

## Cardiognosis and Archeosophy: Mystical Asceticism Within the Struggles of Modern Life

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**ABSTRACT:** Cardiognosis, from the Greek *kardia*, heart, and *gnōsis*, knowledge, is considered by Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), the founder of Archeosophy, to be the most important key to inner transmutation. Palamidessi devoted more than thirty years of study to Cardiognosis as an ascetic and mystical way. The result is an objectively new path: Christo-Sophianic, sapiential, and Archeosophical, having as its objective the *theosis* (deification), and as its spiritual and operative center the invocation within the heart of the Names of Jesus and Sophia. This article revisits the main themes and moments of Palamidessi’s reflection, starting from the first alchemical writings up to his last texts on the “Perennial Wakefulness,” and will also present a few unpublished documents from the author’s archive.

**KEYWORDS:** Cardiognosis, Mystical Asceticism, Archeosophy, Tommaso Palamidessi, Inner Transmutation, Western Esotericism, Theosis.

### *Introduction*

Cardiognosis, from the Greek *kardia* heart and *gnōsis* knowledge, or knowledge of the heart “in a metaphysical, mystical and Archeosophical sense” is considered by Tommaso Palamidessi (1915–1983), the founder of Archeosofia (Archeosophy) and the Archeosofica school, to be one of the most important and effective keys to inner transmutation (Palamidessi 1975a, 136). It constitutes an indispensable passage and even a complete ascetic path for those capable of working within it with “great intensity” and “competence” (Palamidessi 1975a, 136).

The central role of the metaphysical heart and of the “prayer of the heart,” although already present in Palamidessi’s first writings dedicated to alchemy, blossoms in the period he devoted to the hesychasm, that is to say, mainly from 1952 to 1960. To his hesychastic studies, and to his research and in-depth study of Origenian and Alexandrian Christianity, Palamidessi also added a profound background in the theology and spirituality of Sophia, which he developed between 1971 and 1975.

The result of this “cardio-gnoseological” reflection of thirty years is an original ascetic and mystical Christo-Sophianic way, which has as its center the invocation in the heart of the Names of Jesus Christ and Sophia. In this article, I will revisit the themes and the main moments of Palamidessi’s path to Cardiognosis, starting from his first works up to those published posthumously, passing through some public conferences and with the help of some unpublished documents from the author’s archive.

### *Spiritual Alchemy and Cardiognosis*

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a large number of esotericists, thinkers, and academics devoted themselves to the interpretation of the alchemical language (Hanegraaff 2006, 54). Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the same time when the Paracelsian corpus spread, a kind of spiritual alchemy flourished that can be defined as “theosophical.” In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a widespread interest in spiritual alchemy within the context of Victorian occultism was probably triggered by the writings of Mary Ann Atwood (1817–1910: Atwood 1850).

Most relevant to Palamidessi’s studies, such spiritual interpretation of alchemy was presented by Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875) in his *Dogme et rituel de la Haute Magie* (Lévi 2011 [1861]), and developed by Stanislas de Guaita (1861–1897) in *Le serpent de la Genèse* (de Guaita 1897). In Italy it took a form of its own in the works of Giuliano Kremmerz (Ciro Formisano, 1861–1930), was divulged in the journal *UR*, and was finally codified by Julius Evola (1898–1974) in *La Tradizione Ermetica* (Evola 1931).

The *UR* journal was particularly important to Palamidessi because it appeared among the primary sources of his *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* (Palamidessi

1949). This volume followed an article published in 1947 in the journal *Atanòr* entitled “Per la conquista della pietra filosofale” (Palamidessi 1947), and was strongly influenced by the *UR* journal. We note, for example, the choice of commenting the *Turba philosophorum*, as well as that of quoting *De Pharmaco Catholico*, attributed to Johann de Monte-Snyder (Johannes Mondschnieder, 1625?–1670?). Of particular interest to Palamidessi were the articles in *UR* by Ercole Quadrelli (1879–1948), a disciple of Kremmerz who wrote under the pseudonym of Abraxa, whose excerpts are often quoted in full in *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito*.

The descent of the “sense of the I” into the “heart” is a recurring theme in the *UR* journal, especially in the articles by Abraxa and Luce, the latter a pseudonym of Giulio Parise (1902–1969). In particular, Palamidessi took up a significant passage by Luce from “Opus Magicum: il Fuoco” (Luce 1927) on the symbolism of the heart (Palamidessi 1949, 97). In Luce’s article, reference is made to a meditative technique aimed at the descent of the “spirit” into the “heart” through the use of a respiratory rhythm (Luce 1927, 38–9). An interesting passage exemplifying the hesychast prayer technique is quoted by Palamidessi in a footnote from “an ancient codex of the monastery of Mount Athos, due to Abbot Xerocarca” (Palamidessi 1949, 97).

Apart from the *UR* journal, the most important author who influenced *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* was certainly Gino Testi (1892–1951), a friend of Palamidessi, known as the author of *La Materia Pensante* (Testi 1946), of a text on Paracelsus (Theophrastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541: Testi 1942), and finally of a *Dizionario di Alchimia e di chimica antiquaria* (Testi 1950). In 1945, Testi, a Freemason and a frequent collaborator of the publishing house *Atanòr*, had been one of the founders, together with the future Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy, Giordano Gamberini (1915–2003), of the Gnostic Church of Italy (Moramarco 2006, 73), to which, however, I do not believe Palamidessi ever belonged.

Testi and Palamidessi had a frequent exchange of correspondence, of which unfortunately only one letter remains (see Annex A). In it, Testi shows himself happy to host in the journal *Chimica* an article by Palamidessi “against the use of artificial fertilizers in agriculture,” suggesting to quote excerpts and the bibliographical reference of an article by Pico Boggiano (1873–1965).

Palamidessi had been studying the use of fertilizers in agriculture since 1942 when, as editor and probably author, he published *I segreti della radiestesia in agricoltura* (Canavesio 1942) with the publishing house Tommaso Palamidessi Editore. There are many reasons to attribute the authorship of the book to Palamidessi, including linguistic, thematic and bibliographic elements common to his first works, the fact that Palamidessi frequently used pseudonyms in his publications of the time and, finally, the circumstance that a book on dowsing in agriculture was already being planned by the publishing house in May 1941, but the author was listed as “Agostino Martinucci” (Annex B). In any case, Testi’s letter tells us that Palamidessi’s interest in agriculture did not end in 1942, but continued at least until 1948, the year of the letter.

In the letter, Testi was also pleased with Palamidessi’s appreciation of his introduction and notes to the Atanòr Italian edition as *Massoneria occulta ed iniziazione ermetica* of Jean-Marie Ragon’s (1781–1862) *De la maçonnerie occulte et de l’initiation hermétique* (Ragon 1948 [1853]), which had just been published.

Testi had previously been the editor of the “Ermetica” series of the Casa Editrice Toscana of San Gimignano. The series included *Lettera di Giovanni Pontano sul “Fuoco Filosofico”* (Mazzoni 1930), which Palamidessi repeatedly quotes in his text as including “very important directives” on the lighting of the “Sacred Fire” in the “heart.”

In Mazzoni’s publication of *Lettera di Giovanni Pontano sul “Fuoco Filosofico”* (Philosophical Fire), p. 28, there are very important guidelines on the regime of fire, accompanied by a woodcut depicting a heart with a burning flame in the center. [...]

#### FOR THE EXERCISE

Interpret: Sun – Gold – Sulphur – Soul – Heart

First, become the absolute master of your passions, your vices, your virtues. You must be the ruler of your body and thoughts, then (note that to obtain what I have said in a few lines, it takes many months, if not years and years!) light, or rather awaken in your “heart,” by means of imagination, the center of the “fire”; try to feel a warmth, slight at first, then stronger. Fix this sensation in your “heart.”

At first, it will seem difficult to you. The sensation will escape you; but try to keep it in your “heart”; recall it, enlarge it, diminish it at will; submit it to your power; fix it and recall it at will.

Try and try again. Master this force and you will know the “Sacred or Philosophical Fire” (Palamidessi 1949, 104).

We know that Palamidessi had been aware of techniques involving a constant attention towards the cardiac region facilitated by a prolonged visualization of a flaming heart since at least 1945. He refers to it in passing already in his first yoga text (Palamidessi 1945, 74), stating that “other methods of Tantric Yoga suggest to mono-ideate, that is, to represent in imagination a glowing heart surrounded by flames” (Palamidessi 1945, 74). In *La tecnica sessuale dello yoga tantrico indotibetano* he noted that “[t]he Christ, if you observe the paintings reproducing the effigy of the Divine Master, has been described by the Saints with a flaming Heart and radiating a dazzling light” (Palamidessi 1948, 163).

However, while in Palamidessi’s works on yoga the action on the cardiac center does not play a preponderant role compared to the work on the other psychic centers, in *L’Alchimia come via allo Spirito* the “heart” becomes the center of spiritual operations and exercises, so much so that it is identified as the alchemists’ “stove” itself or Athanòr.

To conclude this reference to the Athanòr, I would like to say that Alchemists should carry out the Great Work in the Athanòr, or in their inner selves, in their being, in their will, animated by the fire of faith and love, a lamp fire because it is constant and always at the same degree. Could one not identify the heart, for example, with the Stove, where the fire of the spirit, the fire of the I, descends by virtue of concentration, visualization and silence?

The translation of the sense of self, that is, of the fire-flame-spirit-consciousness, into a first connection with the subtle and elementary aspect of our physical and bodily reality, especially when rhythmic breathing (fire-breathing) comes into play, makes me think precisely of the Athanòr, where the fire is fed by the bellows that project the feeding air into it like a breath (Palamidessi 1949, 111).

The descent of the “fire of the spirit” into the heart and the transformation of the “sense of self” through the use of “rhythmic breathing” are typical themes of the hesychasm and, later, of the meditative techniques involved in the Cardiognosis suggested by Palamidessi in his Archeosophical writings. Although the doctrinal context was very different in the Palamidessi of the 1940s, we can nevertheless see that the core of his meditative techniques was already present at this stage, ready to be grasped and developed later in an openly Christian and Archeosophical doctrinal context.

*Hesychasm, “Christian Yoga,” and the Journey to Mount Athos and Kalambaka*

Considering Palamidessi’s writings on yoga and then on spiritual alchemy, we cannot fail to notice a progressive rapprochement to Christianity. In this context, it is necessary to start by noting that Christ and the Virgin were mentioned as the highest examples of perfection already in the first yoga books (Palamidessi 1945, 62–63 and 85). A strong leaning towards Christianity was already noticeable in 1945, when in his treatise on yoga he included Francis of Assisi (1181 or 1882–1226), Johannes Tauler (1300–1361), Meister Eckhart (Eckhart von Hochheim, 1260–1328), Ruysbroeck the Admirable (John van Ruysbroeck, 1293 or 1294–1381), John of the Cross (1542–1591), together with Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Mary Magdalene de’ Pazzi (1566–1607), Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), and Gemma Galgani (1878–1903), as exponents of the “purest expression of Christian yoga” (Palamidessi 1945, 13).

The concept of “Christian yoga” was therefore already explicit in the Palamidessi of 1945, but it was undoubtedly strengthened in the following years. References to Christian spirituality multiplied, and the latter was credited with an affinity, if not identity, of intentions with yoga and spiritual alchemy.

Now, reader friend, if by chance you had a certain reticence towards us, if by chance you were a Priest of Christ, of that Christ whom I love as you love him, know that the Alchemical Art is a very similar science, if not identical, to Oriental Yoga, which must turn each and every one to the Christ (Palamidessi 1949, 191).

Palamidessi’s reflection is not distant from the contemporary European esoteric scene, in which doctrines and ascetic practices typical of hesychasm circulate, often presented as a form of “Christian yoga,” thus arousing considerable interest and bringing about a certain intellectual ferment.

Hesychasm, as is well known, is an Eastern Christian ascetic method whose objective is *theosis*, a Greek concept for “deification” on which Palamidessi reflected at length (Palamidessi 1978). He understood it as an effective union with God and participation in his nature through the glorified humanity of Christ. This ascetic method is based on the constant and fervent invocation of the Name of Jesus, and the “descent of the spirit into the heart.” It is achieved through a “psychophysical technique” that emerged in its most elaborate form in the writings of some Athonite monks of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Nicephorus the Hesychast (d. 1340), the Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian,

Gregory of Sinai (between 1255 and 1260–1346), and Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) (Toti 2012, 1).

In 1943, the first edition in the West of the *Tales of a Russian Pilgrim* (Gauvain 1943) aroused the curiosity of some esoteric circles such as those around Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), who called it an expression of the “most unaltered heritage of primitive Christian spirituality” (Schuon 1948, 155). René Guénon (1886–1951) noted the “truly initiatory” character of the hesychasm described in the book (Guenon 1954 [1949], 38).

However, it was only in 1953, with the second French edition of the *Tales* by the Éditions du Seuil, and the publication of the *Petite Philocalie* (Gouillard 1953) by the Éditions des Cahiers du Sud, that the prayer of the heart spread outside the original Orthodox circles. In that same year, the article dedicated to the subtle centers in the Orthodox tradition *L'hesychasme: Yoga chrétien?* by hieromonk Anthony Bloom (1914–2003: Masui 1953) was published, which Palamidessi probably already knew in the French version, but certainly read in the Italian Rocco edition of 1955 (Bloom 1955).

It is important here to emphasize how hazardous the definition of hesychasm as “Christian yoga” is. The ascetic technique of hesychasm does, in fact, have points of contact with yoga and with many themes of the *dhikr Allah* of Islamic Sufism in relation to the use of a respiratory rhythm, sometimes coordinated with heartbeats, and of “centers of concentration” towards which meditation is directed. Nevertheless, hesychasm clearly distinguishes itself from both yoga and *dhikr* by its profoundly and indispensable Christocentric orientation. The Name of Jesus is not just one “of many possible mantras” (Toti 2012, 5). Palamidessi was very clear about the distinction. Since he embraced a Christian doctrine and orientation, he repeatedly and extensively pointed out in his writings and lectures that hermeticism, alchemy, and yoga are “good” for their “techniques” and as “methods of awakening,” but “off the mark” if not “disastrous” in their doctrinal, philosophical and religious approaches (see e.g. Baroni 2011, 85–6; Palamidessi n.d. [1952–1979]; Palamidessi 1971; Palamidessi 2012 [1967], 55).

In the period between 1952 and 1955, Palamidessi broke off from his previous publications to turn his “prow [...] towards that lighthouse perpetually lit for eternal salvation, which is Christ” (Palamidessi 1975c, 6). Considering that in 1955 he was already working on a treatise on Christian asceticism that was to

“mark a significant development in the field of mysticism” (Baroni 2011, 87), his decision to personally go to Mount Athos and Kalambaka in 1957 appears as logic. Palamidessi did not provide the timing and details of his stay there, but he described it as “fruitful,” and referred to it on several occasions in his writings and lectures (see Corradetti and Lullo 2020).

We know that during his stay he had the opportunity to consult “some rare works, learning various information about the psychic centers,” was introduced to the prayer of the heart by an Orthodox monk named Father Bissarion (Baroni 2011, 87), and participated in some rituals that he described in 1964 as part of “true Christian Gnosticism” (Palamidessi 2020 [1964]).

After returning from his “expedition” to Greece, Palamidessi devoted himself to a period of intense experimentation made up of retreats, meditations and mystical experiences (Palamidessi 2009, 20). It was also during this period that he began his novitiate in preparation for entering the Franciscan Third Order, which he did in March 1960 (Baroni 2011, 88).

Although there is no direct confirmation, several clues point to the fact that the nucleus of the technical corpus relating to Cardiognosis was elaborated in the period between 1953 and 1960.

### *Archeosophy, the New Didaskaleion of Alexandria*

Starting from at least 1961, Palamidessi was thinking of using his philosophical, religious, and scientific knowledge to create a Christian movement. An unpublished fragment allows us to date in a very specific way the moment in which these ideas emerged in Palamidessi’s mind. The fragment, surprisingly, demonstrates that these ideas preceded the foundation of “Archeosofica” by almost a decade.

Castelnuovo di P. 9-6-61

#### *Advent of a New World*

All of my philosophical-religious-scientific culture leads me to plan the advent, through the work of the Messiah of a new world, a world of Christian fulfilment, a world of freedom, which will be reached through the activity of that “Kingdom of the Spirit”: the “Third Kingdom” (transcription of Annex C, italics indicate the use of red ink).

We note in this unpublished excerpt the reference to philosophy, religion, and science coming together, and driving Palamidessi to undertake a project of coherent change based on the triptych reason-faith-science, which correspond respectively to philosophical, religious, and scientific knowledge. The reference to the “Kingdom of the Spirit” or “Third Kingdom” is clearly to Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) and his “Kingdom of the Holy Spirit,” and has clear eschatological features. The Kingdom of the Holy Spirit will be, in the words of Joachim of Fiore, a “kingdom of freedom,” “of love,” and “brotherhood” (Moltmann 1981, 149), words that closely resemble Palamidessi’s spirit in the unpublished fragment.

Palamidessi’s reflections in this period constituted the substratum for the foundation of the Archeosofica school. This also emerges from his handwritten notes in the later pages of the notebook related to Basil of Caesarea’s (330–379) *Treatise on the Holy Spirit* (Palamidessi 1968a, 5), quoted in the first booklet of Archeosophy, and a list of biblical quotations among which stands out, repeated twice, the reference to the *First Letter to the Corinthians* 2:6–8 (Annex D), regarded by Palamidessi as “a refined statement” of Apostle Paul’s (ca. 5–65 CE) own Archeosophy (Palamidessi 1968a, B).

Palamidessi had developed the conviction of being the reincarnation of Origen (ca. 184–253), following his parapsychological recollections of past lives in the 1940s, between 1953 and 1958, and finally in the mid-1960s (Baroni 2009, 148). In 1966, following these events, Palamidessi personally went to Caesarea of Palestine “to see the ruins in the sands of what was once a center of Christian initiation” (Palamidessi 1969b, 14), and find confirmation of his memories. The foundation of the Scuola Archeosofica (see Cresti 2020) was seen by Palamidessi as the logical continuation of the apostolic and evangelical work begun in previous lives. On several occasions, Palamidessi referred to Archeosofica as the “new Didaskaleion” (Palamidessi 1969a, 6), which continued the work of Pantaenus the Philosopher (d. ca. 200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–210), and Origen, according to a mentality adapted to modern times (Palamidessi n.d., 26, 44 and 61; Lullo 2020, 19).

For these reasons, it is interesting to note the founding program attributed by Palamidessi to the Didaskaleion of Alexandria, where, in the sixth place, the continuous prayer appears.

The fundamental arguments of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and their predecessors, which reflect the Archeosophical thought, can be stated as follows:

- 1)-Eternity of creation.
- 2)-Pre-existence.
- 3)-Apocatastasis.
- 4)-Way of explaining the resurrection and the thousand years of the Apocalypse.
- 5)-Trinitarian and Christological definitions.
- 6)-Continuous prayer and ascetical methods.
- 7)-Scriptural allegory.
- 8)-Significance of the Virgin Mary mother of Jesus, vehicle of the incarnation of the Messiah.
- 9)-Justification of the Theotokos (Our Lady) (Palamidessi n.d., 68).

According to Palamidessi, Cardiognosis and the continuous prayer were an integral part of the catechetical teaching of the early Christians, and also constitute the core of the Archeosophical teaching.

The effective instrument of this careful concentration is the prayer to Jesus, the true key to open the gates of Paradise: a prayer taught by Jesus himself and technically explained by Origen, the Instructor of the two esoteric Christian schools of Alexandria and Caesarea of Palestine (Palamidessi 1969b, 10).

Palamidessi dated the method of Cardiognosis back even to a pre-Christian period. He believed it was known to the Prophets before the Apostles and prepared another experience typical of Jewish mysticism: the experience of the Merkabah or “Chariot of Fire” (Scholem 1965).

Those who succeed in immersing themselves in the splendor of Christ settled in their heart are transfigured by this Light of Eternal Love, which is the Holy Spirit; it is as if they were bathing in the Sun. The method for achieving this is ancient. It goes back to the Prophets, to the first Apostles, to the Christian Fathers of the Greek, Russian, and Asia Minor deserts. It is the prayer of Origen, Gregory Palamas, Gregory of Nyssa [ca. 335–395], Gregory the Wonderworker [ca. 213–270], John Climacus [ca. 579–649]; it is the preparation for Ezekiel’s Merkabah (Palamidessi 1969b, 10).

It is not surprising, therefore, that *L’asceti mistica e la meditazione sul cuore* (Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart) was among the first booklets made available by Palamidessi to his disciples as early as November 1969.

*Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart* (1969)

The eleventh booklet of Archeosophy, published in 1969, is entitled *L'ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore*, and constitutes a compendium to present “what must be done immediately to experience the initial edifying encounters with the ‘Inner Light’ and the first true dialogue in the secret of one’s heart with the Master of Compassion, Jesus” (Palamidessi 1969b, 1).

From the very first page, the practical and experiential character of the writing is evident, especially when, a few pages later, Palamidessi deals more extensively with the “Inner Light” as an experience that in this case is not ecstatic, but obtained through a form of entasis.

[...] Allow us not to define for now what the “Inner Light” is, you will know it through experience: a particular experience, because you will not have it outside your body, but in the blood flowing in your heart as a physiological and meta-physiological experience. The blood, as it passes through the capillaries of the lungs, becomes oxygenated, becomes red and vigorous, freeing itself of toxins and poisonous gases and of the vital energy that has become anti-vital. Verily, we tell you, having experienced it ourselves, the blood passing through the heart in the state of prolonged Enlightenment undergoes a similar process of regeneration due to the Light of the Christ (Palamidessi 1969b, 9).

The experience of the “Inner Light” is incommunicable, and can only be understood through direct experience of the phenomenon as “an embrace of Light.”

It is arduous to describe what the experience of possessing God in the heart is, when the heavy sensations of bodily gravity are suspended, and as if transfixed in Paradise. In the splendor and beauty of Paradise, God gives himself in an embrace of Light, in a burst of Love that burns, transmutes, deifies (Palamidessi 1969b, 8).

The mystical experience is described in this phase as only temporary “because on resuming the common waking consciousness everything disappears.” The volatility of the mystical experience of the early stages is in contrast with the advanced stage of the spiritual journey described by Palamidessi in *Il labirinto dei sogni e la veglia perenne* (Palamidessi 1978), which instead has a character of fixity and continuity. Although the experience of the “Inner Light” is temporary, nevertheless “the benefit of the bath of Light will remain” (Palamidessi 1969b, 9), with its associated psychic and spiritual benefits.

The experience of the “Inner Light” is not a natural experience, but an experience of the personal God who gives Himself to the mystic through Christ:

The “Inner Light” is the intimate embrace with the Christ-Light, the Christ’s absolute perfection, absolute Wisdom, absolute Love, totality of all perfections; a Christ-vibration, welding with God (Palamidessi 1969b, 8).

Palamidessi refers to a “welding” between the practitioner and Christ, emphasizing that “no one is God, and no one can identify with or substitute Him” (Palamidessi 1969b, 6). The mystical state described enables “the Eucharistic presence” in the heart by an experience of the “Adamic state before the separation of the spirit from the heart, that is, before the separation of the spirit from the soul” (Palamidessi 1969b, 7).

The advancement of the mystical state brings *theosis*, or “deification” as a result of prayer (Toti 2012, 5; see also Toti 2006), which is understood by Palamidessi as a “conscious participation in the Holy Spirit in the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22). It consists of a personal communion with God, who “while remaining in an inaccessible transcendence,” manifests himself in Christ “to make us participate in His energy, in His glory, in His Spirit” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22). In *theosis*, the mystical experience becomes transcendent, “supernatural or infused,” which is proper to the state of “perennial wakefulness” (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 34).

The “perennial wakefulness” is an extraordinary spiritual and, at the same time, supernatural state, consisting in the attainment of an inner wakefulness with all that is eternal and immortal in us by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in view of the permanent transforming union of Love with the Holy Trinity (Palamidessi 1978, 1).

Apart from the mystical experience in itself, “marvelous and sublime,” in which “God gives himself in an embrace of Light, in a burst of Love that burns, transmutes, deifies,” for Palamidessi the encounters with the “Inner Light” are also fundamental for eschatological purposes. In fact,

[...] such experiences will be useful when we die and we must repeat this experience in order not to go astray. The dying person must know how to recognize the Clear Light, the Uncreated Light, but if we do not experienced it before, it will be difficult to recognize it after our death (Palamidessi 1969b, 9).

### *The Technique of Cardiognosis*

Although not bound to a technique, Cardiognosis is facilitated by the ascetic method for which, according to Palamidessi, one must prepare preliminarily with a “daily and unceasing prayer polarized in the region of the heart.”

Therefore, the exercise must be continuous, starting with 300 invocations a day and increasing them as much as possible. In the beginning, it is we who do the praying, then it will be the praying that makes itself spontaneously in the heart, in all the serious and ordinary activities, while awake and in sleep: a sleep that will be spiritual “insomnia” (Palamidessi 1969b, 7).

Clearly, the reference is to the hesychastic “continuous prayer,” which, according to Palamidessi, must be “short,” but done “with impetus, joy and hope” according to a traditional formula. The two formulas suggested in the booklet are “Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” and “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” However, any formula can be adopted as long as it contains the “Name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Palamidessi 1978, 38).

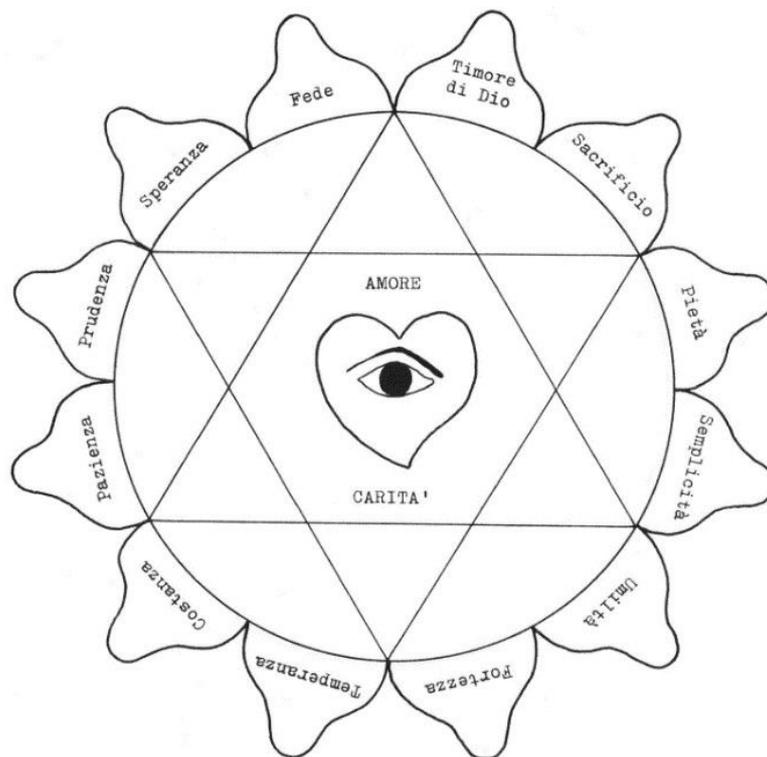
The continuous prayer prepares the Archeosophist for the actual process of Cardiognosis, which, to be carried out correctly, requires a number of measures concerning in particular the duration of the experience.

Summary of what is needed:

- 1)-Personal life pure in thought, words and deeds, according to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.
- 2)-Active social life, in the charitable sense.
- 3)-Intellectual life absorbed in continuous alternation of the comparative reading of the Gospels, the Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse, the Bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gîtâ, the Corpus Hermeticum, the Zohar, the Zend-Avesta.
- 4)-Life of the Sacraments. Therefore, we must go to Mass, receive the Communion.
- 5)-Observation and reflection on the Icon or diagram of the Heart.
- 6)- Correct position of the body and orientation during the prayer according to the first formula (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!), towards the direction of Jerusalem (East-South-East with respect to Rome, with the help of the compass); orientation towards the North, again with respect to Rome, when the second formula is used (Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!), because the Grail is up north.
- 7)-Respiratory discipline or rhythmic breathing during the prayer.
- 8)-Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses.

- 9)-Attention and concentration in one point only: the heart.
- 10)-Invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ.
- 11)-Meditation or prolonged concentration on Christ.
- 12)-Meditation on the diagram or icon of the internalized heart.
- 13)-Contemplation of the Taboric Light in the heart (Palamidessi 1969b, 16).

Thus, Cardiognosis requires moral, social, intellectual and religious requirements, combined with physical and spiritual orientations and disciplines. Of particular importance are the diagrams to be “observed,” “meditated upon” and “internalized,” an example of which is given (Fig. 1), and prolonged meditation or concentration on Christ, for which an operational method is subsequently provided.



**Figure 1.** Diagram for “meditating on the virtues of the cardiac center.” In the petals of the lotus flower we read the 12 “virtues of a pure heart”: Faith, Hope, Prudence, Patience, Constancy, Temperance, Fortitude, Humility, Simplicity, Piety, Sacrifice, Awe of God (Palamidessi 1969b, 24).

The actual meditative practice proposed in the booklet consists in descending the intellect into the heart, aided by an invocation, and exercising breathing

control with long apnea. Although in other writings Palamidessi suggests less rigorous breathing rhythms, in this context he is very specific. One technique begins with five breaths according to the rhythm 1:4:2:4, staring at the image of the “lotus flower with 12 petals of flaming gold color with the sacred face of the glorious Christ in the center” positioned on the wall directly in front of the person who meditates. This is followed by breathing at first with a normal but deep rhythm, and then according to the rhythm 1:4:2. During this latter breathing rhythm, meditation proceeds by invocation and by fixing the mind in the heart with attention and will:

You will do exactly this: inhale gently so as not to disperse the thought and mentally call upon the Lord, while inhaling the air and volitionally forcing the intelligence down into the heart to nail it into the formula (*Matthew* 7:21):

LORD JESUS

THY KINGDOM COME!

You will hold your breath completing the call. Then, expel the air from your lungs, exhaling gently. Then again, concentrate your will and attention in your forehead and direct the forced descent into your heart, repeating the same invocation:

LORD JESUS

THY KINGDOM COME!

Maintain a breathing rhythm of inhalation, stopping the air in the lungs and exhalation as follows: inhale for 1 time, hold your breath for 4 times, exhale for 2 times (Palamidessi 1969b, 21).

We note that the invocation for this meditation in the second edition is changed to “SOPHIA, I LOVE YOU! LORD JESUS, I LOVE YOU!” (Palamidessi 2008, 25–6). The result of a good meditation will be the perception of the “Inner Light,” identified by Palamidessi with the “Taboric Light” experienced in this center after its awakening (Palamidessi 1975a, 137).

### *Sophia and the Sapiential Cardiognosis*

Three very important Sophianic experiences characterized Palamidessi’s mature age, catalyzing his production (Palamidessi 1975b, 69). These experiences brought Palamidessi close to those thinkers and mystics that he himself would define as “Sophianic” in his treatise *Le basi della teologia sofianica*: Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605),

Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), Father Basil Zenkovsky (1881–1962), Nicholas Lossky (1870–1965), Pavel Florensky (Florenskij, 1882–1937), and Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944).

Palamidessi's first Sophianic "encounter," particularly related to Cardiognosis, is described in a poem entitled *La Donna del Trimundio* (The Woman of the "Three Worlds"), of which I quote a few significant lines.

Of heaven illuminated  
queen of space  
primordial  
between earth and cosmos  
you stretched out, gentle, imposing, austere,  
full of mystery.  
Even at that time it was dawning.  
Maybe I was dreaming, or  
not!  
I saw your eyes  
the color of sapphire  
with the pupils of  
prophecy?  
I cannot say  
too far away  
is that twenty-fourth of April  
one thousand nine hundred and seventy-one [...] (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 51).

The date given in the poem is of extreme interest, as it is the same date found in the forty-ninth Archeosophical booklet, entitled *La trasmutazione del cuore nei santi dell'Ekklesia*. The booklet was written by Palamidessi for a conference held in Prato on April 24, 1971, on the occasion of the solemn celebrations in the city Basilica devoted to the Catholic saints Vincent Ferrer (1350–1419) and Catherine de' Ricci (1522–1590) in honor of the eighth centenary of the birth of another saint, Dominic de Guzmán (1170–1221). The conference was held in the presence of the Bishop of Prato, Pietro Fiordelli (1916–2004). It was followed the next day by another conference on "The Function of Archeosofica in the

World” (Palamidessi 1971) with the participation of Renzo Bernardini (1923–1973) and Father Guglielmo di Agresti (1930–2001) who, at the time, was editing the *Collana Ricciana* for the Olschki publishing house.

Palamidessi was in the habit, on the occasion of some important conferences, of drafting a written text that would reflect the topic of the lecture. Many Archeosophy booklets were born in this fashion, among them: *Esperienza misterica del Santo Graal*, *Le basi dell’Astrologia Iniziatica Personale* and, indeed, *La trasmutazione del cuore nei santi dell’Ekklesia*.

This Sophianic experience was followed by two other experiences in May 1974. In this period, Palamidessi, in conjunction with some special planetary transits explained in his text *Le basi dell’Astrologia Iniziatica Personale* (Palamidessi 1975b, 69), decided to go on a retreat for several days, which led to the experiences described in poetic form in his treatise *Le basi della teologia sofianica* (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 58-83), as well as to numerous “imminent” insights and inspirations.

In fact, immediately following the experiences of 1974, he began drafting *Le basi della teologia sofianica* (Palamidessi 1986 [1974]), which was published posthumously, where the features of Archeosophical wisdom are outlined. Here, Palamidessi specifies three orders of Wisdom: Essential Wisdom, Personal Generated Wisdom or Word, and finally Created Wisdom, properly referred to as Sophia.

While analyzing the Scripture, if one is not vigilant the word “Wisdom” lends itself to different interpretations. In a general sense, Wisdom includes:

- (a) *Essential Wisdom*, common to the three divine persons: Father, Word, and Spirit of God.
- (b) *Personal Generated Wisdom*, which is the Word, the Son of the Father.
- (c) *Created Wisdom*, communicated by God to intelligent creatures and personified in Sophia.

[...] So we have a *divine Sophia* and a *created Sophia*: the first is *supratemporal*, the second is *lived out in temporal becoming*. The Sophia is only one, and it is the essential Wisdom of God, but for the practical purposes of the salvation of humanity and the world, it has taken on the appearance of Created Wisdom in order to reach us and help us to ascend (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 18).

Sophia, according to Archeosophical doctrine, is not a fourth hypostasis, as Florensky suggests in his *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Florenskij 1998 [1914], 411), nor is she identified with the Soul of the world. She is the World Soul's archetype, and at the same time its guardian angel, helping Christ and the Holy Spirit in their salvific action and evolution of humanity. The action of Sophia or Created Wisdom is also closely linked to the action of Mary, the mother of the Redeemer, who as the "New Eve" is part of the salvific economy "by a precise divine decree."

As Christ is the Mediator between Humanity and the Eternal Father, so Mary is the Mediator between the evolving World Soul and the archetype of this World Soul as the demiurge of creation, Sophia, assisted by the Holy Spirit (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 85).

It is important to note that for Palamidessi Sophia is a metaphysical creature, with whom it is possible to come into contact and even to engage in a "Sophianic ascetic" (Palamidessi 1986 [1974], 93). The latter should probably be identified, at least in part, with the "sapiential ascesis" (Palamidessi 1968a, 17), one of the seven Archeosophical asceses enumerated in *Tradizione Arcaica e fondamenti dell'Iniziazione Archeosofica*. The main instrument of Sophianic asceticism is the "sapiential Cardiognosis."

In the text *Le basi della teologia sofianica*, while remaining identical in essence, the technique or method suggested for Cardiognosis varies slightly, focusing on the Sophianic aspect. The icon with the twelve petals indicating the virtues of a pure heart is replaced with "a picture depicting in color, and symbolic colors, the Virgin Sophia, Jesus Christ, Mary, and St. John the Baptist." The preliminary breathing rhythm 1:4:2:4 is replaced with the square breathing rhythm 4:4:4:4, accompanied by the fiery visualization of the Hebrew letters of the "logo-dynamis" AUM positioned in the frontal center. Finally, the actual invocation to be performed during the descent into the heart has no specific breathing rhythms and is entirely dedicated to Sophia.

During this inner operation you will cry out from the heart and spirit within you:

O SOPHIA,  
WISDOM OF GOD,  
MY SOUL BURNS FOR YOU!

You must say these words as you inhale, holding the air in your lungs until the end of the formula. The longer the lungs remain still, the more effective the exercise will be (Palamidessi 1986, 104).

The result of such ascesis will be the “phenomena of light due to the uncreated energy of God,” or a manifestation of Christ, Sophia, or Our Lady “suitable to the development you have obtained” (Palamidessi 1986, 105).

### *The Second Edition of Mystical Asceticism and Meditation on the Heart*

In the process of drafting his own writings, Palamidessi used carbon paper to enable him to work in duplicate. Small manual corrections were then made on one of these copies using pencils, and then given to his wife Rosa Bordino (1916–1999) to be retyped and printed. Further alterations were then made over time to the remaining copy of the writing in anticipation of a new edition.

After Palamidessi’s death, his wife Rosa and daughter Silvestra Palamidessi (1948–1996) founded the publishing house Archeosofica and later another publishing house, Arkeios, through which they published some of Palamidessi’s posthumous works such as *Il libro cristiano dei morti*, *L’icona la pittura l’ascesi artistica*, *Le basi della teologia sofianica*, and the entire collection of *Quaderni*, grouped in five volumes under the title *Archeosofia*. In 2005, after Silvestra’s death, the entire collection of Palamidessi’s writings was given to Alessandro Benassai, president of the Associazione Archeosofica, and slowly the unpublished texts, often unfinished, together with new editions of the *Quaderni di Archeosofia*, with the modifications made by Palamidessi, were published in private editions reserved to members. Benassai’s editorial choice, given the private nature of the editions, was to leave the unfinished works as they were, often enclosing reproductions of the autograph notes that should have completed the works.

The new editions of the *Quaderni*, compared with the corrections made to the first edition by Palamidessi, do not differ substantially from the first editions except for a few phrases and references. The second edition of *L’ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore* constitutes a notable exception to this rule, containing widespread changes in the text, all consistently oriented towards a greater emphasis on Sophia.

In the new edition, the figure of Jesus is always placed side by side with that of Sophia, and the two are often identified collectively by the term “Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2008, 1, 7, 9, 18, and 19). The term “prayer to Jesus” is, in fact, replaced with “prayer to Wisdom” (Palamidessi 2008, 7) and specified to consist in “invoking the Names of Jesus Christ and Sophia” (Palamidessi 2008, 23). The most significant change in the text, however, concerns the actual invocation to be used in the meditation on the heart which, instead of being “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” becomes

SOPHIA I LOVE YOU

LORD JESUS I LOVE YOU (Palamidessi 2008, 26).

The invocation “Lord Jesus, Thy Kingdom come!” remains in the text as the traditional formula to be used in the prayer (Palamidessi 2008, 21 and 28), but is replaced in the version for the meditation on the heart.

It is plausible that Palamidessi’s choice of formula was connected with the idea of creating a balance between the masculine and feminine aspects of Wisdom. We can trace this idea at least as far back as 1982 in an autograph writing (Annex E), which was later published and edited in *Archeosofia, Vol. II* (Palamidessi 1989, 255). In Palamidessi’s autograph, we read how the invocation of the Cardiognosis specified in the text was originally supposed to contain the invocation “Holy Spirit!” that preceded “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Thy Kingdom come!,” and was later shortened by Palamidessi himself into “Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Kingdom come!” The simplification of the formula was probably connected with Palamidessi’s statement derived from Lev Gillet’s (1893–1980) *The Jesus Prayer* (Un monaco della Chiesa d’Oriente 1964 [1951], 50) that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord without a special intervention of the Holy Spirit” (Palamidessi 2009, 29).

It is significant, however, that in the new edition of the booklet Jesus Christ is joined in the cardiac invocation by a female sapiential figure, Sophia, something that seems to be a unicum in the history of Christian Cardiognosis.

### *Cardiognosis, Spiritual Transmutation, and Theosis*

The objective of Cardiognosis and, more generally, of asceticism was indicated by Palamidessi with a word typical of the hesychastic doctrine, *theosis*.

Palamidessi devoted a long and reasoned definition to it in his *Dizionario enciclopedico di Archeosofia*:

*THEOSIS*: indicates the deification, but does not make one God himself. Do not fall into the trap of certain occultists, or of certain Indian philosophies, which make the man God. *Theosis* is the conscious participation in the Holy Spirit to the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, who comes to us in the mysteries of the invisible Church, and especially in the Eucharist. God, though remaining in an inaccessible transcendence, comes to us in Christ, so we can participate in his energy, his glory, his “life-giving” Spirit. Deification or *theosis* is therefore the content, according to ontology, of a personal communion (Palamidessi 1979a [1968], 22).

For Palamidessi, *theosis* is the conscious participation in the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ, which is fulfilled by aggregation to the Body of Christ with the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Palamidessi 1985, 24). It is experienced as the “supratemporal and supra-spatial consciousness of a god in God” (Palamidessi 1979b, 36). In this sense, humans can attain *theosis* “because God wants it,” and this is realized through “Pure Knowledge” and the “transmutation of the ‘intelligible matter’ that is the human spiritual essence” (Palamidessi 1975b, 48). In other words, “God is God and we are images of God, mere creatures participating in *theosis*” (Palamidessi 1970a, 26).

Given these premises, the importance of Cardiognosis within Palamidessi’s system cannot be overestimated. In the occult constitution outlined by Palamidessi, the essence of humans is composed of three principles that are interdependent, but unconnected in the usual state: Spirit, Emotional Soul, and Eros-dynamic Soul. In the usual state, humans find themselves unable to love God “with all their mind, with all their heart, and with all their strength” (*Mark* 12:28–34), according to the “commandment of charity” expressed in the Gospels, and therefore unable to fulfil the “conditions” for “conquering the Kingdom of God” (Palamidessi 1972, 11).

The coming together of these principles, which are re-established “by the will of the Great Architect of the Universe” and through ascesis, is a process that necessarily passes through Cardiognosis and Sexognosis, the latter being the “knowledge of the energy of generation aimed at sublimating and directing it” (Palamidessi 1970a, 3). However, even if the sublimation of the sexual force is for Palamidessi “the key to Freedom” and to *theosis* or deification (Palamidessi 1968b, 32), a direct action on the sexual sphere is considered very dangerous

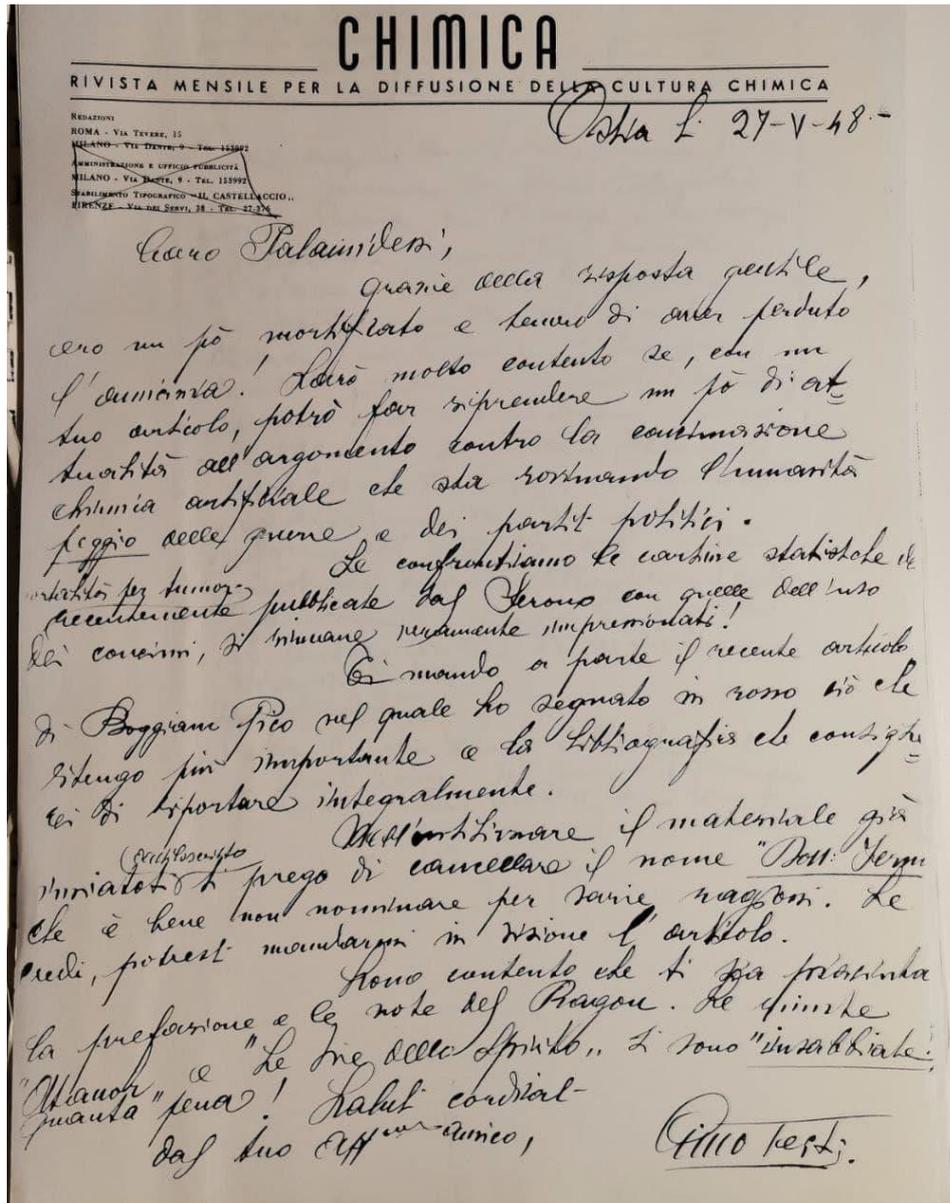
and discouraged in favor of perfecting the Cardiognosis, which allows to realize the awakening without resorting to the artifice of “awakening the kundalini” (Palamidessi 1970b, 10).

For Palamidessi, Cardiognosis constitutes an alternative and complete way to *theosis*, which leads directly to the “Perennial Wakefulness” or rather “to the last degree of perfection attainable in this life, prelude to a more advanced preparation for the blessed life of ‘glory’ according to the ‘Mystery of the Eighth Day’” (Palamidessi 1978, 3).

### *Conclusions*

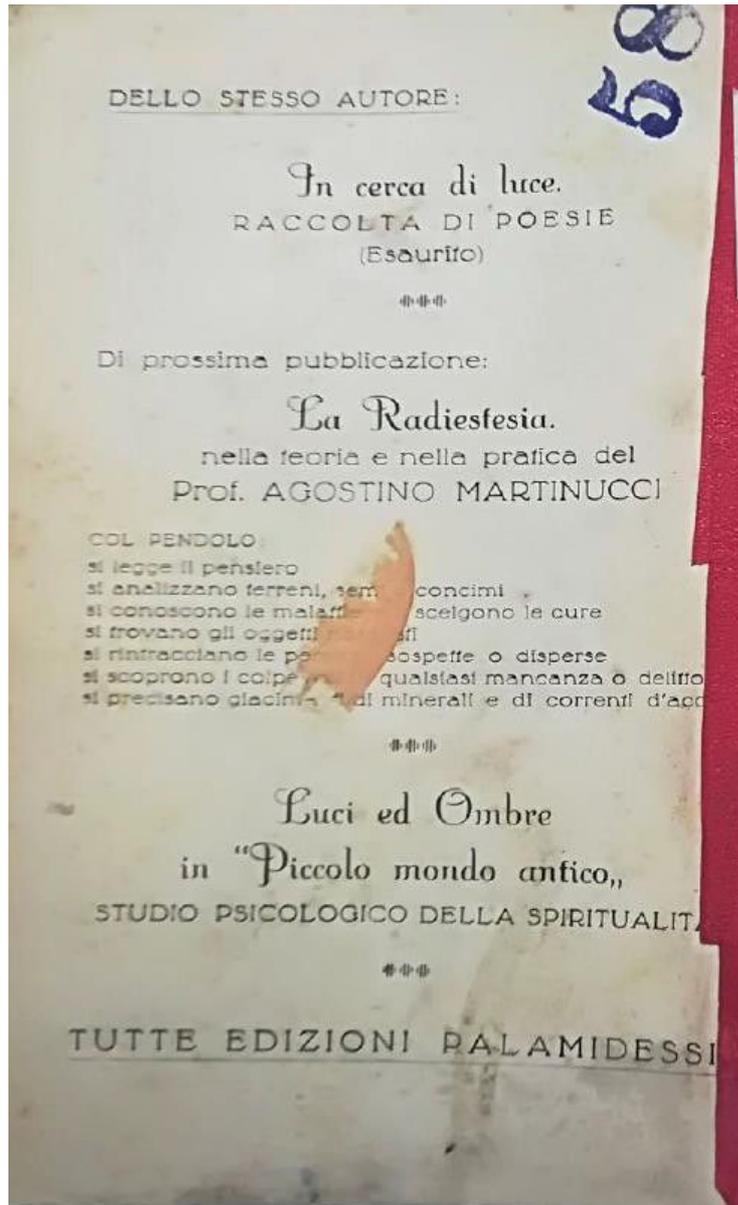
I have reviewed here the fundamental moments in the development of Palamidessi’s Archeosophical Cardiognosis. They bring together the author’s experiences in spiritual alchemy and hesychasm, yoga techniques reinterpreted in the light of Christian theology and Archeosophical wisdom, and personal experiences achieved in more than thirty years of ascetic activity. The result is an ascetic and mystical path that is objectively new, Christ-like, sapiential, and Archeosophical, with *theosis* as its goal and the invocation of the Names of Jesus and Sophia in the heart as its spiritual and operational center.

It is perhaps useful to add that such mystical asceticism is currently practiced by a substantial number of Archeosophists, who privately and collectively practice the techniques offered by Palamidessi in his writings and especially in *L’ascesi mistica e la meditazione sul cuore*.

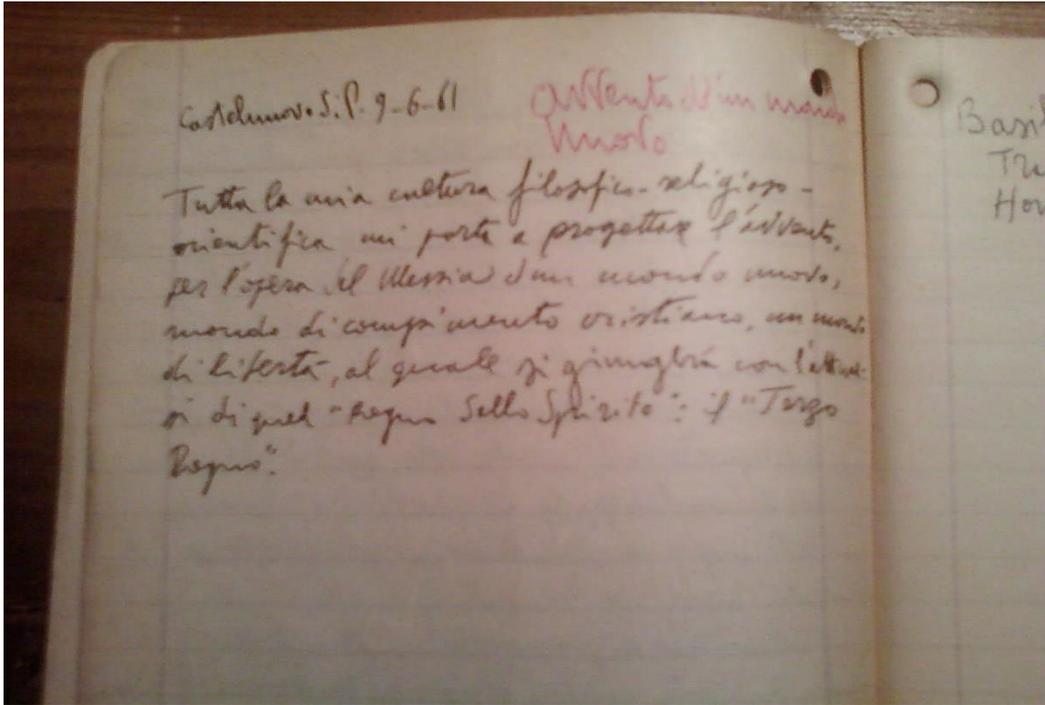


Annex A. Letter from Gino Testi to Tommaso Palamidessi dated May 27, 1948.

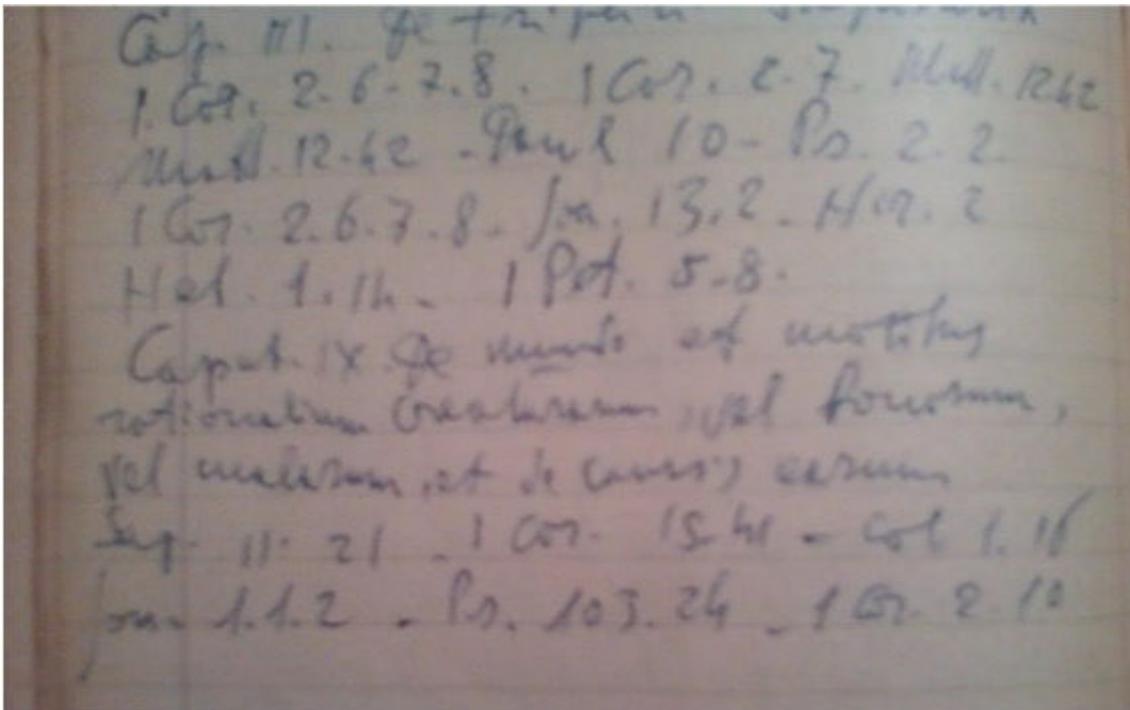
Photo from the personal archive of the author.



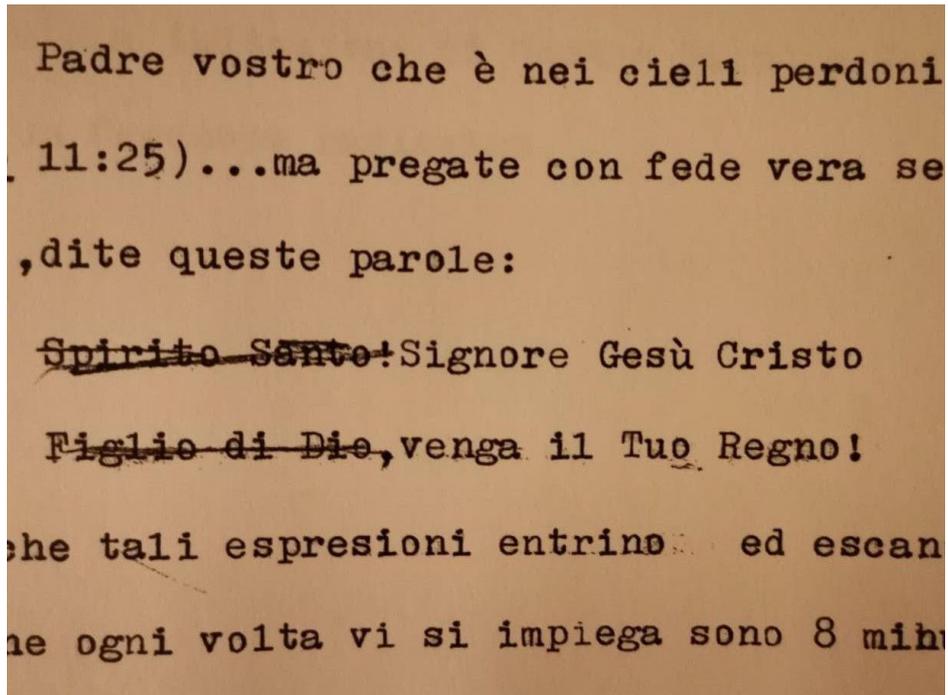
Annex B. Back cover of *Fitto Mistero*, published by Palamidessi and dated May 1941.



**Annex C.** Handwritten notes by Tommaso Palamidessi dated June 9, 1961. Photo from the personal archive of the author, original in the Riva archive.



**Annex D.** Handwritten notes by Tommaso Palamidessi undated but dating in fact to 1961. Photo from the personal archive of the author.



Annex E. Photograph of an anastatic copy of Palamidessi's autograph notes undated, but dating back to 1982. Photograph by the author of a document in the Benassai archive.

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