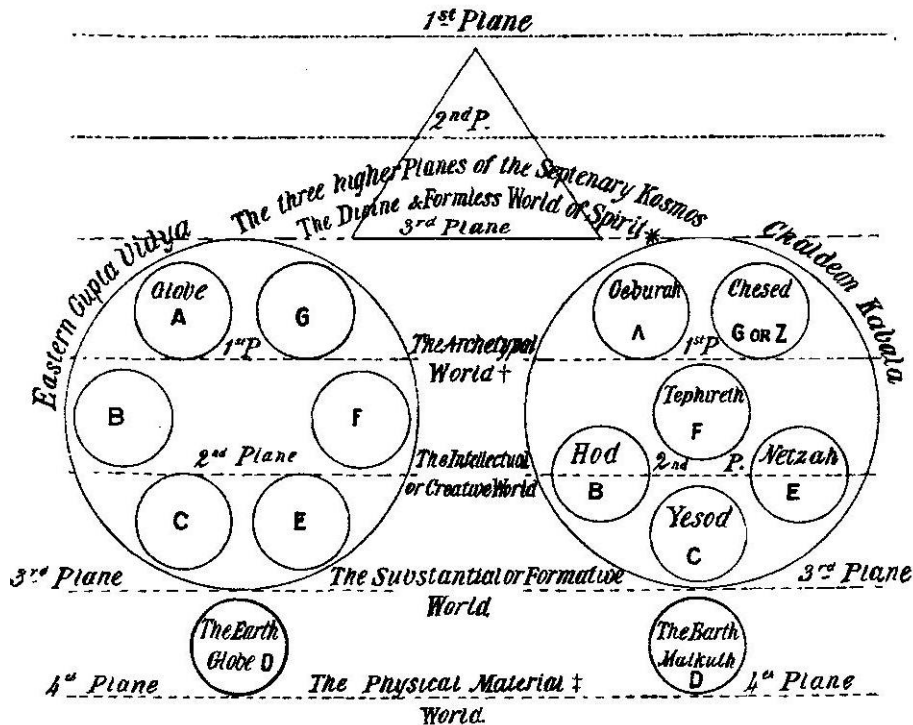
[I am not critiquing the very process of the Theosophical comparative endeavour, or of the comparative endeavour itself. I am looking for a way to explain and evaluate Theosophical statements.]

3.2.1.1 STRUCTURAL EVALUATION

In its broadest sense the Theosophical statement *is* the template against which all knowledge, and all religions, are to be tested. The structural patterning would include the search for number patterns, especially 3, 4, and 7, although, in fact almost all numbers from 1 to 12 (and further) have root meanings in Theosophy. Structural, too, would be the pattern of a ‘male energy’ manifesting through a ‘female vehicle’ or body, resulting in the production of a ‘son’. The basic Theosophical structure or template is found in the following diagram drawn from *The Secret Doctrine*,

³⁷ There is no particular reason why the language medium of comparison could not have been, or could not be, French, German, etc.

DIAGRAM 1: THE GLOBES AND PLANES



* The *Arupa* or "formless," there where form ceases to exist, on the objective plane.

† The word "Archetypal" must not be taken here in the sense that the Platonists gave to it, *i.e.*, the world as it existed in the *Mind* of the Deity; but in that of a world made as a first model, to be followed and improved upon by the worlds which succeed it physically—though deteriorating in purity.

‡ These are the four lower planes of Cosmic Consciousness, the three higher planes being inaccessible to human intellect as developed at present. The seven states of human consciousness pertain to quite another question.

(Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 200)

In this subsection, it is not my intention to detail in full the Theosophical template. I wish here to identify the basic structural paradigm against, and onto which, all religions are measured and located.

This basic diagram has been frequently repeated and amplified in later Theosophical works, and what is sketched here is only one of the various ways H.P. Blavatsky has presented the unfolding of a system. It is used in two chief contexts, firstly, as diagrammatically representing the "Solar System", and secondly, as representing the Earth (as a planetary chain)³⁸ itself. In

³⁸ A planetary chain is made up of seven (or twelve) globes. If Diagram 1 is to refer to a planetary chain, then globe D would be the physical earth, and the other globes would represent the invisible principles of the earth. If Diagram 1 is read as referring to the Solar system, then globe D would represent the Earth planetary chain, and the other globes would represent the other sacred planets of our solar system.

one sense, these two are the macrocosm and microcosm. Another use of the macrocosm/microcosm relationship is between the Earth planetary chain and the Earth globe, and between the Earth globe and the human being as a sevenfold entity. This diagram could have wider application, in relation to the Galaxy, or the Kosmos as a whole. The way in which I will use this template will be guided by the statements of H.P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*.

The '*Stanza's of Dzyan*', the secret book extracts of which form the basis of *The Secret Doctrine*, give an "abstract formula which can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to all evolution: to that of our tiny earth, to the of the chain of planets of which that earth forms one, to the solar Universe to which that chain belongs, and so on, in an ascending scale, till the mind reels and is exhausted in the effort." (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 20-21) The diagram is a schematic presentation of the entire system under discussion, whether that system be a planet, a solar system, or something larger. It begins in the immaterial planes, prior to any manifestation or creation, a realm of basic 'absoluteness', and ends in the most material unfolding of that system. It is spirit in its highest planes and dense matter in its lowest planes. (Another way of stating this is that spirit manifests itself through lower material vehicles or bodies.) For H.P. Blavatsky, and later commentators, perfection does, however, always give way to a greater perfection, and imperfection or materiality is specific to the particular system being presented. Owing to the comprehensiveness of the template, every entity or power within a defined system must fit into it.

In general, *The Secret Doctrine* is chiefly concerned with the Planetary Chain and the Solar System to which the Earth belongs. Periodically, its statements are philosophically concerned in general with creation of the entire universe. As many statements are 'formula's' the general statement can be valid for any system, but the specifics or details would differ depending on the context in which they are made. Dealing with the diagram in relation to the solar system first, it begins with the blank white page on which it is printed. This white background is the abstract potential in which all things reside and which precedes and succeeds all things. It is the First Fundamental Proposition of Theosophy - "An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE, on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought - in the words of the Mandukya, 'unthinkable and unspeakable.'" (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 14) The process of emanation then begins over a series of seven planes, each plane being, in its turn, seven-fold and so on. The basic division is

between the first 3 planes and the bottom 4 planes. The first 3 planes would be the ‘formless’ planes, and the bottom 4 are the world of manifestation. Formless planes and planes of form or manifestation are in the eye of the perceiver. In Theosophical teachings, a being from a more ‘spiritual’ or evolved system would look upon our whole seven-fold solar system as a dense material entity. One’s evolutionary state of development or consciousness will determine what would be viewed as spiritual or material. The first 3 planes would be the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Logos of Theosophy. There are numerous synonyms for this, the chief being; 1st plane - *Brahman:Pradhana*; 2nd plane - *Purusha:Prakriti*; 3rd plane - *Mahat*. From *Mahat*, the 3rd Logos, also the creative logos, or creator god of world religions, emanate the 4 lower planes, respectively, 4th plane - Cosmic *Kama*, 5th plane - Cosmic *Jiva(Prana)*, 6th plane - Astral light, and 7th plane - *Sthula-sarira* (physical world). On these 4 lower planes are seven centres of energy, seven loci of spirit-matter in a particular stage of unfolding. These are referred to as the seven *logoi*. In the solar system, these are the 7 sacred planets - which are conceived of as seven-fold entities. There are two planets on each plane from the 4th to the 6th plane, and 1 physical planet on the 7th plane. The movement of evolution is from the first planet - listed in the diagram as ‘Globe A’, to Globe B, etc until eventually at the end Globe G is attained. If the diagram refers to our solar system, then Globe D is the seven-fold planet Earth.

Looking at the diagram in relation to a Planetary Chain, then the entire diagram refers only to the one single planet in a solar system, in our example the Earth. Here Globe D is the physical earth with which we are familiar. The other 6 Globes are part of the inner principles of the Earth. In the same way, a human being may have a body, mind, and spirit, so too would any entity in the universe, including a planet.

The specific relationship between larger and smaller entities is complicated. In principle, however, the seven-fold system remains true throughout. The first or highest plane, or principle is the Divine, the 2nd, counting downwards is the Spiritual, the 3rd is Mental, the 4th is *Kama*, or Desire principle, the 5th is *Prana*, or Life force, the 6th is the Astral double of the 7th plane or principle which is the Material or physical plane. Whether it is a grain of sand or a galaxy, the broad seven-fold division with its associated attributes remain identical. The degree and detail must differ, for example while on a Galactic level, the 5th plane would have “mental” type attributes. This type of ‘mind’ would not be the same as that of a human being.

This structural placement is well illustrated by H.P. Blavatsky's identification of 'trinities' in world religions, and relating them to her first Three Logos. From the Theosophical perspective this teaching is summarised in the 'Proem' of *The Secret Doctrine*,

- “(1.) The ABSOLUTE ; the *Parabrahm* of the Vedantins or the one Reality, SAT, which is, as Hegel says, both Absolute Being and Non-Being.
- (2.) The first manifestation, the impersonal, and, in philosophy, *unmanifested* Logos, the precursor of the “manifested.” This is the “First Cause,” the “Unconscious” of European Pantheists.
- (3.) Spirit-matter, LIFE; the “Spirit of the Universe,” the Purusha and Prakriti, or the *second* Logos.
- (4.) Cosmic Ideation, MAHAT or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul ; the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter, the basis of the Intelligent operations in and of Nature, also called MAHA-BUDDHI.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 16)

Points 2-4, being the Three Logos, can also be abstracted to the Father, Mother, and, the fruit of their union, the Son. These 3 points also relate to the first 3 planes of the diagram above. As early as *Isis Unveiled* (published in 1877) H.P. Blavatsky can produce a table of various Egyptian trinities as follows:

Kneph (or Mout)	Osiris	Ra (Horus)	the Father
Maut (or MUT)	Isis	Isis	the Mother
Khons	Horus	Malouli	the Son

(Blavatsky 1988, vol. II, pg. 227)

Another example is the deity, *Ammon*. *Ammon* (*Amen* or *Amun* more frequently in Egyptology) is the hidden or Supreme Spirit. (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 366) This figure is the 'concealed' god and first in the trinity of Thebes. He would, therefore, be interpreted by Theosophists to be the First Unmanifest Logos of the Theosophical scheme.

3.2.1.2 FUNCTIONAL EVALUATION

An example of a Theosophical correspondence based on function is that of the Egyptian god *Atum* and the Theosophical *Fohat*. H.P. Blavatsky writes:

“...while in Egypt Fohat was known as Toun issued from Noot,* or Osiris in his character of a primordial god, creator of heaven and of beings (see chapter xvii., ‘*Book of the Dead*’).” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 673)

“Both the hieroglyph, and the text of chapter lxii. In the ‘*Book of the Dead*,’ show the identity of Toun with Fohat.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 674)³⁹

It is not my intention here to examine in detail H.P. Blavatsky’s engagement with the Egyptian *Atum*. Here I wish to illustrate briefly the functional equivalency of the two concepts in the Theosophical imagination.

To the best of my knowledge, the origin of the Theosophical term ‘*Fohat*’ (said to be of Tibetan origin) has not as yet been definitely identified.⁴⁰ In the Theosophical scheme *Fohat* is a complicated and multifaceted concept. To begin with, we might list some Theosophical synonyms. Barborka in his *Divine Plan* lists the following as related terms, “The One Force”, “Cosmic Energy”, “Dynamic Energy of Cosmic Ideation”, “an aspect of *Daiviprakriti* (Vedantic)”, and “Light of the three logoi”. (1992, pg. 482) The general impression is one of causal energy in the un-manifest and manifested realms. In his *Occult Glossary*, de Purucker writes that, *Fohat* can “be considered as the essence of kosmic electricity...[endowed] with the attribute of consciousness”, also the “vital force of the universe”. (pg.50). *Fohat* exists in a latent condition prior to creation; once awoken this Cosmic Energy facilitates the differentiation of matter from its un-manifest to its manifest state. This creative act brings the gods and worlds into being. As it is ceaselessly active in the manifested world, it is both creative and destructive. It is an abundance of life that eventually destroys the forms it initially creates.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, *Toun* is, “the creative force in nature, giving form to all Beings, spirits and men”(1988, vol. I, pg. 312), “spoken of as the *Protean* god who *generates other gods* and gives himself the form he likes”, “the vital electric force”, and the “*overseer* of the gods”. (1988, vol. I, pg. 673) Apparent quotations from the *Book of the Dead* list *Toun* as “the *north wind* and *spirit of the west*”, the “Setting Sun of Life”. (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg.673)

The sense is of a vivifying energy, the essence of electricity, which, while latent prior to creation, once itself awoken, wakes the gods and the worlds and begins the process of emanation. From

³⁹ In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky uses the name ‘*Toun*’ for the now more commonly designated ‘*Atum*’.

⁴⁰ See Reigle’s *Blavatsky’s secret books*, “Notes on Cosmological notes”.

the Theosophical perspective, ‘*fohat*’ is the ancient term and concept of the Wisdom Tradition, and ‘*Toum*’ (*Atum*) is the Egyptian expression and conceptualization of this teaching.

3.3 ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES OF APPROPRIATION

Various strategies and techniques are invoked by H.P. Blavatsky to read Theosophical content into world scriptures. Religious terms and concepts become disassociated from their common usage and context, and they are then re-valued and appropriated into the Theosophical structure. I will be comparing H.P. Blavatsky’s Theosophical use of certain religious terms and ideas in relation to their generally accepted usage in a particular discipline. For example, if she refers to a particular Egyptian concept or term, I will reference this against the mainstream Egyptology ideas on this concept. There may well be debates and disagreements within academic Egyptology over various issues, but I will not be specifically looking for ideas which might support a Theosophical interpretation. I will, however, attempt to compare and note differences and similarities where I find them. (For a good example of a scholar looking for parallels and potential historical sources for Theosophical ideas in the fields of Hinduism and Buddhism, one could look at the work of David Reigle.⁴¹)

3.3.1 ESOTERIC/EXOTERIC

As a broad enabling background, H.P. Blavatsky makes space for inserting Theosophical content into religious texts by positing a distinction between ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’ teachings. A hidden, secret teaching allows for radical interpretations and appropriations. In Theosophical statements, the terms ‘esoteric’ and ‘exoteric’ can be used in two senses. Esoteric may refer to both ‘hidden’ teachings⁴² in general and to the Theosophical truth statements as revealed. Exoteric can refer to the public, ‘protecting’ teachings of a religion, and to revealed esoteric teachings. Once esoteric teachings are revealed (for example, published in a book) to

⁴¹ See David Reigle’s *Blavatsky’s Secret Books*, reference in the bibliography.

⁴² This use of the term is similar to the notion of ‘restricted knowledge’ of Baines in his, *Restricted knowledge, hierarchy and decorum: modern perceptions and ancient institutions*. (1990)

the public they are no longer 'esoteric'.⁴³ They remain, however, part of the larger 'esoteric' Wisdom Tradition.

It is important to note that when speaking of the esoteric tradition, as understood by Theosophy, the primary reference is to the set of teachings understood as Theosophy. That is to say, were one to find a complete sentence from the *Stanzas of Dzyan* in a religious text, it would be named as part of the esoteric statement. (This would be true despite the fact that it was in a published available work.) If a set of previously secret teachings of a specific religion were suddenly revealed, however, but did not bear any doctrinal relation to the Theosophical statement, they would not be part of the esoteric tradition. This narrow and specific presentation does not allow for general similarities to stand unaltered by the Theosophical narrative. For example, if a specific religion had a general statement on cycles or reincarnation, but no specific set of technical teachings associated with the belief, Theosophy would need to fill the gap with its own specific delineated teachings. Similarly, should a religion teach, for example, reincarnation which included non-Theosophical aspects, e.g. retrogressive reincarnation into animals from humans, Theosophy would not regard these as statements of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition.

In a chapter discussing the universal mystery language, H.P. Blavatsky quotes a lengthy passage from a work by Gaston Maspero, which she then comments on. I quote this passage in full as it begins to reveal her perspective on the Egyptian religion and on religion in general. The passage begins:

“‘Every time I hear people talking about the religion of Egypt,’ writes M. Gaston Maspero, the great French Egyptologist and the successor to Mariette Bey, ‘I am tempted to ask *which* of the Egyptian religions they are talking about? Is it of the Egyptian religion of the 4th Dynasty, or of the Egyptian religion of the Ptolemaic period? Is it the religion of the rabble, or of that of the learned men? Of that which was taught in the schools of Heliopolis, or of that other which was in the minds and conceptions of the Theban sacerdotal class? For, between the first tomb of Memphis, which bears the *cartouche* of a king of the third dynasty, and the last stones of Esneh under Ceasar-Philippus, the Arabian, there is an interval of at least five thousand years. Leaving aside the invasion of the Shepherds, Greek colonization, and the thousand revolutions of its

⁴³ “...once made public, no doctrine can be referred to any longer as ‘esoteric’. The esoteric tenets revealed – both in *Esoteric Buddhism* and *The Secret Doctrine* have become *exoteric* now. (Blavatsky 1974, vol. x, pg. 179)

political life, Egypt has passed during those five thousand years through many vicissitudes of life, moral and intellectual. Chapter XVII. of the *Book of the Dead* which seems to contain the exposition of the system of the world as it was understood at Heliopolis during the time of the first dynasties, is known to us only by a few copies of the eleventh and twelfth dynasties. Each of the verses composing it was already at the time interpreted in three or four different ways; so different, indeed, that according to this or another school, the Demiurge became the solar fire – *Ra-shoo*, or the primordial water. Fifteen centuries later, the number of readings had increased considerably. Time had, in its course, modified the ideas about the universe and the forces that ruled it. During the hardly 18 centuries then, might not the Egyptian clergy have altered its dogmas during those fifty centuries that separate Theodosius from the King Builders of the Pyramids?”⁴⁴ (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, p. 311-312)

To which H.P. Blavatsky responds,

“Here we believe the eminent Egyptologist is going too far. The exoteric dogmas may often have been altered, the esoteric never. He does not take into account the sacred immutability of the primitive truths, revealed only during the mysteries of initiation. The Egyptian priests *have forgotten much, they altered nothing*. The loss of a good deal of the primitive teaching was due to the sudden deaths of the great Hierophants, who passed away before they had time to reveal *all* to their successors; mostly, to the absence of worthy heirs to the knowledge. Yet they have preserved in their rituals and dogmas the principle teachings of the secret doctrine.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, p. 312)

This is an interesting passage which highlights the underlying hermeneutical approach to religion of H.P. Blavatsky. A distinction is made between esoteric and exoteric aspects in religion. The esoteric would refer to the Theosophical statements, and to the activities rooted in this doctrinal base, as expounded in the Egyptian religion. Different religions would have the Theosophical teachings in varying degrees. The exoteric then would refer to the outward expression. This outward expression is both evolved and created. Religions become exoteric for varying reasons. Corruption through human fallibility may set in over time, esoteric truths may be deliberately veiled for safety reasons, and wilful distortion may account for the exoteric expressions.

⁴⁴ Boris de Zirkoff, editor of H.P. Blavatsky’s *Collected Works*, traced this passage to Maspero, G 1883, *Guide du visiteur au Musee de Boulaq*, Boulaq, Vienna.

Continuing with this theme, in an ‘Editors Note’ in an earlier article, “*Transmigrations of life-atoms*”, H.P. Blavatsky posits three stages of presentation in the Egyptian religion,

“The Priests of Isis were the only true initiates, and their occult teachings were still more veiled than those of the Chaldeans. There was the true doctrine of the Hierophants of the *inner* Temple; then the half-veiled Hieratic tenets of the Priest of the *outer* Temple; and finally, the vulgar popular religion of the great body of the ignorant who were allowed to reverence animals as divine.” (1983, BCW v, pg. 110)

From the Theosophical perspective, there is a related concept which is properly discussed here. The name of the chapter from which the above extract is drawn is, ‘The mystery language and its keys.’ This mystery language is called ‘*senzar*’ and has been comprehensively discussed in a small monograph by John Algeo entitled, *Senzar: the mystery of the mystery language*.⁴⁵ He sums up his findings in a number of conclusions, one of which is revealing in this context,

“The Mystery language is what we now call symbolism: it speaks to our unconscious minds and can be only imperfectly translated into ordinary, logical language. Thus we can think of Senzar as being the whole complex of sacred symbols with expressions of various kinds, but of two chief types: A. the archetypal symbols in myths and fairy tales, allegories and parables, alchemical recipes and biblical history—stories that have a hidden meaning underneath the obvious narrative, stories that bear ‘a double interpretation’; and B. a visual representation of those archetypal symbols in pictographs or hieroglyphic and cipher-like characters whose meaning the initiated can interpret independently of any language.” (Algeo 1988, pg. 28-29)

The positing of the ‘mystery language’ and symbolism in the world religions gives H.P. Blavatsky something to look for. It provides an entrance into the world religions and a reason to interpret what is there. Virtually all written and oral modes of religious expression are included in the above. This gives her a reason and a right to engage with the world’s traditions. The hidden meaning needs to be unveiled by someone who knows the mystery mode of communicating. The content of the message, the Theosophical root teachings, can now be located and extracted.

⁴⁵ John Algeo, at the time of this publication, was listed as Professor of English at the University of Georgia, and as the First Vice President of the Theosophical Society in America.

The exoteric/esoteric distinction is important in H.P. Blavatsky's interpretive efforts. I do not, however, believe that this should lead to a too one-sided presentation. H.P. Blavatsky believed that the Theosophical statements were rational, logical, and true. She hoped for, and expected, vindication from exoteric sources, and she cast her net widely (if not deeply) in mainstream sources to draw support for her statements.

3.3.2 INTERPRETIVE MOVES

For Theosophists the world's religious texts are open to interpretation in various ways. Religious statements can be viewed as 'symbolical' and, therefore, open to explanation, and they can be interpreted in psychological or historical terms. These moves are so pervasive a method in Theosophical literature that they hardly require supporting quotations. A few representative extracts, however, are to be found below,

“For comprehension the Occult Doctrine is based on that of the seven sciences; which sciences find their expression in the seven different applications of the secret records to the exoteric texts. Thus we have to deal with modes of thought on seven entirely different planes of Ideality. Every text relates to, and has to be rendered from, one of the following standpoints-

1. The Realistic plane of thought ;
2. The Idealistic ;
3. The purely Divine or Spiritual.

The other planes too far transcend the average consciousness especially of the materialistic mind, to admit of their being even symbolized in terms of ordinary phraseology. There is no purely *mythical* element in any of the ancient religious texts; but the mode of thought in which they were originally written has to be found out and closely adhered to during the process of interpretation. For, it is either symbolical (archaic mode of thought), emblematical (a later though very ancient mode of thought), parabolical (allegorical), hieroglyphical, or again *logogrammatical...*” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 335)

“While the Eastern Occultists have seven modes of interpretation, the Jews have only four – namely, the real-mystical ; the allegorical ; the moral ; and the literal or *Pashut*.” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 374)

There are numerous references to the ‘seven keys’ of interpretation,

“...-Geometry, the *fifth* divine Science (‘fifth’ – because it is the *fifth key* in the series of the Seven Keys to the Universal esoteric language and symbology)...” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 471)

“...every religious and philosophical symbol had seven meanings attached to it, each pertaining to its legitimate plane of thought *i.e.*, either purely metaphysical or astronomical; psychic or physiological, etc., etc.” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 538)

An example of how any particular deity may be read in Theosophical thought is outlined by H.P. Blavatsky in the following passage,

“Now all the gods of Olympus, as well as those of the Hindu Pantheon and the Rishis, were the septiform personations (1) of the *noumena* of the intelligent Powers of nature ; (2) of Cosmic Forces ; (3) of celestial bodies ; (4) of gods or Dhyan Chohans ; (5) of psychic and spiritual powers ; (6) of divine kings on earth (or the incarnations of the gods) ; and (7) of terrestrial heroes or men. The knowledge how to discern among these seven forms the one that is meant, belonged at all times to the Initiates, whose earliest predecessors had created this symbolical and allegorical system.” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 765)

The notion that symbols are open to levels of interpretation opens the texts to Theosophical content.

3.4 SPECIFIC STRATEGIES OF APPROPRIATION

I have identified a few specific techniques whereby a term or concept is disassociated from its original context and brought into the Theosophical structure. These can be interrelated, and they overlap in some instances.

Firstly, a technical term may be used in a way which differs in meaning from its accepted usage. For example, H.P. Blavatsky writes, “There are Sanskrit words used – ‘Jiva,’ for one – by *trans-Himalayan* adepts, whose meaning differs greatly in verbal applications, from the meaning it has among Brahmins in India.” (Blavatsky 1975, p. 347) Here an eastern term itself is retained,

but its meaning will differ from its Brahmanical usage. The ‘trans-Himalayan adepts’ referred to would be the brotherhood of teachers, or the Theosophical *mahatmas*.

Secondly, a number of familiar terms may be strung together as synonyms, and then be equated with a specific Theosophical term. There are many instances like this, one example being, “...both Eastern Esotericism and the Kabala – in order to bring the Logos within the range of our conceptions – have resolved the abstract synthesis into concrete images ; viz., into the reflections or multiplied aspects of that Logos, or Avalokiteswara, Brahma, Ormazd, Osiris, Adam-Kadmon, call it by any of these names...” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, p. 429) Here, a series of religious figures and deities are related to the logos teachings of Theosophy. Once this correspondence is in place, these figures can be placed onto the Theosophical template, and various associated meanings can be projected onto them.

A third technique would be the expansion of traditional terms and ideas, for example, the *skandhas*. Traditionally in Buddhism there are 5 *skandhas*. In the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, letter xvi, after a brief outline of the five usual *skandhas*, however, we read:

“We add to them two more, the nature and names of which you may learn hereafter. Suffice for the present to let you know that are connected with, and productive of *sakkayaditthi*, ‘the heresy or delusion of individuality’ and *Attavada* ‘the doctrine of Self’...” (1972, pg. 18)

Here, in one of the signature Theosophical moves, the process of ‘sevening’ has necessitated the expansion of the traditional number of *skandhas* to reflect the root number seven. This is sanctioned through the distinction between exoteric and esoteric teachings.

A fourth possible strategy is that of ‘selection’ and ‘rejection’, a process whereby what ‘fits’ or supports the Theosophical statement is selected, and contradictory aspects are ignored. Instead of a specific example, I extract a quotation from *The Secret Doctrine* which gives the general idea. H.P. Blavatsky writes, “In the Egyptian Papyri the whole Cosmogony of the Secret Doctrine is found scattered about in isolated sentences, even in the “Book of Dead.”” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. II pg. 674) The sometimes fragmentary interpretation of religious texts is sanctioned by the distinction between esoteric and exoteric teachings.

A fifth technique I have labelled ‘insertion’. This differs, however, from the above techniques, in that they manipulate what already exists, whereas this technique is concerned with what is not said. Barborka, quoting *The Secret Doctrine*, gives an example of this:

“Manvantaric impulse commences with the re-awakening of Cosmic Ideation (the ‘Universal Mind’) concurrently with, and parallel to the primary emergence of Cosmic Substance – the latter being the manvantaric vehicle of the former – from its undifferentiated *pralayaic* state. Then, absolute wisdom mirrors itself in its Ideation; which, by a transcendental process, superior to and incomprehensible by human Consciousness, results in Cosmic Energy (*Fohat*). Thrilling through the bosom of inert Substance, *Fohat* impels it to activity, and guides its primary differentiations on all the Seven planes of Cosmic Consciousness.” (Barborka 1992, pg. 492)

In many world cosmogonies the birth of the world, or the universe, may be described in terms of one supreme deity giving birth to those that follow. In the Heliopolitan scheme of Ancient Egypt, we see *Atum*, masturbating, or copulating with himself, and giving birth to the gods which follow. The bare bones mythological description is in Theosophical literature fleshed out and rephrased in a ‘scientific’ language.

A sixth manoeuvre, which I hesitate to call an actual technique or strategy, is that of misreading. By this I refer to basic errors in understanding or reading of primary sources. For example, H.P. Blavatsky’s misreading of Herodotus on Menes. In book II of *The Histories* Herodotus clearly lists the kings of Egypt forward from Menes to his present. H.P. Blavatsky states that these kings precede Menes. (Blavatsky 1988, vol. II, pg. 368-369) A misreading in the passage, one would perhaps assign to error. The misreading does, however, work in favour of her main argument – the antiquity of Egypt.

A final note here would be to point to a counter movement to the above strategies. While appropriating concepts and ideas from a variety of sources, the Theosophical presentation also attempts to distinguish and distance itself from those very sources. H.P. Blavatsky never quite adopts an idea unaltered, for example, the concept of *karma*. While definitely adopting the concept, the specifics differ from the presentation of many eastern religions in various ways. An example would be reincarnating into animals from the human species. While appropriating this at the concept level, there is rejection at the level of specifics. This process can involve a move of complication. In this sense a Theosophical teaching is made so complex and specific that no parallel could ever realistically be found. In this way the uniqueness of Theosophy is stressed, and its authority maintained.

3.5 AN EXAMPLE

Theosophical interpretation can sometimes be quite intricately woven into the source material it is engaging with. Theosophical interpretation is not simply a question of complete ‘nonsense’, or ‘falsity’. The following example highlights some of the issues involved in Theosophical interpretations of source material. H.P. Blavatsky, discussing initiations and pyramids in Egypt, writes:

“Let him turn to some most suggestive Egyptian *bas reliefs*. One especially from the temple of Philoe, represents a scene of *initiation*. Two Gods-Hierophants, one with the head of a hawk (the Sun), the other *ibis*-headed (Mercury, Thoth, the god of Wisdom and secret learning, the assessor of Osiris-Sun), are standing over the body of a candidate just initiated. They are in the act of pouring on his head a double stream of water (the water of life and new *birth*), which stream is interlaced in the shape of a cross and full of small ansated crosses. This is allegorical of the awakening of the candidate (now an Initiate), when the beams of the morning sun (Osiris) strike the crown of his head (*his entranced body being placed on its wooden tau so as to receive the rays*). Then appeared the Hierophants-Initiators, and the sacramental words were pronounced, ostensibly, to the Sun-Osiris, addressed in reality to the Spirit Sun within, enlightening the newly-born man.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 558-559)

Boris de Zirkoff, editor of H.P. Blavatsky’s *Collected Works*, notes that he was unable to locate the image mentioned in any works on the Temple of Philae. He reproduces an image from Kom-Ombos which mirrors the description in the passage above.⁴⁶ I reproduce the image,

⁴⁶ Blavatsky, HP 1962, *H.P. Blavatsky: collected writings 1888, vol. ix*, 2nd edn, The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill, U.S.A. See page 273.

IMAGE 1 : PURIFICATION SCENE



THOTH AND HORUS PURIFYING
THE KING
From Kôm-Ombô, Egypt.

According to de Zirkoff the image represents Thoth and Horus purifying the King. I have located a source which H.P. Blavatsky could have known which shows a similar scene, but attributes it to the Temple of Philae, as in her passage. In the *Description de l'Égypte*⁴⁷ published from 1809 one can find the following image,

IMAGE 2 : PURIFICATION SCENE



This image is commented on again in *Blavatsky Collected Works* xiv, where she writes,

⁴⁷ Neret, G 2007, *Description de l'Égypte: publiée par les orders de Napoleon Bonaparte*, Taschen, Köln.

“The candidate is between two divine sponsors; one “Osiris-Sun” with the head of a hawk, representing life, the other Mercury – the ibis-headed, psychopompic genius, who guides the Souls after death to their new abode, Hades – standing for the death of the physical body, figuratively. Both are shown pouring the ‘stream of life’, the water of purification, on the head of the Initiate, the two streams of which, interlacing, form a cross.” (1985, pg. 148)

H.P. Blavatsky suggests that priests of antiquity adopted the names of the gods they served.⁴⁸ That this scene presents only human participants is possible in the Theosophical reading of the relief. The Theosophical symmetry of the scene as described is unmistakable. The two deities represent the Sun and Mercury, or in Theosophical terms, the *jīva* (or *atman*) and *buddhi* principle. They radiate ‘life’ (new life, initiatory life) onto the human aspect (the personality, ego) of the person, the *manas*. By illuminating the mental principle the individual becomes an adept. The link between the mind and the inner principles is established. Theosophically speaking, then, the image references an initiatory context where an initiate is ‘reborn’ as an adept after successfully passing the requisite trials. The use of loaded terms like ‘candidate’ in the passage reinforces this impression.

The bas relief referred to by H.P. Blavatsky is fairly widespread in Egyptian temples. (Gardiner, 1950) It is a complex image which can differ in presentation and context in various temples. For example, some of the reliefs show Horus and Seth pouring libation on the King, while often it is Horus and Thoth who are represented. Some of the images show the poured water as being represented by *ankh* (life) symbol alone, while other reliefs show the *ankh* symbol interlaced with the symbol for divine power. Water had a sacred character in Ancient Egypt and was believed to be endowed with life giving, revivifying, healing and purification properties. Water, linked to the Nile inundation and life giving properties, was also associated with the birth of the Sun God who rose (was reborn) every morning in the East from the cosmic waters of Nun (on earth the Nile.)

The bas relief could be presented in various contexts. It could be associated with the mortuary/funerary cult where the deceased was purified and revived by the libation from the attending deities. The deceased was reborn, brought back to life, and purified so that they could enter the afterlife, be judged and meet the gods. The bas relief could also represent the coronation ceremony of the king. The Pharaoh was purified, given new life, and offered the

⁴⁸ *The Secret Doctrine*, 1988, vol. II, pg. 379.

symbols of power and dominion by the attending deities of Horus and Thoth. Additionally it is suggested the bas reliefs could represent one step in a series of ritual acts which the king undertook daily. Likened to the Sun which was purified and born from the primeval waters daily, so the king purified and was reborn as part of certain Temple ceremonies. Associated with this could be that any Temple official participating in sacred rituals would need to be purified and born anew to enter the Temple and see the supreme god in its precincts.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a damaged bas relief stone from the Temple of Harendotes on the Island of Philae. Dating from CE41-68 it shows the pharaoh having water, in the form of *ankh* and *was* symbols, being poured onto his head. The pharaoh in this relief is thought to be either Nero or Claudius.

On a superficial level of basic detail one could point to similarities between H.P. Blavatsky's interpretation and that of Egyptology. Both see a scene of initiation, rebirth and new life. While H.P. Blavatsky does not mention it in her extracts, I feel Theosophy would have no problem reading 'pharaoh' for the 'candidate' receiving the purifying and life giving waters. Although she does not mention the *was* symbol of dominion and divine power, not all reliefs have this additional symbol displayed. On a contextual level, however, Theosophy and modern Egyptology begin to part ways. Theosophy has content specific details of initiations involving aspects of the human being and heightened states of consciousness and knowledge. The concept of initiations in Egyptology is a contested one. Even where admitted, they bear no relation to Theosophical perspectives. Re-contextualisation is a fundamental tool of Theosophical interpretation and it is at this level that Theosophical perspectives begin to break down. A strategic and selective reading of a text also typifies the nature of the Theosophical engagement with religion of Ancient Egypt.

3.6 AN ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE

In fairness, the self understanding of Theosophists should be mentioned. Speaking to members of the Theosophical Society, or reading Theosophical literature, one might come away with the idea that Theosophy has no dogmas or set beliefs. I feel I have dealt with this in some detail above. I believe that the Theosophical public presentation of itself does not fully reflect the doctrinal or lived reality of the Society. As examples of texts members may draw on to support the open, democratic nature of the Theosophical Society, I quote two examples.

In the first, referring to the early genesis of humanity, H.P. Blavatsky notes,

“Till then he was, according to tradition and Occult teaching, ‘a god on earth who had fallen into matter,’ or generation. This may or may not be accepted, since the Secret Doctrine does not impose itself as an infallible dogma ; and since, whether its prehistoric records are accepted or rejected, ...” (1988, vol. II, pg. 261)

And, from a work by Robert Bowen,

“She (H.P. Blavatsky) says: If one imagines that one is going to get a satisfactory picture of the constitution of the Universe from the S.D. (*The Secret Doctrine*) one will get only confusion from its study. It is not meant to give any such final verdict on existence, but to LEAD TOWARDS THE TRUTH.” (1979, pg. 8.)

“...TRUTH lies beyond any ideas we can formulate or express.” (1879, pg. 9.)

“Come to the S.D. (she says) without any hope of getting the final Truth of existence from it, or with any idea other than seeing how far it may lead TOWARDS the Truth. See in study a means of exercising and developing the mind never touched by other studies.” (1979, pg. 9)

The first reading seems to be a play on words. Theosophically speaking the Esoteric teachings are true, indeed they inevitably must be given the authority of the source, the *mahatmas*. They are, however, not imposed on anyone. That is, one is free to be a member of the Theosophical Society, and not accept the Theosophical teachings. This does not mean they are not true; it simply means membership of the Outer Society does not depend on acceptance of them.⁴⁹ It can also be noted, that, outside of H.P. Blavatsky and a very few others, we have no access to the “tradition”, Occult teachings” and “prehistoric records”. As such, there can be no real internal challenge to them, and even outside critiques will be judged as coming from a position of ignorance.

The second set of extracts is potentially problematic to the perspective I have taken. I believe, however, that the preponderance of statements, the orientation of members to the teachings,

⁴⁹ To become a member of the Theosophical Society one had (and has) to subscribe to one of the Three Objects of the Society. These objects in brief are, to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood, to promote the study of Aryan and other scriptures, and to investigate the hidden mysteries in nature. They have undergone some changes over time and in the different Societies.

the corrective and interpretive nature of the teachings, and the innate authority of the sources of Theosophy (H.P. Blavatsky and the *mahatmas*) speak against any provisional meanings of teachings in *The Secret Doctrine*. If the *Secret Doctrine* was, in fact, intended primarily as a textual meditation technique (and not a body of knowledge) its constant references to, and polemics against science, and its essentially corrective nature, seems out of place.

This alternate reading has also entered the academic discourse around Theosophy. Kraft can write,

“...but they [the Mahatmas] are not, Blavatsky emphasised, infallible or all-knowing. Nor should her own [H.P. Blavatsky] writings – produced through their training, inspiration and contribution – be regarded as conclusive revelation.” (Kraft, 2002, pg. 155)

Compare this, however, to Santucci in the *Theosophical History* journal, an extract of which I have already produced above,

“Any discussion of a Theosophical teaching, especially one as important as this one, must include the role of Blavatsky in Theosophy. ...there is little doubt in my mind that most assumptions about Theosophy center on an ideology surrounding Blavatsky. She, as the prophet of the Master or Mahatma, is the sole source of Theosophical philosophy; all others who follow her are commentators at most. Because of her special relationship with the Masters, as claimed by Theosophists, and her unique insight, the underlying panoptic wisdom of the teachings that she had revealed can be substantiated by both Western and Eastern philosophy, religion and science. Or to paraphrase, the Ancient Wisdom is proclaimed *ex cathedra* by Blavatsky with proof located in the fossil remains of a vast empire of facts and data located in the athenaeums of West and East, all comprising Truth as it really is, not what it should be.”(2007, vol. xiii, no.4, pg. 1)

Of these two readings of H.P. Blavatsky, that of Santucci rings true. Both the lived Theosophical experience and the Theosophical texts strongly suggest to me that Santucci has correctly read the intent of the Theosophical writings.

It is also true that in the *Mahatma Letters* the *mahatmas* do not claim infallibility, when writing “not as an adept”. (1972, pg. 83, 178) The implication is that the *mahatmas*, despite their advanced spiritual standing, can still act and err as ordinary persons. There is, however, little

doubt in my mind that in these passages they are referring to ‘slips’ and minor errors in details. (That is, when they are not actually directly referring to plagiarism accusations of the day.) If the writings of the *mahatmas* are not essentially ‘correct’, then Theosophists need to begin distinguishing correct from potentially incorrect statements. Lacking any authority to match the *mahatmas*, I predict that this is unlikely ever to occur.

Finally, from *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“No true theosophist, from the most ignorant up to the most learned, ought to claim infallibility for anything he may say or write upon occult matters. The chief point is to admit that, in many a way, in the classification of either cosmic or human principles, in addition to mistakes in the order of evolution, and especially on metaphysical questions, those of us who pretend to teach others more ignorant than ourselves – are all liable to err. Thus mistakes have been made in ‘*Isis Unveiled*,’ in ‘*Esoteric Buddhism*,’ in ‘*Man*,’ in ‘*Magic: White and Black*,’ etc., etc.; and more than one mistake is likely to be found in the present work. This cannot be helped. For a large or even a small work on such abstruse subjects to be entirely exempt from error and blunder, it would have to be written from its first to its last page by a great adept, if not by an Avatar.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 640)

I have raised most of my counterpoints to statements of this nature above. If there are errors in this work, who is able and authorised to detail them? What is the nature of the errors contemplated by H.P. Blavatsky, minor details or fundamental ideas? If the *Secret Doctrine*, which was checked by the *mahatmas* and a work released under *karmic* and cyclic law, can contain errors we must know the nature of these errors. How are errors going to be checked when access to source works and personages are restricted? H.P. Blavatsky is caught between two worlds, the scientific and the esoteric. She attempts to meet the criteria of science hence the nods towards ‘fallibility’; as she is, however, also rooted in an occultistic discourse of revelation and authority, her works are characterised by a sense of ‘infallibility’. I believe that placing *The Secret Doctrine* exclusively into one or the other camp exclusively does an injustice to the work.

Any alternate reading of Theosophy to my outline would simply be in opposition (or potentially complementary) to mine above. It would not negate it. The extracts I have drawn from the writings of H.P. Blavatsky would need to be explained by proponents of any such alternate reading.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Despite its protestations, Theosophy can be clearly identified as a religion and as functioning in religious ways.⁵⁰ In various ways, the Society attempts to distinguish between its teachings and those of other religions. This distinction, rooted in an esoteric/exoteric polarity, can be reflected also as true and untrue or complete and limited depending on the context.

Theosophical teachings, rooted in the authority of the *mahatmas* and H.P. Blavatsky's special relation to them, are presented as being true, that is mirroring the actual workings of nature. The Outer Society does not require acceptance of these teachings, access to the Inner Society, however, would be unavoidably linked to the acceptance of these teachings.

Theosophical statements are content specific, that is, they are not vague general statements open to a wide variety of interpretations. H.P. Blavatsky left voluminous writings that clarify and explain many of the basic teachings of Theosophy. Owing to this content specificity and the charismatic nature of the author, Theosophical statements, especially in *The Secret Doctrine*, are viewed as definitive and indisputable by members.

The Secret Doctrine itself is the supreme attempt of H.P. Blavatsky to establish Theosophy in a variety of fields, ranging from the scientific to the religious and philosophical. The work is a grand synthesis which attempts to insert an already existing Theosophy into each of these fields of knowledge. For Theosophists, Theosophy, in addition to being a body of teachings, also presents a hermeneutical method of interpretation. Theosophical scholars apply the underlying Theosophical assumptions of a perennial philosophical tradition, to which they have unique access, in order to interpret religious traditions around the world.

From an academic perspective, the *Secret Doctrine* appropriates the authority of these various religious traditions. Interpretation is an act of domination and appropriation. Various techniques are used by Theosophy to insert and create content in the world's various traditions and other fields of knowledge. Underlying these techniques is a distinction between esoteric

⁵⁰ Definitions are important in this process. I was informed by the previous leader of the Theosophical Society Pasadena in South Africa that the Society had been denied the status of religion by the South African Government because it did not meet its definition, which included that religions had priests. This would have been in the 60's and 70' when South Africa was governed by Christian conservatives.

and exoteric and a functional and structural strategy of comparison of any tradition against the Theosophical template.

In the following two chapters, I examine how H.P. Blavatsky, in *The Secret Doctrine*, engages with the Egyptian religion on two topics. In chapter four I examine how the Theosophical conception of the human being is related to the Egyptian conception. In chapter five I review how this process of insertion and appropriation is undertaken in relation to the Afterlife as presented in the Egyptian religion.

Theosophy presents itself as an interpretive method of uncovering actual meanings and truths obscured in world religions. In the following chapters, I examine the extent to which this is a valid method and what the results of this method are.

This chapter examines H.P. Blavatsky's presentation of the human constitution in the Ancient Egyptian religion. By 'constitution' I mean the total conception of what makes up a complete human being. The human constitution, or microcosm, is a central topic of Theosophy and of *The Secret Doctrine*. The second volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, entitled 'Anthropogenesis', is an outline of the evolution of life in general on earth and of human life in particular. This volume covers the historical evolution of humanity, and, related to this, the gradual unfolding of the human individual. Coupled with the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, entitled 'Cosmogogenesis', these two volumes cover in scope the microcosmic and macrocosmic teachings of Theosophy.

Following some introductory comments, the first section of this chapter is an outline of the general Theosophical presentation of the human constitution in its own terms. The second section presents H.P. Blavatsky's statements on the constitution of the human being in the Egyptian religion. In the third section of this chapter, I outline the views of contemporary mainstream Egyptology and compare them in brief against the Theosophical presentation.

My primary aim is to present the teachings of H.P. Blavatsky on the Egyptian human constitution as outlined in *The Secret Doctrine*. I will, however, draw on her other writings where appropriate. Linked to this is an assessment of her views against those of contemporary Egyptologists. Two secondary aims are to identify the sources H.P. Blavatsky drew on and to examine the ways in which she drew the concepts of Ancient Egypt into her Theosophical scheme. (Or, conceived alternately, how she inserted her Theosophical content into the Egyptian religion.)

The two Theosophical methods of comparison are the structural placement onto the Theosophical template of Egyptian concepts, and a functional evaluation of Egyptian principles against Theosophical conceptions. As these are the methods through which Theosophy engages with world religions, it is also by means of these two processes (structural placement and functional evaluation) that the academic can assess the Theosophical presentation. I find the idea of structural comparisons persuasive as it is on the identification of patterns and relationships between concepts that much of the Theosophical interpretation of religion rests. From the Theosophical perspective their pattern or grid represents the totality of all that exists

from the highest spiritual realms to the lowest material expression. As there can be nothing outside of these parameters, everything must have its place on it. The functional evaluation also invariably resolves various concepts onto the structural Theosophical grid. These modes of evaluation are inevitable, as in the Theosophical conception nature is ordered and sequential, unfolding in set patterns. For members, the Theosophical teachings and the Theosophical template are descriptions of nature itself.

The Theosophical teachings are presented as being scientific (true, rational, verifiable and objective) statements about nature. The different world religions, from the Theosophical perspective, also attempt to describe the same object – nature as it is. According to Theosophy, each religion is successful in this endeavour to varying degrees. It is also the Theosophical contention that the founding root of the world's various religions was the uniform Ancient Wisdom Tradition. All that is required to unlock the hidden intent and content contained in world religions is a common terminology, the Theosophical terminology. With this theoretical background, Theosophy seeks to locate its basic teachings in the religions of the world. I have discussed this in more detail in chapter three.

For Theosophists then, there exists a fundamental relationship between Egyptian and Theosophical conceptions of the individual. As both are describing the same object, it remains for Theosophical insights to unlock the 'true' meaning of Egyptian texts. 'True' religion is about describing nature as it is, and it remains for Theosophy to evaluate the extent to which world religions have accomplished this. For the academic, the process of evaluating the Theosophical process of comparison is accomplished by a common language (English) and resort to the level of definition of each tradition. (It may be suggested that entertaining the Theosophical statements in this manner is somehow sympathetic to Theosophical thought; in line with Hanegraaff's 'methodological agnosticism', however, this seems unavoidable.)

The functional comparison will also entail looking at concepts and ideas at a more fundamental level than that of simple comparison of place in a structure. The function and action of an entity, or aspect of an entity, in the Theosophical imagination, will be an important basis by which comparable concepts in the Egyptian religion can be located.

An example of Theosophical attempts to correlate the Egyptian and Theosophical scheme can be found in the following table, which I reproduce and adapt from an article, *Egyptian teachings in the light of Theosophy*:

TABLE 1 : MICROCOSMIC AND MACROCOSMIC CORRESPONDENCES

Formless - Horus the Elder	1...Milky Way		
	2. Seraphim - Nebulae: Comets		
	3. Cherubim - Fixed Stars	Ra	Paramatman
Form - Horus the Younger	4. Thrones - Saturn	Osiris	Aakhu - Atman
	5. Dominations - Jupiter	Isis	Khaibit - Buddhi
	6. Virtues - Mars		Ba - Higher Manas
	7. Powers - Sun	Thoth	Ab - Lower Manas
	8. Principalities - Venus	Set	Ku - Kama
	9. Archangels - Mercury	Anubis	Anch - Linga-sariria
	Angels - Moon	Nephthys	- Prana - Jiva
	Men - Earth		Khat - Sthula-sarira

(Whellams & Oderberg, 1941, pg. 428)

This article is one of few I have found which discusses Theosophical and Egyptian correspondences in some detail. For example, combinations of gods are discussed and equivalent Theosophical terms proposed.

I have encountered a number of comparative lists by post-Blavatsky Theosophical authors. Another example, from a pseudonymous Hetep-en-Neter, correlates the principles as follows,

TABLE 2 : EGYPTIAN AND THEOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

Egyptian principle	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Kaybet</i>	<i>Sekhem</i>	<i>Ankh</i>	<i>Ba and Ab</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>Akh</i>	“The Abode of the gods”
Theosophical principle	Body – <i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Kama</i>	<i>Prana</i>	Lower- <i>Manas</i>	Higher- <i>Manas</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	All – inclusive principle, Life. (<i>I extrapolate that Atman is meant, though it is not so stated.</i>)

(1937, pg. 21)

We can immediately note that the order differs from that of Table 1. This type of discrepancy raises a number of issues, particularly in relation to the content specific nature of the Theosophical statements and the essentially definitive nature of the ‘Ancient Wisdom Tradition’. It is not, however, my intention to discuss these presentations in detail here. Relevant to my dissertation is that this type of comparison is fundamental to the Theosophical endeavour of interpreting and appropriating. In theory, one could now reread an Egyptian text substituting Egyptian words with the Theosophical equivalents. Theosophical meaning is inserted into Egyptian texts through this system of correspondence.

In Theosophical works, selected quotations and dislocated extracts are often presented as supporting the general Theosophical interpretation. Rarely does one find in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky a sustained, detailed study to ‘prove’ a particular thesis of correspondence.¹

¹ Compare, for example, L.V. Zabkar’s 184 page study entitled, “*A study of the ba concept in Ancient Egyptian texts*”. H.P. Blavatsky shows no apparent attempt to assess a concept in its

This type of sustained engagement with the original texts can also be rare (though not totally unknown²) in Theosophical literature in general. This is possibly because, in Theosophical circles, it is presumed that Theosophy and H.P. Blavatsky have something legitimate to say about a given topic. Its importance or relevance does not need to be proved; it is presumed and rests to a large extent on the charisma and authority of H.P. Blavatsky and the *mahatmas*. It is also possible that Theosophists have, to a certain extent, abandoned the attempt to engage with mainstream scholarship. This de-contextualising, and a-historical selection of quotations, is fundamental to the Theosophical engagement with Egyptian texts. I suspect that, without the enabling power of this process of uncritical selection, much Theosophical commentary would become mired in irresolvable internal debate and argumentation.

4.1 INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

The seven-fold presentation of the human constitution is a fundamental tenet of mature Theosophy. While the exact nature of the principles did evolve in the Theosophical presentation of H.P. Blavatsky, the basic seven-fold structure remained constant.³ It is generally argued by scholars that she did not present a seven-fold constitution in *Isis Unveiled*⁴. Instead a three-fold division was outlined. Retrospectively, H.P. Blavatsky explained this by suggesting the seven-fold division was too dangerous to reveal at the time to an unprepared audience. While H.P. Blavatsky does admit that other divisions of the individual (e.g. four-fold, five-fold etc.) can exist as functional esoteric systems, she resolves them into her seven-fold presentation, which assumes ancient primacy.⁵ *The Secret Doctrine* presents the familiar Theosophical seven-fold human constitution. I will examine only the principles, and any refinement of the Theosophical presentation of the principles, insofar as an explanation of H.P. Blavatsky's writings on Ancient Egypt requires it.

historical and textual context and then draw conclusions. Instead, it would seem she brings a predetermined solution to a question.

² A solid example would be the works on early Christianity and Gnosticism by the early Theosophical scholar, G.R.S. Mead

³ In the *Esoteric Instructions* and *Inner Group teachings* of H.P. Blavatsky there is a further categorising of the principles presented in the *Secret Doctrine* and other early writings. A more esoteric division is presented in these initially restricted writings.

⁴ See brief discussion of this in Goodrick-Clarke, 2004, pg. 148.

⁵ For a discussion of this issue by H.P. Blavatsky one can read two articles in her *Collected Works* vol. vii., *Classification of "Principles"*, and *Re-classification on principles*.

In the Theosophical system, the division of the seven human principles form a homology with the seven-fold division of the macrocosm. In Theosophical thought the microcosm/macrocosm scheme can be configured in various ways. The macrocosm is usually figured as either the Earth Planetary Chain or the Solar System as a whole. The microcosm is then conceived as being the human individual. It could, however, be the planetary chain of the earth conceived as the microcosm and the solar system the macrocosm. There could be various permutations.

The human microcosm is also intimately related to the evolutionary rounds and races teachings of Theosophy. Each principle continues evolving and manifesting itself during the corresponding rounds and root-races. This system of correspondence is very important in Theosophy, and it dominates the esoteric writings of H.P. Blavatsky. Everything is built into a system of relationships, from colours, sounds, metals, states of matter, to body parts, planets and so on. H.P. Blavatsky notes in her *Collected Works* vol. xii,

“...the correspondences between Colors, Sounds and ‘Principles’ were given; and those who have read the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine* will remember that these seven principles are derived from the seven great Hierarchies of Angels or Dhyanichohans, which are, in their turn, associated with Colors and Sounds, and form collectively the Manifested Logos.” (1980, pg. 561)

In terms of human evolution, during each of the seven rounds and root-races, a different principle and sub-principle is evolved. In the Theosophical conception, general humanity, at present, is said to be in the fourth round and the fifth root-race. This effectively means that humanity is evolving the mental (*manas*, fifth) sub-division of the *kama* principle (fourth principle). What is important to note here is that the seven principles are directly related to the seven races and, in a broader context, to the seven rounds and even to the seven sacred planets of our solar system. This system of correlation is relevant because if, for example, a religion was found to teach only a five-fold division of the individual this would create a potential interpretive problem for Theosophy as the link to the root races would be difficult to establish. (See Appendix Four.)

An interesting introductory study of the seven principles as represented by H.P. Blavatsky and later Theosophical writers can be found in Julie Hall’s article, *The Saptaparna: the meaning*

and origins of the Theosophical septenary constitution of man. (2007, pg. 5-38)⁶ This is a wide-ranging article outlining the evolution of the presentation of the seven-fold constitution in Theosophical writings, discussing potential sources for the teaching, and ending with a view on the ‘orientalism’ charge against Theosophy. It is useful to sketch very briefly, as a general background, some of the points she raises, focusing on origins and sources.

A specific originating historical source for the seven-fold Theosophical classification of the human constitution has not been located. From the potential western sources, Ancient Egypt, Neo-platonism, the Kabbalah, Paracelsus, Allan Kardec, and Spiritism are identified. Added to this would be general traditional western esoteric sources like freemasonic literature and the writing of Jacob Boehme. Potential eastern influences would be Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism. A likely important influence would have been T. Subba Row, an early eastern contact of H.P. Blavatsky who was a Brahmin lawyer. A synthesising aspect would have been H.P. Blavatsky’s own creative re-ordering and selection from these sources. Some of the potential specific literary sources which may have influenced H.P. Blavatsky are mentioned by Hall throughout her article; none of the western or eastern sources, however, reflect exactly the Theosophical schema

Hall’s article does not examine the potential correspondences between these various systems and the Theosophical scheme. This absence in the article might give the impression that correspondences are somehow possible. (By this I mean that there is some real basis for comparison – one may of course compare *any* two things with no real or potential correspondence being possible.) Irrespective of whether H.P. Blavatsky gave ‘valid’ correspondences, the very process of comparison and paralleling is entertained. As I review the opinions of contemporary Egyptologists, we will see that this actual process is called into question. Contemporary Egyptologists call into question the imposition of Greek and Christian categories of body, mind, and soul onto Egyptian thought, which imposition H.P. Blavatsky reflects. According to Egyptologists, the Ancient Egyptians thought in a unique way about the human being, one which did not entertain the usual categories current in Greek and Western philosophical thought. The ability to think outside of these Western categories is a challenge to Theosophical thought and academic thought.⁷

⁶ At the time of writing the article, Julie Hall was listed as a final year Ph.D student in Western Esotericism at the University of Exeter.

⁷ See R.B. Finnestad’s fascinating article on this in relation to Ancient Egypt, ‘*On transposing soul and body into a monistic conception of being: an example from Ancient Egypt*’. (1986)

A final point to note from Hall's article is that the Theosophical scheme of the seven human principles was first presented in 1881 by A.O. Hume, four years after the publication of *Isis Unveiled*. (2007, pg. 5) Theosophical writings, prior to the presentation of the actual Theosophical system, cannot show the same focussed attempt of appropriation and re-interpretation. Theosophy needed to exist before it could begin engaging in detail with other world traditions.

4.2. THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION IN THEOSOPHY

The seven-fold division of the human constitution is so fundamental to the Theosophical teachings that a basic form of it is presented in most Theosophical books. Amongst others, the source I have found useful, and used, is Barborka's *The Divine Plan*. It has become popular to refer to various 'Theosophies', for example that of Leadbeater, Besant, Blavatsky, etc. For this reason, when examining the thoughts of H.P. Blavatsky (as opposed to Theosophy in a more general sense), it is important to refer to either primary texts of H.P. Blavatsky or to texts rooted directly in writings of H.P. Blavatsky so that 'theosophical systems' are not confused. (In practice, this 'separating' is quite difficult owing to the interrelated nature of Theosophical works and the way in which different ideas permeate the various Theosophical Societies in general.)

H.P. Blavatsky's presentation of the Egyptian principles is relatively brief, and, therefore, it is necessary to sketch only the basic outline of the Theosophical principles here. There is some debate over the order or numeration of the Theosophical principles in her writings. These debates revolve chiefly around the order of the *prana* and *linga-sarira* principles. In some of her writings, H.P. Blavatsky presented the order as *sthula-sarira*, *prana*, *linga-sarira* instead of the now more common *sthula-sarira*, *linga-sarira*, *prana*. While this is an interesting historical observation, it is essentially a non-issue in relation to my dissertation. In a table in the *Secret Doctrine*, she does tabulate the order as, *sthula-sarira*, *prana*, *linga-sarira*. (1988, vol. I, pg. 157) In that table, however, she identifies the *linga-sarira* as the 'vehicle' of *prana* which in my opinion reverses this order to reflect the more common presentation. William Quan Judge, easily the most important member of the early Theosophical Society and a founding member, remarked on this issue that the later arrangement does "not substantially alter it." (1973, pg. 35) I will present various presentations from H.P. Blavatsky's writings.

The principles are presented in various ways in H.P. Blavatsky's writings. The groupings are not all simple equivalent presentations of the same object. The main difference is that some principles are left out of the scheme, and, to make up the numbers, either a new 'principle' is inserted or existing principles are split. The seven-fold division, however, remains constant. I will tabulate some of the main presentations and then discuss the principles in more detail.

TABLE 3 : THE SEVEN THEOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

<i>The Secret Doctrine</i> vol. I, pg. 157. Publ. 1888.	De Zirkoff, <i>The Dream that never dies</i> , pg. 117. Publ. 1953.	De Zirkoff, <i>The Dream that never dies</i> , pg. 117. Publ. 1953.	<i>Key to Theosophy</i> , pg. 90. Publ. 1889	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works</i> , <i>vol. XII</i> , Diagram I. Publ. 1889-1890	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works</i> , <i>vol. XII</i> , pg. 529. Publ. 1889-1890	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works</i> , <i>vol. XII</i> , pg. 607. Publ. 1889-1890	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works</i> , <i>vol. XII</i> , pg. 614. Publ. 1889-1890	<i>Inner Group Teachings</i> , pg. 107. Recorded in 1890
<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Rupa or Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	Living body in <i>Prana</i> or animal Life	Objective
<i>Prana - Life</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	Astral
The vehicle of <i>Prana</i> - astral body, <i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Kama-Rupa</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	Lower- <i>Manas</i>	<i>Kama (Rupa)</i>	<i>Kama-Prana</i>
<i>Kama-Rupa</i>	<i>Kama</i>	Lower- <i>Manas</i>	<i>Kama-rupa</i>	Lower- <i>Manas</i>	<i>Kama</i>	<i>Manas</i>	<i>Kama-Manas</i>	<i>Kama-Manas</i>
Mind	<i>Manas</i>	Higher- <i>Manas</i>	<i>Manas</i>	<i>Manas</i>	<i>Manas</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Manas</i> - EGO	<i>Manas</i> - Higher Ego
Spiritual Soul - <i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	Auric Egg	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Buddhi-Manas</i>
<i>Atma</i>	<i>Atman</i>	<i>Atman</i>	<i>Atman</i>	Auric Egg	Auric Egg	<i>Atman</i>	Auric Egg	Auric Egg

(I include Boris de Zirkoff's later presentation as this is the most common way the principles are expressed by later Theosophists.)

The various presentations of the principles are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is of historical interest that different schematic systems were presented by H.P. Blavatsky. Secondly, in terms of the Theosophical interpretive techniques, the subtle differences in the principles *enable* the Theosophical engagement with the world's religions. By presenting various combinations of principles, the interpretive power is increased. The seven-fold basic principles are the foundation of other schemes which also delineate the human being. An example would be the '*nirmanakaya*', '*sambhogakaya*' and '*dharmakaya*' vestures⁸ as interpreted by Theosophy, where the separate vestures are made up of different combinations of the various principles. There are many other terms associated with the delineation of the human being, and a glance through a Theosophical dictionary will reveal an array of teachings around this topic. Two examples of this are the *sutratman* and the *jivatman*.

The Theosophical principles are, therefore, not set out in just one defined scheme. There are variations of the standard scheme, variations which are harnessed in Theosophy's interpretive applications. The variations together have greater explanatory power and allow for greater flexibility in the interpretations of world religions. There is not a uniform progression, though, and various schemes can be present simultaneously in the later works of H.P. Blavatsky. This does present one potential complication in understanding statements made in *The Secret Doctrine*. A neutral term like 'shadow', unexplained in the text, may retrospectively be interpreted according to Theosophical presentations which postdate *The Secret Doctrine*. (The teachings in the *Esoteric Instructions* and *Inner Group* teachings postdate *The Secret Doctrine*.) As the Theosophical teachings evolved in complexity their ability to respond to external criticisms would have evolved too. Its attempts to respond to criticisms of their techniques would have increased their interpretive power. That they were ultimately unsuccessful in gaining mainstream acceptance is of historical interest. For the general purposes of this dissertation, I will use the basic division of *atman*, *buddhi*, *manas*, *kama*, *prana*, *linga-sarira*, and *sthula-sarira*. I will stray from this only when H.P. Blavatsky does so in a specific extract which may be under discussion.

The Theosophical 'esoteric system' accepts a seven-fold division of the individual and of nature.⁹ The ontological status of these principles, and by extension the planes, is slightly

⁸ The term "vesture" refers to a 'body' or 'vehicle' in Theosophical thought.

⁹ The *Stanzas of Dzyan* endorses this, "(3) WHEN THE ONE BECOMES TWO - THE "THREE-FOLD" APPEARS (a). THE THREE ARE (*linked into*) ONE; AND IT IS OUR THREAD, O LANOO, THE HEART OF THE MAN-PLANT, CALLED SAPTAPARNA (b)." (Blavatsky, 1988, pg. 231)

ambiguous. The six lower principles are aspects of the one principle, *atman*, which itself is rooted in the 'One' principle of which all things are expressions. *Atman* itself also interpenetrates those principles below it. The six lower principles (*sthula-sarira* to *buddhi*), however, are not however totally illusory. They partake in some way of the divine reality which underlies all things. Practically they (all the principles) will become 'one' only at the end of a great cycle, after which there will be a new re-embodiment.¹⁰ (Theosophy struggles with this concept macrocosmically in terms of conceptualising how the various planes of existence relate to the 'One reality'. Various concepts are evoked to explain the relationship; for example, the One Reality 'radiates' the lower planes. 'Radiate' being used here in preference to 'emanate'.)

Barborka notes that the seven-fold principles denote the structure of the human being but not how the principles function in practicality. It is a theoretical structure and a living reality, but other presentations can be used in explaining the practical living functions of the individual. (1992, pg. 178) For example, Theosophy explains that the seven principles as configured cannot be separated without the individual dying, but when the individual is conceived in another manner separation is possible.

Not just human beings, but plants, animals, the solar system, and galaxies can all be conceived of in the seven-fold manner. Everything in the Theosophical conception is alive, and has life and consciousness of some sort associated with it. Differentiating the plant from the animal from the human is not a question of fundamental structure, but of evolution and consciousness levels. The awakening of the principles is associated with evolution and, potentially, initiation, which is a hastened evolution. Each principle is also conceived of as being seven-fold. For example, the *manas* principle will have an *atman* aspect, a *buddhi* aspect, a mental aspect, and so on. The principles unfold from *atman* downwards and their awakening is through the process of evolution. The principles of the individual can exist prior to their awakened functioning. Presently humanity is said to be in its fourth round and fifth root race, meaning that the mental aspect of the *kama* principles is being awakened. The full and true mental principle (*manas*) of the human being will, evolutionarily speaking, only begin being awakened far in the future. There are different substances associated with each plane and with each principle. The consciousness side of nature is manifest through substances and matters

¹⁰ One can get a sense of H.P. Blavatsky's take on this difficult metaphysical and philosophical issue in an article in her *Collected Works* vii, where she notes, "...I maintain as an occultist, on the authority of the Secret Doctrine, that though merged entirely into Parabrahm, man's spirit while not individual *per se*, yet preserves its distinct individuality in Paranirvana, owing to the accumulation in it of the aggregates, or *skandhas*..." (1975, pg. 51)

appropriate to each plane. In a similar manner, the higher principles manifest on the lower planes through the lower principles.

Below I outline some of the teachings associated with the human principles tabulated above.

Atman – The highest self, universal. Sometimes it is translated as spirit. In the more esoteric teachings of H.P. Blavatsky it is not regarded strictly as a human principle.¹¹ The ‘auric egg’ is substituted for this principle – i.e. the seventh principle. *Atman* is a universal principle, pure cosmic consciousness and the ‘breath of the absolute’. (de Zirkoff 1983, pg. 120) This principle is poetically described in the *Mahatma Letters* as, “...when we speak of the seventh principle it is neither quality nor quantity nor yet form that are meant, but rather the *space* occupied in that *ocean* of spirit by the results or effects - ...- impressed thereon.” (1972, pg. 74) H.P. Blavatsky notes in a similar vein,

“...it (Atma, seventh principle) is in Metaphysics, that point in space which the human Monad and its vehicle man occupy for the period of every life.” (1987, pg. 117)

In Theosophical writings *atman* and *buddhi* link during incarnation to form the ‘monad’ which, with the higher-*manas*, forms the higher self of the individual.

Auric Egg – The term ‘auric egg’ is not listed in the expanded index of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is revealed in some detail in the *Esoteric Instructions* and the *Inner Group* teachings of H.P. Blavatsky, both of which works postdate the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*. It can often substitute for the *atman* principle. Little is said about it, but it is conceived as containing in germ all the principles that make up the human individual. (Purucker 1969, pg. 15) The auric egg preserves the karmic record of an individual, is the source of the astral body of an individual, and acts as the storehouse of positive and negative thoughts of the person.

Buddhi – literally to ‘enlighten’ or ‘awaken’. This is the higher discriminating and intuitional principle, and it suggests the innate spiritual knowledge inherent in the human being. It is spiritual consciousness manifesting as wisdom and direct knowledge of things. It is a vehicle for the *atmic* principle, and it is associated with the higher conscience and spiritual discernment.

Manas – The mental, thinking, reflective principle or body/vehicle. It is the higher intellectual and discriminating, rational aspect of the mind. The centre of the ego-consciousness is

¹¹ This leads to one Theosophical explanation of a seeming contradiction between Theosophical and Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist notion of ‘no abiding principle in man’ can be in accordance with the ‘abiding’ *Atmic* principle which is not, so to speak, ‘in’ man.

located in this principle. It can be pulled downwards to the *kama* principle to form the *kama-manas*, or lower and passionate mind, or drawn upwards towards *buddhi* to form the *buddhi-manas* – the higher mind. Theosophically speaking this dual division of the mental principle is also referred to as the ‘lower-*manas*’ and the ‘higher-*manas*’. The higher mind, also the ‘Individuality’, is regarded as part of the enduring aspect of the person (the ‘real person’) which does not disintegrate at death. The lower mind (the ‘personality’), also the conscious, rational mind, does not survive death. The mind principle is the most complicated in Theosophical literature. It is what separates us from the animal kingdom. In that kingdom the ‘mental consciousness’ as we understand it is dormant and un-awakened, but does exist in this latent state. The mysterious events which led to the awakening of mind in the human being, the ‘descent of the *manasaputras*’ is one of the central teachings of Theosophy.

Kama – The desire principle or body. This is the primary location of passions. These ‘colourless’ propulsive energies, are directed by the mind either downward towards the physical body or inward to the higher principles. The desires and passions, however, form an independent principle which too dissipates at death. They (the desires and passions) are not so to speak ‘aspects’ of the mind or the body. (Although in Theosophical thought as each principle is seven-fold there would be a ‘*kama*’ aspect to the mental principle.) The *kama-rupa*, or ‘desire vehicle’ is a body wherein after death the principles of the person reside. The higher principles are said to be barely conscious on this lower plane. These higher principles separate from this temporary body (a second death) which also gradually dissipates. It is this *kama-rupa* which is one Theosophical interpretation for the ‘ghost’ or ‘spook’ spoken of. Purucker writes that it is an “exact astral duplicate, in appearance and mannerisms, of the man who died; it his *eidolon* or ‘image.’” (1969, pg. 77)

Prana – The life principle, the vital body. The life force is an energy animating and permeating the human being. This life principle exists in the cosmic sense as a universal principle of which the pervasive *prana* in the human body is a portion. At death these energies return to that universal source. (Barborka, 1992, pg. 189) Theosophical writers describe this body in scientific terms, for example, “psycho-electrical veil”, “psycho-electrical field” and “electromagnetic field”. (Barborka, 1992; Purucker, 1969) This principle is also composed of ‘life-atoms’ of its own class. These energies manifest in the body as vital currents, of which there are various systems of enumeration, three, five, seven-fold etc.

Linga-sarira – The pattern body, or astral body. Composed of subtler matter (suggested to be electric and magnetic in nature) than the physical body, it is the model for the material, physical body, and precedes it. This astral form, which includes astral organs, nerves, and arteries, is a more permanent body than the physical body. The real sense organs are located within this astral body. At death, when the three higher principles withdraw into their spheres, this body survives for a greater or lesser time and slowly decays and disintegrates. It remains near the corpse until it dissipates. (Judge, 1973, pg. 47) This residual shell, which can retain much of the thoughts and memories of the deceased, is also thought to account for the ‘ghosts’ seen and like phenomena. (This is not to say that there might not be other causes for ghosts and similar phenomenon put forward in Theosophical literature.) Barborka explains that the *linga-sarira* and the *kama-rupa* can both be referred to as the ‘astral body’ which can lead to some confusion. One difference between the two is that the former cannot leave the body until after death. (1992, pg. 191)

Sthula-Sarira – This is the gross, coarse or material body. The physical body includes the brain, nerves, blood, bones, lymph, muscles, and organs of sensation and skin. (Judge 1973, pg. 37) It is the vehicle for the other six principles on this earth at this point in evolution. This principle, impermanent and subject to change, has no inherent sense of itself. Matter is composed of the cosmic elements, which in the Theosophical conception is composed of ‘life atoms’. At death the natural process of decay ensues and the body disintegrates into the material kingdoms. It has been suggested by H.P. Blavatsky that the physical body has no importance in the more esoteric numerations of the human constitution.¹² (See Table 3 above for various presentations.) This is an interesting point given the importance placed on the body by the Ancient Egyptians. This difference in attitude to the physical body is highlighted in the Theosophical philosophical preference to cremate the dead against the importance the Ancient Egyptians placed on mummification.

¹² In Blavatsky’s *E. S. Instructions* the body is left out in some tables. See Diagram I and Diagram II. The body is relegated to a ‘vehicle’ and is not a principle proper.

4.3 THE EGYPTIAN PRINCIPLES AS PRESENTED BY H.P. BLAVATSKY

H.P. Blavatsky clearly indicates that the esoteric (Theosophical) teachings of the seven principles constituting the individual can be found in the Egyptian religion.¹³ In *The Secret Doctrine* she writes,

“No Eastern (Aryan) esoteric works are so far published, but we possess the Egyptian papyri which speak clearly of the seven principles or the ‘Seven Souls of Man.’” (1988, vol. I, pg.226-7)

We are warned, though, “not to seek these analogies or concordances between the two systems, esoteric and exoteric, in the translations of our Orientalists.” (Blavatsky, BCW, vol. x, pg. 57) By affirming the distinction between esoteric (Theosophical) and exoteric presentations, space is being created for Theosophical insertion and appropriation. (It also indicates a lack of explicit supporting evidence for Theosophical positions in the source material.)

She does not, however, engage in detail with any primary Egyptian text. Instead her statements on the Egyptian principles in *The Secret Doctrine* are cursory and, in the main, based on the secondary sources of Gerald Massey and Franz Lambert. She does quote from the *Book of the Dead*, but it is not a systematic engagement with this text, and, in some instances, her quotes appear to be drawn from indirect sources. An example of this is her extract on page 635 in volume I of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is clear from the context of the passage that she is discussing the ideas of Gerald Massey in his article *The seven souls of man*, but she makes no direct, independent reference to the *Book of the Dead*; instead, she simply copies his extract word for word.¹⁴

A review of the expanded index of *The Secret Doctrine* reveals that relatively little space is given to a discussion of the principles in the Egyptian religion. In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky’s main work on this topic is contained in pages 630-641 of volume II in a subsection entitled, “*The seven souls of the Egyptologists*”. Two articles in her *Collected Works* which discuss the Egyptian principles are, “*Theories about reincarnation and spirits*” – volume vii published originally in 1886, and the “*Psychology of ancient Egypt*” found in volume x, the

¹³ This is stated in various places, for e.g., in *Collected Works* vol. xiv, H.P. Blavatsky writes, “The septenary principles in man...The Egyptians knew and taught it, and their division of principles is in every point a counterpoint of the Aryan Secret Teaching.” (1985, pg. 381-382)

¹⁴ This particular extract appears to be drawn in part from chapter 88 of the Turin Papyrus, which can be read in translation in Birch (found in Bunsen, volume 5) and Davis (1894). It is located in the section of ‘transformation spells’ in the *Book of the Dead*.

article being published originally in 1888. There is also brief mention made in *Isis unveiled* (published 1877) of the Egyptian divisions constituting a human being. I will review her statements in chronological order.

In *Isis Unveiled*, published in 1877, H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“In the Egyptian notions, as in those of all other faiths founded on philosophy, man was not merely, as with the Christians, a union of soul and body; he was a trinity when spirit was added to it. Besides, that doctrine made him consist of *kha* – body; *khaba* – astral form, or shadow; *ka* – animal soul or life-principle; *ba* – the higher soul; and *akh* – terrestrial intelligence. They had also a sixth principle named *Sah* – or mummy; but the functions of this one commenced only after the death of the body.” (1888, vol. II, pg. 367)¹⁵

This is an interesting passage for two reasons. Firstly, she does not specifically mention the Egyptians having a seven-fold division of the individual. She does not seem at any pains to locate a seven-fold division of the human constitution at this point in her literary career. She does, however, mention a three-fold division.¹⁶ This relates to one of the ‘accusations’ levelled against H.P. Blavatsky, namely that the seven-fold division is a later thought of hers. Her response was that it was not given to her to reveal the seven-fold division at that point in time.¹⁷ This expansion of the three-fold division is only into six at this point. As explained by H.P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, in the reference in footnote 16 below, the ‘seventh is the synthesis of the six principles’. Secondly, as we will see below, the correspondences offered do not tally precisely with later presentations. Related to this is that the order as stated does not seem, Theosophically speaking, quite correct. If the order is correct, it lists the ‘higher soul’ (*ba*) below the ‘terrestrial intelligence’ (*akh*), and makes the *sah* higher than both. (‘Below,’ here signifying more material, and ‘higher’ signifying more spiritual.) It is not entirely clear, however, that she is concerned with listing these aspects in any order. In 1877 the Theosophical principles (*atman*, *buddhi*, *manas*, etc.) had not been revealed, so there could be

¹⁵ This passage is reminiscent of an extract in Bonwick’s *Egyptian belief and modern thought*. This work, however, is dated to 1878, a year after *Isis Unveiled* was published. As Bonwick does reference *Isis Unveiled* in his work, I am more inclined to suspect a common source.

¹⁶ H.P. Blavatsky confirms her usage of the three-fold scheme in *Isis Unveiled* in 1887 BCW vii, pg. 288, in her article *Classification of “Principles”*.

¹⁷ This same passage is referenced in *The Secret Doctrine* vol. I, pg. 231-232. Here it is quoted as proof that the seven-fold system was hinted at in *Isis Unveiled* and is not a new concept. She has, however, dropped the Egyptian terms in this reference to *Isis Unveiled*.

no attempt to correlate the concepts of the Egyptian to Theosophical ideas. The importance of ordering and classification would not be paramount in this context.

Writing in 1886 in an article, “*Theories about reincarnation and spirits*” she notes,

“...old Egyptians and the Neo-platonists...thought on the subject: They divided man into three principle groups subdivided into principles as we do: pure immortal spirit; the “Spectral Soul” (*a luminous phantom*) and the gross material body. Apart from the latter which was considered as the terrestrial shell, these groups were divided into six principles: (1) *Kha*, “vital body”; (2) *Khaba*, “astral form,” or shadow; (3) *Khou*, ‘animal soul’; (4) *Akh*, “terrestrial intelligence”; (5) *Sa*, ‘the divine soul’ (or *Buddhi*); and (6) *Sah* or mummy, the functions of which began after death. *Osiris* was the highest uncreated spirit, for it was, in one sense, a generic name, every man becoming after his translation *Osirified*, *i.e.* absorbed into *Osiris-Sun* or the glorious divine state.” (1975, pg. 189-190)

In a footnote in the article, H.P. Blavatsky places these in parallel with the Theosophical teachings. I tabulate them for convenience: (I have inverted the order from that in the text for the sake of consistency, and the numbers in the left column are to be ignored.)

TABLE 4 : EGYPTIAN AND THEOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

7	<i>Sah</i>	Mummy or body
6	<i>Kha</i>	<i>Pranatma</i> (vital principle)
5	<i>Khaba</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>
4	<i>Khou</i>	<i>Kama-rupa</i> , seat of terrestrial desires
3	<i>Akh</i>	<i>Manas</i>
2	<i>Sa</i> ¹⁸	<i>Buddhi</i>
1	<i>Osiris</i>	<i>Atma</i>

(Blavatsky, BCW vol. vii, pg. 190)

In the written extract the ‘gross material body’ is not part of the six principles listed. In the footnote (reflected in table 4), the *sah* /mummy are correlated with the body. There is no mention of the *ba* principle, and one might suspect that the *sa* mentioned was, perhaps, meant to be the *ba*.

¹⁸ See footnote 17.

Between 1877 (*Isis Unveiled*) and 1886, the Theosophical system had been established and the processes of interpretation and appropriation had begun. The order and classification is now more important as H.P. Blavatsky begins to seek authority over texts and traditions.

By 1888 her orientation to this topic seems to have changed. *The Secret Doctrine*, published in that year, presented two sets of correspondences which I have redrawn into one table (I have inverted the order of the ‘Kabala’ and ‘Hieroglyphics’ columns to keep like principles in parallel.)¹⁹:

¹⁹ Drawn from pages 632 and 633 of *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II. I have amended the tables as presented in *The Secret Doctrine* based on a corrective footnote in the text. H.P. Blavatsky affirms that *manas* is the fifth principle corresponding to *Seb*, which she states is the Egyptian fifth principle.

TABLE 5 : EGYPTIAN AND THEOSOPHICAL CORRESPONDENCES
FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
	(Esoteric) Indian	Egyptian	Kabala	Hieroglyphics
1	Rupa, body or element of form	Kha, body	Guf	Chat - The Elementary Body
2	Prana, the breath of life	Ba, the Soul of Breath	Coach ha Guf	Anch - Vital Force : Archaeus : Mumia
3	Astral body	Khaba, the shade	Nephesh	Ka - The Astral Body : Evestrum : Sidereal man
4	Kama - rupa, or animal soul	Akhu, Intelligence or Perception	Ruach	Ab Hati -The Heart : Feeling : Animal Soul
5	Manas - or Intelligence	Seb, ancestral soul	Neschamah	Bai - Intellectual Soul, the intelligence.
6	Buddhi, Spiritual Soul	Putah, the first intellectual father	Chayah	Cheybi - Spiritual Soul
7	Atma, pure spirit	Atmu, a divine or eternal soul	Jeshida	Chu - Divine Spirit

(Extracted from *The Secret Doctrine*, 1988, vol. II, pg. 632-633)

Columns two and three are drawn from a lecture by Gerald Massey, “*The seven souls of man, and their culmination in the Christ*”, published in 1887. Gerald Massey is discussing an early Theosophical publication, *Esoteric Buddhism* written by A.P. Sinnett. Columns four and five are consolidated by H.P. Blavatsky from journal articles by Franz Lambert.

H.P. Blavatsky presents the Egyptian principles in correspondence to the Theosophical principles. There is no actual discussion of the principles in the text. It is mainly a correspondence based on functionality, although there is an element of a structural relationship

based on the number seven. The location of the seven principles in the Egyptian teachings is important for H.P. Blavatsky as it allows for the interpretation and insertion of the Theosophical content into the Egyptian system. It is relevant to note that H.P. Blavatsky does not appear to present her own correspondence of principles between Egypt and Theosophy fully. She presents instead the work of Gerald Massey and Franz Lambert and then comments on, and amends, them. The table of correspondences presented in *The Secret Doctrine* was briefly commented on in 1892 in the Theosophical magazine, *Lucifer*. The editor (presumably) writes in a review of books,

“In *The Secret Doctrine* (ii. 632, 633), H. P. B. gives Gerald Massey’s list, in which the Ka does not occur, and also the list of Franz Lambert from *The Sphinx*, who identifies the Ka with the Kabalistic Nephesh....H.P. B. herself abstains from endorsing either category or giving esoteric correspondences, and simply cites these authors to show that the division was septenary.”²⁰

The reviewer, seemingly unable to correlate the statements, suggests that the point of the tables is simply to highlight the seven-fold division in Ancient Egypt and not to state actual Theosophical correspondences to Egyptian terms. This is, in part, confirmed by H.P. Blavatsky who, remarking on Lambert’s work, writes that,

“This is a very fair representation of the number of the ‘principles’ of Occultism, but much confused; and this is what we call the 7 principles in man, and what Mr. Massey calls ‘Souls,’... But how can Ruach (Spirit) be lodged in Kama-rupa?” (1988, vol. II, pg. 635)

While there may be some truth in this perspective, it does not, however, seem entirely justified. The corrective footnote H.P. Blavatsky appends to Massey’s tabulation suggests that she is expressing, at least in part, the ‘esoteric’ teachings. As she adopts Massey’s terms of ‘*Seb*’, ‘*Putali*’, and ‘*Atmu*’, however, which are not normally mentioned as aspects of the individual, it is difficult to assess

Mention should be made of the last three principles mentioned by Massey (column 3). The terms ‘*Seb*’, ‘*Putali*’ and ‘*Atmu*’ have puzzled me until I looked up the reference in Massey’s Lecture, *The seven souls of man*. In particular, the last two terms were curious to me. It seemed amazing that there was an Egyptian term ‘*Atmu*’ which was both the seventh principle

²⁰ *Lucifer*, vol. x., no. 55, pg. 84.

and mirrored the Asian *Atma* or *Atman*. In fact, however, Gerald Massey elaborates on these two terms in his lecture. Referring to ‘*Putah*’ he writes, “That was as the *nous* of the Gnostics, the revealer of an intellectual soul, who in Egypt is the god Ptah, or *Putah*, the opener, whom I elsewhere identify with Buddha in India. (1992, pg. 230) ‘*Putah*’ is then identified as the god *Ptah*. For the term ‘*Atmu*’, the seventh soul, Massey writes, “...Atum is equivalent to the Buddhist Atma, the creative soul.” (1992, pg. 230) For ‘*Atmu*’ we can read *Atum*, the Egyptian deity. *Seb*, too, is one of the cosmic deities. Massey then, for all three higher Theosophical principles, lists cosmic deities as correspondences and not Egyptian human aspects.

It is my contention that, if H.P. Blavatsky (or another ‘authorised’ individual) does not pronounce on an issue, for example correspondences between principles, no statement of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition will exist. Later Theosophical writers will present opinions, and very likely contradictory ones, which reflect the uncertainty and lack of definitiveness in the base material, the writings of H.P. Blavatsky.

4.3.1 SELECTED READINGS

In this section I extract and discuss representative readings from H.P. Blavatsky’s writings which refer to the topic of the human constitution as presented in the Egyptian religion.

4.3.1.1 Reading 1

H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“The Book of the Dead gives a complete list of the ‘transformations’ that every defunct undergoes, while divesting himself, one by one, of all those principles – materialised for the sake of clearness into ethereal entities or bodies.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 227)

H.P. Blavatsky is alluding here to a well-known belief of the Ancient Egyptians. In the ‘Transformation Spells’ of the *Book of the dead* the deceased expresses the desire and hope to transform into various entities, including, birds, crocodiles, a god, etc. The desire for the ‘transformed’ states expresses the desire for freedom the deceased hopes to attain in the afterlife.

H.P. Blavatsky interprets the transformations as representing the changes undergone by the deceased during the process of dying. The principles (*linga-sarira*, *sthula-sarira*, etc.) are shed in an orderly manner. They are ‘materialised’, she notes, for the ‘sake of clearness’. By indicating that the Egyptian principles are ‘materialised’, she opens a space for the insertion

of Theosophical content. The inner principles in Theosophical contention are not material ('materialised'), and their presentation as such in Egyptian texts needs to be explained. H.P. Blavatsky also alludes here to a theme that she will carry through in her writings on Egypt, viz. that the process of dying involves the shedding of the lower principles, an idea foreign to the Egyptians.

4.3.1.2 Reading 2

H.P. Blavatsky touches on this theme of the seven-fold divisions of the individual in a passage in *The Secret Doctrine*,

"The *shadow*, the astral form, is annihilated, 'devoured by the Uraeus' (cxlix., 51), the *Manes* will be annihilated ; the two twins (the 4th and 5th principles) will be scattered ; but the Soul-bird, 'the divine Swallow - and the Uraeus of Flame' (Manas and Atma-Buddhi) will live in the eternity, for they are their mother's husbands." (1988, vol. I, pg. 227)

Reference is made to chapter 149 of the *Book of the Dead*. The translation by Davis of chapter cxlix 50 - 52 reads,

"O this dwelling of the hour! This dwelling of the hour in Restau, the burning flame at which do not arrive the gods, in which do not assemble the shades, for there are there uraeus for the annihilating of their souls. O this dwelling of the hour! I am there as a hawk, as the chief of the shades. I am there among the wandering stars. My name shall not perish..." (1894, pg. 175)

Allen translates the same passage as,

"O thou mound (of) Wenet, suburb of Rosetau, whose scorching breath is fire - the gods ascend not to her nor do the Blessed unite with her, and the cobras upon her are (each) named (Destroyer) - O thou mound (of) Wenet, I am the Greatest of the Blessed that are in thee; I am with the imperishable stars that are in thee. I have not perished, my name has not perished." (1974, pg. 145)

Chapter 149 of the *Book of the Dead* is a description of the Netherworld Field of Rushes. This is a domain of *Osiris* through which the deceased must pass by having certain knowledge and passwords. The extracts are from the description of mound twelve (of fourteen in this chapter, but fifteen in chapter 150.)

The general Theosophical sense of the passage from *The Secret Doctrine* is the dissipation of the lower principles (the ‘shadow’, the ‘*Manes*’ and the ‘two twins’) during death. I find it is difficult to assign precise Theosophical correspondences to these principles. It appears to be, shadow – astral body, *Manes* – *kama-rupa*, 4th and 5th principles – lower-*manas* and *kama*. The three higher principles (the ‘divine Swallow’ and ‘Uraeus of Flame’ – identified as *manas* and *atma-buddhi* in the extract) will, however, remain intact following death. In Theosophical teachings the three higher principles are the ‘true person’, the individuality which is immortal. *The Theosophical glossary* further suggests that ‘*uraeus*’ has a reference to initiation and secret wisdom. As death and initiation mirror each other in Theosophical thought, the intent of the passage remains unchanged. In another place, *The Secret Doctrine* identifies the ‘uraeus’ with the ‘primordial vital principles in the Sun’ which devours the lower principles of the deceased. (1988, vol. II, pg. 674)

Lurker in his dictionary, makes the ‘*uraeus*’ a symbol of kingship worn by the gods and the Pharaoh. It was represented as a rearing cobra worn on the head. (1980, pg. 125) This serpent avoided evil and was associated with the sun god *Ra*. One Theosophical reading would be that of referring to the Pharaoh as an initiate.

In essence then, from the Theosophical perspective, the passage deals with the dissipation of the four lower principles at death, while the three higher permanent principles enter into their afterlife states, for example, the *devachan*.

4.3.1.3 Reading 3

H.P. Blavatsky does not approach this theme only by way of tables of correspondences and synonyms. Another way in which the Theosophical seven-fold system is inserted into Egyptian texts, which in turn are then appropriated by the Theosophical system, is through the use of structural similarity. In relation to the seven-fold Theosophical principles and the Egyptian religion, we can see this in H.P. Blavatsky’s identification of certain numerical sequences and themes with the seven principles. In *The Secret Doctrine*, discussing a verse of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* which refers to “...the three-tongued flame of the four wicks...,” she comments,

“The ‘Three-tongued flame’ that never dies is the immortal spiritual triad – the Atma-Buddhi and Manas – the fruition of the latter assimilated by the first two after every terrestrial life. The ‘four wicks’ that go out and are extinguished, are the four lower principles, including the body.

“I am the three-wicked Flame and my wicks are immortal,” says the defunct. ‘I enter into the domain of Sekhem (the God whose arm sows the seed of action produced by the disembodied soul) and I enter the region of the Flames who have destroyed their adversaries,’ i.e., got rid of the sin-creating ‘four wicks.’ (See chap. i., vii., ‘Book of the Dead,’ and the ‘Mysteries of Ro-stan.’)” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 237)

In this passage, the relatively neutral terms of ‘flames’ and the ‘wicks’ are correlated to the Theosophical principles. It is a relationship based on the number ‘seven’ and its associated concepts; three enduring higher principles and four temporary lower principles. Through this interpretive manoeuvre, Egyptian teachings are shown to mirror the Ancient Wisdom teachings of Theosophy, and Egyptian texts and concepts are thereby appropriated.

I have attempted to follow up the references given by H.P. Blavatsky to the *Book of the Dead* and the *Mysteries of Ro-stan*.²¹ The latter I believe has not been identified and is seen to be a ‘secret’ book not available to the public. With regards the former, the *Book of the Dead* (chapter 1, verse vii), I have not found any sentence corresponding to the first sentence the defunct is said to utter. (“I am the three-wicked flame and my wicks are immortal.”) This is presumably the extract from the “*Mysteries of Ro-stan*”.

The following quotation seems to be a version, or paraphrase, of a verse from the 1st chapter of the *Book of the Dead* which Davis renders as,

“I am with Horus in the act of supporting this left arm of the Osiris who is in Sechem; I go out and enter the blazing-abode, exterminating the opponents, in other words, the rebels in Sechem.” (1894, pg. 69-70)

Allen renders the passage (chapter 1, vs. 3 in his work) as,

“I was with Horus on the day of wrapping the Dismembered One and opening the pits, of washing the weary-hearted one and secreting the entrance to the secrets in Rosetau. I was with Horus as saviour of that left shoulder of Osiris that was in (Letopolis), going into and out of the devouring flame on the day of expelling the rebels from (Letopolis).” (1974, pg. 5)

²¹ The entry in *The Theosophical Glossary* for ‘Rostan’ list this work as ‘an occult work in manuscript’. It can therefore be regarded as a work not publically available.

Chapter 1 of the *Book of the dead* was recited by a priest at the head of the funeral procession leading the deceased to their tomb. The Egyptian texts are referencing the myth of *Osiris*. *Osiris* was dismembered, his parts scattered over Egypt, and then ‘saved’ by *Horus* and others. The priest is assuring the deceased that he can assist them as *Thoth* and *Horus* had assisted *Osiris*. The ‘enemies’ (rebels) of *Osiris* are *Seth* and his confederates. The dismembered parts of *Osiris* were scattered over Egypt, and it was in *Letopolis* (*Sechen*; *Sekhem*) that the left arm of *Osiris* was deposited.

In an important Theosophical interpretive technique, H.P. Blavatsky has internalised and psychologised the *Osiris* myth. In this Theosophical context *Osiris* and *Horus* together representing the higher self of an individual ‘gets rid of’ the ‘four wicks’ or the lower self. The ‘region of the Flames’ could be seen as the inner planes, and ‘Flames’ as spiritual beings of certain category. ‘*Sekhem*’ in the Theosophical reading is the *devachan*, which, when conceived of as a locality, is associated with the inner, more spiritual planes. (See *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, pg. 220 where this is clarified. I will discuss it in more detail in the following chapter.)

4.3.1.4 Reading 4

In volume vii of her *Collected Works* H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“Now what was the *Khou*? Simply the astral body, or the aerial simulacrum of the corpse or the mummy – that which in China is called the *Houen*, and in India the *Bhut*.” (1975, pg. 106)

In this same article the term *khou* is referenced in another passage in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Collected Works*, vol. vii,

“Of the *Khous* two kinds were distinguished: first, the justified *Khous*, *i.e.*, those who had been absolved from sin by *Osiris* when they were brought before his tribunal ; those lived a second life. Secondly, there were the guilty *Khous*, “the *Khous* dead a second time”; these were the damned. Second death did not annihilate them, but they were doomed to wander about and to torture people. Their existence had phases analogous to those of the living man, a bond so intimate between the dead and the living that one sees how the observation of religious funeral rites and exorcisms and

prayers (or rather magic incantations) should have become necessary.” (1975, p. g. 115-6)²²

This aspect of the ‘*khou*’ is further elaborated in a later article in vol. vii in H.P. Blavatsky’s *Collected works* where after describing the spiritual state of an ‘*osiris*’ she then outlines its opposite state,

“It was *Khou*, with the lower portions of *Akh* or *Kama rupa* with the additions of the dregs of *Manas* remaining all behind in the astral light of our atmosphere – that formed the counterparts of the terrible and so much dreaded *bhoots* of the Hindus (our ‘elementaries’). (1975, pg. 190)

She continues,

“There were two kinds of *Khous* – the justified ones – who after living for a short time a *second life* (*nam onh*) faded out, disappeared; and those *Khous* who were condemned to wandering without rest in darkness *after dying for a second time* – *mut, em, nam* – and who were called the *H’ou metre* (‘second time dead’) which did not prevent them from clinging to a vicarious life after the manner of Vampires.” (1975, pg. 190)

The sense of these passages is the equating of the *khou* with the Theosophical *kama-rupa*. The *kama-rupa* is not the Theosophical *kama* principle. As an interpretive technique the flexibility (and complexity) of the Theosophical system facilitates its insertion into a wide variety of religious texts. The *kama* or ‘desire’ principle is the fourth principle in the individual’s constitution. The *kama-rupa* is a vehicle or body assumed by the deceased following death, prior to the entering of the *devachan*. The deceased experiences a second death, from this state, and enters the *devachan*. The *kama-rupa* shell may remain behind but will in time disintegrate. Extremely evil individuals may endure in this *kama-rupa* state for long periods of time, i.e. they delay their entrance into the more spiritual states. Of interest is G. de Purucker’s note to the effect that, “The Kama-rupa is an exact astral duplicate in appearance and mannerisms, of the man who died; it is his *eidolon* or ‘image.’” (1933, pg. 86) This is suggestive in terms of the Egyptian description of the various aspects (or modes of being) of the individual deceased e.g. the shadow, *ka*, or *ba*, etc.

These passages are important for another reason. In them H.P. Blavatsky makes a distinction between the *khou* and the *akh*, suggesting that they are separate aspects. I will discuss this in

²² The article itself was originally published in 1886 in the Theosophical journal *The Path*.

more detail further on in this chapter, but of relevance is that some later Theosophists equate the *khou* with the *akh* (that is they are synonyms), while, in some of H.P. Blavatsky's writings on this topic, all reference to the *khou* is dropped.

In *The Secret Doctrine* itself the correspondences are no clearer. In Table 5 in the column 2 and 3 H.P. Blavatsky makes the *kama-rupa* correspond to *akhu*, while *manas* corresponds to *Seb*. In column 4 and 5 it is *cheybi* corresponding to *buddhi*, while *Chu* corresponds to *Atma*. Gottfried de Purucker, in his *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*, makes the *khou*, *khu* and *akhu* synonyms.

4.3.1.5 Reading 5

In various places H.P. Blavatsky will read *Osiris* as a synonym for the *Atman* principle. As one example, from her *Collected Works* vol. XIV, she states,

“The seventh principle being of course the highest, uncreated Spirit was generically called Osiris, therefore every deceased person became Osirified – or an Osiris – after death.” (1985, pg. 381)

In this passage, *Osiris*, is both a synonym for the *Atmic* principle, and, like the terms ‘Buddha’ and ‘Christ’, becomes a title. Generally speaking any person could become a ‘Buddha’ or a ‘Christ’ (or an *Osiris*) after successfully undergoing one of the higher initiations, or after completing the path of human evolution of the seven rounds and seven races. The state would normally be achieved through self-conscious effort during life, that is, initiation. The simple act of dying would not translate a person into the Buddha or Christ status. Irrespective though of whether one became an ‘*Osiris*’ following death or after initiation, H.P. Blavatsky elaborates on the issue by noting in her *Collected Works*, vol vii,

“The reader need not be told that every soul newly-born into its cycle of 3000 years after the death of the body it animated, became, in Egypt, an ‘Osiris,’ was *osirified*, viz., the personality became reduced to its higher principles, a *spirit*.” (1975, pg. 94)

The individual, casting off the lower principles, is ‘reduced’ to his higher principles.

It should be noted that the Theosophical teachings surrounding *Osiris* are very much broader than simply this identification. I am focusing specifically here on the interpretations surrounding the human individual.

For Egyptologists ‘becoming *Osiris*’ referred to the deceased identifying with the resurrection of *Osiris*. The deceased, as *Osiris*, hoped and expected to be reborn and live again in the Afterlife. The deceased conquered death by mirroring the pattern of the *Osiris* myth.

4.4 THE HUMAN CONSTITUTION IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTOLOGY

In this section I outline the mainstream academic perspective on the Egyptian individual. I will relate and contextualise the academic opinion against the Theosophical views as outlined above. I will not present an historical survey of the academic view on this topic. I am interested in the general, current academic perspective. The academic community would, in principle, have no issue with an evolution in understanding and interpretation from earlier to later studies. As new texts are uncovered, new translations made, and more resources are directed towards a subject, an evolving of ideas may be expected.

The Theosophical presentation cannot, however, engage in a topic in the same open-ended manner. It will always approach a topic from its conclusion, from the ‘truth’ of it. For Theosophists, the initiates of the past have solved all the mysteries of nature (for our solar system at the very least), and their conclusions have been checked and verified by later adepts. The Theosophical presentation on a topic will be that of finality and factuality. No amendment to a Theosophical statement of authority can be accepted unless further appeals to authority, or other coping mechanisms, are invoked. While patent errors (mainly in the form of misquotations or mis-referencing) can be admitted, doctrinal statements are not easily subject to a process of correction. Witness a note on the seven principles in the Egyptian religion by Boris de Zirkoff, in his 1972 edition of *Isis Unveiled*,

“...Egyptologists differ among themselves in regard to this subject. Many points remain uncertain in the interpretation of hieroglyphic texts. Some have pointed out the following sequence of constituent portions of man: 1. *Khat* – physical body; 2. *Sahu* – the *Khat* transformed by mummification. 3. *Ka* – the ‘double’ (also ‘material soul’); 4. *Ba* – the soul; 5. *Akh* – glorified spirit; 6. *Khaibit* – the shadow; 7. *Ren* – the name; 8. *Sekhem* – the power; 9. *Ib* – the heart, or conscience.” (Blavatsky, 1972, vol. II, pg. 653)

Pointing out the potential discrepancy between H.P. Blavatsky’s statements and the academic position, recourse is made to ‘differences of opinion between Egyptologists’. While it is true

that Egyptologists point to difficult and imperfectly understood aspects of the Egyptian religion, ‘insider’ differences of opinion over Theosophical doctrines are not really possible as they are based on sources of authority not easily challenged.²³ The history of the engagement of Egyptologists with the Ancient Egyptian religion in no way mirrors the Theosophical engagement. Within Egyptology there are various schools of thought and interpretation on many of the Egyptian themes. There are changes in understanding over time, based on further texts and resources being made available. In Theosophical thought, the beginning is the end in a real sense. Any differences over time need to be explained away with the ‘coping mechanisms’ I have outlined before. (In a sense Theosophical writers attempt to uncover the meaning in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky [and other key authorities] in much the same way as Egyptologists try to recover meaning in the Egyptian texts.)

A subsidiary reason for the Theosophical concepts being in some ways less problematic, and in principle better defined, is that we possess the voluminous writings of H.P. Blavatsky which explicitly work out specific meanings. We are, however, not really privy to the internal debates and thought life of the Egyptians of two to four thousand years ago. My point is that one reason Egyptian concepts are more difficult to grasp as opposed to Theosophical teachings is that, with the latter, we have detailed explanatory works by the founder. Lacking these explanatory and philosophical works, Egyptologists need to work harder to reconstruct the intended meaning of concepts in Ancient Egypt. The lack of explicit definitions in Egyptian sources makes any ‘final conclusion’ more elusive in the academic field.

There is a conceptual issue raised here concerning the process of comparison. Is comparison possible? If so, how is comparison between traditions facilitated? R.B. Finnstad has raised this issue in relation to Ancient Egypt in his important article, “*On transposing soul and body into a monistic conception of being: an example from Ancient Egypt.*” (1986) The academic study of comparative religion grew out of a western, Christian background. Terms such as ‘soul’, ‘body’, ‘spirit’ and ‘god’ have become standard reference points. They are, however, terms loaded with specific western and Christian meaning and associations. If these terms are to be retained, their use in reference to non-western religions needs to be carefully defined to avoid misrepresentations. The academic community has retained these terms, but it is careful to contextualise their use and meaning in specific interpretive settings. Finnstad displays the

²³ Where there is genuine debate over the meaning of a teaching it can be due to ambiguity in the source statements. In this instance it is my contention that no ‘Ancient Wisdom’ position exists, or can exist.

analytical use of these loaded terms in the very foreign context of the Egyptian religion. Egypt does not display the same dualistic and compartmentalised presentation of the human individual as is common in western speculation. I will discuss the Egyptian conceptions below. Suffice it to note at this point that Theosophical interpretation involves no such subtlety. For Theosophists, foreign religions are moulded into mirror images of the Theosophical statement. This is inevitable in the Theosophical process of interpretation owing to its conception of the origin of religions and the nature of the human engagement with 'nature as it is'. [While it is not the thrust of my work, it might be worth noting that this lack of subtlety no doubt characterised early academic comparative studies of religion. The Theosophical method, however, has not, and, perhaps, is not, capable of correcting this.]

It follows, then, that before discussing the basic aspects of the individual, the overall Egyptian conception of the human being as a complete entity needs to be outlined. I intend to follow the dominant mainstream presentation on this theme here. There would be debates presented within the field of Egyptian studies which would be beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Outlining the overall conception of the individual is important, as many Egyptologists suggest that Ancient Egyptians did not conceive of the individual in the same manner as Greek and Western philosophical and religious thought did. If the fundamental Egyptian conception of the individual is radically different from Theosophical views, then the Theosophical programme of correspondence and correlation becomes difficult to sustain. The process of correlating and locating synonyms for terms requires the underlying conceptions to be similar on a fundamental level. At the category level, there must be some basic structural and functional similarity. If category level correspondence is not apparent, then the process of correlating becomes an artificial one of total revision and reconstruction. The violence done to Egyptian concepts is such that Egyptian thoughts are no longer actually engaged in. They are simply ignored and replaced by Theosophical categories and content.

It must be noted here that this discussion will focus on the various modes of being of the individual as they manifest after death. The aspects of the individual as and if they exist *during* an individual's life will form only a subsidiary part of the review.

Underlying the Theosophical programme of correspondences is a conception of the individual which is made up of parts. Each part has specific functions, characteristics, and larger associations. The full human being is composed of all seven parts. In fact all things, beings and non-human objects, are composed of the seven principles. While the parts may not,

under certain circumstances, be practicably separable they are theoretically and philosophically separable.

A forceful statement of the Egyptian conception of the human being is by Louis V. Zabkar in his work, *A study of the ba concept in Ancient Egyptian texts*. (1968)²⁴ In this work Zabkar is critical of attempts to resolve the Egyptian conception of the individual into the body, soul, and spirit dynamic of Greek and western thought. Zabkar repeatedly argues that the Egyptians did not view the individual in ‘dichotomous’, ‘trichotomous’ or ‘tetrachotomous’ terms. There was no dualistic conception of the ‘physical’ body in opposition to the ‘spiritual’ soul. It is, however, relevant to note that he concedes that there have been Egyptologists who have mistakenly viewed the different concepts of the Egyptians in this very sense often translating ‘soul’ for the ‘ba’.²⁵ At the end of his work, Zabkar himself determines the term ‘ba’ to be untranslatable into English, there being simply no equivalent concept available. (1968, pg. 163)

Finnestad retains the use of ‘soul’ and ‘body’ in the context of Egyptian thought; the definition of these words, however, purposefully strays from their usual connotations. For the Ancient Egyptians a person is “a unit of qualities that can be specified as spiritual-and-material; and this unit belongs in its entirety to the terrestrial world ...” (1986, pg.361) The individual is to be conceived of as a unit which, as a complete entity, can be expressed as a ‘body’ or a ‘ka’ or a ‘ba’ etc. Each of these modes of being are conceptualised as complete ‘spiritual-and-material’ units. The ‘body’, in this interpretive sense of the word, implies, for example, the complete person, including emotions, feelings, etc. The individual can be translated into other complete representations, for example the *ka* or *ba* or *akh*. Each represents the total person. The use of the word ‘soul’ then signifies not the ‘spiritual’ aspects of an individual which are separate from the body. ‘Soul’ in this context refers to the ability of the whole individual to transcend his usual existence into a new type of existence after death. This new existence transcends conventional existence, but does not imply a new ‘spiritual’ existence. The new forms, the *ka*, *ba*, etc. are ‘spiritual-and-material’ units representing the entire individual. They are new ‘modes of being’ of the complete person.

²⁴ Zabkar is directly discussing the concept of the *ba* in this work, but his ‘monistic’ concept of the human individual goes beyond just that aspect of Egyptian thought. The *akh*, *ka*, shadow, etc. all represent the totality of the individual, not constituent parts of that individual.

²⁵ The relevance of this observation for Theosophy is that its larger conceptions may, perhaps, be traced to nineteenth century mainstream views of Egyptology. Theosophical views may not have been totally divorced from views current in the era of H.P. Blavatsky.

Zabkar is at pains to stress his opposition to the conception of the human in terms of a dualistic 'body' and 'soul'. His 'monistic' conception suggests that the deceased could exist in various 'shifting modes of being' of which the *ka*, *ba*, and *akh* etc. are examples. (1963, pg.61) These are not to be conceived of as separate parts of the individual, but rather as each representing the totality of the individual's physical and psychic capacities. (1968, pg. 3) The *ba*, for example as the complete individual was one of the forms in which the deceased lived in the afterlife. The Ancient Egyptians did not have a concept of an internal spiritual soul which left the body at death, separating from the body. Instead, the deceased could live in a variety of forms, each of which was the entire person himself. The modes of existence included the physical and psychic features of the individual. The *ba*, *ka*, etc. is then the actual person himself, his 'personified alter ego' which exists in the afterlife as a physical and psychic entity.

There is a phrase in Egyptian texts discussed by Zabkar which is useful to examine here as it quoted in some Theosophical writings as proof of the body/spirit duality. Oderberg and Whellams in their *Egyptian teachings in the light of Theosophy* note, "...the quotation that follows best conveys the meaning of the *khat*: 'Thine essence is in heaven, thy khat is in the earth.'" (1941, pg. 439) They do not give a reference for this phrase; it is, however, well attested in various forms in Egyptian texts. The Theosophical reading of this expression would be that after death the body remains on earth eventually decaying, while the soul withdraws into the inner planes – the *devachan* ('god world'), or has never left the higher planes, for example the *atman* principle. This phrase seems to support a dualistic conception of the human being.

Zabkar agrees that various expressions in Egyptian texts have been used to support a dualistic interpretation of the individual.²⁶ These includes phrases like, 'akh or ba to heaven, corpse to the underworld', a spell to 'remove the ba from the corpse', and 'heaven to thy ba, the underworld to thy corpse', and so on. He challenges, however, the dualistic interpretation for various reasons. Zabkar notes firstly that the destination of the *ba* or *akh* was not only 'heaven'. The *ba* or *akh* could also go to the underworld, or to earth. (1968, pg. 112) The *ba* could also visit the favourite places of the deceased on earth, or join the corpse of the deceased. (1968, pg. 131) The sense of the phrase is that of total freedom of movement. Secondly, the expression, 'to remove the ba from the corpse' meant to make it emanate from the corpse, that is, to bring it into existence. In this context it illustrates one of the speculations of Ancient Egyptians on

²⁶ It would be significant in my opinion if it could be shown that some Egyptologists proposed a dualistic composition of the individual. It would bring Theosophy back within the pale of Egyptology.

the origin of the *ba*. In opposition to this expression are spells to ‘keep the *ba* from departing from the body’, i.e. to make it rest upon the body. (1968, pg. 111) Partial explanation for the different destinations of the *ba* of the deceased has to do with the mixing of the solar doctrines surrounding the god *Ra*, and the underworld *Osirian* elements of the Egyptian religion.

This conception of the individual as a monistic entity capable of various complete representations after death is at odds with the Theosophical view of the individual as a composite of seven parts which have different post-mortem destinies. The Theosophical conception is further resolvable into the three-fold conception of body (*sthula-sarira*, *linga-sarira*, *prana*), soul (*kama*, *manas*) and spirit (*buddhi* and *atman*). Many Theosophical tables of correspondence show just this resolution as an expansion from the three into seven principles. I find it hard to understate the negative implications for the Theosophical interpretive endeavour that this monistic concept of the human individual entails. Firstly, the post-mortem actions of the deceased have no resemblance to Theosophical teachings of the disintegration of the lower principles, and, secondly, the various correspondences within the Theosophical teachings are undermined. On the second point, the different human principles are linked to a wide variety of Theosophical teachings on planetary chains, human root races, and so on. If this correspondence breaks down, the entire Theosophical edifice will be at odds with itself.

The passage of de Zirkoff quoted earlier is useful as it introduces the academic division of the human individual. Bearing in mind the monistic background of the Egyptian presentation, I will outline each aspect in turn and discuss them in relation to the Theosophical principles where possible. Following the order of Budge²⁷ for convenience, the following components are identified:

4.4.1 The body and the mummy

The physical and perishable body was called the *Khat*. (Budge, 1977, pg. lix) Ikram notes that different words were used to represent the body in its different stages, *khet* for the living body, *khat* designating a corpse, and *sah* for designating the mummy. (2003, pg. 23-24) Taylor goes into more detail in his *Death and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt*. He notes *khet* (‘form’) and *iru* (‘appearance’) for the living body, *khat* for the un-mummified or embalmed body, and specific to the embalmed body, *tut* (‘mummy’ or ‘image’), and *sah* which latter refers to a body which has been ritually prepared for the afterlife. (2001, pg. 17)

²⁷ Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 1977, pg. lix – lxv.

Egyptologists agree on the importance of the ritually prepared or mummified body for the continuing existence in the afterlife. The *sah* was seen to be a specially prepared ‘eternal’ and idealized body the function of which was to form a physical base for the non-physical (though still corporeal) *ba* and *ka*. This body was one important link between the non-physical aspects of the deceased individual and the earth. Periodical visits by these non-physical aspects to the entombed mummy, where offerings of various sorts, including food and magical writings, were placed, were essential to continued existence in the afterlife.

These Egyptian terms *khet* and *khat* correspond to the Theosophical ‘body’ or *sthula-sarira*. I am not aware of Theosophical writings making any distinction between the alive and dead body (corpse). The *sah* has no specific correspondence in the Theosophical teachings that I can locate. The difference in emphasis between the Theosophical and Egyptian teachings in relation to the physical body are marked. I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter the process of disembodiment (death) and its relation to mummification, but, at this point, a few general notes can be made.

In *Isis Unveiled* a cryptic remark is made in relation to the *Sah*. H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“They also had a sixth principle named *Sah* – or mummy; but the functions of this one commenced only after the death of the body. After due purification, during which the soul, separated from its body, continued to revisit the latter in its mummified condition, this astral soul ‘became a God,’ for it was finally absorbed into ‘the Soul of the world.’” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. II, pg. 367)

It is not explained what the function of the mummy could have been in Theosophical terms. The *Sah*, the ritually transformed body of the deceased, was an important part of Egyptian funerary beliefs. I can think of no reference to the ritual preparation of the body of the deceased in Theosophical literature. In the broader Theosophical teachings on death and the afterlife, the physical body, or vehicle of the inner principles, plays no further role once it is cast off during the process of dying.

I will discuss the Theosophical view of mummification in Ancient Egypt in an appendix. In this section I am concerned with the *sah* as a principle of the individual in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. What is the equivalent Theosophical principle of the *sah*? Thus far, for H.P. Blavatsky, the *sah* appears to be associated with the mummy and the body. A prominent later Theosophist, Gottfried de Purucker, however, in his *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*

suggests that the *sahu* was roughly equivalent to the Theosophical reincarnating ego. Oderberg and Whellams suggest that the *sahu* may correspond to the Theosophical '*nirmanakaya*' concept. (1941, pg. 438) In general, in Theosophical thought an adept in the *nirmanakaya* state or vesture consists of all the usual human principles except the physical body (discarded) and the *kama* principle (desire having been eliminated by the adept in this spiritual state.) (Blavatsky, 1990, pg. 231) It is difficult to reconcile the two later Theosophical perspectives with each other, and with H.P. Blavatsky's initial statement. One potential reason for the discrepancy between later Theosophical views and H.P. Blavatsky's own presentation is that as the field of Egyptology advanced it became more difficult to stand by the underdeveloped statements of the founder.

4.4.2 The *ka*

Budge translates *ka* as 'double'. (1977, pg. lix) Ikram gives 'double' or 'life-force' as general meanings for *ka*. (2003, pg. 26) Theoretically 'astral double' and 'life force, vital energy' would be two separate principles in the Theosophical scheme.²⁸ Taylor notes the complexity surrounding the term and does not think a direct English translation is possible. He further notes that the Egyptian use of the term was not consistent or uniform over time. (2001, pg. 18) From the Theosophical perspective, any fundamental change in usage over time resulting in basic changes in meaning would be explained away by the esoteric/exoteric paradigm and the notion of further revelation.

A.O. Bolshakov, in his *Man and his double: in Egyptian ideology of the old kingdom*, outlines the historical debates within Egyptology over this complex idea. I will outline part of his historical survey and then examine his perspective on concept of the *ka*. He covers a period of 'primary theories' in which the main lines of interpretation were first suggested. Some lines of enquiry have been carried forward into the present; some have been abandoned.

In brief summary, Bolshakov proposes four basic primary approaches to the concept of the *ka*. The first line, exemplified by Maspero (1893), conceptualises the *ka* as an exact copy of the person, a double, but still a 'physical' entity of a type of matter. It is born with the person and is embodied in statues. Le Page Renouf conceived of the *ka* in terms of the Roman 'genius', a sort of spiritual double. (1997, pg. 124) The second line of interpretation saw the *ka* as an individual's 'genius', with no relation to the tomb statues and murals. W.B. Kristensen saw the *ka* in terms of a person's personified vital force. (1997, pg. 125) The third line of interpretation

²⁸ Theosophically, the 'double' might also refer to the *kama-rupa*.

represented by Erman (1906) suggested the *ka* was a non-material force which distinguishes living beings from non living objects. (1997, pg. 125) The fourth school, represented by A. Wiedemann (1890), developed Samuel Birch's concept of the *ka* as the 'personality' or 'individuality'. (1997, pg. 125) Wiedemann's conceptions were taken up by A.H. Sayce. For Sayce, the *ka* was seen as the double of the person. It was a real and material being, the object seen by the mind when it conceived of it. It was the object's essence and personality, these being related to the 'name' of a person. Sayce, explains Bolshakov, saw the *ka* as the "spiritual reflection of an object, but a spiritual reflection which had a concrete form." (1997, pg. 126)

These concepts were taken up and developed over time to the present day. Many of the ideas were held simultaneously; for example, he notes that for R. David the *ka* was conceived in terms of spirit, double, life or vital force, self, and the personality. (1997, pg. 131)

I will focus on Bolshakov's conception of the *ka* as it reveals the fundamentally different way that Egyptologists approach this issue compared to the Theosophical engagement. Bolshakov suggests that Western philosophy lacks an exact synonym for the concept of the Egyptian *ka*. He proposes "double' as the closest approximation. (1997, pg.153) The *ka* is intimately related to its representations in the tomb which could be the tomb murals depicting the deceased and the statues of the deceased. These representations are paradoxically both inanimate and animate. The representations in the tomb partake in some way of the things they are intended to portray. The representations evoke the memory of the deceased in the mind of the viewer. This 'evoked memory image' of the deceased *is* the *ka*. This subjective mental image is projected outward to become part of the world 'out there', to become another object in the world. The *ka* becomes "a copy of the whole man's individuality including his outer appearance and personal characteristics." (1997, pg. 152) The *ka* is not immaterial, and it is a comprehensive and full copy of the deceased. Bolshakov notes that in Egyptian texts when the phrase, "...for the KA of NN..." is used, where NN stands for the name of the deceased, this is equivalent to saying, "...for NN..." The *ka* of an individual is that person in totality. (1997, pg. 149)

The *ka* is related to the 'name' (*ren*) of a person. Both the name and the image or representation of the deceased could evoke the deceased in the mind of the living. The name designated a specific individual, the evoked image of which objectified was that individual in full. Bolshakov notes that the "*ka* is both the representation and the Double, while the *ren* is the name and the Double." (1997, pg. 157) Both the *ren* and the *ka* exist independently of

their representations; they are born with the person. Their continued existence in the minds of the living, however, was unstable and unreliable. The tomb representations and statues gave the *ka* a more permanent existence independent of the living capacity to recollect the deceased. The deceased, as the *ka*, required food for its continued existence in the afterlife. To facilitate this need various representations of food were made in tomb murals. It is the *ka* of the food offered which the *ka* of the deceased consumed.

The process which characterises that of the human physical being is that of birth to death. The *ka*, however, followed a different movement. It was born with the person, and, at the person's death, 'representations' (i.e. murals and statues) were created, which allowed the *ka* to live in eternity. The *ka*, therefore, was 'born' twice in a sense, firstly with the person, and, secondly, when the 'representations' were ritually brought to life in the tomb. (1997, pg. 210) While alive, the *ka* maintained an individual's life force and mental activities. Bolshakov distinguishes between what he calls the figurative *ka* and the non-figurative *ka*. The former is the external *ka*, the *ka* of the deceased, while the latter was the basis of a person's existence, it regulated his mental and physiological processes, and it enabled both psychic and corporeal activities. (1997, pg. 292) The *ka* represents a conception of life in a continuative aspect. (Finnestad, 1986, pg. 363) Following death, one 'unites with one's *ka*' emphasising that life continues after death.

The *ka* existed in a '*ka* world', so to speak. This double world was an idealised world representing the deceased and the preferences of the deceased. It is an incomplete copy of the world depicting the ideal world of the deceased. This double world, portrayed in tombs, represented an ideal reality as conceived by the deceased. It is still a 'real' world and existed in parallel to the earthly world.

To get a sense of the concepts the Ancient Egyptians associated with the *ka*, I will list a few of the central points made by Egyptologists. I draw on Taylor (2001) and Ikram (2003) for these basic ideas. The *ka* is non-physical, and has been described as either 'crucial' or 'the most important' aspect of the human being. It is created or formed with the person at their birth; it continues through life and into death where it plays a crucial role. The terms 'doppelganger' and 'twin' have been used to describe it. The *ka* was regarded as the animating force of the person. After death it required a physical body or object to inhabit in order to receive the offerings in the tomb. This physical vehicle could be the mummy, the *ka*-statue, or pictorial representations in the tomb or burial chamber. These offerings sustained the *ka* and the deceased, without which they could not survive in the afterlife. It was not thought that the food

offerings were physically consumed by the *ka*; rather the symbolic substances fuelled the aspects of the person in the afterlife. It is in this sense that the *ka* is linked with the concept of a sustaining life-force critical to the survival of the individual in the afterlife.

Regardless of the specific Theosophical correspondence for the *ka*, its basic post-mortem function has no parallel in Theosophical writings. That is, the deceased entity has no need of any sustaining energy from the physical world. Any link to the physical world is regarded as hindering the true afterlife states, and the quicker the four lower Theosophical principles²⁹ dissolve the more beneficial it is for the three higher principles³⁰ which survive death. I will discuss the process of death and the afterlife states in the following chapter, but at this point it can be noted that there is no Theosophical equivalent of the importance of a physical link of the deceased entity to a life-sustaining offering in the physical world.

What is the Theosophical equivalent of the Egyptian *ka*? In her earlier writings, H.P. Blavatsky correlates the *ka* with the Theosophical *prana*. In *The Secret Doctrine*, working with the tables of Massey and Lambert, the *ka* is correlated to the astral body (Lambert) or not related at all (Massey.) This reveals the tension Theosophy invokes by needing to identify its concepts with set concepts in other traditions. Later Theosophical commentators will reflect this uncertainty (between an identification with either the astral double or *prana*), and each choice will be able to be supported by references in H.P. Blavatsky's writings. I suggest then that as H.P. Blavatsky gave no definitive correlation, no 'Ancient Wisdom' statement on this issue exists, and no thoughts of later commentators will attain the status of uncontested acceptance within the Theosophical Society.

4.4.3 The *ba*

It is difficult to do justice in a short space to a complex term like the Egyptian *ba*. Gods, humans, and even inanimate things could have a *ba*. In some texts, some entities could have more than one *ba* (*ba*)³¹. In the context of the king, god or ordinary mortal it signified the manifesting power of that being. The gods then would have more complicated, powerful *bas* than the humans. The *ba* was also the manifesting vehicle of the being (the individual), primarily after death and possibly during sleep. (Taylor, 2001, pg. 20) It was one of the modes

²⁹ Body (*sthula-sarira*), Astral body (*linga-sarira*), Vital energy (*prana*) and Desire principle (*kama*).

³⁰ Spirit (*atman*), Spiritual soul (*buddhi*) and Mind (*manas*).

³¹ A plurality of *bas* represents an intensification of the manifested power of the entity. (Zabkar, 1968, pg. 160)

of non-physical being the individual could assume after death. It should not be forgotten that we are referring to a conception of the total individual, not an ‘aspect’ of an individual such as the ‘soul’. While being regarded as non-physical, however, it shared the human characteristics of eating, drinking, speaking, and moving. It was through this entity that the individual could leave the tomb or cemetery. Then it could travel in the afterlife, with the sun in his solar barque and in this world. (Ikram, 2003, pg. 28) A sense of freedom of movement and the capacity to transform characterises the *ba*, and, in the *Book of the dead*, the ‘transformation spells’ list some of the forms into which the deceased can transform after death. The *ba*, however, had to return to the deceased mummy or body in order to ensure the survival of the deceased, and various spells and prayers concern the uniting of the *ba* and body. This re-uniting of the *ba* to the mummified corpse constituted a notion of Egyptian resurrection. The *ba*, while free to travel in various worlds, of necessity needed to return to the deceased who, ideally mummified and, therefore, in a transformed eternal body, could live in eternity.

Zabkar in his important study, *A study of the ba concept in Ancient Egyptian texts*, goes into great detail on this concept throughout Egyptian history. Focusing on its presentation in the *Book of the Dead* he makes the following conclusions:

- The *ba* comes into existence at or after death;³²
- It is corporeal;
- Being a sort of alter-ego, it is the personification of the vital forces of an individual;
- It is not an aspect of the individual, but represents the fullness of the individual, the totality of the being;³³ and
- It does not bear any real relationship to the Christian concept of the ‘soul’. (1968, pg. 162)

Zabkar introduces an important issue in the comparison of the human individual as imagined in the Theosophical and Egyptian schemes. The *ba* is not a part or aspect of the individual. It is one of a variety of shifting modes of being, each representing the totality of the individual.³⁴

³² This is disputed, though, and in the entry on the ‘*Ba*’ in Redford’s *Essential guide to Egyptian mythology* (2003) where it is noted that some Egyptian texts record the individual in conversation with their *ba* during life.

³³ See also Zabkar, pg. 130.

³⁴ See Zakbar pg. 1, 3, 97 and 154.

The *ba* was not conceived of, in Ancient Egypt, as a spiritual part of man, or as a ‘soul’. It was instead the complete person himself. Zakbar writes in relation to the *ba* concept in the *Coffin Texts*, “The fact that in each of these forms (body or corpse, Ba, Ka, Akh, Shadow) the deceased acts and lives as a full individual points to a monistic concept of man as opposed to the idea, traditionally attributed to the Egyptians, of a man as a composite of a material and a spiritual element. Even though the *Ka* and some other of these entities coexisted with the individual during his lifetime, they were, each one of them, considered to be full physical entities and not ‘spiritual’ components of a human composite.” (1968, pg. 97)

This is a different presentation from that of the Theosophical seven-fold principles, which are in a certain sense distinct, with specific qualities associated with them. The lower four dissipate following the death of the individual, although they may linger around the body for a shorter or longer length of time. Theosophy certainly expresses itself in terms of distinct soul, spirit, and body divisions.

The Theosophical equivalent of the *ba* is not simple to establish. The tables above from H.P. Blavatsky’s writings suggest it was associated with the Theosophical *Prana*, *Kama*, *Buddhi*³⁵ and *Manas*. The later Theosophical writer, de Purucker, suggests that the human soul is the equivalent of a mortal, human double, “equivalent to *prana* in some of its functions, or to *kama-manas*.”³⁶ Oderberg and Whellams make the *ba* correspond to the *higher-manas*. (1941, pg. 439) It presents a difficulty for the Theosophical interpretive method to have an Egyptian concept to equate to two Theosophical principles, as the number seven is set by H.P. Blavatsky and needs to be maintained. That the Egyptians had a seven-fold classification of principles of the human individual is the one thing she seemed certain of. The monistic view of the individual presented by Zakbar, however, renders the Theosophical mode of interpretation untenable. The Theosophical confusion in trying to pin down a specific correlation reveals the struggle it undergoes to come to grips with a totally different way of presenting the human being.

4.4.4 The *ab*

The heart is one of the most recognizable aspects of the individual in the Egyptian religion. Its most popular depiction is from the Judgement scene of the deceased in the *Book of the dead* where it is weighed against the feather of *maat*. The deceased *Osiris* was referred to as being

³⁵ See my comments on Table 4 where I suggest *ba* as a possible substitute for ‘*sa*’.

³⁶ From the entry for *ba* in the *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*.

‘weary of heart’ indicating that his heart was not functioning optimally. The heart was symbolic of life, and the deceased, who desired eternal life, required the heart to be awake and in its place in the body. The heart was the only internal organ not removed during the process of mummification.

Jan Assmann notes that there were two words for heart in Ancient Egypt, the *jb-heart* and the *hati-heart*.³⁷ The *jb-heart* was inherited from the individual’s mother at birth. This heart bound individuals biologically, from parent to child, and so on. Assmann notes that it represented the ‘emotional and cognitive inner life’ of the individual. (2005, pg. 30) The *hati-heart* signified consciousness, memory, and mental phenomena. It was not biologically inherited and was connected to the individuality and personal identity. This personal identity needed to be continued into the afterlife as the deceased desired eternal life.

The physical heart was the vehicle of the essence of the individual and was the most important part of the physical body. The heart remained preserved through the process of mummification, providing a link between the living and the deceased person. It was further protected in the afterlife by amulets being placed on the body. (Ikram 2003, pg. 24) The heart was the centre of the individual, and it governed the body and was the location of the intellect and memory. (Taylor 2001, pg. 17) It was the heart, as the centre of the moral life of the individual, which was weighed against the feather of *maat* in the hall of judgement. Entrance into the afterlife depended on a successful judgement, and the deceased hoped that his heart would confirm his words during this scene.

The only specific mention in *The Secret Doctrine* of the *ab (Ab Hat)* is in the table listing the divisions of Franz Lambert. (See Table 5) It is shown as being in correspondence with the Theosophical *Kama* (desire) principle.

The heart is, however, referred to in a passage in *The Secret Doctrine* as the ‘ancestral heart’.

“And in verse 35, addressing in magic formula that which is called, in Egyptian esotericism, the “ancestral heart,” or the re-incarnating principle, the permanent EGO, the defunct says :- “Oh my heart, my ancestral heart necessary for my transformations,do not separate thyself from me before the guardian of the Scales. Thou art my personality within my breast, divine companion *watching over my flesh*es (bodies).....” (1988, vol. I, pg. 220)

³⁷ Assmann notes that the two terms have been regarded as synonyms. (2005, pg. 29)

In this passage, the ancestral heart is associated with the Theosophical re-incarnating ego, or the higher-*manas*. The passage itself is in reference to reincarnation. H.P Blavatsky references this to chapter lxiv in the *Book of the dead*. In Davis, chapter lxiv vs. 34-35, this is translated as,

“My heart from my mother! My heart from my mother! My heart necessary to my transformations! Do not rise against me, do not bear witness against me, do not oppose me among the circle of the gods and do not part with me before the Keeper of the scales. Thou art my personality in my bosom, divine partner, protecting my flesh.” (1894, pg. 104)

These verses are to be found in chapter 30b of modern translations of the *Book of the dead*. Faulkner translates this as,

“O my heart which I had from my mother! O my heart which I had from my mother! O my heart of different ages. Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance, for you are my ka which was in my body, the protector who made my members hale.” (Faulkner, 1972, pg. 27)

Another translation by Allen shows a slightly different wording. I focus on just one sentence, which in *The Secret Doctrine* refers to the “ancestral heart”,

“My heart of my mother, my heart of my mother, my breast that I had on earth, stand not against me as witness, oppose me not in the Council. (1974, pg. 39)

H.P. Blavatsky shows “ancestral heart”, Faulkner translates “heart of different ages”, and Allen translates, “breast that I had on earth”. The sense of the text appears to be the deceased pleading with his heart not to abandon him in his hour of judgement in the afterlife. The life he lived on earth, recorded in his heart, is now to be judged by the weighing of that heart against the feather of *maat*, the Keeper of the Balance. The deceased wishes to continue his existence in the afterlife, and requires his heart for this to happen.

In the Theosophical context, the defunct is appealing to their higher mind or self, to that permanent aspect of themselves which does not ‘die’ at death. Not to be separated from this aspect of his constitution is the appeal of the personality, the lower-*manas* or lower self, which wishes to be drawn up into the higher planes after death. The inner or higher planes in this

context in the Theosophical teachings are the *devachan*, or Abode of bliss. In the *Secret Doctrine* passage cited above the term ‘fleshes’ or ‘bodies’ refers to the various incarnations of the re-incarnating ego. In the Egyptian text, the ‘flesh’ is the physical body, indicating that the deceased expected to exist in a physical body in the afterlife.

I will discuss the Theosophical use of this passage in the context of reincarnation in an appendix. From the perspective of Egyptology, the context of the passage is in relation to the Judgement scene, and the ‘opening of the mouth’ ceremony. Davis’s translation makes this clear in the sentence preceding that quoted above,

“Now a scarabaeus of hard stone, shaped, coated with gold, shall be placed in the breast of the man to whom shall have been performed the ceremony of the opening of the mouth ... (lxiv, vs. 33-34)” (1894, pg. 104)

The opening of the mouth ceremony was that part of the mortuary ritual in which the senses were restored to the deceased. The deceased became a full living corporeal person in the afterlife. The ‘limbs’, the ‘members’ (of the body), or the ‘flesh’ are restored to the person so that he can live as a full, physical person in the afterlife. The ‘transformations’ the individual desires are the ability to transform into any being in the afterlife. It signifies the freedom and mobility that the deceased hoped to achieve after death.

4.4.5 The *khaibit*

This term refers to a ‘shadow’ or ‘shade’. Ikram suggests the word for ‘shadow’ is *shuyet*. (2003, pg.28) As an integral aspect of the human constitution, it could leave the individual and could exist apart from the body. The shadow was viewed as a physical entity and could be seen as another potential, separate mode of existence of the individual following death. It relied on the tomb offerings for sustenance. (Budge 1977, pg. lxi) For Taylor, the function of the shadow was not clearly defined; it was, however, associated with the body, and as being cast by the body retained a link to it in some manner. (2001, pg. 24) It was, however, also linked to the *ba*, and, like it, returned to the tomb of the deceased at night.

From the Theosophical perspective various forms of the word are used, *Khaba*, *Cheybi* and the term ‘shadow’ itself. What then is the Theosophical corresponding principle? De Purucker in his *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary* has the following entry,

“Khaba or Khaibit (Egyptian) Shade, shadow; many of the deities are represented with two bodies, one often termed the thought-body, corresponding to the mayavi-rupa. There were other Egyptian terms for the mayavi-rupa. Blavatsky made khaba equivalent in the human constitution to the spiritual soul or buddhi, whereas Massey made it equivalent to astral body or linga-sarira (SD 2:632-3). *See also KA.*”

The preponderance of statements made by H.P. Blavatsky, though, put the *khaba* in correspondence with the astral body, not just in the extracts above from *Isis Unveiled*, and in the *Collected Works*, but also in the Reading no. 2 where the *shadow* is made equivalent to the astral body. The list from Franz Lambert in *The Secret Doctrine*, however, does make the *Cheybi* correspond to the Theosophical *buddhi*. In Reading no. 4 we note that H.P. Blavatsky makes the *khou* equivalent to the astral body.

What then to make of these seeming inconsistent statements? One would begin by looking for a definitive statement imbued with Theosophical authority. Without locating that, and being presented with different statements on the same topic, one is forced to conclude that no statement from the Ancient Wisdom tradition on this issue has been revealed. It is possible that one of the presentations is the real esoteric perspective, but there is no certain way for this to be claimed in the Theosophical Society. In the absence of H.P. Blavatsky, one suspects that no defining statement can ever be made. H.P. Blavatsky’s own premise, of a consistent, factual, and scientific Ancient Wisdom tradition which has been checked and confirmed by generations of adepts forces Theosophy to present consistent teachings on a theme.³⁸ Inconsistencies in later Theosophical commentaries reflect uncertainty or ambiguity in the source material.

4.4.6 The *khu* (*Akh*)

One obstacle to discussing this mode of being of the individual is the uncertainty in identifying the Theosophical equivalent. There also appears to be a small change in terminology in the field of Egyptology. Budge lists the term *khu*, but not the term *akh* the latter of which is the term both Ikram and Taylor use. Ikram and Taylor do not refer to the term *khu* which leads me to conclude that *khu* and *akh* are the same concept in Egyptology. H.P. Blavatsky, in her article *Theories about reincarnation and spirits* in her *Collected Works*, does, however, separate the *khou* and the *akh* having them correspond to separate Theosophical principles. (See Table 4) In the series in this article, however, the term *ba* is not mentioned.

³⁸ See *The Secret Doctrine* vol. I, pg. 272-3.

Friedman in her PhD thesis *On the meaning of akh (3H) in the Egyptian mortuary texts* has examined this concept in detail. The term *akh* has basic meaning of ‘effective’ and ‘to be effective’. It was used in reference to daily life situations and was transferred to concepts relating to the afterlife. To become an *akh* meant to become an effective transfigured deceased. It is important to note that Friedman, following in the work of Zabkar, also regards the *akh* as one way in which the full individual can exist and not merely as a ‘spiritual’ aspect of the deceased. The *akh* was capable of full physical life including the ability to move freely and engage in sexual functions. (1981, pg. 14) There was a change in emphasis in Egyptian thought in relation to the *akh* from the *Pyramid Text* to the *Coffin Texts* to the *Book of the Dead*; this change mirrors the changes in the Egyptian religion itself. It also has associations beyond the individual however I focus on this aspect of the *akh*. In the *Coffin Texts*, the *akh* was a synonym for the deceased who remained a corporeal, effective entity requiring food offerings. Emphasising its corporeal aspect was the notion that it could perform labour in the afterlife. (1981, pg. 134) Without the physical body, the deceased could not ‘effectively’ function in the afterlife. (1981, pg. 235)

Budge writes, “The *khu*, or spiritual soul, is often mentioned in connexion with the *ba* or heart-soul, and it seems to have been regarded as an ethereal being, in fact the SOUL, which under no circumstances could die; it dwelt in the *sahu* or spiritual body.” (1977, pg. lxii) For Ikram, the *akh*³⁹ was the outcome of the union between the *ba* and the *ka*, and it had celestial or stellar associations. Becoming an *akh*, or the deceased in the afterlife figured as an eternal, living being of light, was the hoped for goal of people. (2003, pg. 31) Only those persons, however, who were positively judged in the afterlife would be transformed into this state. Those found wanting against the harmony of *maat* would face annihilation instead. In the Old Kingdom, the *akh* was chiefly identified with the gods and kings. Only in later periods of Egyptian history was this transformation associated with the common people of Egypt. The *akh* came into being only after death (although preparations for this state could begin while alive) and reflected the successful transformation of the person from a mortal to an immortal state. (Ikram 2003, pg. 31) To enable the transformation into an *akh* the deceased was also required to have prepared the required offerings and to have magical knowledge of the various spells.

Taylor confirms the *akh* (transfigured being) as being the state of existence the deceased hoped to achieve. It is a state of existence where the deceased became associated or identified with

³⁹ Eaton lists some associations of the *akh*, “effectiveness” in various realms, “the location of the rising sun”, “the horizon or light-land” and “radiance”. (2005/2006, pg. 89)

the gods, and mirrored, or participated, in the movements of the gods. (2001, pg. 31) The gods themselves were *akh*, but in terms of the transfigured deceased it is hard to describe the condition better than Taylor does when he writes, “To be *akh*, then, was to be an effective spirit, enjoying the qualities and prerogatives of gods, having the capacity for eternal life and being capable of influencing other beings...” (2001, pg. 32) Taylor suggests the *akh* differs from the *ka* and *ba* and *ren* as they are aspects of the individual while the *akh* is a state which is attained only after a successful judgement in the afterlife. (2001, pg. 32) The *akh* was also specifically associated with light.

This is a complicated term to consider in the Theosophical context. The later commentator, Gottfried de Purucker, makes *Akhu*, *Khu*, *Chu* and *Khou* all synonyms.⁴⁰ Oderberg and Whellams, however, have seemingly separated the *aakhu* (*atman*) from the *ku* (*kama*). (1941, pg.428-9) Complicating the article by Oderberg and Whellam article is that, on their first diagram, “Correspondences between the celestial and human hierarchies” they list the series, ‘Set, Ku, Kama.’ (1941, pg. 428) On their diagram on the next page “A diagram of the causal (potential) man according to the Ancient Egyptians”, however, they list the series as Set, *Ka*, Kama. (1941, pg. 429) As both ‘ku’ and ‘ka’ are potential Egyptian terms it becomes difficult to follow the correspondence in the minds of the authors. One wonders whether an error has crept into the article at some point.

In her early writings, H.P. Blavatsky makes the *akh* correspond to the Theosophical *manas* principle. In my Table 5, *akhu* is shown next to the *kama-rupa* in the Massey origin table, and, in the Franz Lambert origin table, *chu* is shown in correspondence with *atman*. Intuitively I feel the *atman* correspondence is more correct from a Theosophical perspective; it is, however, not unambiguously supported in H.P. Blavatsky’s writings. Like many other Egyptian / Theosophical correspondences there is no unanimity in the source writings, and as such there can be no Ancient Wisdom statement. A member of the Theosophical Society could argue for a variety of correspondences with reference to supporting origin literature.

4.4.7 The *sekhem*

Budge defines the *sekhem*, or ‘power’ as “the incorporeal personification of the vital force of a man” (1977, pg. lxii) Neither Ikram nor Taylor appears to mention the *sekhem* in relation to the human constitution. Lurker, in his *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, confirms *sekhem* as ‘power’. (1994, pg. 105) The term also refers to certain

⁴⁰ Refer the *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary* under the various alphabetical entries.

entities in the chain of being, for example stars, which are located between humans and the gods. Associated with *Osiris*, it was a divine characteristic and a manifestation of power.

From the Theosophical perspective, H.P. Blavatsky does not mention the term in her various presentations of the human constitution of Ancient Egypt. She does mention the term twice in *The Secret Doctrine*.⁴¹ I have discussed the one verse in Reading no. 3 above, where *Sekhem* appears to be either a deity or a place (or both) which has a function in the afterlife.

The following verse in *The Secret Doctrine* is, perhaps, better discussed in the chapter on the afterlife, but for the sake of completeness I quote it here,

“For Se-khen is the residence or *loka* of the god Khem (Horus-Osiris, or Father and Son), hence the “Devachan” of Atma-Buddhi. In the Ritual of the Dead the defunct is shown entering into Sekhem with Horus-Thot and “emerging from it as a pure spirit” (lxiv., 29).”

“It is in Sekhem that lies concealed ‘the Mysterious Face,’ or the real man concealed under the false personality,...”, “Even exoterically *Sekhem* is the residence of the god Khem, and Khem is Horus avenging the death of his father Osiris, hence punishing the Sins of man when he becomes a disembodied Soul.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 220)

Two separate terms are used above, *se-khen* and *sekhem*. Despite the different spelling in two consecutive sentences I have regarded them as synonyms. *The Theosophical Glossary* lists *sekhem* and *sekten* as synonyms, defining them as, “*Devachan*; the place of post mortem reward, a state of bliss, not a locality.” (1990, pg. 294) Gottfried de Purucker, in his *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary*, lists an entry for *sekhem* as, “(Egyptian) A shrine or sanctuary; the gods of the shrine; the vital power of a human being; any power, spiritual or physical; as a verb, to read, be strong, etc.” The Theosophical sense of these passages is that *Sekhem* is an after death state (the *Devachan*) and location wherein the higher principles rest between incarnations.

One can also note in these passages two further correspondences given for *Atma* and *Buddhi* in H.P. Blavatsky’s writings, *Osiris* for *Atman* and *Horus* for *Buddhi*.

⁴¹ *The Secret Doctrine* 1988, vol. I, pg. 220-1, and pg. 237.

4.4.8 The *ren*

The *ren* or 'name' was another important element of the Egyptian constitution. The name conferred not just identity but even existence itself to the person. This appears to be true for the mortal life and for the survival of the person after death. There was thought to be a deep connection between a person's name and that person's essential existence or individuality. Offerings to the deceased were presented in the name of the deceased and they aided in the continuance of their existence. In the tomb or grave, various objects were inscribed with the name of the deceased, objects which could act as vehicles for the *ka* and *ba*. In the magical sphere, knowledge of a person's (or god's) name could give one power over that being. (Ikram 2003, pg.24-26) Taylor suggests that the *ren* was one of the media through which an individual's existence was made manifest; it contained the essence of the person. (2001, pg. 23) The loss, destruction, or forgetting of the name could result in the individual's ceasing to exist.

I have not found any reference to the term or concept *ren* in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. It is not referred to in any of her correspondence charts, nor is it listed in any of the indexes to her works I have examined. Oderberg and Whellams suggest the 'Ran' or 'essence' corresponds to the "transmuted Individuality of a man which is developed through the aspirations and effort of the personality." (1941. Pg. 437) The importance placed by Egyptians on the concept of the *Ren* is not reflected in general Theosophical thought. The survival of an individual's name in a physical or even mental (memory) way is not important for the deceased's continued existence in the afterlife. Instead, death is ideally accompanied by the complete disintegration of the 'physical' or four lower human principles. The three higher principles withdraw into the inner planes, unconnected to all intents and purposes with the physical world.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Theosophy presents a relatively consistent set of teachings on the seven principles which constitute the individual. The meaning set associated with each principle is well defined and widely accepted across Theosophy. While there are variations, or elaborations, over time these are well integrated in the Theosophical world. The seven principles are one of the fundamental statements of Theosophy and its Ancient Wisdom Tradition. Any tradition aiming for Theosophical acceptance must mirror this sevenfold presentation. Almost any

Theosophical engagement with another tradition involves locating the Theosophical seven principles in its teachings through various interpretive techniques.

H.P. Blavatsky presents no systematic or consistent Theosophical teaching on the constitution of an individual in the Egyptian religion. There are variations in her presentation over time as her works are published. These variations in presentation make it difficult for a definitive position to be found in her Theosophical writings on this issue. This leads to inconsistencies in the writings of later Theosophists who select one or other presentation as a foundation. For later Theosophists, there would be the need to explain the various inconsistent presentations. In terms of my basic thought, H.P. Blavatsky makes content specific statements. Various content specific statements which are at variance with one another are simply that, statements which are in contradiction to one another. It is the role of the academic to note these different positions, while it is the role of Theosophists to make sense of them.

Inconsistencies in the source material call into question the foundation of the Theosophical self presentation as a 'scientific' record of the knowledge of 'generations of adepts'. Where inconsistencies exist, statements need to be judged and evaluated. This process of second level evaluation by Theosophical commentators is subjective, and it lacks the charismatic force of primary statements by H.P. Blavatsky. A further result of the inconsistencies in the foundation writings of H.P. Blavatsky is that later Theosophical writers will present alternate readings of the same texts. We will find, therefore, different correspondences between the Egyptian and Theosophical principles presented by later Theosophical writers.

H.P. Blavatsky also does not appear to engage in any detail directly with primary Egyptian texts, instead using the works of other scholars to support her general themes.⁴² She does not show any real knowledge of Egyptian sources or teachings beyond those already in the public arena. Her references to 'occult' Egyptian works not available to the public would need to be treated with suspicion by academics until they become available for general scrutiny.

A basic conceptual problem with the Theosophical presentation and interpretation is that it can often be based on superficial similarity, but it takes no notice of the wider context of the concept under examination. For example, while Egyptians may have had a term translatable as 'double' in English, this does not mean that the functions associated with this entity mirror

⁴² In *The Secret Doctrine* vol. II, pg. 431 she states she has examined the 'Dendera Zodiacs' in person and does not need to rely on second hand sources. Goyios (2009), however, appears to have shown that she drew from Mackey's *Mythological Astronomy* and carried his errors over into her own work.

those of the equivalent Theosophical term, 'astral double'. This forces the Theosophical interpretive moves invoking the various strategies I outlined in chapter three.

By positing an underlying 'esoteric' meaning, which was correct in the beginning and basically unchanging over time, the Theosophical interpretation is unable (and would perhaps regard it as unnecessary) to contextualise any particular teaching. It must seek uniform meaning and would need to explain changes in meaning and usage of time. Various coping strategies would need to be invoked to do this.

Despite the Theosophical use of tables to identify and correlate equivalent terms and concepts, there may not always be one to one correspondences. The Theosophical system presents a set of theoretically discrete principles. (These principles may not be subject to such set divisions in the human life as lived; there is a sense that they are also theoretical constructs.) In the Egyptian scheme, some of the aspects of the individual appear to contain characteristics of two or more Theosophical principles. This is sanctioned in Theosophical thought. Different world systems may well present the human individual in their own unique way. At issue is that, should the presentation differ from the Theosophical scheme, it would no longer represent the 'school' of esotericism to which H.P. Blavatsky belonged, the Ancient Wisdom School. A relevant point here is that H.P. Blavatsky presentation of the principles did evolve with more subtle divisions coming into play in her *Esoteric Instructions* and *Inner Group Teachings*. These postdate *The Secret Doctrine*, and it is a point to be debated as to whether the later amendments should be retrospectively read into her earlier works.

The human individual in the Egyptian and Theosophical schemes is rooted in their own larger contexts. The functions and purposes of these aspects of the individual (principles in Theosophy) are intimately related to this larger religious context. The Egyptian texts which have survived reveal a focus on the afterlife, and a quest for eternity in that life. Many of the aspects or modes of being which the Egyptian texts deal with are involved with concerns of this afterlife existence. From the Theosophical perspective, there is not the same uniform focus on the afterlife. Only the higher principles survive the death of the individual for any length of time. Theosophy is concerned with the embodied and after-death state of the individual. Part of the focus of the Theosophical presentation is the linking of the individual through his principles to the cosmos or solar system. The principles are associated with different planes and functions. A vast system of correspondences is revealed knowledge of which can lead to

dangerous actions and power on the part of individuals. It is partly through a process of de-contextualisation that the Egyptian terms are appropriated into the Theosophical scheme.

This de-contextualising is highlighted by the ‘monistic’ view of the individual of academic Egyptology. This view of the individual is fundamentally at odds with the Theosophical concept of the individual which more closely mirrors classical Greek and Christian views of body, soul, and spirit. The nature of the Theosophical system of H.P. Blavatsky is such that it cannot integrate different perspectives of the individual; it can only ‘correct’ through its interpretative moves. The Theosophical search for fundamental unity, in fact a search for itself, in world traditions shows its shortcomings as an interpretive technique.

That said, H.P. Blavatsky’s presentation may reflect or mirror some perspectives current in her time. Egyptology has evolved as an academic science, and an academic review and evaluation of Theosophy must be rooted in her historical context. That Theosophical perspectives do not appear to have stood the test of time is a criticism of the Theosophical interpretive technique which is rooted in an ‘esoteric’ wisdom complete in the beginning.

In the following chapter, I will examine the Theosophical presentation of death and the afterlife in the teachings of Ancient Egypt. It is the human being who dies, and the interpretive problems of Theosophy are magnified as the aspects of the individual are embodied in the context of a specific religious doctrine.

The manner in which H.P. Blavatsky presents Egyptian concepts in *The Secret Doctrine* is the topic of this dissertation. In chapter four, the constitution of the individual in the Egyptian and Theosophical teachings was discussed. This chapter will examine the related topics of death and the afterlife as presented in the Theosophical construction of the Egyptian religion. It is the individual who enters the afterlife states and these topics are intimately related.

Conceptions of death and the afterlife are central themes in many world religions, and Theosophy and the Ancient Egyptian religion are no exceptions to this rule. The two related themes of reincarnation and mummification will be touched on in appendix two and five. Many of the details of these themes are subject to debate within Egyptology, and I will contrast the Theosophical statements against the mainstream academic position.

The first section of this chapter outlines the classic Theosophical teachings on death and the afterlife. It highlights the relevant Theosophical concepts that relate specifically to H.P. Blavatsky's presentation of the Ancient Egyptian teachings on these topics. This will form the background for the second section, in which we will read a series of selected readings from *The Secret Doctrine* on these themes. The third section of this chapter will contrast the Theosophical conception against the current mainstream position of Egyptology.

The primary aim remains to state reliably the Theosophical position of H.P. Blavatsky on these themes as they are presented in *The Secret Doctrine*. I will also look to compare and contextualise her statements in the light of mainstream Egyptology and to identify where possible the sources she used and the manner in which she drew these sources into her larger Theosophical scheme.

The level of comparison is the doctrinal. This is the level at which Theosophy operates in its engagement with world religions. In the Theosophical mode of interpretation, religious statements are objective, scientific truth statements about the nature of the world and the history of humanity. Theosophy seeks to locate these 'scientific' Theosophical truths in the world's religions, a process that, on the one hand, legitimises Theosophy and, on the other, appropriates those religions into the Theosophical grand scheme. This process of locating and inserting Theosophical content is both rational and deliberate.

5.1 DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE IN THEOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS

After death states form an essential part of the Theosophical teachings. The teachings are detailed and comprehensive.¹ The purpose of this section is to outline the Theosophical statements on the afterlife. This will form the background against which H.P. Blavatsky's specific statements on the Theosophical understanding of the Egyptian afterlife can be read. The nature of H.P. Blavatsky's statements in *The Secret Doctrine* on most topics is fragmentary, and is meant to provide 'keys' to various hidden meaning. This is the case with her comments on the afterlife of the Ancient Egyptians.

Theosophical books and articles on death, the afterlife, *devachan*, *kama-loka*, and numerous related themes are pervasive in the Theosophical literature. I cannot here survey the field as it is simply too broad. That a reliable Theosophical presentation of any topic may differ to a degree according to author and Theosophical Society is quite possible. A question of sources then becomes relevant. I have referred to this earlier, and I will rely on two main commentaries. The first is Barborka's *The Divine Plan* which has the advantage of arranging itself around quotations from *The Secret Doctrine* which is the source I am specifically assessing. The second source is G. de Purucker's *Fountain-source of occultism*, which I have found to be comprehensive and explanatory on the Theosophical teachings on the after death states.

The basic content involved, as relating to the human being, is the seven principles and the after-life states and localities (specifically the *devachan* and *kama-loka*). The seven human principles, discussed in chapter four in detail, are the *sthula-sarira* (physical body), *linga-sarira* (astral body), *prana* (life principle), *kama* (desire principle), *manas* (mental principle), *buddhi* (spiritual principle) and the *atman* (the divine principle). Broadly speaking, the lower four principles are temporary vehicles for the more permanent and enduring higher three. As the process of death unfolds, the lower four principles begin disintegrating and the higher three begin withdrawing into their own afterlife state, the *devachan* (god-land, god-region²). H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“The ‘Three-tongued flame’ that never dies is the immortal spiritual triad – the Atma-Buddhi and Manas – the fruition of the latter assimilated by the first two after every

¹ Barborka quoting *The Secret Doctrine* notes, “The mysteries of Life and Death were fathomed by the great master-minds of antiquity; ...” (1964, pg. 383-384.)

² de Purucker, G 1969, *Occult glossary: a compendium of oriental and theosophical terms*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, California.

terrestrial life. The ‘four wicks’ that go out and are extinguished, are the four lower principles, including the body.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 237)

The following section is a detailing of the process of death as presented by Theosophy.

5.1.1 What is death? What dies?

This human life and the process of reincarnation are to be seen, from the Theosophical perspective, as part of a much larger evolutionary scheme. The ‘real’ individuality, the monad³, ‘passes’ through all the kingdoms of life, from the mineral kingdom to the plant kingdom, to the animal kingdom, and then to the human kingdom which is that being discussed at present. After the human kingdom, the ranges of the gods are entered. Through each evolutionary stage the potentialities of the monad are unfolded and manifest through vehicles and bodies appropriate to that particular stage and plane of matter. This ever unfolding and enlargement of consciousness (in all its Theosophical aspects), this *becoming* conscious (awake), is the purpose of life.

The three higher principles of the human being are immortal and do not die. At least for immense time periods this higher self is permanent and will endure. What ‘dies’ then are the four lower principles. These lower principles or bodies will decompose or scatter and the higher self will withdraw into its own spheres. In a sense then, Theosophically speaking, the ‘real person’ or the individuality does not die; it is the personality⁴ which is the temporary state of embodiment. The higher self manifests itself on earth through the medium of the four lower principles, the lower self in broad terms. Death is a reversal of this manifesting of the higher self on earth.

Gottfried de Purucker makes an important point from the Theosophical perspective, namely that this process can be looked at in two ways. The process of dying can be looked at from the perspective of the bodies or principles, the ‘vehicular’ side of the human being, or from the perspective of the informing consciousness which is embodying in the bodies which constitute the person. During the process of incarnating, or being reborn, the higher self sends out a spiritual-consciousness ray which descends into more material planes. As it descends, it draws substances from the various planes to allow it to function on that plane. The substances are plane specific matter and form the material side of the principles. These substances,

³ *Atman* and *Buddhi*.

⁴ The *kama-manas*.

composed of life atoms, were associated with the entity in previous lives and are *karmically* attracted back to the incarnating entity. Death then could be viewed by following the withdrawal of this ray of spiritual consciousness (in which case death would be a change of state of consciousness), or by following the dissolution of the bodies which temporarily housed this ray. (de Purucker, 1974, pg. 539)

Humanity in general is said to be in the fourth round and fifth root race. In Theosophical evolutionary terms we are busy unfolding the *manas* aspect of the *kama* principle. Some special persons, however, for example *mahatmas* and *buddhas*, are said to be a number of evolutionary steps ahead of general humanity. A *mahatma*, may for instance, be at that stage of the evolutionary process where the *manas* aspect of *manas* is unfolding. (See Appendix four.) The locus of their consciousness resides naturally in the higher principles. ‘Death’ so to speak is the experience of unconsciousness. General humanity has not consciously awakened their higher principles. When death occurs, the average person cannot remain conscious as this consciousness ray recedes inwards. Spiritually advanced humans can locate their consciousness in the higher principles and will not sink into unconscious states of death. They will traverse the same inner planes, but will do so consciously.

5.1.2 Causal aspects of death

According to de Purucker, death occurs for two main reasons. He writes,

“This mighty spiritual-intellectual attraction acting on the higher part of the *intermediate* nature of the human constitution, combined with the wear and tear on the physico-astral compound during earth life, are the two main contributing causes of physical death.” (1974, pg. 540)

On one hand, the higher-*manas*, the reincarnating ego (the individuality), is, by its nature, attracted to the inner, more spiritual planes. Despite embodying in the lower planes following the laws of nature, it feels a constant pull in the opposite direction. On the other hand, the higher aspects of the individual are characterised by tremendous spiritual and consciousness energy. The energy of the higher principles gradually begins to wear down the lower vehicles, and they begin to disintegrate under the strain. The three principles of *kama*, *prana* and *linga-sarira* begin to break down under the strain of this higher energy flowing through them. The physical body then begins to reflect this inner dissolution in various ways, one of which would be the onset of disease, while another would be the aging process. Old age, then, from the

Theosophical perspective would be caused by an over abundance of life energy pressing on the lower, inner principles of the person, which gradually overpowers the lower vehicles which are the embodied person. The physical body can no longer contain or resist this overflow of life and energy. The three lower, inner principles (*linga-sarira*, *prana*, and *kama*) begin disintegrating first, and the physical body begins to reflect this strain.

5.1.3 Process of dying, disembodying and afterlife states

In Theosophical thought, the process of dying revolves around the higher principles separating from the lower temporary principles. This process is gradual and in general can be said to happen in stages and in a certain order.⁵ Physical life as a fully embodied being is said to be a sphere of causes, by which is meant that it is by an embodied entity that causes and *karma* are generated. The afterlife states are spheres of effects, states where the results of one's thoughts, actions, and aspirations during life are experienced.

Barborka, quoting H.P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*⁶ writes,

“Earth for the physical man, or the animal Soul; Kama-loka (Hades, the Limbo) for the disembodied man, or his *Shell*; Devachan for the higher Triad.” (1964, pg. 393)⁷

As the process of dying unfolds, the physical body (*sthula-sarira*) is said to be easily dropped. The physical body, once the balance of the principles attached to it have withdrawn, decays and disintegrates. Its constituent physical parts will scatter into the material plane, the plane of matter. To facilitate this physical disintegration cremation is said to be preferred.⁸ (Mummification would be almost the exact opposite of this means of dealing with the corpse.) Along with the body, the astral body (*linga-sarira*) and the vital energies (*pranas*) dissipate into their constituent parts and circle through the substances of the planes to which by nature they belong. For example the ‘energies’ of the body would merge with the ‘energies’ of the Earth as a whole. At a certain point in the process, there occurs the first ‘panoramic vision’. In brief, during this process, the events, memories, and thoughts the person experienced during their

⁵ It is possible in Theosophical thought that in specific instances the procedures may differ. For the purposes of clarity, I am discussing the general ‘ideal’ process of dying.

⁶ *The Secret Doctrine*, 1988, vol. I, pg. 244.

⁷ In an earlier chapter we have noted and discussed the seemingly similar statement in Egyptian texts, ‘*Akh* or *ba* to heaven, corpse to the underworld.’

⁸ I have touched on the place of cremation in Theosophy in Appendix five. In the Theosophical system, it is cremation which makes the most sense philosophically. It is not a ‘rule’ of the Theosophical Society.

life passes through their consciousness. The dying person will view their own life during this process.

5.1.3.1 *Kama-loka* – Desire world

Following Barborka's presentation, the first after-death state is the *kama-loka*. The *kama-loka*, literally the Desire-World, is a state of consciousness in which the disembodied entity resides in a vehicle or body called the *kama-rupa*, or Desire Body. Being a '*loka*' it can also be conceived of as a locality. As the physical, astral, and vital principles or bodies dissipate, the *kama* principle and lower mind (lower *manas*) exist as the *kama-rupa* in the *kama-loka*. The period of existence in this state is dependent on the nature of the life of the deceased. A life of baser sensual pleasures and desires will suggest a longer period in this realm of desire. A selfless life of spiritual aspirations will ensure a shorter period in this particular afterlife state. This *kama-rupic* entity accounts in Theosophical theory for many of the ghosts and other astral entities seen or contacted by mediums. This *kama-rupic* entity, too, will disintegrate once its time in the *kama-loka* is expended. The *kama-loka*, characterised by passions and lower mental aspirations, is not a desirable state in which to spend time. Instead a swift passage into the *devachan*, or abode of bliss, is the state of rest and reward to which one hopes to ascend after death.

5.1.3.2 The second death

The transition from the *kama-loka* to the *devachan* is preceded by the so-called 'second death'. The intensity with which the embodied person clung to life as well as their desire for physical life and its pleasures helps determine the cohesive power of the *kama-rupa* and the consequent stay in the *kama-loka*. Eventually, however, the *kama-rupa* will begin to disintegrate, and a second death is experienced, after which the entity moves to a more sublime state of consciousness characterised by the attributes of the higher, more spiritual principles. During this second death, a second 'panoramic vision' occurs where the events of the past life filter through the higher aspect consciousness of the person.

5.1.3.3 *Devachan*

The second death presages the entrance into the *devachan* proper. The *devachan* is a point between two incarnations. At this point all that exists is the two higher immortal principles, the *buddhi* and *atman*, and the higher aspects of the mind (*manas*.) The lower bodies and impulses would have, in theory, disintegrated. In individual circumstances, the *kama-rupa* may

remain as a cohesive body for some length of time. It is, however, a ‘soulless’ entity, and the real person, the Individuality, has left it for the higher states to which it belongs. The *atman* itself is permanently itself and does not ‘move’ or ‘go’ anywhere. Experiencing the *devachan* is the higher mind (higher *manas*), sometimes also called the *buddhi-manas*, under the radiating influence of the *atmic* principle. The time spent in the *devachan*, being a sphere of effects, is also determined by the nature of the life lived. A life of unrelenting evil, or negative thoughts, will not allow of a lengthy period in the *devachan*. That aspect of the person, not having been developed during life, cannot lead to a resulting positive after-death experience. In early Theosophical writings, the average time between 2 incarnations was said to be 1500yrs, based on a factor of 100 times the average life span of the time. (Judge 1973, pg. 126)

Part of the nature of the *devachan* is described in the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*,

“...there are great varieties in the Devachan states.... As many varieties of bliss, as on earth there are shades of perception and of capability to appreciate such reward. It is an ideated paradise, in each case of the Ego’s own making, and by him filled with the scenery, crowded with the incidents, and thronged with the people he would expect to find in such a sphere of compensative bliss.” (Barker, 1972, pg. 100)

The psychological, and subjective, nature of the *devachan* is emphasised in this passage. The *devachan* is a state of consciousness, the content of the experiences being those positive ideas and images built into the higher mind by the person during life. If a person imagines paradise to be a place where one is surrounded by one’s family, doing the activities one is familiar with and enjoyed during life, the after-death experience will mirror this conception.

This is an important concept in the Theosophical literature in its move to interpret the after-death teachings of the world religions. Whereas it may be suggested by some world religions that the person will in the after-life actually perform the various activities expressed, e.g. walking, hunting, eating, etc., in the Theosophical interpretation the entity will only experience these things as mental or higher mental consciousness experiences.⁹

⁹ The nature of the *devachan* is described in *The Sleeping Spheres* by Jasper Niemand. Here, with psychic sight, the state of the *devachanic* entity is described as if viewed from the outside. It is described in terms of lights, colours and vibrations. Thoughts themselves are composed of these aspects of matter. In the second part of the work, the state of an individual, subjective *devachan* experience, that of the author, is described. This experience is that of a continuation of the desired life of the once living person.

The *devachanic* state is not the highest state attainable by a human being. *Nirvana* is the state of the very highest principles. These highest human principles, however, are not said to ‘die’, as they never actually incarnate, and they remain on their own plane eternally aware. *Devachan* is also not the end of the process, as Theosophical teachings present reincarnation as a law in nature. Once the period in the *devachan* is finished, the process of re-embodiment begins.

The consciousness resting in *devachan* is also not the full experience of the highest principles of the individual after death. In Theosophical teaching, reference is made to the ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ rounds.¹⁰ These are not revealed in detail, and I mention them briefly for completeness sake. These teachings are discussed by G. de Purucker in his *Fountain-source of occultism*, and I draw on this work here. As the process of dying unfolds, each principle returns to its source. For example, the physical body decays, and its component atoms are drawn into the general material plane, and so forth for the lower principles. The higher principles have more cosmic and mysterious sources. G. de Purucker writes,

“...the outer rounds deal with the passage of the spiritual monad over the solar system, from planetary chain to planetary chain, and this seven times, these seven planetary chains being the seven sacred planets of the ancients; and the inner rounds refer to the long manvantaric sojourn of a monad in any one of these planetary chains during which the monad undergoes its aeons-long journeys on and in and through the seven (or twelve) globes of that chain.” (1974, pg.629)

Following death, the human ego passes through the various globes which form the earth-chain. The spiritual monad of the human, having a larger sphere of relationship, passes through or touches on the planetary chains which form the Theosophical solar system.

In summary then, H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“Here you have our doctrine, which shows man a *septenary* during life; a *quintile* just after death, in Kamaloka; and a threefold *Ego*, Spirit-Soul, and consciousness in *Devachan*.” (1987. pg. 97)

Each principle or subset of principles of the sevenfold individual has its own post-life destiny. The next step in the process would be that of reincarnating back onto earth.

¹⁰ I refer only to that aspect of this Theosophical teaching which relates to the after-death states.

5.2 DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT AS PRESENTED IN *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

It is the Theosophical endeavour to uncover its teachings in the various religions and philosophies of the world. I have outlined, in an earlier chapter, some of the techniques that are used to insert Theosophical content into religious texts. I have sketched above a brief overview of the Theosophical conception of death and the after death states. This would be the basic template against which the afterlife teachings of world religions would need to be placed. In order to reveal the Theosophical engagement with the Ancient Egyptian material on these themes of death and the afterlife, I will present a number of readings from *The Secret Doctrine*, and I will then comment on them in explanation. Through these readings, various recognizable Egyptian terms and teachings will be shown in their Theosophical context. Selected readings are an appropriate method to uncover the Theosophical reading of Ancient Egypt for the reason that H.P. Blavatsky's engagement is fragmentary. As with many religions she interprets, there is no consistent engagement with a text or an idea.

The purpose of the readings is to reveal the Theosophical understanding/interpretation of the Egyptian material. Sections of the extracts may be examined in other chapters owing to the fact that more than one topic may be engaged with in a single passage. In addition, as the extracts can be lengthy, I will interject my comments and explanatory notes within the extracts inside brackets '[]'.¹¹

A few introductory comments may be useful to make the general Theosophical position in the readings below more comprehensible. The readings deal with the afterlife realms wherein the deceased, in one form or another, will reside following life. Various Egyptians terms are used in Theosophical writings, not always consistently, and it can become difficult to assign one interpretation to a particular term. Four Egyptian terms referring to the afterlife/underworld in Theosophical writings are *amenti*, *aanroo*, the *tuat*, and *tiaou*.

Amenti - The 'secret' or 'hidden' place of *Amen*. The entry in the expanded *Index* to the *Secret Doctrine* lists 'afterworld' as a synonym. This suggests it can be a general term encompassing various afterlife states and locations. In the *Secret Doctrine*, the *amenti* is often correlated to the *kama-loka* - as a place of purification. The judgement of the soul is said to take place in the *amenti*. Other statements appear to link the *amenti* to the Theosophical

¹¹ The extracts themselves are single selections and the reference will be found at the end of the last passage.

devachan. The *Theosophical glossary* lists it as a general term for the afterlife or underworld. G. de Purucker, in the *Encyclopedic Glossary*, correlates it with the 15th division of the *Tuat*. The end of the entry in this source, however, suggests the term can be used generally to include the *kama-loka* and *devachan*.

Aanroo – (also *aarru*, *aaru*, *iaru*, *aanre*) – This is the Egyptian Field of Reeds. In the *Secret Doctrine* it is a division of the *amenti*, or afterworld. It is the domain of *Osiris*, wherein the deceased is given a portion of land. This is usually correlated with the Theosophical *devachan*, and sometimes with the *kama-loka*. The *Theosophical glossary* lists *aanroo* as a celestial field and the 2nd division of *amenti*. The entry in the *Encyclopedic Glossary* essentially repeats that of the *Theosophical Glossary*.

Tuat – This is a version of the Egyptian *duat*. It is a general term for the afterlife planes and states. In this sense it can be a synonym of *amenti*. *Amenti*, however, can also have a more limited meaning when it is used in reference to a section of the *duat* only.

Tiaou – This is a version of the term *tuat*. It is the path of the night sun, which is the path of the sun after it sets and traverses the underworld.

From the Theosophical perspective, ‘afterlife’ is perhaps a better explanatory term than ‘underworld’. The *kama-loka* and *devachan*, and any post-mortem state, are located on the inner planes of the solar system or planetary chain. Once the physical plane is left, various inner states of consciousness are adopted.

(The selected readings may be easier to follow if section 5.3 is read first.)

5.2.1 Selected reading 1:

“In Egypt the defunct man – whose symbol is the pentagram or the five pointed star, the points of which represent the limbs of a man – was shown emblematically transformed into a crocodile : Sebakh or Sevekh ‘or seventh’, as Mr Gerald Massey says, showing it as having been the type of intelligence, is a dragon in reality, not a crocodile. He is the ‘Dragon of Wisdom’ or Manas, the ‘Human Soul’, Mind, the Intelligent principle, called in our esoteric philosophy the ‘Fifth’ principle.”

[The reference to Gerald Massey is to be found in his lecture, *The seven souls of man and their culmination in Christ*.¹² The broader context of the passage is to link the human being to the fifth range of the gods, those associated with ‘mind’. The fifth principle, or plane, counting from the bottom is that linked with *manas* (microcosmically) or *mahat* (macrocosmically). The intent of H.P. Blavatsky here is to define the deceased into a being composed of the three higher Theosophical principles, those which endure after death. These three principles are the higher *manas*, *buddhi* and *atman*.]

“Says the defunct ‘Osirified’ in ch. Lxxxviii., ‘Book of the Dead’, or the *Ritual*, under the glyph of a mummiform god with a crocodile’s head:-

(1) ‘I am the god (crocodile) presiding at the fear... at the arrival of his Soul among men. I am the god-crocodile brought for destruction’ (an allusion to the destruction of divine spiritual purity when man acquires the knowledge of good and evil; also to the ‘fallen’ gods, or angels of every theogony).

(2) ‘I am the fish of the great Horus (as *Makara* is the ‘crocodile’, the vehicle of Varuna). I am merged in Sekten.’”

“This last sentence gives the corroboration of, and repeats the doctrine of, esoteric Buddhism, for it alludes directly to the fifth principle (Manas), or the most spiritual part of its essence rather, which merges into, is absorbed by, and made one with Atma-Buddhi after the death of man. For Se-khen is the residence or *loka* of the god Khem (Horus-Osiris, or Father and Son), hence the ‘Devachan’ of Atma-Buddhi. In the Ritual of the Dead, the defunct is shown entering into Sekhem with Horus-Thot and “emerging from it as pure spirit” (lxiv., 29). Thus the defunct says (v. 130): ‘I see the forms of (myself, as various) men transforming eternally...I know this (chapter). He who knows it...takes all kinds of living forms.’ ...”

[Chapter 88 of the *Book of the dead*, entitled ‘A spell for assuming the form of a crocodile’, reads,

¹² The reference is found on pg. 230 and pg. 243 in the compilation of lectures referenced in the bibliography.

“1. I am the crocodile presiding over fear. I am the god-crocodile at the arriving of his soul among the shades. I am the god-crocodile brought in for destroying. 2. I am the fish of the great Horus in Kem-ur. I am enveloped in Sechem.” (Davis, 1894, pg. 117)

Or,

“I am Sobk, within whom terror of him dwells; I am sobk, (who carries off) by violence; I am the fish(es) of Horus, great in Athribis. I am lord of obeisance in Letopolis.” (Allen, 1974, pg. 74),

Or,

“I am a crocodile immersed in dread, I am a crocodile who takes by robbery, I am the great and mighty fish-like being who is in the Bitter Lakes, I am the Lord of those who bow down in Letopolis.” (Faulkner, 1972, pg. 84)

While a little confusing with the correspondences, H.P. Blavatsky reads *Osiris* for *atman* (father), *Horus* for *buddhi* (son), and the ‘deceased’ is represented by the higher *manas* (Individuality), these three making the full deceased in *devachan*. H.P. Blavatsky is linking the three higher principles to the *devachan* experience. After death, the individual would be reduced to the three higher principles (the higher aspect of *manas*, *buddhi* and *atman*) which would be experiencing the *devachanic* state. Rebirth or reincarnation would reverse this process, in which the three higher principles radiate into the material planes and become the new person on earth.

The first section of the quotation by H.P. Blavatsky seems more properly to refer to incarnating (“...arrival of his Soul among men”¹³) rather than to the process of dying. By referring to the ‘destruction of divine spiritual purity’ and the ‘fallen gods’ this seems clear. The crocodile was an ambiguous figure in Egyptian mythology, sometimes being associated with *Seth*, and sometimes seen as a protector. *Sobek* could represent fertility associated with the Nile floods, as well as royal power, and was eventually assimilated with the sun god *Ra*. In the context of this passage, the deceased may assume the form of a crocodile owing to its associations with power and the defeating of enemies. These are attributes the deceased would value as he negotiates the dangers of the afterlife.

¹³ The passage from Davis reads ‘shades’ instead of ‘men’ which would refer to the afterlife.

H.P. Blavatsky has *Sekten* (or *Sekhem* or *Se-khen*) as a synonym for the theosophical *devachan*. Based on the interpretative move of ‘place’ and ‘order’ this equivalence is sanctioned. For Theosophists, *Sekhem* is equivalent to their *devachan*, and the Theosophical teachings associated with the *devachan* could now be inferred in Egyptian teachings.

H.P. Blavatsky is discussing chapter 64 (Lxiv) of the *Book of the dead* and mentions verses ‘29’ and ‘130’. Her reference to verse 130 appears to be an error and should read simply ‘30’. As I understand this passage in its Theosophical context, H.P. Blavatsky has the deceased in *devachan* reviewing their various incarnations. It is a reference to the various lives of the individual and Theosophical teaching of reincarnation.¹⁴ In its Egyptian context, however, this passage has reference to the various potential ‘transformations’ the justified deceased can undergo. The deceased, found innocent during judgement, has his full senses restored and becomes an *akh*. Transforming into any living entity signifies the freedom that the afterlife brings.]

“And in verse 35, addressing in magic formula that which is called, in Egyptian esotericism, the ‘ancestral heart’, or the re-incarnating principle, the permanent EGO, the defunct says:- ‘Oh my heart, my ancestral heart necessary for my transformations,do not separate thyself from me before the guardian of the Scales. Thou art my personality within my breast, divine companion *watching over my flesh*es (bodies).....”

[I have discussed this passage in chapter four. For H.P. Blavatsky the reference is to reincarnation. In Egyptology the heart is being weighed against the feather *maat*. The deceased is concerned that his heart may testify against him and calls for the heart to speak well of his life and to return to him so that he may become an affective deceased, an *akh*.]

“It is in *Sekhem* that lies concealed ‘the Mysterious Face’, or the real man concealed under the false personality, the triple-crocodile of Egypt, the symbol of the higher Trinity or human Triad, *Atma*, *Buddhi* and *Manas*.^{*} In all the ancient papyri the crocodile is called *Sebek* (Seventh), while the water is the fifth principle esoterically; and, as already stated, Mr. Gerald Massey shows that the crocodile was ‘the Seventh

¹⁴ Barborka suggests the ‘transformations’ mentioned in the passage refer to the passage of the monad through the realms of the seven sacred planets, a reference to the path of the monad after death. (1992, pg.410) As H.P. Blavatsky has not specifically said what is meant, various interpretations can, and will, be offered.

Soul, the supreme one of seven – the Seer unseen.’¹⁵ Even exoterically *Sekhem* is the residence of the god Khem, and Khem is Horus avenging the death of his father Osiris, hence punishing the Sins of man when he becomes a disembodied Soul. Thus the defunct ‘Osirified’ became the god Khem, who ‘gleans the field of *Aanroo*’, *i.e.*, he gleans either his reward or punishment, as that field is the celestial locality (*Devachan*) where the defunct is given *wheat*, the food of divine justice.”

[In this passage H.P. Blavatsky continues her emphasis on the three higher principles residing in a *devachanic* experience. Here *aanroo* is equated with the Theosophical *devachan*. The deceased, in the form of his three higher principles, resides in the *devachan* in the appropriate state of consciousness.]

“*One of the explanations of the real though hidden meaning of this Egyptian religious glyph is easy. The crocodile is the first to await and meet the devouring fires of the morning sun, and very soon came to personify the solar heat. When the sun arose, it was like the arrival on earth and among men ‘of the divine soul which informs the Gods.’ Hence the strange symbolism. The mummy donned the head of a crocodile to show that it was a soul arriving from the earth.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 219-221)

In Egyptology, chapter Lxxxviii of the *Book of the dead* is a transformation spell. The deceased assumed the form of a crocodile and could inspire the same terror and awe that crocodiles emanated towards the living. This powerful animal could destroy its enemies, and the deceased now appropriated these attributes. The crocodile is one of many forms into which the deceased could hope to transform. There are spells to transform into a phoenix, heron, swallow, and so on. Each expresses the desire for freedom of movement in the afterlife.

5.2.2 Selected reading 2:

In footnote in *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“+*Aanroo* is the domain of Osiris, a field divided into *fourteen* sections ‘surrounded with an *iron* enclosure, within which grows the *corn of life* seven cubits high’, the *Kama-loka* of the Egyptians. Those only of the dead, who know the names of the janitors of the ‘seven halls’, will be admitted into Amenti *for ever*; *i.e.*, those who have passed through the seven races of each *round* – otherwise they will rest in the *lower fields*; ‘and

¹⁵ This section is drawn from Gerald Massey’s lecture referred to earlier, *The seven souls of man*, pg. 243 in the edition referenced in the bibliography.

it represents also the seven successive Devachans, or *lokas*. In Amenti, one becomes pure spirit for the eternity (xxx. 4.); while in *Aanroo* ‘the soul of the spirit’, or the defunct, is *devoured* each time by *Uraeus* – the Serpent, Son of the earth (in another sense the primordial vital principles in the Sun), *i.e.*, the Astral body of the deceased or the “Elementary” fades out and disappears in the “Son of the earth,” *limited* time. The soul quits the fields of *Aanroo* and goes on earth under any shape it likes to assume. (See chapter xcix., *Book of the Dead*.) (1988, vol. 1, pg. 674)

[In this passage, H.P. Blavatsky equates *aanroo* with the *kama-loka* and *amenti* with the *devachan*. H.P. Blavatsky is making reference to various Theosophical teachings here. Successfully passing through the ‘seven races of each (seven) round(s)’ would be the conclusion of human evolution. The individual would have completed human evolution and would no longer need to incarnate on earth. To ‘enter Amenti forever’ is possible from the Theosophical perspective only if human evolution is completed. One would no longer reincarnate. From the perspective of mainstream Egyptology, the passages mentioned refer to the ‘freedom’ the deceased desires and achieves as an effective deceased, an *akh* and *ba*. The deceased can assume any form they wish and have the freedom of movement to go anywhere they desire.

The corn growing ‘seven cubits high’ will be discussed below. The essence of the statement from H.P. Blavatsky is the equating of the seven cubits with the seven principles. To be seven principled would mean that the higher triad of principles has not withdrawn from the lower four. It is, therefore, an inferior state to *devachan*, namely the *kama-loka* state she mentions.

The conclusion of the passage and of H.P. Blavatsky in general is always in reference to reincarnation, particularly in the context of individuals who have not completed human evolution. This is an interpretive step not seemingly taken by the Ancient Egyptians or modern Egyptologists.]

5.2.3. Selected reading 3:

In a lengthy passage from *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“The Book of the Dead gives a complete list of the ‘transformations’ that every defunct undergoes, while divesting himself, one by one, of all those principles – materialised for the sake of clearness into ethereal entities or bodies. We must, moreover, remind those who try to prove that the ancient Egyptians knew nothing of and did not teach

Reincarnation, that the ‘Soul’ (the *Ego* or *Self*) of the defunct is said to be living in Eternity : it is immortal, ‘co-eval with, and disappearing with the Solar boat’, *i.e.*, for the cycle of necessity. This ‘Soul’ *emerges from the Tiaou* (the realm *of the cause of life*) and joins the living on Earth *by day*, to return to *Tiaou* every night. This expresses the periodical existences of the Ego.” (Book of the Dead, cvxlili)

[Again the emphasis in this passage is on reincarnation. H.P. Blavatsky puts forward one of her interpretations of the ‘transformations’ which are known from the *Book of the dead*. These ‘transformations’ are symbolical expressions of transformations the deceased experiences during the process of dying.¹⁶ In the *Encyclopedic Theosophical glossary*, the *Tiaou* is the Egyptian *Duat*, or Underworld. (de Purucker, G, nd.) For H.P. Blavatsky the cycling of the solar barque with the deceased in it is symbolical of reincarnation, the ‘periodical existences of the Ego’. This is not the common understanding of Egyptologists where the deceased joins the Sun in his journey across the heavens and through the underworld on an endless journey through eternity. The deceased does not reincarnate on earth in a new personality. In Egyptology, the deceased ‘comes forth by day’, that is leaves the tomb to wander as desired, but must return to the tomb (and underworld) every night.]

“The *shadow*, the astral form, is annihilated, ‘devoured by the Uraeus’ (cxlix., 51), the Manes will be annihilated; the two twins (the 4th and 5th principles) will be scattered; but the Soul-bird, ‘the divine Swallow - and the Uraeus of Flame’ (Manas and Atma-Buddhi) will live in the eternity, for they are their mother’s husbands.+”

[The Theosophical sense of this passage is clear in light of H.P. Blavatsky’s comments inserted in brackets. The lower principles are either annihilated or devoured, while the higher immortal human principles survive death. Chapter 149 of the *Book of the dead* details the fourteen mounds of the Field of Reeds through which the deceased passes on his journey to *Osiris*. Each mound is guarded by various entities with the intent of protecting Osiris from his enemies. It is the enemies of *Osiris* which are devoured by the ‘cobras’ protecting him.]

“Like alone produces like. The Earth gives Man his body, the gods (Dhyanis) his five inner principles, the psychic Shadow, of which those gods are often the animating principle. SPIRIT (Atman) is one - and indiscrete. It is not in the *Tiaou*.”

¹⁶ In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky explains these transformations as revealing part of the Theosophical teachings of ‘man’ being the ‘parent’ of mammals. (1988, vol. II, pg. 635)

[The *Theosophical Glossary* defines the *Tiaou* as, “a kind of *devachanic post mortem* state”.¹⁷ (Blavatsky, 1990, pg. 334) The following passage suggests the *Tiaou* is the underworld. In the Theosophical teachings, the *Atmic* principle remains on its high plane and cannot itself descend or embody. The divine principle is not in any form of manifestation. We have seen, however, in the Egyptian conception that the concept of total freedom of movement is paramount. The deceased in his various modes of existence is not to be restricted from any place.]

“For what is the *Tiaou*? The frequent allusion to it in the ‘Book of the Dead’ contains a mystery. *Tiaou* is the path of the Night Sun, the inferior hemisphere, or the infernal region of the Egyptians, place by them on the *concealed side of the moon*. The human being, in their esotericism, came out from the moon (a triple mystery – astronomical, physiological, and psychical at once); he crossed the whole cycle of existence and then returned to his birth-place before issuing from it again. Thus the defunct is shown arriving in the West, receiving his judgement before Osiris, resurrecting as the god Horus, and circling round the sidereal heavens, which is an allegorical assimilation to Ra, the Sun; then having crossed the *Noot* (the celestial abyss), returning once more to *Tiaou*; an assimilation to Osiris, who, as the God of life and reproduction, inhabits the moon. Plutarch (Isis and Osiris, ch. xliii.) shows the Egyptians celebrating a festival called “The Ingress of Osiris into the moon.” In Chapter xli. life is promised after death; and the renovation of life is placed under patronage of Osiris-Lunus, because the moon was the symbol of life-renewals or reincarnations, owing to its growth, waning, dying, and reappearance every month. In the *Dankmoe*, (iv. 5) it is said:- ‘Oh, Osiris-Lunus! That renews to thee thy renewal.’ And Safekh says to Seti I. (Mariette’s Abydos, plate 51), ‘Thou renewest thyself as the god Lunus when a babe.’ It is still better explained in a Louvre papyrus (P. Pierret, ‘Etudes Egyptologiques’): ‘Couplings and conceptions abound when he (Osiris-Lunus) is seen in heaven on that day.’ Says Osiris: ‘Oh, sole radiant beam of the moon! I issue from the circulating multitudes (of stars)..... Open me the *Tiaou*, for Osiris N, I will issue by day to do what I have to do amongst the living’ (‘Book of the Dead’, ch. ii.), - *i.e.*, to produce conceptions.” (1988, vol. 1, pg. 227-228)

¹⁷ It is also the *Duat* or land of the dead. These are not separate ideas, but closely linked conceptions of the afterlife.

[This is a complicated passage owing to the various Theosophical teachings alluded to. All life on the earth existed before in earlier stages of evolution. The immediately prior stage of evolution was on the moon. The various ‘life-waves’ had completed their evolutionary stage on the moon (which is now a dead planet) and incarnated on earth to continue their evolutionary journey. The beginning of life and the awakening of mind on earth form a substantial part of the Theosophical teachings in volume II of *The Secret Doctrine*. The intent of the passage remains, however, connected to reincarnation and re-embodiment. At the end of this passage, H.P. Blavatsky references chapter ii of the *Book of the dead*. In Davis the title of this chapter is, “A chapter about coming forth by day and living after death.” Instead of referring to reincarnation and a new life of earth the passage expresses the desire of the deceased to continue life in eternity after death. The deceased as a *ba* and *akh* expresses the desire to ‘do what I wish on earth among the living’. The deceased expresses the desire for total freedom of movement, including returning to the tomb and the land of the living, and any other place they may desire. In the Egyptian sense of this passage, it is not the ‘soul’ (Theosophical *manas* principle) expressing an intent to reincarnate. It is rather the desire of the complete individual to have total freedom of movement with no restrictions after death.]

5.2.4 Selected reading 4:

“The deceased is resplendent in his Egg when he crosses to the land of mystery (xxii. i.). He is the Egg of Seb (liv. 1-3)...The Egg was the symbol of life in *immortality* and eternity;...In Kircher’s *Oedipus Egyptiacus* (vol. iii., p. 124) one can see, on the papyrus engraved in it, an egg floating above the mummy. This is the symbol of hope and the promise of a *second birth* for the *Osirified* dead ; his Soul, after due purification in the Amenti, will gestate in this egg of immortality, to be reborn from it into a new life on earth. For this Egg, in the esoteric Doctrine, is the *Devachan*, the abode of Bliss; the winged scarabeus being alike a symbol of it. The ‘winged globe’ is but another form of the egg, and has the same significance as scarabeus, the *Khopiroo* (from the root *Khoproo* ‘to become’, ‘to be reborn’,) which relates to the rebirth of man, as well as to his spiritual regeneration.” (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 364-365)

[The essence of this passage is again the linking of the deceased with the concept of reincarnation. From the Theosophical perspective the ‘egg’ in which the deceased resides is the *hiranyagarbha* (lit. ‘golden egg’). Barborka equates this in the anthropological context with the ‘auric egg’ of the person. (1992, pg. 239) The deceased, in their three principle form,

resides in the *devachan* which as a state of consciousness is viewed as a form of the individual himself. In the afterlife the deceased ‘gestates’ and will be reborn, or reincarnated, back on earth. This gestating in the egg recalls the Theosophical text, *The sleeping spheres*, referred to earlier. The deceased (in their form of the three higher principles) lies resting in the *devachan*. Once the reward of *devachan* is over, the process of reincarnating begins.

Chapter 22 in the *Book of the dead* is entitled, ‘Another chapter about giving back his mouth to the man in the netherworld’. Davis, in part, translates this chapter as following,

“2. I shine in the egg in the unseen world. They give me back my mouth to speak....”
(1894, pg. 87)

Faulkner has,

“I have arisen from the Egg which is in the secret land, my mouth has been given to me that I may speak with it in the presence of the Great God, Lord of the Netherworld;...”
(1972, pg. 51)

And Allen has,

“I have risen from the egg that is in the land of mysteries. My mouth has been given me, that I may speak therewith before the gods of the nether world.” (1974, pg. 36)

All these passages have the deceased residing in an egg in the underworld. His mouth is opened so that he may speak to the lords of the afterlife. The ‘opening of the mouth’ ceremony reanimated the deceased and restored their senses. The deceased identifies himself with *Osiris*, so that they might participate in the desired resurrection into the eternal afterlife. Lurker, in his dictionary gives one meaning of the ‘egg’ as the “inner coffin next to the mummy...it implied hope of an afterlife”. (1994, pg. 48) The coffin itself represented the underworld and was accordingly decorated in such a manner. The general symbolism of life generated within an egg, and the deceased being reanimated in the coffin, may pertain. In Egypt it was hoped that the deceased would be able to leave the coffin which itself was a magical entity. The coffin is then, so to speak, both the underworld and in the underworld. The deceased hopes to rise from the coffin, not to be reborn on earth, but to become an effective dead and live eternally in this new life in the company of the gods. The freedom the deceased desired could, however, include visiting the world, their tomb, etc.

The symbol of the egg has multiple associations in both Egypt and in Theosophy, not to mention in world religions in general. The main purpose of H.P. Blavatsky is to locate reincarnation and the seven principles in the Egyptian religion. That is, to locate the Theosophical teachings in the Egyptian religion.]

5.2.5 Selected reading 5:

In a passage referring to the seven-fold division of the human being, H.P. Blavatsky, in a footnote in *The Secret Doctrine*, comments,

“*The Egyptian allegory in the ‘Book of the Dead’ already mentioned, the hymn that relates to the reward ‘of the Soul’, is as suggestive of our Septenary Doctrine as it is poetical. The deceased is allotted a piece of land in the field of Aanroo, wherein the Manes, the deified shades of the dead, glean, as the harvest they have sown by their actions in life, the corn seven cubits high, which grows in a territory divided into 14 and 7 portions. This corn is the food on which they live and prosper, or that will kill them, in Amenti, the realm of which the Aanroo field is a domain. For, as said in the hymn, (see chap. xxxii. 9) the deceased is either destroyed therein, or becomes pure spirit for the Eternity, in consequence of the ‘Seven times seventy-seven lives’ passed or to be passed on Earth. The idea of the corn reaped as the “fruit of our actions” is very graphic.” (1988, vol. 1, pg. 236)

[In this passage H.P. Blavatsky is chiefly concerned with locating the seven-fold division of the individual in Egyptian teachings and Buddhist teachings. From the passage we can understand that *aanroo* is now conceived of as a division of the *amenti*. The ‘*Manes*’ are equated here to the *kama-rupic* entities of the previously deceased. (Barborka, 1992, pg. 401) The ‘reward of the soul’ is in reference to the nature of the life lived on earth. Embodied life in the Theosophical context is a realm of causes, and afterlife states are those of effects. ‘Corn’ or ‘wheat’ symbolises the karmic fruit of one’s actions. A good life will result in a positive afterlife experience in the *devachan*.

The reference to ‘seven time seventy lives’ is to that of the complete cycle of human existence, the cycling of the monad through seven rounds on a planetary chain. Normal human evolution will result in the perfection of the sevenfold human entity. Each principle is unfolded in fullness. The state of human perfection can be achieved in an accelerated manner through the initiation schools.]

5.2.6 Selected reading 6:

In a passage speaking of ‘wheat’, which H.P. Blavatsky suggests is “not of this earth,” she goes on to say,

“And let us bear in mind, in this connection, how sacred was that cereal with the Egyptian priests; wheat being placed even with their mummies, and found thousands of years later in their coffins. Remember:- ‘The servants of Horus glean the wheat in the field of aanroo, ...wheat *seven cubits high*.’ (*‘Book of the Dead’*, chap. xcix., 33; and *chvi.*, 4.)* The reader is referred to Stanza VII., Verse 3, book I., wherein this verse is explained in another of its meanings, and also to the *‘Book of the Dead’*, chap. cix., v. 4 and 5.”

“*This is a direct reference to the esoteric division of man’s principles symbolised by the divine wheat. The legend which inscribes the third Registrar of the papyrus (*Chap. cx. Of the ‘Book of the Dead’*) states: ‘This is the region of the *Manes* (disembodied men) *seven cubits high*’ – to wit: those just translated and supposed to be still sevenfold with all their principles, even the body represented *astrally* in the *Kama-loka* or *Hades*, before their separation..... ‘And, there is wheat three *cubits high* for mummies in a *state of perfection*’ (*i.e.*, those already separated, whose *three* higher principles are in the Devachan ‘who are permitted to glean it.’ This region (Devachan) is called ‘the land of the re-birth of gods’, and shown to be inhabited by Scheo, Tefnant, and Seb. The ‘region for the manes seven cubits high’, (for the yet imperfect mummies), and the region for those ‘*in a state of perfection*’ who ‘glean wheat *three cubit high*’, is as clear as possible. The Egyptians had the same esoteric philosophy which is now taught by the cis-Himalayan, adepts, who, when buried, have corn and wheat placed over them.” (1988, vol. 2, pg. 374)

[The action again takes place in the Theosophical *kama-loka* and *devachan*. The phrase ‘seven cubits’ and ‘three cubits’ is associated with beings of a seven-fold and three-fold division of principles. The seven-fold beings, being in the lower state of the *kama-loka*, while the three-fold beings, being composed of the three higher principles only, are in a ‘state of perfection’, that is the *devachan*.¹⁸ H.P. Blavatsky concludes that the Egyptians had the same teachings as

¹⁸ This is the repeated interpretation of H.P. Blavatsky. See, for another confirmation, her *Collected Works* vol. x, pg. 58 and 62.

the Wisdom Tradition adepts. Once this identity is established, Theosophical content can be read into the Egyptian texts through the various interpretative mechanisms of Theosophy.]

5.2.7. Selected reading 6:

“The forty ‘Assessors’ who stand in the region of *Amenti* as the accusers of the Soul before *Osiris*, belong to the same class of deities as the *Lipika*, and might stand paralleled, were not the Egyptian gods so little understood in their esoteric meaning. The Hindu *Chitra-Gupta* who reads out the account of every Soul’s life from his register, called *Agra-Sandhani*; the ‘Assessors’ who read theirs from the heart of the defunct, which becomes an open book before (whether) *Yama*, *Minos*, *Osiris*, or *Karma* – are all so many copies of, and variants from the *Lipika*, and their *Astral Records*.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. 1, pg. 104)

[We have a brief reference here to the Egyptian judgement of the dead by *Osiris*. H.P. Blavatsky also equates the Theosophical ‘*Lipikas*’ with the ‘Assessors’. It is now possible for Theosophical content to be inserted into Egyptian texts. It is not just a process of simply listing synonyms. Complicated Theosophical content is injected into Egyptian texts. The *Lipikas* are beings, or cosmic energies, or ‘karmic scribes’ who are associated with the recording of acts, thoughts and deed of entities. It is against this faithful *karmic* record that the deceased are judged. Through this true record of the individual (human or cosmic) the nature of the following incarnation is also determined.

The Judgement scene of Ancient Egypt, is perhaps, the most famous concept of the ancient Egyptians, and in the Theosophical context can refer to two events. The first is the natural law judgement (by their own *karma*) of the deceased after death. The actions, deeds, and thoughts of the deceased are judged by the natural law of *karma*. If sufficient good *karma* had been built up during life, the deceased (i.e. as a three principled entity) will enter the *devachan*. The second potential explanation of the Judgement scene references the initiations. The lower principles of the living candidate are ‘paralysed’, and the higher self enters the afterlife spheres as a conscious entity. These two contexts and the actual processes involved mirror each other. (Sleep is the third process which is related to these concepts.)

Mainstream Egyptology almost wholly rejects any mystery initiations in Egypt in the model of the Ancient Greeks. A fine review of the situation is Naydlers *Shamanic wisdom in the Pyramid texts*. (2005) He summarises the issues and refers to the few Egyptian scholars who

argued favourably for this ‘mystery initiation’ interpretation. Erik Hornung in his work *The secret lore of Egypt* (2001) forcefully represents the mainstream view of the Egyptian religion.

Theosophical writers insert Theosophical content into religions of the world. An example of this, in reference to the Judgement scene, can be found in Schueler’s article, “*The Papyrus of Ani – initiation and the After-Life*”. (1982) For Schueler, the correspondences are; *Maat* – *Karmā*; *ab* (heart) – *kama-manas* (lower-*manas*); *ka* – *kama-rupa*; and *ba* (soul or mind) – *buddhi-manas*. In Schueler’s reading, then, the deceased (or initiate) travels to the afterworld regions in an ethereal body, wherein the personality is judged. If the judgement is positive, the deceased will attain the consciousness state of the higher mind, the Theosophical *buddhi-manas*. His article continues in this vein with various other minor correspondences.

This type of post-Blavatsky interpretation ignores what I will call first and second level dissonance. First level dissonance refers to the incongruity between the writer’s ideas and H.P. Blavatsky’s work. Second level dissonance refers to incongruity between the writer and other commentators on H.P. Blavatsky’s work. At issue is not whether Schueler’s correspondences make sense, or are even theoretically ‘true’. At issue, on the first level, is the relation of the correspondences to the definitive (and varied) statements of H.P. Blavatsky. Any difference between Schueler’s work and H.P. Blavatsky’s signifies an interpretation of the latter by the former. This raises questions of authority and the inaccessibility of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition. The second level dissonance is also concerned with the first level and source writings. Ambiguity or inconsistency in H.P. Blavatsky’s writings is reflected in later Theosophical writings by different positions being taken. Once this happens, the ‘science’ of Theosophical positions begins to falter.]

5.2.8. Selected reading 7:

From the *Secret Doctrine*,

“It is an expression peculiar to the latter, and as hazy for the profane as that of the Egyptians who called the same the ‘Day of COME-TO-US’,+ which is identical with the former, though the verb ‘be’ in this sense, might be still better replaced with either of the two words ‘Remain’ or ‘Rest-with-us’, as it refers to that long period of REST which is called Paranirvana. As in the exoteric interpretation of the Egyptian rites the soul of every defunct person – from the Hierophant down to the sacred bull Apis – became an Osiris, was Osirified, though the Secret Doctrine had always taught, that the real

Osirification was the lot of every Monad only after 3,000 cycles of Existences; so in the present case. The 'Monad', born of the nature and the very Essence of the 'Seven' (its highest principle becoming immediately enshrined in the Seventh Cosmic Element), has to perform its septenary gyration throughout the Cycle of Being and forms, from the highest to the lowest; and then again from man to God. At the threshold of Paranirvana it reassumes its primeval Essence and becomes the Absolute once more." (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 134-135)

[This passage is part of a commentary on a stanza from the *Book of Dzyan*, a section of which reads,

"IT IS THE RING CALLED 'PASS NOT', FOR THOSE WHO DESCEND AND ASCEND (*as also for those*) WHO, DURING THE KALPA, ARE PROGRESSING TOWARD THE GREAT DAY 'BE WITH US' ..." (1988, vol. I, pg. 129)

H.P. Blavatsky is commenting on the phrase, "GREAT DAY 'BE WITH US'". Elsewhere in the commenting passage she references Pierret's French translation of the *Book of the dead* and quotes a sentence from chapter seventeen. The sentence is from chapter xvii, verse 41-42 of the *Book of the dead* which in translation reads,

"(41)...The day of (42) *Come to us!* is the day when Osiris said to the Sun: Come! I see him meeting the Sun in the Amenti." (Davis, 1894, pg. 80)

Or,

"As for that day of 'Come to me', it means that Osiris said to Re, 'Come to me that I may see you' – so said he in the West." (Faulkner, 1972, pg. 48)

What is H.P. Blavatsky saying in this passage? In essence she is referring to the end of a planetary chain, solar system, or galaxy. (To encapsulate, one might say she is referring to the end of the world.) She makes a division between the manifest and un-manifest planes, between spirit and matter, and between the personal ego and the impersonal self (the latter on the microcosmic level). At the end of a cycle of manifestation, the manifested 'world' is withdrawn back into its own inner source or higher self. H.P. Blavatsky interprets the Sun as the origin and source of the manifested worlds. When the cycle of manifestation is over, the entities and worlds emanated by the Sun are drawn in into the state of *paranirvana*. *Paranirvana*, or

parinirvana,¹⁹ is state the monad achieves after a greater cycle of manifestation. In short, then, the monad (*Atma-buddhi*) is absorbed by its parent and source, the Sun. The individual is ‘*Osirified*’.

Chapter xvii is one of the oldest and most important parts of the *Book of the dead*. It encapsulates a great many concepts of the Ancient Egyptians. I have quoted verse 42 from the *Book of the dead* above. This section refers to a fundamental concept of the Egyptians during the Middle and New Kingdoms where the Sun god (*Ra*) and *Osiris* appear to merge into one another. Assmann notes that the call ‘Come’ can refer to death and to the call to the Judgement of the dead, and the consequent resurrection. (2005, pg. 124) The Solar and *Osirian* conceptions of the afterlife meet in this text. The Sun god travels on a cyclic route, which every night includes a descent into the underworld of *Osiris*. During this journey the Sun god unites with the mummified *Osiris*, who represents his corpse. This meeting revives *Osiris*, and renews and rejuvenates the Sun god. Taylor explains that during this union the Sun is to be seen as the *ba* of *Osiris* which is the mummified corpse. This is the model for the human *ba* rejoining the mummy in the tomb. This meeting is a temporary union, and the Sun continues the journey back into the day, and is reborn in the East. The cycle then continues daily for eternity.²⁰

It is difficult to compare the two readings. The context of each differs dramatically. Theosophy can, and will, fall back onto the esoteric/exoteric distinction which allows for the insertion of Theosophical content. The greater the reliance on this technique of insertion, however, the less convincing and powerful is the Theosophical version. I also suggest that the more Theosophists rely on ‘esoteric’ interpretations, which do not bear scrutiny and ask for no supporting references, the further it moves from the spirit and intent of H.P. Blavatsky. H.P. Blavatsky hoped that her esoteric interpretation, being rational and true, would be taken up once fairly considered. It was to be an interpretation which was to make sense once fairly heard.

¹⁹ For a discussion of H.P. Blavatsky’s use of Tibetan and Sanskrit terms see Reigle, D and Reigle, N 1999, *Blavatsky’s secret books: twenty years of research*, Wizards Bookshelf, San Diego.

²⁰ See Hornung, E 1996, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: the one and the many*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, pg. 93-96.

5.3 DEATH AND AFTERLIFE IN EGYPTOLOGY

It would be difficult to sum up the entirety of the Egyptian teachings on death and the afterlife in a few pages. The Egyptian religion covers a span of over three thousand years with specific focus on these themes. Between the *Pyramid Texts*, the *Coffin Texts*, the later *Book of the dead*, and contemporary texts of the underworld there is an evolution of ideas in relation to the Afterlife. In this section I intend to outline in very general terms Egyptian ideas on the afterlife with emphasis on the *Book of the dead*. The *Book of the dead* is the primary Egyptian text H.P. Blavatsky references in *The Secret Doctrine*. My main object is to sketch a picture which will allow a broad comparison with the Theosophical presentation of the Egyptian afterlife and with the specific Theosophical presentation of the afterlife. I will go into more detail on aspects specifically touched on by H.P. Blavatsky in the selected readings above.

Two general comments can be made which help to orientate one to the Egyptian and Theosophical perspectives.

The first relates to the cult of the dead and the mortuary context of the Egyptian religion. This is almost totally lacking in the Theosophical teachings on death and the afterlife. Salima Ikram's work *Death and burial in Ancient Egypt* is a representative introductory mainstream book on these topics. The chapter headings from the table of contents are, The history and land of Egypt, Beliefs in the Afterlife, Mummification, Animal mummies, Funerary equipment and provisioning the dead, The tomb and Funerary, mortuary cults, and the living and the dead. Such is the broad scope of the Egyptian concern with death and the afterlife. Excluding the first chapter, which covers the history and land of Egypt, the second chapter only and part of the last would have potential Theosophical equivalents. There are no Theosophical teachings on mummification, funerary equipment and provisioning the dead, or the tomb. The Egyptian concern with death revolves in a fundamental way around the mummy and its care. Theosophy, favouring the quick dissolution of the physical body, can have no comparable concern.²¹ The difference is not simply one of emphasis. That is, it is not that the Egyptians emphasised one aspect of death and Theosophy another. Theosophy fundamentally differs from the Egyptian texts in its orientation to death and the dead. By dismissing the necessity for mummification Theosophy has separated itself from Egyptian teaching in such a way that I do not see how the difference between the two can be overcome. One cannot imagine the

²¹ I discuss Theosophical thoughts on mummification in more detail in an appendix.

Egyptian religion without mummification, tomb cults and its mortuary context. These are not merely minor aspects of the Egyptian religion; rather they are at the heart of it.

The second point is also telling, although on a different level. In *Journey through the afterlife*, Taylor notes that the Egyptians viewed human life as a series of transformations,

“...birth, growing up, parenthood, old age, death, followed by rebirth.” (2010, pg. 16)

What is important to note here is that ‘rebirth’ in the Egyptian context meant being born into the afterlife. It did not refer to reincarnation on earth as understood by Theosophists. While both Egypt and Theosophy refer to cycles in nature, the context in this instance is very different. Reincarnation is a fundamental tenet of Theosophy. Much as I struggle to imagine Egyptian religion without mummification (or Theosophy with it), I struggle to imagine Theosophy without reincarnation. It is the Theosophical endeavour to locate teachings of reincarnation in the Egyptian religion and most Theosophical writer’s state that it *is* there. Mainstream Egyptology, though, has remained resistant to this idea.²² I discuss the Theosophical reading of reincarnation in the Egyptian religion in an appendix.

In brief, the main themes touched on in the selected readings above would be: the seven-fold constitution of the human being; the place/location of the afterlife realm – including the ‘field of reeds’; ‘*aanroo*’ and ‘*amenti*’; the judgement scene and the weighing of the heart; the transformations of the individual; and the second birth and becoming an *akh*, or pure spirit. With this background context in mind, I will outline the general Egyptian conception of death and the afterlife.²³

Broadly speaking, there were two main mythologies of death in Ancient Egypt. One followed the journey of the sun god *Ra*, whom the deceased wished to join on his cycle through night and day, and the other was associated with the myth of *Osiris* and a journey to the Underworld. A third goal the deceased (at least the Pharaoh in early times) could aspire to was that of becoming a permanent star in the sky and live with the gods who were also conceived as permanent stars. The Egyptians also conceived of death in a variety of ways. Jan Assmann in his *Death and salvation in Ancient Egypt* has characterised these images of death as, ‘Death as

²² Erik Hornung notes, “Life after death does not mean resumption of life on earth; this new life is in the sky and the underworld.” (1992, pg. 110)

²³ I intend to follow the general outline as presented in Taylor’s, *Death and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt*. I will supplement his work where more detail is appropriate for my larger task of comparing Egyptian beliefs with Theosophical presentations of them.

dismemberment', 'Death as social isolation', 'Death as enemy', 'Death as dissociation', 'Death as separation and reversal', 'Death as transition', 'Death as return', 'Death as mystery' and death as 'Going forth by day'. (2005, pg. vii – ix) This is an attempt by Assmann to categorise Egyptian conceptions of death. Death conceived as the dissociation of the parts of human individual is the perspective which has most in common with the Theosophical presentation of dying. (In chapter four I have discussed the problems associated with the Theosophical construction of the Egyptian conception of the individual.)

In general, the earliest Egyptian concern with death appeared to be for the king alone. Gradually in Egyptian history, ordinary/non-royal persons were included in the teachings of the afterlife. This gradual democratisation involved the broadening influence and use of funerary texts throughout the general Egyptian society. Egyptians conceived of the universe as having three basic parts. There was the 'heaven' in the sky, also associated with the watery expanse of primeval times. There was the land of the living, and, then, thirdly the underworld, or *duat* ('otherworld', 'netherworld', 'farworld'.) Conceptions of the locality of the *duat* varied over time, and it could be beneath the earth, in the body of *Nut*, and in the 'west'.

The myth of *Osiris* is recounted in a late form by Plutarch in the second century CE. In Egyptian texts there are allusions to this myth, though it is not recounted in the same detail as Plutarch outlines. Plutarch's work is a synthesis of elements of various potential Osiris stories and myths. That is to say there was, perhaps, not one master narrative of this myth. In this myth, *Osiris* is king of Egypt bringing various civilizing concepts to the country, e.g. agriculture. His brother *Seth* became jealous and lures *Osiris* into a coffin which is cast into the Nile. The drowned *Osiris* is found by *Isis*, whereupon he falls back into the hands of *Seth* and is cut into fourteen pieces which are scattered throughout Egypt. The body parts are recovered, barring the phallus, and *Osiris* is mummified and resurrected. He then becomes ruler of underworld. His son, *Horus*, having avenged his death on earth becomes king of the earthly Egypt. (Taylor, 2001, pg. 26-27) There are various political, economic, and social aspects to this narrative; these, however, do not overly concern us here as this is not the level of interpretation on which Theosophy works. The deceased Egyptian wished to become identified with *Osiris* owing to his successful conquering of death. Much of Egyptian mortuary culture revolves around the identifying of the deceased with the resurrected figure of *Osiris*. The deceased do not actually 'become' *Osiris*, they become like *Osiris* and exist in his company, mirroring his survival of death.

The other well-known myth associated the deceased with the sun god *Ra* and his journey through the day sky, his passing into the underworld, and his rebirth in the morning. This powerful symbol of the cyclic nature of things and of conquering death was a complex myth with many speculative aspects. The travelling of the Sun through the night sky, or the underworld, was conceptualised in various ways. The Sun could be portrayed as travelling through the primeval waters, as traversing the earthly depths, and passing through the sky or heavenly realm; this latter could be conceived as, for example, the body of a crocodile. The Sun had to pass through a series of trials or gates, which represent the dangers associated with the afterlife. The forces of chaos conquered by the Sun led to its being reborn every morning. The deceased, wishing to mirror this conquering of death and to gain eternal life, hoped to journey with the sun in his solar barque on this cyclic journey. (Taylor, 2001, pg.28-29) In later mortuary texts, the myths of *Osiris* and the sun god *Ra* become joined where the sun god encounters the mummified *Osiris* in the underworld, and, by merging in his corpse, *Osiris* is reborn. This became the model for the union of the *ba* and the mummy in funeral belief.

There are variants of the myths, which existed side by side with one another. The essence of these myths, for our purposes, is the conquering of death and gaining of eternal life. The goal of funerary preparations and rituals was to assist the deceased to become an *akh* – an effective spirit. This particular ‘mode of existence’ was achieved only after the hurdle of death had been successfully negotiated. Not all the deceased achieved this state which was dependent on a successful judgement after death and on the correct mortuary practices being carried out on their behalf by the living.

Taylor in his *Journey through the afterlife* outlines the various stages associated with death as expressed in the *Book of the dead*. I will follow his outline closely in the sketch below.

Death was associated with both magic and knowledge in Ancient Egypt. The deceased required certain mortuary rituals to be done on his behalf and he needed certain knowledge in the afterlife to negotiate the dangers successfully. Following death there was a period of grief and the deceased was transferred to a place of embalming. Depending on what the deceased could afford, there were various mummification options. Wealthier persons could expect a longer, more complete, mummification. The deceased was ritually mummified, the aim of which was to create an eternal body as a vehicle for the non physical aspects of the individual. Part of the assimilation of the deceased into an eternal body was to identify the individual parts of the body with various divinities. The mummy itself was an indispensable part of the process

which aimed for the survival of the deceased. The mummy was returned to the family, and a procession to the tomb began.

An essential ritual performed on the mummy was the ‘opening of the mouth’ ceremony. This ceremony could not only reanimate the deceased, but also objects like statues, coffins, buildings, Temples etc. (Taylor, 2010, pg. 88) It is essential that the deceased was reanimated as he needed to perform certain functions and utter certain words to negotiate the afterlife successfully. Through this ceremony the deceased was returned to his senses, and the different ‘modes of existence’ of the deceased were reconnected.

The mummy was placed in the tomb with the requisite accessories and provisions. This could include food, texts to guide the dead, and so on. Offerings from the living were needed to support the *ka* which remained in the vicinity of the tomb with the *sah*. The deceased could leave the tomb in the form of the *ba* (to ‘come forth by day’), which symbolised the freedom of movement desired by the Egyptian in the afterlife. All constrictions of human life would fall away, while the afterlife became an idealised version of this world. It was essential that the deceased returned to the tomb to accept and partake of the offerings; this would allow him to continue his existence in the afterlife.

While the relatives of the deceased maintained and provisioned the tomb, the deceased had to begin negotiating the hazards of the afterlife. The Ancient Egyptian religion evolved over time which led to various teachings existing side by side. For example, possible outcomes of journeying through the underworld (the *duat*) could be, to dwell with *Osiris*, to travel through the *duat* with *Ra*, and to rest in the ‘field of reeds’, envisioned as a paradise. There seems to be no set uniform topography of the underworld presented in the *Book of the dead*, and it is also not clear from the *Book of the dead* where the various parts of the underworld were located (e.g. the Field of reeds.) The deceased needed to negotiate various obstacles like gates, caverns, and mounds. These obstacles can be numbered in various ways in different texts, and even within the same text.²⁴ For example, chapter 149 of the *Book of the dead* lists 14 mounds, while chapter 150 lists 15 mounds. (Taylor, 2010, pg. 138) At the centre of these obstacles is *Osiris* with whom the deceased hopes to identify and partake in the life eternal. The obstacles to be overcome were in large part meant to protect *Osiris* from his enemies.

²⁴ Assmann suggests the number is not important. (2005, pg. 191) From the Theosophical perspective, certain numbers would be pregnant with meaning and create an opening through which Theosophical context can be inserted into the Egyptian texts.

They were not, then, specifically negative, or evil forces; instead they were guardians of the deceased.

The deceased overcame these obstacles through the use of magic and knowledge. These same tools were required for the deceased to maintain control of himself and of the elements. All aspects of the individual needed to be protected in the afterlife from the forces of dissolution and destruction. Specifically, the heart and the head were to be protected for the survival of the deceased in the afterlife.

Various ‘transformations’ of the deceased were envisioned, into a falcon, a hawk, etc.²⁵ These transformations symbolised the freedom of movement in the afterlife. The state of *Osiris* in the underworld could be conceived of as being static and constricted. The deceased wished for a freedom associated with exiting the constricting boundaries (bandages) of the mummy itself. This was known as the ‘coming forth by day’. The idea encompassed the breaking free of the underworld and entering the ‘day’, only to return to the underworld/tomb by night. This process mirrored the passage of the sun god through the celestial sky, into the underworld, and then reborn.

The well-known judgement scene of Egypt is found in chapter 125 of the *Book of the dead*. A form of judgement, however, is attested in Egyptian texts from as early as the *Pyramid Texts*. (Brandon, 1958, pg. 110) In the ‘Hall of the Two Maats’ the deceased has his life reviewed by *Osiris*. To pass this judgement successfully they needed to show certain knowledge and make protestations of innocence, the ‘negative confession’. The heart of the deceased is weighed against the feather of *Maat* which indicates that it is not just special knowledge which assures eternal life, but also conduct on earth during life. Correct behaviour in harmony with *Maat* was the prerequisite for becoming an effective deceased. Importantly, should the judgement go negatively, the deceased would not pass into eternal life, but would pass to a creature which would devour them. This is the feared ‘second death’ of the Ancient Egyptians, a true ‘death’. Those in harmony with *Maat* would be declared ‘*maa-kheru*’ or ‘true of voice’. (Taylor, 2010, pg. 240) The hearts of the deceased would be returned to them, and they would be granted immortality.

As one may expect, the afterlife has been characterised in various ways during the history of Ancient Egypt. Among the ways the location was conceptualised were, the primordial ocean, the underworld, and the heavenly realm of the sky. (Hornung, 1992, pg. 96) One destination

²⁵ I discuss the Theosophical interpretation of ‘transformation’ in more detail in an appendix.

of the deceased in the afterlife was the 'Field of Reeds'. In the *Book of the dead*, the precise location of the Field of Reeds is not clear; it could be in the sky or beneath the earth, or it could be in the 'east', where the sun god ends his nightly journey. (Taylor, 2010, pg. 243) It was conceived as a paradise where the blessed dead resided. The landscape was lush, with waterways, full fields of crops, and so on. It was portrayed as a reflection of the early Egypt, with all its joys and none of its despairs. It was a perfect life, reflecting the earthly life of Egypt, where the deceased would have slave figures or substitutes who did the physical work that agriculture required. For this reason, various '*shabt*' figures were presented in the tomb.

Taylor quotes a section from a discovered Egyptian funeral text that sums up many of the Egyptian attitudes to the afterlife. It is worth repeating here,

"You come in, you go out,
Your heart in joy at the praise of the lord of gods;
A good burial after revered old age,
After old age has come.
You take your place in the lord-of-life [the coffin],
You come to the earth in the tomb of the West.
To become indeed a living *ba*,
It shall thrive on bread, water and air;
To assume the form of phoenix, swallow,
Of Falcon or heron, as you wish.
You cross in the ferry without being hindered,
You fare on the water's flowing flood.
You come to life a second time,
Your *ba* shall not forsake your corpse.
Your *ba* is divine among the spirits [*akh*],
The worthy *bas* converse with you.
You join them to receive what is given on earth,
You thrive on water, you breathe air,
You drink as your heart desires.
Your eyes are given you to see,
Your ears to hear what is spoken;
Your mouth speak, your feet walk,
Your hands, your arms have motion.

Your flesh is firm, your muscles are smooth,
You delight in all your limbs;
You count your members: all there, sound,
There is no fault in what is yours.
Your heart is yours in very truth,
You have your own, your former heart.
You rise to heaven, you open *duat*,
In any shape that you desire...” (2001, pg. 35)

It would be difficult to imagine a similar quote concluding a Theosophical text on the afterlife.

5.4 AN EXAMPLE

H.P. Blavatsky presents a set of interpretive keys by which one unlocks the esoteric (Theosophical) content in religious texts. The extent to which the key ‘fits’ any particular text may differ for various reasons. It is my contention that H.P. Blavatsky expected her hints to fit texts and gain wider acceptance. The scattered and fragmentary nature of her work on any particular religion, however, and the sometimes inconsistent statements in her foundation books, means that many keys have not been fully tested in the field. Theosophists have yet to unfold H.P. Blavatsky’s presentation in a variety of fields fully, and as such have yet to confront (at least publically) many of the problems which will arise.

As an example of this we can take a brief look at chapter 105 of the *Book of the dead*.

“Spell 105 – Spell for propitiating N’s ka for him in the realm of the dead.

Hail to you, my ka of my lifetime; behold, I have come to you, I have appeared in glory, I am strong, besouled and mighty, and I have brought to you natron and incense that I may cleanse you with them, even this evil phrase which I have spoken, this evil impurity which I have done, and nothing has been imputed to me, because to me belongs that papyrus-amulet which is on the neck of Re, which was given to those who are in the horizon; if they are white, I will be white, and my ka will be like them, my ka’s provisions will be like theirs, having been weighted in the balance. May truth be uplifted to the nose of Re, my head being supported by it, for I am an eye which sees

and an ear which hears, I am not a bull for butchery, and none shall have an invocation-offering of me. (Faulkner, 1972, pg. 101)

H.P. Blavatsky has not given any specific interpretation of this chapter. I will focus, therefore, on the one aspect she has commented on in separate contexts, the *ka*. The context is that of the deceased, who has been positively judged, now greeting his *ka*. The *ka* of the deceased left the individual at death and preceded the deceased into the afterlife. It rested there waiting for the deceased. The justified deceased now wishes to re-unite with their *ka*. The *ka* here is presented as a protective spirit, double, and as a life-giving and sustaining force. (Janak, 2003, pg. 194; Assmann, 2005, pg. 100) To ‘go to ones *ka*’ means in this context to have successfully overcome death; and to join with the life-giving qualities in eternity. A new life in eternity is now expected.

H.P. Blavatsky divides the individual into seven principles. In theory, one of these principles should correspond to the *ka*. I see two potential interpretive problems from the Theosophical perspective. The first is that the *ka* has more than one quality associated with it. It is both a ‘double’ and a life-giving force. Secondly, depending on which Theosophical principle it is correlated with, the events in the verse takes place in the afterlife, following death. It is difficult to pin down H.P. Blavatsky’s precise correlation. From Table 6, it can be potentially the *linga-sarira* or the *prana* principle. The Egyptian *ka* concept appears to include both of these principles. This is the first problem. Theosophy and the Egyptians had conflicting conceptualisations of the individual. The Theosophical compartmentalised view and the Egyptian monistic conception are in basic conflict. The second problem is that both the *linga-sarira* and *prana* principle dissipate after death. These are temporary principles which are not aspects of the true individuality out of embodiment, and they have no role in the post-mortem states of the deceased. In the passage, the deceased is meeting their *ka* after death in the afterlife.

I can think of possible Theosophical responses, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I do not want to go beyond what is stated by H.P. Blavatsky herself. Even if explanatory comments were offered, however, as they are not mentioned by H.P. Blavatsky, and might even be at odds with what she has written, there will be questions of authority to be overcome.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The Theosophical context of death and dying differs dramatically from that of Ancient Egypt. The cultural setting differs such that comparison is hardly possible at this level. It is instructive to look at a work like Ikram's *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt*. Even a superficial glance at the table of contents reveals the fundamental differences in emphasis. Ikram's work has seven chapters, one on the history of Egypt, one on beliefs surrounding the afterlife, and then five on mummification (human and animal), the tomb, provisioning the dead and the cult of the dead. As Theosophy basically rejects mummification, it has no need for mortuary cults, tombs, funerary equipment, and provisioning for the dead. The only level of comparison possible is the doctrinal level in terms of the beliefs associated with the afterlife.

This doctrinal level is the level at which Theosophy operates in its interpretive movement. Underlying it, is the implicit understanding of Theosophists that their teachings are essentially scientific and factually true. In terms of the specific teachings relating to death and the afterlife, there are two fundamental hurdles in the Theosophical interpretation. Firstly, the Theosophical conception of the individual differs markedly from that of the Ancient Egyptians. Secondly, Theosophical conceptions of death always culminate in reincarnation. Reincarnation is not a basic concept found in the Egyptian texts.

The broader the level of comparison, the closer the apparent synergy would be between Theosophical and Egyptian concepts. Theosophy, however, presents a 'concept specific' constellation of beliefs. Theosophy rarely remains at the general level of comparison. The more detailed a concept, the more difficult it is to insert without conceptual problems. Theosophical interpretation can be complex and detailed. It does not simply insert its teachings irrespective of the source material being interpreted. It seeks various entry points to read itself into a text. These insertions are most easily uncovered when the larger context of a teaching or belief is taken into account.

The main aim of this dissertation is to detail H.P. Blavatsky's presentation of the individual and the afterlife in Ancient Egypt as expressed in her main work, *The Secret Doctrine*. Secondary aims are to identify, where possible, the sources she drew on, and to examine how Theosophical content is inserted into the religious tradition of Ancient Egypt.

Chapter one locates Theosophy within the current academic field of western esotericism and identifies the technique of methodological agnosticism as an appropriate tool to investigate these aims. The essential section of this chapter, in the light of the rest of the dissertation, is the literature survey. Three possible perspectives on the Theosophical engagement with Ancient Egypt are reviewed. At one end of the spectrum are highly critical, almost dismissive, studies of Theosophical ideas. This perspective is cursorily represented in Erik Hornung's *The secret lore of Egypt: its impact on the west*. At the opposite end of the spectrum are highly uncritical and sympathetic studies, often by persons linked to Theosophy. *Egypt child of Atlantis: a radical interpretation of the origins of civilization* represents this type of engagement. Between these extremes, I identify some writings by Antonios Goyios who, in my opinion, has engaged with this topic in a more detailed and balanced manner.

To facilitate this investigation, chapter two locates the Theosophical Society in its historical context, the late nineteenth century. Chapter two further examines H.P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* in terms of content and authority in the Theosophical world. It concludes with a survey of sources referenced by H.P. Blavatsky, in particular the Egyptian *Book of the dead*.

The key point made in terms of the historical context of the *Secret Doctrine* has to do with the Theosophical relationship and engagement with science, or rather, the sciences. Published in the late 19th century (1888), the *Secret Doctrine* attempts to engage with the sciences of the day. I suggest that the extent to which this engagement is successful, honest, or legitimate has not been adequately assessed. In part this is owing to the fact that the *Secret Doctrine* engages with a number of sciences, ranging from archaeology to physics, biology, geography, and many others (including Egyptology). The Theosophical engagement with each of these individual branches of science, and the manner in which these sciences may inform the actual doctrine of Theosophy, needs to be deliberately and carefully investigated and located in its historical context before it can be judged. At stake in this review is whether the *Secret Doctrine* should

merely be consigned to the ‘esoteric/occult’ category, or whether it passes the threshold of legitimately engaging with sciences of the day. At issue is not whether incorrect or outdated ideas are presented in the *Secret Doctrine* in the light of contemporary research, although this is also of interest. Rather, in question is whether the state of the sciences in the late 19th century was such that Theosophical statements would be automatically precluded from consideration. In some instances, it seems possible that the incipient nature of the sciences (for example, Egyptology), and internal disputes within scientific fields, make some Theosophical positions no more disreputable than mainstream statements.

The Secret Doctrine is the *magnum opus* of H.P. Blavatsky. On internal statement its authority is definitive and not open to dispute on any real level. Its statements are content specific and presented as factual and true. In this it in part reflects the general attitude and posture of the age. *The Secret Doctrine* itself is not the first statement of Theosophical ideas and concepts. Instead it is the grand attempt by H.P. Blavatsky to engage with, and appropriate (or insert Theosophical content into), the sciences, religious traditions, and philosophy. This is a deliberate, rational, and intellectual process, and the *Secret Doctrine* is to be assessed on this level. It is not a ‘mystical’ text closed to academic and intellectual scrutiny.

H.P. Blavatsky drew on a variety of sources, from mainstream to esoteric streams of thought. The nature of her engagement with these sources is fragmentary and selective. Her intent is, in the large part, to insert Theosophical content and authority into a wide variety of fields. This process, however, is rational, intellectual and reasoned. On the other hand, she can often simply declare a fact or position instead of comprehensively establishing that position. This, in part, contributes to the negative assessment of her work by the academic community.

The essential thrust of chapter two is that more research is required into Theosophical positions on various individual topics (as expressed in *The Secret Doctrine*) before they can simply be dismissed. *The Secret Doctrine* was born at the culmination of a transitional period in western intellectual history, where science, religion, and faith had not quite separated as they have today.

Chapter three focuses on two primary themes. Firstly, it examines Theosophy in relation to the concept ‘religion’ and in relation to various religious traditions of the world. Secondly, it reviews various interpretive mechanisms invoked by Theosophy in this engagement.

Despite its disavowals, Theosophy fits into the category of ‘religion’. It is characterised by truth statements and dogmas which, owing to inherent mechanisms of authority, cannot be easily doubted. Although doubt, or non-acceptance, of Theosophical teachings will not exclude membership of the Theosophical Society, it will confer an inferior status compared to ‘believers’. In addition, then, to being rational and intellectual, the *Secret Doctrine* also makes an appeal to faith and authority.

The Secret Doctrine represents H.P. Blavatsky’s attempt to appropriate the prestige and authority of the sciences, religion, and philosophy. It does this through various modes of interpretation and engagement. I review the techniques and strategies Theosophy employs to read Theosophical content into various fields. It is not entirely a one way process, as Theosophical teachings show obvious signs of absorption of scientific and religious concepts. Theosophy is, then, amongst other things, a mode of interpretation. It presents a hermeneutic method which can be judged on its own terms. To do this, the Theosophical perspective and interpretation of Ancient Egypt needs to be compared to other interpretive approaches. I have compared the Theosophical perspective to that of modern Egyptology. While implying a method, Theosophy remains a ‘body of knowledge’ which calls for assessment.

Chapter four is a study of the Theosophical presentation of the constitution of the individual in Ancient Egypt. In essence, what is the Theosophical presentation of the individual in the Ancient Egypt religion? I assess H.P. Blavatsky’s position in terms of technique and consistency. I then contrast her understanding with that of modern contemporary Egyptology. The result of my research reveals a fundamental disconnection between H.P. Blavatsky’s presentation and that of contemporary Egyptology. While some of her positions may have been supported in the late 19th century, modern Egyptology has presented a radically different view of the individual. The monistic conception of an individual is in stark contrast to the Ancient Wisdom statement of a sevenfold constitution. Owing to the inherent structural reliance on authority Theosophy cannot adjust to changing external pressures, which results in an inevitably greater reliance on the esoteric/exoteric distinction.

In chapter five, the conception of the individual is carried over and examined in relation to death and the afterlife states. I contrast the statements in the *Secret Doctrine* with those of contemporary Egyptology. This study reveals two fundamental disconnections. Firstly, Theosophy locates reincarnation in the Egyptian religion. Almost every Theosophical explanatory insight concludes with reincarnation. I have found no contemporary academic

Egyptologist who concedes the concept of reincarnation in Ancient Egypt. Secondly, the monistic conception of the individual is so completely at odds with the Theosophical conception that, if correct, the Theosophical statements begin to lose their sense. Theosophical concepts are tightly located within a larger context of Theosophical thought and their insertion into Ancient Egypt becomes increasingly difficult.

As Theosophical ideas and interpretations begin to differ from mainstream views, Theosophists will increasingly fall back on the exoteric/esoteric distinction. This allows for the insertion of virtually any content regardless of context or meaning. This fallback position represents the failure of the Theosophical engagement with religion on the interpretive level. I have, however, suggested that this fallback position betrays in part the hope and aspiration of the founder, H.P. Blavatsky. Her works present the Theosophical perspectives as reasoned and rational, and fundamentally true. Her intent and hope was that, once given fair hearing, Theosophical positions would be seen for what they were, true. She hoped her perspective of a perennial philosophy, content specific, and uniform all round the world, would, through proper research, be validated. Sociological and contextual studies of the last 50 years, however, have devastated perennial philosophy claims. *The Secret Doctrine* remains then an awkward mix of faith and rational enquiry. The way in which the academic study of religion has advanced since 1888, has left the Theosophical endeavour increasingly irrelevant as a hermeneutic approach. While once perhaps briefly worthy of debate in academic circles, it has become silent in the modern world.

Who owns a text? Who best represents an ancient religion long deceased? All things being equal we would, perhaps, have to say that those institutions which spend the most time with the text or tradition will own it. In terms of Egyptian texts and the Egyptian religion, that institution would be the academic community of Egyptologists. Fringe institutions, like the Theosophical Society, will be entitled to its opinions, but, until they can defend them in the academic world, they will remain marginalised. The extent, however, to which it is possible for Theosophy to respond, in light of the inherent restriction of the content specific nature of the founding texts, remains debatable.

Below is a general chronology of Ancient Egypt which I have adopted from Brewer and Teeter's *Egypt and the Egyptians*. There are variations in the dates among contemporary Egyptologists; however, these minor differences do not affect the basic thrust of my dissertation. No mainstream contemporary Egyptologist presents any chronological dating which remotely mirrors Theosophical statements.

PERIOD	DYNASTY	YEAR
Archaic Period	0	3150 - 3050BC
	1	3050 - 2890BC
	2	2890 - 2686BC
Old Kingdom	3	2686 - 2613BC
	4	2613 - 2498BC
	5	2498 - 2345BC
	6	2345 - 2181BC
First intermediate Period	7 - 10	2181 - 2160BC
	11	2133 - 2160BC
Middle Kingdom	12	2060 - 1991BC
	13	1782 - 1650BC
Second Intermediate Period	14	1650BC
	15 - 16	1663 - 1555BC
	17	1663 - 1570BC
New Kingdom	18	1570 - 1293BC
	19	1293 - 1185BC
	20	1185 - 1070BC
Third Intermediate Period	21	1069 - 945BC
	22	945 - 712BC
	23 - 24	818 - 712BC
	25 - Kushite Period	772 - 656BC
Long Period	26 - Saite Period	656 - 525BC
	27	525 - 404BC
	28	404 - 399BC
	29	399 - 380BC

	30	380 - 362BC
	31	342 - 332BC
Ptolemaic Period		332 - 30BC
Roman Period		30BC - 323AD
Byzantine Period		323 - 642AD
Arab Conquest		642AD

(1999, pg. xii - xv)

Does the concept of reincarnation exist in the Ancient Egyptian religion? This is the basic question, and, if reincarnation does, what form does it take? For Theosophists it must exist in the form outlined by H.P. Blavatsky and the *Mahatmas*. Ancient Egypt is the Western repository of the esoteric teachings, and, if any Western culture knew the esoteric (Theosophical) teachings, it was this great civilization.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Reincarnation and its related concept of *Karma* are central Theosophical teachings. It is difficult to imagine Theosophy without the teaching of cycles and periodicity, so deeply do they permeate almost every aspect of its presentation. One could multiply references to this. I note one,

“Intimately, or rather indissolubly, connected with Karma, then, is the law of re-birth, or of the re-incarnation of the same spiritual individuality in a long, almost interminable, series of personalities.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 306)

Theosophy does uncover the concept of reincarnation, stated above to be a ‘law’, in the Egyptian religion. The attempt to locate reincarnation in the Ancient Egyptian religion revolves around two strategies. One is to rely on the early Greek sources as reliable statements of Egyptian belief¹, and the other is to interpret Egyptian texts directly as referring to reincarnation. Though there would be others, I will review two sympathetic, representative books which refer to this theme as they reveal the scope of the Theosophical engagement. The first work is Walker’s *Reincarnation: a study of forgotten truth*, and the second is Cranston’s *Reincarnation: the phoenix fire mystery*.

E.D. Walker’s *Reincarnation: a study of forgotten truth*² is the older of the two and was published originally in 1888. This work broaches the topic in two ways, firstly with reference to Herodotus’ well-known passage in *The Histories*, and, secondly, with some general,

¹ An example of this can be found in G de Purucker’s, *The esoteric tradition*, vol. II, pg. 605-611.

² Walker, ED 1923, *Reincarnation: a study of forgotten truths*, Theosophical University Press, Covina, California.

unreferenced statements concerning the *Book of the Dead* and the *Osiris* myth. I will not discuss Walker's brief references to the *Book of the Dead*, as he gives no references and makes no sustained attempt to support his statements. Walker's reference to Herodotus is more interesting, and H.P. Blavatsky has commented on aspects of it in relation to mummification³. Walker, quoting Herodotus, writes,

"The Egyptians were the first to broach the opinion that the soul of man is immortal, and that, when the body dies, it enters into the form of an animal which is born at the moment, thence passing on from one animal into another, until it has circled through the forms of all the creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame, and is born anew. The whole period of the transmigration is (they say) three thousand years.' He continues, 'There are Greek writers, some of an earlier, some of a later date, who have borrowed this doctrine from the Egyptians, and put it forward as their own. (II, ch. 123.)" (Walker 1923, pg. 175)⁴

From the Theosophical perspective, this passage of Herodotus is not unproblematic and requires a special Theosophical interpretation.⁵ (In Walker the passage has reference to metempsychosis.)

Gottfried de Purucker has discussed this passage from Herodotus in some detail from the Theosophical perspective in his book, *The esoteric tradition*. He begins by distinguishing among pre-existence, reïmbodiment, rebirth, palingenesis, transmigration, metempsychosis, reincarnation, and metensomatosis. (1973, vol. II, pg. 594) This passage from Herodotus does not fall neatly into any of these eight categories according to him. For de Purucker the passage is referring to, "...the transmigration of the life-atoms forming the psycho-vital part of man's intermediate nature ...". (1973, vol. II, pg. 608) It is not the immortal soul proper being referred to; rather the lower nature⁶ of the person has disintegrated into its basic constituent parts (life-atoms) which, in turn, now cycle through the lower kingdoms of nature, only to be re-collected when the incarnating soul re-descends into human incarnation. In Theosophical

³ This passage is briefly discussed in relation to mummification in Appendix five.

⁴ This passage is found in Herodotus *The Histories*, chapter II, section 123.

⁵ See de Purucker, G 1973, *The esoteric tradition*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, California, vol. II, pg. 608. It is interesting to note that de Purucker seems to agree that supporting proof is not forthcoming in writings from the Egyptian monuments or papyri. (1973, vol. II, pg. 611)

⁶ That is the four lower principles, the physical body, the astral body, the vital body and the *kama* principle.

teachings, the same ‘life-atoms’ which formed the vehicles or principles of the person in one life will be drawn again together by the same reincarnating soul. This has implications for the Theosophical explanation of the practice of mummification which I have discussed elsewhere.

Gottfried de Purucker then mirrors H.P. Blavatsky’s statements made in her *Collected Works*.⁷ The basic problem for Theosophists is that the ‘soul’ of a human being is not said to incarnate into lower life forms (the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms) after death. The Theosophical teaching is ‘once human, always human’, at least until evolution takes the person to the next higher stage of existence. The text of Herodotus speaks of the immortal soul ‘passing through’ various creatures of land, sea, and air before entering into a human body again. From the Theosophical perspective the reincarnating ego, after death, enters the afterlife states where it remains until it reincarnates into a human form. To explain, then, the passage of Herodotus, Theosophists suggest that what ‘enters’ the various creatures are the life atoms which made up the now disintegrated lower vehicles or bodies (e.g. *prana*, *kama*, etc.) of the deceased person.

From the mainstream Egyptological perspective the passage would be discussed in two contexts. Firstly there would be an assessment of Herodotus’ reliability in terms of his statements on Egyptian religion in general, and, secondly, the ideas in the passage would need to be assessed for compatibility against teachings in actual Egyptian texts as currently understood. That is, can these ideas be found in Egyptian texts themselves?

Louis V. Zabkar discusses this passage from Herodotus in his article, *Herodotus and the Egyptian idea of immortality*. In this article he also discusses the linking of the Egyptian “transformation spells” to the concept of the transmigration of the soul. While admitting that some early Egyptologists did take this passage of Herodotus as evidence of reincarnation or transmigration in the Egyptian religion, he notes that most Egyptologists reject the link.⁸ For Zabkar, Herodotus is not a reliable source for Egyptian teachings on the afterlife. He suggests that Herodotus read contemporary Greek theories into poorly understood Egyptian texts and vignettes. (1963, pg. 63) Perhaps, in an attempt to explain copies of the *Book of the Dead* he was shown he would have reverted to Greek theories already current in his time, and then

⁷ Blavatsky, HP 1969, *H.P. Blavatsky: collected writings, vol. iv, 1882-1883*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill, U.S.A.

⁸ This is an important point as I have suggested that some Theosophical positions, when read in their historical context, may not seem as ‘esoteric’ and unsupportable as they are often taken to be by later writers.

imputed an Egyptian origin to the Greek ideas. From the perspective of the Egyptian teachings themselves, Zabkar finds no supporting evidence for the concepts put forward by Herodotus. The chief issue is that the Egyptian concept of a person differs from the Greek view. For Zabkar, the Egyptian conception of the person did not involve that of a separable soul and body, which at death have different destinies. (1963, pg. 60) I have discussed this idea in more detail in the chapter four.

The 'Transformation spells' are also contextualised by Zabkar in relation to his presentation of Egyptian afterlife. The 'transformation' (assuming the form) of the person after death into various entities or beings is not evidence of transmigration of a separable soul, but rather an expression of a desire for "unlimited freedom of movement, of fullness of physical activities and enjoyment" in the afterlife. This freedom is regarded as being an essential part of the Egyptian view of a desirable after death state. (1963, pg. 60)

The second, more contemporary book discussing this topic from a Theosophical perspective is Sylvia Cranston's, *Reincarnation: the phoenix fire mystery*.⁹ Cranston refers to Margaret A. Murray's *The splendour that was Egypt*.¹⁰ For Murray, Herodotus is a reliable source on Egyptian teachings, and she finds supporting evidence in the Egyptian texts for the concept of reincarnation. Regarding the latter she refers to, among others, the Transformation spells, where the deceased can incarnate variously as a pigeon, snake, god, a lotus, etc. (Murray, 1963, pg. 131) Zabkar dismisses these as evidence for the existence of an immortal soul which reincarnates for the reasons I listed in the previous paragraph. (1963, pg. 60) In the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* reference to the 'Benu Bird, the Heart-soul of Ra' (the Egyptian phoenix) is presented as supporting the theory of reincarnation. (Head & Cranston, 1994, pg. 115) In a less convincing statement she quotes J.B. Priestley to the effect that when Egyptian texts refer to someone living 'millions of years' this is "not the false eternity of popular Christianity but the innumerable incarnations ... accepted by Buddhists." (Head & Cranston, 1994, pg. 116)

None of this is very convincing, and the paucity of references to Egyptian texts suggests that Theosophy has a problem finding indisputable (or uncontested) proof of reincarnation in

⁹ Head, J & Cranston, S 1994, (eds.), *Reincarnation: the phoenix fire mystery : an east-west dialogue on death and rebirth from the worlds of religion, science, psychology, philosophy, art, and literature, and from great thinkers of the past and present*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena.

¹⁰ Murray, MA 1963, *The splendour that was Egypt*, Sidgwick and Jackson Limited, London.

Egyptian texts. For Theosophist, however, reincarnation must exist in the Egyptian religion as H.P. Blavatsky affirms it existed there.

1.2 SELECTED READINGS

1.2.1 Selected reading 1:

In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky does locate the concept of reincarnation in the Egyptian religion. In one passage she introduces the concept in general,

“...the cross within a circle, and the globe, with two wings added to it, which then became the sacred *Scarabaeus* of the Egyptians, its very name being suggestive of the secret idea attached to it. For the *Scarabaeus* is called in Egypt (in the *papyri*) *Khopiron* and *Khopri* from the verb *Khopron* ‘to become’, and has thus been made a symbol and an emblem of human life and of the successive *becomings* of man, through the various peregrinations and metempsychoses (reincarnations) of the liberated Soul. This mystical symbol shows plainly that the Egyptians believed in reincarnation and the successive lives and existences of the Immortal entity. Being, however, an esoteric doctrine, revealed only during the mysteries by the priest-hierophants and the King-Initiates to the candidates, it was kept secret.” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. II, pg. 552)

As the *scarabaeus* symbol was visible to the general public in Egypt, it is the associated teaching of reincarnation which Theosophy suggests was a secret teaching. By resorting to the exoteric/exoteric division in religions, Theosophy can insert its content into a text. H.P. Blavatsky in another passage links the symbol of the egg with the *scarabaeus*. She notes,

“The ‘winged globe’ is but another form of the egg, and has the same significance as the scarabeus, the *Khopiroo* (from the root *Khoproo* ‘to become’, ‘to be reborn’,) which relates to the rebirth of man, as well as to his spiritual regeneration.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 365)

She explains that the *Osirified* deceased is reborn to a ‘new life on earth’. The reference here, then, is to reincarnation, and to the spiritual evolution of the soul, as it ‘wings’ its way through the planes.

1.2.2 Selected reading 2:

Three further passages refer to reincarnation in the Egyptian religion. The first I have briefly discussed in an earlier section in a different context.

“And in verse 35, addressing in magic formula that which is called, in Egyptian esotericism, the ‘ancestral heart’, or the re-incarnating principle, the permanent EGO, the defunct says :- ‘Oh my heart, my ancestral heart necessary for my transformations,do not separate thyself from me before the guardian of the Scales. Thou art my personality within my breast, divine companion *watching over my fleshs* (bodies).....” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I, pg. 220)

In a clear reference to reincarnation, the ‘ancestral heart’ is identified as the Theosophical ‘reincarnating principle’ or ‘permanent ego’. I will examine the last sentence in more detail as it illustrates one method by which Theosophical content is read into a text.

Some alternate translations are,

“...for you are my ka which was in my body, the protector who made my members hale.” (Faulkner, 1972, pg. 27) (Chapter 30B)

“Thou art my spirit that is in my body, Khnum who makes sound my limbs.” (Allen, 1974, pg. 40) (Chapter 30B)

“Thou art my personality in my bosom, divine partner, protecting my flesh.” (Davis, 1894, pg. 104) (Chapter lxiv, v.35)

In the Theosophical commentary, the ‘Ancestral heart’ is equated to the Individuality, the permanent part of the person, which survives death and sends a portion or ray of itself out to re-incarnate, following a rest in the *devachan* (afterlife state.). That aspect which was emanated from the permanent ego and which becomes the individual as embodied on earth is the ‘personality’. It is the normal consciousness which we associate with human beings. In Theosophical principles, the re-incarnating ego is the higher-*manas*. In the Theosophical context the phrase, ‘watching over my fleshs (bodies)’ would mean the higher-*manas* looks over its various human incarnations. This would be interpreted by Theosophists as a reference to reincarnation.

A possible alternate Theosophical reading, that the ‘fleshs’ or ‘bodies’ refer to the principles below the higher-*manas* (e.g. *kama*, *prana*, *linga-sarira*, *sthula-sarira*), seems improbable to me

as the passage then makes no obvious reference to reincarnation, and makes no contextual sense.

A difficult point from the Theosophical interpretive perspective is the phrase ‘personality within the breast’. The array of alternate options from translations reflects the difficulty Egyptologists have in translating words into English, and finding an exact equivalent in Theosophical literature is problematic. On the one hand, H.P. Blavatsky has left no clear correspondence; to which Theosophical principle does the ‘*ka*’ correspond? On the other hand, where ‘*ka*’ (for example) is identified by her, it is never correlated with one of the three higher permanent principles. The sense of the passage demands that the ‘ancestral heart’ or reincarnating/permanent ego must correspond to higher-*manas* for the passage to make sense in terms of reincarnation.

In this famous verse¹¹, the deceased is appealing to his heart (the seat of consciousness) not to testify against him in the judgement. That is, his life is to be assessed, and if he is found worthy, he will enter the blessed afterlife.

Comparing the two interpretations we need to notice the different contexts. In both, a judgement scene or action is implied. The mainstream reading is that the deceased who is found worthy will have his heart returned to him and will be reborn, or resurrected, into the afterlife.¹² From a Theosophical perspective, the passage is said to refer to the mechanism of reincarnation, the individual being reborn on earth as a human being. This contextualising is crucial to understanding many statements in Egyptian texts and studies. For example, Taylor writes, “...Egyptians view of it (life) as a series of transformations: birth, growing up, parenthood, old age, death, followed by rebirth.” (2010, pg. 16) Read in isolation from the general context of the Egyptian religion it might seem to imply reincarnation. ‘Rebirth’, however, read in the contextualised setting uniformly refers to being reborn into the afterlife and eternity. This isolating and de-contextualising of sentences is one of the Theosophical techniques of interpretation and appropriation.

1.2.3 Selected reading 3:

Another passage also clearly references reincarnation in the Egyptian context,

¹¹ Chapter 30B in modern translations of the *Book of the dead*, and chapter lxiv, v. 35 in *Turin Papyrus* version of the *Book of the dead* used by H.P. Blavatsky.

¹² Brandon, SGF 1958, ‘A problem of the Osirian judgement of the dead’, *Numen*, vol. 5, pg. 110-127.

“The Book of the Dead gives a complete list of the ‘transformations’ that every defunct undergoes, while divesting himself, one by one, of all those principles – materialised for the sake of clearness into ethereal entities or bodies. We must, moreover, remind those who try to prove that the ancient Egyptians knew nothing of and did not teach Reincarnation, that the ‘Soul’ (the *Ego* or *Self*) of the defunct is said to be living in Eternity : it is immortal, ‘coeval with, and disappearing with the Solar boat’, *i.e.*, for the cycle of necessity. This ‘Soul’ *emerges from the Tiaou* (the realm of the cause of life) and joins the living on Earth *by day*, to return to *Tiaou* every night. This expresses the periodical existences of the Ego. (Book of the Dead, cvxliii.)” (Blavatsky 1988, vol. I,pg. 227)

For H.P. Blavatsky the theme of this passage is that of reincarnation. The ‘periodical existences of the ego’, etc. are clear to understand. The added dimension this passage brings is the mention of ‘transformations’. Here the transformations are explained as representing or symbolising the shedding of the various lower principles of the individual as part of the process of dying.

H.P. Blavatsky in her article ‘Egyptian magic’ in her *Collected Works volume vii* suggests another explanation of these transformations. She is refuting the suggestion that the transformation into a ‘hawk’, ‘heron’, etc. refers to punishment of the reincarnating soul which is reborn in various lower life forms. Theosophy does not accept regressive reincarnation into animals and lower forms of life, for example the mineral and vegetable kingdoms. Her explanation of the deceased being born as a bird, etc. is that these various animals have symbolical meanings. She notes,

“The man who all his life acted hypocritically and passed for a good man, but had been in sober reality watching like a bird of prey his chance to pounce upon his fellow-creatures, and had deprived them of their property, will be sentenced by Karma to bear the punishment for hypocrisy and covetousness in a future life. What will it be? Since every human unit has ultimately to progress in its evolution, and since that ‘man’ will be reborn at some future time as a good, sincere, well-meaning man, his sentence to be reincarnated as a hawk may simply mean that he will then be regarded metaphorically as such.” (1975, pg. 112)

At work here is the Theosophical move of re-interpreting any statement in such a way that it fits the pre-existing Theosophical idea. This re-reading of a text is representative of how

Theosophy engages with any text it encounters. I have outlined above the general understanding of the ‘transformation’ texts in Egyptology. They refer to the deceased’s desire for total freedom of movement in the afterlife. Assuming any form represents this control and freedom which human life did not afford.

1.2.4 Selected reading 4:

For completeness’ sake, I cite a brief sentence which confirms that H.P. Blavatsky believed the Egyptians held a belief in reincarnation. In *The Secret Doctrine* she writes,

“(4) He is the Law of existence and Being (v. 10), the *Bennoo* (or phoenix, the bird of resurrection in Eternity), in whom night follows the day, and day the night – an allusion to the periodical cycles of cosmic resurrection and human re-incarnation; for what can this mean? ‘The wayfarer who crosses millions of years, in the name of the One, and the great green (primordial water or Chaos) the name of the other’ (v. 17), one betting millions of years in succession, the other engulfing them, to restore them back.” (1988, vol. 1, pg. 312)

1.2.5 Selected reading 5:

H.P. Blavatsky writing of the ‘goddess Hiquet’,

“She not only participated in the organization of the world, together with *Khnoom*, but was also connected with *the dogma of resurrection*.^{*13}

“*With the Egyptians it was the resurrection in rebirth after 3,000 years of purification, either in Devachan or ‘the fields of bliss.’” (1988, vol. I, pg. 385-386)¹⁴

H.P. Blavatsky mentions the ‘dogma of resurrection’. Certain, ‘true’, teachings are dogmas of the Theosophical Society. General membership of the Society does not depend on acceptance of reincarnation. It, however, remains ‘true’, and further advancement on the Theosophical path will eventually entail one’s accepting it.

¹³ It is perhaps interesting to note that in 1885 there was a translation of an article from the French by the Egyptologist Paul Pierret entitled *The dogma of the resurrection among the Ancient Egyptians*. It is Pierret’s French translation of the *Book of the dead* that H.P. Blavatsky appeared to use in the *Secret Doctrine*.

¹⁴ The figure ‘3000’ is also used by H.P. Blavatsky to refer to 3000 ‘cycles of existence’ indicating the completing of human evolution through seven full rounds. (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 135)

Heket was a frog form, or frog headed, deity. She is a primeval deity associated with *Khnum*, and with childbirth, or fashioning the child in the womb. (Lurker, 1994, pg. 62) Budge elaborates that this ancient deity was associated with generation, birth, and fertility. (1969, vol. 2, pg. 378) He further links this deity with renewed life and resurrection and a midwifery role. Her assistance in the resurrection of *Osiris* further possibly linked her to the resurrection of Jesus in early Christianity. (Budge, 1988, pg. 97-98)

1.3 REINCARNATION IN EGYPT

There is very little one can draw on from mainstream studies of Egypt on this issue. The idea that the Ancient Egyptians believed in reincarnation is an idea essentially confined to esoteric studies of Egypt. I have found no mainstream Egyptologist who recognizes reincarnation in Egyptian texts. Terms like ‘rebirth’ or ‘resurrection’ uniformly refer to the deceased’s becoming an *akh*, an effective deceased, in the afterlife. As Ikram notes, “...the person was transformed from being a mortal into an immortal.” (2003, pg. 31) The deceased, mirroring the course of the sun, is reborn nightly in the underworld where they assume full bodily functioning. The new life is not on earth but is experienced in the afterworld. At death the *ka* of the deceased left the individual, and preceded the deceased into the afterlife. The deceased was then to undergo the funerary preparations (embalming etc.) as demanded and to pass the Judgement in the afterlife. If he is successful the deceased ‘goes to their *ka*’ and are resurrected in the afterlife.

Even the most sympathetic academic study, Naydler’s *Shamanic wisdom in the Pyramid Texts*, contains no entry for ‘reincarnation’ in the index. At best, Erik Hornung concedes that he can understand how writers of antiquity could, in their confusion interpret the transformations of the *ba* in the context of metempsychosis. (1992, pg. 183) For him, as for Zabkar, Ancient Greeks interpreted little-understood Egyptian concepts in the framework of their existing religious teachings.

Were reincarnation ever admitted as a fundamental part of the Egyptian religion, Egyptian studies and current academic understanding would undergo a gigantic paradigm shift. As Naydler’s book illustrates, the battleground in current Egyptology is whether the Ancient Egyptians had a concept of ‘initiation’ similar to that of the Greeks where a living individual deliberately entered the afterworld.

1.4 SUMMARY:

Reincarnation is a cornerstone of the Theosophical teachings. It is a fact in nature and cannot be disputed. Simply put, reincarnation is true. For Theosophy, Ancient Egypt is one of the great repositories of occult wisdom. The adepts and hierophants of Ancient Egypt must have, and did, know the Theosophical teaching of reincarnation. As the Theosophical teachings are scientific and reflect the processes of nature, the Ancient Egyptians would have understood the process of reincarnation in the same way. The true esoteric school was at 'one' around the world, and the content specific nature of Theosophical statements often does not allow any leeway for variety in presentation. There is no Theosophical writer who can competently claim that the Ancient Egyptians religion did not, in its esoteric form, contain the concept of reincarnation.

H.P. Blavatsky has located reincarnation in the Egyptian religion. Theosophical evidence for reincarnation is rooted in a number of familiar assumptions and movements. Firstly, there is the notion of an esoteric teaching which reflects the Theosophical teachings. Secondly, its interpretations of Egyptian texts are piecemeal, and radically de-contextualised. Thirdly, there is a reliance on ancient writers as reliable sources of information on Ancient Egypt, while there is simultaneously a denigration of many more contemporary sources. This reliance on ancient sources is not uncontested and Theosophical content is inserted into these sources in various ways.

It is conceivable to me, and some Egyptologists confirm, that there may be early Egyptologists and pre-Rosetta stone scholars who endorsed reincarnation as an idea current in Ancient Egypt. Egyptology is a science which has evolved over time. Locating the *Secret Doctrine* in the context of 18th and 19th century Egyptology, may lead to interesting conclusions. In terms of contemporary Egyptology, however, Theosophy has strayed some distance from the mainstream academic presentation on this issue.

The Theosophical perspective faces the familiar hurdles with the selected texts which refer to reincarnation. There is no firm Theosophical correspondence to the Egyptian terms. Where Theosophical terms are inserted into Egyptian texts the context begins makes the correlations untenable. From the Theosophical perspective, the esoteric/exoteric distinction can resolve almost any interpretive predicament. Once Theosophy heads down this path, however, it

relinquishes any pretence of being a rational, scientific, and objective view of the Egyptian religion. It is my position that H.P. Blavatsky, and the original founders, had hoped and intended that the Theosophical system would be taken seriously by, amongst others, the scholarly community. They believed the Theosophical teachings would unlock the original meaning of the Egyptian texts. Of course they had larger goals than simply interpreting ancient religions. They hoped the Society would form the foundation for future religions which would be based on the Theosophical facts of nature. In the *Letters from the masters of the wisdom*, The *Maha-Chohan*, teacher of the *Mahatmas* of Theosophy, wrote in 1881,

“The Theosophical society was chosen as the corner-stone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity.” (1919, pg. 5)

APPENDIX THREE : TYPES OF STATEMENTS MADE IN *THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

Various types of statements are made in the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. Some are translations of esoteric works while others are interpretive statements and so on. I suggest that in *The Secret Doctrine* almost all statements are authoritative and difficult to be disputed.

The first type of statement is the extracts from the esoteric *Book of Dzyan*. The following is an extract of the first three verses of Stanza 1,

“1. THE ETERNAL PARENT WRAPPED IN HER EVER INVISIBLE ROBES
HAD SLUMBERED ONCE AGAIN FOR SEVEN ETERNITIES.

2. TIME WAS NOT, FOR IT LAY ASLEEP IN THE INFINITE BOSOM OF
DURATION.

3. UNIVERSAL MIND WAS NOT, FOR THERE WERE NO AH-HI TO
CONTAIN IT.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 27)

As there is no access to this esoteric work, its statements are incontestable. H.P. Blavatsky, being the source of them for the public, cannot be disputed with on their content and meaning. Even if further stanzas were revealed, they could not contradict the extracts already revealed without a serious attack on H.P. Blavatsky and her work.¹

The second type of statement comes from the *Occult Catechism*,

“What is it that ever is?” “Space, the eternal Anupadaka.” “What is it that ever was?” “The Germ in the Root.” “What is it that is ever coming and going?” “The Great Breath.” “Then, there are three Eternals?” “No, the three are one. That which ever is is one, that which ever was is one, that which is ever being and becoming is also one : and this is Space.” (1988, vol. I, pg. 11)

As this is also an extract from a restricted esoteric source, its content too cannot be disputed. It is to be accepted as factual and true.

There are also extracts from ‘A private commentary’, which is possibly related to the *Occult Catechism*,

¹ Any further presentation on this level would of necessity fall into the category of either neo-Theosophy or second generation Theosophy.

“(xvii.) ‘*The Initial Existence in the first twilight of the Maha-Manwantara (after the MAHA-PRALAYA that follows every age of Brahma)* is a CONSCIOUS SPIRITUAL QUALITY. *In the manifested WORLDS (solar systems) it is, in its OBJECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY, like the film from a Divine Breath to the gaze of the entranced seer.*” (1988, vol. I, pg. 289)

This type of statement, being from esoteric works, unavailable to anyone (except H.P. Blavatsky), is authoritative and indisputable much like the two earlier statements.

These three statements are drawn from esoteric works and share similar levels of authority. They cannot, in the Theosophical world, be easily challenged.

A further type of statement is the commentaries made by H.P. Blavatsky on the *Stanzas*. For example, the first sentence of the comments on verse 2 of Stanza 1 given above,

“(a) Time is only an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced; but ‘lies asleep.’” (1988, vol. I, pg. 37)

H.P. Blavatsky’s comments are statements on the meaning of the *Stanzas*. It would be difficult to argue that the explanation offered is not the intent of the *Stanza*. We have no access to the *Stanzas* or to commentaries on them. We must, as readers, assume that this explanation is the esoteric interpretation of the *Stanza*. Each verse of the *Stanzas* revealed has an attendant commentary by H.P. Blavatsky. Each commentary stands authoritatively as a ‘true’ explanation.

The second part of each volume of *The Secret Doctrine* deals with ‘Symbolism’. H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“Interpreted with the help of merely the symbolical key, Enoch is the type of the dual nature of man – spiritual and physical. Hence he occupies the centre of the astronomical cross (given by Eliphas Levi from a secret work), which is a six-pointed star, ‘the Adonai.’” (1988, vol. II, pg. 533)

Or,

“Now, the Secret Doctrine furnishes a key which reveals to us on indisputable grounds of comparative analogy that *Garuda*, the allegorical and monstrous half-man and half-

bird, - the *Vahan* or vehicle on which Vishnu (who is Kala, 'time') is shown to ride - is the origin of all such allegories. He is the Indian *phoenix*, the emblem of cyclic and periodical time, the 'man-lion' *Singha*, of whose representations the so-called 'gnostic gems' are so full." (1988, vol. II, pg. 564)

I could, I believe, select virtually any passage to illustrate my point that statements made in *The Secret Doctrine* are definitive and presented as truths. Can any ordinary member dispute the nature of *Garuda* and his associations? H.P. Blavatsky is the transmitter and readers are the receivers of this wisdom. Members, and others, may have intelligent things (even "true" things) to say, but their statements will never achieve the status of those made by H.P. Blavatsky.

The third section of each volume of *The Secret Doctrine* is dedicated to contrasting science and the Theosophical teachings. As an illustrative comment, in a footnote H.P. Blavatsky notes,

"Haeckel does *not* postulate a *vegetable* ancestor." (1988, vol. II, pg. 685.

I do not regard this as an indisputable statement of the Ancient Wisdom. Were it to be shown that Haeckel did postulate a 'vegetable ancestor' the status of *The Secret Doctrine* would not be adversely affected. In various statements, H.P. Blavatsky presents an opinion of a scientist or academic. I do not imagine the *Mahatmas* of Theosophy specially checked and confirmed that she had faithfully represented scientific thoughts and opinions. Their checking pertains to opinions of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition, which is accessed almost exclusively through select sources such as the writings of H.P. Blavatsky and the *Mahatma Letters*.

Where, however, she presents a commentary on the statement of a scientist, I regard this as virtually indisputable in the Theosophical world. For example,

"*Let us remember in this connection the esoteric teaching which tells us of Man having had in the Third Round a GIGANTIC APE-LIKE FORM on the astral plane. And similarly at the close of the Third Race in this Round." (1988, vol. II, pg. 688)

Not every sentence in the Secret Doctrine is presaged by the term 'esoteric' or 'occult'. (Here I refer to statements which begin with or include the phrase, 'the esoteric school teaching', or 'the Ancient Wisdom teaches', or like comments.) Nor need they be in order to be regarded as essentially irrefutable, and presented as a truth. For example, H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“There *was* a ‘special creation’ for man, and a ‘special creation’ for the ape, *his* progeny; only on other lines than ever bargained for by Science.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 678)

Can it be doubted that the Ancient Wisdom teaches a special creation for man and ape, or that the ape is the progeny of man?

Some passages are problematic in that they appear to be clear misstatements on the part of H.P. Blavatsky. For example,

“Nearly five hundred years before the actual era, Herodotus was shown by the priests of Egypt the statues of their human Kings and Pontiffs-*piromis* (the archi-prophets or Maha-Chohans of the temples), *born one from the other* (without the intervention of woman) who had reigned before Menes, their first *human* King. These statues, he says, were enormous colossi in wood, three hundred and forty five in number, *each of which had his name, his history and his annals*. And they assured Herodotus* (unless the most truthful of historians, the ‘Father of History,’ is now accused of fibbing, *just in this instance*) that no historian could ever understand or write an account of these superhuman Kings, unless he had studied and learned the history *of the three dynasties* that preceded the human – namely, the DYNASTIES OF THE GODS, that of the demi-gods, and of the Heroes, or giants. These ‘three dynasties’ are the three Races.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 369)

Drawn from *The Histories* (Book Two section 142 and 143) this is a complicated passage with various dimensions to it. The general thrust of the passage is to push back the dating of the origin of the Egyptian civilization. There is the Theosophical correlation of the ‘three dynasties’ to the ‘three Races’. Can Theosophist now deny that the early dynasties are to be correlated to the Theosophical races? She also correlates the *Pontiffs-piromis* with the *Maha-Chohans* of Theosophy. Theosophical content is being inserted by the technique of correspondence. H.P. Blavatsky present Herodotus’ account as ‘truthful’ as if being true and false are the only options. A deeper dynamic of projecting content into subjects, or even being misled by informants, does not feature.

Of interest to me, however, in the current context is that H.P. Blavatsky has made two errors in this passage. Firstly, she indicates that the ‘three hundred and forty five’ kings precede Menes, when, in fact, in the passage in Herodotus they succeed Menes. Secondly, she intimates that

these kings were born ‘without the intervention of woman’, by some supernatural means. In *The Histories*, however, the exact opposite is implied by the informant. We recall that the *Secret Doctrine* has been checked by the *Mahatmas*. I feel Theosophists are in a quandary with issues like this. Once error (real factual errors) is admitted in *The Secret Doctrine* one has to ask where this process will end. Is any statement open to this revision? The authority and charisma of the work does not allow this type of interaction. I have brought this passage to the attention of two Theosophists. I find their responses instructive. The first suggested that H.P. Blavatsky may have had access to original manuscripts of Herodotus in a monastery on Mount Athos, this ‘lost’ manuscript having a rendition of the *Histories* which mirrored the statement in the *Secret Doctrine*. The other suggested that errors were possible in *The Secret Doctrine*; however, there were other options, for example, Menes may be a title, and not the name of a particular figure, and that H.P. Blavatsky may have deliberately inserted an error into her works to keep students ‘awake’. The sense that the *Secret Doctrine* does not contain error can lead to positions which override commonsense. This is essentially my perspective of how *The Secret Doctrine* is received in Theosophical circles. I know of no Theosophical work which has engaged with this fairly obvious error. The passage is usually repeated in its original context.

There is another implication of this passage, the reference to Menes as an historical figure. H.P. Blavatsky does not show any knowledge of contemporary debates surrounding the figure of Menes. (I infer here that she, in fact, displays no special knowledge here.) These include questions of whether, such a figure existed and what the relationship of Menes, Narmer and Hor-Aha might have been. The basic reason for this is revealed by Emery, who notes that, prior to 1895, very little was known of the early dynasties of Ancient Egypt. (H.P. Blavatsky died in 1891.) It is with the archaeological finds of Quibell (1894), de Morgan (1896) and Amelineau (1897) only that the early history of Egypt has begun to be revealed. (1972 pg. 24) H.P. Blavatsky could have drawn only on the sources of information available prior to this, namely the classical sources and the existing Egyptian sources, the ‘Tablet of Abydos’, the ‘Tablet of Karnak’, the ‘Tablet of Sakkara’, the ‘Turin Papyrus’, and the ‘Palermo Stone’.

By mentioning Menes, H.P. Blavatsky has effectively endorsed his existence. Later Theosophical scholars will continue to refer to Menes, and the passages in the *Secret Doctrine* referring to Menes will continue to be quoted.

I feel one could pick almost any passage to illustrate my point of the virtual indisputable nature of the statements in the *Secret Doctrine*. A passage which has intrigued me for some time in *The Secret Doctrine* states,

“Theoretically, the Kalpas are infinite, but practically they are divided and sub-divided in Space and Time, each division – down to the smallest – having its own Dhyani as patron or regent.” ... “The knowledge of the astrological aspect of the constellations on the respective ‘birth-days’ of these Dhyanis – Amitabha (the O-mi-to Fo, of China), included: *e.g.*, on the 19th day of the second month, on the 17th day of the eleventh month, and on the 7th day of the third month, etc., etc. – gives the Occultist the greatest facilities for performing what are called ‘magic’ feats.” (1988, vol. II, pg. 179)

In the above passage three dates sacred to the ‘gods’ are indicated. In the Theosophical scheme there should be, in theory at least, seven dates to match the seven *Dhyanis*. (H.P. Blavatsky adds the “etc, etc” suggestive of further dates.) I have not found any reference in H.P. Blavatsky’s writings where these dates are further discussed. How then can we complete the series?

The first two of these dates appear to have been drawn from Edkins’ *Chinese Buddhism*.² (I do not find the third date, ‘7th day of the third month’, listed. It is obviously possible that there could be another source for this passage; the correspondence between the two dates is, however, difficult to ignore.) Chapter X, entitled ‘The Buddhist calendar’ gives a series of sacred and festival dates. Section 3 (page 208) contains dates pertaining to ‘the buddhas and bodhisattwas’. Pertaining to the above listed three dates, Edkins writes, “*Birthday of “Kwan-shi-yin p ‘u-sa” (Avalokiteshwara), 2d month, 19th day*”, and “*Birthday of O-mi-to Fo or “Amida” (Amitabha) Buddha, 11th month, 17th day.*” In addition to these dates listed in section three, Edkins lists dates for,

- birthday of Shakyamuni – 4th month, 8th day
- anniversary of Shakyamuni’s elevation to rank of buddha – 12th month, 8th day
- anniversary of Buddha’s entrance into nirvana – 2nd month, 15th day

² I have used an online version dated to 1893. H.P. Blavatsky, however, could have drawn from an earlier 1880 edition. Edkins, J, 1893, *Chinese Buddhism: a volume of sketches, historical, descriptive, and critical*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, London. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/cbu/cbu00.htm>.

- Birthday of Yo-shi Fo (Bhaishajyaguru Buddha) - 9th month, 30th day
- Birthday of Mi-li Fo (Maitreya Buddha) - 1st month, 1st day
- Birthday of the female Buddha, Chun-ti - 3rd month, 6th day
- Birthday of “Wen-shu p ‘u-sa” (Manjusri Bodhisattwa) - 4th month, 4th day
- Birthday of “P’u-hien p ‘u-sa” (Samantabhadra) - 2nd month, 21st day
- Birthday of Ta=shi-chi p ‘u-sa - 8th month, 13th day
- Birthday of Ti-tsang p ‘u-sa - 7th month, 30th day.

It is my suggestion that the sequence cannot be completed. H.P. Blavatsky’s thoughts cannot be completed by another person, as they cannot have the authority bestowed on her by her unique access to the *Mahatmas*. Her special place makes her statements, especially in *The Secret Doctrine*, valuable beyond normal expressions. Even if the greatest Theosophical scholar were to complete the dates (and in reality be correct, although this could never be judged) the completed dates would not carry the same force as those given in H.P. Blavatsky’s work. They would simply be opinions, whereas H.P. Blavatsky’s statements are facts. One of the sacred days of the *Dhyanis* is on the 17th of the 11th month, another is on the 19th day of the 2nd month, but for the rest we cannot say. There can be no certainty.

H.P. Blavatsky’s statements in *The Secret Doctrine* carry a weight and authority which remove her statements from the realm of opinion and place them in the realm of fact. Even patent errors carry an authority for ordinary members of the Theosophical Society. H.P. Blavatsky’s link to the Wisdom Tradition, she being the chosen vessel for the *Mahatmas*, ensures that her statements are perceived as ‘truth’ statements. Many of her statements in the *Secret Doctrine* cannot be evaluated as they are drawn from secret works to which we do not access. Some of her statements are presented as representing the ideas of the ‘esoteric school’; these too cannot be gainsaid. Later Theosophical writers remain, on the whole, commentators, not originators of new content.

New content can be generated, but only by further appeals to *Mahatmic* authority, and special access to the esoteric works, for example the works of Alice Bailey, C.W. Leadbeater, and others. Once this happens, a break with ‘Blavatsky’ Theosophy occurs, and the concept of ‘neo-Theosophy’ or ‘second generation Theosophy’ must come into play.

APPENDIX FOUR : ROUNDS AND PRINCIPLES TABLE

Below I reproduce a slightly adapted table from Geoffrey A. Barborka's *The Divine Plan* which clearly illustrates the interrelatedness of the principles and the rounds, and by extension the root-races.

	<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>	<i>Prana</i>	<i>Kama</i>	<i>Manas</i>	<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Atman</i>	
7 th Round	*	*	*	*	*	*	***	<i>ATMAN</i>
6 th Round	*	*	*	*	*	***	*	<i>BUDDHI</i>
5 th Round	*	*	*	*	***	*	*	<i>MANAS</i>
4 th Round	*	*	*	***	*	*	*	<i>KAMA</i>
3 rd Round	*	*	***	*	*	*	*	<i>PRANA</i>
2 nd Round	*	***	*	*	*	*	*	<i>LINGA-SARIRA</i>
1 st Round	***	*	*	*	*	*	*	<i>STHULA-SARIRA</i>

(1992, pg. 375)

The three stars (***) represent the special principle to be developed during that round.

The single star (*) in each column represents the six other aspects of each principle.

For example, then, in the 4th Round the *kama* principle will be developed. Humanity in general is at present in the 4th Round and 5th root-race. As such the *manas* sub-principle of the *kama* principle is being unfolded.

As the principles are seven-fold, and the root-races and rounds are consequently seven-fold, any tradition not offering a seven-fold division of the human being provides an interpretive

problem for Theosophy. The interpretive strategies of Theosophy include finding other traditions deficient, or elaborating other traditions divisions such that they make up seven.

The practice of mummifying the dead, so central to the Egyptian religion (Ikram describes it a ‘quintessential’), presents a problem to be explained by Theosophical writers. Theosophical teachings, which philosophically have limited interest in the physical body and endorse its swift dissolution at death, need to provide a rationale behind this famous practice. I have found relatively little Theosophical literature which engages with this almost-defining practice of the Ancient Egyptians. I suspect this is for two main reasons, firstly, H.P. Blavatsky does not definitively deal with this practice, and, secondly, there is no easy Theosophical explanation of it.

In general, Theosophical perspectives on Egyptian mummification can be resolved into a few set orientations. These are,

- 1) Mummification can be left unexplained or ignored. Many Theosophical writings simply skirt the issue.
- 2) It can be explained as having an ‘esoteric’ function which has not been revealed to us. This practice, having potential origins in Atlantean culture and continued by Pharaoh Initiates, is, therefore, said to have an underlying esoteric rationale which we are not privy to. It is seen, then, as a potentially positive practice under certain unnamed circumstances.
- 3) It can be explained as a degenerate practice which echoes only unnamed practices of the Atlantean peoples. Related to this it can be seen as a new practice of the historical Egyptians with no relation to earlier Atlantean, or early Egyptian, culture.
- 4) It can be regarded as plain black magic.

The practice of mummification reveals a tension in Theosophy. On the one hand, Egypt is *the* great cradle of the Western occult tradition. On the other hand, mummification is very difficult to justify in Theosophical philosophy.¹

H.P. Blavatsky has left little information on the Egyptian practice of mummifying the dead. Discussing the lack of skeletal remains of giants in antiquity, H.P. Blavatsky notes, “*Cremation was universal* till a comparatively recent period – some 80, or 100,000 years ago.” (1988, vol.

¹ Many of these issues are raised by J.M. Pryse in his article ‘The mummy’ in the Theosophical periodical *Lucifer* in 1893.

II, pg. 753) This is not to suggest that burial or mummification was unknown in the earlier races, but it does emphasise the place of cremation in Theosophical thought. Cremation is philosophically the preferred way of dealing with the dead. In her *Collected Works* vol. iii, no less an authority than the *Mahatma K.H.* can note, “We never bury our dead. They are burnt or left above the earth.” (1968, pg. 294) H.P. Blavatsky, in a footnote to the same article, notes, “People begin intuitively to realize the great truth, and societies for burning bodies and *crematories* are now started in many places in Europe.” (1968, pg. 294)²

The essence of the Theosophical process of dying, in its beginning stages, is that the inner principles need to separate from the physical body. By preventing the dissolution of the physical body, the natural cycling of the inner principles is retarded. It is in this context, that H.P. Blavatsky’s comments on mummification need to be viewed.

H.P. Blavatsky writes,

“The ‘Astral Soul’ may remain with the body for days after the dissolution of the latter, but separates itself entirely from it but on its complete disintegration. Such was the belief of the Ancient Egyptians in reference to their mummies...” (1968, pg. 282-283)³

In relation to academic Egyptology, this idea is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the Egyptians hoped to maintain the integrity of the physical body, and, secondly, there was no ‘entire separation’ contemplated in Egyptian thought. The various aspects of the individual continued to visit the tomb and the mummified body for its survival. A different level of critique would involve whether the Egyptians had a concept comparable to the Theosophical ‘Astral Soul’. By injecting Theosophical terminology into an Egyptian context, whole worlds of meaning are simultaneously inserted.

Perhaps the most direct engagement made by H.P. Blavatsky on the practice of mummification is found in her *Collected Works*. Commenting on an article by William Oxley in the *Theosophist*, which appears to reference a passage from Herodotus, H.P. Blavatsky writes,

² This latter comment references the Theosophical involvement in the cremation of Baron de Palm in Pennsylvania in 1876. This is discussed by H.S. Olcott in his *Old Diary Leaves* volume 1, where he refers to it as the first public cremation in the United States.

³ In *Isis Unveiled*, however, she indicates that the astral soul lingered around the mummy for 3000 years, unless it broke the astral thread which connected it. If it broke the link with the body, the astral soul would unite with its higher soul. (Blavatsky, 1988, vol. I, pg. 226)

“He (Oxley) looks at the objective terrestrial and *empty* shell – the ‘mummy’ – and forgets that there may be hidden under the crude allegory a great scientific occult truth. We are taught that for 3000 years at least the ‘mummy,’ notwithstanding all the chemical preparations, goes on throwing off, to the last, invisible atoms which from the hour of death, re-entering the various *vortices* of being, go indeed ‘through every variety of organized life forms.’ But it is not the soul, the fifth, least of all the sixth principle, but the *life atoms* of the *jiva*, the second principle. At the end of 3000 years, sometimes more, and sometimes less, after endless transmigrations all these atoms are once more drawn together, and are made to form the new outer clothing of the body of the same monad (the real soul) which had already been clothed with [them] two or three thousands of years before. Even in the worst case, that of the annihilation of the conscious *personal* principle, the monad or individual soul is ever the same as are also the atoms of the lower principles which, regenerated and renewed in this ever-flowing river of being, are magnetically drawn together owing to their affinity, and are once more reincarnated together. Such was the true occult theory of the Egyptians.”

(Blavatsky, 1969, pg. 559)

This is an interesting passage for various reasons. The general context of the passage is to refute the idea that the human ego/soul reincarnates into orders of being below the human. The passage also seems to negate the efficacy of mummification. The life-atoms of the individual transmigrate regardless of the mummification procedures undertaken. Oxley points out that as mummies are still lying in their burial place, they have obviously not re-housed the returning souls of the deceased. His point is that, if a context of reincarnation was intended, that is that the deceased was mummified so that the soul could re-enter the very same body it left on dying, this seems to have been unsuccessful. For H.P. Blavatsky the life-atoms of the person have long since left the mummy and will, in due course, be drawn together to form a new body for the reincarnating ego. This is the general Theosophical presentation of reincarnation.

H.P. Blavatsky finishes the passage with, ‘...such was the true occult theory of the Egyptians.’ In a later article, she revisits her statements and explains what she meant by the word ‘true’. She writes, “...-the word “true” being used there in the sense of its being the doctrine they (Egyptians) really believed in, as distinct from both the tenets fathered upon them by some Orientalists and quoted by Mr. Oxley, and that which the modern occultists may be now teaching.” (1984, vol. v, pg. 110)

H.P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* itself, while making scattered statements on ‘mummies’ in various contexts, makes no reference to the *rationale* behind mummification in Ancient Egypt. She also makes no important contribution to the rationale behind mummification in *Isis Unveiled*. H.P. Blavatsky does, however, refer to the ‘mummy’ in *Isis Unveiled*. She notes,

“They (the Egyptians) had also a sixth principle named *Sah* – or mummy; but the functions of this one commenced only after the death of the body. After due purification, during which the soul, separated from its body, continued to revisit the latter in its mummified condition, this astral soul “became a God,” for it was finally absorbed into ‘the Soul of the world.’ (1988, vol. II, pg. 367-368)

What functions the mummy or *sah* undertook after death is unclear in the passage. The sense of this passage is that, during the purification processes that follow death, the soul/astral soul continues to visit the body. At some point the visits cease with the absorption of the individual soul into the world soul.

H.P. Blavatsky, in some places, appears to use the term ‘mummy’ to signify simply the material body. In this sense, the soul returning to the mummy merely refers to the process of reincarnation, the soul returning to ‘a’ body. I read various entries in the *Theosophical Glossary* in this manner, specifically the entries under ‘reincarnation’ and ‘*kuklos anagkes*’.

A later Theosophical scholar and Leader, Gottfried de Purucker, discusses mummification briefly in several of his books. He suggests the practice can be traced back to ‘Atlantean black magic’ which was aimed at preventing the transmigration of the ‘life atoms’. He concludes, “...the practice is without moral justification.” (1974, pg. 546) While H.P. Blavatsky does not seem to state this quite so bluntly in her writings, this is the view that is most in harmony with general Theosophical teachings.

With these relatively few perspectives and comments, a defining practice of Ancient Egypt is dismissed by Theosophical philosophy.

In light of the brief comments made by Theosophy on mummification, one need only be brief in referring to this process in the Ancient Egyptian context. Mummification is a basic aspect of Egyptian funerary beliefs and practices. The whole edifice of the Egyptian funerary tradition falls if mummification and the preservation of the body is not part of it. The *sah* or mummy, the ritualised corpse, was essential for the use of the *ka* and *ba* in the afterlife. An eternal

afterlife could not be guaranteed for the deceased if the actions associated with tomb culture were not carried out. An example would be the tomb offerings on which the *ka* and *ba* relied for their continuity. A great deal of time and expense was offered by the surviving relatives (and by the deceased himself while alive) in preparing the tomb and ensuring that the correct rituals were performed.

It is also not only the deceased who was mummified. Salima Ikram mentions four varieties of animal mummies found in tombs. These are pets, animals mummified to provide food for the deceased, sacred animals, and votive offering mummies. (2003, pg. 77) It is difficult to make sense of this from the Theosophical perspective of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition. I am not aware of any place where H.P. Blavatsky discusses the mummification of animals in Ancient Egypt. I suspect that if she had, this practice would have been seen as a degenerate practice with no justification in the esoteric teachings of Theosophy. The point, or irony, of the situation is that, unless an ‘authorized’ member of the Ancient Wisdom Tradition clarifies a teaching, no clarity can be found. Later writers will express opinions, each as valid as the next in terms of their relation to the ‘truth’ or the Ancient Wisdom Tradition.

Theosophical writers have struggled to incorporate the Egyptian practice of mummification into their philosophy. The problems are two-fold. Firstly, H.P. Blavatsky has not offered an explanation for it. Secondly, the practice in general does not ‘fit’ Theosophical theory on death and dying. There is no interest in tomb culture and contact with the dead that characterises Ancient Egypt. Left in this state, later Theosophists have offered individual explanations, which naturally they attempt to root in the Theosophical teachings.

Mummification reveals the sharp impact contextualising a specific action can have.

Mummification in the Ancient Egyptian religion is a fundamental aspect of a wider conception of death and dying. The general context of death and dying in Theosophical teachings is philosophically different from that of Egypt. The radical de-contextualising of set practices, teachings and concepts by Theosophists in their attempt to interpret various world religions leads them into the impasse.

One suspects that Theosophists would prefer not to be confronted by a practice which is so difficult to integrate or explain.

APPENDIX 6 : TABLE OF MICROCOSMIC CORRESPONDENCES

Theosophical Principles and divisions	<i>Isis Unveiled</i>	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works 1886</i>	<i>Blavatsky Collected Works 1886</i> (fn)	<i>Secret Doctrine - Massey</i>	<i>Secret Doctrine - Lambert</i>	Oderberg and Whellams	Hetep en neter	Ryan	De Zirkoff - <i>Isis Unveiled</i>	De Purucker - <i>Encyclopedic Glossary</i>
<i>Sthula-sarira</i>	<i>Kha</i>		<i>Sah</i>	<i>Kha</i>	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Khat</i>	<i>Khat / Sahu</i>	<i>Kha / Khat</i>
<i>Linga-sarira</i>	<i>Khaba</i>	<i>Khaba</i>	<i>Khaba</i>	<i>Khaba</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>Anch</i>	<i>Khaibit</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>Ka</i>
<i>Prana</i>	<i>(Ka)</i>	<i>Kha</i>	<i>Kha</i>	<i>Ba</i>	<i>Anch</i>		<i>Anch</i>	<i>Bas</i>		<i>Ba</i>
<i>Kama</i>	<i>Ka</i>					<i>Ku</i>	<i>Sekhem</i>			<i>Khaba</i>
<i>Kama-rupa</i>		<i>Khou</i>	<i>Khou</i>	<i>Akhu</i>	<i>Ab-hati</i>					<i>Khou (1)</i>
Lower- <i>manas</i>						<i>Ab</i>	<i>(Ba / Ab)</i>			
<i>Kama-manas</i>	<i>Akh</i>									<i>Ba</i>
<i>Manas</i>		<i>Akh</i>	<i>Akh</i>	<i>Seb</i>	<i>Bai</i>			<i>Ab</i>	<i>Ba</i>	<i>Khaba</i>
Higher- <i>manas</i>	<i>Ba</i>					<i>Ba</i>	<i>Ka</i>	<i>Ba</i>		<i>Khou (2)</i>
<i>Buddhi-manas</i>										<i>Sahu</i>
<i>Buddhi</i>	<i>Sah</i>	<i>Sa</i>	<i>Sa</i>	<i>Putah</i>	<i>Cheybi</i>	<i>Khaibit</i>	<i>Akh</i>	<i>Khaibit</i>		<i>Khaba</i>
Auric egg										
<i>Atman</i>	Synthesis of the six	<i>Osiris</i>	<i>Osiris</i>	<i>Atmu</i>	<i>Chu</i>	<i>Aakhu</i>	Abode of the gods	<i>Khu</i>	<i>Akh</i>	<i>Khaba</i>
Notes									Unresolved - <i>Khaibit</i> , <i>Ren</i> , <i>Sekhem</i> , <i>Ib</i>	(<i>Akhu</i> , <i>Khu</i> , <i>Khou</i> - synonyms) (<i>Cheybi</i> , <i>Khaba</i> , <i>Khaibit</i> - synonyms - <i>Mayavi-rupa</i>

This is not intended as a comprehensive, or definitive, table. This is essentially because some of the correspondences are unresolved and open to dispute or alternate placement. This represents ambiguity in the source statements. I have, therefore, in some columns, shown the same Egyptian term against two separate potential Theosophical equivalents. (see second column.) Some columns, for example in the column from the *Encyclopedic glossary*, show a single Egyptian term representing a constellation of Theosophical equivalents. Some Theosophical terms are essentially synonyms, for example, lower-*manas* and *kama-manas*, and higher-*manas* and *buddhi-manas*. In the interest of accuracy I have not collapsed them in the table above.

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