Article title: Archeosophy and experimental metaphysics of Palamidessi: The spiritual practice

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ARCHEOSOPHY AND THE EXPERIMENTAL METAPHYSICS OF PALAMIDESSI, THAT IS THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT:

The centre of the reflections of Tommaso Palamidessi (1915-1983), starting from the first writings of the 1940's, is the providing of the spiritual techniques capable of carrying forward the study of the metaphysical reality to an experimental plane. The full realization of his "experimental metaphysics" is constituted by Archeosophy, understood as the experimental way, presented by him in 1968 and developed in the following years. The concrete basis of every supersensible experimentation for Palamidessi is the awakening of those which are the centres of force, identified with the "spiritual senses" of the Fathers of Church, which as such allow the superior worlds to be rendered sensible. In the thought of Palamidessi therefore the possibility of an experimental metaphysics and of a spiritual practice become implementable once the techniques of awakening and of the development of these subtle centres are provided.

While taking into account the thematic vastness of the various "asceses" proposed by Archeosophy, with the relative methods, experiments and exercises, in this study we synthetically present three orders of spiritual practices suggested by Palamidessi in his writings, and widely diffused among Archeosophers: the meditation on the centres of force, the spiritual exercises with the "rite of the *eucharistia lucernaris*" and the Cardio-gnosis with the "prayer to the Sapience".

KEY WORDS: Archeosophy, Palamidessi, Experimental Metaphysics, Techniques of initiatic awakening, *Chakras*, Spiritual Senses, Centres of Force, Spiritual Exercises, *Lucernaris* Rite, Cardio-gnosis, Prayer of Jesus.

The "experimental metaphysics" of Tommaso Palamidessi

In 1975 there saw the light of day one of the most important monographs signed by Tommaso Palamidessi (1915-1983), *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening*, accompanied by an interesting and indicative subtitle: *The Study of the Centres of Force and the Experimental Metaphysics*. The volume constitutes one of the first and most articulated texts in Italian dedicated to the study of the *chakras* or "centres of force", in which the Oriental techniques, well known to Tommaso Palamidessi, are re-elaborated through the lens of a "Judaic and Christian tradition" (Palamidessi 1975a, 56). The juxtaposition between "experimental metaphysics" and "centres of force" indicated by Palamidessi, far from being random, is in reality the deep expression of one of the most important themes of his thought, which occupied him for the greater part of his life: the idea of applying the experimental method to arguments of a purely metaphysical nature.

The context in which the thought of Palamidessi is developed is that very fertile Italian esotericism of the first half of the XX century. It is well known how, both in the modern era and in that contemporary, religion and science, far from being disciplines with well-defined static boundaries follow a fluid and dynamic discourse which alternates with mutual exclusions and continual revaluations (Von Stuckard 2014). In the inseparable binomial of religion and science it is often esoteric research which plays a propulsive role in experimental science (Thorndyke 1882), suggesting a direct experiential verification of the supersensible reality, or in the role of "scientism" seeking a confirmation of their own doctrines in academic research (Hammer 2004, 205). And yet, if the synergies between hermeticism, magic and the birth of science in the Renaissance era constitute a well known and investigated hypothesis (Yeats 1964), the relationships between esoteric movements and contemporary science are still an interesting and fecund area of investigation, in many ways still unexplored (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 234-245). In this sense it is accepted, for example, that the animal magnetism theorized as therapy by Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) and the para-psychological investigation on telepathy played a notable role in the development of modern psychiatry (Ellenberger 1970); likewise it is known how spiritism and the "psychic researches" led to the investigation of reality considered ultra-physical and often confused with phenomena of an electromagnetic character. An emblematic case in this sense can be considered the discovery of the EEG by Hans Berger (Millett 2001). If therefore often times scientific research originated from metaphysical research, on the other hand it is also certainly true that on many occasions there has been the effort to propose again the experimental method, with the relative successes developed in the metaphysical ambit. Remaining in a similar ambit of Palamidessi, we can detect how already in the works of Eliphas Levi (1810-1891), and in particular in his *The Key of the Mysteries* (Levi 1861), occultism is proposed as the solution to the apparent antimony between "faith" and "science" using the light of "reason". In this context, the citation of *Isis Unveiled* by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) (Blavatsky 1877) cannot be omitted, which in a certain sense can be considered a true manifesto of occultism as the only true "theological key and scientific absolute". Furthermore, albeit less well known at the international level, in this phase there arose in Palamidessi a strong interest in the Ur Group, and in a particular way the references to a "science of the I" (Ur Group 1927). But more than the theosophic approach of Blavatsky and successively that of Charles Leadbeater (1854-1934), it is most certainly that of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), even if with some substantial variants, which is closest to the idea of "experimental metaphysics" that we find delineated in Palamidessi.

In order to explore, at least as a preliminary working hypothesis, and then to start an "experimental metaphysics", one of the fundamental problems to resolve is without doubt that of identifying the sensory organs that allow the acquisition of spiritual experiences and thus in first person operate the experiments of a metaphysical nature. The problem in this regard was already clearly indicated by Steiner. In his writing on the access to the superior worlds (Steiner 1904), the Austrian philosopher refers to the formation of psychic "sensorial organs", which correspond to the *chakras*.

According to the author, these naturally and progressively awaken in the consciousness of the initiate in accordance with their spiritual progress and permit them to accede to the supersensible worlds. Although very attentive to underline the limits and boundaries of that which for him, from his point of view, is purely an analogy between *chakras* and physical sensorial organs, and while noticing the problematics that elapse between subjective illusion and objective clairvoyance (Steiner 1904, 29), Steiner manages to philosophically trace back to empiricism the foundation of the "occult knowledge". Starting

from this philosophical base, Palamidessi pushes radically beyond. In the new Palamidessian perspective the centres of force are not only sensorial organs receptive to the psychic and energetic realities but actually true and proper “spiritual antennas”, able to become sensitive to the transcendent and divine realities. In this regard it is well to point out that in particular Tommaso Palamidessi pulls together the psychic, or of force, centers and the knowledge of the “uncreated divine energies” of the Hesychasm of Saint Gregory Palamas, that he identifies with the Sefirot or divine emanations of the Qabbalistic tradition (Palamidessi 1975a, 51-59). Consequently, in this new perspective the subtle centres become not only the base for an occult knowledge of the superior worlds, as in Steiner, but even the foundation for a transcendent metaphysical knowledge.

Although remaining unknowable in his essence, God becomes directly knowable “in his energy” through the above-mentioned centres of force:

God is unknown and unknowable up until when our consciousness persists in the impure and turbid state. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8) [...] The true body and the true heart with which to contemplate the On High are the so-called Causal Body and the Cardiac Centre, situated in the said body, a subtle, igneous, mental instrument and hidden within us in order to re-clothe the erotic-animic-spiritual entity that we are (Palamidessi 1975a, 19).

Although only an act of Faith in relation to the divine essence is possible, the knowledge of the transcendent here becomes a matter of direct experimentation, no longer limited to only mystics but potentially accessible to all the willing who are able to dedicate themselves profitably to the ascetic practices, to those who know how to make themselves “pure in heart”. In fact, while in Steiner the process of the awakening of the above-mentioned psychic organs should not be forced or accelerated in any way, penalty the subjective illusion, for Palamidessi the process of spiritual evolution presupposes a conscious effort of ascesis assisted by special meditative practices. In fact, according to Palamidessi “the forcing of the heavens is a right of the Christian Initiate, encouraged and authorized to this forcing” by Jesus himself and more specifically legitimated by the evangelic phrase “the kingdom of the heavens is acquired with the force” (Palamidessi 2012 [1973], 150). The “slow advancement of the consciousness” which would correspond to the natural evolution is here definitively substituted by “a new force which comes from Christ”. It follows, among other things, that the path traced out by Palamidessi does not provide an experimental and personal knowledge of the divine which is the prerogative of only a few initiates but a knowledge that can be acquired by all those who manage to “force the kingdom of the Heavens”. This characteristic trait of the author, that follows his radical conversion to Christianity and which is based on a universalistic vision, will bring him to formulate the idea of an “integral ascesis”, that is, capable of integrally involving the individual, as much in the various components of their occult constitution as in the different activities orientated towards a single objective: “to conquer the kingdom of the heavens” (Palamidessi 1969a, 2).

Archeosophy, experimental method and integral ascesis

Even though *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening* is a monographic treatise, formally independent of *Archeosofica*, in many ways it turns out to be a cornerstone. In fact, according to the author, Archeosophy is the full realization of its experimental metaphysics, more specifically, it is defined as a “pure experimental method” and an “a posteriori

philosophy" (Palamidessi 1968a, 1). In the Booklets of Archeosophy the terms such as "experiment", "experience", "experimenter", recur very frequently and with an incredibly vast field of application, that goes, for example, from the para-psychological memory of past lives (Palamidessi 1968b) to those transcendent metaphysics of the mysteric experiences of the Holy Grail (Palamidessi, 1970, 23).

That the idea of experimentation is connected to the concept of Archeosophy is shown by its being used in the same definition of Archeosophy given by Palamidessi *ad vocem* in the booklet entitled *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archeosophy*:

[Archeosophy...] It is a philosophy which springs from the experience, as it rests on the concrete and positive principles of the methodical experimentation in order to know the superior worlds, we ourselves and God, through the development of new senses defined spiritual. Today it is the most complete interpretation of the Christianity (Palamidessi 1979a, 8).

Underlying the vision of Archeosophy as the complete interpretation of Christianity is the idea that it does not alter the true essence of Christianity but repropose it in a new form, more in line and consistent with the scientific mentality that humanity will acquire in the near future. In fact, about ten years earlier Palamidessi preparing one of the *Booklets of Archeosophy* wrote that:

The practice which we propose to you, if you wish to accept it, will take you through the Mystical Way to the Initiatic Way, because Archeosofica is the new Didaskaleion of Alexandria in Egypt and of Caesarea in Palestine, at the time of Origen and of Clement of Alexandria, but developed according to a more advanced mentality for the Age of Aquarius, in correspondence with the Scientific-Technological Revelation (Palamidessi 1969b, 7).

The short piece cited above allows us to highlight also another aspect closely connected to Archeosofica and with the experimental method: that of the progressive Revelation and the Age of Aquarius. In the vision of Palamidessi the incipient "third millennium" will be characterized by the "Scientific-Technological Revelation" taught by Archeosofica, the esoteric school established on the model of the Didaskaleion of Alexandria in Egypt. The intention therefore is not that of distorting the most intimate and true essence of Christianity, of which some of the spokesmen were Fathers of the Church, among whom in particular Origen, but to render it more suitable for our mentality and for that of the future according to the progressive Revelation, that is, the gradual revealing of itself of the divine revelation; both natural and supernatural (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 9).

The experimental aspect therefore of Archeosofica is ideally connected with the next development of Humanity, once it has arrived in the Age of Aquarius, an era of scientific and technological innovations, of great revolutions and political upheavals. In his studies of Initiatic Astrology, dating back to the early 1940's, Palamidessi had already discussed the "astrological ages" theme and the progressive Revelation of God to Humanity in accordance with "precise cosmic cycles". The divinity, though not evolving and remaining always itself, manifests itself to Humanity in a progressive form and with modalities coherent with the mentality of the moment, synthetically signified and marked by the precession of the equinoxes and the "Zodiacal Ages" (Palamidessi 1975b, 36). Each one of them is marked by its own Revelation with characteristics borrowed from the corresponding zodiacal sign. For these reasons if the Age of Pisces has been marked by a strong emphasis towards charitable love, mysticism and faith (the specific characteristics of the sign of Pisces), the Zodiacal Age

of Aquarius instead will be marked by science, individual freedom, brotherhood and by the progressive revelation of the feminine aspect of God (Palamidessi 1986c). The beginning of the Age of Aquarius is indicated by Palamidessi in 1789 and its duration at circa 2,160 years (Palamidessi 1975b, 40). In accordance with the progressive Revelation and the Age of Aquarius, the religious way of the future must therefore structure itself in conformity to the experimental and innovative characteristics of the sign of Aquarius and consequently it can only be “a religious and scientific way at the same time” (Palamidessi 1975b, 41).

The idea of a “way” presupposes an evolution, an end and an end of the evolution, as well as progressive advancement, which Palamidessi names “ascesis”. Ascesis or inner process, which commits the human being to “climb the grades of perfection”, is meant by Palamidessi in the etymological sense of “athletic exercise” and “to work with art” (Palamidessi 1979a, 9). In this sense, the ascetes proposed by Archeosofica are many and integrative, all included in what Palamidessi defines as “integral ascesis” made up of the following: physiological and psychosomatic, social, mystic, theurgical, magical, cosmic, sapiential or initiatic (Palamidessi 1968a, 9-10). These ascetes, synthetically described in *Archaic Tradition and Foundations of the Archeosophical Initiation*, are then developed in successive *Booklets of Archeosophy*, collectively made up of about fifty volumes, a third of which still unpublished.

The ascetic techniques proposed by Palamidessi embrace a complete spectrum of activities from sacred singing to poetry and melurgy, from iconography to the symbolism of numbers and geometrical forms. Among the arguments proposed by him are herbal medicine, hypno-magnetism, radiesthesia, like also the mediumship, which in this context aims at prophetism. Among the studies stand out symbolism, alchemy, the Kabbalah, the sacred languages and angelology. Regarding the practices of suggested meditation, numerous aspects are explained: from the gymnastic positions to the breathing exercises; from the meditation with and without symbol to the awakening of the centres of force; from the meditation on the planetary and stellar entities of the “Initiatic Astrology” to the “Divine Names” of the Kabbalistic tradition; from the prayers of the mystical ascesis to the ritual prayers in the afterlife for the dying; from the memory of past lives to the control of dreams, etc. (Baroni 2011, 157-185). In this context it is impossible to examine even synthetically all the ascetic areas proposed by Palamidessi in his *Booklets*, but it is perhaps relevant to point out how the common innovative element of each treatment consists of defining a specific ascetic way for each discipline. Each monographic treatment, which connects closely to the others, does not have just a mere informative character but rather sets out specific practical exercises of an ascetic character aimed at the spiritual progress of the individual. If this approach does not necessarily constitute a novelty in the disciplines traditionally mystical, such as Cardio-gnosis and iconography, instead, in many cases, for example in radiesthesia, astrology, singing and mediumship, the result turns out to be totally innovative.

Among the numerous spiritual practices suggested by Archeosofica, which the Archeosopher can easily and freely tap into by reading the *Booklets*, it seems to us useful to present some of these in this study because of their relevance: the meditation on the centres of force, the “spiritual exercises” of the Archeosopher with the “rite of the lucernaris Eucharist” and the “prayer to the Sapience” or “Cardio-gnosis”.

The meditation on the centres of force and the awakening of the spiritual senses

Before presenting more specifically the Archeosofica production on the centres of force by Palamidessi it seems right to us to contextualize, even if briefly, the articulation of

the theoretical-doctrinal-practical scaffolding developed by him on the argument. The reflections accrued in this area embrace a period of more than thirty years (from 1945, date of his first publication on the argument, to 1975, when as mentioned there was published *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening*), and in our opinion constitute a Gordian knot in the passage from a Theosophic language and discourse to that more properly Christian and Archeosophic. In fact, the central role in the experimental metaphysics of Palamidessi is covered exactly by the doctrine of the centres of force, which are the latent “sensorial psychic organs”, without which “the visual, acoustic, tactile perceptive experience of the aspirant to perfection would be uncertain” (Palamidessi 1975a, 22). Accordingly, the passage from an Oriental doctrine of chakras to that fully Christian of the “spiritual senses” corresponds also to the passage from a Theosophic context to precisely that of Christian esotericism.

The writings of this period by Palamidessi fervently dialogue with the esoteric-occultist background of the time. Already starting from the end of the XIX century the doctrine of the centres of force was slowly affirmed in European esoteric circles and consequently also in Italian circles. However, we have to wait until the early years of the XX century for them to be highlighted by the work of Steiner (Steiner 1904), Woodroffe (Woodroffe 1909), Leadbeater (Leadbeater 1927) and of Marquès-Rivière (Marquès-Rivière 1930). That this doctrine was contemporarily spreading also in the field of Italian esotericism can be detected in the article bearing the signature of Arvo and Ea (Arvo 1926) with the title *La dottrina esoterica dei centri segreti del corpo in un mistico cristiano*, appearing in the UR magazine, a magazine which Palamidessi cited repeatedly in his first writings.

The first publication of Palamidessi on the chakras, *I poteri occulti dell'uomo e la yoga tantrica indiana e tibetana*, dates back to 1945 with the publisher Spartaco Giovane (Palamidessi 1945). Its contents owe much to Campigny (Campigny 1941) and to Marquès-Rivière, with whom Palamidessi was in contact. To this publication there followed *La tecnica sessuale dello yoga tantrico indo-tibetano* (Palamidessi 1948), in which different chapters are focused on the awakening and development of the centres of force, or “*korlos*” of the Tibetan tradition. Already in the first writings it can be seen that the interest of Palamidessi regarding the centres of force is of an eminently practical nature. In the texts of this period in fact every theoretical-doctrinal component and every speculation of a personal nature is reduced to the minimum: the publications want to form short and slim manuals for ready consultation, in which there are presented the relative instructions of starting off a concrete meditative practice. So there are suggested preparatory practices, meditative operations and visualizations to help the awakening of the subtle centres, operating in accordance with the most favourable astrological positions.

In the first period of investigation on the subtle centres, from 1945 to 1952, the research is carried out, as is usual in Palamidessi, on the dual terrain of both the theoretical and practical investigation. We remember for example that in these years appeared the experimentations with the “theurgic mirror” for the autoscopic vision of the centres of force (Baroni 2011, 60). The outcomes of this experimentation at first hand will lead the esotericist to adopt a classification system based on 12 principle centres of force (Palamidessi 1974a, 6):

I have learned from Yoga literature contrasting information about the numbers of the Centres of force or chakras, because some writers speak of the presence in the subtle body of 7, others of 21 centres and still others of as many as 49, for this reason at the time of my experimentation in this field, namely between 1945 and 1952, I kept to the current opinion of seven principal centres. Besides, in my attempts with the eteroscopic clairvoyance I was able to see no more than seven, as I was dealing with subjects of limited psychic development. In fact, in some I was able to ascertain the presence of the frontal, cardiac and umbilical centres, in others only the cardiac centre,

and in others still, I could observe nothing but the colours of the etheric aura. It was later that I was able to discover and realize that the centres are 12, through some experiments I carried out on myself with the "theurgic mirror", projecting my image onto this instrument, which I had patiently and meticulously prepared. I carried out the experiment in 1959 according to the notes I am in the habit of taking down about the most important events in my life.

Even if still in the embryonic state, already in the first writing of Palamidessi there can be traced the elements that will characterize his thought, such as the reference to the centres of force as sensorial organs of awakening and also a clear reference to the aureole of Jesus Christ and of the Most Blessed Virgin as iconographic symbol, that would indicate the awakening of the coronal centre (Palamidessi 1945, 62-63; 85). A strong propensity to Christianity and the reference to the "Christian Yoga" can be seen in this writing, in which mystics and Christian saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Tauler, Eckhart, Ruysbroeck the Admirable and Saint John of the Cross are cited together with Saint Catherine of Siena, Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, Saint Theresa of Ávila and Gemma Galgani as "the purest expression of Christian Yoga" (Palamidessi 1945, 13).

The term "Christian Yoga" used by Palamidessi in the 1945 text is of a certain interest given that it will appear in an essay of Anthony Bloom (1914-2003) entitled *L'esicismo, Yoga Cristiano: i centri "sottili" dell'essere umano la preghiera "segreta" nella tradizione del Monte Athos* (Bloom 1955), published for the first time in French in 1953 in the collection *Yoga, science de l'homme intégral* (Masui 1953). Passages from the article of the hieromonk Bloom will also be retrieved by Palamidessi in numerous writings of the 1970's, a sign of the interest that this book aroused in the author. The early 1950's mark the return of Tommaso Palamidessi to Christianity, and among the little news we have received we know that in 1955 he was already planning a treatise on Christian asceticism, that would mark a "significant development in the field of mysticism" and whose title seems like it was to contain the word "technique" (Baroni 2011, 87). Urged probably also by this project in 1957 he goes with his wife Rosa Bordino (1916-1999) on an "expedition" to Mount Athos and to Kalambaka to visit the monasteries in a period which can be considered to be one of the most important moments of his life. On his return from this journey Palamidessi dedicated himself to a febrile experimentation of Christian origin, made up of intense retreats, meditations and mystic experiences (Palamidessi 2009, 20). The inner travail is however accompanied by publishing silence and no publication on the argument will appear for at least ten years, that is, until the foundation of Archeosofica in 1968.

Regarding these ten years we know very little or almost nothing of his reflections on the doctrine of the centres of force, for this reason we believe it is interesting to present an unpublished excerpt of Palamidessi, dated 17 May 1964, and drawn up on the occasion of a conference held in Perugia at the Centro di Orientamento Religioso of Aldo Capitini, who Palamidessi was in contact with. We note that the participation at the C.O.R. on the part of Palamidessi was not unusual, given that we have evidence he participated in at least another two conferences between 1964 and 1968.

ESOTERIC INITIATION ON MOUNT ATHOS

The Initiation on Mount Athos calls for great erudition and several years of meditation. The Athonite doctrine acknowledges the preexistence of souls, the cyclic return of souls in bodies (reincarnation) for therapeutic purposes, that is, to heal souls, to purge them of previous evil deeds, the plurality of the inhabited worlds, the eternity of the

creation, the spiritual resurrection of bodies, not the resurrection of the flesh, the final restoration even of the demons, that is, of perverse souls, the negation of eternal pains, the spiritual, mystical, anagogical, allegorical research research, that is, the research of the deep sense of the Sacred Scriptures.

Very little is made known about what occurs on Mount Athos and the details are revealed only at the third grade. I can tell you for certain that some of their rites I have witnessed during my fruitful sojourn belong to the true Christian Gnosticism, born from the relationships between Mazdeism and Hellenism, which later was harmonized with the Christian Mysticism of the disciples of Saint John of Patmos, author of the Apocalypse.

Thus, the seven Demiurges, that is, the seven Elders of Saint John or the Seven Planetary Spirits, each govern a plane of the Initiation. For every plane there are seven "words of power" or "49 keys" in total. Forming part of Christian esotericism of Mount Athos is the Kabbalistic teaching of the 50 Gates of Light, or better of 49+1. The 50th Gate is inaccessible, even Moses did not arrive to it. This gate is God, the inaccessible, impenetrable.

The 50 gates are a path prepared by the Holy Spirit to pave the way towards the 32 Ways of the Wisdom. The Athonite Initiation includes also 9 baptisms and the steps are called "the seven keys of gold", they refer most certainly to the seven physical centres, to the seven astral centres, to the seven psychic centres of the man.

In the catechesis instructions these centres are pointed out in the promise to overcome the seven deadly sins.

The true esoteric Initiation resides in the knowledge and in the conscious awakening of these subsidiary centres denominated the "49 crucifixes" and sometimes the "49 fires", they make the acquisition of the Seven Virtues.

After the ritual awakening of these centres on the part of the spiritual Master, the Disciple of Mount Athos has to exercise himself in the "prayer of the heart" taught by Origen in *De Oratione*, by Evagrius Ponticus, by Gregory Palamas, by Nicephorus the Hesychast.

Who does not exercise in the pronunciation of the Names of Jesus Christ and in the meditation on their own heart, rhythming on the breath and closing all the doors of the body, cannot become Son of God. The Disciple who wishes to make contact with the Christ, the Heavens and perceive the divine energies of the Father; if he wants to know the spiritual worlds, he must go beyond his five senses, he must make function the 49 senses which have been given to him from birth.

And all this cannot be had from either the Protestant Church or the Roman Church, but from the esoteric Church.

In this writing of 1964 the fundamental themes on the doctrine of the centres of force in the Christian key, re-elaborated by Palamidessi, are already fully articulated: the centres of force as spiritual senses; the reference to Palamas and to the uncreated divine energies; the seven deadly sins, associated to the psychic centres, which must be transmuted into

seven virtues; the use of special “words of power”, pronounced to awaken the centres; the teaching of some Kabbalistic doctrines, then also developed in the Christian teaching.

After this short but articulated text, we have nothing more structured on the argument relative to the centres of force until 1974 when Palamidessi began the drafting (remained incomplete) of *Booklet Fifteen of Archeosophy* entitled *Awakening and Development of the Centres of Force* (Palamidessi 1974a). The following year there will be released the monograph *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening*, which marks the maturity, with regard to the texts known to us, of the Christian-Archesosophic period of Palamidessi.

In this monograph the main references inherent to the doctrine of the “spiritual senses” come from the patristics, and in particular from Origen, presented as a figure of reference to Christian esotericism, which is cited many times in his *Contra Celso* and in *Dispute with Heraclides*. The spiritual senses, correlated to the Sefirot, are the centres of force, which once purified, awakened and developed by means of the meditative and ascetic practices result in experimenting experiences of mystical and initiatic awakening (Palamidessi 1975a, 34).

Figure 1 Icon of the buccal-laryngeal, or of the throat, centre (Palamidessi 1975a, ??). The divine names corresponding to that centre are HEBREW (yhvh) and HEBREW (elohim) (Palamidessi 1975a, 45).

The meditative technique for the development of the centres of force is presented with a common “technical schema” (Palamidessi 1975a, 101-103), unlike what is displayed in the *Booklets of Archeosophy*, where specific exercises with variants are shown for each centre. If, as previously stated, to each subtle centre there corresponds a virtue, consequently as a preliminary work to the awakening it becomes necessary to practice intensely the corresponding virtue. After this preparation period one can proceed with the meditation sessions, which it is advised to last for about 40 minutes. Each meditation follows the same approach: after an oration dedicated to Jesus Christ, Sophia, the Virgin and Apostles, written by Palamidessi himself, the ascetic prepares for the meditation through the concourse of the correct bodily posture and the control of the breathing by operating the rhythmic energetic respirations according to the techniques similar to those of pranayama.

In this phase of meditation, the ascetic focuses the attention on the centre of force, visualizing it as “empty”, then centralizing themselves on the forehead they have to visualize a torrent of incandescent lava, which starting from the frontal centre will slowly descend into the chosen centre creating a vortex rotating counter-clockwise. This igneous visualization, together with the rhythmic respiration, has to be accompanied by a mental invocation to Father God, Son and Holy Spirit, to whom is added one to the Sapience. Only after this preliminary preparatory phase is it possible to proceed with the mental invocation of the divine, or logo-dynamo, name, exactly in the centre to awaken, according to a correspondence between the Hebraic divine names and Sefirot, which the author provides previously in the text (Palamidessi 1975a, 45), which is essentially coherent with that given by Kircher in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*. In the second phase of the meditation, that relating to the invocation of the divine names, visualizations are not suggested, but it is specified that it has to be done with the eyes open, looking at a fixed point of front of yourself.

In the pages of this monograph, in the sections relating to each centre of force, there are geometrical diagrams similar to the *yantra* of Oriental doctrines (an example can be seen in Figure 1). The use of such diagrams is not specified clearly, and even if it is mentioned that such icons must be “internalised during the awakenings” in some points Palamidessi seems to be alluding to a ritual use of these diagrams (Palamidessi 1975a, 129).

In the end, the good fruit of meditation will consist in the appearance of the “Virtues themselves of the redeemed Centre”, to which there will be added the specific charisms related to each centre, which once awakened constitute the “spiritual senses” of the “New Man” (Palamidessi 1975a, 104, 82).

Of particular relevance in this context is the association between the centres of force, sefirot and divine names of the Qabalistic tradition. This correspondence will be successively developed by Palamidessi, associating in the post-1982 writings the meditation on the centres of force to the proceedings of the *merkabaica* ascesis and specifically the centres of force as metaphysical doors leading to the *hekhalot*, or divine sanctuaries of Judaic mysticism (Palamidessi 1989: 237). He is, to our knowledge, the first esoteric to develop in a complete way the association between centres of force, sefirot, divine names, angelical hierarchies and *hekhalot*.

The spiritual exercises of the Archeosopher

An ideal complement to the *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening* can be found in the text *The Daily Spiritual Exercises of the Archeosopher* (Palamidessi 1985 (1979)). It is not by chance that the Booklet begins by referring exactly to the volume of 1975: “I have already been precise in my volume *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening*, when I affirmed that God is accessible only on condition that the man seeks to make himself perfect”, and by citing, some lines under, the centres of force as “wonderful sensorial and spiritual organs, which allow the most fascinating exploration of new dimensions” (Palamidessi 1985, 2). The text, meant for the daily and extraordinary spiritual practice of the Archeosopher who is already familiar with Archeosophical studies, is also especially addressed to those who “believe themselves to be initiates in an Order and rely only on the rites and the power of the symbols” (Palamidessi 1985, 2). This last specification allows us to briefly frame the text and to put forward some hypotheses on its genesis. In the Booklet *The Aims of the Lotus+Cross Initiatic Order* Palamidessi makes reference to the initiatic order founded by him in 1948 as an order which possess its “Rule” (Palamidessi 1969a, 15). It is widely known between Lotus Crucians that a provisional *Regola per tutti coloro che vogliono appartenere all’Ordine Iniziatico*

Loto+Croce, made up of 72 Articles, was drafted in 1973 and that it would be sent to those who had asked for it from Palamidessi. A direct testimony is the laconic promotion that Palamidessi made in his magazine *Il Messaggio*, inserting in the list of the titles of the files drafted by him also the *Rituale teurgico per l'affiliazione Loto+Croce* and the *Rituale teurgico per la prima iniziazione di Neofito L+C* (Palamidessi 1974b, 6). But it is also known among Lotus Crucians that this “provisional rule” was almost immediately withdrawn by the same author, most likely in 1976, and never actually spread among those belonging to the Order, given its character of absolute individual liberty. Even if *The Daily Spiritual Exercises of the Archeosopher* was published posthumously its drafting dates back to 1979, and the structure, in many aspects similar to that of a monastic rule, leads us to hypothesize that for Palamidessi such a writing had in a certain way to substitute the precedent rule written only for the initiates and, by that date already withdrawn.

We remark again that this *Booklet of Archeosophy* is not part of a reserved literature but that it is accessible to all those who, being in concordance with the principles displayed in the treatise, voluntarily and freely want to undertake on a daily basis or for a certain period of time the suggested life style.

The Daily Spiritual Exercises of the Archeosopher constitute a text which is essentially similar to the liturgy of the hours of the Christian tradition, and not only. References to morning and evening prayers, coinciding with the rising and setting of the sun, are well before Christianity and certainly rooted in the Hebraism of the 1st century (Taft 1986, 11), but we know that from the very first Christianity there existed a division of the day into canonical hours which clearly pronounced the alternation of work and prayer (the reference to prayer three times a day is already in *Didache* 8.3 and that of praying at fixed hours in 1 *Clem.* 40:1-4). These hours prove to be coherently defined as “terce, sext and none” in Alexandrian writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian (Perrone 2011) and in the end in a more complete way and akin to the latter developments of the liturgy of the hours in *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome (Taft 1986, 24). It was Saint Benedict with his rule who later codified the daily prayers in accordance with the Roman divisions of the day, providing in this way also a base which would be essential for the redaction of the successive rules of the greater part of the European Christian monastic orders.

In a similar way to the divine Office or liturgy of the hours in the text of Palamidessi there is used the following structure of the day (Palamidessi 1985, 9/10??).

MATINS-LAUD-DAWN	(from 3 to 5 in the morning).
PRIME	(from 6 to 8).
TERCE	(from 9 to 11).
SEXT	(from 12 to 14).
NONE	(from 15 to 17).
VESPERS-COMPLINE	(from 18 to 20 and from 21 to 23).

The office of the hours proposed by Palamidessi is very simple in its structure: each hour is distinguished by a dominant idea reflected in the relative invocation of the office, on which the Archeosopher can meditate. To the invocation of the hour, whose prayer is composed by Palamidessi himself, can be added other traditional ones such as the *Benedictus* (Laud), the *Veni Creator* and the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Terce), the *Rector Potens* (Sext) and the *Magnificat* (Vespers). To the Matins and Laud are added also a *Archeosophical Psalm*, it too composed by Palamidessi. Two meditations are suggested at the dawn and at the sunset:

the first dedicated to the rising Sun and associated to the Laud, while the second consists of a true and proper rite called “rite of the *eucharistia lucernaris*”, prelude to the Vespers. The daily spiritual exercises end with a compline meditation, which consists of visualizing a flame in the heart at the moment of falling asleep, associating it with a prayer to the Christ rhythmized on the breathing.

It must be noted that the extreme versatility of the suggested prayers and their essentially private nature make it impossible to know to what extent such practices are actually diffused and followed among the same Archeosophers and Lotus Crucians. It may be relevant instead, also because of its collective nature, for us to linger on the rite of the Lamp, whose celebration is very common amongst Archeosophers and Lotus Crucians, even if it is not daily.

The idea of a “rite of the *eucharistia lucernaris*” was most probably suggested to Palamidessi by the rite of the Agape of primitive Christianity. The *Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 20,8) mention the Agape, it is also named by Tertullian (160-220) in the *Apology* (Apology 39) and the role of the Lamp in this rite is cited in the twenty sixth chapter of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome (170-235). That the benediction of the flame was a precept considered to be very ancient in the IV century is attested by Basil of Caesarea (330-379) in *On the Holy Spirit* (29, ??), and broader indications are to be found in the second volume of the *Manuale di storia liturgica* (Righetti 1955), repeatedly pointed out by Palamidessi.

In the *Booklet* of Archeosophy, practical indications are given to perform the rite: you can carry it out on your own or it can be collective, it calls for a table on which to place three mats of black, white and red of decreasing size, on which is placed a tripod to hold a glass of olive oil with a wick or simply a candle. The prayer has to be performed turned towards the East, so all the participants arrange themselves in the West. After a first invocation to the Holy Trinity, in order to revoke the presence of the Christ all the lights are extinguished and proceeds to the lighting of the lamp, preferably done by a woman, reciting a second invocation which is a formula of benediction. The benediction of the flame over, everybody takes their place and sits down, and after having made the sign of the cross they rhythm an invocation to the Light of Christ on their breathing, at the same time observing first of all the flame of the light and successively “the light that has to appear inside of you” (Palamidessi 1985, 42 ???).

From this short synthesis can be easily intuited the purely mystical character of the rite, even if for Palamidessi this meditation is not independent of the development of the centres of force as we find a hint already in *Techniques of Initiatic Awakening*:

Accurate research should be carried out on the comparison with the so-called phosphenes, that is, of the spots of light or luminous blotches which form as residual light in the inner vision. The concentration on the phosphenes seems to produce or to help the awakening of some para-psychological aptitudes. The ocular fixing of a source of light associated with the meditation has a meaning, which could be analogous to the practice of the prayer and fixing on the flame of an oil lamp, as was used in ancient times, reciting or singing the Hymn to the Lucernario (Palamidessi 1975a, ??).

The Cardio-gnosis and the prayer to the Sapience

One of the keys for the inner transmutation is most certainly considered by Palamidessi to be that of the “Cardio-gnosis”, or knowledge of the heart in the

“metaphysical, mystical and Archeosophical sense” (Palamidessi 1975a, 136). The importance conferred on the cardiac Center is such as to make him affirm that who works with “great intensity” and “expertise” on this subtle centre would not need to meditate on the others (Palamidessi 1975a, 136).

The central role of the metaphysical heart and of the “prayer of the heart” came to Palamidessi from Hesychasm, which he knew closely and re-elaborated in a totally personal way in the course of circa twenty years (from 1955 to 1975). The Cardio-gnosis of Palamidessi is based, as well as on a life coherent with the aims of the predefined spiritual order, on two principles which are distinct but connected: the continual prayer in the heart which he calls “prayer to the Sapience”, consisting of the constant oration polarized in the region of the heart, and the true and proper meditation on the cardiac Centre so as make the intelligence and the spirit descend into the theophanic place of the heart (Palamidessi 1969c, 19).

With regard to the “prayer of the heart” the reflection of Palamidessi is not avulsed from the doctrines and practices of the Hesychasts which around the middle of the 20th century began to circulate in the European esoteric circles. In 1943 the first diffusion of the *Racconti di un pellegrino russo* (Gauvain 1943) began to arouse curiosity in some restricted esoteric ambients, such as those of Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) and of René Guénon (1886-1951), but it is only in 1953, with the second edition of the *Éditions du Seuil* and with the printing of the *Filocalia* by the *Éditions des Cahiers du Sud*, that the prayer of the heart is diffused outside of the original orthodox ambients. In this same year there was given to be printed the article dedicated to the subtle centres in the Orthodox tradition *L'hésychasme: Yoga chrétienne?* of the above-mentioned hieromonk Bloom (Masui 1953), which Palamidessi probably knew also in the French version but most certainly read in the 1955 Italian edition of Rocco (Bloom 1955). In the latter volume there is printed, subsequent to the translation of the Bloom article, a text, it too plausibly translated from the French, by an anonymous author veiled by the letters “H. d. B.” and entitled *La preghiera del cuore*. Although belonging to a volume cited many times by Palamidessi and even though dealing with the technique of the continual prayer, it has to be said how this specific text seems not to have had any influence on the subsequent writings of the Archeosophical period. In fact, Palamidessi himself says that he was introduced to the continual prayer on the heart directly by an Egyptian Hesychast monk, Father Bissarione, described as being very cultured and courteous, during his stay on Mount Athos and in the monasteries of Kalambaka (Palamidessi 2009, 14).

According to what Palamidessi explains the continual prayer consists of the mental repetition of a formula that has to be “short, but with an upsurge, joy and hope” (Palamidessi 2009, 20). The specific formula is not relevant provided it contains the name of Jesus, however Palamidessi advises to lean on traditional formulae such as “Lord Jesus Your Kingdom come”, “Lord Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me”, or also simply “My Jesus” (Palamidessi 1969c, 15; Palamidessi 2009, 20). The exercise must be continual, starting from 300 invocations a day, increasing them as much as possible, until “it will be the prayer to do it on its own in all the serious and ordinary occupations, from awakening and in the sleep” (Palamidessi 2008, 15).

Regarding the prayer of the heart and more generally the Cardio-gnosis it is necessary to say that the vision of Palamidessi has an ulterior development in the Sophianic sense after 1974. This can be noted also in the two versions of the invocation proposed: if in the first edition of the *Mystical Ascesis and the Meditation on the Heart* he speaks of the “prayer to Jesus” (Palamidessi 1969c, 6) and there is suggested the meditative formula “Lord Jesus,

thy Kingdom come!", in the second edition, posthumously edited in 2008, the continual prayer is called "prayer to the Sapience" and the advised invocation is "Sophia, you I love! Lord Jesus you I love!". The reasons for the insertion of the figure of Sophia are anything but superficial as they involve a substantial Sophianic development in the thought of Palamidessi, which is closely associated with experiences of a Christ-Sophianic character. In fact, in May 1974, Palamidessi, in conjunction with some special planetary transits explained in his text *The Bases of the Personal Initiatic Astrology* (Palamidessi 1975b, 44), decides to undertake a retreat, whose results are the experiences described in poetic form in his treatise *The Bases of the Sophianic Theology* (Palamidessi 1986, 58-83), as well as numerous and "pressing" intuitions and inspirations. As a result of these experiences Palamidessi undertakes the drafting of numerous volumes, among which his work dedicated to Sophiology, where there appears a variant of the Cardio-gnosis. In this volume there is explained that the heart will be the place "to meet in a human-cosmic dimension, understandable only with the experience, with Christ and Sophia" (Palamidessi 1986, 101) and also the meditation on the heart is proposed with a meditative formula totally oriented in the Sophianic sense: "Oh Sophia, Sapience of God, my soul burns for You!".

Palamidessi also gives in his writings some variants of the practice of the "meditation on the heart" (Palamidessi 1979b, 31; Palamidessi 1978, 38; Palamidessi 1986, 101), all characterized by some common traits like a respiratory control with long apnoea and the movement of the concentrated attention from the forehead to the heart. Among Archeosophers the most diffused version of the practice seems to be that described in *The Mystical Ascesis and the Meditation on the Heart* (Palamidessi 1969c, 18; Palamidessi 2008, 25). Apart from the variation in the invocation and some slight recognisable differences between the first and second edition the practice described follows the same path: after 5 respirations made following the 1:4:2:4 rhythm, fixing the image of the Sapience on the opposite wall, the respiration continues at first with a normal but deep rhythm and then according to the 1:4:2 rhythm. The meditator must inhale concentrating on the forehead, mentally recalling Sophia, and after this they have to make the intelligence descend into the heart through the attention and the will and fix it in the heart, helped in this process by the mental invocation "Sophia, you I love! Lord Jesus, you I love!" (Palamidessi 2008, 25-26). The result of the good meditation will be the perception of the "inner Light", identified by Palamidessi with the "Taboric Light", experimentable in this centre after its awakening (Palamidessi 1975a, 137).

Conclusions

With this synthetic *excursus* centred on the Archeosofica spiritual practice proposed by Tommaso Palamidessi we have established above all how the personal experimental dimension has always been at the centre of the researches of the Christian esotericist. These, presenting Archeosophy as the "reinstatement in the primordial Tradition" (Palamidessi 1968a, 1), propose a new and modern but always traditional synthesis and in a manner consistent with the Christendom of the origins, elaborating an unpublished "experimental metaphysics". The foundation in 1968 of the Archeosofica School, conceived by him, becomes crucial as a "free school for free scholars", for the sharing of its researches and experimentations.

To personally gain access to the supersensible experimentations needs the awakening of the centres of force, defined by Palamidessi as "spiritual senses", that allow you to render experienceable the superior worlds. In a particular way the meditation on the centres of force, the spiritual exercises with the "rite of the *eucharistia lucernaris*" and the Cardiognosis

with the “prayer to the Sapience”, play, among the numerous practices and the spiritual exercises proposed by Palamidessi, a fundamental role in the context of an integral ascesis for an intimate work of inner transmutation on the Christic model.

It seems necessary to us to specify that these are most certainly not the only practices written by Palamidessi nor the only ones used by Archeosophers and Lotus Crucians. Precisely for the free and independent nature on which Archeosofica has been conceived, the choice of the spiritual exercises to be practised and their modes of application are left totally to the judgement of the individual Archeosophers. So, we have considered it opportune to concentrate on those techniques that seem to us most widely practised by Archeosophers, and which we believe in a certain way characterize Archeosophy within the ambit of the New Religious Movements of Christian origin. Therefore, this study wishes to be only a brief overview of arguments which are amenable for much wider future researches and in-depth studies.

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