

LATIN 1420  
Spring 2021

# Christian Wildberg

## The Hermetic Asclepius

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*Where and when?*

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:30 – 5:45 PM  
103 Parkvale Building / Zoom

### Course Description

Here's a question: In the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> centuries, which text from antiquity was most frequently printed and widely read in the Renaissance, apart from the Bible?

Homer? — No. Vergil? — No. Plato? — Nope.

The answer is: the tractates of Hermes Trismegistus. Nowadays, hardly anyone studies this 'stuff' in an academic context, although there are plenty of 'believers' in ancient esoteric wisdom out there, interesting people who regard themselves as members of the secret hermetic order, utter silent prayers, and celebrate occult rituals. Just search the net. In this class, we are going to get to the bottom of all this, or, if not that, at least lift the veil a couple of inches and take a peek.

We will read and discuss the only Latin hermetic treatise, called the 'Asclepius.' The Latin, as far as vocabulary and grammar go, is not terribly difficult, except when it is, because the text is either corrupt or so obscure that much detective work and ingenuity is needed to even get half of the gist. You will learn how to read an *apparatus criticus*, and much besides. What we have here, I believe, are the remnants of a once flourishing tradition of Egyptian philosophy; the class will not only teach you some Latin, but also introduce you to the intellectual and religious commitments of a world ploughed under by the march of the West to 'cultural victory,' such as it was, over once rich and vibrant traditions of northern Africa.

