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AUSTRALIA

**Light Broken Through the Prism of Life:**

**René Schwaller de Lubicz and the Hermetic Problem of Salt**

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School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics

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## Abstract

The life and work of the Alsatian hermeticist and Egyptosophist, René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887–1961) attests to the continued presence of a distinctly nondual current of alchemical precept and practice in which material transmutation and spiritual transmutation are not separate nor merely coincidental endeavours but two indispensably linked sides of the same coin. The link, for Schwaller, was perceived as a juncture of meta-physical and proto-physical forces, a process conceived in terms of an alchemical “salt” (a neutralisation reaction between an “acid” and a “base”). This thesis demonstrates that Lubiczian alchemy, by centring on the esoteric formation of all “bodies,” to include the hidden “nucleus” of continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality, speaks directly to the perception of alchemy as a nondual, operative-spiritual process.

Before examining Schwaller’s work proper, part one of this thesis deals with methodological and historiographical considerations at some length. I begin by detailing the “hermetic problem of salt” through cultural-historical, mythographical, chemical and alchemical lenses in order to introduce the phenomenon of salt as an “abstract concretion” resulting from polarised opposites (acid and base, fire and water, sun and sea, sulphur and mercury, etc.) The juncture of opposing principles perceived in the “hermetic problem” of salt anticipates the methodological discussion, which examines the dichotomy between history and phenomenology, along with the materialist and metaphysical sympathies of these methodologies. Form mirroring content, the method employed in this thesis seeks to establish a “neutralisation reaction” between such extremes, encompassing both empirical-historical and eidetic-phenomenological approaches. The guiding model for this synthesis is the Heraclitean *palintonos harmoniē* (counter-stretched harmony), in which inherently opposed tensions are viewed as integral rather than antithetical to the deeper vitality of the whole. Following from this, the broader argument of this thesis is based upon the perception that the modern academic caricature of alchemy as either operative (reducible to chemical explanations) or spiritual (reducible to psychological explanations) is in many respects a false dichotomy. In support of a more integrative premise, detailed examples are adduced from both eastern and western branches of alchemy (i) to argue for the revision of rigidly dualistic biases within the historiography of alchemy and (ii) to lend support to the adoption of a more nuanced critical apparatus that is able to come to terms with nondualistic currents within the plurality of alchemies. Upon these premises, the life and work of Schwaller de Lubicz is turned to as a modern exemplar of this nondual current in alchemy.

Part two of this thesis focuses on Schwaller de Lubicz’s life and work, his colour theory, and his alchemy. Through a detailed bio-bibliographical survey, the keys to Schwaller’s intellectual development are presented and situated within their relevant contexts. I examine his artistic, Theosophical, socio-political, initiatic, alchemical and Egyptological milieus. As a student of Matisse, Schwaller had a life-long interest in colour and light. For this reason, the colour phenomenon is presented as a guiding thread for the dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy in general and the “manipulation of salt” in particular. The colour theory is examined with reference to Newton’s *Opticks*,

Goethe's *Farbenlehre* and ultimately to the operative work on stained glass that Schwaller undertook with Jean-Julien Champagne (alias Fulcanelli).

The work on colour, metals and stained glass is for Schwaller a propaedeutic for understanding the process by which spirit (light, colour) transforms the bodies in which it is incarnated (matter, substance). Ultimately, the "hermetic problem of salt" is seen to centre directly upon the mineral register of an entity's consciousness (palingenetic memory); because this imperishable register of consciousness is also the determiner of an entity's form, salt is consequently regarded as the mechanism of evolution, resurrection and palingenesis. The deeper dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy thus concerns the role of this "fixed nucleus" in the formation of bodies, from mineral to human. In particular, I examine the principles of Schwaller's metallurgical alchemy in order to understand how the "spirit of metals" acts as a fiery metallic seed (sulphur) that "coagulates" a nutritive substance (mercury) into a bodily form (salt). This understanding is applied to the stained-glass work. I then look at his meta-biological alchemy, in which it is not the genetic seed but the palingenetic mineral salt that forms the determining principle in the biological entity's evolution. In essence, Schwaller's "hermetic problem of salt" is understood as the fulcrum not only of individual immortality, but also of the qualitative mutations (leaps) between kingdoms and species. More specifically, the kingdoms of nature are seen to emerge alchemically through 'qualitative exaltations' induced by the divine seed-ferment (sulphur) upon the primordial *materia* (mercury) giving rise to a neutral centre of gravity: the saline magnetic nucleus or 'styptic coagulating force', the spiritual locus of physical form.

In the final analysis, Schwaller's alchemy is quintessentially nondual in the sense that it encompasses both operative and spiritual processes. These are not separate but deeply interrelated realities. Through the idea of salt, Schwaller offers a holarchical explanation for the continuities between mineralogical, biological and spiritual bodies, and thus a theory for the material mechanism by which consciousness transforms phenomenal form. To approach this kind of alchemy as exclusively chemical or psychological is thus completely inadequate and reinforces the necessity for a nondual critical apparatus.

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## Abbreviations

<i>Al-Kemi</i>	VANDENBROECK, ANDRÉ. <i>Al-Kemi : Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz</i> , Inner Traditions/Lindisfarne Press Uroboros Series v. 1. Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987.
<i>Aor</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, ISHA. "Aor": <i>Sa vie—son oeuvre</i> . Paris: La Colombe, 1963.
<i>CAAG</i>	BERTHELOT, MARCELLIN and C. E. RUELLE. <i>Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs</i> . 3 vols. Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1888-1889.
<i>DGWE</i>	HANEGRAAFF, WOUTER J. ed. <i>Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism</i> , Leiden: Brill, 2005.
<i>DK</i>	DIELS, HERMANN and WALTHER KRANZ, <i>Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und deutsch</i> , 6. verb. Aufl. Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951.
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> .
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> .
<i>KGA</i>	NIETZSCHE, F. W. <i>Werke : Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , ed. Colli and Montinari. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967.
<i>LÄ</i>	HELCK, WOLFGANG and EBERHARDT OTTO, eds. <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> . Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972.
<i>L'Œuvre au rouge</i>	DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, EMMANUEL. <i>Schwaller de Lubicz: L'Œuvre au rouge</i> , Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2006.
<i>LSJ</i>	LIDDELL, HENRY GEORGE, ROBERT SCOTT, HENRY STUART JONES, RODERICK MCKENZIE, and ERIC ARTHUR BARBER. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Rev. and augm. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
<i>PGM</i>	BETZ, HANS DIETER, ed. <i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells</i> . 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
<i>PT</i>	FAULKNER, R. O. ed. <i>The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
<i>Quête alchimique</i>	DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, EMMANUEL. <i>La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956</i> . Milan: Arché, 2006.
<i>Roi</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, R. A. <i>Le Roi de la théocratie pharaonique</i> . Collection Homo Sapiens. Paris: Flammarion, 1956.
<i>Temple</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, R. A. <i>Le Temple de l'homme: Apet du Sud à Louxor</i> . 3 vols. Paris: Caractères, 1957 (Reprint Dervy, 1999, 2 vols).
<i>WÄS</i>	ERMAN, ADOLF and HERMANN GRAPOW, eds. <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache</i> . 7 Bänder. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971.
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache</i> .
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i> .

## Preface

This thesis originally began as a much wider project whose aim was to examine the broad question of apotheosis as a process of ontological mutation. A dual emphasis was placed on the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of German *Kulturphilosoph* Jean Gebser and the hermetic philosophy of Alsatian *Ägyptosoph*, René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz. During the course of the project, the research and its methodology grew beyond the limits of a PhD thesis and, as a compromise, a decision was made to temporarily circumscribe the broader project by presenting the Schwaller and alchemy based material as a stand-alone thesis. What is presented here is thus a historical-biographical study of Schwaller de Lubicz focusing on his hermetic and alchemical thought. Aspects of the original, broader project have surfaced by way of numerous conference papers given between 2004 and 2010, some of which are now beginning to emerge in publications.

The title of this thesis is taken from a passage in Schwaller's 1926 work, *L'Appel du feu* (The Call of Fire): '*tu es lumière, mais lumière brisée à travers le prisme de la vie*' ('you are light, but light broken through the prism of life'). This serves not only as a metaphor for the biographical study of de Lubicz undertaken in this thesis, but also as a reference to the specific role of his *Farbentheorie* (colour theory) in his alchemical *œuvre*. The imperative to comprehend the living relationship between the invisible and the visible aspects of existence was, for Schwaller, most emblematically manifested in the phenomenon of light and colour. In regarding the colour phenomenon not only as a "body" or "act" of light (per Goethe), but as a crucial signature of the hermetic process that acts through all things, Schwaller conveys the nature of existence in terms of a juncture of metaphysical and physical forces. Like the interaction of light and darkness in Goethean theory, two opposed forces (light and darkness; sulphur and mercury; acid and base) interact and neutralise to constitute the phenomenal world (colour; cinnabar; salt).

Applique à ton travail les principes vrais et ton progrès sera ta récompense, non l'appréciation de se semblables. Lorsque le fruit de ton travail est mûr, renie-le, car c'est l'effort et la conscience acquise qui ont valeur réelle et non l'objet matérialisé. Applique l'acquise de ta conscience à l'ouvrage d'un nouveau but. N'est-ce pas qu'à travers tes incarnations tu ne cesses de faire—inconsciemment? Fais-le consciemment en cette vie, afin de progresser plus vite. Ainsi tu appliqueras dans son vrai sens le principe de la « révolution constante » .

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Verbe Nature* §58

PART I

THE HERMETIC PROBLEM OF SALT

## INTRODUCTION

Every individual rises again in the very form which his Work (in the alchemical sense) has fixed in the secret (esoteric) depth of himself.<sup>1</sup>

Shaikh Ahmad Ahsā'i

The enigma that lies at the very heart of this thesis crystallised around a remark made by the Alsatian alchemist and *Āgyptosoph*,<sup>2</sup> René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887-1961): *The Hermetic problem of our particular moment is Salt*.<sup>3</sup> René Schwaller, who received the chivalric title 'de Lubicz' in 1919 from the Lithuanian poet and diplomat, Oskar Vladislav de Lubicz Milosz, is in many respects the epitome of what Kocku von Stuckrad has called a 'multilayered religious identity'.<sup>4</sup> From Alsace to Egypt,

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1 Commentary on the *Hikma al-'arshīya*, 187, 227; Henry CORBIN, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 102-3.

2 Backformed from *Āgyptosophie* (*Āgypt*, Egypt + *sophos*, wisdom, 'wisdom of Egypt'), modeled after *Philosoph*, *Philosophie*; *Theosoph*, *Theosophie*, etc.; see Erik HORNING, *Das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluß auf das Abendland* (C. H. Beck, München, 1999; Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2003), 9: 'Bereits in der Antike wurde eine Meinung begründet, die das Land am Nil als Quelle aller Weisheit und als Hort hermetischen Wissens sieht. Damit begann eine Tradition, die bis heute reicht und die ich als *Āgyptosophie* bezeichnen möchte'.

3 André VANDENBROECK, *Al-Kemi: Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* (Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), 81 (emphasis mine): 'The Hermetic problem of our particular moment is Salt, but we have no good and complete texts from that point of view; we have good texts from the point of view of Sulphur and Mercury, but the shift in emphasis on the problem of Salt is recent, since around the turn of the century, and in direct relationship with post-Newtonian physics and the crisis in Darwinism'.

4 Kocku von STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, London: Equinox, 2005), 7-8.



## I N T R O D U C T I O N

Schwaller's esoteric quest took him through a number of diverse roles: artist, social revolutionary, chemical engineer, spagyric researcher, hermetic philosopher, neo-Pythagorean mathematician, and Egyptologist. However, the stable form uniting these shifting facets is his vocation as *alchemist*. The central focus of Schwaller's alchemy, and thus the central point underlying the different aspects of his esoteric vision, is the alchemical concept of *salt*. This he conceived as a kind of Hegelian 'concrete universal' (*konkretes Allgemeine*): a cosmic juncture of abstraction and concretion, of the universal and the particular, of the metaphysical and the proto-physical.<sup>5</sup>

In the language of western alchemy, salt embodies the ligature between the primordial polarities, sulphur and mercury, mineral theophanies which, together with salt, represent the three formative metaphysical principles that create the phenomenal world.<sup>6</sup> Just as sulphur and mercury react to form a salt (cinnabar; mercuric sulphide), so too, for Schwaller, do meta-physical and proto-physical forces react to form the concrete world of visible, physical reality. Whereas sulphur was traditionally seen to impart soul, and mercury spirit, salt imparted *but also embodied* the principle of fixedness and solidity. Salt was conceived as the bedrock of physical existence, both the immutable principle and corruptible "body" of any phenomenon. According to this schematic, salt is both the formative force and physical product, noumenon and phenomenon, straddling the realms of eternity and transience. The meaning of the hermetic problem of salt thus inheres in its role as *juncture* between metaphysical and physical realities. This, it is argued, cuts to the very core of the conception of matter in alchemy, irreversibly complicating the dualistic notions of "spiritual" versus "material" so central to empirical-historical dichotomisation. Comments de Lubicz:

with the notion of salt, we are reaching a point that represents the limit of rational and irrational, where metaphysics and physics meet; it is a moment that can only be described as transcendent, yet it must remain inseparable from the concrete. It is not something that can be explained. But it can be shown, yet there is no guarantee that even when shown, you will see. For actually, the entire universe and every detail of it is such a juncture of transcendence with concreteness. So why don't you see it right here and now?<sup>7</sup>

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5 Cf. Glenn Alexander MAGEE, *The Hegel Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2010), 61-2.

6 While sulphur and mercury have an alchemical history extending into antiquity, the addition of salt—forming the *tria prima*—is usually attributed to Paracelsus (1493–1541 CE). The deeper roots of the concept, however, remain to be examined in the course of this thesis. On Paracelsus and the *tria prima*, see in particular Andrew WEEKS, *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541): Essential Theoretical Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 15-19, 29; Walter PAGEL, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: S. Karger, 1958), 101.

7 *Al-Kemi*, 182-3.

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For Schwaller, the ‘Hermetic problem of Salt’ hinges upon a metaphysics of *perception*, and germane to this perception is the observation that the mineral kingdom is a spiritual presence. The mineral kingdom, the most “material” of all phenomena, was for Schwaller the maternal, nourishing matrix of metallic life (the “womb” of metallogenesis), as well as the paternal foundation for biological life (the “skeleton” of biological genesis). As such, the most enduring part of the animate body—the incorruptible mineral ashes of the bones that endure the death of the entity to survive all putrefaction and combustion—were seen to contain the agent of all transmutations. These alkaline salts, mythically identified with the phoenix that rises from its ashes and the alchemical salamander that ‘lives in fire and feeds on fire’, were regarded as the key not only to individual immortality, but also to the qualitative mutations (leaps) between kingdoms and species.<sup>8</sup>

With unusual specificity, Schwaller held that the human femur contains an incorruptible nucleus upon which the most vital moments of human consciousness could be permanently “inscribed”. The fixed salt, ‘which compared to the chromosome is extremely fixed or even indestructible’,<sup>9</sup> was seen by Schwaller as more permanent than DNA and accorded a key role in his esoteric theory of evolution (*genesis*). Contrary to the Darwinian theory (where only the characteristics of the *species* are able to be preserved through genetic transmission), Schwaller maintained that the salt located in the femur is the precise mechanism by which *individual* characteristics—the vital modes of consciousness—are able to be preserved and transmitted beyond the death of the individual. This salt was therefore central to the alchemical process of rebirth (*palingenesis*). Within the wider framework of Schwaller’s cosmology—in which material genesis is conceived as the visible index of the evolution of consciousness—the alchemical salt forms the “magnet” that draws primordial matter through the existential vehicles of the mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms towards the *ultima materia* (or *telos*) of ‘spiritual concretion’. As such it formed the

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- 8 On the alchemical salamander, cf. FULCANELLI, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales et l’interprétation ésotérique des symboles hermétiques du grand œuvre* (Paris: Société Nouvelle des Éditions Pauvert, 1979), 105: ‘la Salamandre « qui vit dans le feu et se nourrit du feu »; ‘Ce lézard fabuleux ne désigne pas autre chose que le sel central, incombustible et fixe, qui garde sa nature jusque dans les cendres des métaux calcinés, et que les Anciens ont nommé *Semence métallique*. Dans la violence de l’action ignée, les portions ajustibles du corps se détruisent; seules les parties pures, inaltérables, résistent et, quoique très fixes, peuvent s’extraire par lixiviation’; Swower, trans., 81: ‘This fabulous lizard stands for nothing else but the incombustible and fixed central salt, which preserves its nature even in the ashes of the calcinated metals and which the ancients called *metallic seed*. The parts of the body which can be burnt are destroyed in the violence of the igneous process; only the pure, unalterable parts resist and, although they are very fixed, they can be extracted by percolation’.
- 9 René SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Le Temple de l’homme*, I, 66/I, 34: ‘Le sel fixe, qui est très fixe—ou même indestructible par rapport au chromosome’.

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hidden link—the invisible bond in the chain of continuity—in the otherwise apparently discontinuous process in which the generation and corruption of evolving forms is situated.

As will be seen, salt for Schwaller acts as a centre of gravity, a point of densification which condenses primordial, unformed energy into solid materiality to form a “core” or “nucleus” that evokes, in proportionate reaction to the force of densification, a force of energetic expansion. These two “directions of force”—one inward and contractive; one outward and expansive—share a common centre, a nexus of centripetal and centrifugal activity. Simultaneously, these two forces constitute a unified whole that exists as a balance or neutralisation of the two energies. This bi-fold energy is reflected in all kingdoms in the dense inner and soft outer levels of all bodies: the nucleus versus electron cloud of the atom (mineral); the trunk or stem versus the leaves (vegetable); and the bones versus the organs and flesh (animal).<sup>10</sup> The salt in the femur is thus the primordial link in the chain of being.

To the strictly positivist consciousness, this position may appear strange. However, it is suggested that the logic that operates at root of the motif—salt, thighbone, *palingenesis*—is not only consistent with an entire complex of ancient initiatory symbolism, but ultimately that through this, a deeper consciousness—with its own epistemology—is implicated in the esoteric perception of reality. In order to understand this on its own terms, rather than reduce it to the perspectives of positivist science, efforts to see beyond our own dualistic logic must be made.

It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that what Corbin says of Jaldakī and Islamic alchemy—i.e. that alchemy is a hieratic art whose spiritual finality was no less than the creation of an immortal *corpus resurrectionis*—applies equally to the alchemy of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz and that, by understanding the esotericism of Schwaller in this sense, one may be granted an insight not only into some of the more profound currents of twentieth century alchemy and hermeticism, but, through an exposure to Schwaller de Lubicz’s *clavis hermeneutica*, one may in fact gain a deeper understanding of the defining characteristics of alchemy itself (or at the very least, those of a distinct current within the plurality of alchemies in general).<sup>11</sup> In brief, the aims of alchemy, as integrally conceived by Jaldakī or de Lubicz, possess a fundamental theological directive and in a very specific sense form a hieratic *ars* or *technē* (art, science, technique); whether practised on sensible species or on the human soul, the aim of this *hieratikē technē* is to liberate the consciousness of an entity by rendering its body—its vehicle of expression—increasingly immortal. In a general sense, then, this

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10 As such, each kingdom, in its own way, reflects the essential mysterium of the phenomenon of the sun—i.e., a juncture of gravity and light in perfect equipoise. Moreover, the symbolic image of the sun used in hermetic and alchemical texts (a central point within a circle), perfectly encapsulates the phenomenon by representing it as centre and circumference.

11 Henry CORBIN, ‘Le « Livre des sept Statues » d’Apollonios de Tyane, commenté par Jaldakī’, *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L’Herne, 1986), 71-3.

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thesis addresses itself to a series of definitional issues in the historiography of alchemy and hermeticism. Availing itself of an interdisciplinary critical apparatus, Schwaller de Lubicz is taken as an object of empirical-historical and philosophical study, but also as a *guide* to understanding alchemy phenomenologically, i.e. from the perspective of a modern, practising, spiritual and laboratory alchemist.

In a general sense, the method employed in this thesis is itself a juncture of the more “dense” and the more “expansive” methodologies offered by the academy (e.g. empirical history and phenomenology); these are engaged in order to provide a “double” mode of access to the principle *underpinning* the alchemical *sal philosophorum*: the fixed yet elusive nexus in which abstraction and concretion cohere as an irrevocable unity. Schwaller provides a finite point of access to this principle, and through him one begins to understand how the alchemical salt is able to be conceived not only as the key to the dynamics of metallurgical and biological evolution, but also as the pivot of two “ways” within the physical aspect of the hermetic opus—*la voie humide* (the wet way) and *la voie sèche* (the dry way)—which in turn mirror the two paths of liberation in the *œuvres* spiritual aspect—*palingenesis* (metempsychosis) and resurrection (creation of a spiritual *corpus*). By studying the history and phenomenology of the alchemical salt in the work of Schwaller de Lubicz, this thesis ultimately seeks to consolidate a nondualistic approach to the conception of alchemy in which the physical, laboratory or operative aspect of the work was not merely a stage for psychological projection (à la Jung), nor a mystification or obfuscation of merely chemical techniques (à la Principe and Newman), but rather a process that engages deeply with the principles by which consciousness is incarnated in various bodies, from mineral to human (to include the ‘hidden harmony’ underpinning mutations between kingdoms).<sup>12</sup>

In a more concrete sense, this thesis seeks to provide biographical, philosophical and phenomenological modes of access to Schwaller’s life and work. In doing so, it seeks not merely to situate, contextualise and *explain*, but also to elucidate, interpret and *understand* the esoteric precepts and practices that inform de Lubicz’s alchemy. In presenting a circumscribed study of the alchemy of Schwaller de Lubicz, however, this study also makes a broader point. The simultaneously operative and spiritual nature of Lubiczian alchemy highlights an important but neglected current within western alchemy generally. This current, which I have termed “nondual”, only comes into proper focus once both eastern and western alchemical currents are taken into account.<sup>13</sup> This requires a broader historiographic purview than is usually accorded to

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12 On the ‘hidden harmony’, cf. fragment 54 of HERACLITUS (Hyppolytus, *Ref.* IX, 9, 5): ‘The unapparent connection [*harmonie*] is stronger than the apparent’; G. S. KIRK, J. E. RAVEN, and M. SCHOFIELD, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192.

13 In order to emphasise the idea that material and spiritual aspects of alchemy are not necessarily separate endeavours, I have termed this current of alchemy “nondual”. This term is employed to help establish a conceptual apparatus capable of emphasising the

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studies of alchemy by scholars of western esotericism. The broader, nondual current of alchemy, of which Lubiczian alchemy is a modern representative, may be seen to have its most explicit points of reference within the alchemical traditions of the east. It takes its obvious points of departure from Chinese, Indian and Tibetan alchemy, where operations on material bodies form a propaedeutic to the formation of a divine body. Here, the more operative aims (e.g. metallurgical transmutation, macrobotics, iatrochemistry) are subsumed within the context of a deeper spiritual imperative: liberation in life (*jivanmukti*).<sup>14</sup> While it would be a gross mistake to suggest that Lubiczian alchemy is identical with eastern alchemies (or that eastern alchemies themselves are essentially identical), the point that I wish to emphasise here is that both eastern alchemies and Lubiczian alchemy both necessitate a more integrative conceptual apparatus in which metallurgical, biological and spiritual process of transmutation can be regarded not as separate currents to be isolated, but as intimately related aspects of a nondualistic whole.

It must also be added that premises for a nondualistic alchemy are also equally, if less explicitly, present in western and middle eastern alchemical traditions. Schwaller's alchemy, I suggest, should be situated and understood within the broader contexts provided by these currents of alchemy. Hence, before approaching Schwaller's work proper, this thesis offers a detailed survey of both eastern and western alchemies; in doing so, it seeks to furnish sufficient evidence for alchemy as a nondual process.

The structure of this thesis will proceed as follows. First, the balance of this chapter will circumambulate the "problem" of salt from the perspectives of philology, mythography, chemistry, and alchemy in order to sufficiently crystallise the idea that salt is not merely a 'hermetic problem' but also a problem worthy of academic attention. The next two chapters comprising the first part of this thesis will be concerned with methodological issues in the study of religion and esotericism in general, and historiographical considerations in the study of alchemy in particular. Upon these bases, the second part of this thesis will then turn to the life and work of de Lubicz proper. The three substantial chapters of part two will focus on (i) a detailed biographical and bibliographical survey of Schwaller de Lubicz's life and work; (ii) an examination of his colour theory (along with its intellectual-historical foundations in

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simultaneity of physical and metaphysical concerns. It should be emphasised that the purpose of offering such a nondualistic critical apparatus is not to engage in sweeping universalistic claims about western or eastern alchemies, but rather to offer a descriptive vantage that is better positioned to perceive and articulate those cases in which the operative and spiritual aims are integrated within a greater conceptual unity.

- 14 Properly speaking, nondual or integral alchemies are, in fact, ultimately spiritual, but it is a spirituality that *encompasses* rather than denies the practical or operative aspects of alchemy. Just as the One in Neoplatonic metaphysics encompasses the many (but the many does not encompass the one), so too do the nondual or integral expressions of alchemy integrate the operative and experimental aspects of alchemy; the purely operative alchemies, however, do not necessarily encompass the spiritual alchemies.

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Newton and Goethe's theories) as a symbolic, visual model for the dynamics of alchemical transmutation; and (iii) the dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy proper, focusing on Schwaller's precepts and practices within the domains of metallurgical, biological and spiritual transmutation, and how these are understood as three broad modalities within a nondual process of ontological mutation.

### *Thesis Statement*

The life and work of the Alsatian hermeticist and Egyptosophist, René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887–1961) attests to the continued presence of a distinctly nondual current of alchemical precept and practice in which material transmutation and spiritual transmutation are not separate nor merely coincidental endeavours but two indispensably linked sides of the same coin. The link, for Schwaller, was perceived as a juncture of meta-physical and proto-physical forces, a process conceived in terms of an alchemical "salt" (a neutralisation reaction between an "acid" and a "base"). This thesis demonstrates that Lubiczian alchemy, by centring on the esoteric formation of all "bodies," to include the hidden "nucleus" of continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality, speaks directly to the perception of alchemy as a nondual, operative-spiritual process.

### *Contribution and Significance*

Apart from possessing an arguably profound *inherent* interest, a few remarks are necessary on why de Lubicz has been chosen as the focus of this study. Beyond the fact that Schwaller is often regarded as a "giant" in modern philosophical esotericism, and beyond the fact that the study of his work has been sorely neglected in the English academic literature on alchemy and esotericism, de Lubicz is especially pertinent as a focus for demonstrating the nondual premise of this thesis because he is one of the most recent and important representatives of this current in alchemy in the West. The relative historical proximity of Schwaller has the advantage of making him more comprehensible in so far as the shifts in culture and consciousness that separate our own era from those that precede it is not so pronounced; obviously, the further back one goes, especially with esoteric and alchemical figures, the more difficult it is to truly "understand" where a given writer is coming from, much less what they are actually saying. In regards to the idea of salt, it should be pointed out that Schwaller was deeply cognisant of contemporary quantum physical, chemical and biological theories (his official profession was chemical engineer); because of this, his insistence on an operational *and* spiritual alchemy becomes all the more revealing because he was not undertaking alchemy as a quantitative science, but as a *hieratikē technē*. By examining his work on salt, which he constantly compared to a nucleus, an especially deep insight

is gained into just what it is that distinguishes operative spiritual alchemy from processes that can be reduced to quantitative science.

Historically speaking, by presenting a contextualised study of a highly important but sorely neglected figure of twentieth century esotericism, the most immediate value of this thesis lies in bringing to light the life and work of a figure whose project is vital to the understanding of alchemy and many other currents of esotericism in twentieth century Europe. The first contribution of this thesis is thus to the biography and history of de Lubicz, and in so far as a detailed academic study of his life and work has yet to appear in English, our study is unique.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of sources, too, it should be noted that all the primary and, wherever possible, many of the secondary sources used in this thesis are drawn upon in their original languages; to aid the reader, however, copious, extended translations of many of the most pertinent of these primary and secondary texts have been offered by way of course. This is intended not only to give insight into the fascinating esoteric world of de Lubicz, but to make thereby many of the most important sources for the study of de Lubicz available to English readers for the first time.

In terms of the sociology of esotericism, Schwaller's connections to well-known figures such as Henri Matisse, Jean Cocteau and Andre Bréton (among others) are touched upon; but more specifically to influential alchemists such as Fulcanelli (alias Jean-Julien Champagne) and other figures from the Parisian alchemical revival. This alchemical milieu and the influence it has had on a distinctly operative yet spiritual alchemy—and continues to have on contemporary alchemy and paralchemy<sup>16</sup> into the twenty-first century (especially via figures such as Eugène Canseliet, Jean Dubois, Albert Riedel/Frater Albertus, and their many students), continues to make the figure of Schwaller de Lubicz a significant key to understanding the persistence of the phenomenon of alchemy in a supposed age of science.

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15 Some short but insightful introductory studies of de Lubicz's life and work have appeared in the English translations of Schwaller's works. These include: Christopher BAMFORD, 'Introduction', *A Study of Numbers: A Guide to the Constant Creation of the Universe*, trans. Robert Lawlor (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1986), 9-19; Deborah LAWLOR, 'R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz and Nature Word', *Nature Word*, trans. Deborah Lawlor (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1990), 47-68; By far the most extensive study of de Lubicz's thought in English so far is that of John Anthony WEST, *The Serpent in the Sky* (1979); Although not an academic study, West produces a cogently argued and thoroughly referenced work focusing on Schwaller's Egyptological ideas. West's aim is to revive de Lubicz's symbolist methodology and his book is distinctly embroiled in an extension of the same polemics that Schwaller himself was involved in throughout his Egyptological work. The details of this polemic are addressed in chapter four under the rubric: 'The War between Symbolists and Egyptologists'.

16 The prefix *para-* (from Greek *para-* 'beside, near, from, against, contrary to', cf. Sanskrit *para* 'beyond, ultimate') indicates a current of chemistry beyond or beside that of ordinary chemistry.

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In terms of intellectual history, the most important traditions that inform Schwaller's non-dual concept of salt, his alchemical colour theory, and the dynamics of his hermetic physics are elaborated. Through this it is hoped that the nature of Lubiczian alchemy, along with its connections to an admittedly bewildering complex of neo-Pythagorean, Egyptosophical and hermetic philosophy, are clarified. From a methodological point of view, it is hoped that the present thesis has contributed to the conceptual apparatus in the historiography of alchemy by providing theoretical reference points that are able to come to terms with (i) alchemy as a contemporary *hieratikē technē*, (ii) the perception of reality as a *nondual process*, (iii) the centrality of salt as a metaphysical 'corporifying' principle, and (iv) the hidden continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality.

Finally, the philosophical significance of this thesis must be seen to lie in the phenomenological method of Schwaller de Lubicz himself, in whom one finds an epistemology and an ontology of great subtlety and sophistication; a philosophy to which mere academic historicism would not do justice unless it was able to come to terms with the deeper metaphysics of perception that underpins Schwaller de Lubicz's entire *œuvre*. For this reason, this thesis also hopes to contribute an eidetic, empathic engagement with de Lubicz in order to come to a proper hermeneutic understanding (*Verstehen*) of his alchemical *Weltanschauung*.

### *Sources for the Study of de Lubicz*

De Lubicz's original writings are all in French, and appeared from the early 1910s through to the early 1960s (with some posthumous works surfacing intermittently after 1961). Save for the small text, *Les Nombres*, none of the works published by Schwaller before 1949 have appeared in English translation. In 2005, copies of de Lubicz's principle untranslated texts were secured from the Bibliothèque Nationale Strasbourg, the Basel Universitätsbibliothek, and the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam. Since then, study of de Lubicz's collected *œuvre* has been undertaken by the present researcher, to include translation of significant portions of this material. In 2006, Dufour-Kowalski released his two editions of selections from de Lubicz's writings with important critical apparatus; the same year, two volumes of unpublished notes were released with no critical apparatus. This new material significantly increased the primary sources available to the researcher. The chief primary and secondary sources for the study of de Lubicz are detailed in the bibliography, and contextualised in chapter four.

The first source for the biography of Schwaller is that of his wife: Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, "*Aor*": *R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz—sa vie, son oeuvre*.<sup>17</sup> Isha's biography appeared shortly after her husband's death (December 7, 1961). Brief surveys of Schwaller's life and/or work are contained in Pierre Mariel, *Dictionnaire des sciences*

17 Henceforth *Aor* (Paris: La Colombe, 1963).



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*occultes en occident*,<sup>18</sup> and more recently, Jean-Pierre Laurant's entry, 'Schwaller de Lubicz', in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*.<sup>19</sup> Useful introductory materials have also been furnished for the English translations of Schwaller's works, in particular: *Nature Word*, *Numbers*, and *The Temple in Man*. Recently, Erik Sablé's *La vie et l'œuvre de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* has provided an attempt to situate Schwaller's life and work in terms of his consistent emphasis on the esoteric laws of genesis, which are discernible from his earliest writings to his last. However, the best critical apparatus to date has been provided in 2006 by Emmanuel Dufour-Kowalski's two compilations of Schwaller's material: *Schwaller de Lubicz: L'Œuvre au rouge* and *La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956*.<sup>20</sup> Dufour-Kowalski avails himself of the significant documentary evidence preserved in the Ta Meri Archives, Schwaller's *Nachlass*. This body of material seems to have passed to Dufour-Kowalski's care after previously being tended by Olivier Robichon and Thérèse Collet.

A particularly important source for this study is André VandenBroeck's memoir, *Al-Kemi: Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz*,<sup>21</sup> in which the author describes eighteen months he spent in more or less daily contact with Schwaller in 1959–1960 (shortly before Schwaller's death). Herein, VandenBroeck recounts their fascinating philosophical dialogues in great detail, providing much important information; he also makes some genuinely startling claims (most notably, Schwaller's crucial connection with the work of Fulcanelli). In many respects, part of the task of this thesis has been to pursue in more detail, with scholarly rigour, many of the points that VandenBroeck broaches from the point of view of a personal memoir. Especially germane to this thesis are his discussions of Schwaller's hermetic philosophy, his relationship with Fulcanelli, his alchemical colour theory, and the centrality of the fixed salt to Schwaller's entire *œuvre*.

With respect to questions of source criticism, it is important to mention that VandenBroeck's account presents highly detailed, verbatim accounts of their complex philosophical dialogues. Although he made notes at the time, which he later fleshed out, the feat of memory required for the memoir is formidable. On this, VandenBroeck himself remarks: 'I have a painter's memory for moments and a musician's memory for tone (rather than a storyteller's for duration), and although twenty-five years have passed and it is difficult to define the complexity of my first reaction, I do know exactly what was said and in what spirit'.<sup>22</sup> The research presented in this thesis corroborates the authenticity of VandenBroeck's account on many points of detail, and for this reason it is to be regarded as a highly reliable source vital to the study of de Lubicz's life and work.

18 (Paris: Culture Art Loisir, 1971), 392-396.

19 Ed. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1045-6.

20 Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2006 (henceforth *L'Œuvre au Rouge*); Milan: Arché, 2006, (henceforth *La Quête Alchimique*).

21 Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987 (henceforth *Al-Kemi*).

22 *Al-Kemi*, 166.

## Salt: Linguistic, Mythographic and Chemical Perspectives

Heaven knows a civilised life is impossible without salt and so necessary is this basic substance that its name is applied metaphorically even to intense mental pleasures. We call them *sales* [wit] ... But the clearest proof of its importance is that no sacrifice is carried out without the *mola salsa*.

—Pliny<sup>23</sup>

Since Paracelsus (1493-1541), salt has played a role in alchemy as the physical “body” which remains after combustion, the corporeal substance that survives death to inaugurate new life. It was both ‘corruption and preservation against corruption’ (Dorn); both the ‘last agent of corruption’ and the ‘first agent in generation’ (Steeb).<sup>24</sup> As such, the alchemical salt functions as the fulcrum of death and revivification. The idea that the agent, instrument and patient of the alchemical process are not separate entities but aspects of one reality prefigures the significance accorded in this thesis to ‘the hermetic problem of salt’. Just as in chemistry a salt may be defined as the product of an acid and a base, alchemically, salt is the integral resolution to the primordial polarities embodied in the mineral *symbolique* of cinnabar (HgS), the *salt* of sulphur and mercury. In the alchemy of Schwaller de Lubicz, salt forms the equilibrium between an active function (sulphur, divinity, *peiras*) and its passive resistance (mercurial substance, *prima materia*, the *apeiron*), aspects which are latently present in the primordial (pre-polarised) unity, but crystallised into physical existence as “salt”. With Schwaller’s concept, one is dealing with a juncture of the metaphysical and proto-physical. As will be seen, however, this also inheres in the body as a fulcrum point of death and palingenesis.

*Leap, Salve, Balsam*

In order to understand the nature of alchemical salt one must first understand the nature of common salt. In doing this, however, it is soon realised that salt is anything but common; like many everyday things, salt is so familiar that its singular peculiarity

23 *Naturalis Historia*, xxxi, xli; cf. PLUTARCH, *Moralia, Table Talk*, iv, 4, 668.

24 Gerhard DORN (fl. 1566-1584), ‘Speculativae philosophiae, gradus septem vel decem continens’, in *Theatrum Chemicum* (Strassbourg: 1602-61), 307; Johan Christoph STEEB, *Coelum Sephiroticum Hebraeorum* (Mainz, 1679), 29: ‘sal sit ultimum in corruptione, sed & primum in generatione’; De Lubicz reformulates the bivalence of the alchemical salt in terms of ‘a ligature of concreteness and abstraction’.

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is taken for granted. Visser, in an extraordinary study of the elements of an ordinary meal, aptly encapsulates the cultural purview of salt in the following words:

Salt is the only rock directly consumed by man. It corrodes but preserves, desiccates but is wrested from the water. It has fascinated man for thousands of years not only as a substance he prized and was willing to labour to obtain, but also as a generator of poetic and of mythic meaning. The contradictions it embodies only intensify its power and its links with experience of the sacred.<sup>25</sup>

European languages derive their word ‘salt’ from Proto-Indo-European \**sāl-* (\**sēl-*) reflected directly in Latin as *sal*, ‘salt, salt water, brine; intellectual savour, wit’, Greek *hals*, ‘salt, sea’ (cf. Welsh *halen*) and in Proto-Germanic as \**saltom* (Old English *sealt*, Gothic *salt*, German *Salz*). In addition to its mineral referent, *sal* also gives rise to a number of cognates that help crystallise its further semantic and symbolic nuances. *Saltus*, *saltum*, ‘leap’, derives from the verb *salio*, ‘leap, jump, leap sexually’, whence *Salii*, ‘priests of Mars’ from the ‘primitive rites (practically universal) of dancing or leaping for the encouragement of crops’;<sup>26</sup> *saltāre*, ‘dance’, *salmo*, ‘salmon’ (leaping fish), (*in*)*sultāre*, (‘insult’, literally ‘leap on, in’; figuratively, ‘taunt, provoke, move to action’), all from Indo-European \**sēl-*, ‘move forth, start up or out’, whence Greek ἀλλομαι, άλτο, άλμα (*ballomai*, *halto*, *halma*), ‘leap’; Sanskrit *ucchalati* (\**ud-sal-*), ‘starts up’.<sup>27</sup> Importantly for the alchemical conception, alongside ‘leap’ one finds the meanings at the root of English ‘salve’ (balm, balsam), derived from Indo-European \**sel-p-*, \**sel-bh-*, and giving rise to Cyprian *elphos* (butter), Gothic *salbōn*, Old English *sealfian*; in Latin: *salus*, ‘soundness, health, safety’; *salūbris*, ‘wholesome, healthy’; *salūtāre*, ‘keep safe, wish health, salute’; *salvus*, ‘safe, sound’; *salvēre*, ‘be in good health’; *salvē*, ‘hail!’; cf. also \**sēl-eu-*; Avestan *hvarva*, ‘whole, uninjured’; Sanskrit *sarva-*, *sarvatāti*, ‘soundness’ and Greek ὅλοιται, ὅλος (*holoítai*, *holos*), ‘whole’. These meanings are further connected to *solidus*, *sollus*, *sōlor*, with an ultimate sense of ‘gathering, compacting’, hence ‘solidity’.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to its salvific, balsamic and holistic aspect, which must be regarded as the meaning most central to the alchemical perception, the significance of salt as both ‘leap’ and ‘solidity’ must also be recognised as integral. In particular, it pertains to Schwaller’s conception of salt as the fixed imperishable nucleus (*solidus*) regarded as the hidden mechanism underpinning the ontological ‘leaps’ or mutations of visible evolution (contra the Aristotelian dicta, *natura non facit saltum*, ‘nature does not

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25 Margaret VISSER, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal* (Toronto, Ont.: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 75.

26 T. G. TUCKER, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (Chicago: Ares, 1976), 212.

27 TUCKER, 212.

28 TUCKER, 212.

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proceed by a leap').<sup>29</sup> For Schwaller, the seemingly disconnected leaps of biological mutation are in fact bound by a hidden harmony grounded in the saline alchemical nucleus.

Although it is the intention of this thesis to explore the deeper meaning of salt in Schwaller de Lubicz—alchemically configured as the determiner of an entity's form—a number of studies have pointed to the crucial role of salt as a significant shaper of civilisation.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the earliest point of departure for this is the fact that salt only rises to especial prominence with the emergence of an agricultural economy. Salt intake, initially bound to blood and meat, had to be supplemented.<sup>31</sup> Comments Darby:

When man first learnt the use of salt is enshrouded in the mists of the remotest past. Parallel to the Ancient Greek's ignorance of the seasoning, the original Indo-Europeans and the Sanskrit speaking peoples had no word for it. This apparent lack of salt-craving in early people could have been a result of their reliance on raw or roasted meat. Later, when with the invention of boiling the sodium content of meat was reduced, and when the shift to an agricultural economy introduced vegetables in increasing amounts, sodium chloride became a basic need to provide an adequate sodium intake and, more important still, to counterbalance the high potassium content of plants.<sup>32</sup>

Commodity histories show that salt was not always the easily available resource it is today; it had to be striven for; it required effort and ingenuity (perhaps even *wit*). It created trade and war; it was used as pay and exploited as a tax. Nor did salt have the current stigma of being an unhealthy excess (a problem symptomatic of modern surfeit).<sup>33</sup> Quite to the contrary, salt was typically a sign of privilege and prestige. 'Salt

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29 Although attributed to Aristotle, the phrase *natura non facit saltum* comes from Carl Linnaeus's *Philosophia Botanica* (1751); Linnaeus's expression itself is a Latin rendering of a French expression from the preface to Gottfried Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703): '*La nature ne fait jamais des sauts*' ('nature never makes a leap'); it continues in the idea of phyletic gradualism versus punctuated equilibrium in evolutionary theory.

30 Victor HEHN, *Das Salz: Eine kulturhistorische Studie* (Berlin, 1873); Matthias Jacob SCHLEIDEN, *Das Salz: Seine Geschichte, seine Symbolik und seine Bedeutung im Menschenleben: Eine monographische Skizze* (Leipzig, 1875; Weinheim, 1983); Jean-François BERGIER, *Une histoire du sel* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1982); S. A. M. ADSHEAD, *Salt and Civilization* (New York: St. Martins, 1992); Pierre LASZLO, *Salt: Grain of Life*, trans. Mary Beth MADER (New York, 2001 = *Chemins et savoirs du sel*, 1998); Mark KURLANSKY, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2003).

31 VISSER, 65.

32 William J. DARBY, Paul GHALIOUNGUI, Louis GRIVETTI, *Food: The Gift of Osiris* (London: Academic Press, 1977) I, 444, though cf. evidence and remarks at 445.

33 Cf. MENEELY et al. (1957) cited in DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 447.

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like speech is essentially semiotic', Adshead remarks; 'As such it could convey a variety of meanings, of which the clearest in early times was social distance: high cooking, low cooking, above and below the salt'.<sup>34</sup> Considerations such as these help contextualise many of the ancient values surrounding salt, some of which have become proverbial. In the *New Testament*, for instance, but also elsewhere, the sharing of salt (often with bread at a table), represented a deep bond of trust, of communal solidarity, while the spilling of it was considered a grave *faux pas*.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, if salt was as freely available for liberal exploitation as it is today, such ethical and social implications would scarcely carry any weight at all.

Most of salt's social meanings reflect its deepest functional value as a *preservative*. Just as salt keeps the integrity of plants and meats intact, so salt was seen to keep the integrity of a body of people together. As a prestige substance that could preserve food through the death of winter and bind people in communal solidarity, salt was highly regarded; during Roman times, salt even became a form of currency, whence our word 'salary' (from Latin *salarium*, 'salt money') after the Roman habit of paying soldiers in pieces of compressed salt (hence the phrase: 'to be worth one's salt').<sup>36</sup> Because of its integrating character, salt bridges opposites. Paradoxically, however, the more one attempts to pin salt down in a strictly rational manner, the more the contradictions it embodies abound.

'There are totally different opinions concerning salt', writes Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE),<sup>37</sup> who preserves a number of contemporary beliefs, including the view that salt possesses not only preservative qualities, but animating and even generative power:

Some include salt with the most important spices and healing materials, calling it the real 'soul of life', and it is supposed to possess such nourishing and enlivening powers that mice if they lick salt at once become pregnant.<sup>38</sup>

Consider also whether this other property of salt is not divine too [...] As the soul, our most divine element, preserves life by preventing dissolution of the body, just so salt, controls and checks the process of decay. This is why some Stoics say that the sow at birth is dead flesh, but that the soul is implanted in it later, like salt, to preserve it [...] Ships carrying salt breed an infinite number of rats because,

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34 Cf. ADSHEAD, *Salt and Civilization*, 24.

35 DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 444; cf. Michael LATTKE, 'Salze der Freundschaft in Mk 9 50c', *Zeitschrift f. d. neutest. Wissenschaft*, 75 (1984); VISSER, 76.

36 PLINY, *Nat. Hist.*, XXXI, 88, 89; the *Codex Justiniani*, lib., XXXIX, IV, II, makes it illicit 'to sell to the enemy the whetstone to sharpen iron; as well as iron, wheat or salt'.

37 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV (4) 3; V (10) 4; trans. Edmund O von LIPPMAN, 'Chemical and Technical References in Plutarch', *Ambix* 3.1-2 (1948): 7.

38 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV (4) 3; V (10) 4; (LIPPMAN, 7).

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according to some authorities, the female conceives without coition by licking salt.<sup>39</sup>

The connection of salt to the soul, a balsam to the body, will be explored in more detail when the alchemical contexts of salinity are examined. Its fertilising, generative power, on the other hand, bears obvious comparison to salt's known capacity to stimulate the growth of the earth—a leavening function extended to the role of the Apostles in the Christian Gospels: 'Ye are the salt of the earth'.<sup>40</sup> And yet too much salt will make the earth sterile.

In ancient times, offerings to the gods were made with salt among the Israelites: 'with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt',<sup>41</sup> but without salt among the Greeks: 'mindful to this day of the earlier customs, they roast in the flame the entrails in honour of the gods without adding salt'.<sup>42</sup> The Egyptian priests favoured rock salt in sacrifices as purer than sea salt;<sup>43</sup> and yet 'one of the things forbidden to them is to set salt upon a table';<sup>44</sup> they 'abstain completely from salt as a point of religion, even eating their bread unsalted'.<sup>45</sup> Although the Egyptians 'never brought salt to the table', Pythagoras, who according to the doxographic traditions studied in the Egyptian temples, tells us that:

It should be brought to the table to remind us of what is right; for salt preserves whatever it finds, and it arises from the purest sources, the sun and the sea.<sup>46</sup>

The understanding of salt as a product of sun and sea, i.e. of fire and water, *ouranos* and *oceanos*, touches on its broader esoteric and cosmological implications, not all of which were peculiar to Pythagoras.<sup>47</sup> These aspects become central in alchemy, where, as will be seen, salt acts as the earthly ligature between fire (sun) and water (sea), the arcane substance whose patent ambiguities stem from its role as embodiment

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39 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 685.

40 *Luke* 14:34; *Mark* 9:49; *Matthew* 5:13.

41 *Leviticus* 2:3; cf. *Ezekiel* 43:24; *Ezra* 6:9, 21-2; 4:14; Homeric poems do not mention the addition of salt in sacrifices; cf. the explanation in ATHENAEUS, *Deipnos.*, XIV, 23, 661; DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 443.

42 ATHENAEUS, *Deipnos.*, XIV, 23, 661.

43 Egyptian: *hmat*, Coptic: *hmou*; ROLF GUNDLACH, 'Salz', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 5, cols 371-374; Rock salt deposits known in Siwa: PLINY, *Nat. Hist.*, XXXI, 39; STRABO I, 3, 4, ch. 49; ARRIAN, *Anabasis Alexandri*, III, 4, 3-4; HERODOTUS IV, 181-185.

44 PLUTARCH, *Iside et Osiride*, 363, 32.

45 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 684-5.

46 DIOGENES LAERTUS, VIII, 35.

47 Cf. TACITUS, *Annals*, XIII, 57, remarking on the Hermunduri and the Chatti: 'It is they think through the bounties of divine power, that in that river and in these forests salt is produced not as in other countries by the drying up of an overflow of the sea [...] but by a combination of two opposite elements, fire and water'.

and juncture of opposites: purity and impurity, eros and enmity, wetness and desiccation, fertility and sterility, love and strife. One thing that the present discussion of the mythological and historical aspects of salt hopes to emphasise is that none of these ideas are really born of speculation or abstraction; rather, they are all intimately linked to the basic phenomenology of the substance itself.

Above all, salt is ambiguous. While some of these ambiguities may be attributed to the unevenness of the sources, and while some points of contradiction may be cleared up upon closer examination (the negative Egyptian views on salt, for instance, mainly seem to apply to times of ritual fasting), this does not eclipse the overarching sense that salt, by its very nature, defies strict definition.

### *Brine-Born Aphrodite*

From numerous ancient sources describing the nature of salt, one arrives at the view that salt's piquant effect was seen to extend beyond the sensation on the tongue.<sup>48</sup> Salt stimulated not only the appetite but desire in general.<sup>49</sup> And because desire polarises the religious impulse more than anything else—a path of liberation to some, a hindrance to others—it is understandable why the Egyptians, according to Plutarch, 'make it a point of religion to abstain completely from salt'.<sup>50</sup> Equally, one can understand how salt, as an aphrodisiac, was connected specifically to the cult of Aphrodite, the goddess of desire *par excellence*. As Plutarch notes, the stimulating nature of eroticism evoked by the feminine is expressed using the very language of salt:

For this reason perhaps, feminine beauty is called 'salty' and 'piquant' when it is not passive, nor unyielding, but has charm and provocativeness. I imagine that the poets called Aphrodite 'born of brine' [...] by way of alluding to the generative property of salt.<sup>51</sup>

Plutarch is referring to a tradition preserved by Hesiod, which will be looked at presently, but before the origin of the 'brine-born' goddess is examined, it is worth noting that our own language still preserves this deep association between salt and provocative beauty. Latin *sal* lies, phonetically and semantically, at the root of words such as *salsa* and *sauce* (both meaning 'salted'), whence the deep connection between sexuality and food implicit in the habit of referring to provocative objects of desire as

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48 Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, for instance, both prescribe salt as a digestive stimulant.

49 PLUTARCH, *Iside et Osiride*, 352, 5: '[The Egyptian priests] use no salt with their food during their periods of holy living, [because salt] by sharpening their appetite, makes them more inclined to drinking and eating'.

50 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 684-5.

51 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV, 10, 684-5.

‘saucy’ or ‘sassy’ (both derivations of *sal*). And so the most stimulating flavours—the saltiest, those that that make us *salivate*—are the ones most readily appropriated to express our desire.

The ancient etymology of Aphrodite as ‘brine-born’ (from *aphros*, ‘sea-spume’) is deeply mired not only in desire but also enmity, the twin impulses that Empedocles would call ‘Love and Strife’ (*Philotēs kai Neikos*).<sup>52</sup> Aphrodite, one learns, is born from the primordial patricide (and perhaps a crime of passion). Hesiod’s *Theogony* tells us how the goddess Gaia (Earth), the unwilling recipient of the lusts of Ouranos (Heaven), incites the children born of this union against their hated father. Not without Oedipal implications, Cronus rises surreptitiously against his progenitor and, with a sickle of jagged flint, severs his father’s genitals:

And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam (*aphros*) spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. [...] Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and the foam-born goddess [...] because she grew amid the foam.<sup>53</sup>

As will be seen, these two primordial impulses prove pivotal to the alchemical function of salt that is met in Schwaller—the determiner of all affinities and aversions. And if Aphrodite is connected to salt’s desire-provoking aspect, it will come as no surprise to find that her ultimate counterpart was associated with just the opposite: war and strife. As is well known, Aphrodite is paired with Ares among the Greeks (as Venus is to Mars among the Romans), but the origins of her cult are intimately bound to Ancient Near Eastern origins;<sup>54</sup> moreover, in her Phoenician incarnation (Astarte), she embodies not only eros and sexuality, but war and strife. Presumably because of these traits, the Egyptian texts of the early Eighteenth Dynasty saw fit to partner her with their own untamed transgressor god, Seth-Typhon—a divinity who, like Aphrodite, was associated specifically with sea-salt and sea-spume (*aphros*).<sup>55</sup>

### *Typhon’s Spume*

‘Sea’, writes Heraclitus, ‘is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious’.<sup>56</sup> For the

52 EMPEDOCLES, fragment 17 (SIMPLICIUS, *in Phys.* 158, 1); KIRK, RAVEN, SCHOFIELD, 287.

53 *Theogony*, 189-200; H.G. EVELYN-WHITE, trans. *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, Loeb Classical Library Volume 57 (London: William Heinemann, 1914).

54 Aphrodite took the bi-name Cypris from the island Cyprus, the ancient cult centre of the Sumerian goddess Ishtar (= Inanna = Astarte).

55 *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*.

56 HERACLITUS, fragment 61 (= Hippolytus *Ref.* IX, 10.5); Θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθαρῶτατον καὶ



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Egyptians, anything connected with the sea was, in general, evaluated negatively. Sea-salt in particular was regarded as impure, the ‘spume’ or ‘foam’ of Typhon (ἀφρός τυφώνις, *aphros typhōnis*).<sup>57</sup> Plutarch explains this by the fact that the Nile’s pure waters run down from their source and empty into the unpalatable, salty Mediterranean.<sup>58</sup> This natural phenomenon takes on cosmological ramifications: because of the southern origin of the life-giving Nilotic waters, South became the direction associated with the generative source of all existence; North on the other hand—culminating in the Nile delta where the river is swallowed by the sea—was regarded as the realm in which the pure, living waters were annihilated by the impure, salty waters. Comments Plutarch:

For this reason the priests keep themselves aloof from the sea, and call salt the ‘spume of Typhon’, and one of the things forbidden to them is to set salt upon a table; also they do not speak to pilots; because these men make use of the sea, and gain their livelihood from the sea [...] This is the reason why they eschew fish.<sup>59</sup>

While sea salt was avoided, salt in rock form was considered quite pure: Egyptian priests were known to access mines of rock salt from the desert Oasis of Siwa.<sup>60</sup> Arrian, the third century BCE historian, remarks:

There are natural salts in this district, to be obtained by digging; some of these salts are taken by the priests of Amon going to Egypt. For whenever they are going towards Egypt, they pack salt into baskets woven of palm leaves and take them as a present to the king or someone else. Both Egyptians and others who are particular about religious observance, use this salt in their sacrifices as being purer than the sea-salts.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, like the arid red desert and the fertile nilotic soil, the briny sea was contrasted with the fresh waters of the Nile to oppose the foreign with the familiar, the impure with the pure, and, ultimately, the Sethian with the Osirian. So too, sea salt and rock salt.

The deeper implications of the Typhonian nature of seawater emerge in the *Greek Magical Papyri* where the Egyptian deity Seth-Typhon is found taking on many of the

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μιαρώτατον, ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον, ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον.  
trans. KIRK-RAVEN-SCHOFIELD, 188.

57 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363).

58 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363).

59 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363), with further remarks and citations in DARBY, et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 447.

60 Notably, Siwa was the locus of the Egyptian oracle that affirmed Alexander the Great as ‘Son of Zeus-Amun’.

61 ARRIAN, *Anabasis Alexandri* III, 4. 3-4.

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epithets typically accorded by the Greeks to Poseidon: ‘mover of the seas great depths’; ‘boiler of waves’; ‘shaker of rocks’; ‘wall trembler’, etc.—all intimating the vast, destructive powers deriving from the ocean’s primal depths. This numinous power must be understood as the potency underpinning the *materia magica* prescribed in the invocations to Seth-Typhon, where, among other things, one finds the presence of seashells or seawater in Typhonian rituals.<sup>62</sup> One does not have to look far before one realises that magic employing shells from the salt-sea forms part of a wider genre within the magical papyri—spells that have the explicit aim of effecting intense sexual attraction. The role of Typhon in such spells is clear: he is invoked to effect an affinity so strong that the person upon whom this agonistic and erotic magic is used will suffer psychophysical punishments (e.g. insomnia: ‘give her the punishments’; ‘bitter and pressing necessity’, etc.) until their desire for the magician is physically consummated.<sup>63</sup>

Interestingly, the premiere substance sympathetic to Seth-Typhon was iron: the metal most drastically corrupted by salt. Moreover, iron and salt-water are the primary constituents of human blood, a microcosmic recapitulation of the primordial salt ocean (mythologically conceived: the cosmogonic waters; evolutionarily conceived: the marine origin of species). Blood is the symbol *par excellence* for intense passion, and its two poles are love and war, a fact which precisely explains Seth-Typhon’s overwhelming functions in the magical papyri: eros and enmity. Again, it is no surprise that intense sexual attraction (desire, affinity, union) and intense hatred (repulsion, aversion, separation) evoke Empedocles’ principles of ‘Love and Strife’—the functions governing the unification and separation of the four elements. Moreover, the connection of Seth with redness, blood, eros, war and the like equates with everything that the Indian sages placed under the rubric of *rajas*, the excited passions, which, as has been seen, are distinctly associated with the stimulating power of salt.<sup>64</sup> Be that as it may, the same divine *energeia* fed and informed the functions of the Greek and Roman war gods, Ares and Mars, both of whom take the association with iron in the scale of planetary metals, as did Seth-Typhon among the Egyptians.

Seth is not only connected to salt, but to the power of the bull’s *thigh*, the instrument by which the gods are ritually killed and revived. Here the connection of Seth to the power of the thigh suggests the pivotal role played by this god in the quintessentially alchemical process of death and rebirth, of slaying and nourishment. This theme will be reiterated more than once in the course of this thesis, and it should be pointed out that any deliberations on this mythologeme are intended as so many historical and phenomenological “circumambulations” around the deep resonances generated by de Lubicz’s emphasis on the role of the fixed femoral salt in palingenesis.

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62 *PGM VII. 374-6; PGM VII. 467-77.*

63 Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Poseidon* (hymn 22); *Orphic Hymn to Poseidon* (hymn 17); AELIAN, *On Animals*, 12. 45; *PGM*, passim (spells to Typhon).

64 In the *Rig Veda*, cf. Rudra, ‘the red one’.

*Between Acid and Alkali*

In the middle ages, the meaning of the term ‘salt’ was widened to include substances that were seen to resemble common salt (e.g. in appearance, solubility and so forth).<sup>65</sup> Chemically speaking, a salt is a neutralisation reaction between an acid and a base. The two have a natural affinity for each other, one seeking to gain an electron (the acid), the other seeking to lose one (the base). When this occurs, the product is a salt. While more complex chemical definitions of salt can be given, this one, advanced by Guillaume Francois Rouelle in 1744,<sup>66</sup> allows one to perceive the broader principles that motivated the alchemists to select salt as the mineral image of the interaction of sulphur and mercury (cinnabar, HgS, a salt in the chemical sense formed from sulphur and mercury). As Mark Kurlansky points out:

It turned out that salt was once a microcosm for one of the oldest concepts of nature and the order of the universe. From the fourth century B.C. Chinese belief in the forces of yin and yang, to most of the worlds religions, to modern science, to the basic principles of cooking, there has always been a belief that two opposing forces find completion—one receiving a missing part and the other shedding an extra one. A salt is a small but perfect thing.<sup>67</sup>

More precise chemical definitions specify that a salt is an electrically neutral ionic compound. Here, the same principle of perfect equipoise between opposing energies prevails. Ions are atoms or molecules whose net electrical charge is either positive or negative: either the protons dominate to produce an ion with a positive electric charge (an anion, from Greek *ana-*, ‘up’), or the electrons dominate to produce an ion with a negative electric charge (a cation, from Greek *kata-*, ‘down’). When anions and cations

65 F. Sherwood TAYLOR, *Inorganic and Theoretical Chemistry* (London: William Heineman, 1944), 194.

66 William B. JENSEN, ‘The origin of the term “base”’, *The Journal of Chemical Education* 83, 8 (2006): 1130; Mark KURLANSKY, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2003), 300. Cf. the contemporary definition in N. LEMERY, *Cours de Chymie* (ed. Theodore Baron d’Henouville, Paris, 1675; reprinted 1756), 733-4: ‘The acid is always a solvent, when it is put in large enough quantity on the matter which we wish to dissolve; but it always makes a Coagulum, when as it is in too small a quantity its points have got stuck in the pores of the matter, and are far from having the strength to separate it in order to come out of it; this is what is seen when we pour some spirit of vitriol on liquor of salt of tartar; for if we put on only what is necessary to penetrate the salt, the acid points remain as if sheathed and they weigh down the body, which is why a coagulation and precipitation occur; but if we add to the liquor as much again of the spirit of vitriol as we had put on to it, or more, the Coagulum will disappear, because the little bodies, which when assembled together were holding up the acid and preventing its movements, will be separated and dissolved by the acid which has become stronger’.

67 KURLANSKY, *Salt*, 300.

bond to form an ionic compound whose electric charges are in equilibrium, they neutralise and the result is called a salt.

The chemical definition opens up the conception of salt beyond that of mere sodium chloride. Chemically, the coloured oxides and other reactions of metals—of especial significance to the alchemical perception—are often salts (the metal itself taking the role of base; oxygen the acid).<sup>68</sup> Alchemically, or at least proto-chemically, because the reactions of metals were coloured, they were important signifiers of the metal's nature, often seen as an index of its spirit or tincture (*ios*, 'tincture, violet/purple'). The seven planetary metals were often signified by their coloured salts or oxides: e.g. lead is white; iron, red (rust); copper is blue/green; silver is black. Gold remains pure (unreacting) but its tincture was identified with royal purple (seen in the red-purple colour of colloidal gold, gold dust, ruby glass etc.)

### Alchemical Salt

#### *Salt in Alchemy before Paracelsus*

Although the purview of hieratic alchemy was far wider than mere proto-chemistry, chemical and technical processes were undeniably integral to the alchemists' *savoir-faire*. As such it is no surprise to find salts of various kinds figuring in the earliest strata of alchemical writings, east and west. In the Greek "proto-chemical" texts that Marcellin Berthelot brought together under the rubric of alchemy, several different salts are distinguished and listed in the registers alongside the lists of planetary metals and other chemically significant minerals. In addition to salt (*halas*), one finds common salt (*halas koinon*) and sal ammoniak (*halas amoniakon*).<sup>69</sup> More importantly, however, is the significant prefiguration of the *tria prima* and *tetrastoicheia* (four element) relationship that is found in Olympiodorus (late fifth century CE).<sup>70</sup> Olympiodorus depicts an ouroboric serpent to which some important symbolic nuances are added (Illustration 1). In addition to the usual henadic (unitary) symbolism of this ancient motif, the text displays its serpent with four feet and three ears. The glosses to the image inform us that 'the four feet are the *tetrasōmiā* (the four elemental bodies) while the three ears are 'volatile spirits' (*aitthalai*). As will be seen in the balance of this thesis, this relationship of unity to duality, duality to trinity, and trinity to quaternary is pivotal to the hermetic physics that Schwaller would attempt to convey in terms of an alchemical *Farbenlehre* (cf. the Pythagorean tetraktys).

68 Here, metal provides the cation; oxygen the anion.

69 BERTHELOT, *CAAG*, 108-9. Note also alums (*stypikon*).

70 Paris MS. 2327 fol. 196.

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ILLUSTRATION 1: OUROBOROS, PARIS MS. 2327 FOL. 196

One serpent (*ophis*), two natures or poisons (*iōn*: fixed and volatile); three ears (the three volatile spirits); four legs (*tetrasōma*: the four bodies or elements).

The four elemental bodies have been interpreted as lead, copper, tin and iron, (Pb, Cu, Sn, Fe), while the three sublimed vapours have been identified with sulphur, mercury and arsenic (S, Hg, As).<sup>71</sup> Although salt is not included in this depiction, what is significant is that here one finds the exact framework in which salt would later be situated as one of the three principles (*tria prima*: sulphur, mercury, salt) alongside the four Empedoclean elements (*tetrastoicheia*: fire, air, water, earth); here salt may be seen to replace arsenic due to its more integral relationship to sulphur and mercury in the form of cinnabar (mercuric sulphide, HgS): the *salt* of mercury and sulphur. In regards to the metaphysical and cosmological nuances of the symbolism, it may be noted that the three ears are outside the circle while the four legs are inside, a fact that coheres with the view of the trinity as creative and therefore standing outside of creation, while the four elements, being created, are circumscribed within (cf. the distinction in Neoplatonism between hypercosmic and encosmic forces, or in Eastern Orthodox theology between uncreated and created energies).<sup>72</sup> The distinct relation of salt to the body and the elements may account for the cross-like sign it takes in the Greek manuscripts (Illustration 2).

71 Joseph NEEDHAM, Lu GWEI-DJEN, Nathan SIVIN, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5. pt. 4: *Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Apparatus and Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 375.

72 It should be noted that the trinitarian conception mentioned here precedes Christian theology; it is notably significant in Egyptian theology and Pythagorean metaphysics.

INTRODUCTION

	⊕	χαλκένθος	⊕	θινοσαλιμνεος	
	⊗	χαλκίτης	⊕	ρεφάνινοηλάιον	
	⊕	λίθοι	⊕	κικινονέλαιον	
5	⊕	ελάφιον	⊕	κικινονέλαιον	
	≈	ηλακκιδυαλα	⊕	νίτρον	5
	⊕	όμβρια	⊕	ετυπηριαρχίτη	
	⊕	γδαρ	⊕	ετυπηριαλετριγγλη	
	⊕	ήκερρι	⊕	ήκερρι	
	⊕	νηκτελ	⊕	ύρρι	
10	⊕	ημερονυχθημερα	⊕	πυριτη	10
	⊕	πέτλα	⊕	κακάλια	
	⊕	ηλακκιδιον	⊕	κακάλια	
	⊕	κινναβερις	⊕	κακάλια	
	⊕	κροκος			
15	⊕	ύχρα		αλλε	15
	⊕	αρενικον	⊕	υακ ελακκινον	
	⊕	ερίκον	⊕	μακκινον	
	⊕	αρχοντα	⊕	αρχοντα	
	⊕	ελακκιδι	⊕	α	
20	⊕	μεσ			
	⊕	ωρι	⊕	ελακκινον	
	⊕	λαχί			
	⊕	ψιμυθον			
	⊕	λιχία	⊕	ελακκινον	
25	⊕	οφθαλμο	⊕	τιτανος	⊕
	⊕	ωι	⊕	ελακκινον	⊕
	⊕	οστρακον	⊕	ωων	⊕
	⊕	κτανον			
	⊕	υελος			
30	⊕	ωβρυζωσι	⊕	ωβρυζωσι	
	⊕	λαδων			
	⊕	ετηλη			

ILLUSTRATION 2: SIGNS FOR SALT, COLUMN TWO, LINES 15-20

Marcellin BERTHELOT, *Introduction à l'étude de la chimie des anciens et du moyen âge I*, 108.

In Arabic alchemy, salt figures most prominently in an alchemical text that became influential in the West via its Latin translation: *The Book of Alums and Salts*

(Arabic: *al qawl fil 'l-milh*, 'a tradition on salt'; Latin: *Liber de aluminibus et salibus*).<sup>73</sup> This text appears to be a practical handbook describing various substances and operations, such as alum, different kinds of salt (including the use of alkaline and ammoniac salts), the preparation of arsenic for laboratory use, the comparison of arsenic and sulphur, as well as the features of silver, tin, lead, iron, copper and glass.<sup>74</sup> Contrary to the habit of many scholars of alchemy to attribute the sulphur-mercury-salt theory to Paracelsus, the triad in fact emerged as an alchemical motif *before* Paracelsus. As both Eberly and Haage inform us, it was Abu Bakr Muhammad Zakariyya Ar-Razi (d. 925)<sup>75</sup> who added the third principle of salt to the primordial alchemical principles (sulphur and mercury) inherited from Greek antiquity (implicit in the exhalation theory of metallogenesis), and already existing in Jabir's system.<sup>76</sup> This and related traditions must be recognised as clear precursors to Paracelsus's conception of the *tria prima*. Comments Eberly:

Razi had an extremely well equipped laboratory and followed all of the essentials of Jabir's systems. In one area in particular, he expanded upon Jabir's theory. Razi added a third principle, philosophically representing Spirit [Sulphur] as Mind, and Mercury as Soul, while adding Salt as the principle of crystallization or body. [...] Razi's descriptions of alchemical processes were closely studied and put into practice by later European alchemists including Nicolas Flamel and Paracelsus.<sup>77</sup>

In the earliest strata of medieval hermetic texts, such as the *Turba Philosophorum* and *Rosarium Philosophorum*, salt is already accorded an abundance of alchemical significations.<sup>78</sup> In the *Turba*, salt water and sea water are synonyms for the *aqua permanens*.<sup>79</sup> In the *Rosarium*, Senior tell us that mercurius is made from salt: 'First comes the ash, then comes the salt, and from that salt by diverse operations the Mercury of the Philosophers'.<sup>80</sup> Arnaldus de Villanova (1235?-1313) reveals that

73 J. RUSKA, *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze: Ein Grundwerk der spätlateinischen Alchemie* (Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1935).

74 Gabriele FERRARIO, 'Origins and Transmission of the *Liber de aluminibus et salibus*', in Lawrence M. PRINCIPE, ed., *Chymists and Chymistry: Studies in the History of Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2007), 140.

75 Ar-Razi, as EBERLY points out, must not be confused with other well-known Razis, such as Najm al-Din Razi; one must also be cognisant of the fact that the name bore more than one western transliteration (e.g. Rhazes and Rhasis).

76 John EBERLY, *Al-Kimia: The Mystical Islamic Essence of the Sacred Art of Alchemy* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 27-9; Bernard D. HAAGE, 'Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th Century', *DGWE*, 29.

77 EBERLY, *Al-Kimia*, 28.

78 Cf. texts adduced in JUNG, *Mysterium Conjunctionis*, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. (trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 188 ff.

79 JUNG, *Mysterium*, 283.

80 *Rosarium philosophorum, Art. Aurif.*, II, 210.

‘Whoever possesses the salt that can be melted, and the oil that cannot be burned, may praise God’.<sup>81</sup> (The idea of salt in connection to an oil that cannot be burned will be seen to persist in de Lubicz’s alchemical texts). Salt is both the ‘root of the art’ and ‘the soap of the sages’ (*sapo sapientum*) and is described as ‘bitter’ (*sal amarum*).<sup>82</sup> Perhaps the most interesting signification in the *Rosarium*, in light of the role salt would take as the pivot of death and revivification, is the description of salt as ‘the key that closes and opens’.<sup>83</sup>

Here one begins to meet the same duality of function that gives salt its inherent ambiguity. However, its identification with the function of a key (*clavis*) helps considerably in conceiving salt with more clarity. The *Gloria Mundi* would later reveal that salt ‘becomes impure and pure of itself, it dissolves and coagulates itself, or, as the sages say, locks and unlocks itself’.<sup>84</sup> Here one gains a good intimation of the function that salt would be later accorded in the traditions that emerge in Schwaller. Perhaps the most concise encapsulation, in relation to the idea of salt as the pivot of death and palingenesis, is Johan Christoph Steeb’s remark that *sal sit ultimum in corruptione, sed & primum in generatione*, ‘salt is the last in corruption and the first in generation’.<sup>85</sup>

#### *Paracelsus’ Balsam and the Tria Prima*

As has been mentioned, the keynote of alchemical precept and praxis pertaining to salt was struck by Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, alias Paracelsus (1493–1541). Although it is important to recognise that the essential structure of the *tria prima* was already in place before Paracelsus (indeed, it is inherent to the composition of cinnabar), it is undeniable that the triad of sulphur, mercury and salt is raised by Paracelsus to a previously unparalleled prominence.

Of course, Paracelsus was hardly one to follow ancient authorities merely at their word. Indeed, it is imperative to recognise from the start that Paracelsus learnt much of his knowledge about minerals directly from the mines. While Paracelsus travelled widely, he lived and worked chiefly in southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland. If anywhere is to be regarded as “Paracelsus country”, it is the Alpine regions of Salzburg and its surrounds. Now, Salzburg, as its name (‘salt mountain’) attests, has long been the chief source of sodium for the surrounding regions: that is to say, rock salt, mined from the mountains, not sea salt. To this day in Austria and southern Germany common table salt is sold in an iodised form (*Jodsalz*) because its rock form, which is

81 *Ros. phil.*, 244.

82 *Ros. phil.*, 222: ‘the root of the art is the soap of the sages’. On salt as soap (and also bitter), cf. the Egyptian use of natron.

83 *Ros. phil.*, 225. JUNG points in this connection to the *Aurora Consurgens*, 141, where the bride calls herself the ‘key’ (*clavicula*).

84 ‘Gloria mundi’, *Museum Hermeticum*, 216 (= WAITE, I, 177); JUNG, *Mysterium*, 190.

85 Joh. Christophi STEEB, *Coelum Sephiroiticum Hebraeorum*, 29.



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pure sodium, lacks the beneficial “impurities” that accrue to sea salt (iodine being an essential nutritional mineral).

In Paracelsus’ writings, the *tria prima* are often compared to the three aspects that are present during the process of combustion (i.e. fire, smoke, ash): ‘Whatever burns is sulphur, whatever is humid is mercury, and that which is the balsam of these two is salt’.<sup>86</sup> Paracelsians also employed the *tria prima* to represent the composition of the human microcosm: spirit (mercury), soul (sulphur) and body (salt), and this correlation was extended to some extent to the Christian trinity: father (sulphur), holy spirit (mercury), son (salt).<sup>87</sup> ‘In this manner’, states Paracelsus, ‘in three things, all has been created [...] namely, in salt, in sulphur, and in liquid. In these three things all things are contained, whether sensate or insensate [...] So too you understand that in the same manner that man is created [in the image of the triune God], so too all creatures are created in the number of the Trinity, in the number three’.<sup>88</sup>

Given the foregoing, it is tempting to oversimplify the meaning of salt as the “physical body”, but if this were the case, if salt was merely representative of corporeality, any mineral could have served the function of “body.” It does not answer the question: why salt? One key to answering this question—while also avoiding the narrow bind of oversimplification—lies in Schwaller’s observation that salt is the ‘*foundation and support of the body*’ and the ‘*guardian of form*’.<sup>89</sup> This is underscored by the fact that Paracelsus describes salt as a *balsam*:

God, in his goodness and greatness, willed that man should be led by Nature to such a state of necessity as to be unable to live naturally without natural Salt. Hence its necessity in all foods. Salt is the balsam of Nature, which drives away the corruption of the warm Sulphur with the moist Mercury, out of which two ingredients man is by nature compacted. Now, since it is necessary that these prime constituents should be nourished with something like themselves, it follows as a matter of course that man must use ardent foods for the sustenance of his internal Sulphur; moist foods for nourishing the Mercury, and salted foods for keeping the Salt in a faculty for building up the body. Its power for conservation is chiefly seen in the fact that it keeps dead flesh for a very long time from decay; hence it is easy to guess that it will still more preserve living flesh.<sup>90</sup>

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86 WAITE ed., I, 258-9.

87 Cf. PARACELUSUS, ‘Concerning the Nature of Things’ (WAITE ed. I, 125): ‘For Mercury is the spirit, Sulphur is the soul, and Salt is the body’.

88 PARACELUSUS, *Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Kurt GOLDAMMER (Wiesbaden and Stuttgart: Steiner, 1955), 63.

89 *Temple I*, 67; *Al-Kemi*, 186. Emphasis added.

90 PARACELUSUS, *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings*, ed. A. E. Waite (Edmonds, WA: The Alchemical Press, 1992), 98 = *The Economy of Minerals*, Ch. 9: ‘Concerning the Virtues and Properties of Salts in Alchemy and in Medicine’.

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Moreover, in German, *Balsam* possesses the meaning of something that heals or preserves, and it is easy to see how this balsamic function is specific to salt, a substance which is still used widely to preserve the flesh of plants and animals. Indeed, salt is a *salve* (from Latin *sal*), and it is worth noting in this connection that *Balsam* forms the German word for mummification (*Balsamierung*, ‘en-balm-ing’), and that one of the main substances used by the Egyptians for preserving their mummies was a salt (natron), which served as an anhydrous (drying) agent, desiccating the flesh and therefore preventing putrefaction.<sup>91</sup> Once again, the function of salt it to preserve, and yet at the same time, salt also corrodes or is corrosion.<sup>92</sup>

### *Sal Philosophorum*

Quite apart from common table salt, or any other purely chemical salt for that matter, the medieval alchemists refer to the ‘Salt of the Philosophers’ or ‘Salt of the Sages (*Sal Sapientie*)’. One thing that distinguishes what is often designated as “our Salt”—i.e. “philosophical salt”—from common chemical salts is the fact that it is seen to possess the ability to preserve not plants but *metals*. Basil Valentine, in Key IV of his *Zwölf Schlüssel*, states:

Just as salt is the great preserver of all things and protects them from putrefaction, so too is the salt of our magistry a protector of metals from annihilation and corruption. However, if their balsam—their embodied saline spirit (*eingelebter Salz-Geist*)—were to die, withering away from nature like a body which perishes and is no longer fruitful, then the spirit of metals will depart, leaving through natural death an empty, dead husk from which no life can ever rise again.<sup>93</sup>

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91 Natron was used in Egypt for its cleansing properties and imported by the Greeks for the same purpose. See Robert K. RITNER, ‘Innovations and Adaptations in Ancient Egyptian Medicine’, *JNES* 59, 2 (2000), 107-17, at p. 116 with n. 55; Warren DAWSON, ‘A Strange Drug’, *Aegyptus* 12, 1932, 12-15.

92 The corrupting reaction to oxygen that often forms the salts of metals is usually poisonous; its *colour*, however, was considered the ‘flower’ of the metal; the specific colour of this flower was understood as a vital signature of the metal’s spirit.

93 Basil VALENTINE, *Zwölf Schlüssel*, ed. TANCKIUS, vol. II, 657-8: ‘Gleich wie das Saltz ist eine Erhalterin aller Ding / und bewahret für der Fäule / Also ist das Saltz unserer Meister auch ein Schutz der Metallen / daß sie nicht können gar zu nichte gemacht und verderbet werden / daß nicht wieder etwas darauß werden solte / es sterbe dann ihr Balsam / und eingelebter Saltz-Geist von Natur ab / als denn wer der Leib todt / und könnte nichts fruchtbarliches weiter darauß gemacht werden / Denn die Geister der Metallen werden abgewichen / und nur durch natürliches Absterben eine leere todte Wohnung verlassen / darinnen kein Leben wieder zu bringen’.

Once again, through its dual nature—preserving and corrupting—a fundamental ambivalence adheres to the reality embodied in salt. And yet, the key to salt resides in its ultimately integrating function. It is the *clavis* which binds and unbinds, preserves and corrupts. It itself does not undergo the process which it enacts, embodies or disembodies. Importantly, however, as one learns from Schwaller, salt acts as the permanent mineral “memory” of this eternal process of generation and corruption.

Perhaps the most interesting and influential synthesis of esoteric theological and cosmological ideas on salt are those that crystallise in the tradition of Jacob Boehme, where salt emerges as a spiritual-material integrum central to a trinitarian *theosophia*. Here one learns that earthly or material salt recapitulates a heavenly potency called by Boehme *salliter*; this heavenly salt is an explosive force of light and fire likened to gunpowder (*sal-nitre*, cf. Paracelsus’ ‘terrestrial lightning’).<sup>94</sup> For Boehme, this heavenly and earthly salt are indicated by the two “halves” of the conventional salt symbol, which resemble two hemispheres, one turned upon the other (one “giving” and the other “receiving”). These theories reach a magnificent depth of expression in Georg von Welling’s *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum* (1721). Welling (1655–1727), an alchemist for whom the books of theology and nature were thoroughly complementary, worked as a director of mining in the town of Baden-Durlach (a position that allowed him to explore his extensive knowledge and passion for both the practicalities and the mysteries of geology). His monumental *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum* explores how the rich relationship of salt as fire/air/sulphur on one hand, and water/earth/mercury on the other, is played out in all its intricacies to convey the mysterious dynamic of the fire-water juncture embodied in heavenly and earthly salt (Welling uses the Hebrew term for heaven, *schemajim*, literally, ‘fire-water’ alongside the superimposed alchemical triangles of fire and water to form the Star of David). In his initial chapters, Welling describes the common symbol of salt as a ‘cubical’ figure and thus the figure of an ‘earthly body’; ‘its form is diaphanous or transparent, like glass’; it is ‘malleable and fluid and all bodies penetrate it with ease’. ‘Its taste is sour or acidic and a little astringent’; it is of a ‘desiccating nature and character’; moreover, it is ‘cooling’ and yet ‘in its interior there is a natural or genuine fire’.<sup>95</sup>

94 Lawrence M. PRINCIPE and Andrew WEEKS, ‘Jacob Boehme’s Divine Substance *Salitter*: Its Nature, Origin, and Relationship to Seventeenth Century Scientific Theories’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 22, 1 (1989): 53-61; PARACELUS (Waite ed.), I, 263.

95 Georg von WELLING, *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum: Der Ursprung, Natur, Eigenschaften und Gebrauch des Saltzes, Schwefels und Mercurii*, Andre Auflage (Frankfurt und Leipzig: in der Fleischerischen Buchhandlung, 1760), 2 (I, § 3), 40 (II, § 1): ‘Droben ist § 3. gesagt worden, daß des gemeinen [Salz] Figur (1) sey cubisch, die da ist eine Figur der irdischen Körper, und diese Eigenschaft habe es im Durchstreichen der Erde bekommen. In eben demselben §. wird gesagt, (2) seine Form sey diaphan oder durchscheinend, gleich dem Glas. (3) Das es sey güssig und flüssig, und alle Körper ganz leichte durchgehe. (4) Sein Geschmack seye sauer, und ein wenig zusammenziehend; (5) Es

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As Magee has demonstrated, hermetic influences in general, and Paracelsian and Boehmian ideas in particular, fed into and informed the work of G. W. F. Hegel. ‘According to an ancient and general opinion’, writes Hegel, ‘each body consists of four elements. In more recent times, Paracelsus has regarded them as being composed of mercury or fluidity, sulphur or oil, and salt, which Jacob Böhme called the great triad’. To this, Hegel adds: ‘It should not be overlooked [...] that in their essence they contain and express the determinations of the Concept’. According to Magee, this admission is highly significant, for Hegel is saying that ‘if the alchemical language of Paracelsus, Böhme, and others is considered in a nonliteral way, its inner content is, in essence, identical to his system’ (i.e. the ‘determinations of the Concept’).<sup>96</sup>

Interestingly, despite Boehme’s known influence on mainstream academic philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel, it is Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* that emerges from the modern German academic tradition with the most abiding insights into the phenomenon of salt. Curiously, although it possesses no apparent connections to esoteric or alchemical discourse, *Zarathustra* as a whole is nevertheless pervaded with a pronounced hermetic ambiance; somehow, Nietzsche’s remarks on salt penetrate right to the heart of its mysterium. At the end of book three, Zarathustra not only speaks of salt as binding opposites, but also connects this to a desire for eternity which cannot be satisfied through simple procreation:

If ever I drunk a full draught from that vessel of foaming spice, in which all things are well-blent:  
If ever my hand fused the nearest to the farthest, fire to spirit, desire to suffering and the worst to the best:  
If I myself were a grain of that redeeming salt that makes all things in the vessel well-blent:—  
—for there is a salt that binds good with evil; for even the most evil is worthy to be a spice for the final over-foaming—  
O how should I not be rutting after eternity and after the conjugal ring of rings—the ring of recurrence!  
Never have I found the woman by whom I wanted children, for it would be this woman that I love: for I love you, O Eternity!  
*For I love you, O eternity!*<sup>97</sup>

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sey austrocknender Natur und Eigenschaft; (6) Kühlend; Und (7) daß es in seinem Innersten sey ein wesentliches Feuer’.

96 Glenn Alexander MAGEE, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 209, citing Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Philosophy of Nature*, § 316 = M. J. PETRY, trans. *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, 3 vols. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), vol. 2, 117; cf. also MAGEE, *Hegel Dictionary*, 58-60.

97 NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (‘Die sieben Siegel’, 4 = *KSA*, 289): ‘Wenn ich je vollen Zuges trank aus jenem schäumenden Würz- und Mischkrüge, in dem alle Dinge gut gemischt sind: Wenn meine Hand je Fernstes zum Nächsten goss und Feuer zu Geist und

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Salt as the redeeming juncture of opposites is framed by Nietzsche in terms that evoke the themes of autonomous morality expressed in his *Jenseits von Gut und Bösen*. Running deeper, however, is the surprising link that Nietzsche makes between salt and a desire for eternity that cannot be met through procreation; here one recognises not only the Indo-European ‘path of the fathers’ versus the ‘path of the gods’, but also the two paths in alchemy known as *la voie humide* and *la voie sèche*—the wet and the dry ways. Nietzsche taps directly into the crux of the human *œuvre*. Genetic continuity, i.e. continuity of and through the species, does not satisfy the soul’s desire for eternity; only the desire that is fixed in the salt, deep in the bones, has the capacity to survive biological generation and corruption. Nietzsche’s love for eternity expresses the same reality that Schwaller articulated in terms of the saline nucleus in the femur: the path of eternity, *palingenesis* and *resurrection*, hinges not on the chromosomes but upon a fixed mineral salt.

### Salt in Schwaller’s Alchemy

Unity manifests itself as Trinity. It is the “creatrix” of form, but still not form itself; form emerges through movement, that is, Time and Space.<sup>98</sup>

—Schwaller de Lubicz

#### *Sulphur, Mercury and Salt*

Schwaller’s understanding of the *tria prima* as the creatrix of form is essentially consonant with the trinitarian conceptions of Egyptian (and later Pythagorean) cosmogonic theology. Here, the creator’s divine hypostases—Hu, Sia and Heka—manifest as the extra- or hyper-cosmic forces that exist *before* creation; they are the forces necessary to the establishment of creation rather than creation *per se*. This may be compared to the identical conception that emerges in Iamblican theurgy, which distinguishes between hypercosmic and encosmic divinities, or the same essential

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Lust zu Leid und Schlimmstes zum Gütigsten: Wenn ich selber ein Korn bin von jenem erlösenden Salze, welches macht, dass alle Dinge im Mischkrüge gut sich mischen: — denn es giebt ein Salz, das Gutes mit Bösem bindet; und auch das Böseste ist zum Würzen würdig und zum letzten Überschäumen: — Oh wie sollte ich nicht nach der Ewigkeit brünstig sein und nach dem hochzeitlichen Ring der Ringe, — dem Ring der Wiederkunft? Nie noch fand ich das Weib, von dem ich Kinder mochte, sei denn dieses Weib, das ich liebe: denn ich liebe dich, oh Ewigkeit! Denn ich liebe dich, oh Ewigkeit!

98 SCHWALLER, ‘Le monde de la trinité’, *Notes et Propos inédits* I, 64: ‘L’Unité se manifeste comme Trinité. Celle-ci est «créatrice» de la forme, mais non encore forme elle-même, laquelle va apparaître par le mouvement, c’est-à-dire Temps dans l’Espace’.

principles as carried through into the trinitarian theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, which distinguishes between uncreated and created energies. Beyond these general point of orientation, Schwaller's hermetic metaphysics accorded the *tria prima* some very specific characteristics:

The Trinity, that is to say the Three Principles, is the basis of all reasoning, and this is why in the whole "series of genesis" it is necessary to have all [three] to establish the foundational Triad that will be[come] the particular Triad. It includes first of all an abstract or nourishing datum, secondly a datum of measure, rhythmisation and fixation, and finally, a datum which is concrete or fixed like seed. This is what the hermetic philosophers have transcribed, concretely and symbolically, by Mercury, Sulphur and Salt, playing on the metallic appearance in which metallic Mercury plays the role of nutritive substance, Sulphur the coagulant of this Mercury, and Salt the fixed product of this function. In general, everything in nature, being a formed Species, will be Salt. Everything that coagulates a nourishing substance will be Sulphur or of the nature of Sulphur, from the chromosome to the curdling of milk. Everything that is coagulable will be Mercury, whatever its form.<sup>99</sup>

The image of coagulation—with Sulphur as the coagulating agent, Mercury as the coagulated substance, and Salt as the resulting form—is used repeatedly by Schwaller.<sup>100</sup> The formal articulation of this idea, as published in his mature oeuvre, connects the motif to the embryological process:

In biology, the great mystery is the existence, in all living beings, of albumin or albuminoid (proteinaceous) matter. One of the albuminoid substances is coagulable by heat (the white of the egg is of this type), another is not. The

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99 SCHWALLER, 'Le monde de la trinité', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 65-6: 'La Trinité, c'est-à-dire les Trois Principes, sont la base de tout raisonnement, c'est pourquoi dans toute «chaîne de genèse» il faut avant tout établir la Triade de base qui sera le Triade particulière. Elle comprend toujours d'abord une donnée abstraite ou nourricière, une donnée de mesure, de rhythmisation, de fixation et, finalement, une donnée concrète ou fixée comme semence. C'est ce que les philosophes hermétiques ont transcrit concrètement, symboliquement, par Mercure, Soufre et Sel, jouant sur l'apparence métallique où le Mercure métallique joue le rôle de substance nourricière, le Soufre étant coagulant de ce Mercure, le Sel est le produit fixe de cette fonction. En généralisant: tout dans la Nature étant Espèce formée, sera Sel: tout ce qui coagule une nourriture sera Soufre ou de nature de Soufre, depuis le chromosome jusqu'au caillé du lait. Tout ce qui es coagulable sera Mercure, quelle que soit sa forme'.

100 On the development of the idea of salt as neutralisation reaction between an acid and a base in chemistry and alchemy, see the numerous texts and contexts cited in A. M. DUNCAN, 'Styles of Language and Modes of Chemical Thought', *Ambix* 28, 2 (1981): passim (83-107).

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albuminoid substance carrying the spermatozoa is of this latter type. The albuminoid sperm cannot be coagulated because it carries the spermatozoa that coagulate the albuminoid substance of the female ovum. As soon as one spermatozoon has penetrated the ovum, this ovum coagulates on its surface, thus preventing any further penetration: fertilisation has occurred. (In reality, this impenetrability is not caused by a material obstacle, the solid shell, but by the fact that the two equal energetic polarities repel one another). The spermatozoon therefore plays the role of a “vital coagulating fire” just as common fire coagulates the feminine albumin. This is the *action* of a masculine fire in a cold, passive, feminine environment. Here also, there are always material carriers for these energies, but they manifest the existence of an energy with an active male aspect and a passive female aspect that undergoes or submits to it. Ordinary fire brutally coagulates the white of an egg, but the spermatozoon coagulates it gently by specifying it into the embryo of its species. This image shows that the potentiality of the seed passes to a defined effect through the coagulation of a passive substance, similar to the action of an acid liquid in an alkaline liquid, which forms a specified salt. Now the sperm is no more acid than the male albumin, but it plays in the animal kingdom [*animalement*] the same role as acid; ordinary fire is neither male nor acid and yet it has a type of male and acid action. This and other considerations incline the philosopher to speak of an Activity that is positive, acid and coagulating, without material carrier, and of a Passivity, a substance that is negative, alkaline, and coagulable, also without material carrier. From their interaction results the initial, not-yet-specified coagulation, the *threefold Unity*, which is also called the “Creative Logos” (Word, *Verbe*) because the Logos, as speech, only signifies the name, that is, the definition of the “specificity” of things.<sup>101</sup>

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101 *Temple I*, 77-8/I, 42: ‘En biologie le grand mystère est l’existence, chez tout être vivant, de l’albumine ou des matières albuminoïdes (protéïniques). L’une des substances albuminoïdes est coagulable à la chaleur (le blanc d’œuf en est le type), l’autre ne l’est pas. Le type de cette dernière est la substance albuminoïde portant le spermatozoaire. Le sperme albuminoïde ne peut pas être coagulable puisqu’il porte le spermatozoaire coagulant la substance albuminoïde de l’ovule féminin. Dès qu’un des spermatozoïdes a pénétré l’ovule, celui-ci se coagule à sa surface et empêche toute autre pénétration: la fécondation a eu lieu. [Cette impénétrabilité n’est pas en réalité provoquée par un obstacle matériel, la coque solide, mais par le fait que deux polarités énergétiques égales se repoussent.] Le spermatozoaire joue donc le rôle d’une feu « coagulant vital » comme le feu vulgaire coagule l’albumine féminine. C’est l’*action* d’une feu masculin en un milieu passif, froid, féminin. Il y a toujours encore, ici, des porteurs matériels de ces énergies, mais ils manifestent l’existence d’une énergie à l’aspect mâle actif, et d’un aspect féminin passif qui subit. Le feu ordinaire coagule brutalement le blanc d’œuf, mais le spermatozoaire le coagule doucement en le spécifiant en embryon de son espèce. Ceci est une image qui montre que la virtualité de la semence passe à l’effet défini à travers la coagulation d’une substance passive, semblable à l’action d’une liquide acide en une liquide alcalin formant

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To salt as the mean term between the agent and patient of coagulation, he occasionally adds other revealing expressions, such as the following:

In geometry, in a triangle, the given line is Mercury, the Angles are Sulphur, and the resultant triangle is Salt.<sup>102</sup>

Whereas here, Schwaller identifies Salt with a 'datum' or 'given' which is 'fixed like seed' (*une donnée concrète ou fixée comme semence*), elsewhere he identifies the active, sulphuric function with that of the seed (*semence*). What this means is that the neutral saline product, once formed, then acts in the sulphuric capacity of a seed and ferment, but also foundation:

It can only be a matter of an active Fire, that is, of a seminal "intensity", like the "fire" of pepper, for example, or better: the "fire" of either an organic or a catalysing ferment. The character of all the ferments, i.e. the seeds, is to determine into Time and Space a form of nourishment—in principle without form; clearly, therefore, it plays a coagulating role. The coagulation of all "bloods" is precisely their fixation into the form of the species of the coagulating seed, the coagulation being, as in other cases, a transformation of an aquatic element into a terrestrial or solid element, without desiccation and without addition or diminution of the component parts.<sup>103</sup>

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un sel défini. Or le spermatozoaire, pas plus que l'albumine mâle, n'est acide, mais il joue animalement le même rôle; le feu ordinaire n'est ni mâle ni acide, il est pourtant le type de l'action mâle et acide. Ceci, et d'autres considérations, incitent le philosophe à parler d'une Activité positive, acide, coagulante, sans porteur matériel, et d'une Passivité, substance négative, alcaline, coagulable, également sans caractère matériel. De leur interaction résulte le première coagulation encore non spécifiée, l'*Unité ternaire*, aussi appelée le « Verbe créateur » parce que le Verbe, en tant que parole, ne signifie que le Nom, c'est-à-dire la définition de la spécificité des choses' (trans. modified).

102 SCHWALLER, 'Le monde de la trinité', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 66: 'En géométrie, dans un triangle, la ligne donnée est Mercure, les Angles sont Soufre, le triangle qui en résulte est Sel'.

103 SCHWALLER, 'La semence', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 44: 'Il ne peut alors s'agir que d'un Feu actif, c'est-à-dire d'une « intensité » séminale, comme le « feu » du poivre, par exemple, ou bien le « feu » d'un ferment organique, ou bien d'une ferment catalyseur. Le caractère de tous les ferments, c'est-à-dire des semences, étant de déterminer en Temps et Espace une nourriture—en principe sans forme—, c'est donc nettement un rôle coagulant. La coagulation de tous le « sangs » étant précisément leur fixation en forme de l'espèce de la semence coagulante, la coagulation étant, par ailleurs, un changement d'un élément aquatique en élément terrestre ou solide, sans dessèchement, sans addition ou diminution de composants'.



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In the identification of both sulphur and salt as *semence*, one discerns a specific coherence of opposites that, in elemental terms, is described by the expression 'Fire of the Earth'. The salt is described in the passage quoted above as a seed (*semence*). This seed "becomes" seed again through the process of tree and fruit (growth, ferment, coagulation). It is at once a beginning and a finality (*prima* and *ultima materia*). The reality described is non-dual. Beginning and end partake of something that is not describable by an exclusively linear causality; and yet it is seen to "grow" or "develop" along a definite "line" or "path" of cause and effect; at the same time it partakes of a cyclic or self-returning character; and yet, for Schwaller, it is not the circle but the *spherical spiral* that provides the true image of its reality: a vision which encompasses a punctillar centre, a process of cyclic departure and return from this centre (oscillation), as well as linear "development", all of which are merely partial descriptors of a more encompassing, and yet more mysterious, reality-process. The fundamental coherence of this vision to the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of Jean Gebser (1905–1973) consolidates the significance of Schwaller's perception for the ontology of the primordial unity which is at once duality and trinity. For Gebser, consciousness manifests through point-like (vital-magical), polar-cyclic (mythic-psychological) and rectilinear (mental-rational) ontologies, each being a visible crystallisation of the ever-present, invisible and originary ontology which unfolds itself not according to exclusively unitary, cyclic or linear modalities of time and space, but according to its own innate integrum.

Thus there is no contradiction in finding the presence of fiery sulphur in the desiccating dryness of the salt, for it is precisely in the one substance that the sulphuric seed (active function) and saline seed (fixed kernel) cohere. The fixed, concrete seed-form (itself a coagulation of mercury by sulphur) contains the active sulphuric functions (the coagulating rhythms) which it will impose upon the nutritive mercurial substance (unformed matter). 'One nature', as a Graeco-Egyptian alchemical formula puts it, 'acts upon itself'.

### *Salt and the Fire of the Earth*

Among the various perspectives that have been surveyed on the nature and the principles inherent to salt, it is perhaps the Pythagorean statement—'salt is born from the purest sources, the sun and the sea'—that pertains most directly to the deeper meaning of Schwaller's hermetic phenomenology. Salt for Schwaller was placed in a septennial relationship comprising the *tria prima* and the four elements (Figure 3). Elementally, salt was situated by Schwaller at the end of a progression beginning with fire and air and ending in water and earth. Fire and air form a triad with sulphur; air and water form a triad with mercury; water and earth form a triad with salt. But salt was also understood to join the end of this progression to a new beginning, to a new fire/sulphur, exactly as the octave recapitulates the primordial *tonos* in musical

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harmony. For Schwaller, it was precisely this ‘juncture of abstract and concrete’ (fire and earth) that was identified with the formation of the philosopher’s stone (or at least the *key* to the formation of the philosopher’s stone):

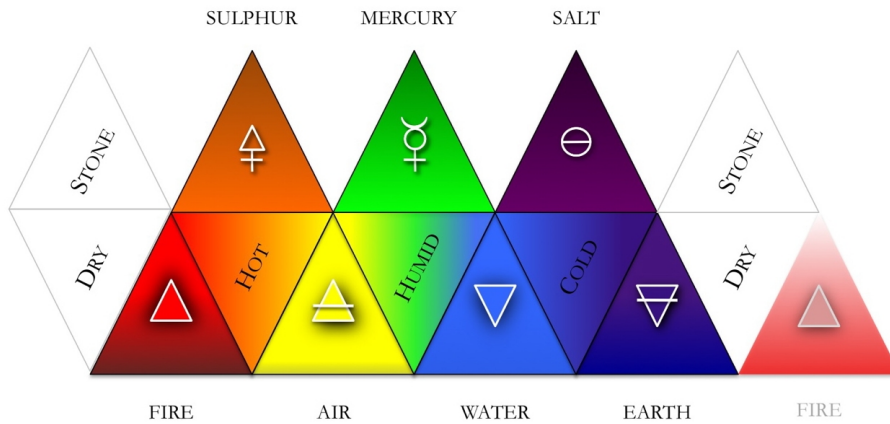


ILLUSTRATION 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRIA PRIMA AND TETRASTOICHEIA

Trinity (Sulphur-Mercury-Salt) begets quaternary (Fire-Air-Water-Earth). The juncture of Fire and Earth (abstract and concrete) is the means by which the end of the series is linked to its beginning. Diagram after Schwaller and VandenBroeck.

In this configuration (which prefigures the discussion of de Lubicz’s colour theory that will be undertaken in chapter five), one begins to see the hermetic “problem” of salt, i.e. its mysterium. Salt partakes of something that stands between water and fire (Pythagoras’ ‘purest sources’) in a way that is intimately related to earth, to which it imparts its dryness. Here one finds an imbroglia that suggests at once an element and a principle. Its connection to fire is felt in the hermetic associations of the elements (the sulphuric triad, fire and air, is characterised by heat; the mercurial triad, air and water, is characterised by humidity or wetness, while the saline triad, water and earth, is characterised by *dryness*: thus the desiccating quality of salt can only come from fire). Visser’s remarks, once again, prove cogent and penetrating:

Salt, once isolated, is white and glittering. It is the opposite of wet. You win it by freeing it from water with the help of fire and the sun, and it dries out flesh. Eating salt causes thirst. Dryness, in the pre-Socratic cosmic system which still informs our imagery, is always connected with fire, heat, and light.<sup>104</sup>

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104 VISSER, 76.

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Thus, inherent to salt is an equal participation in fire, sulphur and heat (+) and water, mercury, and wetness (–), such that it may be analogised with a chemical neutralisation reaction in which the positive and negative values become electrically equalised. This neutral condition is for Schwaller the very ground of being in which we are existentially and phenomenologically situated (‘everything in nature, being a formed Species, will be Salt’). Thus, to see existence—reality as we know it—as a neutralisation reaction between an active sulphuric function (*divinity, logos, eidos*) and passive mercurial substance (*prima materia*), to perceive the coagulating sulphur and the nourishing mercury through the “cinnabar” of all things, this is to “find” the philosopher’s stone. It is fundamentally, for Schwaller, a metaphysics of perception.

### *A Nondual Spiritual Alchemy*

In sum, Schwaller’s alchemy is a non-dual spiritual alchemy. What is meant by this is that Lubiczian alchemy is not a dualistic spiritual alchemy that dismisses the physical or physiological aspects of the alchemical tradition as somehow inferior or irrelevant to the purely spiritual aspects of the alchemical purview. In other words, it is not an alchemy that can be subsumed under the dualistic spiritual interpretation of Atwood (which became largely normative in esoteric circles throughout the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries) or the psychological interpretation of Silberer and Jung, which views the material aspect of alchemy as merely a “screen” for the projection of the soul’s archetypal dramaturgy. Schwaller’s alchemy grows from the milieu of Parisian alchemists surrounding Fulcanelli, who were deeply immersed in the practical, laboratory aspects of the work, but who were ultimately seeking the verification not of material but spiritual processes. The Parisian alchemists of the *fin-de-siècle* and the early Twentieth century looked not to Atwood (et al.), but to the texts of Basil Valentine, Nicolas Flamel, and later, Cyliani, as exemplars of the alchemical tradition. For Schwaller, these seemingly bewildering texts not only masked a distinct laboratory process (a fact that has been increasingly recognised by scholars through specific studies of Early Modern alchemists such as Newton and Philalethes), but ran deeper still: behind the operative process and the physical manipulations, these texts preserved (and required) a method of perception based on struggle and breakthrough that mirrored the perceptual effort necessitated in the reading of the symbolic language of nature herself (hence the importance of the idea of the *liber naturae*, the ‘book of nature’ along with its *signatura*). It was precisely this effort to think according to a deeper symbolic imperative that gave Schwaller the *clavis hermeneutica* to the text of the Pharaonic temple. While scholars see the idea of a monolithic esoteric, hermetic or alchemical tradition as historically problematic, merely an identity construct, Schwaller saw the breakthrough to the perception of an actual ontological reality that eludes a purely quantitative epistemology as the true test of a hermetic adept. For Schwaller, the perception of this reality, at once abstract and concrete, the very

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bedrock of existence, at once material and spiritual, did not need a historical transmission because it was ever-present, therefore perennially available to human perception. To “discover” this ontological bedrock was equivalent to “finding” the stone, which was seen more as the process underpinning and embodied in materiality *per se*—the mineral kingdom being regarded as the first material manifestation of spirit—than as a peculiar piece of isolatable matter. For Schwaller it was this fundamental mode of reality-apperception, rather than rigid points of technical or doctrinal exegesis, that formed the true hidden current of continuity within the hermetic tradition, indelibly marking all “good” texts and adepts. But it also had a material application or proof, and this formed the *experimentum crucis* (and here it should be noted that the term *experimentum*, in Latin as in French, means both experiment and experience). Alchemy for Schwaller thus centred on a metaphysics of perception but also a material proof that this perception was germane to the very structure of matter and existence as we know it.

### Spiritual Corporification

The thing that is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable. The thing that is sown is contemptible, but what is raised is glorious. The thing that is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful. When it is sown it embodies the soul (*psyche*), when it is raised it embodies the spirit (*pneuma*).

*I Corinthians 15:42-44.*

Having surveyed the ambivalent yet ultimately integrating symbolism of salt, we are now in a position to understand the hermetic application of this principle to the aims of hieratic alchemy: the transmutation of the physical corpus into an immortal resurrection body: an act of spiritual concretion in which the body is spiritualised and the spirit corporified. The deeper valences of alchemy thus unfold as both a material and a spiritual process and, as will be explored in the chapter three, become comprehensible as a form of theurgic apotheosis. As the words of the sixth century Syrian theurgist, Iamblichus, make clear, the decidedly *anagogic* nature of the divine energies (*theon ergon*) emerge as central to the metaphysics of perception:

[T]he presence of the Gods gives us health of body, virtue of soul and purity of mind. In short, it elevates everything in us to its proper principle. It annihilates what is cold and destructive in us, it increases our heat and causes it to become more powerful and dominant. It makes everything in the soul consonant with the *Nous* [mind, consciousness]; it causes a light to shine with intelligible harmony,

and it reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eyes of the soul by means of the eyes of the body.<sup>105</sup>

*Alchemy and the Resurrection Body*

The idea of the fixed alchemical salt finds its most significant forebears in the concept of the *corpus resurrectionis*.<sup>106</sup> In this respect, Schwaller is one of the few modern (Western) alchemists to possess what Corbin, in reference to Jaldakī, called a ‘very lucid consciousness of the spiritual finality and of the esoteric sense of the alchemical operation accomplished on sensible species’.<sup>107</sup> This spiritual finality, in the metaphysical purview of Islamic illuminationist theosophy, is no less than the creation of a resurrection body (*corpus resurrectionis*). In Schwaller’s alchemy one sees very clearly that all the intensifications made on material species occur through an inscription on the entity’s indestructible nucleus (alchemically, a mineral salt); because this nucleus is the foundation of the body, the more intensifications it experiences, the more its essential (primordial but also future) body will approach the perfect equilibrium of an indestructible (and paradoxically, incorporeal) physical vehicle until the point is reached where, ultimately, luminous consciousness itself becomes its own perfect body. Thus, the abstract and the concrete, the volatile and the fixed, are ultimately conjoined through a process of intensification registered permanently in the being’s incorruptible aspect—the salt in the bones or ashes (cf. the Hebrew *luz* or *os sacrum*).

What is the nature of this spiritual body? In a remark by Saint Gregory the Sinaite, the spiritual body is equated with the process of *theōsis* (deification) and thus becomes amenable to a theurgical interpretation:

The incorruptible body will be earthly, but without moisture and coarseness, having been unutterably changed from animate to spiritual, so that it will be both of the dust and heavenly. *Just as it was created in the beginning, so also will it arise, that it may be conformable to the image of the Son of Man by entire participation in deification.*<sup>108</sup>

105 IAMBlichus, *De Mysteriis*, 81, 13-82.2; trans. SHAW, 220.

106 Cf., most notably, the resurrection theology of the Gospel of Paul, the Shaikhī school in Iranian Sufism, and the diamond body of Vajrayana Buddhism.

107 Henry CORBIN, ‘Le « Livre des sept Statues » d’Apollonios de Tyane, commenté par Jaldakī’, *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L’Herne, 1986), 67-8: « Ses nombreux ouvrages se signalent par sa conscience très lucide de la finalité spirituelle et du sens ésotérique de l’opération alchimique accomplie sur des espèces sensibles ».

108 Saint GREGORY THE SINAITE, ‘Chapters on Commandments and Dogmas’, trans. Seraphim ROSE, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (= *Philokalia*, Russian, vol. 5; English, vol. 4).

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The matter of the spiritual body is clearly nondual ('both of dust and heavenly'). Robert Avens, in a preface to a discussion of Corbin and Swedenborg's contributions to the understanding of the spiritual body, helps situate the deeper meaning that pertains to the "matter" of the resurrection body:

It seems clear, then, that whatever Paul might have meant by the expression "spiritual body", he did not mean that the resurrected bodies were numerically identical with the earthly bodies—a view that was advocated by most writers for the Western or Latin church. The crucial question in all speculations of this kind has to do with Paul's treatment of "matter". We are naturally perplexed with the notion of a body that is composed of a material other than physical matter. Probably the best that can be said on this score is that Paul had chosen a middle course between, on the one hand, a crassly materialistic doctrine of physical resurrection (reanimation of a corpse) and, on the other hand, a dualistic doctrine of the liberation of the soul from the body.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, the resurrection body, like the alchemical salt, forms a paradoxical ligature between abstract and concrete, metaphysical and physical, spirit and body. While orthodox theologians such as Seraphim Rose draw on this and other passages to emphasise the Patristic doctrine that the body of Adam, the body that one will return to in resurrection, was (and is) different to one's current, corruptible body, the ultimate nature of the "matter" of the resurrection body must remain a mystery. In this respect, Gregory of Nyssa's remarks, from a treatise entitled 'On the Soul and Resurrection' may perhaps be taken as final:

The true explanation of all these questions is stored up in the treasure-houses of Wisdom, and will not come to the light until that moment when we shall be taught the mystery of Resurrection by the reality of it. [...] to embrace it in a definition, we will say that the Resurrection is "the reconstitution of our nature in its original form".<sup>110</sup>

The original form he refers to is, of course, the Adamic, i.e. adamantine body, with obvious parallels to the Indo-Tibetan *vajra* (diamond) body. As Rose emphasises, the only thing that is certain is that the resurrection body will be different from its current, i.e. corruptible, form. As to whether it is "spirit" or "matter", or a nondual state that embraces yet supersedes both (per Corbin's *mundus imaginalis*, which spiritualises bodies and embodies spirit), it is perhaps best to remain apophatic.

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109 Robert AVENS, 'Re-Visioning Resurrection: St. Paul and Swedenborg', *Journal of Religion and Health* 23, 4 (1984): 302-3.

110 GREGORY of NYSSA, 'On the Soul and Resurrection'; *Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers V: Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* 464.

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As C. F. D. Moule notes, however, the somewhat ambiguous relationship between the mortal and incorruptible bodies may well inhere in the fact that transmutation between them was possible: for Moule, the Pauline resurrection theology was ‘perhaps wholly novel and derived directly from his experience of Christ—namely, that matter is to be used but transformed in the process of obedient surrender to the will of God’. ‘Matter is not illusory’, continues Moule; it is ‘not to be shunned and escaped from, nor yet exactly destined to be annihilated [...] Rather, matter is to be transformed into that which transcends it’.<sup>111</sup> These remarks approach the essence of the (nondual) alchemical *œuvre* in a way that confirms what one may call its theurgic and perhaps even tantric sense insofar as it recognises and embraces the *body* and *matter* as a *vehicles* or *foundations* for liberation. In short, macrocosmically and microcosmically, material substance is to be transformed into a spiritual vehicle and instrument.

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111 C. F. D. MOULE, ‘St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection’, *New Testament Studies* 12, (1966): 109; cf. also P. W. GOOCH, ‘On the Disembodied Resurrected Persons: A Study in the Logic of Christian Eschatology’, *Religious Studies* 17, 199-213.

## METHODOLOGY

The reason that becomes aware of its limitations thus transcends itself in the direction of something else.

—Jürgen Habermas<sup>112</sup>

Before one proceed to discuss alchemy more directly, a few remarks are necessary on the study of (western) esotericism as a field of academic discourse. To the extent that the academic study of esotericism is effectively an extension of the academic study of religion, it is heir to the same basic methodological problems. These problems have a key point of genesis in the increasing separation of religious studies from theology under the aegis of a secularising academy, which, despite much rhetoric about secularisation, retains an inherent tension between metaphysical and materialist sympathies. Such tensions, I maintain, are not only germane to the origins of the academy itself, they form its creative lifeblood.

Indicative of these tensions, methodological debates in *Religionswissenschaft* have typically fallen between two extremes: (i) the “positivist” or “empiricist” approach, which limits itself to external and objective phenomena, and seeks to explain religiosity in terms of its historical dialectics, cultural contexts or socio-political contingencies; and (ii) the “phenomenological” or “essentialist” approach, which attempts to engage the internal or subjective aspects of religious phenomena, seeking to explain religiosity in terms of its hermeneutic meaning, phenomenological presence, or morphological constants. Thus, on one side, one finds “objectivity” held up as a means of access to truth, and on the other side, “subjectivity.” In many respects, the choice between one or the other betrays a false dichotomy. Ultimately, if one wants to be animated by the greater philosophical lifeblood, both subjective *and* objective approaches must be taken into account.

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112 Jürgen HABERMAS and Joseph RATZINGER, *The Dialectics of Secularisation: On Reason and Religion* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2005), 40; *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft and Religion* (Freiburg: Herder 2005).



### Prelude

“Ariadne”, says Dionysus, “you are a labyrinth: Theseus has gone astray in you, he has lost his thread; what good is it to him that he is not devoured by the Minotaur? That which devours him is worse than a Minotaur” (Dionysus). “You are flattering me”, Ariadne replied, “I am weary of my pity, all heroes should perish by me (one must become God for me to love)”.

—Nietzsche.<sup>113</sup>

In many respects, we enter into methodology as into a labyrinth. Without something approaching Ariadne’s guiding thread, it will be difficult to extricate ourselves from the virulent debates that typically characterise the modern academy when confronted, essentially, with the spectre of its ancient origins. That is to say, the modern idea of a “secular academy” is in no uncertain terms fraught with the profoundest of difficulties, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in *Religionswissenschaft*.

To the extent that the spirit in which something is created always continues to imbue it, it must be recognised that the original academy, the academy of ancient Athens, was founded on a still more ancient site formerly devoted to the cult of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war. It was not an ivory tower, but a grove of olive trees, and above its entrance it bore the inscription: ‘those ignorant of geometry may not enter’. Here, under the aegis of an essentially Pythagoreanising imperative, the ancient academy emphasised not secular reason, but rational metaphysics.

As recent scholarship on the history of Greek philosophy has increasingly come to realise, the development of philosophy in antiquity is not so much a matter of simple oppositions between Platonists and Aristotelians; rather, it is a more subtle process of drawing out inherent tensions already present in the dialogues of Plato. In many respects, the academy’s foundations in rational metaphysics emerge as a perennial spectre for today’s secular antimetaphysicists; indeed, Alfred North Whitehead’s famous statement that ‘the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato’ proves as pertinent now as it was in 1929.<sup>114</sup>

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113 NIETZSCHE, *KSA* 12, 401-2, 9 [115], Fall 1887; cited in Pierre KLOSSOWSKI, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (*Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, Paris: Mercure de France, 1969; trans. Daniel W. Smith, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 247.

114 Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (corrected ed., David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York: Free Press, 1979), 39: ‘I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings’, continues Whitehead; ‘I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through

## M E T H O D O L O G Y

With the separation of metaphysics from natural cosmology at the close of the Middle Ages, academia was freed from its theological directives; on one hand the Renaissance/humanist academy took its inspiration from the Greek academy; on the other it increasingly sought to reinterpret itself as a secular institution. The birth of early modern esotericism, which may be interpreted as a series of attempts at preserving the abandoned links between metaphysics and natural philosophy, is inseparably bound to these broader cultural processes.

The persistent legacy of metaphysics in the academy cannot be denied, and the tendency of postmodern thought towards radical antimetaphysics merely confirms this by its very reactivity. With this in mind, and with an eye towards the critiques of both objectivity and subjectivity encountered in ontological and epistemological circles throughout the twentieth century, the following passage from Badiou's *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* may be presented as something of an "Ariadne's thread" through the labyrinth of methodology:

The criterion of the exteriority (or transcendence) of mathematical structures (or objects) results in a diagnosis of 'Platonism' for almost all works belonging to the 'philosophy of science'. But this diagnosis is undoubtedly wrong. It is wrong because it presupposes that the 'Platonist' espouses a distinction between internal and external, knowing subject and known 'object'; a distinction which is utterly foreign to the genuine Platonic framework. However firmly established this distinction may be in contemporary epistemology, however fundamental the theme of the objectivity of the object and the subjectivity of the subject may be for it, one cannot but entirely fail to grasp the thought-process at work in Plato on the basis of such presuppositions.<sup>115</sup>

The theme of the nonduality of subject and object is also at the heart of Schwaller de Lubicz's epistemology, and for this reason, the study of Schwaller de Lubicz (and to a large extent, the more sophisticated expression of esotericism in general), presents itself not merely as a cultural phenomenon to be deconstructed according to postmodern sensibilities; rather, it presents the opportunity to re-evaluate some of the philosophical assumptions of contemporary academia. In this sense, it may offer a greater (to some, more disconcerting), challenge.

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them. His personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experience at a great period of civilization, his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization, have made his writing an inexhaustible mine of suggestion'.

115 Alain BADIOU, 'Platonism and Mathematical Ontology', *Theoretical Writings* (ed. and trans. Brassier and Toscano, London: Continuum, 2004), 49; *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 95-119.

## Philosophy and Phenomenology

*Emmanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*

In addition to the inherent tensions in Platonic philosophy and the separation of theological metaphysics from natural philosophy at the close of the Middle Ages, the more modern origins of academic methodology have their roots in the related debates between empiricism and rationalism that emerged in the seventeenth century. The empiricists (Bacon, Hume, Locke, Berkeley) consolidate concepts that go back as far as Aristotle, holding that the mind is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), that knowledge is *a posteriori* to experience, and that external sense data therefore provide the most reliable evidence for knowledge.<sup>116</sup> The rationalists on the other hand (Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza), following Socrates and Plato, hold that the human mind provides access to knowledge independently of the senses, that our very ability to understand sense-data stems from this *a priori* knowledge, and that direct rational intuition therefore provides the most reliable evidence for knowledge.<sup>117</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century, Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) had irrevocably problematised both of these positions with his so-called “Copernican revolution in philosophy”. His famous *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) held that the objects of pure (i.e. speculative) reason, the ‘things in and of themselves’ (*Dingen an sich selbst*), were essentially beyond experience and therefore unknowable. At the same time, the objects of the material senses could not be consciously understood or comprehended without them. His complex philosophy thus maintained that ‘human reason has this particular fate in one genus of its knowledge: it is burdened by questions which it cannot dismiss, for they are prescribed by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, for they exceed the capacities of human reason’.<sup>118</sup>

This Kantian dilemma is pivotal to the trajectories that analytical and continental traditions in philosophy would take throughout the twentieth century. Whereas analytical philosophy follows the “negative” pole of Kant’s critique to close off all speculative discussion of traditional metaphysics (effectively reverting to Hume), continental philosophy follows the “positive” pole of this critique to concern itself with the kinds of questions that, according to Kant, cannot be ignored, dismissed or

116 On empiricism and the *tabula rasa* concept, cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, 3.4.430a1.

117 On *a priori* knowledge, see PLATO, *Phaedo* 72b (knowledge as *anamnesis*); *Meno* 82 (geometric proofs of *a priori* knowledge).

118 Emmanuel KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Könemann: Köln, 1995), 15: ‘Die menschliche Vernunft hat das besondere Schicksal in einer Gattung ihrer Erkenntnisse: daß die durch Fragen belästigt wird, die sie nicht abweisen kann, denn sie sind ihr durch die Natur der Vernunft selbst aufgegeben, die sie aber auch nicht beantworten kann, denn sie übersteigen alles Vermögen der menschlichen Vernunft’.

rejected (e.g. metaphysics, morality, aesthetics etc.)<sup>119</sup> More specifically, Kant's distinction between the *noumena* (i.e. the *Dingen an sich selbst*) and phenomena (*Erscheinungen* or appearances) becomes a major point of departure for the development of philosophical phenomenology.

It should be pointed out that the term *phaenomenologia* (in German *Phänomenologie*) is not original to Kant. He appears to have gotten the term from the Swiss physicist, astronomer, mathematician, and logician, Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-1777), who was a correspondent of Kant's.<sup>120</sup> Interestingly for the study of esotericism, however, the earliest known evidence for the word phenomenology derives neither from Kant nor Lambert, but from the Swabian theosopher, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782).<sup>121</sup> Oetinger's theosophy, bordering closely on *Naturphilosophie*, viewed visible nature as a theophany (divine appearance) and phenomenology as a procedure for displaying the 'divine system of relations'.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, it is from this deeper purview—the visible cosmos as theophany—that the phenomenology of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) would emerge: a figure whose indebtedness to the hermetic tradition has been well documented.<sup>123</sup> With one foot in Teutonic theosophy, and the other in academic philosophy, Hegel reacted to the inherent problems of the Kantian approach by regarding actual phenomenal processes (not only *Natur*, but also *Geschichte*, objective history) as indices of a holarchical, absolute consciousness (*absoluter Geist*).<sup>124</sup> For Hegel, phenomenology is the science of the appearances of this absolute spirit. That is to say, all appearances—from naïve sense certainty and the perception of universals, to the distinction between appearance and reality—are so many manifestations of absolute spirit coming to know itself through the vehicle of human consciousness. Likewise, so-called "external reality" as a whole—from natural evolution to the historical process—are also so many vehicles of this same dialectic.

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119 David WEST, *Continental Philosophy: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 24.

120 In 1762, Lambert used the term *phaenomenologia* to describe a 'transcendental optics' (*optica transcendentalis*); in his 1764 *Neues Organon oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Bezeichnung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrthum und Schein* (Leipzig, 1764), vol. 2, part iv, he uses the term to distinguish between truth (*Wahrheit*) and appearance (*Schein*); 'A quite special, though purely negative science', writes Kant to Lambert (September 2, 1770), 'general phenomenology (*phaenomenologia generalis*), seems to be presupposed by metaphysics'.

121 Niels Willem BOKHOVE, *Phänomenologie: Ursprung und Entwicklung des Terminus im 18. Jahrhundert* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1991), 148.

122 Glenn Alexander MAGEE, *The Hegel Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2010), 167.

123 MAGEE, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001; revised ed., 2008).

124 *Hegel Dictionary*, 29.

In effect, both subjectivity and objectivity are seen by Hegel as desires or drives by which absolute spirit seeks to know itself by encountering itself as an other.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the duality between the two domains is non-substantive; it is sublated in the absolute knowledge that both are partial yet fundamentally interrelated expressions of the universal or absolute idea (*absolute Idee*). Unlike the *eidos* of Greek philosophy, Hegel's *Idee* is neither transcendent (per Plato) or immanent (per Aristotle); rather, it is the universal whole that contains the particulars within it and in which each particular appearance or part expresses something of the potential of the holarchical structure of the absolute that contains it. Although it may be argued that this conception is akin to the Platonic cosmos as presented in the *Timaeus* (where the 'circle of the same' [the universal] contains the 'circle of difference' [the particular]), the point to bear in mind is that Hegel's idealism is misunderstood if it is seen as an abstraction. Rather, Hegel's absolute is explicitly configured as a 'concrete universal' (*konkretes Allgemeine*).<sup>126</sup> This idea of reality as both universal and concrete is crucial to understanding the work of de Lubicz, who conceives the alchemical salt (and the philosopher's stone) in a very similar fashion. Hegel, therefore, provides an important piece of conceptual apparatus for the study of Lubiczian alchemy.

In its ultimate form, Hegel's system thus suggest a fundamental nonduality of history and spirit. In the teleology of his system, 'the terminus is at that point where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own self, and the notion corresponds to the object and the object to the notion'.<sup>127</sup> This culmination of *Geist* and *Geschichte* in a unity of subject and object anticipates on a macrocosmic scale the ontological unity of knower and known that lies at the heart of the phenomenological approaches of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Henry Corbin. These approaches are also germane to the conceptual apparatus employed in this thesis. Before they are examined, however, some of the implications of Hegel's system must first be sketched.

It is difficult to overestimate the consequences of Hegel's philosophy, even though his influence is probably felt more in the developments that opposed and reacted to his system (whether consciously or unconsciously), than in any distinct perpetuation of his philosophy *per se*. Among the responses and reactions to Hegel's speculative philosophy of history, for instance, is the consolidation of history itself as a respectable academic discipline, and the development of dialectical materialism as a political philosophy. The significance of both of these developments for modern academic habitudes are profound. The methods of empirical, source-based history were established in the nineteenth century by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) and Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903), largely under the influence of Hegel. Whereas

125 'Otherness still exists', adds MAGEE (171), 'but it is now understood in terms of its place within the whole'.

126 *Hegel Dictionary*, 61.

127 HEGEL, quoted in R. NORMAN, *Hegel's Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 17.

Ranke stripped away the Hegelian *Weltgeist* and placed empirical human agency at the centre of historical processes, Mommsen, the great classicist, was more sympathetic, imbuing his meticulous engagement with contingent historical detail with an overarching “Hegelian” sense of historical destiny.<sup>128</sup> Hegel’s nondual vision of history as consciousness also attracted the attention and opposition of the “young Hegelians”, such as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) and later, Karl Marx (1818–1883), both of whom also saw fit to remove everything “noumenal” or absolute from their analysis of history. Feuerbach would criticise Hegel for trying to synthesise philosophy with religion (rather than science), advancing a materialising critique that would bear a strong influence on Marx’s dialectical materialism (itself a direct inversion of Hegel’s dialectic of spirit).<sup>129</sup> For Marx, it is not a dialectic of ideas (*Geist*) that governs history, but rather the ideas of the *ruling class*: i.e. the ideology of the *elite*. In short, *social forces*, not metaphysical forces, are the actual movers of history. As a direct corollary of this view, philosophy becomes understood more in terms of commitment to political action rather than intellectual speculation.<sup>130</sup> This point is crucial for understanding the philosophical developments in academic methodology throughout the twentieth century, which have been largely dominated by avid (or jaded) Marxists.<sup>131</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Hegel still held a central place in the “British Idealism” of F. H. Bradley (1846–1924). From the 1920s, however, the “Vienna Circle” mounted a strong attack against this approach through a reversion to a strict positivist-empiricism, declaring all metaphysical speculations meaningless. Whereas the positivist-empiricist current fed directly into analytic philosophy (largely of an Anglo-American character), the more speculative or subjective currents of thought found their home in continental philosophy (so-called due to its largely European character). With the advent of postmodernism, however, even continental philosophy becomes opposed to metaphysics and idealism. It can be argued, however, that this too is a response to Hegel, insofar as Hegel was the systematising philosopher *par excellence*

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128 On Mommsen and Hegel, see Alfred HEUSS, *Theodor Mommsen und das 19 Jahrhundert* (Kiel: Hirt, 1956), 75–85.

129 Via Schelling, Hegel’s ideas also influenced Marx’s literary collaborator, Friedrich Engels, as well as Soren Kierkegaard (hence existentialism).

130 As MAGEE notes (*Hegel Dictionary*, 6), ‘by the second half of the twentieth century, fully a third of the world lived under regimes inspired by Marxist theory’.

131 Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault and many other precursors or architects of post-structuralism and post-modernism were all members, at one point, of the *Parti communiste français*, while Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida were all closely tied to other expressions of the revolutionary (or reformist) left. In another line of development, Marx’s method has gained considerable influence through the critical theory of the Frankfurt School through thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas. See WEST, *Continental Philosophy*, 213–7.

and the proponent of one of the grandest of all narratives in modern philosophy. As Magee notes:

while many of the philosophies [...] mentioned thus far are important and thought-provoking in their own right, taken as “responses” to Hegel they are mostly question-begging: they reject the very possibility of doing what Hegel does, without actually identifying how he has failed to do it. In other words, they do not come to terms with the actual details of Hegel’s philosophy and show where the errors lie. Their approach is essentially to sweep Hegel aside, rather than to actually engage him.<sup>132</sup>

Whether justified or not, many secularising, materialist-historical, sociological and antimetaphysical approaches to the analysis of history and culture stem, implicitly or explicitly, from (i) a reaction to Enlightenment idealism, especially as embodied by Descartes and Kant (and later, Hegel), and (ii) a pronounced political commitment to the revolutionary or reformist left, directly following Marx’s inversion of Hegel.<sup>133</sup> Despite the nuances and complexities of these two broad (op)positions (and here one must take into account their numerous variations and permutations), the ramifications are usually oversimplified into a methodological polemic in which the study of history and culture becomes a tacit battleground between idealist or “spiritual” and materialist or “political” commitments. However, this should not preclude a genuine effort at striking a more balanced position. Once again, it is only by recognising the inherent “creative tension” between the polarities, rather than by attempting to uphold a rigid mutual exclusivity between them, that one may hope to establish a Heraclitean ‘harmony of contraries’.<sup>134</sup> This may in fact be truer to Hegel’s dialectical vision than the idea of ‘thesis-antithesis-synthesis’, a formulation Hegel never used.

#### *Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger*

Descartes, Kant, Hegel and even Hume, had already pointed out that all knowledge is carried by consciousness, and this becomes the starting point for modern phenomenology.<sup>135</sup> Based on the principle that ‘no objective science can do justice to the subjectivity that accomplishes science’,<sup>136</sup> Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), in works

132 *Hegel Dictionary*, 7.

133 See comments at n. 131.

134 HERACLITUS, fragment 51: *palintonos harmoniē* (a ‘back-’ or ‘counter-stretched harmony’).

135 In so far as this foundation consolidates the Enlightenment epistemology of an abstract universal subject (Kant), it is also the starting point for the postmodern critique of subjectivity as a secure basis of knowledge.

136 A. D. SMITH, *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* (London: Routledge, 2003), 253, referring to *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (trans. David Carr, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1970), 342 [294–5].

such as the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/1901) and the *Cartesianische Meditatione* (1931), sought to undertake a phenomenology of pure consciousness. In doing this he sought to apprehend the Kantian *Dingen an sich*, the transcendental principles by which consciousness constitutes all experience. Although for Kant the *Dingen* were beyond the grasp of experience, Husserl sought to apprehend them phenomenologically, a method which he considered as nothing less than the foundations for a new absolute science and the basis for the reform of all science. ‘The term phenomenology’, writes Husserl in 1927, ‘designates [...] a new kind of descriptive method [...] and an a priori science derived from it; a science which is intended to supply the basic instrument (*Organon*) for a rigorously scientific philosophy and, in its consequent application, to make possible the methodical reform of all the sciences’.<sup>137</sup> As subjective consciousness formed the deeper empirical and epistemological basis of all external empirical experience (the *Lebenswelt*, taken for granted in the “natural attitude” of empirical perception), its description was seen to form a more fundamental and encompassing order of knowledge than that of the positivist natural sciences, which he criticised as naïve. True empiricism, for Husserl, demands a ‘phenomenological reversal of our gaze’ to the life of consciousness, a reversal of the ‘natural attitude in which everyday life as a whole as well as the positive sciences operate’.<sup>138</sup> This reversal enabled a two-fold direction of description in which both the noetic subject and the noematic object could be encompassed.<sup>139</sup>

The phenomenological method itself proceeds from a rigorous ἐποχή (*epochē*, ‘suspension’, ‘bracketing’) of commitments or judgements concerning what appears in the field of consciousness. Husserl considered it a radicalisation of Descartes’ already radical reduction, which doubted the existence of everything but the pure thinking subject (the *ego cogito*): ‘Accordingly, one might almost call phenomenology a neo-Cartesianism, even though it is obliged—and precisely by the radical development of Cartesian motifs—to reject nearly all the well-known doctrinal content of the Cartesian philosophy’.<sup>140</sup> The goal of the phenomenological reduction was to permit a transition from the factual form (the intentional object perceived through our unidirectional ‘natural attitude’) to the essential form (the *eidōs*), and thus to perceive the transcendental invariants that enable us to comprehend the varied flux of experience. Although Husserl in fact distinguished three types of phenomenology—static, dynamic/genetic, and eidetic—it was the perception of the *eidōs* that constituted the culminating achievement of the phenomenological method: a direct intuition

137 Edmund HUSSERL, ‘Phenomenology’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1927; revised trans. Richard E. Palmer, 1981); Peter McCormick and Frederick Elliston, eds., *Husserl: Shorter Works* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 22.

138 HUSSERL, ‘Phenomenology’, 27.

139 HUSSERL, ‘Phenomenology’, 23, 25. This is presupposed in Brentano’s idea of the *intentionality* of consciousness.

140 HUSSERL, *Cartesian Meditations*, in William McNeill and Karen S. Feldman, eds., *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 97.



(*Anschauung*) of transcendental phenomena. For Husserl, this enabled the resolution of all philosophical antitheses:

In the systematic work of phenomenology, which progresses from intuitively given [concrete] data to heights of abstraction, the old traditional ambiguous antitheses of the philosophical standpoint are resolved—by themselves and without the arts of an argumentative dialectic, and without weak efforts and compromises: oppositions such as between rationalism (Platonism) and empiricism, subjectivism and objectivism, ontologism and transcendentalism, psychologism and antipsychologism, positivism and metaphysics, or the teleological versus the causal interpretation of the world.<sup>141</sup>

With Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Husserl’s student and successor, the emphasis of phenomenology is irrevocably shifted from the field of consciousness (with its essentially epistemological basis), to *being* (and thus an *ontological* basis). In distinction to Husserl’s focus on absolute or transcendental knowledge, Heidegger places the emphasis of phenomenology on *Dasein* (existence), a word which means not so much ‘being there’ (as it is usually translated), but ‘being *here*’ (and thus presence, albeit in an existential rather than metaphysical sense).<sup>142</sup> For Heidegger, Being is transcendental (*‘Sein ist das transcendens schlechthin’*),<sup>143</sup> but it can only be approached in its historically finite, situational form (*Dasein*). Thus, phenomenology and ontology are not separate endeavours, but parts of an intimately related whole, which, as will be seen, pertains directly to the dialectic of the hidden and revealed, and thus the problem of esotericism.

The other aspect of Heidegger’s thought that would have a determining influence on all subsequent phenomenology was his emphasis on hermeneutics or interpretation (*hermeneuein*), an emphasis that he derives chiefly from Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who was in fact reviving a long-standing tradition of textual interpretation rooted in biblical exegesis. As opposed to mere explanation (*Erklären*, an epistemological concern rooted in the *Aufklärung*), hermeneutics applies itself more deeply to the problem of understanding (*Verstehen*). Importantly for phenomenology, Dilthey distinguishes sharply between *Empirie* (experience) and *Empirismus* (empiricism), asserting the fundamental precedence of the facts of consciousness.<sup>144</sup>

141 HUSSERL, ‘Phenomenology’, 34.

142 In German, *da*, while literally cognate with English ‘there’, also means ‘here’ (cf. *da bin ich*, ‘here I am’); thus, *da-sein*, while literally meaning ‘being-there’, may be more accurately rendered ‘being-*here*’ (thus *Zugegensein*, ‘presence’). In philosophical contexts, *Dasein* is the term that German scholastic tradition uses to distinguish existence (*Vorhandensein*, *menschliche Existenz*) from essence (*Sosein*, ‘being thus’).

143 Martin HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, 38; *Being and Time* (trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 62.

144 ‘Empirie, nicht Empirismus’, wrote Dilthey in the 1870s; *Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart:

Contra the Enlightenment emphasis on a pure, theoretical reason, Dilthey emphasises the more *Romantik* elements of *Lebensphilosophie*—‘the whole of human nature as it is revealed in experience, in the study of language, in the study of history’.<sup>145</sup> Here, the defining feature of human subjectivity is not its abstract reason but its lived experience (*Erlebnis*). It is this emphasis on the living historicity of human experience that finds distinct expression in Heidegger’s phenomenology, where the hermeneutics of *Dasein* are not concerned with abstract transcendental essences, but with ‘being in the world’ (*Sein-in-der-Welt*).

In the preliminary sections of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger gives a detailed analysis of the meaning of phenomenology. Here, he explicates the fascinating dynamic at play between what is hidden, and how what is hidden shows itself. The word φαίνομενον (*phainomenon*), according to Heidegger, means ‘that which shows itself, the self-revealing, the manifest’.<sup>146</sup> What shows itself (*das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare*), however, is to be distinguished from mere ‘appearance’ (*Erscheinung*) or ‘seeming’ (*Scheinen*).<sup>147</sup> Responding to the Kantian *Problematik*, Heidegger argues that phenomena are never appearances; rather, appearances and semblances presuppose, indeed are constituted by, phenomena:

According to him [Kant], “appearances” are, in the first place, the ‘objects of empirical intuition’: they are what shows itself in such an intuition. But what thus shows itself (the “phenomenon” in the genuine, primordial sense) is at the same time an ‘appearance’ as an emanation of something which *hides* itself in that appearance—an emanation which announces.<sup>148</sup>

It is not difficult to see how these considerations apply to religion and especially esotericism. Indeed, while the phenomenology of religion has important precursors in the work of Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye and William Brede Kristensen (both of whom take their terminology from Hegel),<sup>149</sup> it is Kristensen’s student,

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B. G. Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1914-1982), vol. XVIII, cited in Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi’s ‘Introduction’ to Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (ed. and trans. Makkreel and Rodi, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 8.

145 DILTHEY, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 51 (trans. Michael Neville).

146 HEIDEGGER, 28/51: ‘das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare’.

147 HEIDEGGER, 29/51.

148 HEIDEGGER, 30/53-4.

149 See CHANTEPIE DE LA SAUSSAYE, Pierre Daniël, *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Mohr, 1887); KRISTENSEN, W. Brede, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion* (trans. John B. Carman, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971). Both Chantepie de la Saussaye and Kristensen draw on Hegel’s distinction between “essence” and “manifestation,” a formulation that would also influence Gerardus van der

Gerardus van der Leeuw, who first integrates the hermeneutics of Dilthey, Husserl and Heidegger into the phenomenology of religion.

The more immediate precursors to the academic study of western esotericism, however, lie within the phenomenological approaches to religion as advanced by Henry Corbin and Mircea Eliade. Luminaries of Carl Jung's *Eranos* symposia from the 1930s through to the 1950s, Eliade and Corbin characteristically distinguish between the outer or "exoteric" aspects of religion and its inner or "esoteric" aspects. The external or exoteric aspects of religion were, to Eliade and Corbin, overemphasised by normative academic methodologies (i.e. by the history, sociology and psychology of religion). As an alternative and complement to these approaches (which were regarded as reductive), Corbin in particular employed the phenomenological and hermeneutic methods then developing in continental philosophical circles to provide a living, *ontological* mode of access to religion. Phenomenology and hermeneutics thus become keys to what Corbin and Eliade regard as the esoteric dimension of religion—its ontological presence (*Sein, Dasein*). As opposed to "exotericism" (the external history, the ethical and legal prescriptions, and the sociological functions of religion), "esotericism" was accordingly presented as the deepest, innermost, mystical core or "essence" of a religion. In Platonic terms, Corbin and Eliade were thus concerned less with the *becoming* of religion, and more with its *being*. The two aspects, however, were seen to form an integral whole.

### *The Phenomenology of Religion*

In his 1926 article, 'Über einige neuere Ergebnisse der psychologischen Forschung und ihre Anwendung auf die Geschichte, insonderheit die Religionsgeschichte', Gerardus van der Leeuw distinguishes between empirical and phenomenological methods as general approaches within the academy. Employing Dilthey's crucial distinction between explanation and understanding (*Erklären* and *Verstehen*), van der Leeuw points out that empiricists assume an existential distance between subject and object (i.e. between researcher and phenomenon), while phenomenologists avoid the ideal of detachment entirely, seeking conscious participation in the phenomenon in question. Thus, whereas the empiricists seek to *explain* phenomena from a distance, phenomenologists seek to *understand* phenomena through direct conscious engagement.<sup>150</sup>

As Daniels observes in his essay on van der Leeuw's phenomenology (and as Husserl has already pointed out with regard to the positivist sciences), the link between these two seemingly opposed approaches is to be found in 'the frank

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Leeuw.

150 DANIELS, John, 'How new is Neo-phenomenology? A Comparison of the Methodologies of Gerardus van der Leeuw and Jacques Waardenburg', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7, 1 (1995): 44.

acknowledgement in phenomenology of the subjective pole of all human activity, including scholarly research'.<sup>151</sup> The ramifications of this are significant, for 'the accent on detachment [...] leads to a much reduced existential involvement in the object of study'. Continues Daniels:

This in turn gives rise to the hope of a single theoretical framework within which the world can be understood, since the variations in perception concomitant with varying viewpoints are minimised. The result is a picture of the world which is reassuringly "objective" and certain. It is also, in the view of van der Leeuw, a picture which is existentially truncated and therefore limited to a corresponding degree.<sup>152</sup>

Despite the limitations of empiricism, van der Leeuw's method regards both the objective *and* subjective poles of academic research as equally necessary. This perception of phenomena as fundamentally two-fold, possessing both a subjective and an objective pole, underpins van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933), which discusses religion specifically in terms of its "essence" and "manifestation".<sup>153</sup> His method proceeds in the following manner. Having first gathered the objective data according to standard empirical procedures (the clarification or *Erklären* of the matter at hand), the phenomenologist then applies a form of "conscious empathy" in order to enter into (and thus participate in) the object. Once this empathic engagement is established, a Husserlian *epochē* is applied in order that the "essences" that constitute the experience may be disclosed to understanding (*Verstehen*). This "restraint" or "holding" of one's presuppositions is vital to the procedure; *Verstehen* must be rendered open to modification by new truth.<sup>154</sup> For this same reason, the understanding distilled from the phenomenological apperception must also be kept open to revision in light of further empirical data.

It is important to emphasise here that the capacity for phenomenology to *integrate* empiricism, i.e. to oscillate between objective and subjective standpoints, is not reciprocated by empiricism. Whereas phenomenology encompasses objective experience (*empirismus*) as an extension of *Empirie* (subjective experience, the facts of consciousness), the opposite is not true: empiricism itself (in the narrowly conceived or naïve sense) is unable to integrate phenomenology. This point is often overlooked in debates that seek to perpetuate a crude binary opposition between phenomenology and empiricism, and which, upon closer inspection, are revealed as a false dichotomy. Recognition of this goes a long way to resolving the methodological impasses that are perpetuated in the study of religion and esotericism.

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151 DANIELS, 'Neo-phenomenology', 45.

152 DANIELS, 'Neo-phenomenology', 45.

153 LEEUW, Gerardus van der, *epilegomena to Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (J. E. Turner, trans., Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

154 DANIELS, 'Neo-phenomenology', 46-7.

That having been said, it is also important to note some of the shortcomings of the phenomenological approach. One criticism that may be noted is that in the search for *a priori* categories (such as “religion” or “esotericism”), one is in danger of projecting one’s pre-understanding of the phenomenon onto the data before one even reaches it (thus compromising it before one “opens up” to it). That is to say, one may close off vital forms of empirical data, such as physics, biology, chemistry, history, sociology, politics, anthropology, psychology and so forth, simply by virtue of one’s subjective, preconceived notion of “religion” or “esotericism” as an independent, *sui generis* category. The phenomenological approach first demands the dismantling of artificial barriers received from previous scholars (phenomenologists or otherwise); this is precisely where the more “detached” method of empirical explanation—with its cultural-historical “situatedness”—is needed to counterbalance the more “engaged” method of phenomenological understanding. Balanced scholarship, I suggest, demands both detached objectivity *and* empathic participation. If the subjective pole of phenomena is overemphasised, one risks losing the benchmark of empirical falsification; if the objective pole is overemphasised, one risks losing the touchstone of living human meaning. It is precisely for this reason that phenomenology and empiricism are to be regarded less as diametric opposites, and more as complementary methods in a greater dialectic. In many respects, both methods serve to “keep each other honest”. Indeed, as Steven Kepnes argues (drawing on the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur), the study of religion requires nothing less than a *rapprochement* between the two methods of *Verstehen* and *Erklären*.<sup>155</sup>

#### *Phenomenology versus History*

One is now in a position to appreciate how the polemic that emerges between “history” and “phenomenology” is simply a restatement of the same false dichotomy that pits the objective pole of concrete experience (empiricism) against the subjective pole of conscious experience (phenomenology). For scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Raffaele Pettazzoni, and Henry Corbin, religious phenomenology is in the final analysis *complementary* to the historical or empirical approaches to religion. While the language of such scholars typically betrays a higher regard for the essential meanings rather than the contingencies of religious phenomena, the methodology that they explicitly affirm is, at least in principle, conceived as an integral engagement with both phenomenology *and* history. In 1961, in the opening issue of his journal, *History of Religions*, Eliade writes:

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155 Steven D. KEPNES, ‘Bridging the Gap between Understanding and Explanation: Approaches to the Study of Religion’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25 (1986): 504-12.

[...] the *homo religiosus* represents the “total man”; hence, the science of religions must become a total discipline, in the sense that it must use, integrate, and articulate the results obtained by the various methods of approaching a religious phenomenon. In the past few years a number of scholars have felt the need to transcend the alternative *religious phenomenology* and *History of Religions* and to reach a broader perspective in which these two intellectual operations can be applied together. It is toward the integral conception of the science of religions that the efforts of scholars seem to be orienting themselves today. To be sure, these two approaches correspond in some degree to different philosophical temperaments. And it would be naive to suppose that the tension between those who try to understand the *essence* and the *structures* and those whose only concern is the *history* of religious phenomena will one day be completely done away with. But such a tension is creative. It is by virtue of it that the science of religions will escape dogmatism and stagnation.<sup>156</sup>

In light of the past fifty years of what may only loosely be called “developments” in method and theory in the study of religion, Eliade’s remarks on the opposed philosophical temperaments (and the creative tension that exists between them) remain deeply apposite. At the same time, this creative opposition must be recognised as underpinning the polemic against historicism and sociology that one discerns not only here, but in Eliade’s *œuvre* generally; a polemic that is not to be understood as an attack on empirical approaches *per se*, but rather on the mutually exclusivist (and fundamentally materialist) mentality that disavows the validity of any pre- or meta-empirical approaches to the history of religions. As Allen points out, Eliade was not ahistorical *per se*; he was interested in a particular *interpretation* or *philosophy* of history, one which ran parallel to the much more pervasive critique of modernity advanced by the Traditionalists and their thorough-going ‘revolt against the modern world’ (to adapt an expression from one of their leading exponents).<sup>157</sup> Historicism, for Eliade, wasn’t enough to escape what he called the ‘terror of history’ (i.e. the meaninglessness of modern humanity divorced from its spiritual roots). His critique of *merely* historical and explanatory approaches to religion was thus based upon their perceived inability to do proper justice to the inherent *meaning* of religious phenomena. ‘Like it or not’, comments Eliade, ‘the scholar has not finished his work when he has reconstructed the history of a religious form or brought out its sociological, economic or political

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156 Mircea ELIADE, ‘History of Religions and a New Humanism’, *History of Religions* 1, 1 (1961): 2.

157 ALLEN, Douglas, ‘Encounters with Mircea Eliade and his Legacy for the Twenty-First Century’, *Religion* 38 (2008): 324-5; the expression ‘revolt against the modern world’ comes from Julius EVOLA’s *Rivolta contra il mondo moderno* (Milan: Hoelpi, 1934; Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1993); on Eliade, Evola and Traditionalism, see Mark SEDGWICK, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 110 ff.

contexts. In addition, he must understand its meaning—that is, identify and elucidate the situations and positions that have induced or made possible its appearance or its triumph at a particular historical moment'.<sup>158</sup>

Thus, although the phenomenological approach to religion is usually criticised for its ahistorical methodology (even though its very “ahistoricity” is explicitly advanced as a complement to, rather than a replacement of, the perceived one-sidedness of the historical approach to religion), it is clear that it is not the (a)historicity of religious phenomenology that is problematic to its critics, but rather the *philosophy of history* underpinning, or suggested by, this phenomenology. This is nowhere more explicit than in the work of Henry Corbin, and in many respects, the philosophy of history more popularly expounded by Eliade must be regarded as having its more rigorous intellectual foundations in the work of his French friend and colleague. More than any other, it is Corbin’s phenomenology of religion that introduces the Heideggerian bedrock of ontology into the domain of *Religionswissenschaft*.

#### *The Phenomenology of Henry Corbin*

It is through the œuvre of Henry Corbin (1903–1978) that phenomenology and hermeneutics, in the senses detailed above, enter most thoroughly into *Religionswissenschaft* generally and the study of western esotericism in particular. Although Corbin is best known as an Iranologist, where he is chiefly recognised for his work as the first European editor and translator of Shihāboddīn Yahya Suhrawardī (published from 1945–1970 through the *Bibliothèque iranienne* series),<sup>159</sup> his deeper and more abiding vocation is as a philosopher, metaphysician and sophiologist.

Having studied medieval philosophy under Étienne Gilson, Corbin was introduced to the richness of the Islamic intellectual world first and foremost as a philosopher rather than as a religious historian; he was also a talented Germanist, and together these skills lead him to become, in his early career (i.e. throughout the 1930s), a prolific translator of contemporary thinkers such as Karl Barth, H. Conrad-Martius, H. de Man and Karl Jaspers.<sup>160</sup> His first translation of Suhrawardī (with Paul

158 ELIADE, ‘New Humanism’, 7.

159 Shihāboddīn Yahyā SUHRAWARDĪ, *Opera metaphysica et mystica I: Edita et prolegomenis instructa* (Istamboul: Bibliotheca Islamica 16a, 1945 [Réédition 1976]); *Opera metaphysica et mystica II: Prolegomènes en français et édition critique*. Coll. « Bibliothèque iranienne », 2 (Téhéran/Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1952 [Réédition, 1976-3, 1994-6]); *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques, vol. II (Opera metaphysica et mystica III)*. Œuvres en persan éditées avec une introduction par S. H. Nasr. Prolegomènes, analyses et commentaires par H. Corbin. Coll. « Bibliothèque iranienne », 17 (Téhéran/Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1970 [Réédition 1977]).

160 K. BARTH, ‘Misère et grandeur de l’église évangélique’, trans. H. Corbin, *Foi et Vie* 39 (1932); H. CONRAD-MARTIUS, ‘L’Existence, la substantialité et l’être’, trans. H. Corbin,

Kraus) also appeared during this period.<sup>161</sup> Perhaps most importantly (methodologically speaking), Corbin was the first French translator of Heidegger.<sup>162</sup> This deep interest in philosophy, theology and phenomenology, in addition to his work in Islamic prophetic philosophy, gives an intimation of the breadth of Corbin's purview. To help complete the picture, it may be added that Corbin also drew deeply from the wellsprings of the German theosophical tradition—from Jacob Boehme to Franz von Baader (the very milieu in which the term phenomenology arose)—as well as from the hermetic and Platonic traditions generally. All of this was part of a personal and professional quest for *sophia* (wisdom), whose horizons were, for Corbin, never restricted to *philosophia*, *theologia*, or *theosophia*, but rather, sought to encompass all of them under the aegis of a highly sophisticated sophiology. 'A philosopher's campaign must be led simultaneously on many fronts', comments Corbin in a 1978 interview, 'especially if the philosophy in question is not limited to the narrow rationalist definition that certain thinkers of our days have inherited from the philosophers of the "enlightenment." Far from it! The philosopher's investigations should encompass a wide enough field that the visionary philosophies of a Jacob Boehme, of an Ibn 'Arabi, of a Swedenborg etc. can be set there together, in short, that scriptural and visionary (imaginal) works may be accommodated as so many sources offered up to philosophical contemplation. Otherwise *philosophia* no longer has anything to do with *sophia*.'<sup>163</sup>

Because Corbin's purview is central to the origins of the academic study of western esotericism as a formal discipline, it is important to dwell on his approach in some detail. Although his vocation was in many respects only secondarily that of a historian of religions, his philosophy nevertheless has a crucial bearing upon that discipline (and

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*Recherches philosophiques*, t. 2 (1933): 148-181; H. de MAN, *L'Idée socialiste*. trans. H. Corbin et A. Kojevnikoff (Paris: B. Grasset, 1935); K. JASPERS, 'La Norme du jour et la passion pour la nuit', trans. H. Corbin, *Hermès* 3e série, 1 (1938), 51-68; J. G. HAMANN, 'Aesthetica in nuce: Rhapsodie en prose kabbalistique', trans. H. Corbin, *Mesures*, janv. (1939).

161 'Suhrawardî d'Alep: Le bruissement de l'aile de Gabriel (Awâz-e Parr-e Jabrâ'yêl); Traitè philosophique et mystique', ed. and trans. H. Corbin et P. Kraus, *Journal asiatique*, juill.-sept. (1935) = *L'Archange Empourpré* (1976-5), 221-264.

162 M. HEIDEGGER, 'Hölderlin et l'essence de la poésie', trans. H. Corbin, *Mesures* 3, 15 juill. (1937), 120-143; *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique ? Suivi d'extraits sur l'être et le temps et d'une conférence sur Hölderlin*, trans. H. Corbin (avec un avant-propos et des notes) (Paris: Gallimard, 1938); 'Phénoménologie de la mort' (*Sein und Zeit*, § 52-§ 53), trans. H. Corbin, *Hermès* 3e série, 1, janv. (1938), 37-51.

163 *Cahier de l'Herne: Henry Corbin* (dirigé par Christian Jambet, Paris: L'Herne, 1981), 23-37, 38-56: 'My education is originally philosophical, which is why, to all intents and purposes, I am neither a Germanist nor an Orientalist, but a Philosopher pursuing his Quest wherever the Spirit guides him. If it has guided me towards Freiburg, towards Teheran, towards Ispahan, for me the latter remain essentially "emblematic cities", the symbols of a permanent voyage'.



its sub-discipline). Corbin's philosophical approach to religion and esotericism was fundamentally situated within the tradition of hermeneutics, which he was already familiar with through Protestant theology, through Dilthey, and finally, through Heidegger.<sup>164</sup>

Corbin met Heidegger in Freiburg in 1934 and 1936, and in 1938 published a translation of Heidegger's *Was ist Metaphysik?* (*Qu'est ce que la Métaphysique*). For Corbin, the Heideggerian method became the *clavis hermeneutica* that enabled him to open up the legacy of *ishraqi* theosophers such as Suhrawardī and Mulla Sadra. 'What I was enchanted to rediscover in Heidegger', comments Corbin, 'was essentially the filiation of hermeneutics itself passing through the theologian Schleiermacher, and if I lay claim to phenomenology, it is because philosophical hermeneutics is essentially the key that opens the hidden meaning (etymologically the *esoteric*) underlying the exoteric statement'.<sup>165</sup>

The idea of hermeneutics as a key is crucial, and here Corbin makes an important distinction between the hermeneutic key itself, and the "lock" that is opened by this key.<sup>166</sup> For Corbin, 'the *clavis hermeneutica* opens all the locks that close access to the veiled, to the occulted, to the esoteric'. The significance of Heidegger for Corbin lies not so much in him providing the key itself, which, as indicated, has a long-standing tradition in biblical exegesis, arriving to Heidegger through Schleiermacher and also Dilthey; rather, the significance was in how he *used* the key. For Corbin, this use was not bound to the perpetuation of Heidegger's worldview (no more than history as a dialectic process, for instance, is bound to Hegel's spiritual worldview).<sup>167</sup> This much is clear simply by looking at the differences between the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, in which one is committed to a transcendental worldview, and the

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164 In 1934, Corbin reviewed van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion* (*Revue critique*, 1934, 486-489), Dilthey's *Von deutscher Dichtung und Musik, aus den Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* (*Recherches philosophiques*, t. 3, 1933-1934, 434), and Franz Brentano's *Kategorienlehre, Mit Unterstützung der Brentano-Gesellschaft* (*Recherches philosophiques*, t. 3, 1933-1934, 433-434).

165 *Cahier de l'Herne: Henry Corbin*.

166 *Cahier de l'Herne: Henry Corbin*: 'Inevitably, because on the one hand the concept of hermeneutics had a Heideggerian flavour, and because on the other hand my first publications concerned the great Iranian philosopher Suhrawardī, certain historians stubbornly maintained their "virtuous insinuations" that I had "mixed up" (sic) Heidegger with Suhrawardī. But to make use of a key to open a lock is not at all the same thing as to confuse the key with the lock. It wasn't even a question of using Heidegger as a key, but rather of making use of the same key that he had himself made use of, and which was at everyone's disposition'.

167 *Cahier de l'Herne*: 'This key is, if I may say so, the principal tool with which the phenomenologist's mental laboratory is equipped. But to make use of this *clavis hermeneutica*—Heidegger having shown one how it might be used and adapted—does not in any way demand, nor in any way mean, that one therefore shares the same world view, the same *Weltanschauung* as Heidegger'.

other to a decidedly temporal worldview. Such philosophical predispositions flowed, for Corbin, from a ‘pre-existential philosophical choice’ founded on an ‘act of presence’ which only secondarily becomes situated in *Dasein*:

The hermeneutic proceeds from the “act of presence” signified in the *Da* of the *Dasein*; its task is therefore to illuminate how, in understanding itself, the human *Being-there* situates itself, circumscribes the *Da*, the *situs* of its presence and unveils the horizon which had up until then remained hidden. The metaphysics of the *Ishrâqîyûn*, and par excellence that of a Mollâ Sadrâ culminates in a metaphysics of Presence (*hozûr*). Around this *situs*, Heidegger arranges all the ambiguity of human finitude characterized as a “Being-toward-Death” (*Sein zum Tode*). With a Mollâ Sadrâ, or an Ibn ‘Arabi, the Presence as they experience it in this world—as it is unveiled by the “phenomenon of the world” lived by them—is not that Presence whose finality is death, a Being-towards-Death, but a “Being-towards-Beyond-Death”, let us say: *Sein zum Jenseits des Todes*. One may see quite clearly that the conception of the world, the pre-existential philosophical choice, whether it be that of Heidegger, or that of our Iranian “theosophers”, is itself constitutive of the *Da* of the *Dasein*, of the act of Being-there present to the world and its variants. From here on in, all that remains to be done is to hold and press this notion of Presence, as closely and as intently as possible. To what is this human presence, this Being-there, present?

Following from the ‘act of presence’ (which determines one’s *situs* in *Dasein*), one’s existential responsibility is thus to find the form ‘adapted to the lock [one has] to open’. For Mulla Sadra, the *clavis hermeneutica* opens the lock of Suhrawardi; for Swedenborg, it ‘opens the locks of the Bible’s *Arcana caelestia*’; for Heidegger, it uncovers *die Frage des Seins*; for Corbin, it unlocks the sophiology of the *mundus imaginalis*, the realm which ‘spiritualises bodies and corporealises the spiritual’ (a concept central to his understanding of esotericism).

Once again, one must distinguish the philosophical *clavis* from the philosophical *Weltanschauung* that is opened by means of this *clavis*. For the worldview itself, as Eliade recognised, is ultimately a matter of philosophical temperament. The distinction between lock and key is crucial to comprehending the difference (but also relationship) between Corbin’s method and his philosophical position, a difference/interrelationship that most critics of Corbin have entirely failed to take into account. If this point is being pressed, it is precisely because Corbin’s methodology is usually dismissed not because of the key, but because of the door he chose to open with that key. Therefore, before turning to Corbin’s lock, it is first necessary to understand his key.

*Knowledge by Presence*

Heidegger's shift of philosophical emphasis from epistemology (Descartes, Kant, Husserl) to ontology, and thus *die Frage des Seins*, provided the basis for Corbin's phenomenological approach to 'knowledge by presence' or 'knowledge as a mode of being'; ontological knowledge, for Corbin, 'does not pass via the intermediary of a representation'; rather, it is 'immediate presence'.<sup>168</sup> In a 1978 interview, Corbin speaks at length about his relationship to Heidegger's thought, emphasising the importance of subjective presence to knowledge:

The phenomenon of the senses, which is fundamental to the metaphysics of *Sein und Zeit*, is the link between the signifier and signified. But what is this link, without which the signifier and signified would remain objects of only theoretical consideration? This link is the subject, and this subject is presence, presence of the mode of being to the mode of understanding. Pre-sence, *Da-sein*.<sup>169</sup>

The fundamental connection between knowing and being, between epistemology and ontology, is central to Corbin's approach (and contribution) to *Religionswissenschaft*. Because his philosophical horizons encompassed east and west, it was natural for him to discern the same "Heideggerian" difference between knowing and being in his encounter with the twelfth century Persian illuminationist theosopher, Shihābaddīn Yahyā Suhrawardī. Almost eight hundred years before Heidegger, Suhrawardī's *Kitāb Hikmat al-Isbrāq* makes a fundamental distinction between "mediated" or "representational" knowledge (*ilm al-husūlī*) and "direct" or "presentational" knowledge (*ilm al-huzūrī*),<sup>170</sup> a distinction that would be rendered explicit in the seventeenth century by Mulla Sadra. As Ibrahim Kalin observes, 'unification of intellect and intelligible already implies this very premise: perfect cognition obtains when there is no epistemic rupture between knowledge and knower'.<sup>171</sup>

168 CORBIN, *Cahier de l'Herne* 39 (dirigé par Christian Jambet, Paris: éd. de l'Herne, 1981), 31: 'ne passe pas par l'intermédiaire d'une *représentation*, [...] mais est présence immédiate'.

169 Henry CORBIN in Christian JAMBET, ed. *Henry Corbin* (Paris: L'Herne, 1981), 25-6: 'Le phénomène du sens, qui est fondamental dans la métaphysique de *Sein und Zeit*, c'est le lien entre le signifiant et le signifié. Mais qu'est-ce qui fait ce lien, sans lequel signifiant et signifié resteraient aussi bien des objets de considération théorique? Ce lien, c'est le sujet, et ce sujet c'est la présence, présence du mode d'être au mode de comprendre. Pré-sence, *Da-sein*'.

170 SUHRAWARDI, *Le Livre de la sagesse orientale*, II, xi, § 165 (150); Commentaires de Molla Sadra Shirazi, I, § 319 (445).

171 Ibrahim KALIN, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170.

The point is best comprehended through a concrete example. The cardinal difference between indirect knowledge and direct or “presential” knowledge (*connaissance pré-sentielle*)<sup>172</sup> is best illustrated by the difference between *knowing* about love and *being* in love. The first instance is merely approximate knowledge; one knows of love only from a distance, from a detached, external perspective. The second instance is immediate and irrefutable: one knows love directly through pure, unadulterated experience. And like love itself, the knowledge gained from direct presential experience of the phenomenon is innately and immediately persuasive, for it not only *transforms* the subject, it transforms their *reasoning*. All externally imposed rational edifices, insofar as they are at variance with the raw experience, fall in the face of love’s direct compulsion.<sup>173</sup> Having said that, an important point must be made here: knowledge acquired through the immediate presence of a phenomenon is by no means absolute or infallible. We have all been fools for love. But at the same time, our mature knowledge of the phenomenon—our *wisdom*, as it were (i.e. our *sophia*)—only comes about through having undergone extensive experience of it. And of course, there is nothing whatsoever to stop a wealth of experience based upon knowledge-by-presence from being synthesised with perspectives gleaned from a distance. Indeed, this, I argue, is actually the most healthy approach to the problem of knowledge; as such, it should clearly inform any pretence to the love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*).

Now, knowledge by presence has a number of significant implications when transposed to the domain of religious studies and metaphysics. For one, it cuts clearly and directly against the dualistic premises of “objectivity”, for in order to know religious or metaphysical phenomena, one has to dive into them with one’s very being. This is the point where one departs from Heidegger and enters the stream of

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172 CORBIN, *Le Livre de la sagesse orientale*, 445.

173 In a similar vein, van der Leeuw uses the example of the swimmer who obviously knows the phenomenon of the river far better than the one who merely examines it from the bank but never dives into it. Ontological knowledge, in any domain, is infinitely superior to mere conceptual knowledge (including linguistic knowing, Wittgenstein notwithstanding). Pain is another example of “knowledge” known through its direct presence to one’s being. Although it may be argued that one does not need to be hit by a bus to know that it is bad, such knowledge is always extrapolated from raw ontological experience, the presence of pain. Cf. SUHRAWARDI, *al-Mashari’ wa’l-mutarabat*, 485, cited in KALIN, 170: ‘One of the points that support our claim that we have perceptions that do not need a form other than the very presence of what is perceived is the following: one is in pain of a cut in one of his organs and feels it. But this cut does not assume another form of representation in this organ or another. Rather, what is perceived is this very cut, and it is what is sensed and pain by itself, not by another form that issues from it. This proves that among the things perceived it is sufficient for their essence, in order for them to be perceived, to be in the soul or to have a relation of presence particular to the soul’. Also pertinent here are Kalin’s remarks (170, 193 nn. 206-7) on Wittgenstein and “pain language” (cf. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 246, 248, 283).

Suhrawardī (this being precisely the trajectory of Corbin).<sup>174</sup> Beyond the path of simply *believing* in meta-empirical realities (faith), and beyond the path of *rationally justifying* or *criticising* the existence of such realities (reason), lies the path of knowledge through *being*. In other words, this is the path of *gnosis*. To the “objective” academic, it is almost invariably seen as anathema. Here, however, it must be recognised that the so-called “objective” (or objectifying) scholar, by keeping his or her being “at a distance” from the phenomenon under scrutiny (e.g. by making a clear division between “etic” and “emic” perspectives), is imposing a subject-object dualism that effectively cuts the knower off from any numinous knowledge (i.e. direct ontological experience) of that which they purport to study.<sup>175</sup>

The fundamental *immediacy* of this epistemological premise still has much to offer, especially at a time when western academia, as Nile Green points out in a recent essay on Corbin’s methodology, ‘is increasingly uncertain of its ability to interpret or even comprehend the phenomena of other cultures’.<sup>176</sup> Corbin’s premise that there is neither truly “east” nor “west” in the geographic sense, no dichotomy of “western philosophy” and “Islamic philosophy”, but ‘only philosophy, only phenomena’, provides a necessary antidote to epistemological agnosticism.<sup>177</sup> Such an approach is neither simplistic nor naïve; rather, it stems precisely from the ontological principle described above: ‘the principle (Heideggerian or otherwise) that Being is the only thing that can know being’.<sup>178</sup>

### *Corbin’s Philosophy of History*

Corbin’s fundamental distinction between knowledge and being corresponds to two dimensions of history that, in the final analysis (at least from a methodological point of view), are to be seen as complementary: an objective or exoteric dimension and a subjective or esoteric dimension. Drawing on the framework provided by the fourteenth century Iranian mystic, ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Semnānī, Corbin situates material historicity in horizontal time (*zamān āfāqī*, the ‘time of horizons’), which is contrasted against the ontological dimension of history, or ‘vertical time’ (*zamān anfūsī*, ‘psycho-spiritual time’).<sup>179</sup> Here, the hermeneutics of ontological time inhere not in studying the things of the past as if they were dead (the realm of what “has been”), but rather of rendering them alive in the ontological present (bringing them *into* being). As Nile

174 See GREEN, ‘Hidden Imam’, 222,

175 It should be noted that the numinous knowledge, or experience gained through a phenomenology of religious realities, does not necessarily tell the investigator anything about its exploitation by socio-religious institutions.

176 GREEN, ‘Hidden Imam’, 221.

177 GREEN, ‘Hidden Imam’, 221.

178 GREEN, ‘Hidden Imam’, 221.

179 CORBIN, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (London: Shambhala, 1978), 132.

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Green argues, Corbin's meta-, trans-, or hiero-historical approach actually has more in common with Heidegger's emphasis on 'being in time' than one may at first suspect, for, according to Heidegger, 'in its factual Being *Dasein* always is as and 'what' it already was. Whether explicitly or not, it *is* its past'.<sup>180</sup> This, adds Green, is the perspective from which Corbin's writings must be read:

The historicist perspective is based upon the supposition of a materialist view of history (there need be no sense in history); Corbin's world, and/or the world of his subjects, is based on a spiritually immanent view of history (there must be sense in history). Thus, while Corbin went against the tradition of modern historical scholarship, from first principles his rationale has no less validity than the materialist paradigm. As a trained philosopher, Corbin felt that his critics had no greater philosophical basis to their approach to the past than he did himself. Although Corbin was keen to stress the importance of historical awareness on the materialist level, he nonetheless felt that to be aware only on this level was one of the great tragedies of the modern age. A tragedy because such awareness robs humanity of a living connection with its past, a past that on the level of material history is, perforce, dead.<sup>181</sup>

The phenomenological approach to history, i.e. of approaching historical objects through their "presence" rather than their "past", means that the objects of history only become knowable insofar as they are evoked to living presence in the consciousness of the investigator. Empirical resources (e.g. source texts and other cultural artefacts) obviously serve as a basis for this evocation, and are not by any means neglected; but the fact remains that any engagement with the "past" only occurs through its presentation to consciousness. This, of course, is a two edged sword, and underlies the recognition that any so-called "objective study" says as much, if not more, about the subjectivity of the investigator as it does about the "object" under investigation. Here, history becomes understood as a meaningful encounter between consciousness and its "presentiations" of the past, rather than as a naively "objective" endeavour. As Gadamer recognised, one cannot escape the fact that all scholarship entails a juncture of two hermeneutic horizons: that of the subject and that of the object.<sup>182</sup>

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180 GREEN, 'Hidden Imam', 224; HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings* (ed. D. F. KRELL, London: Routledge, 1994), 63.

181 GREEN, 224.

182 Hans-Georg GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960).

*Corbin's Concept of Esotericism*

Having described Corbin's method (*clavis*), it remains to describe the lock that he opened with this key, i.e. his philosophy or world-view (and the meaning this has for the study of esotericism). Following the hermeneutic method, Corbin approached religion precisely in terms of the dynamic interplay between the hidden (esoteric, *bātin*) and the revealed (exoteric, *zāhir*). This precisely defined, deeply Heideggerian phenomenological dynamic at the centre of Corbin's approach has been almost entirely ignored in the reception of his work in general, and in his approach to esotericism in particular. Indeed, due to his presence at Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn's Eranos conferences, Corbin's approach is summarily dismissed as "religionist" through a careless identification with Jung's approach.<sup>183</sup> This drastic oversimplification overlooks some very important differences and distinctions that Corbin himself went to specific pains to point out.

Corbin's worldview centred on the ontological position of the *mundus imaginalis*, and this remains his most important philosophical contribution. The *mundus imaginalis*, for Corbin, is precisely a mediating world between the esoteric and the exoteric. It is the liminal ontological *situs* that *conceals through revelation* and *reveals through concealment*, and as such partakes precisely of the Heideggerian phenomenological dynamic discussed earlier:

It attaches itself essentially to the device of Greek science: *sōzein ta phainomena*, to save the phenomena (the appearances) [...] The phenomenon is that which shows itself, that which is apparent and which in its apparition shows something that cannot reveal itself in and of itself other than by remaining simultaneously hidden under its appearance. [...] In the philosophical and religious sciences, the phenomenon announces itself in technical terms derived from the Greek element *-phany*: epiphany, theophany, hierophany, etc. Phenomenology consists in "saving the phenomena", in saving the appearance, by disengaging or unveiling the hidden that shows itself under this appearance. The *logos* of the phenomenon (of phenomeno-logy), is therefore called the hidden, the invisible present under the visible. It is to let the phenomenon show itself as it appears to the subject to which it shows itself.<sup>184</sup>

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183 Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF, 'Esotericism', *DGWE*, 337: 'Such an understanding, which is also found among the proponents of perennialism [→ Tradition], is particularly congenial to religious studies of a "religionist" orientation (represented by scholars in the tradition of e.g. Mircea Eliade, → Henry Corbin, and → Carl Gustav Jung). Such approaches tend to promote the esoteric or "inner" dimension of religion as its true core, and oppose it to more "superficial", merely "exoteric" dimensions, such as social institutions and official dogmas.'

184 CORBIN, *Philosophie iranienne et philosophie comparée* (Paris: Buchet/Castel, 1985), 22-23: 'Elle se rattache essentiellement à la devise de la science grecque: *sōzein ta phainomena*,

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Rather than positing a purely transcendent worldview (per Husserl), or a temporal worldview (per Heidegger), Corbin posits the *imaginal* world as the point of transition, indeed translation (*hermeneus*) between the two: it is the *limen* or threshold between the metaphysical and the physical, and in a precise sense fulfils a phenomenological function between *Dasein* and a metaphysics of presence. ‘I have as such done nothing more than attempt to deepen this understanding, firstly in the vast unexplored domain of Shiite Islamic gnosis, and then in the neighbouring domains of Christian and Judaic gnosis’.<sup>185</sup>

The concept of the *mundus imaginalis*, of the imagination as an ontological verity, an organ of visionary apperception mediating the intelligible and the sensible, constitutes Corbin’s mature contribution to *Religionswissenschaft*. Steven Wasserstrom, one of Corbin’s more outspoken critics, aptly likens it to a ‘unified field theory of religious experience’, and in many respects this description captures the deeper significance of Corbin’s phenomenology.<sup>186</sup> For Corbin, the imaginal world is sharply distinguished from the imaginary constructs of human fantasy; the *mundus imaginalis* is the phenomenological locus in which visionary objects appear to human experience with full ontological presence, and as such, it is the precise modality of presential knowledge. Ultimately, Corbin’s *œuvre* seeks nothing less than to reclaim the organ of imaginal apperception in order that ontological experience of the deepest religious realities can reveal itself to human consciousness.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of the phenomenological approach*

Having surveyed the western background to phenomenology generally (Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger), and the connection between being and knowing that Corbin picks up from Heidegger specifically, one is provided with a better means of situating what is usually only vaguely comprehended (hence dismissed) in *Religionswissenschaft* as the “phenomenology of religion”. The strength and weakness of the phenomenological approach is precisely its subjectivity. That the results of this method can be criticised as “subjective” is thus a half-truth. The results of phenomenology can

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sauver les phénomènes (les apparences) [...] Le phénomène, c’est ce qui se montre, ce qui est apparent et qui dans son apparition montre quelque chose qui ne peut se révéler en lui qu’en restant simultanément caché sous son apparence [...] Dans les sciences philosophiques et religieuses le phénomène s’annonce dans les termes techniques où figure l’élément phanie, tiré du grec: épiphanie, théophanie, hiérophanie, etc. La phénoménologie consiste à « sauver le phénomène », sauver l’apparence, en dégageant ou dévoilant le caché qui se montre sous cette apparence. Le Logos du phénomène, la phénoménologie, c’est donc dire le caché, l’invisible présent sous le visible. C’est laisser se montrer le phénomène tel qu’il se montre au sujet à qui il se montre’.

185 Corbin, *Cahier de l’Herne*, 1978.

186 Steven M. WASSERSTROM, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 148.



be idiosyncratic, to be sure (the interpretations of Heidegger himself are testament to this, as are those of Eliade and Corbin). Indeed, the phenomenologist and their “object” may in some cases become too closely intertwined. As Green observes, ‘in his phenomenological identification with his subjects, it becomes difficult to separate Corbin from his subjects, his own thoughts from that of, say, Ibn ‘Arabi or Ruzbehan Baqli. To his supporters, his method of “spiritual hermeneutics” [...] manifests the world of his subjects; to his detractors it manifests only the peculiar world of Henry Corbin’.<sup>187</sup> The flip side of this is that phenomenology is usually more aware of the subjective constitution of the categories and the data that inform all academic research. Its empathetic approach gives it more understanding.

For this reason, it is imperative to integrate the insights of Ricoeur and Kepnes, who seek to resolve the problem by ensuring that explanation and understanding, empiricism and phenomenology, always proceed hand in hand.

Another point to bear in mind is that phenomenology is usually more *creative* than approaches that seek to adhere to the normative limitations of objectivity, empiricism, or representationalism. By integrating subjectivity, experience and presence, scholarship becomes “unsafe”.<sup>188</sup> That is to say, because phenomenology requires putting oneself into one’s work (thus running the obvious risks of subjectivity and idiosyncrasy), the act of scholarship becomes a much more *personal* process. As such, it differentiates itself markedly from the impersonal procedures normally expected of academics. As such, it is more consistent with one’s *being* and therefore more amenable to revealing and fulfilling one’s *own* philosophical quest (whatever that may be), rather than the projects of official “science”.

The other main critique that is usually levelled against the phenomenology of religion is directed not so much at its method but at its worldview. The critique here is that phenomenology plays a sympathetic and ultimately apologetic role, rather than a critical one. In other words, because it *doesn’t* reduce, deconstruct or depose religion, it is seen as tacitly supporting it. This attitude is part of wider debate in

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187 GREEN, 222, citing CORBIN, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, 121.

188 WASSERSTROM, 154–5, even considers Corbin dangerous. Deeply threatened by the fact that Corbin’s personal and professional quest completely eclipsed his “official” role as historian of religions (Corbin not only dared to be a prophetic philosopher, he criticised the modern west’s secular academic assumptions), Wasserstrom rails against Corbin’s credentials as an academic, a historian and a philosopher (roles which Corbin characteristically redefined with a wealth of philosophical justification). With an almost sensationalist rhetorical sensibility, Wasserstrom raises a number of very pointed *ad hominem* arguments against Corbin, and in a number of disingenuous manoeuvres (interlaced with some legitimate concerns), he goes so far as to claim, with Umberto Eco, that the kind of syncretism employed in perennialist/Traditionalist hermeneutics is a ‘fundamental of fascist thinking’. Again, it seems to be more an issue of the *philosophy* of history, and the politics implicitly or explicitly assumed by this philosophy of history, rather than Corbin’s actual academic merits *per se*, that is genuinely at stake in Wasserstrom’s polemic.

*Religionswissenschaft* in which the role of the scholar of religions is affirmed as “critic” and not “caretaker”. Such a call to pure criticism, germane to the very identity of the self-styled “radical critic”, posits a polemical, highly normative view of religious scholarship (indeed, all scholarship) as expressly concerned with the ineluctable contingency of all human endeavour. Metaphysics is accordingly interpreted as a social construct, an ideology having no intrinsic or inherent reality; as such, it is oppressive unless exposed by critical scholars, who are thus self-perceived as benefiting humanity by removing the scales from its eyes.

Subjective approaches, e.g. ontological modes of access, in so far as they are essentialist, are seen to belie metaphysical assumptions, which should be exposed, not defended. Empathetic scholars of religious (or esoteric) phenomena are thus viewed as disguised apologists, while any concession to subjective modes of access is ultimately devalued, after Marx, as “false consciousness”. However, this polemic against the subjective aspect or approach overlooks the important phenomenological distinction between empathy and sympathy (as articulated by van der Leeuw), and the inevitable counterpole to dialectical materialism: the *subjective* pole of all knowledge.

Perhaps due to the fact that, upon first principles, the phenomenological approach stands up as well as any other accepted academic method, Corbin and Eliade have been relentlessly attacked with *ad hominem* arguments.<sup>189</sup> The motive underpinning such attacks appears to lie in a deep resentment for any approach to religion within a supposedly secular academy that seeks to affirm meta-empirical epistemologies (knowledge by presence) as a valid and meaningful modality of truth. Typically, *Religionswissenschaft* (as opposed to theology) builds either upon positivist assumptions (which betray the continued presence of Enlightenment rationalism) or antimetaphysical assumptions (which usually stem from the decisive influence of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche upon critical theory). The phenomenological approach, as applied by Corbin and Eliade, clearly cuts against both positivist and critical theoretical assumptions, and therefore invites opposition. Here it should be noted that, while postmodernist critical theory is just as often a staunch opponent of Enlightenment rationalism as it is of metaphysics, what both positivist-empirical and critical theoretical approaches have in common is a rejection of meta-empirical realities as modalities of truth. They are first and foremost *secular* worldviews, and as such, any approaches that affirm the metaphysical as an ontological reality therefore represent a common enemy. Spiritual realities, according to this attitude, are to be regarded as mere fantasies or social constructs; they do not exist in and of themselves; they are certainly not to be regarded positively for their inherent value; and if they are to be studied at all, it is only to deconstruct them and so expose their fundamental socio-political contingencies.

Although recent scholarship in religious studies has generally dismissed the deeper implications of Eliade’s project in favour of critiquing its perceived political

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189 See especially WASSERSTROM, with my comments in the previous note.

contingencies, his call for the central relevance of *Religionswissenschaft* to a ‘new humanism’ appears, in some respects, to anticipate the much more recent attempts by philosophers such as Habermas to understand religion as a vital constituent of the human condition.<sup>190</sup> As West points out, this recognition of the importance of religion by one of the world’s leading socialist intellectuals from the Frankfurt school of western Marxism has forced serious philosophers to rethink their otherwise secular assumptions.<sup>191</sup> In 2004, Habermas held dialogues with Joseph Ratzinger (shortly before he became Pope Benedict XVI),<sup>192</sup> and one of the results of this dialogue was the beginnings of a mutual recognition of the reciprocity of reason and religion. Thus, in the interest of a renewed dialogue between secular reason and religious traditions, Habermas proposes a dialectic based on mutual recognition:

[T]he religious side must accept the authority of ‘natural’ reason as the fallible results of the institutionalized sciences and the basic principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality. Conversely, secular reason may not set itself up as the judge concerning truths of faith, even though in the end it can accept as reasonable only what it can translate into its own, in principle universally accessible, discourses.<sup>193</sup>

This necessity for a mutual recognition of the secular and the religious allows one to speak, with Habermas, of a *postsäkulare Gesellschaft*, which, not insignificantly, has enormous ramifications for the ideology of secularisation that currently dominates academia. The ramifications of post-secularity, and of a ‘post-secular society’, naturally extend into religious studies within academia, where ironically, secularising attitudes are not always balanced with non-judgemental attitudes to religious truth to create mutually beneficial interaction and understanding, nor even fertile tension, but rather tend to be upheld as deeply normative discourses that *discourage* mutual (i.e. *two-way*) interaction and understanding. As these broader issues filter down into the academic study of esotericism, where a deeper consciousness of the close connection between esoteric religious thought and the emergence of secular values is usually better recognised, one finds the leading representative and methodological spokesperson of that discipline—Wouter Hanegraaff—upholding a rigid, positivist-empiricist position that mitigates against the establishment of a plurality of voices within the discipline. Before the empirical stance of Hanegraaff is examined, however, the trajectory leading

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190 David WEST, *Continental Philosophy*, 83-4, with refs.

191 WEST, 83-4

192 Jürgen HABERMAS and Joseph RATZINGER, *The Dialectics of Secularisation: On Reason and Religion* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2005); *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft and Religion* (Freiburg: Herder 2005).

193 Jürgen HABERMAS, *An Awareness of what is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Polity, Cambridge, 2010), 16; *Ein Bewußtsein von dem, was fehlt* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 2008).

from Corbin and Eranos to the academic study of esotericism proper must first be traced. This lies in the work of Antoine Faivre.

### Academic Approaches to Western Esotericism

In 1965, a chair in the history of Christian esotericism was formally established in the Religious Studies section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at the Sorbonne. The chair was created for François Secret, but it was Henry Corbin who suggested its title ('History of Esoteric Christianity'), thereby planting the seed for the study of western esotericism as a historical current.<sup>194</sup> This marks the first official recognition of esotericism as part of an official program within the academy; one of the first students to complete this program was Antoine Faivre, who would assume the chair himself some fourteen years later.

*Antoine Faivre: Esotericism as a « forme de pensée »*

The formal parameters for the academic study of western esotericism proper were set in place by Antoine Faivre, a colleague and student of Corbin's. Faivre published a study of Kirchenberger and Illuminism in 1966, and his doctoral dissertation on Eckhartshausen and Christian theosophy in 1969, followed by a number of articles on esoteric currents in eighteenth century France and Germany (alchemy, theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Martinism and masonry).<sup>195</sup> From 1975 to 1986, Faivre was a participating member of Corbin's Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem,<sup>196</sup> and published a number of detailed studies in its journal, *Cahiers de l'Université de Saint Jean de Jérusalem*.<sup>197</sup> In 1979, a year after Corbin's death, Faivre took over the

194 Cf. Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF, 'The Birth of Esotericism from the Spirit of Protestantism', *Aries* 10, 2 (2010): 199 n. 4.

195 Antoine FAIVRE, *Kirchberger et l'Illuminisme du dix-huitième siècle* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); *Eckartshausen et la théosophie chrétienne* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969).

196 Cf. CORBIN, 'L'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem, Centre international de recherche spirituelle comparée' and 'Science traditionnelle et renaissance spirituelle', *Cahier de l'Université Saint Jean de Jérusalem* 1 (1975), 8-12, 25-50.

197 Antoine FAIVRE, 'Philosophie de la Nature et naturalisme scientiste', *CUSJJ*, 1 (*Sciences traditionnelles et sciences profanes*, 1975), 90-110; 'Église intérieure et Jérusalem céleste. Fondements d'une anthropologie cosmique selon Franz von Baader et la théosophie chrétienne', *CUSJJ*, 2 (*Jérusalem, la Cité spirituelle*, 1976), 77-91; = *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (1986), 160-173, (1996), I, 138-163; 'Théosophie chrétienne et prophétie', *CUSJJ*, 3 (*La Foi prophétique et le sacré*, 1977), 139-150; 'Les "Noces Chymiques de Christian Rosenkreuz" comme pèlerinage de l'âme', *CUSJJ*, 4 (*Les Pèlerins de l'Orient et les vagabonds de l'Occident*, 1978), 139-153 (= *Accès*, 1986, 193-207; 1996, I, 198-213); 'Les métamorphoses d'Hermès. Cosmologies néo-gnostiques et Gnose traditionnelle', *CUSJJ*, 5

directorship of François Secret's chair in Christian esoteric studies, whereupon it was given the title 'History of esoteric and mystical currents in modern and contemporary Europe'.

According to Faivre, 'L'Europe modern' indicates the period beginning at the end of the fifteenth century and stretching through to contemporary times.<sup>198</sup> Although esoteric currents reach back into antiquity, their emergence as distinct entities in the Latin west at the end of the fifteenth century coincides with a transformation of the *prisca theologia* of the Middle Ages into the *philosophia occulta* and *philosophia perennis* of early modernity.<sup>199</sup> This is because esotericism, before the advent of modernity, was compatible with and embedded within the prevailing theological paradigms; at the end of the Middle Ages, however, the esoteric currents within theology are abandoned and the sciences of nature begin to be cultivated for their own sake; from here on in, western esotericism begins to take on relatively autonomous forms. For Faivre, these developments hinge upon the connection between metaphysics and cosmology:

as long as the cosmological domain (that of "second causes") remained subordinate to the metaphysical (that of "first causes"), the various articulations dealing with that connection presented no problem to theology. [...] but once the sciences of Nature were separated from theology, they started to be cultivated for their own sake (in Christianity and Islam this process began to take hold in the twelfth century). When theology cast off what had formerly been a part of itself, the result was an enormous abandoned field.<sup>200</sup>

This 'enormous abandoned field' was quickly appropriated in the Renaissance by humanist scholars with metaphysical and cosmological leanings; as such, it led to the formation of an 'extra-theological' method for explaining the link between the universal and the particular.<sup>201</sup> This extra-theological imperative took a number of distinct forms, the historical genesis of which Faivre seeks to trace. These include alchemy, *philosophia occulta*, Christian kabbalah, *Naturphilosophie* ('Paracelsism and

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(*Les yeux de chair et les yeux de feu. La science et la gnose*, 1979), 95-120 (= *Accès*, 1986, 327-353; 1996, I, 338-365); 'Synthèse de la session', *CUSJJ*, 6 (*Le combat pour l'Âme du Monde. Urgence de la Sophiologie*, 1980), 225-232; 'Miles Redivivus. Aspects de l'Imaginaire chevaleresque au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Alchimie, Franc-Maçonnerie, Littérature', *CUSJJ*, 10 (*La Chevalerie spirituelle*, 1984), 98-124; (= *Accès*, 1986, 208-234; 1996, I, 214-241); 'Pensées de Dieu, images de l'homme. Figures, miroirs et engendrements selon J. Boehme, F.Ch. Etinger et Franz von Baader', *CUSJJ*, 12 (*Face de Dieu et théophanies*, 1986), 100-119 (= *Accès*, 1996, II, 220-240).

198 FAIVRE, 'Kocku von Stuckrad et la Notion d'Esoterisme', *Aries* 6.2 (2006): 207

199 Antoine FAIVRE and Karen-Claire VOSS, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions', *Numen* 42.1 (1995): [48-77], 50-51.

200 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 51.

201 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 52.

what followed in its wake'), theosophy ('Boehme and his followers'), Rosicrucianism (including 'the various branches of initiatic societies which appeared subsequently'), and hermeticism ('the reception and influence during the modern period of the writings attributed to the mythical Hermes Trismegistus').<sup>202</sup>

The essays that Faivre submitted to Corbin's journal later formed the substantive chapters of his influential book, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (1984/1996).<sup>203</sup> Here, one finds a number of detailed, textual-historical studies on the history and *imaginaire* of modern esotericism, with a particular emphasis on the philosophy of nature, German theosophy generally, and Franz von Baader in particular. The revised edition of *Accès* includes some influential methodological reflections ('Réflexions sur la notion d'ésotérisme') in order to more accurately define (or at least delimit) western esotericism as a referential historical and bibliographical corpus.<sup>204</sup> Here, Faivre proposes an essentially morphological typology in which esotericism is defined as a form of thought (*forme de pensée*) constituted by four essential and two non-essential characteristics or components: (i) a system of symbolic or actual *correspondences* between the parts of the universe; (ii) the perception of *nature* as a *living*, multilayered phenomenon able to be read like a book; (iii) the idea of *imagination* as an organ of revelation, together with *mediations* as means of symbolisation; and (iv) the *experience of transmutation*, which distinguishes esotericism from mere speculative spirituality; the final two components are: (v) the *praxis of concordance* between traditions; and (vi) an emphasis on initiatory *transmission*.<sup>205</sup>

Two points are worth noting here. First, that the concept of imagination posited here has a deep indebtedness to the purview and philosophy of Corbin (with its inherent resonances with the Germanic theosophical tradition), and Faivre's placing it here must be taken in light of this influence. Second, this definition also shows how the approach of scholars such as Eliade and Corbin, insofar as they replicate the aims of perennialism (cf. Corbin's 'comparative spiritual hermeneutics'), actually serve as an example of element (v), the praxis of concordance. Faivre is thus simultaneously influenced by this scholarly tradition, and aware of the problematic nature of its overlap with esotericism. 'The task of the scholar of esoteric studies', comments Faivre, 'is not to prove that such an invisible "Tradition", hidden behind the veil of historical events, did or did not exist as such before the Renaissance; rather, the task consists of trying to grasp and to describe the different facets of the emergence of this idea as it

202 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 49.

203 *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1986; republished in an augmented edition with a second volume, 1996); English translation, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994); *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000).

204 These methodological reflections first appeared in Faivre's earlier book, *L'Esotérisme. Que Sais-Je?* (Paris: P.U.F., 1992).

205 FAIVRE, *Access*, 10-15.

appears in the imaginary and discourses of the last centuries'.<sup>206</sup> Here the idea of the imaginary (*l'imaginaire, un imaginaire*, not to be confused with Corbin's *imaginal*) follows French academic usage, and indicates 'the images, symbols, and myths which underlie and/or permeate a discourse, a conversation, a literary or artistic work, a current of thought, an artistic or political trend, etc. (whether consciously or not)'.<sup>207</sup> Indicating neither something unreal, nor the imagination as a mental faculty, the concept of *l'imaginaire* approaches, in the context of western esotericism, what Faivre has described as a 'form of thought' (*forme de pensée*).<sup>208</sup>

It should also be pointed out that Faivre's typology is heuristic and was never meant to be normative in any restricting sense. However, apart from his typology (which has been overemphasised in almost all subsequent methodological discussions in the study of western esotericism), a few other remarks are worth making in regard to Faivre's method as exemplified by his considerable *œuvre*.<sup>209</sup> First and foremost a Germanist, Faivre's work evinces a strongly *textualist* basis, involving the situation, elucidation, translation and interpretation of esoteric texts, invariably on rigorous philological and historical grounds. Consistent with this, his broader aims are intellectual-historical, and both as a Germanist and as an intellectual historian of modern western esotericism, one of his chief contributions has been to chart the hitherto obscure territory occupied by German theosophists in the tradition of Jacob Boehme, such as Franz von Baader and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, and to draw out the significance of key themes expounded in their works. Especial focus is thus given to the *ideas* of the esotericists themselves, which, instead of being dismissed, marginalised, or reduced, are presented upon a textualist basis and situated in their intellectual-historical contexts. By taking this approach, the *ideas* of esotericism are granted a large degree of philosophical validity in their own right; having been situated, translated and critically elucidated, they are thus permitted, in many respects, to "speak for themselves". In order to do this, the study of esotericism demands a transdisciplinary, contextualist and hermeneutic character:

How can we put ourselves within range of a theosopher, a ritual, a book of alchemy, without having questions about the landscape: the neighbouring fields, the common borders, the philosophical, literary, and sociological contexts? Certainly not to break and splinter selected objects, nor to strike them with insignificance by reduction, but rather to return to them after we have taken on this supplementary knowledge, to question them all the better, then, on their specific, irreducible content, since we are at that point, more capable of making

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206 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 51.

207 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 72 n. 3.

208 FAIVRE, VOSS, 'Western Esotericism': 72 n. 3.

209 Faivre's bibliography, like Corbin's, totals almost fifty pages.

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the prism of their uncoercible kernel sparkle and shine through our hermeneutics now enriched with new tools.<sup>210</sup>

This same basic attitude and approach also informs the work of Joscelyn Godwin who, in numerous studies over the past thirty years, has presented and continues to present esoteric ideas in a balanced and non-polemical manner. Like Faivre, Godwin builds upon the necessary foundations of textualism, historiography and intellectual history, but ultimately enables the esoteric figures and ideas with which he deals to “speak for themselves”. Godwin is first and foremost a musicologist, but has written extensively on western esotericism due to the deep and intimate connection that has existed between music and metaphysics since Plato. While Faivre and Godwin both provide critical insights, elucidations and evaluations of the material they treat, such critiques stop short of polemical attacks on esotericism itself; instead, the kinds of critical apparatus employed by Faivre and Godwin are used to establish a moderate and balanced frame of reference for discussing and approaching esotericism and its intellectual history. Above all, they aim at *understanding* the phenomenon, rather than reducing it, deconstructing it, or deposing it.

### *Wouter Hanegraaff: The Empirical Method*

Since 1992, Wouter Hanegraaff has explicitly taken up the mantle of esotericism as an academic discipline. Whereas Faivre has developed the study of western esotericism along the thematic lines of inquiry first established by Henry Corbin and François Secret, (e.g. by exploring the conception of *theosophia* and the *vis imaginitiva* in European intellectual history), Hanegraaff has attempted to situate the study of western esotericism along the lines first established by scholars of Renaissance culture, such as Paul Oskar Kristeller and Frances A. Yates. Here, Hanegraaff has promoted the study of esoteric currents such as gnosis and hermeticism, especially as they have been received in western esoteric contexts since the Renaissance. Acknowledging the ‘Yates paradigm’ (yet attempting to go beyond it), Hanegraaff has published a number of normative methodological studies that seek to promote the significance of esotericism as a field of academic research; in doing this, he seeks to limit such an endeavour to a purely empirical approach.

Hanegraaff’s empirical approach to esotericism is essentially a recapitulation of Jan Platvoet’s empirical method in studies in religion. Writing since the 1960s, Platvoet was reacting to the predominance of liberal Calvinist theology in religious studies in the Netherlands.<sup>211</sup> The chief methodological position he was reacting to was that of

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210 FAIVRE, *Access*, 41.

211 See Jan Platvoet, ‘From Consonance to Autonomy: The Science of Religion in the Netherlands, 1948-1995’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 10 (1998): 334-351; ‘The science of Religion in Dutch *Duplex Ordo* Theology, 1860-1960’, *Numen* 45, 2



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Gerardus van der Leeuw and thus the phenomenology of religion. In an effort to counteract what has been called the “religionist” approach, Platvoet promoted an “empirical” approach to religious studies. Hanegraaff’s method, therefore, is a late restatement of this same approach, applied to the field of western esotericism. However, just as Platvoet’s method is a reaction against his phenomenological forebears, so too is Hanegraaff’s.

As envisioned by Platvoet and Hanegraaff, the empirical approach seeks to delimit religious studies (and by extension the study of esotericism) to the most basic (or naïve) level of epistemological certainty: that of material sense-data. From a strictly empirical-historical standpoint, it is argued, claims of a “meta-empirical” character can neither be confirmed nor denied, for to do so would require access to meta-empirical data. Access to a meta-empirical standpoint, they claim, is beyond the (narrowly understood) purview of the academic enterprise, which constructs “scholars” as dualistically separate from their objects of study (e.g. the worldview of the scholar is to be kept separate, at all costs, from the worldview of the “believer”). Comments Hanegraaff:

Believers always see religion, analytically speaking, from the perspective of what Platvoet calls a “multiple tier cosmology”. This means that their world-view encompasses an empirically perceptible *and* one or more meta-empirical realms (or, it might be added, experiential dimensions). In studying religion, scholars are dependent on believers expressing their awareness of a meta-empirical reality in empirically perceptible ways (words, images, behaviour, etc.) but *qua* scholars, they do not themselves have direct access to the meta-empirical. Because they can thus neither verify nor falsify its existence, or any claims made about it, methodological agnosticism is the only proper attitude.<sup>212</sup>

The positive intent motivating this “methodological agnosticism” is the desire to prevent academic discourses in religious studies from devolving into tacit polemics for or against meta-empirical realities. Ultimately, empiricism ‘cannot afford to take sides in the philosophical debate over what may broadly be called idealism vs. materialism’.<sup>213</sup> While the investigator may or may not personally believe in meta-empirical realities, in their role as academic they are tasked to suspend their personal convictions (whether materialist or metaphysical) in an effort to be “objective”. Thus, according to this highly normative conception, there is no provision for a broader, polyvocal conception of *Religionswissenschaft* outside Hanegraaff’s proposed empirical method, much less for academic approaches based upon deeper epistemological definitions of empiricism (Dilthey’s *Empirie* versus *Empirismus*, for example). The

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(1998): 115-62.

212 Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7.2 (1995):101.

213 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method’: 102.

academic purview of Hanegraaff, moreover, is strictly separated into a subject-object dualism, where the “etic” is always distinct from the “emic”.

This approach is, of course, a common-place of material-historical conservatism. The more original contribution of Platvoet’s method is his observation that the two realities (single-tier and multi-tier) can be adhered to either axiomatically or non-axiomatically. That is to say, the empirical scholar limits their investigation to a one-tier cosmology not because they axiomatically believe that it is the only ontological reality *per se*, but because it is believed to be ‘the only one available to them for investigation’.<sup>214</sup> Here, the view that only the empirical “tier” of reality is accessible to investigation must itself be recognised as an axiomatic belief. In any event, the main point is that a non-axiomatic approach to empiricism does not necessarily involve a commitment to a materialistic world-view. Upon this basis, the empirical approach is constructed by Hanegraaff as a “third term” between the extremes of reductionism (materialism) and religionism (idealism). To support this approach, Hanegraaff expends quite some effort attempting to suggest that the empirical method is not reductionistic. Materialist ideology is criticised as ‘unscientific’ by Hanegraaff because it ‘treats the meta-empirical as if its existence has been falsified’.<sup>215</sup> Religionist ideology, on the other hand, is also unscientific—not because it claims more than it can prove, but because it ‘blur[s] the distinction between empirical and non-empirical knowledge [...] incorrectly claiming “scientific” validity for the latter’.<sup>216</sup> In short, Hanegraaff claims that reductionism and religionism axiomatically affirm the supremacy of their respective cosmologies, while empiricism is non-axiomatic in regards to such cosmological assumptions.

A few criticisms are worth noting. In addition to the axiomatic assumption that empirical reality ‘is the only one available to [scholars] for investigation’, Hanegraaff overlooks the fact that the very act of privileging material sense-data (non-axiomatically or otherwise) already presupposes a philosophical choice—tacitly affirming the epistemological value of the material-empirical over the meta-empirical. As such, his attempt to distinguish between empirical limitation and positivist-materialist reduction remains unconvincing.<sup>217</sup> The empirical method cannot be sustained as a cosmologically uncommitted limitation of data, for the limitation is

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214 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method’: 101-2.

215 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method’: 102.

216 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method’: 102.

217 Indeed, the approaches are regarded by Hanegraaff as complementary. ‘No conflict needs to exist, and much may be gained from mutual interaction, unless of course one party wishes to monopolize the research of the other’. (‘Empirical Method’: 117). While it would seem that the same attitude is also valid for the potential tensions between phenomenology and empiricism, here mutual interaction is strictly forbidden because Hanegraaff is in this instance situated on the monopolising side of the fence insofar as he wishes to place strongly normative demands on what can and cannot be accepted as “science.”

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itself a cosmological commitment. At best, the empiricist approach perpetuates the framework of epistemological assumptions provided by materialist cosmology, but attempts to suspend any explicit philosophical judgements about the reality of materialist or idealist cosmologies. In a sense it is comparable to the Husserlian *epochē*, but applied only to the 'naïve' level empirical-historical sense-data, rather than to the deeper, empirical 'facts of consciousness'.

Despite these methodological inconsistencies, in practice, the empirical approach to esotericism follows a more or less standard historical method. In many respects, the whole empirical-historical emphasis coincides with an attempt, initiated by Faivre, to disentangle the study of esotericism from approaches that are, in some sense, forms of esotericism themselves. In particular, Hanegraaff is concerned to avoid the typological construction of esotericism as a universal essence of religion. Reacting to the approach favoured by "religionist" scholars such as Corbin and Eliade, Hanegraaff emphasises the historical construction of esotericism in a fashion more in line with Faivre's approach. Indeed, Hanegraaff follows Faivre in delimiting *western* esotericism as a historical current (or series of currents) emerging in Renaissance texts and contexts, rather than as an ahistorical, universal essence.

Beyond Corbin and Eliade, Hanegraaff is also reacting to the idea of a perennial tradition (*philosophia perennis*). Although having precedents in Plotinus and Cicero, the idea of a perennial philosophy was largely crystallised in the Renaissance by Agostino Steuco (1497–1548), where it is intimately bound to the historical manifestations of extra-theological esotericism that also emerged in this period.<sup>218</sup> The perennialist hermeneutic involves an attempt to perceive the universal form (*eidos*) or essence (*essentia*) of religion through its historically contingent manifestations; as such it forms the foundation of comparative mysticism, influencing developments in both modern esoteric and modern academic thought right down to the present century.<sup>219</sup> Hanegraaff's polemical attitudes against perennialist perspectives in the academy stem from an attempt to extricate *actual* esotericism from the *study of* esotericism; his aim is to keep the perspectives of scholar and esotericist completely separate in order to avoid what he sees as contamination.

In its favour, Hanegraaff's method attempts to prevent the study of esotericism from falling prey to the often virulent polemics surrounding the ideology of esotericism itself; that is to say, in its efficient form, the study of esotericism should neither be disproportionately apologetic nor disproportionately antagonistic to esotericism. However, the objectivism promoted by Hanegraaff sets up a rigid divide between "scholars" and "esotericists", i.e. between etic and emic approaches, and firmly

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218 PLOTINUS, *Enneads* 5.1.8; CICERO, *Tusc. Disp.* I.12–14; Charles B. SCHMITT, 'Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27.4 (1966): 505–32.

219 Cf. Mark SEDGWICK, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21 ff., 39 ff.

instantiates a tragic academic duality in which so-called “objective” and “subjective” approaches to knowledge are strictly opposed.

The commitment to “objectivity” that Hanegraaff promotes—the limitation to empirical data; the suspension of judgement as to the ultimate truth value of religious, metaphysical or esoteric claims in an effort to be “neutral” and “agnostic”—is thus deeply problematic. Such a position ignores the past century of philosophical debate on such matters. More and more, it can be argued that the “contamination” of approaches so feared by Hanegraaff is impossible to avoid, much less sustain without perpetuating tacit materialist ontologies and thus polemics against the object of study; for that reason, the construction of academia as somehow pristine and “uncontaminated” by its object of study is inherently problematic to begin with.

Rather than attempt to keep the perennialist (essentialist) and empiricist (materialist/relativist) approaches hygienically separated, permitting one in the academy and not the other, it may well be better to simply abandon the rigid dualism altogether and “get dirty”. If the scholar is to *understand* what Freud called ‘the black tide of mud, of occultism’, he or she must enter the stream. This is not to say the scholar should abandon critical attitudes or neglect attention to empirical, historically contingent data. Rather, as with the issue of representational versus presentational knowledge, both poles must be engaged in order to reach anything approaching a mature view. The scholar’s task, it would seem, is more to express the juncture of their objective explanations and subjective understandings. Needless to say, such a synthesis will by no means be final.

### *Esotericism as a Polemical Category*

In a more recent article, Hanegraaff argues that esotericism has always existed as a polemical category in western thought; this polemical category, moreover, has its ultimate origins in the construction of a pagan “other” in the self-definition of monotheism.<sup>220</sup> As a polemical category in the west’s identity construction, the perception of esotericism says more about how we want to be rather than how we actually are. As such, the study of western esotericism comes to possess far more academic significance than the mere charting of the west’s historical curiosities; rather, it participates in the broader project of critically examining the west’s “other”; by shedding light on the polemics and nuancing the oversimplifications borne of such polemics, the academic study of western esotericism thus contributes to the west’s self-understanding.<sup>221</sup> Importantly, Hanegraaff claims that the process of qualifying and

220 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research’, *Aries* 5, 2 (2005): 225-6.

221 While aspects of this understanding of esotericism are valid and have an undoubted pragmatic value, it neglects to account for Faivre’s important observation that esotericism, or at least a significant aspect of it, is not necessarily opposed to normative western

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complicating once clear-cut ideological divisions is itself a threat to the dominant paradigm of the west's self-understanding. The task of the study of esotericism is thus to question and undermine these narratives; this 'forces us to see who, what and how we really *are*'.<sup>222</sup> Despite this curiously essentialist attitude (i.e. from a scholar who rails against essentialism and promotes methodological agnosticism), Hanegraaff's deconstruction of western esotericism as a category of western "otherness" is instructive. What is more interesting for understanding Hanegraaff's overall approach, however, is his definition of polemicism itself, and how his own discourse is an example of it. This requires further elaboration, as it has a significant bearing upon the approach taken in this thesis.

Hanegraaff specifically defines polemical discourses as subject to five basic conditions. They require (i) a real or imaginary threat (i.e. a sense of unrest or insecurity to motivate the polemic itself); (ii) that the threat is not clear, present, or readily accessible (clear and present danger does not require a polemic); (iii) a target for the polemic (an enemy, real or imaginary); (iv) an audience for the polemic (the discourse must transcend monologue if it is to persuade); and finally (v) simple oppositions, not complex arguments (nuances and qualifications being polemically ineffective).<sup>223</sup> Hanegraaff suggests that a polemic is effective when it successfully makes its target audience mistake the constructed categories of the imagination with reality. The very category of western esotericism, he argues, is the result of many centuries of (effective) polemical discourse, and as such its existence as a separate category is merely a construction of the imagination; in reality, it is a dimension of western culture generally. While Hanegraaff does not wish to discard such constructs, he does want to avoid confusing them with what he sees as historical reality. Ironically, however, Hanegraaff is forced to admit that the very idea of 'historical reality' is itself a polemical (and thus over-simplistic) identity construct: 'a consistent historical perspective [...] defines its very identity (!) by opposing demonstrable facts against pious rhetoric, contingency against providence, diversity against unicity, complexity against simplicity, and indeed, relativity against dogmatic truth claims'. In a footnote, he recognises that the very paper in which he is expounding this argument, along with some of his other work, can itself be interpreted as 'examples of a polemical discourse' and that 'although the simplification necessary in any polemical discourse is explicitly incompatible with the very position I am defending, I cannot avoid it altogether if I want to make myself understood'; 'If this proves anything', he continues, 'it is that me and my opponents [sic] find ourselves in the same predicament, insofar as none of us

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monotheism. As Faivre has suggested, what became esotericism was formerly *intrinsic* to monotheism. That is to say, esotericism emerges as a distinctly modern current (in the French sense) precisely when the links between metaphysics and natural cosmology begin to be severed at the end of the Middle Ages with the emergence of Renaissance science.

222 HANEGRAAFF, 'Forbidden Knowledge', 226.

223 HANEGRAAFF, 'Forbidden Knowledge', 226-7.

can claim the virtue of an “uncontaminated purity” as opposed to the “error” or our opponents’.<sup>224</sup>

Hanegraaff is thus quite aware that his argument is a polemic, and states so quite plainly. This admission is interesting because it reveals a different side to Hanegraaff, one which is not always congruent with the image of the “neutral” attitude to religion and esotericism that he admonishes scholars to take. Indeed, in a recent review article of the *œuvre* of an emergent religious scholar, Hanegraaff’s highly polemical attitude to other scholarly approaches to religion/esotericism becomes extremely pronounced. Not surprisingly, deep cracks in Hanegraaff’s mask of methodological “agnosticism” and scholarly “neutrality” begin to appear. Because of the current dominance of Hanegraaff in the academic study of esotericism generally, and of his strongly normative and exclusivist methodological prescriptions in particular, this point requires further elaboration and comment.

### *Against Heresies*

In his 2005 definition of a polemic, Hanegraaff states that a polemical discourse does not exist unless there is a perceived or actual threat. In 2008, Hanegraaff submitted a full-length review article to the journal *Religion*. The article, which totals seventeen pages, focuses on the work of Jeffrey J. Kripal, a new and highly respected scholar of religion.<sup>225</sup> Contrary to Hanegraaff’s proposed and purported “agnostic” method, Kripal offers a boldly *gnostic* approach to religious studies. After initially praising Kripal’s style and also his awareness of key methodological problems in *Religionswissenschaft*, Hanegraaff then mounts a strong and sustained polemic *against* Kripal’s central approach.

By his own definition, Hanegraaff is clearly threatened, and it is easy to understand why. Whereas Hanegraaff posits empiricism as the ‘third alternative’ between religionist and reductionist approaches to meta-empirical claims, Kripal develops Gilles Quispel’s idea of *gnosis* as a ‘third component’ between (or perhaps, beyond) faith and reason.<sup>226</sup> Using an evolutionist/pedagogical metaphor, Kripal posits that the “school of faith” (whose virtue is belief) must graduate to enter the “school of reason” (whose virtue is doubt) but then adds that the school of reason must also graduate and enter the “school of gnosis” (whose virtue is direct experience of meta-empirical realities). Each evolution or graduation requires transcending the limitations

224 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Forbidden Knowledge’, 233 (exclamation in original); 233 n. 26.

225 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Leaving the Garden (In Search of Religion): Jeffrey J. Kripal’s Vision of a Gnostic Study of Religion’, *Religion* 38 (2008): 259-76. Kripal was awarded the AAR’s prize for ‘best first book’, *Kali’s Child: The Mystical and Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

226 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Leaving the Garden’: 261-2; cf. G. QUISPEL, ed., *Gnosis, de derde component van de Europese cultuurtraditie* (Utrecht: Hes, 1988).

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of the previous school. Thus, not only does Kripal bring *gnosis* directly into the methodological heart of the academic study of religion (which for Hanegraaff should remain agnostic), he posits a completely different ‘third component’, diametrically opposed to Hanegraaff’s:

The potential of a modern critical gnosticism seems especially worth exploring. Gilles Quispel has suggested that Western culture possesses three ways of understanding—faith, reason, and *gnosis*—and that the third (knowledge that comes from intuitive, visionary, or mystical experience of the divine, rather than from either faith or reason) has been the least developed. The study of religion shares in a dual heritage deriving from the Enlightenment, with its suspicious and rational approach to religion, and from the Romantic movement, with its apotheosis of the imagination; and there are many forms of study that privilege one or the other of these modes. But there is a third epistemology, largely untapped even in religious studies, and following Quispel I suggest that we think of it as fundamentally gnostic.<sup>227</sup>

Hanegraaff and Kripal thus posit competing third terms, and ironically, the picture that emerges may be represented as a sort of Jungian quaternary (Illustration 4). Just as reason is diametrically opposed to faith, so the two proposed “mean terms” are also polarised: empiricism, the objective pole of experience (*Empirismus*) is diametrically opposed to *gnosis*, the subjective pole of experience (*Empirie*):

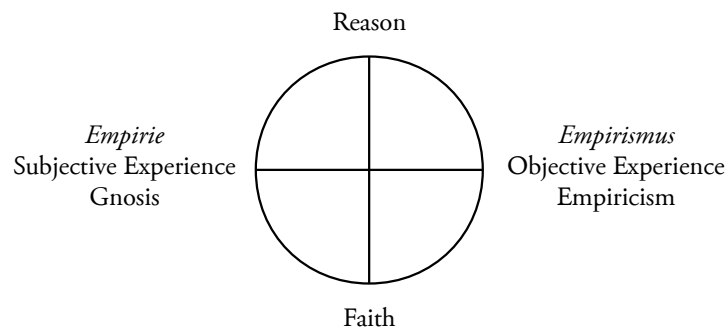


ILLUSTRATION 4: EPISTEMOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS TO RELIGION

Even more ironically (for one so critical of the Eranos school), Hanegraaff, in his analysis of western polemicism, has already employed a Jungian metaphor; he says that

<sup>227</sup> Jeffrey J. KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics: Scholars as Gnostic Diplomats’, *Common Knowledge* 10.3 (2004): 513-14. Ironically, Quispel’s idea was actually suggested to Kripal by Hanegraaff himself.

the academic study of esotericism, as the archetypal “shadow” of western monotheistic discourses, can be consciously integrated and thus used to help “individuate” the self-image of western culture.<sup>228</sup> Following his own (here Jungian) logic, it may be averred that Hanegraaff’s own “shadow” is no less than *gnosis* itself—not as an “object” of empirical study (Hanegraaff is quite prolific in publishing *about* gnosis)—; rather, Hanegraaff’s “shadow” *is* gnosis; i.e. gnosis as direct, presential knowledge (knowledge by presence). In the diagram above, gnosis can clearly be seen taking the diametrically opposite position to empiricism. One could suggest, therefore (and quite plausibly), that the gnostic method advanced by Kripal should not be excluded, but rather, *integrated* in order to help “individuate” academic methodology.<sup>229</sup>

This is not all. Hanegraaff’s ostensible critique is that Kripal is essentially bringing religionist attitudes derived from transpersonal psychology (which for Hanegraaff is an expression of the New Age movement) into religious studies, a field which Hanegraaff wishes to construct as exclusively empirical. This much is to be expected as a more or less conditioned response from Hanegraaff. What is telling, however, is the footnote where Hanegraaff’s agnostic mask slips to reveal the deeper motivation behind his disproportionate polemic. In commenting on Kripal’s call for a ‘much needed global morality’, and his statement that ‘cultural differences and local knowledges are socially and politically important but not ontologically ultimate’,<sup>230</sup> Hanegraaff declares that,

[a]part from the fact that, in my opinion, scholars are simply in no position to make statements about ontology at all, I strongly disagree with the political statement. On the contrary, it seems to me that the “integral humanism”, “global spirituality”, “global morality”, or even the “world religion” which Kripal sees as ‘a hope’ for the future is actually ‘a threat’ (pp. 91-93): no matter how good the intentions, it would inevitably degenerate to some kind of totalitarianism.<sup>231</sup>

228 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Forbidden Knowledge’, 250 n. 67.

229 If I may be permitted to follow Hanegraaff in making psychological implications explicit, it is clear that Hanegraaff is obviously strongly drawn to esotericism, to hermeticism, and in effect, to gnosis. At the same time, he appears to display a curious resistance against the actual experience of it. ‘Multilayered identities’ (per von Stuckrad) are apparently not permitted for academics. One must be a scholar, not a mystic (this despite the fact that many contemporary examples exist in which both roles exist in the same person, as Kripal points out in some detail). One may ask whether Hanegraaff is strongly drawn to esoteric gnosis as to his own shadow (which exerts for him a sort of *numinosum tremendum et fascinans*); or whether his entire academic apparatus, and his avowed agnosticism (‘we do not know anything at all’), is merely a sophisticated edifice of rational denial against the gnosis he unconsciously desires? Such questions are for me to pose but not answer. In many respects, they apply to all disproportionately critical polemics against metaphysics that seek to disguise themselves as balanced scholarship.

230 Jeffrey J. KRIPAL, *The Serpent’s Gift: Gnostic Reflections on the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 94, 118.

231 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Leaving the Garden’, 270 n. 19. The context of Kripal’s statement is



Clearly for Hanegraaff, the attempt to move beyond the faith/reason dichotomy and to construct a ‘critical gnosticism’ is not simply an unsuitable methodology due to its commitment to meta-empirical realities; rather, it is a political *threat*. By his own definition, Hanegraaff is threatened by the political agendas or consequences he sees as necessarily implicit in or following from the ontological ultimacy of Kripal’s approach. Having identified this as a threat, Kripal’s approach—the “enemy” or “target” of his polemic—is summarily over-simplified by identification with the already over-simplified polemical category of “religionism”; by association, moreover, Kripal’s delicately nuanced attempt to reach beyond the ‘desert of critical theory’ (constructionism, relativism, etc.)<sup>232</sup> are blithely and disingenuously conflated with one of the west’s greatest cultural taboos—totalitarianism—a taboo that is also evoked, with varying degrees of accuracy and legitimacy, in the legacies of “religionist” scholars such as Jung, Eliade and Corbin.<sup>233</sup> Naturally, over and against Kripal’s quest for ontological ultimacy, Hanegraaff constructs the position of the “scholar”. The scholar, for Hanegraaff, is defined solely by his or her rigid adherence to the Enlightenment ideal of empirical truth.<sup>234</sup> Importantly, no provision for more nuanced, qualified, post-Enlightenment approaches to truth (such as phenomenology) are allowed to persist, for this would interfere with the effectiveness of the polemic according to Hanegraaff’s own definition.

Hanegraaff has also identified some ‘procedures of exclusion’ that go hand in hand with polemical discourses. Here, four ‘reasons for exclusion’ (danger, immorality, irrationality, error) are countered by two ‘strategies of exclusion’ (prohibition and ridicule). On one hand, danger and immorality are to be excluded by *prohibition*, while on the other, irrationality and error are to be excluded by *ridicule*.<sup>235</sup> Given that Hanegraaff’s reaction to the presence of any meta-empirical, gnostic, or esoteric epistemologies in the academy is to prohibit them (i.e. by asserting they are not academic), the inference becomes clear: according to his own logic, the meta-empirical

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important to take into account here: ‘Some readers will take “world religion” as a threat. I take it as a hope, though also a warning: we must finally assume responsibility for our social constructions and ask hard practical questions about their ability to produce a world at relative peace’ (KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’: 488).

232 KRIPAL, *The Serpent’s Gift*, 84.

233 While the political sympathies of Jung, Corbin and Eliade are by no means unproblematic, the tactic of tarring a scholar with the brush of fascism in order to denounce their ideas is not only underhanded, it is a clear logical fallacy (an *ad hominem* attack); worse than this, the appeal to loaded issues (e.g. cultural taboos) in an attempt to incite reactive emotions against a polemical target is precisely the tactic of the propagandist rather than the supposedly neutral scholar.

234 ‘I maintain’, states Hanegraaff (‘Forbidden Knowledge’, 228 n. 9), ‘that the commitment of academic scholarship in the Enlightenment tradition is to the truth, by means of critical research and reflection (even though any such “truth” is always limited, conditional and provisory)’.

235 HANEGRAAFF, ‘Forbidden Knowledge’, 228-9.

or gnostic approaches are not simply irrational or false (he does not ridicule them); rather, they are *dangerous*. They are not a threat to morality, reason or truth; they are an actual threat to *safety* because they are believed to lead ‘inevitably to some kind of totalitarianism’. In light of these points, it is very difficult to regard Hanegraaff as the neutral or agnostic scholar he claims to be; he is not pursuing objective, scholarly critique from a disinterested perspective (to the extent that this is even possible); rather, he is clearly committed to and implicated in a politically motivated polemic against the threat of esoteric “religionism”.

If one looks at Kripal’s work without the filter of Hanegraaff’s polemic, quite a different picture emerges. One finds that Kripal is quite aware of the ethical and political dangers of the ‘mystocentric’ approach criticised by Wasserstrom; he is also deeply cognisant of the fact that ‘historians of religion [...] are often closet mystics’.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, his project aims precisely to redefine *mystic* in an ‘untraditional—that is modern—way’ that is subservient neither to religion nor to rationalism. Questioning Bruno Latour’s assertion that constructivism has no opposites, Kripal develops the idea of a comparative ‘mystics’ (after the French, *la mystique*),<sup>237</sup> indicating thereby ‘a discourse that undermines the doctrinal claims of individual religions by setting them beside the claims of other religions’; the purpose of such a comparative mystics, for Kripal, is ‘to expose all doctrinal claims as historically and culturally relative expressions of a deeper mystery or ontological ground that nevertheless requires these relative expressions for its self-revelation’.<sup>238</sup> While a large part of Kripal’s ‘comparative mystics’ is based on denying the ontological ultimacy of *difference* so prevalent in the ‘desert of critical theory’, he also seeks to avoid the excesses of this approach by refusing, alongside the ‘fetishization of difference’, the ‘dangerous hegemonies of identification and conflation’.<sup>239</sup> Following Wasserstrom, he recognises that ‘mysticism, gnosticism and fascism are by no means incompatible’ and that the ‘ethical liabilities of mysticism’ and the ‘troubling political affiliations of many who have made it their life’s study’ need to be addressed and counterbalanced. Along with most scholars of a suspicious temperament, he recognises that ‘the absolute collapse of difference within mystical monism does not lend itself to an adequate ethics or to vibrant social critique’. However, while most critical scholars fixate on the social, historical and political contingencies of religion, Kripal takes a different path: ‘Whereas Wasserstrom and other like-minded colleagues want to move the discipline more fully toward pure reason—to make it more academic in every sense—my interest is more in moving beyond the faith/reason distinction into a new kind of *gnosis* and into less predictable

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236 KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’, 505.

237 KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’, 489; BRUNO LATOUR, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* trans. Charlotte Bigg (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2002); the translation of *la mystique* as ‘mystics’ follows the example of *la physique*, *la mathématique*, *la symbolique* etc.

238 KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’, 489.

239 KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’, 491.

forms of argument and expression'.<sup>240</sup> Here it should be emphasised that Kripal does not promote a reversion to ancient Gnosticism, but rather an 'academic gnosticism' that is at once a 'professional heresy' as well as a form of 'gnostic diplomacy'. While cognisant of the overarching turn towards contextualism prevalent in most disciplines within the humanities, Kripal's academic gnosticism holds out a hope that efforts toward a 'global morality' may not be hampered by the pessimistic climate of epistemological doubt (it is precisely this hope that Hanegraaff is threatened by):

I am aware that the humanities disciplines, apart from comparative religion, are now basically contextualist in orientation. Knowing (*gnosis*) disappears where contexts are said to be incommensurable and cultures are not subject to criticism by criteria other than their own. Gnosticism is therefore, among the milieus that dismiss epistemological doubt, perhaps the most mistrusted. Not only does the kind of academic gnosticism I am proposing here question the infallibility of modern epistemology, it refuses—adamantly—to ground itself in any one tradition, context or regime of truth. It is notoriously comparative, countercultural, and even (it might be added) anticultural. Still, contextualists should not reject the gnostic stance automatically. Our present historical context, after all, indicates that contextualism operates to balkanize the human species and hinder efforts to establish standards of much-needed global morality. Moreover, contextualists—who tend to be trained in history and historical method—know that there have long been people who, on the basis of claims to *gnosis* wider and deeper than local knowledge, have risked their lives to expose cultural, national, and religious myths as such. If there is hope for our religious worlds—and there may not be—it may well reside in this attitude of openness, dissent, and (finally) heresy.<sup>241</sup>

Clearly, Hanegraaff's polemical claim that Kripal's approach will lead to totalitarianism does not square at all with the position presented by Kripal himself. As such, Hanegraaff's attitude may be recognised as a conscious misrepresentation designed to make the polemic more effective (a tactic Hanegraaff openly admits as necessary for making himself understood).<sup>242</sup> Either way, Hanegraaff reveals himself as more or less openly hostile to a particular manifestation of esotericism (i.e. a scholarly or academic manifestation of esotericism). Hanegraaff is therefore in violation of his own methodological prescriptions for non-axiomatic, non-polemical, agnostic and neutral scholarship.

That having been said, the inconsistencies and unbalanced attitudes that plague Hanegraaff's approach need not speak against an empirical-historical approach *per se*. After all, this is still a valid option for those who wish to adhere to the pervasive logic

240 KRIPAL, 'Comparative Mystics', 512-13.

241 KRIPAL, 'Comparative Mystics', 515-16.

242 HANEGRAAFF, 'Forbidden Knowledge', 233 with n. 26.

of epistemological doubt that blankets the academy. It is also a valid approach for those who wish to integrate empirical methods, *non-exclusively*, within a broader, more creative epistemological framework. To this end, before I elaborate my own approach, Kocku von Stuckrad's attempt to situate esotericism in a polyvocal 'field of discourse' should first be explored.

*Esotericism as a Diskursfeld*

In a short but serviceable introductory text to the academic study of western esotericism, Kocku von Stuckrad has recently proposed that religion and esotericism should be studied as 'fields of discourse' (*Diskursfeldern*).<sup>243</sup> The methodological articles that Stuckrad has written in order to explicate this method are inextricably mired in a valiant (but possibly futile) attempt to engage the radically relativist, constructivist and contextualist philosophies currently fashionable in American and European critical theory; however, these philosophies tend to be virulently antagonistic to religion and esotericism, based on their antimetaphysical ideologies, which seek to reduce religion to the status of a mere social construct, and to dismiss thereby any attempts (or epistemologies) that claim ontological modes of access to realities that purely material epistemologies cannot recognise (e.g. phenomenology of any kind). In other words, such attitudes within critical theory are simply reiterating what Marx, Freud and Nietzsche already said over a hundred years ago, but with the familiar postmodern glosses of epistemological uncertainty, *différance*, the inescapability of ethnocentrism, and the death of grand narratives.

That having been said, what is gained from his methodological articles is a genuine attempt to come to terms with recent developments in treating epistemological issues within the academy generally, and as they apply to the study of religion in particular. Here, Stuckrad is initially concerned to defend the validity of the discipline itself, which according to scholars such as Timothy Fitzgerald should be abolished from the academy entirely (on the basis that religious studies is merely 'a disguised form of ecumenical theology'). Stuckrad emphasises the apparent importance of the (neo-) pragmatist philosophy of Richard Rorty and the significance of debates in American and European critical theory. 'These ideas', comments Stuckrad, 'are crucial for the study of religion as, from this perspective, we cannot claim access to any kind of transcendent realm but have to base our theories on meanings, communicated symbols, or belief-sentences'. He thus takes Hanegraaff's empirical method and turns it towards a more Weberian sociological analysis in order to help redeem religious studies from the rampant cultural relativism represented by the "anthropological turn" in studies in religion.

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243 Kocku von STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005).

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Within this context, Stuckrad's argument is that 'we should make the academic study of religion into a metatheory about things religious', and in doing so he promotes a *polyfocal* approach (which he derives from Nietzsche).<sup>244</sup> The polyfocal approach is described as integrative; Stuckrad proposes a metatheory of mutually interacting cultural forces, which stands in a "meta" position in regards to both academic theories as well as the "objects" that academic theories seek to focus on (i.e. religion, esotericism etc.) 'As far as the integrative aspect is concerned, discursive study of religion allows for a polyfocal analysis of religious and cultural phenomena, describing different views and scholarly explanations from a meta-perspective that does not cling to nor refute certain ontologies and rationalities'.<sup>245</sup> On the surface this appears to provide a workable and commendable approach. However, germane to the foundations of this approach is an explicit rejection of a whole range of supposedly inadequate philosophical methods or positions (notably phenomenology), which are deemed unfit to be included in the otherwise integrative, polyvocal meta-discourse. This typically postmodern tactic thus perpetuates the familiar antimetaphysical bias against knowledge by presence. However, by only including those academic perspectives which are felt to maintain current philosophical fashions (i.e. antimetaphysical cultural relativism), it is therefore no surprise that, for Stuckrad, a metatheory of mutually interacting cultural forces cannot escape relativism; in his own words, it merely 'provides an instrument for *coping* with it'.<sup>246</sup> Thus, Stuckrad proposes a metatheoretical approach which, although ostensibly tasked to be polyvocal or integrative, is nevertheless forced to remain within the limits imposed by empirical-historical and culturally relativist theories. By turning away from a theory of religion and towards a 'theory of discourse',<sup>247</sup> Stuckrad proposes a 'communicative turn' in methodology. 'There is simply no escaping the fact that the only thing scholars of religion have as a basis for scrutiny is visible and *expressed* religion, i.e. religious propositions that are communicated in sentences, signs, and symbolic action'.<sup>248</sup> Once again, this is simply a restatement of the familiar methodological restriction to empirical-historical data. Despite his earnest engagement with problems in critical theory, therefore, it seems that the necessitated 'communicative turn' merely amounts to a more self-conscious, postmodern form of materialist-empiricism, all the while displaying the required awareness that such a project can never be "objective".

Such attitudes are more or less a commonplace in the postmodern humanities. Inevitably, one must contend not only with an "anthropological turn" (Geertz); one

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244 Kocku von STUCKRAD, 'Discursive Study of Religion: From States of Mind to Communication and Action', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003), 262.

245 STUCKRAD, 'Discursive Study of Religion', 268.

246 STUCKRAD, 'Discursive Study of Religion', 268.

247 STUCKRAD, 'Discursive Study of Religion', 263: 'My thesis is that a meta-theory, or rather, an *integrative theory of religious studies* that no longer depends on any definition of religion, should take the form of *theory of discourse*'.

248 STUCKRAD, 'Discursive Study of Religion', 263.

must also contend with a “linguistic turn” (Wittgenstein), a “pragmatic turn” (Rorty), as well as a general detour through the “writing culture debate”. According to Stuckrad, what is needed now is a “communicative turn”. However, as one navigates these sophisticated (and apparently “crucial”) turns, it is difficult to escape the impression that the philosophical bases of academic methodology are either going around in circles, or worse, have become irretrievably lost in a convoluted labyrinth. For certainly there is an eternal return of the same critiques evoked over a century ago by Nietzsche, Marx and Freud; what is more, per the postmodern glosses given to these well-known critiques, the more one becomes mired in the labyrinth of methodology, the more the “Ariadne’s Thread” of grand narratives appears to be spurned. It is thus far from convincing that any exclusively constructivist-relativist, cultural-contextualist, empirical-historical, or discursive approach to religion and esotericism is going to do anything but perpetuate the infinite convolutions of epistemological doubt.

### The Approach Taken in this Thesis

As may already be evident from the foregoing discussion, the approach that I advocate in this thesis is one that mirrors, in many respects, the core *topos* of the thesis itself: the juncture of abstraction and concretion, metaphysics and physics, subjectivity and objectivity, and thus an *attempt* to perceive reality as a “nondual”, historical and phenomenological integrum. What I mean by this is quite simply the effort to strike a vital balance between the two methodological polarities that are usually only understood within *Religionswissenschaft* as mutual exclusivities. Such an approach is not necessarily new. It finds its academic and philosophical precursors in the *rapprochement* between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* described by Ricoeur and Kepnes; in the complementarity between history and phenomenology described (but not always followed) by Eliade and Corbin; and through the oscillation between the two poles of empiricism (*Empirismus* and *Empirie*) delineated by Dilthey, Husserl, and van der Leeuw. In this respect I ultimately agree with Kripal’s view that ‘it is possible to be both an “insider” and an “outsider”, to draw on the symbolic and ritual resources of a tradition without being slavishly bound to it [...] to choose a form of consciousness that participates in both “faith” and “reason” but moves beyond both into a kind of *gnosis*’.<sup>249</sup> Such an approach finds its deeper philosophical justification in the ontological tradition of presential knowledge that comes through Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra on one hand, and through Heidegger, Quispel, and Corbin on the other. For academic balance, however, presentational knowledge (the internal, “subjective” or experiential perspective) must go hand in hand with representational knowledge (the external, “objective” or empirical perspective).

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249 KRIPAL, ‘Comparative Mystics’, 516.

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In terms of “ideology”, the foregoing discussion has shown that it is important to avoid the extremes of a mutually exclusive metaphysical-spiritualist approach (essentialism) as well as a mutually exclusive political-materialist approach (relativism). Given that postmodern approaches are generally over-committed to an antimetaphysical, political-materialist world view, while essentialist approaches are generally over-committed to a metaphysical, transcendent-spiritualist worldview, effort must be made to strike not merely a more balanced, post-secular approach, but to intensify, capture and conduct the inherent tension between these approaches through a Heraclitian ‘counterstretched harmony’.

In order to go beyond dichotomisations in any genuine way, therefore, the two approaches must, of course, *inter-react*. They must not only mutually inform each other, they must mutually *transform* each other. Just as sulphur and mercury react to form a neutral salt (cinnabar, HgS), and just as light and darkness interact (per Goethe’s colour theory) to create the phenomenon of colour (the visible spectrum), so too must the phenomenological and empirical perspectives crystallise into something that is both quantitative *and* qualitative; ideally, it must produce something that is more than the sum of its parts.

With these remarks in mind, it must be noted that Hegel’s system is especially interesting for the present study as it offers a philosophical dialectic that mirrors the alchemical trichotomy of sulphur (thesis), mercury (antithesis), and salt (synthesis). Insofar as the reflection of form and content makes for an elegant exposition, one is strongly obliged, when such a dynamic presents itself, to explore it as a methodological principle. While it is not my intention to pursue a Hegelian philosophy of history *per se*, the alchemical dialectic embodied in the phenomenon of salt as a neutralisation reaction between an acid and a base provides perhaps the most useful and intuitive structure for situating the present (syn-)thesis. For in many respects the present work finds itself stretched like a string between two polarities, and as such the “meta” task of this study is not merely to strike the *tonos* (tone, tension), but to evoke the Heraclitian ‘counterstretched harmony’ formed between the tonified extremes. The extremes in this case are ontological transcendence (knowledge by presence) and historical contingency (approximate or representational knowledge), precisely the extremes Hegel sought to bring together in the notion of the ‘concrete universal’. In many respects, the methodology of this thesis seeks to establish its own concrete abstraction by seeking a chiasmus or crossing between the “vertical” (subjective-ontological) and “horizontal” (objective-empirical) approaches to *Religionswissenschaft*.

### *Modes of Access to Schwaller de Lubicz*

In many respects Schwaller’s entire philosophy may be seen as an attempt to balance precisely these same extremes (i.e. the divide between objectivity and subjectivity; the material and metaphysical, etc.), and in a sense, the deeper significance of this thesis

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lies not so much in shedding light on an obscure figure from the margins of modern European intellectual history; rather, it lies in the fact that Schwaller's philosophy in and of itself offers a significant (albeit alternative) approach to the same fundamental ontological and epistemological predicaments that academic philosophy wrestles with. For this reason, I maintain that the high philosophical esotericism of a figure such as de Lubicz deserves not only critical historical attention, but also critical philosophical/phenomenological attention.

To situate and contextualise Schwaller and his ideas, I will employ strictly empirical methods (historiography, biography, philology, intellectual history). To bring them to life, however, I will employ the methods of philosophical phenomenology (hermeneutics, knowledge by presence, eidetic vision). Both of these approaches are intended to feed, inform and transform each other.

On the one hand, therefore, this thesis proposes to undertake a contextualised study of de Lubicz's life and work. Methodologically, this requires first and foremost a biographical and intellectual-historical approach in order to properly situate de Lubicz in his various sociocultural contexts. To this end, I begin part two of this thesis with a detailed bio-bibliographical and textualist-historical survey of Schwaller's life and work. One theme that emerges from this aspect of the study, especially given his background as a student of Matisse, is the great emphasis accorded to the *symbolique of colour* in de Lubicz's alchemy. In order to explicate this, and in order to provide a clear and intuitive means of access to the dynamics of de Lubicz's alchemy proper, a detailed intellectual-historical approach to Schwaller's colour theory will be provided via a focus on Newton and Goethe's colour theories and how they shape and inform the dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy.

On the other hand, in addition to a biographical and intellectual-historical approach, de Lubicz also demands a firm philosophical and phenomenological engagement. The internal consistency of the esoteric philosophy of de Lubicz will be elaborated with reference to his metaphysical and cosmological thought, and how these ideas relate to his natural philosophical conceptions, thus situating his understanding of alchemy as a process of ontological mutation. The metaphysical and cosmological themes will be explored as they emerge in the contexts of his biography, his colour theory and his theory of ontological mutation. Finally, the approach undertaken in the balance of this thesis will also unfold via so many "reiterations" upon key themes (philosophical, metaphysical and symbolic), and in this respect, this thesis is also a morphological and phenomenological study focusing upon the Lubiczian *topos* of the fixed salt—the juncture of abstract and concrete (the "Ariadne's thread" of this thesis). Each "reiteration" upon this motif is intended to add further nuances, from different perspectives, in order to sufficiently adumbrate and analyse the nature of the phenomenon. By integrating historiographical, textualist, biographical, intellectual-historical, philosophical and phenomenological perspectives (and, where necessary, engaging in detailed mythographic, philological, and natural scientific



digressions in order to go beyond generalities), it is hoped that a more integral appraisal of the life and work of Schwaller de Lubicz is afforded.

### *Premises for a Nondual Alchemy*

This thesis elaborates upon the premise that a form of nondual alchemy was present, and even to some extent definitive, in the most ancient of the alchemical sources at our disposal (Pharaonic and Hellenistic Egypt, China, India, Tibet, all of which influenced Islam and hence the very term *al-kimiya*, the etymology of which will also be discussed at length). Although one must stop short of claiming that alchemy as a whole is of a nondual character (merely material applications of alchemy, for example, do exist; indeed, the utilitarian bi-products of alchemy, increasingly separated from the holistic and spiritual directive of a preexisting nondual alchemy, lead to *chymistry* and thus chemistry), it is important to find sufficient support for this basic premise in the more important textual traditions within the ancient and early modern strata of alchemy, east and west. One of the first things that needs to be done, therefore, is to adduce and discuss these sources. Research into the historical sources of alchemy is presented in the next chapter of the present thesis. Through this means, the presence is indicated of a strong nondual current within the plurality of alchemies for which both metallurgical and soteriological concerns were fundamentally united within a broader, *naturphilosophische* framework. In particular, an important emphasis will be placed upon the conception of alchemy as theurgy, i.e. as a system in which material transformation was integrated as a propaedeutic not only to soteriological *theōsis*, but to the spiritual regeneration of nature as a whole.

### *Nondualistic Conceptual Apparatus*

In order to understand just what is meant when the term ‘nondual’ is used, a few remarks are necessary. The term itself is a formal translation of the Sanskrit word *advaita* (*a-* + *dvaita*, ‘not dual’),<sup>250</sup> and is used to indicate an epistemology in which both “seer” and “seen” are experienced not as separate entities but as a unity, a single act of being in which both the subject and object of experience merge into pure function. While nondualism forms the basis of three of the broadest currents in eastern metaphysics (Buddhism, Taoism and Vedānta), it is also expressed explicitly or implicitly in the western philosophical canon by figures such as Plotinus, Eckhart, Boehme, Blake, Spinoza, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson and Whitehead, to name but a few. Despite this, the idea of nondualism has not been readily understood or accepted in the West, and this is because western constructions of reality, especially after Descartes and Kant, are based precisely upon a strict affirmation of subject-object

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250 Noting that ‘*a-*’ as *alpha privatum* indicates not merely negation but also ‘freedom from’.

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dualism. At the root of the matter lie two fundamentally different ways of *experiencing the world*. One is the “everyday” experience available to everyone; the other proceeds from a metaphysical experience theoretically available to, but not necessarily attained by, everyone. Although dualism and nondualism describe two different experiences of the world, it is not simply a matter of the materialist-idealist divide (which is simply another dualism). As David Loy remarks:

none of these three [Buddhism, Taoism, Vedānta] denies the dualistic “relative” world that we are familiar with and presuppose as “commonsense”: the world as a collection of discrete objects, interacting causally in space and time. Their claim is rather that there is another, nondual way of experiencing the world, and that this other mode of experience is actually more veridical and superior to the dualistic mode we usually take for granted. The difference between such nondualistic approaches and the contemporary Western one (which, given its global influence, can hardly be labelled Western any more) is that the latter has constructed its metaphysics on the basis of dualistic experience only, whereas the former acknowledges the deep significance of nondual experience by constructing its metaphysical categories according to what it reveals.<sup>251</sup>

What is proposed in this thesis is to begin to understand certain forms of alchemy as an expression of a nondual experience of the world, especially with regard to the dualities of spirit and matter, and with particular regard to their corollaries: subjective experience and objective experiment. Insights from German *Kulturphilosoph* Jean Gebser allow one to recognise that nondualistic epistemologies do not exclude but *integrate* more perspectively bound epistemologies within a greater whole.<sup>252</sup> This requires an effort to place the entire basis of rational epistemology within a relationship in which subjectivity and objectivity emerge as parts of a more integral process that incorporates, but is not exclusively reduced to, either of its two “halves”. In short, a more nondual critical apparatus still allows one to benefit from dualistic epistemologies, but it also allows the possibility of recognising and going beyond their limitations.

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251 David Loy, *Nondualism: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1988), 3.

252 See in particular GEBSER, *Ursprung und Gegenwart* in *Gesamtausgabe* II-IV.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:  
 NONDUAL CURRENTS IN EASTERN AND  
 WESTERN ALCHEMIES

One is the serpent whose poison is doubly composed (symbolised).

—Kleopatra

Due to the very nature of the topic, the study of alchemy has bordered on a surprisingly large number of disciplines. Generally, and significantly, it may be said to straddle both the history of science and the history of religions. Moreover, due to the wide, cross-cultural purview of alchemy, these dual histories have converged in Egyptological, Sinological, Classical, Islamic, Indo-Tibetan, Medieval Western, Early Modern and Modern Western contexts.<sup>253</sup> More recently, following the efforts of

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253 Notable studies in these fields include M. BERTHELOT and C. E. RUELLE, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 3 vols. (Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1888-1889); RUSKA, *Arabische Alchimisten* (Weisbaden, 1924; reprint 1977); Julius RUSKA, *Tabula Smaragdina: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1926); RUSKA, 'Turba Philosophorum' (Berlin, 1931); RUSKA, *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze: Ein Grundwerk der spätlateinischen Alchemie* (Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1935); RUSKA, *Al-Razes Buch Geheminis der Geheimnisse mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen in deutscher Übersetzung* (Berlin, 1937); Paul KRAUS, *Jabir ibn Hayyan: Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1942-3; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986); E. O. von LIPPMAN, *Austehung und Verbreitung der Alchemie* 3 vols. (Berlin: Springer, 1919, 1931; Weinheim/Bergstrasse: Verlag Chemie, 1954); Joseph NEEDHAM, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); Lama Anagarika GOVINDA, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (London: Rider & Co., 1960); MIRCEA ELIADE, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956) = *The Forge and the Crucible* (New York: Harper, 1962); Nathan SIVIN, *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Jack LINDSAY, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Frederick Muller, 1970); Martin PLESSNER, *Vorsokratische Philosophie und griechische Alchemie in arabisch-lateinischer Überlieferung* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1975); Robert

Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, alchemy has become a *topos* in the history of western esotericism (i.e. the history of hermeticism, gnosis, alchemy and related currents), which has become increasingly established as an academic discipline.<sup>254</sup> The premises of this thesis will draw upon perspectives from all of these areas; the main body of the study will be most predominantly directed towards discourses within the academic study of religion, alchemy and esotericism. Methodologically, this thesis offers a balance of empirical-historical, philosophical and phenomenological perspectives.

*Issues in the Study and Interpretation of Alchemy*

As in other areas, scholars have started to speak less of ‘alchemy’ and more of ‘alchemies’, and an increasing effort has been made to distinguish and contextualise the individual currents or expressions of alchemy over and against the idea of alchemy as a sweeping, monolithic tradition. With this distinction comes the recognition that the idea of alchemy as a single, unified phenomenon is more the product of an esoteric interpretation of history (e.g. metahistory or hierohistory) rather than a strictly empirical description of historical phenomena. The idea of a hermetic or alchemical “tradition” thus says as much about the formulation of esoteric identity as it does

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HALLEUX, *Les Textes alchimiques: Typologie des sources du moyen age occidental* (Turnhout-Belgium: Brepols, 1979); François DAUMAS, ‘L’Alchimie a-t-elle une origine égyptienne?’, in *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposions 26.–30. September 1978 in Trier* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1983); Henry CORBIN, *Alchimie comme art hiératique* (ed. Pierre Lory, Paris: L’Herne, 1986); Phillipe DERCHAINE, ‘L’Atelier des Orfèvres à Dendara et les origines de l’alchimie’, *Chronique d’Égypte* 129 (1990): 219–42; David Gordon WHITE, *The Alchemical Body: Sidha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); B. D. HAAGE, *Alchemie im Mittelalter: Ideen und Bilder—von Zosimos bis Paracelsus* (Munich: Artemis & Winkler, 1996); William R. NEWMAN and Lawrence M. PRINCIPE, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), to name but a few.

254 Antoine FAIVRE, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); ‘Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion: Selected Papers Presented at the 17th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Mexico City, 1995*, eds. Antoine FAIVRE and Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), 1–10; Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF, ‘Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (1995): 99–129; ‘The Birth of a Discipline’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, vii–xvii; ‘On the Construction of ‘Esoteric Traditions’’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, 11–61; ‘Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity’, *Aries* 1, 1 (2001): 5–37.

about the complex historical and social vicissitudes of the phenomenon in question;<sup>255</sup> and yet, as will be seen, the idea of hermeticism itself is deeply bound to a tradition of interpretation and translation (*hermeneus*) between traditions. Moreover, as Faivre has noted, alchemy, like magic and astrology evince a strong cross-cultural character.

Because a large part of the historiography of alchemy has typically been formulated within the context of the history of science, and because a virulent polemic against alchemy was pivotal to the *establishment* of a rationalised science, this has resulted in an overwhelmingly positivist and dualistic intellectual heritage in the study of alchemy. In the one-sided criticism advanced by positivist histories of science, alchemy is summarily dismissed as merely erroneous proto-chemistry. Fortunately, much of the effort in the historiography of alchemy over the past fifty years has been successful in slowly dismantling this lingering attitude so that more balanced perspectives have been able to prevail.<sup>256</sup>

Misconceptions in the historiography of alchemy from the perspective of science are, of course, balanced by those advanced from the perspective of religion and spirituality. With the turn of the scientific revolution towards the end of the Seventeenth Century, alchemy and chemistry, previously synonymous under the term *chymistry*, were vociferously differentiated and, although the esoteric rhetoric of alchemy continued, its operative aspect was largely (though not entirely) abandoned.<sup>257</sup> By the Victorian era, this current culminated in the works of Mary Anne Atwood and the affirmation of an exclusively spiritual alchemy in which the operative element would be dismissed entirely.<sup>258</sup> ‘There is no evidence’, remarks Principe, ‘that a

255 Cf. Kocku von STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 6-II, who makes the distinction between a religious or esoteric ‘tradition’ and a religious or esoteric ‘field of discourse’; he also discusses the importance of recognising the complexity of esoteric identities.

256 Significant studies in this respect include the work of J. R. PARTINGTON, *A History of Chemistry*, 4 vols. (London, MacMillan, 1961-70); Walter PAGEL, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: Karger, 1982); Allen G. DEBUS, *The English Paracelsians* (Oldbourne Press: History of science library, 1965); DEBUS, *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1977, 2002); A. G. DEBUS and M. T. WALTON, eds., *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies)* (Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998); Joseph NEEDHAM, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954); MIRCEA ELIADE, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956); Henry CORBIN, *Alchimie comme art hiératique* (ed. Pierre Lory, Paris: L’Herne, 1986); William R. NEWMAN and Lawrence M. PRINCIPE, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), amongst others.

257 On the term *chymistry*, see William R. NEWMAN and Lawrence M. PRINCIPE, ‘Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake’, *Early Science and Medicine*, 3, 1 (1998): 32-65.

258 Cf. in particular Mary Anne ATWOOD, *A Suggestive Enquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*

majority, or even a significant fraction of pre-18th century European alchemical writers and practitioners saw their work as anything other than natural philosophical in character, as even the prolific occult writer, A. E. Waite (1857–1942) was forced to admit toward the end of his career in 1926'.<sup>259</sup> Such remarks are useful for establishing broad lines of development, and while on the large accurate, must also be taken with a grain of salt, especially in light of statements by pre-eighteenth century alchemists such as Stephanos of Alexandria (seventh century), who explicitly emphasises intellectual and theological aims, most notably in his admonition: 'Put away the material theory so that you may be deemed worthy to see with your intellectual eyes the hidden mystery'.<sup>260</sup>

Despite such nuances, many scholars remain increasingly critical of not only the spiritual interpretations of alchemy popular in the nineteenth century, but also the psychological interpretations of alchemy that emerged in the twentieth. The scholarly discontent with these interpretations appears to derive from the fact that they strongly colour many people's assumptions about alchemy. These scholars therefore see themselves as undertaking the 'continuous dismantling of erroneous views of alchemy promulgated since the Enlightenment which have, despite their dubious qualifications and origins, deeply tintured a major part of the literature on alchemy written during the 19th and 20th centuries'.<sup>261</sup> Such attitudes encompass the very influential work of Carl Jung, for whom processes in the alchemical vessel are a screen for the archetypal projections of the psyche.<sup>262</sup> Not surprisingly, Jung has come under increasing historical criticism in this regard; Lawrence M. Principe, for instance, has suggested that the work of Jung is merely an extension of the 'deleterious outgrowth' of Victorian occultism.<sup>263</sup> Principe, whose own area of specialty is Early Modern European alchemy, is particularly critical of the occult-spiritual and psychological interpretations as he finds them in especial contrast to his findings in the works of early modern Helmontian *chymists*, such as Starkey (alias Philalethes), Boyle, and Newton, among others.

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(Belfast: William Tait, 1918).

259 Lawrence M. PRINCIPLE, 'Alchemy I: Introduction', in *DGWE*, ed. HANEGRAAFF (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 13.

260 Stephanos' work is explicitly linked to the Byzantine and Arabic traditions that form the foundation of European alchemy; see F. Sherwood TAYLOR, 'The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria: Translation and Commentary, Part I', *Ambix* 1 (1937): 116-39; 'The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria: Translation and Commentary, Part II', *Ambix* 1 (1937): 39-49. Quotation modified.

261 Lawrence M. PRINCIPLE, 'Alchemy I: Introduction', *DGWE*, 12.

262 Carl Gustav JUNG, *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zurich, 1944); JUNG, *Mysterium coniunctionis: Untersuchungen über die Trennung und Zusammensetzung der seelischen Gegensätze in der alchemie* (Zurich, 1955); JUNG, 'Studien über alchemistische Vorstellungen', *C. G. Jung Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 13 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter-Verlag, 1978).

263 PRINCIPLE, 'Alchemy', *DGWE*, 14.

While the excesses of the spiritualist and psychological interpretations are recognisable when circumscribed to their proper contexts, this by no means precludes more nuanced approaches to the question of psychological and spiritual alchemies. In this respect, in the early modern period alone, some of Principe and Newman's own oversimplifications have been countered by the more nuanced studies of the spiritual dimension in early modern alchemy proffered by scholars such as Hereward Tilton, who observes: 'The historiography proposed by Principe and Newman can only be upheld by portraying early modern laboratory alchemy as purely 'chemical' research (conceived in crypto-positivist terms), and by erasing from history the development of alchemical thought subsequent to the seventeenth century. For researchers in the history of western esotericism, this *modus operandi* is entirely inadequate'.<sup>264</sup> Indeed, too rigid an insistence on an overtly or exclusively operative alchemy cannot be sustained nor extended beyond its proper contexts, any more than can an exclusively spiritual alchemy; this is especially evident once one steps outside the relatively narrow period of early modern and modern western Europe, whereupon the picture changes drastically. The broader picture offered by the history of religions opens up a far deeper perspective on the relationship between operative and spiritual alchemies. David Gordon White's magisterial study of *rasayana* siddha traditions in Medieval India, for instance, lays bare a blatantly alchemical world in which the transmutation of the mortal human body into an immortal divine body was explicitly homologised with metallurgical transmutations according to the formula: 'as in metals, so in the body'.<sup>265</sup> Here, the whole elixir tradition takes centre stage, the origins of which take us back to the deeply Daoist alchemy of ancient China, which, per the work of Needham and Sivin, shows no contradiction at all between the inner (*nei tan*) and outer (*wei tan*) elixirs.<sup>266</sup> The case becomes even more explicit in the Tibetan Buddhist alchemy of the *Kalacakra Tantra*, in which metallurgical, medicinal, and metaphysical aims are thoroughly intertwined; here, metallurgical and botanical processes are used in the creation of iatrochemical elixirs designed to prolong life not for its own sake, but in order to "buy time" to achieve liberation in life (*jivanmukti*) through the actualisation

264 Hereward TILTON, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569–1622)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 256, with 9–18, 235–6, 253–6.

265 *Rasārṇava* 17. 164–5: *yathā lohe tathā dehe kartavhah sūtakah sadāl samānam kurute devi pravishan dehalohayoh/ pūrvam lohe pariksheta tato dehe prayojayet*; David Gordon WHITE, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 315 with 446 n. 21, and passim.

266 Nathan SIVIN, *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); idem, 'Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time', *Isis* 67, no. 4 (1976): 513–26; idem., 'The Theoretical Background of Elixir Alchemy', in Joseph NEEDHAM et al., *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), V.4, 210–305.

of the initiate's Buddha Nature.<sup>267</sup> Elsewhere, the work of Corbin on Jaldakī shows the deep insistence that was placed in Arabic tradition on alchemy as an *ars hieratica* and the distinct relationship that was seen to exist between the metallurgical process and the creation of a resurrection body.

The deep relationship that is seen here between metallurgical and physiological processes all pertain strongly to de Lubicz's perception of salt as the foundation of and hidden continuity between all bodies, from 'mineral to man'. Therefore, inasmuch as general statements about alchemy are to be advanced cautiously, if at all, the fact that alchemy has traditionally been studied from the twin vantages of the history of science and the history of religions appears to reflect a strong tendency in alchemy toward the unification of the material and the spiritual. A study of the alchemy of de Lubicz not only allows this broader premise to be explored in a limited context, it also allows one to gain a deeper insight into the nondual premises of alchemical precept and practice.

### Alchemy: Issues of Theory and Definition

The historical purview of what came to be called alchemy includes an undeniable current of influence stemming from Pharaonic and Hellenistic Egypt on one hand, and another stemming from ancient China and medieval India on the other—currents that appear to have cross-fertilised before converging in Arabic alchemy, whence the term proper: *al-kīmiyā*. Given this interweaving lineage, the term alchemy itself is perhaps intentionally polyvalent, being intended to evoke not a single linguistic origin, per modern linguistic requirements, but rather, through the associations of "folk" etymology, to encapsulate a multiplicity of meanings, the clearest notes of resonance being struck in the Chinese and Graeco-Egyptian linguistic registers.

Overall, an appraisal of the Chinese and Indo-Tibetan alchemical traditions, too often neglected as inessential to the study of the western alchemical canon, will be seen to be just as pertinent to the historiography of alchemy as the Graeco-Egyptian, Arabic and European traditions. Within this purview, an essential confluence of metallurgical, macrobiotic and metaphysical principles will be seen to cohere.

#### *Al-Kīmiyā*

It is perhaps no coincidence that the earliest extant evidence for the term alchemy comes from a series of ninth to tenth century Coptic manuscripts acquired in Sōhāg, Upper Egypt, just across the Nile from Akhmim (alias Panopolis, the Late Antique centre of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy).<sup>268</sup> Coptic itself is descended from the language of

267 See Edward Todd FENNER, *Rasayana Siddhi: Medicine and Alchemy in the Buddhist Tantras* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1979).

268 MS British Library, Oriental (MS BL Or.) 3669(1); MSS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Copt.



the Pharaohs and is the last stage of the old Egyptian language. Because of this, and because in Hellenistic times Coptic adopted a modified Greek script (along with many Greek loanwords), the language itself is, by its very history, heir to a rich Graeco-Egyptian heritage.<sup>269</sup> However, the manuscripts in question derive not from Hellenistic Egypt but from Medieval Coptic-Islamic Egypt. Not only do they employ many Arabic loanwords, they are in all likelihood translations of Arabic originals.<sup>270</sup> Although the manuscripts date to the ninth and tenth centuries (physically antedating most Greek and Arabic alchemical manuscripts),<sup>271</sup> the content describes oral instructions passed from master to disciple in a pedagogical setting, and therefore suggest traditions which almost certainly preceded their written versions. In these texts, the term *alchimia* (Coptic *alchimia*, Arabic *al-kīmiyā*) is used in the sense of 'elixir, catalyst',<sup>272</sup> and, as will be seen, this is the quintessential meaning that almost unanimously inheres to the phenomenon in all other alchemical traditions. Before the significance of this can be understood, however, an attempt must be made to take the Far Eastern, Near Eastern and Hellenistic background of alchemy into account.

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a.1, a.2 and a.3; cf. Tonio Sebastian RICHTER, 'What Kind of Alchemy is Attested by Tenth-Century Coptic Manuscripts?', *Ambix* 56 (2009): 25–6.

269 See RICHTER, 'Greek, Coptic, and the 'Language of the Hijra': Rise and Decline of the Coptic Language in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt', in *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, ed. H. Cotton, R. Hoyland and D. J. Wasserstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 398–443.

270 RICHTER (2009): 31–3; other possible provenances include: (i) survival of an indigenous Hellenistic-Egyptian alchemical tradition, (ii) translation from a Greek original, (iii) original composition in Coptic. Richter leans towards what Stern assumed: translation from an Arabic original.

271 Obviously, however, the *content* of the Greek and many of the Arabic manuscripts predates the Coptic material. As RICHTER notes ('Coptic Manuscripts', 26 n. 19): 'After the semi-alchemical papyri from Leiden and Stockholm, written in the third to fourth century CE, the earliest Greek manuscript is the copy of the *Corpus Chemicorum Graecorum* Codex Marcianus graecus 299, dated to the tenth to eleventh century [...] The earliest extant Arabic manuscripts on alchemy, to my knowledge, also date to the eleventh century'. Cf. Robert HALLEUX, *Les textes alchimiques: Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidentale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979); Fuat SEZGIN, ed., *Wissenschaft und Technik im Islam*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften, 2003), 109; E.O. von LIPPMANN, 'Ein neues arabisches Manuskript über Alchemie aus der Zeit um 1000', *Proteus* 1 (1931): 31–35. Sezgin references a manuscript by al-Kindī entitled *Kitāb Kīmiyā' al-'itr* (405/1014, ed. Garbers 1948).

272 RICHTER (2009): 27 n. 27.

*Etymologies*

Scholars have long known that the word alchemy points to an Islamic transmission (Arabic *alkīmiyā* > Spanish *alquimia*, Latin *alchimia*, French *alchymie*, etc.)<sup>273</sup> The Arabic definite article *al-* points clearly to this, yet the precise origin of the lexeme *kīmiyā* is far from certain. Academic consensus has generally favoured Greek sources, notably those published by Marcellin Berthelot,<sup>274</sup> suggesting an origin from the term *χυμα* (*chyma*, ‘that which is poured out’; ‘flows, fluid’; ‘ingot, bar’; metaphorically, ‘confused mass, aggregate, crowd’; ‘materials, constituents’), whence *χυμεια* (*chymeia*, ‘the art of alloying metals’) named from its supposed inventor, *Χυμης* (*Chymēs*).<sup>275</sup> The root *kīmiyā* has also been traced to the Egyptian name for Egypt, *km.t* (Coptic *keme*, *kēmī*), which Plutarch gives as *χημια* (*chēmīa*), ‘the blackest earth’ (μάλιστα μελάγγειον).<sup>276</sup> Given this, the term alchemy appears to come to the Latin west from late Greek sources through the same kinds of channels which preserved Platonic and Aristotelian texts, in Arabic translation, after the fall of the Greek Academy. While all of this is well-tilled ground, matters are not as simple as they first appear. Joseph Needham, in the alchemical volumes of his magisterial *Science and Civilisation in*

273 See in particular: F. SEZGIN, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, IV (Leiden, 1971), 1-299; M. ULLMANN, *Die Natur und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden, 1972), 144-270; ULLMANN, ‘al-kīmiyā’, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, V, second edition (Leiden, 1986), 110-15; ULLMANN, ‘al-kīmiyā’, in *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, 1 (Wiesbaden, 1970-); and several articles in Z. R. W. M. VON MARTELS, *Alchemy Revisited* (Leiden, 1990); see also Charles BURNETT, ‘The Astrologer’s Assay of the Alchemist: Early References to Alchemy in Arabic and Latin Texts’, *Ambix* 39, 3 (1992): 103-9.

274 Marcellin BERTHELOT, *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs*, 3 vols (Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1887).

275 LSJ, vide: *χυμα*; On the Greek metallurgical etymology in refutation of the Egyptian etymology, see H. DIELS, *Antike Technik: Sechs Vorträge* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1914). The Greek etymology itself goes back at least as far as the turn of the seventeenth century. Cf. John HARRIS, *Lexicon Technicum: or, an Universal English Dictionary of Arts and Sciences Explaining not only the Terms of Art, but the Arts Themselves* (London, 1704), unpaginated: ‘CHYMISTRY, is variously defined, but the design of this Art is to separate usefully the Purer Parts of any mix’d Body from the more Gross and Impure. It seems probably to be derived from the Greek word *χυμός*, which signifies a Juice, or the purer Substance of a mix’d Body; though some will have it to come from *χέειν*, to melt. It is also called the Spagyrick, Hermetick, and Pyrotechnick Art, as also by some Alchymy’. Note here that Harris adduces *chymos*, ‘juice’, on which the Chinese and Indian terminology must be compared (see below: *chin i, rasayana*).

276 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, 33; Frank Cole BABBITT, trans., *Moralia*, V (Loeb, 1936), 83. The Egyptian thesis (*chēmīa* > chem-) appears to have been first put forward in modern times by Hermann CONRING, *De Hermetica Medicina* (1648), 19, though, as BAIN has shown (below), it appears to have been current in antiquity.

*China*, makes a very plausible case for the Greek and Arabic borrowing of the Chinese term, *chin/kiem* (gold juice), terms explicitly linked to aurifaction, aurifiction and elixirs for perfecting bodies,<sup>277</sup> all of which appears to place *kīmiyā* in an original context not only of Daoist<sup>278</sup> metallurgical practices, but also of traditions of physical immortality (*macrobiotics*).<sup>279</sup> After one of the most thorough surveys of the existing etymological evidence for alchemy,<sup>280</sup> Needham concludes:

If some have found an influence of *chin* (*kiem*) on *chēmeia* (*chimeia*, *chymeia*) difficult to accept, there has been less desire to question its influence on *al-kīmiyā*. No Arabic etymologist ever produced a plausible derivation of the word from Semitic roots, and there is the further point that both *chin i* and *kīmiyā* could and did mean an actual substance or elixir as well as the art of making elixirs, while *chēmeia* does not seem to have been used as a concrete noun of that kind. We are left with the possibility that the name of the Chinese ‘gold art’, crystallised in the syllable *chin* (*kiem*), spread over the length and breadth of the Old World, evoking first the Greek terms for chemistry and then, indirectly or directly, the Arabic one.<sup>281</sup>

Needham makes it saliently clear that alchemy is not simply a product of hellenistic culture. Although it is difficult to accept an exclusively Chinese origin for alchemy, the copious evidence adduced by Needham and his collaborators over four large volumes—only a fragment of which can be presented here—irrevocably transforms (and complicates) the overall picture of the genesis of alchemy. In short, not only must one come to terms with the Ancient Near Eastern influence upon Hellenistic and Islamicate alchemical traditions, one must also contend with the Ancient *Far* Eastern influences upon the intellectual and technical history of alchemy.

277 NEEDHAM, 5.4, 353, citing MAHDIHASSAN: *chin i*, ‘gold juice, gold liquid’; cf. WU and DAVIS, ‘gold fluid, potable gold’; of *chi i*, Needham remarks: ‘the ancient pronunciation [...] would have been *kiem iak*’. Cf. HOMER H. DUBS, ‘The Origin of Alchemy’, *Ambix* 9 (1961): 34: ‘This Chinese phrase, *jin-yi* [...], was pronounced in T’ang times at the imperial capital as *ki[e]m-iök*. This phrase means, literally, “the juice (or sperm) of gold”. It was one of the common Chinese names for the elixir of immortality. Like other alchemical phrases, it disappeared from usage with the decay of Chinese alchemy’.

278 ‘Taoist’ being taken in its broadest sense. Cf. SIMIN, ‘On the Word Taoist as a Source of Perplexity: With Special Reference to the Relationships of Science and Religion in Traditional China’, *History of Religions* 17 (1978): 303-30.

279 On alchemy as macrobiotics (longevity and physical immortality), see NEEDHAM, 5.4, under the rubric ‘comparative macrobiotics’. The term macrobiotics traces back to Hippocrates, where a coherence between ancient Greek humoral medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine may be discerned.

280 NEEDHAM, 5.4, 346-55.

281 NEEDHAM, 5.4, 355.

*The Inner and Outer Elixirs (Nei Tan, Wei Tan)*

Chinese alchemical practices centred on the preparation of an elixir (*tan*, literally ‘cinnabar’)<sup>282</sup> that was able to (i) mature metals into gold (*wei tan*, ‘outer elixir’), or (ii) bequeath physical immortality to humans (*nei tan*, ‘inner elixir’). As Sivin makes clear, the Chinese elixir concept was inextricably bound not only to gold, but more especially to cinnabar (*tan*):

Gold was an obvious endpoint for the evolution of minerals, for it was exempt from decay. In China a second line of development, more important in alchemy, led toward cinnabar (HgS). Chinese gave its large, translucent, nearly vitreous crystals, the color of fresh blood, a special place among semi-precious stones. Cinnabar was, like gold, associated with vitality and immortality from very early times. Alchemists associated it with the maximal phase of yang, Fire, and adapted *tan* (cinnabar) as a term for elixirs whether or not mercuric sulfide was among their ingredients.

As a substance that was able to mature metals into gold and humans into immortals, the elixir bears a fundamental coherence with the concept of the philosopher’s stone as met in European alchemy.<sup>283</sup> The macrobiotic function of this elixir was particularly emblematic of Chinese alchemy, and Needham has suggested that this current was the dominant source of Western iatrochemistry (alchemy or parachemistry applied to medical ends). As Needham emphasises, the *nei tan* elixir refers to a physiological, indeed, biochemical substance ‘prepared by physiological methods out of physiological constituents already in the body’.<sup>284</sup> Because of this internal/physiological emphasis, Needham was moved to suggest a more appropriate term to reflect the true nature of the cultivation of the internal elixir within Chinese tradition:

In order to do justice to the Chinese *nei tan* conceptions it would be desirable to introduce an entirely new word for ‘the elixir within’. For this purpose we have settled upon the term ‘enchymoma’. This is satisfactory in many ways; its prefix indicates at once that it is within the body, while its second and third syllables come from the Greek word *χυμος*, *chumos*, juice—connected obviously not only

282 Nathan SIVIN, ‘Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time’, *Isis* 67, 4 (1976): 515.

283 Here it should be noted that the term *lithos philosophos* traces back as far as Zosimos of Panopolis (c. 300 CE), who describes it in terms of a series of paradoxes: ‘This stone which isn’t a stone, this precious thing which has no value, this polymorphous thing which has no form, this unknown thing which is known to all’; cited in HAAGE, ‘Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th Century’, *DGWE*, 25; cf. the *Peri tou lithou tes philosophias* (On the philosophical stone), *CAAG* II, 198-204.

284 NEEDHAM, 5.5, 27.

with the term chyme, still current in modern physiology, but also one of the possible origins of the very name of chemistry itself. Enchymoma (= *egchymōma*, ἐγχυμωμα) would be a pouring in, and indeed the noun *enchymōsis* (= *egchymōsis*, ἐγχυμωσις) occurs already in Hippocrates [Epid. 2. 1037F], defined as ‘the infusion of vital humours into the solid parts, such as takes place in anger, shame, joy, etc., also a sudden injection of blood into the cutaneous vessels, as in blushing’. Since the infusion of vital honour, the restoration of the primary infantile vitalities to ageing muscles, joints and organs, was just what the Taoist physiological alchemists were aiming at, the word seems eminently suitable to place beside ‘elixir’, which we can reserve for the external preparation, whether made from metallic or mineral substances or from plants.<sup>285</sup>

Although the Chinese terminology allows us to distinguish an “esoteric” and an “exoteric” form of alchemy (*nei tan*, *wei tan*), it must always be remembered that the categories were not dualistic but relational and complementary. As Sivin remarks: ‘This “internal” (*nei*) form and “external” (*wai*) alchemy were so closely complementary, and were so regularly practised in conjunction before the eleventh century (when external alchemy began to die out), that it is often impossible to distinguish which sort of operation a text is concerned with. Their theoretical basis was largely identical’.<sup>286</sup> Perspectives such as Sivin’s are important for they help feed and inform a suitable conceptual apparatus for approaching texts in the western alchemical canon that display a similar complementarity between metallurgical and metaphysical processes.<sup>287</sup> Elsewhere, Sivin makes more explicit remarks on the similarities between Chinese and European alchemy:

“Internal alchemy” is parallel in many ways to the “spiritual alchemy” of the West, which used the preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone to stand for the process by which an individual passes through the “death of the soul” to rebirth and spiritual perfection. In China the language of alchemy was applied to various techniques of breath control whose aim was physical immortality—material resurrection of the integral personality in a new and imperishable body which is nurtured like an embryo by yogic disciplines within the old physique, just as an alchemist brings an elixir to maturity in a matrix of lead.<sup>288</sup>

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285 NEEDHAM, 5.5, 27.

286 SIVIN (1976): 515 n. 2.

287 In this connection, SIVIN (1976: 524 n. 20), refers to a ‘broadly similar’ understanding of Alexandrian alchemy that may be discerned in studies by Debus and Sheppard. Cf. Allen G. DEBUS, ‘The Significance of the History of Early Chemistry’, *Journal of World History* 9 (1965): 39-58; H. J. SHEPPARD, ‘The Origin of the Gnostic-Alchemical Relationship’, *Scientia* 97 (1962): 146-149.

288 SIVIN, *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies*, 30-1.

An essential self-reflexivity must thus be seen to exist between the external/chemical and the internal/phenomenological processes, a fact borne out very clearly in a Tang era text supplied by Sivin in which the preparation of the medicine or elixir depends precisely on the internal state of the alchemist:

Necessary that the maturing come within man,  
 Due to the maturing of his heart and mind.  
 If heart and mind have reached divinity, so will the Medicine;  
 If heart and mind are confused the Medicine will be unpredictable.  
 The Perfect Tao is a perfect emptying of heart and mind.  
 Within the darkness, unknowable wonders.  
 When the wise man has attained the August Source  
 In time he will truly reach the clouds.<sup>289</sup>

This text shows explicitly that perfection or maturity in the external aspect of the work (the medicine or elixir) mirrors the perfection or maturity of the internal aspect of the work (the heart and mind). Indeed, it goes so far as to say that if the heart and mind reach divinity, then so will the medicine or elixir. Although this is not saying the same thing as the Jungian proposition that unconscious psychological contents are projected onto the observed reactions in the alchemical vessel, it nevertheless affirms the centrality of the psychological and pneumatological aspect of the alchemical work in a way that cannot be dismissed as a peculiarity of modern interpretation.<sup>290</sup> Moreover, it consolidates the necessity for a non-dual conceptual apparatus in the historiography of alchemy in which the physical aspect of the *œuvre* is able to be seen as an index of the alchemist's inner (psychospiritual) comportment. Indeed, that the human psychosomatic complex cannot be subtracted from the alchemical equation is made blatantly apparent in a passage from the *Tan Ching Shih Tu*, which Needham provides as a definitive summary of Chinese physiological alchemy:

There is a way of using the common human condition to regenerate (the primary vitalities) and so to escape from the human condition. One can put it in a nutshell: the normal current leads to the generation of children, but going counter-current leads to the *enchymoma* (of eternal life). In these two phrases I have disclosed to you the entire mechanism of Nature (whereby man can discover the fountain of perpetual youth).<sup>291</sup>

289 *Ch'ih sung tzu hsuan chi* ('Arcane Memorandum of the Red Pine Master') cited in *Tan lun chueh chih hsien chien*, in SIVIN, *Chinese Alchemy*, 525, who notes: 'probably T'ang or earlier' (Tang Dynasty = seventh to tenth centuries); "Medicine" is a conventional synonym for the elixir'.

290 Contra PRINCIPE and NEWMAN's many polemics: PRINCIPE and NEWMAN, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire*, 35-8; PRINCIPE, 'Alchemy', *DGWE*, 12-16.

291 NEEDHAM 5.5, 243.

Given the close interactions between India, Tibet and China throughout the early and later medieval periods, it is no surprise that this passage from the *Tan Ching Shih Tu* also touches on the central dynamic of the Indo-Tibetan alchemical tradition. Perhaps more explicitly than even China, Indo-Tibetan tradition places the spiritual and physiological processes of transmutation in an unequivocally nondual relationship. Here, alchemy centres precisely on the mystery of embodied immortality in a way that completely challenges dualistic understandings of body and spirit.

### *Rasayana*

From the tenth to fourteenth centuries, the term *vedha* is employed in tantric texts and contexts to describe an ‘initiation having the form of penetration’ (*vedhamāyi dīksā*), in which a drop (*bindu*) of the sublimated seed of the god Shiva (or a guru) penetrates and transfigures the body of the initiate into a vehicle for divine consciousness.<sup>292</sup> This seminal tincture of the guru is one with the semen of Shiva, and significantly, in tantric alchemical traditions (*rasayana*), this penetration/transformation motif was intimately bound to metallurgical transmutation, which formed a propaedeutic to the transmutation of the human body into an immortal body. The bases of the essential connection between metallic and human transmutation stem from a wealth of fascinating myths about the origins of metals from the bodily fluids of the gods and goddesses. Specifically, mercury is repeatedly portrayed as the semen of Shiva while sulphur is identified with the uterine blood of his divine feminine consort.<sup>293</sup> The mineral kingdom in general is thus a theophany, and cinnabar in particular represents the erotic conjunction of divine sexual fluids. Remarkably, tantric tradition centres on the same mineral theophany as does China and Hellenistic Egypt, but here the gender polarity is reversed, mercury being the masculine agent and sulphur the feminine reagent; however, this reversal does cohere with the principle by which the *metal* was the male *seed* and the *mineral* was the feminine *matrix*, a principle that would prove central to the alchemy of de Lubicz.

The tantric alchemists sought nothing less than embodied apotheosis (*jivanmukti*, ‘liberation in life’). The body they sought to create was characterised as a golden, adamantine or diamond body, i.e. the immortal body which stems from the inner identification of the initiate’s consciousness with Brahman (the egocentric consciousness having being abandoned as illusory) and which, through one-pointed (*ekbindu*) concentration of consciousness, radiates the crystalline light of the one, existentiating, divine dharma (cf. the Tibetan Buddhist *vajra* or diamond consciousness).

In India, as in China, the metallurgical, macrobiotic and metaphysical aspects of alchemy were never isolated; they were always complimentary. In the *Rasārṇava*, the

292 WHITE, *Alchemical Body*, 312-18.

293 WHITE, *Alchemical Body*, 186-202.

key alchemical precept holds that the sublimated mercury which transforms metals into silver or gold can be consumed by the initiate to transform the corruptible, mortal body into an incorruptible, immortal body, per the following précis of siddha alchemical praxis:

As in metal, so in the body. Mercury ought always to be employed in this way. When it penetrates a metal and the body, it [mercury] behaves in an identical way. First test it on a metal, then use it in the body.<sup>294</sup>

Mercury so comprehended is a pan-seminal, penetrating spiritual essence. It is the divine vital fluid (*rāsa*) which, as White notes, subtly interpenetrates all living bodies 'like the scent a flower'. While the remarkable similarity of this idea to the conception of 'Our Mercury' or 'Philosophical Mercury' in numerous European alchemical texts cannot be ignored, it is equally revealing to look back towards the origins of the conception of a transformative fluid essence in alchemy. The Sanskrit term translated as alchemy is *rasayana*, from *rasa*, 'essence, juice, mercury' + *ayana*, 'path, way'. *Rasa* itself comes from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*ras-* ('to flow, wet, moisten') that gives us the word resin,<sup>295</sup> and here it is interesting to note the close semantic connection not only to Greek χυμὸς (*chymos*, 'juice, chyme') and Chinese *chin i* ('gold juice'), but also to Needham's *enchymoma* for 'inner elixir/cinnabar' (*nei tan*).

Divine essence as seminal transmuting power (ferment) is equated with a fluid, mercurial form inherent to the divine metabolism of Shiva. The seed of Shiva is said to kill or immortalise humans, depending upon one's level of initiatic comportment; in a similar vein, per the tantric emphasis on the homology between the 'fluid vitalities' of the microcosm and those of the macrocosm, mercury, like human semen, is able to be transmuted into divinising nectar (*soma*, *amrita*). The process of engaging a killing energy and transmuting it into an immortalising one is also identical to the motif of the kundalini serpent and the reversal of its life-draining energy into a vitalising and divinising energy, a process which is said to unfold along the axis of the spine through the transmutation of mortal semen into immortal nectar.

294 *Rasārṇava* 17.164-5: 'yathā lohe tathā dehe kartavhah sūtakah sadā/ samānam kurute devi pravishan dehalohayoh/ pūrvam lohe pariksheta tato dehe prayojayet'; WHITE, *Alchemical Body*, 315 with 446 n. 21; On alchemy, WHITE notes (446 n. 20) that the modern Hindi term for alchemy is *kīmiyā[garī]*, a late borrowing from the Persian; cf. Ramcandra VARMA, ed., *Samkshipt Hindi Shabd Sāgar* (Benares: Nagaripracarini Sabha, 1981), 206.

295 Through the root *\*ras-*, Sanskrit *rasa* ('fluid, sap, juice'; 'essence' in the sense 'best or strongest part') is cognate with Latin *ros* (French *rosé*), Lithuanian *rasa*, Old Church Slavonic, *rosa*, 'dew', another term of pervasive significance in European alchemy. On the multivalent meanings in Sanskrit, see WHITE, 184 ff. *Rasa* is homologised with water (*āp*), semen (*retas*), vital fluid (*ojas*), herbal remedies (*oshadhi*, *aushadhi*), nectar (*amrita*) and *soma* (both moon god and draught of immortality).



## H I S T O R I O G R A P H Y

In regards to the more specific focus of this thesis, it may be noted that the fundamental distinction between a procreative current and an immortal counter-current that is met in Chinese *nei tan* practices (and in the tantric reversal of *kundalini*) may also be discerned in Schwaller's distinction between the genetic (cellular) and palingenetic (mineral) mechanisms of ontological continuity. Such morphological parallels, of course, should not preclude historical perspectives. Needham's thesis on the Chinese origin of alchemy, for instance, is supported by attested lines of historical connection between Chinese, Indo-Tibetan and Islamic cultures which interacted via the trade routes of the Silk Road in precisely the period in which the term *alkīmiyā* would emerge in Islamic literature. In addition, there is the possibility that even the earlier Greek terminology was influenced by contact with Chinese alchemical traditions in Classical or Hellenistic times along these same Silk Roads. The Chinese origin is thus very persuasive, yet despite the strict issue of nomenclature, the Graeco-Egyptian etymologies, although they cannot be authoritatively established, cannot be thoroughly dismissed either, for in their favour lies a persistent *hermetic* presence running through Graeco-Egyptian, Islamic and European culture, and this provides a decisive unifying factor.

While the past thirty years of scholarship has seen a slow but steady turnaround of the assumption that the hermetic texts were merely Hellenistic literary pastiches with no genuine origins in Egyptian theology, the actual Egyptian origins of alchemy continues to find far more resistance than it should in spite of the solid Egyptological evidence that has amounted in its favour. For this reason, the question of Egypt not only as an etymology but as a source of alchemy needs to be more sufficiently examined. Indeed, it is only by looking to the deep continuities between Egyptian and hermetic but also theurgic and hieratic Neoplatonic traditions that one comes to recognise the profound morphological relationships that exist between the western and eastern branches of alchemy.

### Black Earth

The black colour, if you follow me, is light of pure Ipseity; within this darkness is the Water of Life.<sup>296</sup>

—Shams al-Din Lahiji

Geophysical factors were deeply embedded in the very identity of pharaonic Egypt. In distinct contrast to the red, arid desert (*dsrt*), the dark alluvial soil of the fertile Nile literally defined Egypt (*km.t*, ‘the black’) and provided it with a nourishing livelihood. ‘Black (earth)’ gave Egypt its native title, and Plutarch’s contention—that *chēmia* is an Egyptian word referring to the ‘blackest earth’ (μάλιστα μελάγγειον)—would eventually be confirmed by Egyptian and Coptic philology: Middle Egyptian *km* (*kem*), ‘black’ > *km.t* (*kemet*), ‘the blackness, black earth, the black land’ > Coptic *kemi*, *kēme*, ‘black, the black land’.<sup>297</sup> In Greek, the *locus classicus* identifying the word *chēmia* with Egypt is as follows:

Egypt, moreover, which has the blackest of soils, they call by the same name as the black portion of the eye, ‘*Chēmiā*’, and compare it to a heart; for it is warm and moist and is enclosed by the southern portions of the inhabited world and adjoins them, like the heart in a man’s left side.<sup>298</sup>

296 Commentary on SHABESTARI’S *Rose Garden of the Mystery* in CORBIN, *Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*; cf. in this connection the following two citations from Egyptian and Chinese tradition: ‘The essence of darkness reveals itself to whoever looks at the sun’ (*Book of the Dead*, spell 115), and ‘Within the darkness, unknowable wonders’ (*The Arcane Memorandum of the Red Pine Master*).

297 Cf. GRAPOW/ERMAN, *Wörterbuch* V, 126-8: ‘Das schwartze Fruchtländ, im Gegs. zur gelbroten Wüste, Ägypten’ (Attested since the end of the Old Kingdom). See also, *Wörterbuch*, V, 124: ‘das Schwartze, u. ä., besonders in den Verbindungen: I. das Schwarz der Nacht. II. das Schwarz des Nagels. III. Med. als etwas ofizinell Verwandetes’.

298 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, 33; Frank Cole BABBITT, trans., *Moralia* V (Loeb, 1936), 83: ἔτι τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα μελάγγειον οὖσαν, ὥσπερ τὸ μέλαν τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ, χημίαν καλοῦσι καὶ καρδίαν παρεικάζουσι· θερμὴ γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ ὑγρὰ καὶ τοῖς νοτίοις μέρεσι τῆς οἰκουμένης, ὥσπερ ἡ καρδία τοῖς εὐωνύμοις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, μάλιστα ἐγκέκλεισται καὶ προσκεχώρηκεν. Cf. also HERODOTUS, II.12; PHILIP OF THESSALONICA, *Anth. Pal.* 6.231.1; VIRGIL, *G.*, 4.287-94; *Sybilline Oracles*, 214.31; and for further refs, BAIN, 205-7. The significance of the black of the eye is discussed in detail below. On the comparison of Egypt to the heart in the left side of the body (enclosed by the southern portions of the inhabited world), attention must be drawn to the comparison made in the *Korē Kosmou*, Exc. XXIV, 11-14 (SCOTT, 501-3), in which the land of Egypt is likened to a woman lying

Although Plutarch doesn't connect this lexeme with alchemy in any direct way, references to 'black earth' do arise in other Greek texts in direct connection with Egypt, hermeticism and alchemy.<sup>299</sup> In his study of the *Cyranides*, a hermetic magico-medical text of Egyptian provenance, David Bain identifies seven occurrences of the esoteric phrase, *melanitis gē* (black earth), an expression which is 'not primarily intended as a generic description of a type of soil' but rather 'denotes a particular locality'.<sup>300</sup> Bain makes a case for connecting this phrase specifically to the land of Egypt and, by extension, alchemy, presenting suggestive evidence that in late Greek Egypt, the traditional Egyptian word for Egypt was adopted in Greek-speaking circles where it was identified with alchemy—the art of the black land—χημία. 'However', concludes Bain, 'matters are more complicated':

It can hardly be a coincidence that the colour black is a prominent, indeed essential, feature of the techniques of alchemy (see Needham 1980:348). Peter Kingsley has suggested to me that the expression 'the black' or 'the black land' should not be restricted to one meaning. For an Egyptian or someone familiar with the Egyptian cast of mind both meanings, 'the black land', 'the colour black' are acceptable as explanations of the name of alchemy and, what is more, acceptable concurrently. While the question of etymology will ultimately perhaps remain insoluble, we can at least say with confidence that there were Greeks living in Egypt in late antiquity who thought of Egypt as the black land and connected blackness with alchemy. The new testimony must be added to the already existing heap of evidence which has been adduced to support the view that the origins of western alchemy were indeed Egyptian.<sup>301</sup>

*The Pupil of the Eye*

*Kem* was also the Egyptian word for the 'pupil of the eye',<sup>302</sup> a fact which confirms Plutarch's identification of *chēmia* with not only Egypt's 'black earth' (*melaggeion*) but

upon the earth gazing up at the sky; her head is in the south, her right shoulder in the east, her left shoulder in the west, while her feet are in the far north; the people that inhabit these areas are accorded various characteristics relating to the corresponding body parts of the terrestrial woman; Egypt, however, takes the privileged place of the centre and heart, thus embodying the locus of the soul (mind) of the entire world.

299 BAIN, 208-9.

300 BAIN 208-12; *Cyr.* ed. KAIMAKIS, I.14.15, I.15.12-16, I.16.6, 2.37.2; *Compendium aureum* ed. DELATTE, 1942, 216.1off., OLYMPIODORUS, *CAG*, ed. BERTHELOT, 102.2; cf. FOWDEN, 1993, 161f.

301 David BAIN, 'Μελανιτις γη, An Unnoticed Greek name for Egypt: New Evidence for the Origins and Etymology of Alchemy?', *The World of Ancient Magic*, 219.

302 ERMAN/GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch V*, 124.

also ‘the black of the eye’ (*to melan tou ophthalmou*).<sup>303</sup> Just as the black soil was contrasted by the Egyptians with the red desert, so too was the black pupil contrasted with the white of the eye.<sup>304</sup> Now, the meaning of pupil here is not accidental, and, like Plutarch’s reference to black earth, has its roots in authentic (and alchemically significant) Egyptian ideas. In the hermetic corpus, one finds a text entitled the *Korē Kosmou*, an expression that can be rendered simply as ‘the virgin of the world’, but which also has another, and in this context more accurate, sense: the ‘pupil of the eye of the world’.<sup>305</sup> This at first curious meaning is intimately bound to a number of semantic registers that root it deep in the cult of Isis. On one hand it appears to explain the meaning of the Greek word κόρη (*korē*, ‘maiden, virgin, young girl, daughter’)<sup>306</sup> by reference to the fact that the pupil of the eye was understood in many ancient cultures as a diminutive of affection in a sense closely related to the English expression, ‘apple of my eye’;<sup>307</sup> more specifically, the ancients found that the dark point of the eye was the place where one could see one’s reflection in miniature, especially when looking into the eye of a loved one (as noted by Socrates in *Alcibiades I*):

So you have noticed, then, that the face of anyone who looks into another person’s eyes appears in the visual organ of the person opposite him as in a mirror, (a part of the eye) which we therefore call the ‘pupil’ (κόρη), because it is a sort of image (εἶδωλον) of the looker.<sup>308</sup>

While this meaning seems to evoke associations with the Greek maiden Persephone as daughter (*korē*) of Demeter, the ultimate referent is in fact to the Egyptian goddess, Isis. Interestingly, however, Plutarch has explained the difference between Demeter and Persephone by linking the mother to the earth and the daughter

303 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, 33.

304 ERMAN/GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch V*, 124: “das Schwartzte” des Auges (d.h. die Pupille im Gegs. zum [hd] “dem Weissen” im Auge’.

305 See Howard JACKSON, ‘Isis, Pupil of the Eye of the World’, *Chronique d’Egypte* 61 (1986): 116-35; LSJ gloss κοροκόσμιον, *korokosmion*, as ‘girls toy’ and ‘the pupil the eye’.

306 Here *korē* is the feminine form of *ko(u)ros*, ‘boy’ (cf. LSJ); most translators thus render *Korē Kosmou* along the lines of ‘maiden/virgin of the world’, e.g. COPENHAVER, xxxviii, ‘Daughter of the Cosmos’; PATRIZZI, however, gives both *Minerva Mundi* and *Pupilla Mundi*; cf. G. R. S. MEAD, 93 n. 2 with further commentary, 93-168.

307 ‘Apple of the eye’ is a translation of the Latin phrase, *pupilla oculi*, which itself has notable precedents in the Hebrew expression, *bat ‘ayin*, ‘daughter of the eye’ and *ischon*, ‘dark’ or ‘daughter’ of the eye (Ps. vii. 8; Prov. vii. 2); the terms *pupilla* and *pupula* derive from *pupa*, ‘girl, doll’ (cf. greek *korokosmion*). See Eugène MONSEUR, ‘L’âme pupilline’, *RHR* 51 (1905), 1-23; MEAD, 165-7; Marbury B. OGLE, ‘The Apple of the Eye’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 73 (1942): 181-191; JACKSON, 119.

308 Pseudo-(?) PLATO, *Alcibiades I* (132E-133A).

(*korē*) to the moon, comparing the latter to the pupil of the eye because the moon, just like a mirror, reflects the sun's light.<sup>309</sup> As with many hermetic and alchemical expressions, however, mythological double entendres were often the very means by which theological traditions were translated from Egyptian into Hellenistic contexts (cf. Thoth-Hermes as *hermeneus*).<sup>310</sup> In short, and as Jackson notes, the two senses of *korē* are not mutually exclusive but rather inextricably intertwined.<sup>311</sup> Jackson suggests that while the identification: Persephone=Moon=Isis may have helped the general web of associations to the idea of *korē*, the ultimate provenance of the expression lies less in Isis' role as reflecting moon goddess and more directly in her role as the pupil of the eye of the *sun*.<sup>312</sup> Here, the main themes of the *Korē Kosmou* are cemented directly in an Egyptian theological context. Not only were heavenly bodies such as the sun and moon considered the 'eyes' of the gods,<sup>313</sup> but the pupil of the eye of the sun in particular was identified with Isis. While the provenance of this may go as far back as the *Pyramid Texts* (which refer to the *hwn.t jm(y).t jr.t hr*, the 'girl who is in the eye of Horus'),<sup>314</sup> by Graeco-Roman times, a simplified expression, *hwn.t jr.t* ('the girl in the eye') or simply *hwn.t* (girl, virgin)<sup>315</sup> came to refer to Isis (among a number of other

309 'So for example, although they give the right names to Demeter and Lora, they are wrong in believing that both are together in the same region. The fact is that the former is in the region of the earth and is sovereign over terrestrial things, and the latter is in the moon and mistress of lunar things. She has been called Kore and Persephone (Φερσεφόνη), the latter as being a bearer of light (φοσφόρος) and Kore because that is what we call the part of the eye in which is reflected the likeness of him who looks into it as the light of the sun is seen in the moon'. §406, trans. Harold CHERNISS (Loeb ed.), as modified by JACKSON, 125 (*Kore* for *Cora*).

310 KINGSLEY, 'Poimandres'. Cf. also JACKSON, 126 n 2: 'Given the fact [...] that, differently determined, the same word was used to denote the land of Egypt, it is not surprising that the pun-loving Egyptians could come to call Egypt the pupil of the eye of a god'.

311 JACKSON, 118.

312 JACKSON, 120, 121 nn. 1-2, 130, noting Ptolemaic Egyptian texts that describe Isis as *Ra.t*, a 'female Re' ("Ra-ette"), or *Jm.t*, 'female sun disk, sun goddess'; For sources, see Hermann JUNKER and Erich WINTER, *Das Geburtshaus des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (Wien: Böhlau, 1965), 167.12, 281.8-9, 11, 391.17-19; JUNKER, *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä*, 4.5, 53.17, 56.17.

313 This is mentioned in the text of the *Korē Kosmou* itself: Exc. 23.34: περιλαμπή τε, ὀφθαλμοὶ θεῶν, ἄστρα καὶ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης φῶς ἀκοπίαστρον; note also that in Egyptian anthropogony, humans arise from the tears of Re. Cf. further refs in JACKSON, 126-6, n. 2.

314 *Pyramid Texts* §93a.

315 ERMAN/GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch* III, 53: 'Mädchen, Jungfrau'; "das Mädchen im Auge" als Bez. für die Pupille'. Note also that, as a verb, *hm* means 'rejuvenate, become young'; *Wörterbuch* III, 54: 'wieder jung werden, sich verjüngen; jung machen', etc.

goddesses) as the embodiment of the pupil (*dfd*, but also *km*)<sup>316</sup> of the eye of the solar divinity: Horus or Re.<sup>317</sup> Comments Jackson:

It is to be noted that in Egyptian settings the two meanings of *hwn.t* remain closely affiliated; [...] the association of various goddesses called *hwn.t* for their youthfulness with the pupil of the eyes of deities of that myth cycle remained very close, while in Greek settings, with the unique exception of Plutarch's speculation about Persephone/Kore, the two meanings of κόρη do not remain interconnected. Hence, as *hwn.t*, Isis' association with the pupil of a heavenly eye is firmly established in Egypt, and the author of the *Korē Kosmou* could well call Isis κόρη κόσμου and mean « pupil of the eye of the world ».

What was the function of the pupil of the eye of the sun? Isis as *pupilla* of Re/Horus appears to be both the all-seeing, existentiating light and the avenging, apotropaic fire emanating from this divine eye: 'I give you the sight of the right eye in the day, the vision of the left eye in the night';<sup>318</sup> 'Mistress of the Universe, who came forth from the eye of Horus, Noble Serpent which issued from Re and which came forth from the pupil (*dfd*) in the eye of Atum when Re arose the first time'.<sup>319</sup> The dominant theme of the *Korē Kosmou* is the embodiment (*ensōmatōsis*) of souls, which is enacted as a punishment for their transgression of their rightful place in the cosmic hierarchy. In this wider context, the goddess emerges as the pupil of the eye responsible for the emanation not only of divine light but also divine punishment. For Jackson, this dual power of the divine eye's pupil aligns exactly with the role of Osiris and Isis in the *Korē Kosmou*, who, at the behest of the four elements (each of whom bewail the pollution that humans are subjecting them to), descend to the earthly world to impose karmic justice upon the embodied souls: 'Another shall now come down to dwell among you, an efflux of my being, who shall keep holy watch on men's deeds. He shall be the judge of the living,—a judge that none can deceive,—and a terrible king of the dead; and every man shall meet with such retribution as his deeds deserve'.<sup>320</sup> Subsequent to this, Osiris and Isis also teach humans the ways to harmonise themselves with their higher nature: the divine rites, the consecration of temples and the institution of sacrifices.<sup>321</sup>

Ultimately, like the pupil of the eye, the significance of black appears to lie in its role as a perfect receptor of light (spirit). In the ancient view, a distinction was made

316 JACKSON, 126 with n. 2, comparing Coptic *kake, keke*, 'darkness, pupil of the eye' with a feminine form in Middle Egyptian, *km.t*; ERMAN/GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch* V, 124.

317 JACKSON, 127 with n 4, 128 with n 1.

318 OTTO, *Gott und Mensch*, 102, § 25.

319 *Festival Songs of Isis and Nephthys* = R. O. FAULKNER trans. 'The Bremner Rhind Papyrus—I', *JEA* 22 (1936): 132 (modified, JACKSON).

320 *Korē Kosmou*, Exc. XXIII. 62 (SCOTT, 490-1); JACKSON, 129-30

321 *Korē Kosmou*, Exc. XXIII. 65 (SCOTT, 492-3)

between human and divine vision: where the human eye had to receive external light in order to see, the divine eye was the source of its own light, a motif which is also detectable in Platonic optics and in Plutarch. The relationship of (divine) light to the black of the eye thus touches upon some very important themes that place the significance of esoteric optics and alchemical colour theory—topics central to the work of Schwaller de Lubicz—in an important light. Schwaller himself was adamant that the metaphysical connection between organ of perception and phenomenon perceived could be understood by studying the nature of the organ itself: thus to know light, one must know the eye.

*The Perfect Black*

Another significant link between the *Korē Kosmou* and blackness emerges right at the beginning of the text itself. The *Korē Kosmou* is part of the wider genre of hermetic Isis literature in which the Egyptian goddess imparts wisdom to her son, Horus; here, by way of recounting the initiatory chain of transmission, she alludes to her own initiation into ‘the perfect black’:

Pay attention, my son Horus, as you shall hear the secret doctrine which my forebear Kamephis chanced to hear from Hermes the writer of the records of all things, but I heard it from Kamephis the eldest of all of us when he honoured me with the perfect black (*teleiō melani*): now you hear it from me.<sup>322</sup>

The expression τελείω μέλανι (*teleiō melani*) also occurs in the *Greek Magical Papyri* in direct connection with the same goddess. After burning incense to the moon, the magician invokes her:

I call on you, Lady Isis, whom Agathos Daimon permitted to rule in the perfect black (*teleiō melani*) [...] Lady Isis, Nemesis, Adrasteia, many-named, many-formed, glorify me, as I have glorified the name of your son, Horus.<sup>323</sup>

The term *teleiō melani* has been interpreted in a number of ways: Reitzenstein gives ‘the perfect black [country]’, and while he connects Agathos Daimon to Amun-Chnum, he connects the black land not to Egypt but to the Desocaschoenus territory between Syene and Takompso (known for its black pottery in connection to an Isis priesthood);<sup>324</sup> Mead translates more directly: ‘the Black [Rite] that gives perfection’

322 *Korē Kosmou* = *CH*, Stobaeus Exc. XXIII.32 (SCOTT, 456-7); *CH* 4.10.10-5 (NOCK-FESTUGIÈRE). On Kamephis (Κμηφίς) see THISSEN, 1996.

323 *PGM* VII. 492f. trans. M. SMITH (BETZ, ed., 131.) as modified by BAIN, 218; cf. REITZENSTEIN (1904), 139 ff.

324 REITZENSTEIN, 140.

(and for the *PGM* passage suggests Agathos Daimon = Osiris, translating: ‘he who is Lord in the perfecting black’);<sup>325</sup> Scott appears to follow Mead, suggesting ‘Black (?) Rites’, or possibly, ‘in the great rites’.<sup>326</sup> Reitzenstein and Mead’s further discussions are perhaps the most revealing, as they attempt to situate the idea of ‘black’ within a wide intersection of references to Graeco-Egyptian mysteries,<sup>327</sup> while also going on to adduce the important connections to the pupil of the eye that have already been examined. For Reitzenstein, Amun-Kmephis (Ammon-Knepf) is the ‘mysterious black’ (*teleiō melani*) by virtue of the epithet: ‘he who hold himself hidden in his eye’ or ‘he who veils himself in his pupil’.<sup>328</sup> Here, it should be added that the term *teleiō* neatly encapsulates both of the meanings of Amun’s name, which, as Hornung has pointed out, means both ‘the hidden one’ and ‘the perfected one’.<sup>329</sup>

*Melanōsis*

The connection of the *chēm-* etyma to blackness has often been linked to the first stage of the (fourfold) alchemical process, *melanōsis*, ‘the blackening’. In order to go beyond generalisations, however, the specific idea of blackness in the earliest Graeco-Egyptian alchemical texts must be explored in more detail. It is important to recognise that, right from the beginning of Graeco-Egyptian alchemy, the names and colours of the metals were interchangeable; the colour itself was understood as the “spirit” of the metal, while the material medium which served as its support was the “body”.<sup>330</sup> The nature of the metal thus depends on the purity of the body and the intensity of the spiritual colour. In effect, the planetary metals were seen as one entity in which different degrees of “somatic” purity and spiritual/chromatic (or “pneumochromatic”) intensity prevailed. The alchemical process, therefore, inhered in two fundamental goals (framed in the metallic aspect of the work by the separation and reunification of body and spirit):

- Separatio*—
- i) Purification of the body
  - ii) Intensification of the spirit
- Unificatio*—

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325 G. R. S. MEAD, 149, 156, citing the ancient mystery tradition: ‘Osiris is a dark god’.

326 SCOTT, 457 n. 2.

327 REITZENSTEIN, 142-4; MEAD, 156-8.

328 Noting the etymology of the name Amun: ‘the hidden one’.

329 See Erik HORNUNG, *Idea into Image* (= *Geist der Pharaonenzeit*).

330 See Arthur John HOPKINS, ‘A Study of the Kerotakis Process as Given by Zosimos and Later Alchemical Writers’, *Isis* 29 (1938): 328.



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It is not difficult to see how this process could apply to non-metallic bodies, and, as will be seen in the work of de Lubicz, this is precisely the approach that was encompassed within the biological and metaphysical applications of the *œuvre*. Not only does the process of spiritual intensification form the key to ontogenesis as articulated in Schwaller's concept of 'qualitative exaltation', the process coheres deeply with the great shifts in the structures of human ontology as observed in the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of Jean Gebser, who describes the becoming of consciousness precisely in terms of increasing intensifications of the spirit.<sup>331</sup> Returning to the mineral kingdom, alchemically understood as the living foundation of all biological phenomena, much is gained by examining the deeper meanings of the four colour-stages within the metallurgical process, the first of which was black:

I.	Μελανωσις	<i>Melanōsis</i> ( <i>nigredo</i> )	‘blackening’	Uncoloured matter
II.	Λευκωσις	<i>Leukōsis</i> ( <i>albedo</i> )	‘whitening’	Silver (contains “occult gold”)
III.	Ξανθωσις	<i>Xanthōsis</i> ( <i>citrinitas</i> )	‘yellowing’	Gold (contains “occult violet”)
IV.	Ιωσις	<i>Iōsis</i> ( <i>rubedo</i> )	‘purpling’	Pure tincture (elixir/stone)

Like the pupil of the eye, the significance of black lies again in its role as a perfect medium for light (spirit). Given that colour represented the defining, individual qualities of the metallic phenomenon, black—the absence of colour—represented a primordial state devoid of such qualities. To blacken was to render a (metallic) body spiritless. A spiritless body was the perfect medium for somatic purification and, in turn, a *purified* spiritless body became the perfect medium for the transformative spiritual *tincture*. Because of this, black was the *conditio sine qua non* of alchemical transmutation.<sup>332</sup>

Hopkins describes how the black *prima materia* was infused with the volatile spirits of metals using the kerotakis process. The kerotakis was a closed, two level vessel that enabled one substance to be immersed in the volatile fumes rising from another substance.<sup>333</sup> One substance was placed at the bottom of the vessel directly over a heat source; the other substance was placed in the top half of the vessel on a grill. The fumes from the first substance would rise up and envelope the second. Because the

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331 GEBSER, *Gesamtausgabe*, vols II-IV.

332 HOPKINS, ‘Kerotakis’: 328.

333 For a description, see: J. R. PARTINGTON, ‘The Kerotakis Apparatus’, *Nature* vol. 159, issue 4049 (1947): 784.

vessel was closed, the fumes would circulate continuously—rising, condensing, falling—until the original substance had expended itself. All the while, the second substance was infused with its “spirit”.

This was the practical means by which the metallic body was blackened, whitened, yellowed and finally empurpled by the volatile spirits of metals. During the first phase, an original material was blackened either superficially, or ‘through and through’,<sup>334</sup> and it is quite possible that the *melanōsis* that thoroughly penetrated the matter (as opposed to the superficial blackening) bears some relationship to the idea of the ‘perfect black’. In this connection, it may be pointed out that, in many respects, the prime black matter here acts exactly as fertile black soil (*kem*) for the spiritual seed (tincture). Interestingly, a distinct gender symbolism becomes apparent not only in the feminine, nourishing earth (cf. the *Korē* as virgin), but also in the penetrating power of the male reagents (volatile spirits), culminating in the explicitly virile *ios* (a word etymologically connected to virulence and virility; the Egyptian concept of semen as venom may provide a further semantic underlay).

The kerotakis process has been emphasised for two reasons. First, it is a clear recapitulation of the conditions of metallogenesis as understood according to the exhalation theory. Here, fusible metallic bodies are seen to originate from vapours arising from sulphur and mercury. The exhalation theory, derived from Aristotle’s *Meteorologica*, persisted in Arabic and Latin Western traditions to inform the kinds of Early Modern empirical alchemies that would be later revived in the milieu of Parisian alchemists surrounding Fulcanelli. It is therefore crucial to understanding the emphasis that de Lubicz would give to the role of the volatile spirits of metals in the production of alchemically stained glass. Second, although the process is clearly of an empirical/technical order of metallurgical alchemy, it is clearly situated within a wider framework of soteriological and cosmogonic theurgy. Here, the liberation of the soul is crucial to the spiritual regeneration of nature through theurgic apotheosis and demiurgic participation in the constancy of cosmogenesis; the metallurgical work is effectively an empirical test, in this life, of the alchemist’s ability to master the dual process of bodily purification (*melanōsis*) and spiritual intensification (*iōsis*) so fundamental to the Pythagorean imperative underpinning hieratic alchemy. This dual engagement with alchemy as a metallurgical and theurgical process is thus crucial to understanding the Neopythagorean, Egyptosophical and practical alchemical currents that meet many centuries later in René Schwaller de Lubicz.

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334 NB: ‘through and through’ as ‘perfect(ly) black’. Silver contains ‘occult gold’; gold, ‘occult ios’; *CAAG*, 2.3, 6. ‘The operation which brings out the hidden nature’; *CAAG*, 3.29, 11: ‘In doing this you will cause the quality [colour] hidden in the interior to come forth’; ‘In fact’ (says Mary), ‘transform their very nature and you will find what you wish’. See also: *CAAG* 2.4, 48; 3.4, 20-1; *CAAG* 3.29, 3: ‘the tincture in violet may be recognised by this sign, that is should start deep in the interior [occult]—that which is called the Ios of gold’. Cf. HOPKINS, ‘Kerotakis’, passim.

What becomes evident is that there is a stage beyond gold in which the spiritual colour—the “pneumochromatic” virility—reaches such an intensity that it alone can transform the body. This was the function of what later became known as the ‘elixir’ or ‘philosophical stone’ and it was identified with the *ios* concept, a polysemantic word meaning not only ‘violet’ (the flower and the colour) but also ‘poison, venom, arrow’; ‘rust’ (on iron); ‘verdigris’ (on copper); as well as ‘one’ (*monos*).<sup>335</sup> The term is cognate with the Latin root *vir* (whence *vīs*, ‘virulence, power, strength’; *vīrus*, ‘poison’; *vīrtus* ‘virility, virtue, masculine strength’) as well as Sanskrit *vīrya/vīrah* (virile hero).<sup>336</sup> The cumulative meanings suggests a violet-coloured, virulent potency that is able to penetrate like an arrow and infect like a poison in order to strengthen the chromatic virtue (leading in metals to the “flowers” or oxidisations that transform and corrupt their bodies).<sup>337</sup>

The emphasis on metallic transmutation through the use of virulent powdered elixirs of silver and gold not only attests to the presence of empirical knowledge and practice, it is also deeply bound to the spiritual aspect of alchemy, a point that one only begins to understand more fully when one recognises the overwhelming emphasis in the contemporary hermetic corpus that was placed upon *ensōmatōsis* and *enspsychōsis*—the formation of bodies and the incarnation of souls within them. In this context, a spiritual intensity that transforms the body is also deeply emblematic of the principal functions of soteriology in which the creation of a resurrection body takes central stage as propaedeutic to the spiritual regeneration of the natural cosmos. This theurgic and demiurgic aspect of alchemy is crucial to understanding the nondual nature of the process, and demands to be examined in more detail.

### Alchemy as Theurgy, Alchemy as Tantra

Iamblichus, like Plato, placed the demonic within the embodied soul, the only chaos untamed by the Demiurge. Yet, in Iamblichus’s Platonism the purpose of this alienation was made clearer: while Plato’s Demiurge gave to each soul a spark of himself (*Tim.* 41c), Iamblichus understood this to mean that each soul had the responsibility to perform its own demiurgy, that is to say, its own *theurgy*. The task for every soul was to partake in divine mimesis by creating a cosmos out of the initial chaos of its embodiment.

—Gregory Shaw<sup>338</sup>

335 Cf. LSJ, *vide* ἰόομαι, ‘become or be rusty’; ‘become acrid or embittered’; ‘convert into ἰός’ (Zos. Alch., 148, 238B).

336 Cf. LSJ; MONIER-WILLIAMS.

337 See especially EVOLA, *Hermetic Tradition*, 90-3.

338 Gregory SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press: 1995), 15.

*Penetration, Baptism, Redemption*

Zosimos of Panopolis (c. 300 CE) is generally recognised as one of the earliest attested alchemists within the Graeco-Egyptian canon.<sup>339</sup> Panopolis was the Greek name for Akhmim, the Upper Egyptian city whose native name derives from the ancient Hermopolitan theology that personified the pre-creative powers of the primordial waters as an eight-fold hypostasis of Amun, whose name means ‘the hidden or perfect one’ (Akhmim is the same city in which the Coptic-Arabic alchemical manuscripts mentioned at the beginning of this chapter were found). The rich alchemical history of this city lies deeply rooted within the wider Egyptian temple traditions in which artisanal technique and temple cult were not only inextricably intertwined, but still thriving in Late Antiquity alongside gnostic, hermetic, Christian and Greek traditions.<sup>340</sup> Zosimos, an Egyptian himself, alludes to the role of Egyptian priests as guardians of alchemical knowledge (some even possessing alchemical books), and he is said to have visited a Memphite temple in order to see its special furnace.<sup>341</sup> Given that Zosimos emerged from a cultural heritage in which artisanal technique and temple cult formed two sides of the same coin, it is no surprise to find him as equally concerned with metallurgical transmutation as he is with soteriological metaphysics. But it is not only Egyptian traditions to which Zosimos refers. The divine origins of the art are intriguingly linked to the Judaic mythology of the Nephilim. In a fragment preserved by a ninth century Byzantine chronicler, Zosimos relates how ‘certain angels’ revealed the ‘arts of nature’ to human women in exchange for erotic intercourse:

It is stated in the holy scriptures or books, dear lady, that there exists a race of daimons who have commerce with women. Hermes made mention of them in his *Physika*; in fact almost the entire work, openly and secretly, alludes to them. It is related in the ancient and divine scriptures that certain angels lusted for women, and descending from the heavens, they taught them all the arts of nature. On account of this, says the scripture, they offended god, and now live outside heaven—because they taught to men all the evil arts which are of no advantage to the soul. These same scriptures also say that from them [the angels] the giants were born. Their initial transmission about these arts came from *Chēmes*. He called this book the *Book of Chēmes*, whence the art is called *Chēmeia*.<sup>342</sup>

339 Marcellin BERTHELOT, in his *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* (1887), was the first to place Zosimos under the rubric of Greek alchemy.

340 See DERCHAIN, ‘L’Atelier des Orfèvres’, 219–42.

341 Alchemical furnace: FOWDEN, 120, 66 n. 35, 67; FESTUGIÈRE, *Hermétisme*, 158 n. 69; *Les Alchimistes Grecs*, 26.5–6; CHADWICK, *Priscillian*, 21 nn. 2, 4; Egyptian priests and alchemy: ZOSIMOS, *fr. syr.* 222, 223–4, 226.

342 A. A. MOSSHAMMER, ed., *George Synkellos, Ecloga Chronographica* (Leipzig: Tübnner, 1984), 14.4–14; trans. after Kyle A. FRASER, ‘Zosimos of Panopolis and the Book of Enoch: Alchemy as Forbidden Knowledge’, *Aries* 4, 2 (2004): 125, 128; Michèl MERTENS,

Not only does this passage point, and lend weight, to the most convincing (Egyptian) etymology of alchemy within the purview of late antique sources, the art of *Chêmeia* is also related specifically to Hermes, thus bringing alchemy once again into the ambit of Egyptian tradition. As to the ‘arts of nature’ themselves, they are elaborated in a related account from the *Book of Enoch*:

And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them (1 Enoch 6.1-3) [...] And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives [...] and they began to going unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments (7.1-2) [...] And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives [...] and made known to them the metals of the earth and the art of working them [...] and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures [...] Baraqijal (taught) astrology, Kokabel the constellations [...] Araquiel the signs of the earth, Shamsiel the signs of the sun [...] And as men perished, they cried, and their cry went up to heaven (8.1-4).<sup>343</sup>

Beyond these important points, however, it is perhaps the reference to ‘colouring tinctures’ (τα βαφικα, *ta baphika*) that provides the key to the conception of alchemy as a hieratic art. In Greek, the word for ‘colouring tinctures’ (βαφικα, *baphika*) is related to the word ‘baptise’ (βαπτίζειν, *baptizein*); the sense in both cases is of a penetrating, purifying and perfecting power (cf. *rasa*, mercury). For Zosimos, baptism allowed the metallurgical and spiritual work to be conceived together as cognate processes of purification. It is imperative to realise that here the work on nature (*physis*), was deeply embedded within the hermetic soteriological framework that Zosimos ultimately operated within. Here, the penultimate and ultimate aims of alchemy correspond to apotheosis (participation in divine energies) and demiurgy (participation in creative energies) respectively. The penultimate aim of alchemy for Zosimos is thus the liberation of the *psyche* from enslavement in the world of fatality (*heimarmenē*), and this is achieved through a mysterious baptismal *krater* (mixing bowl):

Do these things until you perfect your soul. When you recognize that you have been perfected, then, realizing [or: perfecting] the natural tinctures (*baphike*), spit on matter, take refuge in Poimandres, and once baptized in the *krater* (*baptistheisa tēi kratēri*) ascend quickly to your own race.<sup>344</sup>

*Alchimistes Grecs, Tome IV: Zosime de Panapolis* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), LXX-LXXVII.

343 1 Enoch; R. H. CHARLES, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 191-3; Parentheses and ellipses as cited in FRASER, 127.

344 In André-Jean FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste Tome I: L'Astrologie et les Sciences* (Paris: Occultes, 1950), 368, II. 1-4.

The reference to Poimandres is not insignificant, for the hermetic text that bears his name informs the reader that Poimandres is no less than the ‘mind (*noos*) of the divine sovereign’,<sup>345</sup> while another related hermetic text speaks of a *krater* that is ‘filled with νοῦς (*nous*)’, i.e., ‘(divine) mind’:

All those who heeded the proclamation and were baptized in mind (*ebaptisanto tou noos*), these received the *gnōsis* and became complete men, having received mind.<sup>346</sup>

While the fascinating details of the soul’s baptism in divine mind could delay us indefinitely, it is important to recognise here that the process of deification, of liberating the *psyche* from the fatality imposed by astral *heimarmenē*, describes but half of a much greater process. Before one proceeds to discuss the other half, however (and thus to adumbrate the *ultimate* aims of alchemy), the strong anti-cosmic attitude displayed in Zosimos’ admonition to ‘spit on mater’ must first be contextualised.

As is well known, two views of the cosmos pervaded Hellenistic antiquity: the cosmos as a positive, beneficent order into which the soul should be integrated; the cosmos as a deceptive, corrupting prison from which the soul should be liberated.<sup>347</sup> Platonic tradition was heir to both perceptions, and the reason for this ambiguity stems from apparent contradictions inherent to the dialogues themselves. As some scholars have keenly recognised, however, these attitudes actually reflect phases of the Platonic προπαιδεία (*propaideia*, the ‘formative’ or ‘preparatory’ teachings) in which the dialogues are tailored to the stages through which the soul must progress in order to be prepared for the mysteries. The soul reflects and perceives the cosmos according to the current composition of its own nature: either as a limit to its freedom or as a *vehicle* for its freedom. It is the latter attitude which best reflects the proper nature of apotheosis.

Such preparation is necessary because the process of ‘reflecting’ a negative or positive ontological perception was only *intensified* in undergoing the mysteries: the *katabasis*, the initiatic descent into the underworld that pivoted upon an encounter with the chthonic feminine numen (Persephone, Hecate). As Hans Lewy remarks: ‘The Chaldean Hecate encountered human souls in forms *always adequate to their internal condition*: for those sunk in the body she was necessity; for the erring, demonic temptation; for the renegade, a curse; for those who recalled their divine nature, a guide; and for those who returned home, grace’.<sup>348</sup> Attitudes to matter and the feminine (cf. μάτηρ as ‘mother’ and ‘matter’) are thus a crucial spiritual index, and Hecate, the very personification of all nature and matter—and the queen of the

345 *Corpus Hermeticum* I.

346 *Corpus Hermeticum* IV, 4.

347 Cf. SMITH, *Map is Not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 88-103, 138-9, 160, 172-89; SHAW 8-10.

348 LEWY, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, 365.

daimons responsible for binding souls to matter—emerges as the mirror *par excellence* of the embodied soul, reflecting the soul's inner constitution or bearing towards *mat(t)er* back at it.<sup>349</sup>

Right at the root of this mirroring phenomenon is the soul's position as mean term between the transient and the eternal, and in particular the soul's faculty of φαντασία (*phantasia*, 'imagination') which acts precisely as a mediating faculty between the visible and the invisible.<sup>350</sup>

### *Apotheosis and Demiurgy*

The foregoing discussion helps refine the question of alchemical *theōsis* as one of *theon ergon*, divine action, and this forms an important preface to understanding not only alchemy as a hieratic art, but also to understanding the significance of Schwaller de Lubicz's perception of divinity as functional consciousness. Against Platonic dualists, for whom philosophy was an escape from a demonic, spiritually devoid cosmos, Iamblichus held that matter and nature were derived from, i.e. created by, a divine principle; the modalities of nature were *extensions* of divinity. Thus, the phenomenal cosmos for Iamblichus is a theurgic act in itself, the visible portion of the entire spectrum of divine activity. Most importantly, the soul's dual nature—the mean term between mortal and immortal—gave it the privileged position of being able to participate directly in the creation *and* salvation of the cosmos.<sup>351</sup>

To return to the question of the ultimate aims of the alchemical process, and thus to Zosimos, it becomes apparent that the key to the liberation of the soul from its enchainment in matter consisted not merely in escaping from the bonds of matter. A deeper responsibility was entailed: the redemption of nature herself. This aspect aligns precisely with the hieratic neoplatonic and theurgic imperative in which the process of apotheosis, properly conceived, involved not merely the *anagogia* or deification of the soul, but also a participation in the cosmic *demiurgia* by which divine forms were able to more fully interpenetrate matter in order to make nature a more perfect divine instrument. Comments Fraser:

The goal of alchemy, for Zosimos, is liberation of the spiritual part of the human from the bonds of matter and Fate—from the clutches of the archons and their daimons. However, alchemy cannot simply ignore these forces, or wish them

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349 SHAW, *Theurgy*.

350 *Phantasia*, it should be noted, is not to be understood here in the sense of idle fancy (i.e. simply fantasy) but in the more profound sense given by Henry CORBIN: the *mundus imaginalis* (the imaginal world), i.e. the locus of and faculty for perceiving (and interacting with) the world of archetypal images—and thus the modality by which divinity reveals itself to the *psyche*.

351 SHAW, 16.

away: as a form of “theurgy”, alchemy works directly with material substances, and seeks salvation through a spiritual regeneration of matter. Alchemy works *through* the world—a world ruled by hostile daimonic powers.<sup>352</sup>

The same process is germane to the experience of *theōsis* (deification) as conceived by Eastern Orthodox theologians, who speak not just of the soul’s deification but also of the *theōsis* of the cosmos<sup>353</sup> (and in this respect, it is no coincidence that the first Christian alchemists were not those famous to western Europe, but those of early Byzantium, heir to the same Graeco-Egyptian traditions as Zosimos; indeed, as will be seen, the Byzantine alchemist Stephanos of Alexandria is the name behind the very transmission of alchemy to early Islamic culture, as recorded in the Book of Morienus).<sup>354</sup> Ultimately, the process requires the human soul itself to become a perfecting spiritual tincture, and in this light, the decisive (and perhaps definitive) goal of alchemy is thus to liberate the soul so that it may participate in the divine activity of the cosmic *baphika*, thus redeeming nature and hence, potentially, all embodied souls. Here, the deeper identity between Iamblichean theurgy and Zosimos’ alchemy becomes strikingly apparent; and this more profound conception of alchemy—i.e. alchemy as theurgy—becomes vital for understanding just how the material aspect of perfection is engaged not as a means toward material ends *per se*, but as a foundation (and *telos*) for the perfection of *psyche*, *soma* and *kosmos*.<sup>355</sup>

352 Kyle A. FRASER, ‘Zosimos of Panopolis and the Book of Enoch: Alchemy as Forbidden Knowledge’, *Aries* 4, 2 (2004): 131-2.

353 See Vladimir LOSSKY, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press: Crestwood, NY, 1976).

354 Cf. generally Robert MATHIESEN, ‘Byzantium’, in *DGWE*, 218-25. As one moves from the eastern and near eastern alchemies towards their influence upon Islamic and European alchemies, the issue of an Abrahamic alchemical tradition may be broached. Although this is difficult to sustain in any monolithic sense, it is at least useful as a heuristic tool, and it is important to note some of the Judaic, Christian and Islamic elements of alchemy as a preface to understanding the complex religious heritage of European alchemy, which, although simultaneously heir to theological lineages of a blatantly monotheistic and pagan-hermetic character, nevertheless took a largely Christian form. In so far as they stem from an essentially Ancient Near Eastern origin, Judaic elements have already been seen to be deeply intertwined with the Hellenistic alchemies of Zosimos (cf. Theosobeia, Maria et al.) Not only is the apochryphal *Book of Enoch* central to the understanding of the hieratic arts as conceived by Zosimos, elements of Semitic and Judaic ritual thoroughly imbue the Graeco-Egyptian papyri that form the basis of the magical and alchemical corpuses (not to mention their distinct overlaps with the gnostic and hermetic codices). Despite this high syncretism, however, the bulk of the Graeco-Egyptian magical and alchemical texts remain brazenly pagan and hence polytheistic. Perhaps more accurately, one may refer with Erik Hornung to ‘the one and the many’, understood as two sides of the same divine coin.

355 Cf. Albert de JONG, ‘Zosimos of Panopolis’, *DGWE*, 1185: ‘Scholars have claimed that for Zosimos, the ‘procedures of conventional alchemy are strictly preparatory to the



*Poison and Penetration*

While historical connections between Greece and India are well-known, establishing anything definitive in the way of historical connections between Graeco-Egyptian alchemy and Indo-Tibetan alchemy is fraught with difficulties. However, clear morphological parallels between theurgy and tantra exist that cannot be ignored. As has been seen, tantric alchemy works on metals as a propaedeutic to transforming the mortal body into a spiritual body in order to attain *jivanmukti* (embodied immortality or ‘liberation in life’). It is thus no surprise to find the essential connection between the theurgic and tantric approaches to alchemy inhering precisely in their doctrines of the meta/physical body. Comments Shaw:

The similarities between the doctrines of the subtle body in later Neoplatonism and the yoga traditions are suggestive, particularly with respect to the role of “heat” as it relates to “breath” and the “channels” of the soul’s mystical body in yogic and theurgic practices. Iamblichus says the presence of the god heats the soul and effects a visual theophany. The divine heating occurred within the soul’s “mystical” body, yet the fact that this body was called pneumatic (*pneumatikos*), as well as aetheric (*aitherodes*) and luminous (*augoeides*; *DM* 239, 9-11) suggests that physical breath (*pneuma*) played a role in this heating and incandescence. Breath may have been the means through which the soul was translated to its mystical body and, once established there, homologized to the cosmos and Creator.<sup>356</sup>

The mystical body—the pneumatic or pranic physiology—is thus the crucial link between the anagogic and demiurgic aspects of alchemy. Through interpenetration with spirit (*pneuma*, *prana*), the soul is raised to divinity, the body immortalised, and thus allowed to participate in the ever-presence of creation. Some more specific comparisons of the anagogic process are elaborated by Shaw as follows:

“Heat” (*tapas/yoga* : *thermon/theurgy*) is awakened by, or directly related to, the “breath” (*pranayoga* : *pneuma/theurgy*). When sufficiently heated, it flows up the “channels” (*nadis/yoga* : *ochetail/theurgy*) of the mystical body to divinize the soul. It may be possible also to compare the fiery goddess Hecate, invoked by theurgists, with the goddess Kundalini, invoked by yogins, since both were responsible for the salvation or punishment of souls depending on their purity and preparation for the encounter.<sup>357</sup>

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purification and perfection of the soul’ (Fowden 1986, 123). Many texts, by contrast, suggest that purification of the soul was, for Zosimus, a *conditio sine qua non* for the alchemical work, which could lead to the knowledge allowing a person to escape the bonds of Fate’.

356 SHAW, *Theurgy*, 222.

357 SHAW, *Theurgy*, 222 n. 12.

In addition to Shaw's points, and in specific light of the foregoing discussion of the role of baptising tinctures (*baphikē*) in the soteriological system of Zosimos, one cannot ignore the overwhelming insistence placed by the tantric alchemists of medieval India on liberation through the penetrating, purifying and perfecting power of mercury (*rasa*). Given that baptism (*baphē*) as tincture (*baphikē*) conveys the idea of both metallic and spiritual penetrations, and given that the idea of mercury would be unanimously associated with *spiritus* in European alchemy (French *esprit*, German *Geist*), it is crucial to recognise that the principle act of spiritual penetration is pivotal to both western and eastern systems of alchemy. In order to furnish the deeper, metaphysical and soteriological background to this idea in a way that also sheds light on Hellenic alchemical motifs, an important precedent in the Upanishadic symbolism of archery must be mentioned.

As Coomaraswamy notes, texts such as the *Mundaka Upanishad* employ the verb *viddhi* as a double entendre, playing on the dual meanings of the homophonous roots:  $\sqrt{\text{vid}}$ , 'know, understand, perceive' and  $\sqrt{\text{vidh}}$  (*vyadh*), 'bore through, pierce, hit'.<sup>358</sup> Here the penetration of a physical target by an arrow is seen to cohere with the adept's penetration of the absolute through the realisation that arrow and target, like *atman* and *brahman*, are not dual but one.<sup>359</sup>

Having taken as a bow the great weapon of the Upanishad, one should fix in it the arrow sharpened by constant Meditation (*upāsana-nisitam*). Drawing it with a mind like unto reality (*tadbhāva-gatena cetasā*, 'that-which-is'), O noble one, penetrate (*viddhi*) the Imperishable like a target! The primordial sound (*Om*) is the bow; *Atman* the arrow; *Brahman* the mark. With soberness, reality ('that-which-is') can be penetrated. You should become one, consubstantial, with reality (*tanmayo bhavet*), like the arrow and the target!<sup>360</sup>

Given that the Graeco-Egyptian *ios*, the penetrating substance *par excellence*, also means 'poison, arrow', one cannot help detect some intriguing alchemical consonances in the idea of penetration: the arrow of *atman* penetrates ('knows, perceives') the absolute (*brahman*) just as the transfiguring elixir/tincture (*ios*) transfixes and baptises (*baphē*) the body and the soul.<sup>361</sup> The spiritual resonances of archery become even further amplified as soon as one takes into account the fact that, in Abrahamic

358 Ananda COOMARASWAMY, 'The Symbolism of Archery'; *Mundaka Upanishad*, II.3.4; Charles Rockwell LANMAN, *A Sanskrit Reader* (Harvard University Press, 1884; Delhi, 2001), 244, 253.

359 This general motif is also taken up as a specific *sadhana* in Tibetan esoteric praxis; the fourth statement from *The Six Meditation Techniques of Acarya Manjusrimitra*, for instance, admonishes: 'aim [the arrow] at the target [of the crown bindu]'.

360 Modified trans. after Coomaraswamy and Aurobindo.

361 In Greek the more standard word for arrow, *toxos*, is synonymous with 'poison' (whence 'toxic', for usually arrows bore poison to their targets).

tradition, the notion of ‘sin’ (Hebrew *bet*, Greek *hamartia*) means precisely ‘to miss or fall short of the mark’. But without straying too far from the more immediate contexts, it should be mentioned that the motif of archery is invariably connected in the Greek mind with Apollo, the god of healing who, in the opening passages of Homer’s *Iliad*, dispenses disease bearing arrows upon Agamemnon and his army.<sup>362</sup> Here one enters the presence of a quintessential play of life and death that would also find alchemical expression in the idea of the universal “medicine” (*katholikon pharmakon*), noting further that the term *pharmakon* means not merely medicine but ‘poison, medicine, magical spell/philtre’. In tantric alchemy, there a similar play on the word for poison (*visha*), which, in texts such as Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, refers to the double, killing/vivifying power of the *kundalini* serpent’s venom (secretly: nectar), holding the power not only to ‘poison’ (*vish-*) but to ‘pervade’ (*vish-*) and hence to transfigure with deifying *amrita*.<sup>363</sup> Ultimately, the abiding double nature of this “poison as *Gift*”<sup>364</sup> encapsulates one of the most fundamental dynamics of the alchemical process, and, at least to a certain extent, both the Graeco-Egyptian and Indo-Tibetan alchemical traditions can be recognised as adumbrating the same essential reality.

### Divine Animation of Matter

#### *The House of Gold and the Unity of Hieratic and Artisanal Technē*

Returning to the permutations on the meaning of *kem*, it is important to not only situate alchemy in light of the hermetic tradition (for which there are strong historical and linguistic footholds in the Graeco-Egyptian sources), but also to better evaluate the genuine origins of the hermetic and alchemical traditions in pharaonic civilisation. The origins of the *Hermetica* in Egyptian theology have been examined and to varying degrees confirmed by scholars such as Stricker, Iversen, Mahé, Fowden, Daumas, and Kingsley.<sup>365</sup> As to alchemy as hermetic *technē*, it should be noted that the earliest

362 HOMER, *Iliad*, 1.10 ff.

363 *Tantrāloka* 3. 171; WHITE, *Alchemical Body*, 221, 465 n. 16; SILBURN, *Kundalini*, 27, 52.

364 In German, *Gift* means ‘poison’.

365 B. H. STRICKER, ‘The Corpus Hermeticum’, *Mnemosyne* 2 (1949): 79-80; Erik IVERSEN, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1984), passim; Jean-Pierre MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte: Les textes de Nag Hammadi et leurs parallèles Grecs et Latins*, 2 vols. (Quebec, 1987-1982); François DAUMAS, ‘Le fonds Égyptien de l’hermétisme’, in Julien RIES, ed. *Gnosticisme et monde hellénistique: Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve (11-14 mars 1980)* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1982), 3-25; KINGSLEY, ‘Poimandres: The Etymology of the Name and the

sources in the Graeco-Egyptian canon, the *Leiden* and *Stockholm* papyri (i.e. the Demotic Magical Papyri), were discovered in Upper Egypt. These texts, in addition to possessing a metallurgical and “proto-chemical” aspect, also bear a distinct and undeniable overlap with the ritual or theurgic material contained in the *Greek Magical Papyri*—a series of ritual manuals whose ultimate provenance is Egyptian temple cult. Indeed, the connection between the Greek and the Demotic magical papyri is so self-evident that the most recent translation has seen fit to bring them together as one corpus.<sup>366</sup> More and more, one finds oneself in the presence of an essentially Hellenistic cultural translation of pharaonic Egyptian ritual *cultus*, of which the hermeneuts or translators—clearly of a cosmopolitan and esoteric outlook—completely embraced not only Egyptian and Greek theological tradition, but also Judaic and Christian ritual liturgy (all of which becomes particularly pronounced in the use of divine names). Side by side with these theological and ritual traditions one finds Pythagorean, Mithraic, hermetic, gnostic and, of course, alchemical recitations. When engaging with such a bewildering array of material, the profound ramifications of Peter Kingsley’s remark that hermeticism is a ‘tradition of translation’ (*hermeneus*), must always, at every step of the way, be borne in mind:

it is important not to underestimate the significance of the linguistic fact that the Greek word for ‘interpreter’ or ‘translator’—*hermēneus*—was a derivative from the god-name Hermes. The Hermes-*hermēneus* pun was a well-worn one in the Greek language, inside as well as outside of Hermetic circles. Hermes was automatically associated with the function of interpreter and translator; and in the Graeco-Egyptian world a *hermēneus* was almost bound to be a translator from Egyptian into Greek. There was a real appropriateness in making Hermes Trismegistus the key recipient and transmitter—rather than the originator—of traditions deriving from the older Hermes: the great god Thoth. [...] on the other hand this example of an Egyptian name being translated and interpreted in Greek provides a remarkably vivid—and, from the point of view of the *Hermetica* as a whole, highly significant—example of what Hermetists meant when they attributed the role of interpreter and translator not only to the transmitter but even to the originator of their tradition. In short, here right at the start of the Hermetic corpus we have a startling reminder of *the role of Hermetism as a tradition of translation*.<sup>367</sup>

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Origins of the Hermetica’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 1-24; ‘From Pythagoras to the *Turba Philosophorum*: Egypt and Pythagorean Tradition’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 1-13.

366 Hans Dieter BETZ, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*. Second edition. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

367 KINGSLEY, ‘Poimandres’, 9-10.

Increasingly, the more astute among scholars are realising that this is not a matter of rabid, unthinking syncretism, but of a conscious translation of Egyptian theological directives into the symbolic registers of Hellenistic esotericism. In short, alchemy is so deeply embedded in the ritual, theological and cosmological traditions of late antique Graeco-Egyptian esotericism, whose own roots are planted deep in the (black) earth of pharaonic Egyptian temple cult, that to seek to understand alchemy as merely chemistry or metallurgy is fraught with the gravest of difficulties.

But the question still remains: is there any evidence in pharaonic Egypt for anything which approaches the hieratic conception of alchemy? Although scholars have recognised Egyptian metallurgical and technological influence upon Greek proto-chemistry, few step outside the bounds of this one-sided conceptual definition to discern the coalescence of spiritual and material praxes with an overarching emphasis on apotheosis through the creation of an immortal body, aspects that show distinct prominence in Chinese, Indo-Tibetan, Hellenistic-Egyptian and Islamic alchemical tradition. Indeed, one does not have to look far at all before an emphasis on spiritual immortality through the creation of a permanent body is found in pharaonic Egypt. Among Egyptologists, Edmund Meltzer is one of the few scholars who inclines increasingly towards the view that ‘the transmutation of the body in mummification was a prototypical alchemical act’, adding that such a suggestion is underscored ‘by the association and, sometimes, identification of the mummy with gold’.<sup>368</sup> Here the broad connections between Egyptian mortuary cult and the creation of an immortal body couldn’t be clearer; furthermore, this point helps explain the entire royal emphasis that was replete throughout all the later hermetic-alchemical texts.<sup>369</sup> But that having been said, can such claims be grounded any more concretely in Egyptian texts? Recent Egyptological scholarship would suggest—yes.

In 1990, the renowned French Egyptologist Philippe Derchain published a study of the texts of the *ht nb* (*la maison d’or* or ‘house of gold’) from the Temple of Hathor at Dendera, Upper Egypt.<sup>370</sup> Derchain showed how the artisanal traditions of the *ht nb* and the goldmaker’s workshop functioned hand in hand with Egyptian temple cult in the production of living statues. Stemming from traditions stretching back into the deepest antiquity, the specific intermingling of artisanal and theological traditions within the context of Egyptian temple cult penetrates directly to the heart of the origins of alchemy in Ptolemaic Egypt. Here the geographical nexus cannot be ignored, for Dendera is situated along the same bend in the Nile that harbours the

368 Edmund MELTZER, ‘Reflections on Egypt and Alchemy’, *Discussion in Egyptology* 46 (2000), 23.

369 Cf. also the reference to the preserving bodies in the hermetic *kore kosmou*.

370 Philippe DERCHAIN, ‘L’Atelier des Orfèvres à Dendara et les origines de l’alchimie’, *Chronique d’Égypte* 129 (1990): 219–42. See also: François DAUMAS, ‘L’Alchimie a-t-elle une origine égyptienne?’, in *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposiums 26.–30. September 1978 in Trier*. Aegyptiaca Treverensia 2 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1983), 109–18.

temple complexes of Luxor and Karnak (the object of de Lubicz's twelve year study), the alchemically significant town of Akhmim (birthplace of Zosimos), Nag Hammadi (where the Coptic gnostic and hermetic codices would be discovered in 1954) and Sōhāg (the provenance of the later Coptic alchemical texts mentioned at the beginning of this chapter).

The technical traditions that were developed and employed in Egyptian temple institutions were a vital part of the process by which ritual objects, especially statues, were created, consecrated, and divinised for use in Egyptian temple cult. Needless to say, the ramifications of this simple fact have enormous consequences for understanding alchemy as an art of creation, consecration and divine animation. In this context, all *materia magica* employed in theurgic and magical praxis must be seen to partake of an identical procedure (a point all the more significant in light of the overwhelming persistence of Egyptian temple cult in the magical, alchemical and theurgic practices preserved in the *Greek Magical Papyri*). In any event, at the heart of this process was the act of creating gods, or rather, material vehicles for divine forces, such as statues and talismans. The art also extended to the reanimation of the dead, an ontological category that, in Egyptian funerary tradition, was closely assimilated to that of the gods/statues themselves.<sup>371</sup>

### *The Opening of the Mouth*

The ritual dynamics of divine animation inhered in a specific ceremony known as the *opet-re* (the opening of the mouth and eyes), the quintessential Egyptian rite for consecration, deification, and the infusing of spiritual presence into matter. The opening of the mouth was performed on the dead and upon divine statues so that they were able to receive sustenance through food offerings (hence the opening of the *mouth*) as well as light (hence the opening of the *eyes*). As has been demonstrated by Ann Macy Roth, all the symbols of the mouthopening ritual point to the process of (re)birth. By mimicking the birth and maturation of a child, the ritual sought to 'take the newly reborn deceased person through the transitions of birth and childhood, so that he or she could be nourished by the adult food provided in such profusion for Egyptian mortuary cults'.<sup>372</sup> In particular, the ritual emphasises the aspects of the birth

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371 Eberhardt OTTO, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960), II, 1. According to Otto, the remaining evidence does not allow us to discern whether a distinction was made by the ancient Egyptians between the statues of kings, the statues of the dead and the statues of gods. It would thus seem that a blending of these realities—royalty, death, divinity—was likely the case. That Egyptian conceptions distinguish little between kings, the dead and gods in fact confirms the picture that emerges from other sources in the study of the dynamics of ancient apotheosis: death, whether initiatory or literal, is fundamentally bound to the process of royal deification.

372 ROTH, 'Fingers, Stars, and the 'Opening of the Mouth': The Nature and Function of the

and maturation process which affect nourishment: ‘the initial connection to the placenta, the severing of the umbilical cord, nursing, weaning, and teething’.<sup>373</sup> This is consistent with the fact that the nourishing force *par excellence* in Egyptian theology was the *ka*, a word which meant not only spirit, but placenta, and whose sense has been translated as ‘all that enlivens’.<sup>374</sup> Ultimately, the deep interrelationship between artisanal technology and sacerdotal cult discerned in the mouth-opening ritual becomes comprehensible only when one realises that the verb *mshj*, employed in the sense of ‘fashion, create’, also means ‘to give birth’.<sup>375</sup> Moreover, the very instrument used in the rituals for opening the mouth was assimilated not only to the artisan’s chief tool—the adze—but also to the foreleg of the bull. Not only was this the choicest cut of meat used in food offerings, it was, more essentially, the thigh of Seth (*khepesh en setesh*), a potent symbol of vivifying and destructive power deeply instrumental to the death and revivification of Osiris. Here, the significance accorded to the motif of the fixed salt in the femur (specifically: its role as pivot of death and palingenesis), becomes comprehensible through the deep connection between the symbol of the thigh, initiatic death and divine rebirth.

#### *The Thigh and Palingenesis*

In order to understand more precisely how this magical process of revivification occurred, one must turn to the scenes from the tomb of Rekhmira where the adze and the foreleg are assimilated to each other (Illustration 5). Here, the foreleg of the bull is specifically assimilated to the adze through the interweaving of their symbolic forms, thus identifying the nourishing force (the bull, the *ka*) with the creative or shaping force (the iron-bladed statue making tool). The adze was also seen to resemble the constellation of northern circumpolar stars—*ursur major*—known to the Greeks as ἀρκτος (*arktos*, the ‘great bear’), but regarded by the Egyptians as the thigh or foreleg of a bull (Illustration 6). Finally, it is also likened to the *khepesh* scimitar (the word *khepesh* meaning both ‘foreleg’ and ‘scimitar’) (Illustration 7).<sup>376</sup>

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Ntrwj-Blades’, *JEA* 79 (1993): 60.

373 ROTH, ‘Ntrwj-Blades’, 60.

374 HORNUNG, *Idea into Image*, 175.

375 *WÄS* II, 137: ‘gebären, bilden’.

376 ROTH, ‘Ntrwj-Blades’, 70; Herman TE VELDE, *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 86-9.

H I S T O R I O G R A P H Y

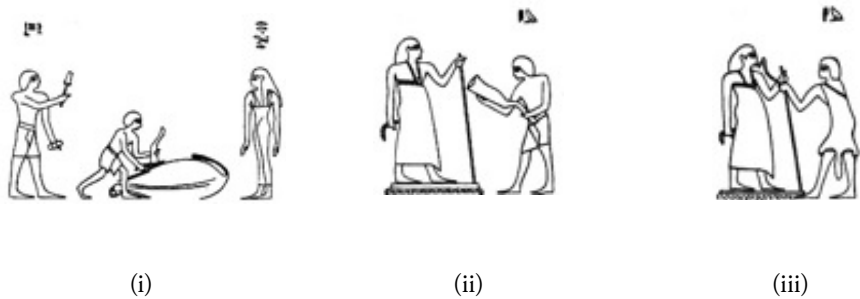


ILLUSTRATION 5: MOUTH-OPENING RITUAL, SCENES 43, 45 AND 46

Tomb of Rekhmira (after OTTO). (i) Removal of the bull's foreleg; (ii) Offering of the foreleg to the statue; (iii) Assimilation of foreleg to adze; opening of the mouth.

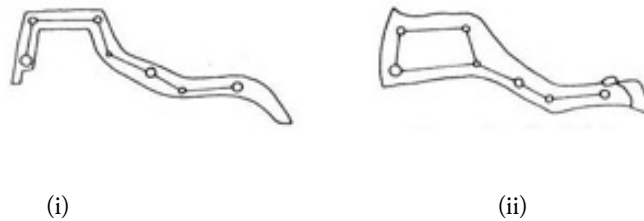


ILLUSTRATION 6: URSUR MAJOR AS (i) ADZE AND (ii) FORELEG OF A BULL

The adze was a statue making tool and the symbolic instrument for 'opening the mouth'; it had a blade of iron associated with the bones of Seth, the god of separation and division who played a central yet ambivalent function in the dangerous transitions of birth and death (reproduced from ROTH).



ILLUSTRATION 7: THE KHEPESH SCIMITAR

The constellation of the bull's foreleg came to stand, in Egypt as elsewhere, for the 'immortal' or 'undying' stars which never set (revolving around the celestial pole rather than sinking below the horizon); in Homer: 'the Great Bear that mankind also calls the Wagon: she wheels on her axis always fixed, watching the Hunter, and she alone is



denied a plunge in the Ocean's baths'.<sup>377</sup> The zenith of fixed stars possessed unrivalled symbolic distinction as the deathless summit of the celestial vault, tracing the unmoveable pivot upon which the cosmos was seen to turn. What is more, these 'undying stars' (*mskhtiw*) were regarded as the origin of meteoric iron (*bia*), which, like 'falling stars', would plunge to earth from their celestial locus as *thunderbolts*.<sup>378</sup> The iron-bladed adze and the thigh-constellation therefore unite not only in their form, but in the nature of their cosmic substance: meteoric iron—the thunderbolt. With this in mind, the functional identity of adze and thigh as mouthopening instrument starts to become clearer. G. A. Wainwright makes it explicit:

The thunderbolt, or lightning stroke, is the most tremendous force in nature for splitting, rending and blasting. A thunderbolt was, therefore, the most terrific instrument the priest could find with which to accomplish his design of forcing open that which death had closed.<sup>379</sup>

Thus, the bull's thigh, the adze, meteoric iron and the thunderbolt all cohere as a single reality—an astral nourishing, shaping, creative (and destructive) force. What is more, this reality, according to the mouthopening passages from the *Pyramid Texts*, is seen to come forth from a very specific god:

Horus has opened the mouth of N.  
with that with which he opened the mouth of his father,  
with which he opened the mouth of Osiris  
with the iron (*bia*) that came from Seth,  
the blade of iron from the undying stars (*mskhtiw bia*)  
with which the mouths of the gods are opened.<sup>380</sup>

Murderer of Osiris, divine criminal, enemy *par excellence*, disturber of the order which Egypt itself sought to exemplify, Seth (Typhon) is nevertheless crucial to a cosmic ecology whereby the transitions between death and life can only be effected after the overmastering power of Seth has made a drastic fissure at the very threshold between existence and non-existence.<sup>381</sup> While Hermann te Velde already saw how the

377 *Il.* 18.69-71; cf. also the remarks on Presocratic cosmology in KIRK-RAVEN-SHOFIELD, 10-17.

378 In Greek, *sidēros* means both 'star' and 'iron'; in English a 'siderite' refers to a meteor consisting principally of metallic iron.

379 WAINWRIGHT, 'Iron in Egypt', *JEA* 18 (1932): 7.

380 Mouth-opening ritual, episode 26, after OTTO; cf. scene no. 25 in the tomb-chapel of Rekhmira: *wp.n hr r n N m wpt.n.f r n it.f im m wpt.n.f r n wsir im / m bia pr m swty msxyw bia / wp r n ntrw im.f wp.k r N im.f*. FAULKNER, ed., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 13-14. Cf. OTTO, scenes 46 and 36; ROTH, 65. Cf. also *PT* § 306: *me en ek khepesh en setesh* (take the fore-leg of Seth).

381 On Seth's role in the cosmic ecology, see HORNUNG, 'Chaotische Bereiche in der

force represented by the foreleg of Seth is pivotal to both the death and rebirth of Osiris,<sup>382</sup> the implications of this observation are seldom drawn. The central ontological changes that inform the Osirian drama are achieved precisely through the power of Osiris' most feared *enemy*. 'Viewed in this way', remarks te Velde, 'Seth is not only a murderer and demon of death, but also assists the resurrection of Osiris. This would mean that he is the demonic initiator, who leads his brother to life through death by violence'.<sup>383</sup>

Another revealing example of the thigh as symbol of divine rebirth occurs in the Pythagorean doxographies. Here, a wealth of evidence presents itself to suggest that Pythagoras himself was regarded as a god—at least by his disciples, who in fact revered him as the *incarnation* of the Hyperborean Apollo:

- (i) Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 28. 140: The Pythagoreans derive their confidence in their views from the fact that the first to express them was no ordinary man but a god.<sup>384</sup>
- (ii) Ael. *V. H.* 4. 7: Pythagoras used to teach that he was of higher than mortal nature and origin.<sup>385</sup>
- (iii) D.L. 8. 1. 11: He is said to have been an awful person, and it was the opinion of his disciples that he was Apollo, come from the Hyperboreans.<sup>386</sup>
- (iv) Ael. *V.H.* 2. 26: Aristotle says that Pythagoras was hailed by the people of Croton as Apollon Hyperboreios.<sup>387</sup>

The visible sign of Pythagoras' divine nature was a golden thigh. In the account of the Iamblichus, the divine nature of Pythagoras is revealed to Abaris—the high priest of the Hyperborean Apollo. Abaris arrives from 'beyond the northern winds' (Hyperborea) to present an arrow to Pythagoras, as if he were a god:

Pythagoras, however, accepted the arrow, without expressing any amazement at the novelty of the thing, nor asking why the arrow was presented to him, as if he really was a God. Then he took Abaris aside and showed him his golden thigh, as

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geordnetem Welt', *ZÄS* 81 (1956): 28-32; VELDE, 'Seth', in *LÄ*, col. 909: 'But as limited disorder was accepted as essential to a living order, S. was accepted and venerated as a god with whom one had to come to terms'.

382 VELDE, *Seth*, 84-91.

383 VELDE, 98.

384 Cf. *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta*, ed. W. D. ROSS (= *AFS*), 130-3.

385 = *AFS*, 131.

386 = *AFS*, 131.

387 = *AFS*, 130. Further: APULEIUS, *De Deo Soc.* 20. 167: 'I believe Aristotle is sufficient witness to the fact that the Pythagoreans marvelled at any town-bred person who said he had never seen a divine being'.

an indication that he was not wholly mistaken [in his estimation of his real nature].<sup>388</sup>

As Kingsley has shown, details of seeming legend are to be comprehended not through the logic of history but as codes deeply bound to the magical practices and rituals of the mystery cults.<sup>389</sup> Like the bronze sandals worn by Empedocles and other initiates within the purview of Pythagorean tradition, the golden thigh is in fact an esoteric symbol and therefore needs to be comprehended within a precise initiatory context.<sup>390</sup> As Cook points out, this detail presupposes the death of Apollo as well as his consequent rebirth as Pythagoras; the golden thigh is thus a direct symbol of Pythagoras's divine nature: the hyperborean Apollo incarnate. Once again, the symbol is deeply implicated in the mysteries of initiatory death and revivification.<sup>391</sup>

As to the *arrow* received by Pythagoras, it confirms the association with Apollo that is garnered from the thigh. The bow and arrow, along with the lyre, are the sacred instruments of Apollo. *The Homeric Hymn to Apollo* informs us that it was with an arrow that Apollo slew the serpent *Python*.<sup>392</sup> Here the root *pyth-*, which figures in the names Pythia and Python, brings these events into specific association with Pythagoras, connecting him once again to the hyperborean Apollo. The overarching symbolic references all point to the primordial motif of *drakontomachia* (serpent slaying), and here one cannot overlook the deep coherence that the slaying of Python has with its Egyptian counterpart. Here it is precisely Seth-Typhon, the ambivalent god presiding over dangerous transitions, who slays the chaos serpent, Apep; the motif is tied specifically to the daily rebirth of the sun. The motif of solar rebirth, moreover, refers back directly into the mouthopening ritual, where the severing of the chaos serpent in cosmogenesis is assimilated to the cutting of the umbilical cord in human birth.

It may seem strange that in Egyptian myth, Seth-Typhon figures as the slayer of the primordial serpent (or, instrumentally, as the thunderbolt itself) whereas in Greek

388 IAMBlichus, *Vit. Pyth.* § 19; FIDELER and GUTHRIE, eds., 80.

389 KINGSLEY, *Ancient Philosophy*, 289-91: 'With also the same definiteness as the case of the bronze sandal, the symbolism of the golden thigh can be traced back to an initiatory scenario of death, descent into the underworld, and ritual dismemberment of the body followed by its reassembly and regeneration. It is also significant that a background of metallurgical magic is also clearly to be assumed here: one of much the same type as must be assumed as well in the case of the bronze sandal'.

390 In one account, Empedocles is said to have died by 'falling off a chariot and breaking his thigh'. KINGSLEY, *Ancient Philosophy*, 289-91, has interpreted this as an initiatic death through *descensus/katabasis* into the underworld.

391 COOK, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), II, 223-5; BURKERT, *Love and Science*, 159-61; DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 163 n. 43; ELIADE, *Shamanism*, 45 ff, 53.

392 As René GUÉNON points out, this is equivalent to the thunderbolt (*vajra*) with which Indra kills *Ahi* or *Vitra*. See the discussion of 'Symbolic Weapons' in *Fundamental Symbols*, 125.

myth Zeus wields the thunderbolt *against* Typhon. Confounding matters, Typhon is intimately associated in Greek myth with the serpent Python, the dragoness who is slain by the arrows of Apollo, a recapitulation of the slaying of Apep.<sup>393</sup> This seeming idiosyncrasy gains clarification when one realises the fundamentally liminal nature of Seth, who, presiding over the cosmological threshold between the underworld (*duat*) and the created world, embodies the precise locus where slayer, slain and instrument of slaying coalesce. Here, a curious alchemical paradox emerges whereby agent, instrument and patient begin to be seen not as separate entities but as *fluid aspects* of a primordial, nondual, self-reflexive act.

There is another, more famous connection between the lightning bolt and the thigh that needs to be mentioned. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, the god Dionysus is fathered by Zeus on a mortal woman, Semele, but before he comes to term, Hera, ever-jealous, tricks Zeus into appearing before his mortal consort in the fullness of his divine force. Zeus appears as the *kerounos* (thunderbolt, cf. *kepes*), the divine fire that 'burns away mortal parts', and Semele is consequently destroyed; Dionysus, however, survives due to his immortal nature, and Zeus rescues the unborn god from his mother's mortal ashes and places him in a womb or cavity in his *thigh*. Here, Dionysus is described as

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393 Calvert WATKINS, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 448-59. Watkins, in a detailed analysis of the linguistic evidence from the Greek and Anatolian reflexes of the *drakontomachia* or 'dragon-slaying' myth, suggests that the emphasis on the vanquishing of Typhon has to be understood as a diffusion of a motif from Anatolian to Greek in which a precise use of terminology prevailed. This is predicated upon the consistent use of the verb for 'lashing' in Greek and its clear cognate in Anatolian, which here means 'binding'. Watkins suggests that the mythologeme in Anatolian, when translated into Greek, would naturally employ such cognates insofar as they are transparent to bilingual (i.e. Anatolian-Greek) speakers. It is precisely this use of the cognates *ishimas* and *imas* that accounts for the motif being translated into Greek with the meaning 'lash' as opposed to the Anatolian 'bind'. The two meanings would appear to account for the different traditions of the Typhon myth in Greek: one preserving the form—in Homer and Hesiod, Typhon is lashed; the other preserving the meaning—in Greek sources, Typhon is 'bound'. One does not have to look far before we find the exact motif in native Egyptian traditions: the binding of Seth. As border god and desert god, Seth came to fulfil the role of enemy *par excellence*, and in Egyptian iconography, Seth is frequently depicted being bound by the Pharaoh, as well as penetrated by knives. These types of images represent mastery over foreign forces, for to the Egyptian conception this kind of binding was tied specifically to rituals of royal excretion. The prominent role in Egyptian temple cult of 'binding' as a magical excretion technique feeds directly into the practices of the *Greek Magical Papyri*. Here the prevalence of binding in the mechanics of agonistic magic coincides exactly with the use of the word *katadesmos* (to bind down; cf. Latin *defixiones*) as technical terminology.

the ‘thigh-bred’ (*mero-traphēs*)<sup>394</sup> because he gestates in and is born from the thigh of his divine father as in a womb (*thalamois/thalamais*; cf. Illustration 8).<sup>395</sup>

And Zeus the son of Cronos  
 Ensconced him [Dionysus] instantly in a secret womb (*thalamais*)  
 Chambered within his thigh (*mērō*),  
 And with golden pins closed him from Hera’s sight.<sup>396</sup>

The deep connection of the thigh to death and palingenesis emerges as a cross-cultural phenomenon. Indo-European myths unanimously associate the thighs with animating or (re)generative power. In *Rg Veda* (10.90), the creation of the human caste system from the body of the primordial *anthropos* (Purusha) establishes a functional homology between the parts of the primordial being and the human caste system. Whereas the brahman—the sovereign—comes from the head and the kshatriya—the warrior—arises from the arms, the vaishya—the productive, creative and generative strata of society—is derived from the *thighs* of the primordial being. The thigh is also explicitly connected to the *soma* sacrifice, as Coomaraswamy notes:

It is most significant in view of the fact that the offering is primarily to Indra, that the purchased *soma* is placed by the priest on the sacrificer’s bared thigh with the formula “Enter the right thigh of Indra”, and that the sacrificer then rises, saying “With new life, with good life, am I risen after the immortals”. Indra also loses his energy as a consequence of his struggle with Vṛtra, the demon of drought; his power and strength went into the earth and became plants and roots, and this is why *soma* is in the milk of cows, for plants are their food. His strength is restored by *soma*.<sup>397</sup>

394 LSJ, 1129: *AP* 11.329 (Nicharch.); STRABO, 15.1.7; EUST. ad D.P. 1153; also *-trephēs*, *Orph. H.* 52.3. Cf. HERODOTUS. 2. 146.2; ARRIAN, *F.G.H.* 3. 592 (localising the birth in Bithynia); THEOCRITUS 26.33 (in Drakanon; cf. *H. Hymn.* 1.1).

395 Cf. remarks in E. R. DODDS, ed., *Euripides Bacchae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 79.

396 EURIPIDES, *Bacchae*, lines 94-98 (trans. Philip Vellacott); DODDS, *Euripides Bacchae*, 6-7.

397 Ananda COOMARASWAMY, *Yaksas: Essays in the Water Cosmology*, ed. Paul Schroeder, rev. enlarg. ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 133-4. Cf. *Tāittiriya Sambhita*, 6.1.11.



ILLUSTRATION 8: DIONYSUS BORN FROM THE THIGH OF ZEUS

(Tarantos Krater)

Similarly in the grail mythos, the ‘dolorous stroke’—the wound that debilitates King Arthur (*Ursur*, the bear = *arktos*) and causes the entire land to suffer—is in his thigh. When the king is wounded, the land withers; when the wound is healed, the land is regenerated. So too in the Germanic branch of the Indo-European tree; Snorri Sturluson recounts the tale of Thor’s magical goats who, after being cooked and eaten, are able to be regenerated as long as their bones are kept intact. The power of the thigh is specifically highlighted when Loki, the Æsir’s calumniator, breaks the femur of one of the two goats to get the marrow. When the goats are regenerated, one has a lame leg.<sup>398</sup>

As was signalled in the introduction to this thesis, Schwaller places an enormous emphasis on the thigh as the locus of the fixed salt or nucleus. In many respects, the foregoing discussion is an attempt to explicate under an academic aegis what Schwaller merely intimated under an esoteric aegis: that the hermetic problem of salt and its role

398 STURLUSON, *Gylfaginning*, 44, 5 ff; FAULKES, 36, line 9 ff (*lerleggr*, ‘upper-leg, thigh-bone, ham-bone’; *mergr*, ‘marrow’).

in metempsychosis can only be understood when its connection to a wealth of mythological lore is recognised—from the mouthopening ritual to the Grail King’s ‘dolorous stroke’. Like salt, the thigh holds a dual significance: vitality and death are intertwined and the thigh is the instrument of this dual power. As Schwaller intimates, the femur is the support of palingenesis, holding the nucleus which preserves the psyche across the dangerous threshold of physical and initiatic death. It is the indestructible guardian of form—the fixed alchemical salt—the hidden link in the chain of being which can only be climbed through the *nigredo* of vitalising death. And yet at the same time, the lame thigh (in Germanic myth, Thor’s goat; in Celtic myth, the Grail king) reveals a weakening of the vitalising power that bespeaks a flaw in the cosmogonic process, a corruption of royal power, a fly in the “universal ointment” (*katholikon pharmakon*). And yet it is precisely this wound, this crack or flaw, this rupture of the primordial equilibrium, that gives rise to the harmonies of creation and growth. Danger is crucial to all vital transitions; fracture (scission) marks the creation of the phenomenal world as well as its destruction. A twofold effect is born from the one function; there is a “breaking that gives birth” and a “breaking that gives death”.

As has been seen, the Egyptian divinity Seth-Typhon was seen as the power behind the constellation of the bull’s thigh, which was conceived as a scimitar (the *khepesh en setesh*), a weapon of meteoric iron assimilated to the substance of lightning bolts (*meshkhetiu*). This was the power which killed Osiris; it was also the power used to revivify him: it was used in the mouthopening ritual to awaken the dead and to animate statues/gods, whereupon it again became assimilated to the bull’s thigh through the offering ritual—the thigh as the choicest cut of meat upon which the *renatus* was nourished. Ultimately, the theocratic strength embodied in the thigh was the only force strong enough to breach the dangerous limen of birth and death, to cross the most dangerous of all ontological thresholds, cosmologically recapitulated every day with the rising of the sun. Thus, beyond the *limen* of birth and death, the thigh embodies the principle of palingenetic continuity—the immortal pivot of death and rebirth enduring in the most permanent mineral remains.

### *Resonances of Telestic Art*

Returning to the motif of statue animation, the mouthopening ritual has a number of resonances in later Graeco-Egyptian esotericism, from the *Greek Magical Papyri*, which preserves spells for animating cult images,<sup>399</sup> to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which

399 The *voces magicæ* of PGM XII. 270-350 preserve a form the Egyptian phrase *wp.t-r* (*opet-re*), ‘to split open the mouth’, which, according to H. J. THISSEN, forms the basis of the Greek invocation of Ουφωρ (*Ouphōr*). See: THISSEN, ‘Ägyptologische Beiträge zu den griechischen magischen Papyri’, in *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, ed. VERHOEVEN and GRAEFE, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*; 39 (Leuven: Department Orientalistiek/Peeters, 1991).

living, speaking statues are able to heal and harm. Most famously, in the Latin tractate, *Asclepius*, the god Thoth-Hermes (the personification of divine consciousness) reveals the miraculous function of cult statues to his disciple Asclepius:

Do you mean statues, Trismegistus?

Yes, Asclepius. See how even you doubt! I mean statues, animated, filled with sense and spirit, completing many great deeds, such as foreknowledge—predicting by lots, divine possession, dreams, and many other things—enfeebling people and healing them, <dispensing> sorrow and joy according to their merits.<sup>400</sup>

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See also HOPFNER, I, § 808. The spell itself, moreover, is actually a rite for animating cult images, yet in this instance the temple statue is replaced by a ring inset with an inscribed gemstone (a heliotrope: green chalcedony with spots of red jasper) upon which images of the god Helios and a radiant scarab, both encircled by an ouroboros, are carved. Ian MOYER and Jacco DIELEMAN have shown how this example from the magical papyri attests to the miniaturisation process described by Jonathan Z. Smith, whereby practices originally employed within temple contexts by ‘priests’ are scaled down for use by ‘magicians’. The inscription on the gemstone thus functions as the cult-image, and in this connection the inscribed gemstone is in fact referred to as a *statue*. This is significant because it demonstrates one way in which ritual practitioners from Egyptian temples consciously adapted and transmitted their native traditions beyond their original cultural contexts; in the case of *PGM XII. 270-350*, it demonstrates the adaptation and preservation of the mouthopening ritual in particular. See: MOYER and DIELEMAN, ‘Miniaturization and the Opening of the Mouth in a Greek Magical Text (*PGM XII.270-350*)’, *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 3, 1 (2003): 66 ff; SMITH, ‘Trading Places’, in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Meyer and Mirecki, *Religions in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

400 *Asclepius* 23-4; SCOTT and FERGUSON, eds., *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), I, 338-40: ‘Ascl. Statuas dicis, o Trismegiste? — Trism. Statuas, o Asclepi. Videsne quatenus tu ipse diffidas? Statuas animatas sensu et spiritu plenas, tantaque facientes et talia, statuas futurorum praescias, eaque sorte, vate, somniis, multisque aliis rebus praedicentes, imbecillitates hominibus facientes easque curantes, tristitiam laetitiamque pro meritis <dispensantes>’; Discussion: HOPFNER, I, § 807 ff; cf. FESTUGIÈRE-NOCK, *Corpus Hermeticum*, II, 314; Coptic parallels in *Nag Hammadi Codex VI*, 8, 69, 30; See also IVERSEN’s remarks, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*, 37: ‘Owning to their magical and demonological implications the Hermetic references to man’s ability ‘to create gods’, and to the magical powers of cultic statuary were from the time of Augustine and throughout the history of the tradition considered the most dangerous and controversial of Hermetic doctrines, constantly cited by all adversaries and foes as shocking examples of the basically impious and heretic nature of the entire movement, and their direct reference to Egyptian notions and beliefs has long ago been generally recognized also by modern scholars’.



These parallels, which draw distinctly upon the mouthopening ritual as their ultimate prototype, demonstrate well enough that a specific trajectory of traditional Egyptian god-making ritual fed into and informed the esoteric practices of late antiquity. What these examples also suggest is that a fundamental overlapping of both precept and practice existed between the magical papyri, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and theurgy, all of which were deeply bound to alchemy through the unity of artisanal and hieratic *technē*. As has become increasingly evident since the discovery of the *Nag Hammadi Library* in 1954, the *Hermetica* do indeed possess a genuine Egyptian background, as demonstrated most notably by the landmark study of Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermès en haute égypte* (1978-82). Giving attention to Coptic and Armenian evidence, Mahé established beyond any doubt the Egyptian background of the *Hermetica*,<sup>401</sup> and it is now abundantly clear that lingering academic prejudice against the Egyptian origins of Mithraic, Hermetic and theurgic texts (or at least central elements within them) cannot be sustained.<sup>402</sup> The connections are explicit, but only become genuinely persuasive when the complex of interactions between Near Eastern religiosity and ancient Greek esotericism are comprehended in their geographic, historical, mythological and ritual contexts. As has been made particularly apparent by Fowden and Kingsley, the context was an essentially syncretistic cultural milieu, and must not be understood as a process which simply reduced all Greek magic to Egyptian origins, but a more complex interaction in which hieratic practitioners were able to participate in the translation of Egyptian cosmology and cultus into the symbolic languages of the Hellenistic world.

If I have deliberated upon this point, it is because the motif of alchemically animated statues also emerges right at the heart of Islamic alchemical tradition, attesting thereby to the continued presence of the quintessentially Egyptian hieratic art. In a text known as *The Book of Seven Statues*, Jaldakī provides a translation of and commentary upon a lost Greek original attributed to Apollonius of Tyana. Significantly, this lost text of Apollonius is the very same source from which the enormously influential *Tabula Smaragdina* is derived (i.e. the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, a text repeatedly regarded by European adepts as an authentic

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401 While this basic point was in fact advanced by Reitzenstein three quarters of a century earlier in his *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur* (1904), it had in the meantime fallen out of favour under the influence of A. D. NOCK and A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE's critical edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1945-54), which, along with FESTUGIÈRE's four volume *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (1950-1954), dismissed all Egyptian elements in the literature as merely superfluous. However, the discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* corpus in the same year that the last volume of Festugière's opus appeared tacitly, but irrevocably, demolished his claims.

402 For a useful survey of the academic approaches to the *Hermetica* throughout the twentieth century, see the introduction to COPENHAVER, *Hermetica*, li-lviii.

précis of the very essence of the alchemical process).<sup>403</sup> According to Henry Corbin, Jaldakī's work is of capital importance for several reasons:

In the first case, it is a matter of the transmission of a Greek text for which we only have the Arabic version at our disposal. In the second case, this text is a major testimony of the hermetic tradition in Iran. And finally, it clarifies for us very well the conception of alchemy as a hieratic art, to employ an expression from Proclus (Arabic: *sinā'a ilāhīya, ars divīna*). The statues designated by the word *asnām* are in reality living and speaking statues, and each statue is the priest of the Temple that belongs to it. Together they are the seven priests of the seven Temples corresponding to the seven planetary divinities. One may think here of the seven Temples of the Sabaeans of Harran that provided a haven for hermeticism in Islam until at least the tenth century. These statues are living and speaking because they are made not just from common metal but from "philosophical metal" issued from the alchemical operation, and it is this that renders them capable of fulfilling their sacerdotal function in their temple. In sum, they are "sacerdotal living statues". The motif of the living statue and the motif of the priest are the two aspects under which alchemy presents itself here as an *ars hieratica*.<sup>404</sup>

In Apollonius one discerns the motif of divine creator as alchemist, raising everything to perfection by virtue of his all-penetrating *technē*: 'Every beautiful thing, every gracious and brilliant thing, is raised by my art and by my work'.<sup>405</sup> Jaldakī's commentary on this passage emphasises the overarching fact that the agent of any act cannot exist without this divine power, and that any activity or agency is ultimately to be recognised as an extension of the one divine *energeia* acting through and upon all things ('as above, so below'):

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403 That traditions reflective of genuine Egyptian temple cult are evoked in the very same translation that gives rise to one of the most preeminent Arabic-Latin alchemical motifs —'as above, so below'—is something that cannot be easily overlooked. In this connection, one passage in the Apollonius text highlights the anagogic and perfecting power of divinity which animates and acts through all things, and it is clear that we can understand this as the same power evoked in the mouthopening ritual to vivify inanimate matter: 'Every beautiful thing, every gracious and brilliant thing, is raised by my art and by my work. That which I clothe with a part of my vestment receives complete beauty and total lustre because my colour is the most beautiful, the greatest and the most lustrous of colours'. Trans. after Henry CORBIN, 'Le « Livre des sept Statues » d'Apollonios de Tyane, commenté par Jaldakī', *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L'Herne, 1986), 114. Note especially the connection of colour to life and spirit, which increases in significance in light of Zosimos's *baphika*.

404 CORBIN, 'Le « Livre des sept Statues », 63-4

405 Trans. after CORBIN, 'Le « Livre des sept Statues »', 114.

Thus, every agent which acts upon a patient (a receptacle, *qābil*) among created things, this action produces itself by the energy which God has conferred to it, and the origin of that which nourishes this energy comes from the divine power. If we suppose that God were to cut off the nourishment of this energy, this energy itself will be abolished, the action would not be able to take place, and the capacity to act will itself be removed from the agent by the agent. The agent therefore will no longer be an agent; there will no longer be for him a patient upon which he acts, and there will be a state of arrest and impotence. All strength and power therefore belong to God Most High. It is He who provides the spirit of life. It is for Him to give life, it is for Him to remove this force and the nourishment of this force, and to produce therefore death. He is the Living, such that “there is no god but Him, Lord of the Sublime Throne” (*Koran* XXVII, 26).<sup>406</sup>

The ramifications that this has for understanding the nature of the *hieratikē technē* are clear. Products produced are consciously imbued with divine energy. In addition, however, divinity is not only the source of the anagogic vivifying force that animates matter, it is also the source of the matter that is animated. In effect, agent and patient are one:

Know that God Most High has created the entire Universe and has divided it into two parts: one, active, [exercising its action] in another, [which is] passive. [Literally, an agent, *fā'il*, and a recipient, *qābil*]. And as it is of the condition of the agent (the active) to comprehend, to utter (*proférer*) and to hold forth discourse, it is fitting for him to say: “I have acted, I have asserted”, just as the sovereign declares, with the plural of majesty: “We have ordained, we have prescribed”; likewise the judge [*qādī*], who declares: “I have judged, I have given a ruling, I

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406 CORBIN, I 14-16. Continuing: ‘Therefore, by virtue of these precisions, when the agent of a thing declares: “Me, I have done this”, his remark is metaphorical in one respect, and true in another. On one hand, the force by which he acts is not in essence his, because if it belonged to him by essence, he would also have power in essence; it would follow that he will be the creator of his acts and that power emanates from him by his self-same essence, not from another, but this is impossible, because he is only the agent by means of a certain force, and this force by which he is active has need of the nourishment which the True and Establishing Creator sends to him. Therefore when the agent declares: “I have done, I have arranged thus”, it is in this respect a metaphor. On the other hand, the true sense of this remark is that the activity clearly emanates from him ad extra by the force which God made exist for him, and clearly this force needs the help of the Creator. The agent is therefore the agent only by a force which for him is a gift accorded by the Creator, but it always remains possible that this force will be removed from him, for it does not belong to him in reality. It is conferred to him for a determined duration, after which God takes it from him, if he so chooses—there is no divinity outside Him, He makes live and He makes die (*Koran*, VII, 158) and He has power over all things. Comprehend this well’.

have signed”, words which are permanent and binding. And likewise too, man affirms: “I have acted so, in such and such a manner”, and here, also, one can relate back to the sun the acts and the signatures that he asserts, which God has instituted for him. But the agent in reality and in the absolute sense is God Most High, and the ensemble of acts which proceed in beings, whatever the agent may be, these acts take place by His assistance [*madad*], by His power and His will.

In these passages, one begins to glimpse something of the metaphysical thinking that underpins the process not only of statue animation, but of the divine vivification of all matter. Through this, the interplay of divinity and materiality so central to the alchemical *œuvre* is able to be discerned; as will be seen, this motif emerges as central to the hermetic philosophy of Schwaller de Lubicz.

#### *Corbin on Jaldakī*

The ramifications that this text holds for the conception of alchemy have been encapsulated by Corbin in his emphasis on the conception of alchemy as a *hieratikē technē*. Because Corbin’s comments are central to the concerns of this thesis, and because they have not previously been published in English, a translation has been rendered and reproduced at length. Resuming with Jaldakī’s text, Corbin writes:

Not only does it contain a mine of information, it is eminently representative of a conception of alchemy that is neither a simple dramaturgy of the unconscious or psychological allegory, nor a simple manipulation of materials practised in the manner of a mere chemist or pharmacist (*droguiste*). It is an operation at once material and spiritual, the juncture between the two aspects remaining the hidden secret underneath the symbols of the “Philosophers” (as the alchemists designate themselves). And because the *ars hieratica* integrates the two operations, its locus is in fact a mesocosm (*intermonde*), of which the ritual form and the cadre of a temple are the best means of imposing the integral representation.<sup>407</sup>

Here again, the connection to the institution of the divine temple underscores the deep resonance that the tradition preserved in Jaldakī holds for the simultaneously metallurgical and theurgical nature of alchemy. In pursuing this, Corbin astutely centres on the methodological shortcomings in the conception of alchemy as advanced by the great scholars of Islamic science:

Underlying this great historical debate is another question, which, as we discussed above, is directed at the very conception of alchemy. It is impossible to appreciate the respective positions of its adversaries and its adepts without having first verified whether both are truly speaking of the same thing. When an Avicenna refuses the very idea of transmutation (a refusal which agrees with his

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407 CORBIN, 67.

proper metaphysics of essences, unfamiliar to the idea of intensifications of being professed by a Mulla Sadrā Shīrāzī), it appears that he remains completely distant from that which will be sought by an adept such as Jaldakī in his commentary on the *Book of the Seven Statues* (and also in his other books). The difficulty is aggravated by the fact that the majority of western historians have treated Graeco-Islamic alchemy as if it were a precursory chapter to modern chemistry. Holmyard, Ruska, Kraus think only to situate Jābir, for example, within a line that leads to Boyle, Lavoisier, etc. The misunderstanding is serious, if not complete. To speak of “quantitative science” in Jābir, as P. Kraus does, is perhaps to play with words, since it is a matter for Jābir of measuring “the desire of the Soul of the world [which is] incorporeal to the elements”; moreover, an express declaration in Jābir invites us to read the collection called the Seventy Books as a ciphered text, a complete exposé in veiled form. All these reservations have already been formulated by the publication with a translation—it will soon be thirty years—of our study of ‘The Book of Glory of Jābir ibn Hayyan’. One must ask: do the “quantitative” formulas established by Jābir have anything in common with the meaning of the same in the laboratories of our own day?

It seems essential, as Jābir himself invites us to do (for example in the Five Hundred Books, cf. above)—to differentiate several levels of signification. The same operation can be accomplished respectively by a chemist and by an alchemist: the respective level of hermeneutic proposed by each will in no way be the same. The first case, the chemist, can be typified in the person of the doctor Rhazes. The second case, the alchemist, can be typified in the person of Jaldakī. This includes his forebears (e.g. Zosimos) and his successors, whose preoccupation links them to the tradition identified in the west as “laboratory and oratory” and which leads to the liturgical idea of a *Missa alchemica*. The historian, or better, the phenomenologist of alchemy, does not find themselves placed before a simple dilemma calling for a decision between the “puffers”, “charcoal-makers”, or charlatans and the serious practitioners who would conduct “scientific work”. There is a third term, the only one capable of representing alchemy properly and authentically as both a science and a spiritual experience (*expérimentation*) of Nature and of humanity. This alchemy is eminently represented by Jaldakī, and the tradition continues in Iran through the work of a Mīr Fendereskī, and up until our own day in the Shaykhī school. Meditation on the alchemical operation as a spiritual experience (*expérimentation*) of Nature tends to liberate the thought or spiritual energy (*extrahere cogitationem*) immanent in the metals that the alchemists treat, in order to incorporate them into the interior being (*l’homme intérieur*). Synchronistically, they realise the inner growth of the subtle body, the “body of resurrection”. In other words, to interiorise the true operation is to

obtain the psychic reactions that resolve themselves into a mystical physiology of the “resurrection body”. In short, this is why alchemy is a hieratic art.<sup>408</sup>

While many of Corbin’s comments would repay further study, two particular points should be highlighted. The first is a matter crucial to issues of theory and methodology in the study of alchemy. His remark that a ‘phenomenologist of alchemy’ should be able to avoid the polemicising impulse of the historian of science is still relevant today, particularly in light of the work of Principe and Newman, who despite their dismantling of many other shortcomings in the historiography of alchemy, constantly take swipes at nineteenth and twentieth century spiritual alchemies (notably Jung), which they set up as a foil to the empirical alchemies of Starkey, Newton and Boyle (et al.) Clearly, Corbin’s call for a critical apparatus that is capable of ‘representing alchemy properly and authentically as both a science and a spiritual *expérimentation* of Nature and of humanity’ offers a much more nuanced methodological and epistemological sensitivity than a crude historical-chemical objectivism that still perpetuates many of the tacit assumptions of positivist academia. While it is true that Corbin was a friend and colleague of Jung’s and attended Eranos, it should be emphasised that there is no comparison in their approaches to alchemy. Indeed, in his remark that Jaldakī is ‘eminently representative of a conception of alchemy that is neither a simple dramaturgy of the unconscious or psychological allegory, nor a simple manipulation of materials practised in the manner of a mere chemist or pharmacist’, Corbin anticipates and evades both the psychological and scientific reductionisms.

The second aspect that must be emphasised has to do with the aims of alchemy. Corbin’s insights into the significance of the resurrection body become central to conceiving alchemy in a way that is concerned with the transformation not only of metallurgical or biological bodies, but with the deeper soteriological principle of the immortal *corpus resurrectionis*. That this is not merely speculation on Corbin’s part but is a vital aspect of the traditions that he studies is evidenced in the work of the Shaikhī school, which describes an idea very close to de Lubicz’s conception of the fixed salt. So Shaik Ahmad Ahsāī (d. 1241/1826): ‘the fact is that its hidden invisible element, its “innerness”, survives; this is the spiritual body [...], which is not formed of the sublunar Elements, but from the four Elements of the world of Hūrqalyā, which are seventy times nobler and more precious than the Elements of the terrestrial world’.<sup>409</sup> This “body” may be understood as the *form* which determines the different states of bodies, ‘for, in the last analysis, spirits are light-being in the fluid state (*nūr wujūdii dhā’ib*). Bodies are also light-being, but in the solid state. The difference between them is the same as the difference between water and snow’;<sup>410</sup> hence Mullā Sadrā Shīrīzi

408 CORBIN, 71-3.

409 ‘Epistle addressed to Fath-‘Ali Shāh Qājar, Shah of Persia (1797–1834)’, *Jawāmi’ ‘al-kalim*, vol. 1.1, 5th risāla, 122-4; trans. CORBIN, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 198.

410 ‘Extract from the commentary by Shaik Ahmād Ahsā’ī on the *Theosophy of the Throne*’;

(Sadruddin Shirazī, d. 1050/1640, in a Shaikhī commentary): ‘the soul is spiritual “matter” (*mādda rūhianīya*)’.<sup>411</sup> Here, one discerns that the transmutation of material bodies is effectively an initiation into the laws or principles by which the mortal human body may be resolved into its immortal form: the resurrection body. And yet it is the *form* and not the matter that determines the status of the body’s (in)corruptibility:

For in truth Form is the configuration of matter; therefore it is the configuration of the thing “which returns”, it is not the thing itself. This is why the Imām Ja‘far compares it with the brick of potter’s clay which is broken, and again replaced in the mould. It is indeed the same brick, and yet it is another brick: the matter is the same, but the form is different [...] Each individual, when resurrected, assumes the form which, thanks to his works, has lodged in his most secret part.<sup>412</sup>

As has been seen with the theurgic aspect of alchemy met in Zosimos—whom Corbin places as a precursor to the current of alchemy represented by Jaldakī—corporeal purification and spiritual intensification form the keys to an apotheosis that bears within it an imperative not merely to become immortal, but to fulfil a deeper divine imperative by acting and participating in the capacity of a divinely transformative elixir by which the spiritual regeneration of nature can be effected. Thus, the hieratic alchemist is tasked not merely to transform his or her own body into its immortal form, but also the body of the *cosmos*.

### The Origins and Nature of European Alchemy

Interestingly, the text that describes the introduction of alchemy to pre-Islamic Arabia is also the same text that was translated into Latin centuries later in order to introduce alchemy to the European West. In Arabic, this text is known as the *Risalah marīnus al-rahab al-hakīm lil-amīr khalid bin yazīd* (The Epistle of Maryanus the Hermit the Philosopher to Prince Khalid ibn Yazid).<sup>413</sup> It was translated into Latin by Robertus Castrensis (Robert of Chester) in 1144. While scholars once disputed whether the purported translator, Robert of Chester, actually translated it from the Arabic or wrote it himself, manuscripts have now come to light for both the Arabic originals as well as

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trans. CORBIN, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 204.

411 ‘Extract from the commentary by Shaik Ahmād Ahsā’ī on the *Theosophy of the Throne*, *Tabrīz*, 1278/1861, 156-66; trans. CORBIN, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, 206.

412 SHAIKH AHMAD AHSĀ’Ī; trans. CORBIN, 221.

413 The two source manuscripts are Fatih 3227 (fol. 8b-18b) and Şehit Ali Pasha 1749 (fol. 61a-74b); the former is presently being edited for publication by Al-Hassan. For the textual history, see AL-HASSAN, ‘The Arabic Origin of *Liber de compositione alchimiae*’ (forthcoming).

the earliest Latin translations.<sup>414</sup> These sources show beyond any doubt that the earliest versions consisted of a dialogue between Morienus and the Arabic King, Khalid Ibn Yazid Ibn Mu'Awiyya. The speech of Morienus was a later addition and appears only in the revised Latin version published four hundred years later in Paris (1564; all the translations into European vernaculars, except for Stavenhagen's 1974 version, follow the revised Latin version).<sup>415</sup> The speech, and of course the preface by Robert of Chester, does not exist in the Arabic texts.

In his preface, Robert of Chester explicitly introduces the term *alchymia* as if its audience has not heard it before:

Since you Latins have not yet understood what *alchymia* is, I shall enlighten you in the present work [...] Hermes the philosopher and others who came after him, defined the word in such a way: *alchymia* is a corporeal substance composed from the One and through the One (*ex uno et per unum*), joining the most precious things together through relationship and effect, and naturally converting the same things by a natural commixture and by the best artifices.<sup>416</sup>

Significantly, the term is defined as a corporeal substance (*substantia corporea*), a point which coheres with the picture that emerges from the Far Eastern and early Arabic background, where alchemy (*chin i*, *rasayana*, *al-kīmiyā*) refers to a catalytic substance or elixir (*al-iksir*) capable of effecting the transmutation of bodies (whether metallurgical, biological, or spiritual). Moreover, in the Latin text, *alchymia* is said to have a harmonising, unifying effect in addition to its transmuting power. Thus, alchemy is not concerned with random mutation, but with a transmutation that brings about increasingly harmonic relations to unity (i.e. *ratios*, per the Pythagorean current in hermeticism).

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414 Cf. L. STAVENHAGEN, *A Testament of Alchemy* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1974), 52; R. LEMAY, 'L'Authenticité de la préface de Robert de Chester à sa traduction du Morienus (1144)', *Chrysopœia* 4 (1990).

415 First English translation (from the 1564 Paris edition): British Library, MS Sloane 3697 = Eric HOLMYARD, 'A Romance of Chemistry' (Parts I-V), *Chemistry and Industry*, January–March (1925); Cf. Lee STAVENHAGEN, *A Testament of Alchemy* (University Press of New England: Hanover, New Hampshire, 1974).

416 J. RUSKA, 'Zwei Bücher *De compositione Alchemie* und ihre Vorreden', *Archiv für Geschichte der Mathematik, der Naturwissenschaft und der Technik* 2 (1928): 28–37: 'Quoniam quid sit alchymia nondum vestra cognovit Latinitas, in presenti sermone elucidabo [...] Hermes vero philosophus, et alii qui post ipsum fuere, hoc vocabulum diffiniunt: alchymia est substantia corporea ex uno et per unum composita preciosiora ad invicem per cognationem et effectum conjungens et eadem naturali commixtione ingeniis melioribus naturaliter convertens'. Trans. modified after Charles BURNETT, 'The Astrologer's Assay of the Alchemist: Early References to Alchemy in Arabic and Latin Texts', *Ambix* 39 (1992), 105.



The text presents itself as a dialogue between semi-legendary alchemist, Morienus (Ar. Maryanus), and the early Islamic King, Khalid Ibn Yazid Ibn Mu'awiyya (d. 704 or 708 CE). Although the Arabic manuscripts date from the succeeding centuries, the events they describe are situated right at the beginning of Islamicate culture and in close relation to the Bait al-Hikma (House of Wisdom), the famous translation centre that was instrumental in preserving and transmitting Greek intellectual traditions throughout Islamicate culture, a fact which also proved instrumental in the transmission of these same textual traditions to the Latin West.<sup>417</sup>

Intriguingly, the text itself makes concrete links to known Byzantine alchemical tradition. Specifically, it mentions Stephanos of Alexandria, a seventh century philosopher-chemist who lectured on geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music during the reign of Herakleios (610–41 CE). Stephanos' text (*Praxis 1*) is distinctly and simultaneously concerned with both spiritual and metallurgical processes. As F. S. Taylor notes, the text is one of the first explicitly spiritual alchemical texts,<sup>418</sup> and in this connection it is important to recognise that the concept of *physis* ('nature') for Stephanos was almost certainly bound to that of the nature of Christ: 'The word [*physis*] was widely applied in theology at the time of Stephanos, when controversy as to the relation of the human and divine natures of Christ was a burning question in Byzantium. This application of the word was probably present to the mind of Stephanos in writing these passages'.<sup>419</sup> In this connection, it may not be entirely insignificant that a profound metallurgical metaphor was employed in Christological debates around this time—debates that lie at the very root of the divergence between eastern Orthodoxy and western Catholicism. The metaphor in question concerned the dual nature of Christ; it employed the symbol of *iron irradiated by fire* to explain how

417 The key manuscripts are Fatih 3227 (fol. 8b-18b) and Şehit Ali Pasha 1749 (fol. 61a-74b) with citations of the Maryanus-Khalid dialogue appearing in successive Arabic manuscripts; See especially AL-HASSAN, 'The Arabic Origin of *Liber de compositione alchimiae*' and 'The Culture and Civilization of the Umayyads and Prince Khalid Ibn Yazid'; *Studies in Al-Kimiya: Critical Issues in Latin and Arabic Alchemy and Chemistry* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2009), passim. Commens Al-Hassan: 'There is no doubt about Khalid's place in the history of the Umayyad Caliphate. Ruska and others doubted whether he has engaged himself in alchemy. Sezgin gave enough historical evidence testifying that Khalid did actually work on this science. His relationship with Maryanus was told by Jabir in *Kitab al-Rabib*, and citations from the dialogue were given by most succeeding Arab alchemists, such as Ibn Umayl (10th century)'.

418 F. Sherwood TAYLOR, 'The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria', *Ambix* 1 (1937): 139 n. 61: 'To the author's knowledge this is the earliest passage wherein it is implied that Alchemy is not a quest to be carried on in the laboratory. In this lecture, Stephanos indicates clearly that he views Alchemy as a mental process (pp. 123, 131, 133). It does not of course appear from the passage whether this is Stephanos' own view of Alchemy or whether he is putting forward an earlier tradition. The latter would appear to be more likely as Stephanos shows little evidence of original thought'.

419 TAYLOR, 135 n. 23.

man suffused with divinity could simultaneously condense not only two natures (iron and fire) but also two actions (cutting and burning) in one physical manifestation (Christ as *theandros*). Stephanos himself highlights the need for a spiritual perception:

Put away the material theory (*hylōdē theōrian*) so that you may be deemed worthy to see the hidden mystery with your noetic eyes (*tois noerois hymōn ophthalmois*). For there is need of a single natural <thing> and of one nature conquering the all.<sup>420</sup>

Such is the background to the earliest Latin text mentioning alchemy: the *Morieni Romani, Quondam Eremitae Hierosolymitani, de transfiguratione metallorum, et occulta, summaggu antiquorum Philosophorum medicina, Libellus, nusquam hactenus in lucem editus* (Booklet of Morienus Romanus, of old the Hermit of Jerusalem, on the Transfiguration of the Metals and the Whole of the Ancient Philosophers' Occult Arts, Never Before Published, 1144). This is Stavenhagen's translation of the title, and one wonders if the Latin might be rendered more accurately. That is to say, *occulta* appears to be an adverb, and thus to indicate 'secretly', while *medicina* is not translated at all (the two terms are condensed into 'Occult Arts'). An alternative rendition might be '... on the Transfiguration of the Metals, and Secretly (*occulta*), the Whole of the Ancient Philosophers' Healing Arts (*medicina*)'. If such a translation is viable, this would place mineral alchemy—and its secret interpretation as medicinal-physiological alchemy—together from the very beginning (this is also consistent with what is learnt from eastern alchemies).

Before one approaches the European alchemical tradition, it is important to note that although Far Eastern, Near Eastern and Islamicate alchemical traditions clearly fed into and informed Medieval and Early Modern European alchemies, many of these traditions also continued to develop along their own lines. Although Chinese alchemical texts began to disappear in the eleventh century (though Daoist macrobiotic and medical traditions continued), Indo-Tibetan and Islamic alchemy in particular continue to offer rich and complex parallel traditions of alchemical precept and practice right down into the contemporary modern era. As such, they rival their counterparts in the European west not only in terms of persistence, but also in terms of sophistication. (A comparison may be made with the trajectories of Hindu and Islamic philosophy, both of which continue to develop independently of their acknowledgement—or lack thereof—in Eurocentric intellectual histories). Given such considerations, Newman and Principe's claims about post-seventeenth century alchemy become difficult to sustain when one extracts oneself from such narrowly Eurocentric perspectives, as the material already cited from the nineteenth century Shaikhī school of Iranian Sufism so clearly attests.

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420 TAYLOR, 122-123. Translation modified.

For these reasons, the deep indebtedness of European alchemy not only to its Arabic precursors but also to its Graeco-Egyptian and, quite possibly, Chinese sources must always be borne in mind. This is all the more pertinent given the tendency of historically specialised scholars to treat European alchemy too narrowly. Here, the example of the *Summa Perfectionis*, an influential Latin text, would appear to be a case in point. Based on Ruska's speculations, Newman advanced the theory that the *Summa Perfectionis Magisterii* and related texts were produced in the thirteenth century by a hitherto unknown compiler by the name of Paul of Taranto.<sup>421</sup> As Al-Hassan has shown, however, these claims are contradicted by the evidence of Arabic originals of these texts, and it thus follows that Ruska's speculations, and thus the theories of Newman that were based upon them, are groundless.<sup>422</sup>

One of the key points Al-Hassan points to in dismantling this argument is the fact that the three natural principles—the volatile spirits: sulphur, mercury and arsenic—were present in Arabic works (contrary to the claims of Berthelot and Newman).<sup>423</sup> It has already been seen that they are implicit in the Graeco-Egyptian ouroboric symbolism that identifies the three ears of the serpent as volatile spirits (*aithers*) and the four feet as elements (*tetrasōma*). It is no surprise that they emerge as distinct principles in Arabic alchemical texts, and that this long-standing tradition provided the basic framework of the Paracelsian *tria prima* (and here it should be remembered that the inclusion of salt as the third term of this alchemical trinity—a *tria* almost unanimously attributed to Paracelsus—was also previously present in Arabic sources).

Such critiques begin to shed light on the interesting methodological issue of striking a sufficient balance between the breadth and the narrowness of a given study. Newman and Principe's work is, for the most part, at once historically important and narrowly polemical. And yet, scholars of previous academic generations such as Allen G. Debus still manage to provide a much more balanced introduction to the issue in a way that integrates rather than disconnects alchemy from its deeper esoteric contexts:

The alchemy of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries represents a fusion of many seemingly disparate themes derived from ancient and medieval Near and Far Eastern sources. A simple definition is difficult if not impossible. The alchemists always maintained a special interest in the changes of matter and surely most of them accepted the concept of transmutation, but there were other significant

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421 NEWMAN, 'New Light on the Identity of 'Geber'', *Sudhoffs Archiv* 69 (1985): 76-90.

422 AHMAD Y. AL-HASSAN, 'The Arabic Origin of the *Summa* and Gebser Latin Works: A Refutation of Berthelot, Ruska and Newman on the Basis of Arabic Sources' (forthcoming). Al-Hassan provides copious evidence proving that the hypotheses of Berthelot, Ruska and Newman, who tried to divorce Latin alchemy from its Arabic origins, are unfounded; in light of Arabic sources, the *Summa* is seen to derive from the actual Jabirian corpus, either as a compilation translated from diverse Arabic originals, or as a complete translation from a missing Arabic text.

423 AL-HASSAN, 'The Arabic Origin of the *Summa*'. (forthcoming).

strains evident in alchemical thought as well. Important among these was the early and persistent belief that the study of alchemy had a special role in medicine through the preparation of remedies and the search for the prolongation of life. In addition to this was the belief that alchemy was the fundamental science for the investigation of nature. And yet, if the alchemists spoke repeatedly of experience and observation as the true keys to nature, they also maintained a fervent belief in a universe unified through the relationship of the macrocosm and the microcosm—a relationship that of necessity tied this science to astrology. The alchemists were convinced further that their search for the truths of nature might be conceived in terms of a religious quest which would result in a greater knowledge of the Creator.<sup>424</sup>

Here it becomes evident that the empirical and the mystical are not mutually exclusive endeavours but complimentary, indeed, interwoven aspects of a greater whole. And yet, it cannot be denied that the tenor of the times was moving increasingly towards an (over-) emphasis on the empirical datum as a consensus description of reality, a fact that clearly motivated religious scientist-alchemists such as Newton, Boyle and Starkey to either hide or encrypt their alchemical projects while openly pursuing more acceptable forms of scientific research.

Principe and Newman have rightly emphasised the genuine sophistication of the empirical tradition in Early Modern alchemy, and to their credit, they have also dismantled many of the biases or misconceptions that linger in the historiography of alchemy. They have not, however, managed to go beyond the dualistic polemics that have typically plagued the conception of alchemy, but, to be fair, this may be in part due to the nature of modern academic disciplines themselves, which tend to separate the history of science and the history of religions as a basic extension of the overarching separation of the sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*); the academic audience to which such a problem must respond is already bifurcated into ideologically dissimilar contingents. Be that as it may, in countering the claims of the exclusively spiritual alchemists and their followers with hard historical and laboratory evidence, Principe and Newman have greatly assisted in deflating the over-puffed balloon of an exclusively spiritual alchemy. But in their desire to dismantle the claims of the spiritual alchemists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they are in danger of imposing one definitive standard of alchemy upon currents of alchemy which may benefit more from being understood on their own

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424 Allen G. DEBUS, 'Alchemy', in Philip P. WIENER, ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1968), 27, continuing: 'It is not surprising then to find a late sixteenth-century author defining medicine as "the searching out of the secretes of nature", a goal that was to be accomplished by resort to "mathematicall and supernaturall precepts, the exercise whereof is Mechanicall, and to be accomplished with labor." Having thus defined medicine, he went on to state that the real name of this art was simply chemistry or alchemy (Bostocke, 1585)'.

terms rather than criticised in light of norms derived from historically separate or divergent traditions. This polemic against spiritual alchemy, while well-justified in many respects, is in other respects in danger of “throwing out the baby with the bathwater”. As has been seen, the deeper currents in the historiography of alchemy emerging from China, India, Pharaonic Egypt, Hellenistic Egypt, Byzantium and Islam—the very foundations of early modern alchemy—all attest to the simultaneous engagement of the empirical and the spiritual as intimately related phenomena. All of this suggests that the polemical tendency to oppose the empirical to the spiritual should be moderated, underscoring once again the need for nondualistic critical apparatus in the study of alchemy.

*Rehabilitating the Book of Nature (Alchemy as Naturphilosophie)*

The specific kind of alchemy that figures such as Schwaller and Fulcanelli attempted to revive and practice was chiefly that of early modern adepts such as Basil Valentine, Nicolas Flamel and Philalethes (and later, Cyliani); to understand the nature of Lubiczian alchemy, it is therefore necessary to raise some issues in how Early Modern alchemy has been interpreted. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Principe and Newman, in several publications, have taken up the task of ‘rehabilitating alchemy’ from the prevailing views in which it has been erroneously situated, i.e. especially as mere proto-chemistry or somehow false chemistry. They have argued persuasively for alchemy to be recognised as dealing less with mystical speculation and more with very real, empirically reproducible practices that can be described in modern chemical terms. To this end, Newman himself has actually reproduced some of these practices in a modern laboratory setting and therefore shown that alchemical procedures can indeed be translated into the language of modern science. In particular, Newman and his assistants have demonstrated that many of Newton’s encoded alchemical procedures can be deciphered, replicated and described in modern chemical parlance: e.g. the *arbor Dianae* or ‘tree of Diana’ refers to a metallic dendrite of silver and mercury;<sup>425</sup> the ‘net’: a purple alloy of copper and antimony taking on a net-like

425 Dendrite, from Greek *dendrites*, ‘tree-like’, from *dendron*, ‘tree’, referring to a tree-formed mineral. Comments NEWMAN, “Chymistry’ and Isaac Newton: Mystical Myth?”, *Indiana University Alumni Association* 52 (2007): 7: ‘Diana was the traditional goddess of the Moon, and the alchemists had associated the Moon with silver since late Antiquity. Hence a Tree of Diana should be a silver tree, and so it is. The Tree of Diana is a lovely metallic dendrite composed of silver and mercury, made by putting some silver-mercury amalgam in a dilute solution of silver and mercury dissolved in nitric acid. Newton also probably knew of other types contemporary metallic vegetation, such as the one that we now know as a silica garden. In Newton’s day, the garden was made by first dissolving iron in “spirit of salt”, that is, hydrochloric acid, and then boiling the solution to dryness. The reddish sediment produced by this is nowadays called iron(III) chloride. In the meantime, a material known then as “oil of sand” was made by fusing sand with salt of tartar, what we

appearance; and the ‘star regulus of antimony’, a crystalline form of metallic antimony.<sup>426</sup> Because of this, both Principe and Newman have vociferously (but also disproportionately) attacked the spiritual and psychological interpretations of alchemy advanced by Atwood and Jung, arguing that the spiritual and psychological interpretations have no relation to the actual, empirically grounded practices of figures such as Newton or Philalethes. Needless to say, this research is very significant for the historiography of alchemy, science and religion in early modernity, especially in so far as it crosses categories that must be defined with ever-increasing sensitivity to nuances and contexts; for it can no longer be ignored that pivotal figures in the history of science such as Newton, Boyle and Starkey were simultaneously alchemists with deeply mystical aspirations, and that they either hid or masked their alchemical endeavours from all but the closest of their *chymical* colleagues (while openly presenting their purely empirical ideas to their ordinary peers).

The need to unify rather than separate the discourses of alchemy and chemistry under the early modern term *chymistry* and also to carefully contextualise currents within this *chymistry* have been suggested as the best way to proceed in the study of (early modern) alchemy *vis-à-vis* early modern science. Alchemy and chemistry alike are understood as discourses within the broader field of *natural philosophy*. However, it is precisely here that the picture becomes more complex and hence interesting. Natural philosophy itself is not necessarily wholly synonymous with natural science as it has come to be understood since the Enlightenment (i.e. a quantitative empirical science along the lines of that established, ironically, by Newton); it also encompassed currents that would emerge in *Naturphilosophie* (i.e. the German Romantic philosophy of nature, a *qualitative* empirical science, most notably represented by Goethe). Moreover, especially as comprehended by alchemists, natural philosophy often takes on significantly religious and soteriological concerns. These concerns cannot be dismissed as merely religious or symbolic “expressions” of essentially chemical procedures according to the “analogical thinking” characteristic of the time, per Principe and Newman,<sup>427</sup> without severing them from the deep interwovenness that

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now call potassium carbonate, at a high temperature. When you do this, a white powder is formed, which dissolves into a thick, clear liquid in humid air. This “oil of sand” is the modern potassium silicate. It is a close relative of the much more common commercial “water glass”, also known as sodium silicate. When one puts his metal salt into the “oil of sand”, the salt gradually dissolves in the potassium silicate solution and the solution is immediately encased in a silicate shell. Osmotic pressure causes the shell to rupture, the salt-solution rises, and the process is repeated, forming a sort of tree. One could easily think that it displayed signs of life’.

426 On the star regulus of antimony, see also the description and illustration in Rubellus PETRINUS, *The Great Alchemical Work of Eirenaeus Philalethes, Nicholas Flamel and Basil Valentine* (Brisbane: Salamander & Sons, 2007).

427 Lawrence PRINCIPLE and William NEWMAN, ‘Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy’, NEWMAN and GRAFTON (eds), *Secrets of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge

was seen to inhere, for many natural philosophers, between natural processes and spiritual processes within an essentially *vitalist* or *panentheist* framework. This vitalist-panentheist conception of nature is crucial to the alchemical perception of *physis* as a living entity interpenetrated with divinity or spirit; it is also crucial to the idea of nature as a *theophany*, to the extent that one could reverse the claims of Newman and Principe by saying that chemical procedures are merely scientific “expressions” of essentially spiritual realities according to the “critical” thinking so prevalent at the time. Both positions must be recognised as having some validity (indeed, symmetry), and a more nuanced apprehension must be cultivated. Not only must the wider debates between cosmos as organism and cosmos as mechanism be taken into account whenever the issue of natural philosophy is raised as a blanket descriptor of alchemy, so too must the issue of *ars* (*technē*) versus *natura* (*physis*) be recognised as possessing capital importance, especially in regard to the alchemists’ claim to be able to “perfect nature”.<sup>428</sup>

It seems clear that the tendency to want to translate alchemical expressions *only* into the register of empirical science is in danger of losing some of the profound valences that pertain deeply to the early modern spiritual conception of matter. In particular, the theurgic idea that has already been examined in relation to Zosimos emerges distinctly in certain currents of early modern alchemy (notably Dr. John Dee). That nature is a spiritual instrument, and that work on nature and matter is ultimately

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University Press, 2001).

428 NEWMAN, ‘Technology and Alchemical Debate in the Late Middle Ages’, *Isis* 80, 3 (1989): 423-45; *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); noting Frank KLAASEN’s comments (review: *Isis*, 97, 2 (2006) 343-4): ‘Despite the clear value of examining the art versus nature debate, Newman’s approach has some potential drawbacks. Owing to its rhetorical or selective nature, the literature of controversy may only partially represent authors’ views. For example, Newman takes *ars* to be a direct synonym for the Greek *technē*. While this tends to be true in the context of the art versus nature debate, the valences of the former term in the Christian Middle Ages were more complex. Christian myth cast the arts as in some senses redemptive, or at least compensatory, for postlapsarian humanity. The arts were frequently regarded as having explicit moral and spiritual value. Moreover, particularly for those more platonically inclined, the arts were sometimes understood to have an intimate connection with the structure of the cosmos. The etchings of Robert Fludd perhaps best illustrate this long-standing tradition in which the arts were not mere imitations of nature but had a direct ontological connection through it to the divine. Many of the opponents of alchemy unquestionably took for granted some of these ideas, which assume a more intimate relationship between nature (in the sense of the physical and ethical structure of the cosmos) and art. Not surprisingly, when authors rejected alchemy’s claims that art and nature overlap, these subtleties tend not to be visible. Although it would not substantially affect Newman’s overall argument, a brief consideration of these elements and an explicit discussion of the potentially partial nature of the literature of controversy might have lent an additional and valuable level of nuance to this study’.

a means towards the spiritual regeneration and redemption of nature and the cosmos as a whole, must be recognised as a consistent alchemical motif that was not necessarily displaced simply by the emergence of more empirical methods.<sup>429</sup> Nature, like humankind, was often regarded as a fallen theophany and the alchemist had the deeper imperative not only to liberate their own soul through creating a body of glory, but to *participate* in the spiritual regeneration of the greater material cosmos in order to restore nature to her pristine status: the first body of divine revelation. Here again, the issue of both *corpus* and *physis* becomes inseparable from their wider, spiritual-soteriological framework.

These contexts, both the ability to translate early modern alchemy into the language of empirical science, and the deeper imperative to restore the book of nature and thus restore the primordial revelation, allow one to appreciate the currents that begin to emerge in the work of Schwaller de Lubicz. Although de Lubicz was a close contemporary of Jung, and emerged out of the spiritual milieu of Parisian theosophy, Schwaller was neither a psychological nor a spiritual alchemist in the senses that have been decried by Principe and Newman; rather, Schwaller presents himself as someone deeply immersed in the same simultaneously empirical and soteriological endeavour as that of the early modern *Naturphilosophen*, who were in fact his literary initiators. Generally speaking, Schwaller is much more comparable to a figure like Rudolph Steiner, who took his method from Goethean phenomenology, rather than a figure like Carl Jung, who took his method from Freudian psychology. And while it is not necessary to perpetuate the polemics of Principe and Newman against Jung, who must be accorded his proper place, it must be emphasised that Lubiczian alchemy, while distinctly modern, is of a completely different character to that of his contemporaries. De Lubicz himself studied deeply the works of early modern *chymists* and attempted to reproduce their results. While Jung was still alive, Schwaller remarked: 'no one has been further from an understanding of Greek and medieval alchemy than Jung and the psychoanalytic school. Alchemy depends on laboratory results. It is a manipulation of matter which has always been known. It occurs everywhere in nature, all the time'.<sup>430</sup> In this respect, one may regard the views of Principe and Newman on these points as merely a late academic realisation of points which were plainly evident to practising twentieth century alchemists at least forty years previously. For these reasons, the work of de Lubicz presents itself as especially pertinent to the understanding not only of modern conceptions of alchemy, but also of its deeper currents of continuity.

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429 It should be added that such a project by no means precludes empirical approaches or results of a quantitative scientific character.

430 *Al-Kemi*, 48.



PART II

LIGHT BROKEN THROUGH THE PRISM  
OF LIFE

## SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ: LIFE AND WORK

You are light, but light broken through the prism of life.<sup>431</sup>

—« Aor » to René Schwaller de Lubicz.

The entire life and work of René Schwaller de Lubicz sought to exemplify the golden mean between the ‘abstract and the concrete’. Through a detailed, contextualised survey of Schwaller’s life and work, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that Schwaller is as equally concerned with material alchemical processes as he is with spiritual alchemical processes, both of which were united in his quest to understand the nondual constitution of reality. Here it becomes evident that Schwaller’s concerns—from his earliest post-war esoteric and sociopolitical groups, which sought to revivify the soul of a damaged civilisation through the traditional *métier* of the artisan, to his Pythagoreanising Egyptosophy, which sought to understand the phenomenon of the temple (and the natural cosmos as a whole) as a volumetric expression of divine geometric functions—all revolved around the central meta/physical inquiry by which matter was not only comprehended but experienced and engaged as an expression of spirit.<sup>432</sup> In terms of the broader argument of this thesis, the chapters in this section aim to situate Schwaller clearly in the lineage of alchemists who regard *Naturphilosophie* as a spiritual methodology for reading the book of nature as a theophany.

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431 SCHWALLER, *L’Appel de feu* : ‘Tu es lumière, mais lumière brisée à travers le prisme de la vie’ (unpaginated in the original edition; = *Deuxieme Nuit*, 4).

432 The construction “meta/physical” has been employed to emphasise the inclusion of φυσικ (physis, ‘nature’) within the purview of metaphysical apperception, and thus to express, in one locution, the juncture of metaphysical and physical realities so central to de Lubicz’s hieratic science.

*Seven Year Cycles*

Deeply Pythagorean, Schwaller saw the human lifespan as governed by a series of seven-year cycles that correspond to phases of organic (and initiatic) development. He identified key moments in his early years—at the age of seven and at the age of fourteen—in which certain formative experiences crystallised to awaken his abiding quest into the nature of origin. For the purposes of structuring the following biographical survey, the seven-year cycle provides a useful means for approaching his life in a way that is consistent with his self-understanding, as the shifts in his life generally fall quite neatly and organically into the series defined by these seven-year periods. It should be added that Schwaller was not the only one to conceive life in this way. German *Kulturphilosoph*, Jean Gebser, for instance, also conceived the life process in a similar fashion, and points to the ancient origins of this conception in Solon and Plato. For this reason, it is useful to place Gebser's explication of the process next to Schwaller's own remarks as a preface to the biographical study that follows. Comments Gebser:

Individual life obeys in the smallest details the same laws of fulfilment that humankind as a whole undergoes. And so the way of the individual human is a way of *becoming increasingly conscious*. It leads *from egolessness through egoity to ego-freedom*. Who misses this way has, at least today as a European, missed his life. Between the ages of 14 and 21, each of us must complete the break from the clan, from the family, and begin the search for the self (ego). If we don't do this, we remain infantile, a child. Between the ages of 28 and 35, each of us must *find* the self; if we don't do this, we remain an eternal child. Between the ages of 42 and 49, each of us must gain distance from our self or ego, must realise what may be described as ego-freedom; if we don't do this, we remain a man and will never become a human: and the human encompasses the masculine as well as the feminine. It would be a misunderstanding, however, to believe that this should be formulated as some sort of life-schedule. One does not need to be precisely 21, 35 or 49. For this reason it only refers back in a general sense to the famous seven-year rhythm already known in antiquity to Solon and Plato, and which modern medicine has since rediscovered in the fact that all the cells of our body are completely reformed every seven years.<sup>433</sup>

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433 GEBSER, *In der Bewährung*, (Berne/Munich: Francke, 1969), 107 ff. = *Gesamtausgabe* 5/1: 255: 'Das Einzelleben untersteht im kleinen ähnlichen Vollzugsgesetzen wie das menschheitliche. Auch der Weg des einzelnen Menschen ist ein Weg der *zunehmenden Bewußtwerdung*. Er führt *aus der Ichlosigkeit über die Ichhaftigkeit zur Ichfreiheit*. Wer diesen Weg verfehlt, der hat, wenigstens heute und als Europäer, sein Leben verfehlt. Ein jeder von uns muß zwischendem 14. und 21. Lebensjahr die Loslösung aus dem Clan, der Familie vollziehen und sich auf die Suche nach seinem Ich begeben. Tut er es nicht, bleibt er infantile, bleibt ein Knabe. Ein jeder von uns muß zwischen 28. und 35. Lebensjahr sein

Comment Schwaller:

Mark my words, the effects of the seven-year cycle, whether consciously realized or not, are inescapable. For most people, I admit, life is just one straight line, day after day, and they will have to come back and try again, in roughly the same formal parameters. Before the age of forty-two, I myself thought there were other activities that would further the work of consciousness, activities involving people, concrete applications of the abstract ideas in the form of group organizations, esoteric schools, if you want, but once I entered the seventh cycle, I realized my error. It was during that cycle that I finished the practical work on salt, here in this house, and that I proved the work experimentally, with Fulcanelli handling some crucial manipulations. But the aftermath of all this once again showed me what I should have already learned in Paris: it is dangerous to use the *Oeuvre* and the knowledge it affords in any other way than for inscribed experience. The voluntary obscurity of adepts all through history must come in part from this realization. [...] Well, these are typically the experiences of the first six cycles, the drive of youth and a certain exuberance that characterizes the early adult cycles. [...] Each cycle concerns a specific stage of development which every individual conforms to in his particular manner; some put more emphasis on one cycle, some on the other, but the basic character of the cycle is invariant for all individuals of the species. The first birth is the experience held in common by all living things, the physical appearance on the planet. After that, each species falls into a time-measure of its own, which for the human being is a seven year cycle. The second human cycle [7-14] is characterized by great intuitive input, usually with spiritual overtones. This is when lasting attachments are often made to particular religions, or to particular religious personalities. The third cycle [14-21] as a rule is marked by intellectual development, and the fourth [21-28] usually concentrates on the emotional complex. It is here that emotive tone, so important to inscription, starts becoming firmly established. It must be said that some individuals travel through

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Ich finden; tut er es nicht, bleibt er ein ewiger Jüngling. Ein jeder von uns muß zwischen dem 42. und 49. Jahr Distanz zu seinem Ich gewinnen, muß das realisieren, was man als Ichfreiheit bezeichnen kann; tut er es nicht, bleibt er bloß ein Mann und wird niemals ein Mensch, der auch, als Mann, das Weibliche begreift. Es wäre jedoch ein Mißverständnis zu glauben, damit solle gewissermaßen ein Lebensfahrplan entworfen sein. Es braucht nicht immer genau das 21., 35., 49. Jahr zu sein. Es sei damit nur allgemein auf den uralt bekannten Siebener-Rhythmus verweisen, um den schon Solon und damit Platon gewußt haben und den die moderne Medizin wiederentdeckt hat, da sich ja alle Zellen unseres Körpers je nach sieben Jahren vollständig neu bilden'. Georg FEUERSTEIN, *Structures of Consciousness*, 175: 'The chronological "gaps" in Gebser's model are a typical instance of the aperspectival element in his thinking. Only the rationally-fixed consciousness demands the "missing" years be accounted for through linear categorization'; for further refs, see FEUERSTEIN, 176 n. 17.

these periods of particular sensitivity for one faculty or other without profiting hardly at all from the general bias of their organism toward certain aspects of the functional milieu. The earlier the cycle, the more clearly defined its formative specialty. Starting with the fifth [28-35], cyclical character becomes more diffuse, as personal orientation affirms itself and begins to displace the influence of the natural cycle. The cycles of later life are less and less distinct. If the first three or four cycles are not fairly clearly marked, therefore, it is unlikely that the later ones will have any influence whatsoever. And for some incarnations, the only birth is the very first one, the physical entry into the world, and they by and large live out the implications of that birth and are aware of very little beyond the physical context.<sup>434</sup>

*René « Aor » Schwaller de Lubicz*

René Adolphe Schwaller was born 30 December 1887 in Strasbourg—the *vignoble* region of France that straddles the border of Rhineland Germany. Schwaller would acquire two more names in the course of his life: the chivalric title « de Lubicz » and the initiatic appellation « Aor ».<sup>435</sup> The story of these names will reveal much. For now, however, it is important to realise that he was first and foremost *Alsatian*. His nature is a precise reflection of the land—or rather, *borderland*—into which he was born: Alsace

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<sup>434</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 197-200.

<sup>435</sup> The chief sources for the biography of Schwaller are that of his wife: Isha SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *“Aor”: R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz—sa vie, son oeuvre* (Paris: La Colombe, 1963); Isha’s biography appeared shortly after her husband’s death (December 7, 1961). Details of his birth and death are confirmed by the bibliographic records of the Bibliothèque Nationale; Further surveys of Schwaller’s life and/or work are contained in Pierre MARIEL, *Dictionnaire des sciences occultes en occident* (Paris: Culture Art Loisir, 1971), 392-396, and more recently, Jean-Pierre LAURANT’s entry, ‘Schwaller de Lubicz’, in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (ed. HANEGRAEFF et al., Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1045-6. Useful introductory materials have also been furnished for the English translations of Schwaller’s works, in particular: *Nature Word*, *Numbers*, and *The Temple in Man*. Recently, Erik SABLÉ’s *La vie et l’œuvre de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* has provided an attempt to situate Schwaller’s life and work in terms of his consistent emphasis on the esoteric laws of genesis, which are discernible from his earliest writings to his last. However, the best critical apparatus to date has been provided in 2006 by Emmanuel DUFOUR-KOWALSKI’s two compilations of Schwaller’s material: *Schwaller de Lubicz: L’Œuvre au Rouge* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 2006) and *La Quête Alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956* (Milan: Arché, 2006). Dufour-Kowalski avails himself of the significant documentary evidence preserved in the *Ta Meri Archives*, Schwaller’s *Nachlass*. This body of material has seemingly passed to Dufour-Kowalski’s care after previously being tended by Olivier Robichon and Thérèse Collet.

(German *Elsaß*, Latin *Alsatia*), the longitudinal strip of land defined by the Vosges in the west and by the Rhine in the east. Since Julius Caesar first wrested the region from the Germanic tribes in the first century CE, its history has been one of repeated oscillation between Gallic and Germanic rule. In early modern times, Louis XIV annexed Alsace to the French crown (1648), while the French Revolution (1789) divided it into the *Haut* and *Bas* regions. At the end of the Franco-Prussian war (1871–2), France gave up most of the region to Germany, and it was here, in *Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen* (German-ruled Alsace-Lorraine) that Schwaller was born. In spite of its Germanic character, however, the region remains defiantly French, as did René Schwaller. Indeed, his part-French, part-German name reflects the bifold lineage of not only the territory but its people: his father, Joseph Schwaller (a pharmacist), was of Swiss-German origin while his mother, Marie Bernard (originally from Asnières), was French.<sup>436</sup> And yet, while the bilingual milieu into which Schwaller was born would give him fluency in two languages, he spoke and wrote in his mother's tongue. As Christopher Bamford remarks in his introduction to the English translation of Schwaller's *Les Nombres*: 'All his life he wrestled with this inheritance, continuing, as it were, to "think in German" but write in French'.<sup>437</sup> Ultimately, in the close yet uneasy confluence of the Romance and the Germanic, it was the fertile tension of *vignoble* France that dominated the composition of his nature.

Schwaller divided the leisures of his youth between 'reveries in the forest, painting and chemical experiments in the laboratory of his father'.<sup>438</sup> At the age of seven, Schwaller had his first crucial experience in which the simple handling of a coin sparked for him a concrete experience of the relation between unity and duality—the perception of *number as form*—and with this an insight into the nature of God crystallised in a way that would colour his entire life and work.<sup>439</sup> The opening of this cycle was thus stamped with the realisation of the simultaneously dual and non-dual nature of divinity revealed in the simple, tangible reality of a two-sided coin. At the same age he formulated the question that would guide his entire philosophical and

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436 *L'Œuvre au Rouge*, 17; SABLÉ, *La vie et l'œuvre de René Schwaller de Lubicz*, 13.

437 BAMFORD, 'Introduction', *A Study of Numbers: A Guide to the Constant Creation of the Universe* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1986): 15; Cf. also DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 9: 'Du point de vue stylistique, il ne faut point négliger l'approche formelle de son auteur, allergique à toute expression romanesque ou poétique, n'hésitant pas à alimenter son vocabulaire philosophique de néologismes techniques'. (From the stylistic point of view, one must not neglect to mention the formal approach of the author, allergic to all Romanesque or poetic expressions, never hesitating to supplement his philosophical vocabulary with technical neologisms').

438 *Aor*, 14: 'partageant ses loisirs entre les rêveries dans la forêt, la peinture et les expériences de chimie dans le laboratoire de son père'.

439 *Al-Kemi*, 198–9.

alchemical quest into the mystery of existence—*Quelle est l'origine de la matière*—‘what is the origin of matter?’<sup>440</sup>

At the age of fourteen, the experience inaugurating his third cycle (the entry into intellectual development), concerned light and fire. Here one learns of an experiment conducted in the laboratory of his father involving the production of hydrochloric acid, a common but impressive experiment which proceeds from the fact that the two components of the acid—hydrogen gas and chlorine—are so photosensitive that diffuse light will produce a reaction and direct sunlight an explosion.<sup>441</sup> For reasons that will become clearer in due course, the following description of the process, reproduced from Fulcanelli's *Les Demeures philosophales* (Philosophical Dwellings, 1931), must be taken as representative of Schwaller's own formative experience:

Light—rarefied and spiritualised fire—possesses the same virtues and the same chemical power as crude, elementary fire. An experiment aimed at the synthetic realisation of hydrochloric acid (HCl) from its components is enough to demonstrate this. If one encloses equal volumes of chlorine and hydrogen gas in a glass flask, the two gasses will retain their own individuality as long as the flask that contains them is kept in darkness. Already, with diffused light, little by little, their combination begins to occur. But if one exposes the vessel to direct solar rays, it shatters under the pressure of a violent explosion.<sup>442</sup>

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440 *Aor*, 14. On the significance of formative impressions made at the age of seven, cf. also the opening pages of FULCANELLI'S *Le Mystère des cathédrales*—a book with direct ties to Schwaller's work: ‘La plus forte impression de notre prime jeunesse, — nous avons sept ans, — celle dont nous gardons encore un souvenir vivace, fut l'émotion qui provoqua, en notre âme d'enfant, la vue d'une cathédrale gothique. Nous en fûmes, sur-le-champ, transporté, extasié, frappé d'admiration, incapable de nous arracher à l'attrait du merveilleux, à la magie du splendide, de l'immense, du vertigineux que dégageait cette œuvre plus divine qu'humaine’. (Paris: Pauvert, 1964), 47; ‘The strongest impression of my childhood—I was seven years old—an impression of which I still retain a vivid memory, was the emotion aroused in my young heart by the sight of a gothic cathedral. I was immediately enraptured by it. I was in ecstasy, struck with wonder, unable to tear myself away from the attraction of the marvellous, from the magic of such splendour, such immensity, such intoxication expressed by this more divine than human work’. (1971/1984, 35).

441 *Al-Kemi*, 200-I.

442 FULCANELLI, *Les Demeures philosophales et le symbolisme hermétique dans ses rapports avec l'art sacré et l'ésotérisme du grand-œuvre*, (Paris: Jean Schmidt, 1930): ‘La lumière, — feu raréfié et spiritualisé, — possède les mêmes vertus et le même pouvoir chimique que le feu élémentaire grossier. Une expérience, dirigée vers la réalisation synthétique de l'acide chlorhydrique (Cl H) en partant de ses composants, le démontre suffisamment. Si l'on enferme dans un flacon de verre des volumes égaux de gaz chlore et d'hydrogène, les deux gaz conserveront leur individualité propre tant que la fiole qui les contient sera maintenue dans l'obscurité. Déjà, à la lumière diffuse, leur combinaison s'effectue peu à peu ; mais si

Here the chemical experiment crystallises the creative, catalytic role of light and fire in alchemy. André VandenBroeck, to whom Schwaller would confide a wealth of information in the years before his death, comments:

This experiment made an enormous impression on the young man, and his interest in color phenomena dated from that day. It had become evident to him that for the objects of perception, light ceases to exist as such, as it diffuses into the color phenomenon. A part of knowledge concerning light would have to be gathered through color: color had become a form of perception. He instantly felt that the state of consciousness which accompanied this intellectual opening was connected to another decisive moment in his life, the moment of his “metaphysical” discovery of number through the two-sided coin. Number was present again, the unity of light fracturing into the ordered multiplicity of the spectrum. The revelation of one becoming two had been fleshed out by the analysis of the *space* between one and two. And that space was the scale of color.<sup>443</sup>

Here, in their inception, are the formative keys Schwaller would use to understand the origin of matter: number and light. Through the coin, Schwaller understood the unity underlying apparent duality; number would lead him to understand *phi* as the harmonic function of scission by which one *divides* itself into two. This would become a core principle of his mature cosmology: the golden proportion as an activity of unity that simultaneously engenders the mystery of duality (creation and fall). Through fire, Schwaller would open himself up to the perception of metaphysical light as ‘*non-polarised energy*’, a term he would use interchangeably with ‘the Absolute’, ‘God’ and the primordial ‘One’. For Schwaller, the origin of matter was generated through the *polarisation* of this primordial energy into an active and a passive aspect (sulphur and mercury; acid and base), conceived together as the agent and patient of one creative inter-reaction of which the material cosmos—visible and tangible form—was the neutralisation (the ‘cinnabar’ or ‘salt’). Through this process, the phenomenal world of *colour* appeared, bringing into being the characteristic seven-fold signature of light. For Schwaller, the septenaries of the natural cosmos, from the colour spectrum to musical harmony, were demonstrations of the laws of manifestation underpinning all things, from the structure of the atom to the configuration of the solar system.

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l'on expose le vaisseau aux rayons solaires directs, il vole en éclats sous la poussée d'une violente explosion’.

<sup>443</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 201.



**Early Years in Paris: 1904–1922**

In 1904, at the age of seventeen, René Schwaller left his home town of Strasbourg to evade military service in the German Empire. Fleeing on foot by night, he crossed the French border via the Vosges to arrive in Paris, where he was received by a maternal aunt.<sup>444</sup> In Paris, Schwaller would be exposed to a number of formative influences: the colour theories of Henri Matisse (of whom he would become a student); key figures in the Parisian alchemical revival, notably Fulcanelli (with whom he would collaborate); and the esoteric milieu of the Parisian Theosophical Society (of which he would become a member). He would also inaugurate his first esoteric group, *Les Veilleurs*.

*Matisse*

L'Académie Matisse was opened in Paris in 1908 and by 1910, Schwaller was closely tied to a woman by the name of Marthe Essig, a German speaking *élève* of Matisse who was in charge of the latter's studio. Essig became Schwaller's first wife and gave birth to Schwaller's only child, Guy.<sup>445</sup> Strangely, very little is heard about either Marthe or Guy after this period, and it may be assumed that Schwaller and Marthe went their separate ways.

A deep concern with colour would become central to Schwaller's alchemical conceptions, and for this reason, the question of Matisse's influence on Schwaller's *Farbenlehre* is of capital importance. Although there is no direct evidence of the exact influence of the painter on the young alchemist, it is not difficult to discern the elements that Schwaller would have doubtless found significant. As Erik Sablé observes in his short biography of Schwaller:

Matisse had very precise ideas on art, creation and life. In his notes and articles he advises, for example, never to lose the first emotion, and to maintain a state of non-knowing and non-willing in order to leave room for any innocence that might spring up. Now, the intelligence of the heart, of which René would speak much later, has precisely for its essence the qualities of spontaneity and non-volition.<sup>446</sup>

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444 *L'Œuvre au Rouge*, 17 (cf. *Aor*, 14). DUFOUR-KOWALSKI notes that it was in Asnières, a municipality near Paris, that Schwaller secured his identity papers; this is why his birth location is officially listed as Asnières when in fact he was born in Strasbourg (he completed his *premières humanités* at the lycée de Strasbourg in 1904). His identity papers would later list his profession as 'ingénieur chimiste'.

445 *L'Œuvre au Rouge*, 18.

446 SABLÉ, *La vie et l'œuvre de René Schwaller de Lubicz* (Paris: Éditions Dervy, 2003), 14: 'Il serait d'ailleurs intéressant de connaître exactement l'influence du peintre sur la pensée, la façon de voir le monde du jeune René car Matisse avait des idées très précises sur l'art, la

Given that Schwaller would be increasingly drawn to colour as a central metaphysical concern, it is highly significant that he was exposed to Matisse during the years following 1910: the exact period that Matisse began his first bold experiments with colour as a pure phenomenon. Indeed, Matisse's exhibitions between 1911 and 1913 caused much outrage precisely because he emphasised colour almost to the complete neglect of formal and stylistic elements.<sup>447</sup> For Matisse, colour was a *vital* phenomenon; colour expressed something of the *life* of things which prevailed beyond their mere appearance. In exploring this, Matisse began to express with colour what Henri Bergson was articulating at the same time, philosophically, as the *élan vital* (the vital spark or impulse). The connection here is not accidental, for not only were Bergson and Matisse both concerned with the perception of the vital element, students of Matisse during this period were also known to oscillate eagerly between the artist's studio and the popular lectures that were being given by the vitalist philosopher at the Sorbonne.<sup>448</sup> Matthew Stuart Prichard, a resident philosopher-aesthete in Matisse's

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création, la vie. Dans ses notes et ses articles, il conseille par exemple de ne jamais perdre l'émotion première, de maintenir un état de non-savoir et non-vouloir pour laisser place à l'innocence qui peut surgir. Or, l'intelligence du cœur, non-mentale, dont parlera René Schwaller bien plus tard a précisément pour essence la spontanéité, le non-vouloir'. Emmanuel DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, *L'Œuvre au Rouge*, 17-8, has suggested that, for Schwaller: 'Le couleur devient « symbole » d'une révélation intérieure, puissance vibratoire venant féconder la forme—celle d'une espace spirituel—utilisation des tonalités fondamentales qui impliquent un mode particulier d'expression—tonalités qui évoquent aussi l'état d'âme du peintre, sa genèse personnelle. Mais la gestuelle picturale à l'école de Matisse a aussi son importance, avec l'art du trait bien connu des pictographes chinois, pour qui le sacré est d'abord synonyme de transcendance—les diverses techniques « orientales » demeureront pour l'apprenti-peintre alsacien l'objet d'une réflexion philosophique sur l'Art et le monde des Causes'. (Colour becomes a "symbol" of an interior revelation, a vibratory power that fecundates form—that of a spiritual space—a utilisation of the fundamental tonalities that imply a particular mode of expression—tonalities which also evoke the state of the painter's soul, his personal genesis. But the pictorial gestures (*gestuelle picturale*) at the school of Matisse also bore an important relationship to the well-known strokes of Chinese pictographs, in which the sacred is first and foremost synonymous with transcendence. The various "oriental" techniques would remain for the Alsatian apprentice the object of a philosophical reflection on Art and the world of Causes).

<sup>447</sup> Cf. Lawrence GOWING, *Matisse* (Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 108-21.

<sup>448</sup> This connection between the ideas of Matisse and Bergson was chiefly fostered by Matthew Stuart Prichard, an Oxford educated lawyer who spurned a career in art history to pursue his true vocation as a philosopher-aesthete. Described by T. S. Elliot as bearing 'an influence out of all proportion to his public fame', Prichard entered the company of Matisse in 1910, bringing with him a social circle which was 'divided more or less equally into wealthy middle-aged women on the one hand and young male disciples on the other'. See in particular Hilary SPURLING, *Matisse the Master: A Life of Henri Matisse: The Conquest of Colour, 1909-1954* (Hamish Hamilton: London, 2005), 45, along with the following comment (148): 'The nature of perception, which preoccupied Matisse, was one of the key

circle, remarks of *le Maître*: ‘he accepted Bergson’s idea that the artist is concerned with the discovery and expression of reality’.<sup>449</sup> Matisse himself remarked how the recent invention of photography only served to reveal the true purpose of the artist, i.e., how ‘its real service was in showing that the artist was concerned with something other than external appearances’.<sup>450</sup> Through colour, then, the artist sought to perceive and express something deeper, something more real—the living, animating, energetic source—the *élan vital*.

Among the two volumes of papers recently published from Schwaller’s personal notebooks,<sup>451</sup> one’s attention is drawn to a short, undated text from the early 1940s: ‘Quelques mots sur l’art et la nouvelle mentalité’ (Some remarks on art and the new mentality). Here, Schwaller evokes attitudes clearly reflective of those cultivated in Matisse’s studio thirty years earlier:

Art must never attempt to reproduce what the eye sees. What the eye reveals—or the senses in general—is nothing but a motion of an impression. To want to go against the grain by rendering the totality of what the senses speak is to reconstruct, to make an intellectual intervention in order to express an emotion, a sentiment, an impression of synthesis that is absolutely opposed to intellectual possibilities, which are always analytical. If the impression is coloured, only the colour, without any concern for the form, must be rendered. If form wants to justify the colour, analysis intervenes and kills the feeling. How poignant is the impression of a simple palette and how eloquent the harmony or disharmony of these daubs of colour?<sup>452</sup>

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questions currently being addressed by the philosopher Henri Bergson in a wildly popular series of public lectures at the Collège de France. Prichard and his followers, all passionate Bergsonians, shuttled between Matisse’s studio and the Sorbonne, laying the philosopher’s findings before the painter, who recognised a basic system that might take him further even than masters like Delacroix and Corot’.

449 Matthew Stuart PRICHARD, ‘Conversations avec Matisse’, from Rémi LABRUSSE’s unpublished compilation of Prichard’s letters and notebooks, along with records of his conversations made by his disciples Georges Duthuit and William King. Cited in SPURLING, *Matisse the Master*, 148, 477 n. 41.

450 Cited in SPURLING, 148.

451 *Notes et propos inédits* I–II (Apremont: M.C.O.R/La Table d’Émeraude, 2005-6).

452 SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, ‘Quelques mots sur l’art et la nouvelle mentalité’, *Notes et Propos inédits*, I, 167-8: ‘Jamais l’Art ne devrait essayer de reproduire ce que l’œil voit. Ce qui l’œil montre, ou les sens en général, n’est que le motif d’une impression. Vouloir aller à rebours en rendre la totalité de ce que les sens disent, c’est reconstruire, c’est faire intervenir l’intellect pour exprimer une émotion, un sentiment, une impression de synthèse, absolument opposée aux possibilités intellectuelles, toujours analytiques. Si l’impression est colorée, seule la couleur, sans aucun souci de la forme, devrait le rendre. Si la forme veut justifier la couleur, l’analyse intervient et tue le sentiment. Combien poignante peut être l’impression d’une simple palette et combien éloquente l’harmonie ou disharmonie de ces

Schwaller's emphasis on pure colour and also the concern of the true artist to express the intuitive and vital element of life (rather than the rational and perspectival stultification of life) thus squares perfectly with Matisse's exploration of colour as a pure phenomenon. Clearly, the specific milieu around Matisse, as well as its crossover into the intellectual climate provided by Bergson, were formative contexts for Schwaller. Interestingly, in this connection, he would always remain a vitalist. But it must also be recognised that the deeper origins of Schwaller's vitalism are ultimately esoteric—that is to say, hermetic-alchemical. A look at the intellectual history of vitalism is enough to reveal that the philosophical vitalism of Bergson or the artistic vitalism of Matisse are really only recapitulations of the debates between vitalism and mechanism that surged in scientific and medical circles throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>453</sup> In this period, the scientific context, concomitant with the emergence of the discipline of biology itself (the so-called “science of life”), bordered also upon the intellectual history of alchemy. Here it must be noted that the widening opposition between the view of cosmos as either mechanism or organism played no small role in the increasing separation that was also being established between the rational science of chemistry and the hieratic science of alchemy. It is therefore no surprise that Schwaller, who saw alchemy precisely as a science of life (albeit one founded upon primordial unity, to include the mineral kingdom as a living entity), would naturally side with the vitalists in the resurgent debates of his own day. Essentially, the vitalism that informs the ideal of a hieratic or sacred science must be recognised as central to Schwaller's quest to understand the origin of matter; it would lead him through—and ultimately beyond—the esoteric milieux of his day.

*The Parisian Alchemical Revival and Fulcanelli*

During the nineteenth century, a growing interest in alchemy and hermeticism took root in France; during the first decades of the twentieth century, it flourished. Texts such as Gérard de Nerval's *Nicolas Flamel* (1831), Cyliani's *Hermès Dévoilé* (1832), Louis-Paul-François Cambriel's nineteen-lesson *Cours de Philosophie Hermétique* (1843),<sup>454</sup> Alexandre Dumas' *Un Alchimiste au XIXe siècle* (1844), and in academic quarters, Berthelot's *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* (1887), all proved influential in raising the alchemical tenor of the times. By the close of the *fin-de-siècle*, Paris had become home to a fully fledged alchemical revival which, by the early decades of the twentieth

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taches de couleurs'. Cf. further, 168: 'Le Vie est mouvement, le mouvement est fait de moments qui se lient par un impondérable'. ('Life is movement and movement is made of moments that link themselves by an imponderable').

453 See Guido CIMINO and François DUCHESNEU, *Vitalisms: From Heller to the Cell Theory. Proceedings of the Zaragoza Symposium. XIXth International Congress of History of Science 22–29 August 1993* (Leo S. Olschki Editore: Firenze, 1994), passim.

454 Cf. Eugène CHEVREUL's critiques appearing in *Le Journal des Savants* from May 1851.

century, reached a particularly characteristic form of expression. One thing that seems to distinguish this current is a decisive interest in operative traditions in alchemy; the exegetes of the Parisian alchemical revival were much more inclined to look to early modern laboratory alchemists such as Philalethes and Flamel rather than the popular spiritual alchemists of the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, French alchemy in this period cannot be divorced from the pervasive influence of esoteric figures such as Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse-Louis Constant) (1810–1875), Albert Poisson (1864–1893), Stanislas de Guaita (1861–1897), Gerard Encausse/Papus (1862–1916) and F. Jollivet Castillot (1868–1939), to name but a few; all profoundly coloured the French esoteric milieu throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and importantly, much of their intellectual influence found its ferment within the orbit of the Société Theosophique, which played a significant sociological role in Parisian esotericism).<sup>455</sup> But if one name stands at the centre of this return towards an operative (and yet also spiritual) alchemy, it is that of Fulcanelli.<sup>456</sup>

In 1913, an artist, alchemist and inventor by the name of Jean-Julien Champagne (1877–1932) approached the young Alsatian in the Café Closerie de Lilas in Paris.<sup>457</sup> A clandestine meeting was soon arranged during which Champagne would reveal that he was Fulcanelli, insisting that his double identity (and Schwaller's subsequent contact with him) remain an absolute secret. The two agreed to begin collaborating on alchemical matters, and before long, they formed a working relationship that would span almost twenty years. The exclusive focus of this alliance was the reproduction, using alchemical techniques, of the unique blues and reds of the earliest Gothic stained glass. In Parisian alchemical circles, this endeavour was regarded as no less than an *experimentum crucis* of the alchemical opus.

From very early on, Schwaller had been undertaking research in a closely related vein: a work 'that would show with detailed proof, through the structural elements of the cathedrals, and through the sculpture and ornaments, that they were a Christic expression of the Hermetic *Oeuvre*'.<sup>458</sup> In 1922, he lent his documentation to Champagne, who dissuaded Schwaller from publishing the material on the grounds that it 'revealed too much'.<sup>459</sup> Schwaller was unconcerned, and had apparently held similar sentiments himself. At the time, he was in the midst of preparations to relocate to the Engadine region in Switzerland. In 1926, however, Champagne, under the

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455 See Richard CARON, 'Notes sur l'histoire de l'alchimie en France à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> et au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle', in Richard CARON, Joscelyn GODWIN, Wouter J. HANEGRAAFF & Jean-Louis VIEILLARD-BARON, eds, *Ésotérisme, gnoses & imaginaire symbolique: mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 17–25.

456 For the background, see especially Geneviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé* (Paris: Dervy, 1996) = *Fulcanelli and the Alchemical Revival* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny, 2006), 6–48 with Appendix A ('Chronology of the Alchemical Revival'), 121–28.

457 DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé*, passim.

458 *Al-Kemi*, 80.

459 *Al-Kemi*, 80–1.

pseudonym Fulcanelli, published a supplemented and embellished version of Schwaller's material in a book entitled *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (The Mystery of the Cathedrals). Schwaller later claimed: 'It was entirely based on my work'.<sup>460</sup>

Despite this hermetic theft, Schwaller continued to work with Champagne on a specific alchemical problem pertaining to the manipulation of salt, the key to which was purportedly contained in a mysterious manuscript obtained by Champagne. This secret manuscript cast the hermetic problem upon which they were working in the language of *colour*. The details of this colour cipher are crucial to Schwaller's alchemy, and will be examined at length in the balance of this thesis. However, a few remarks are required in order to help explain the dynamics of the Schwaller-Champagne relationship. Why, for instance, would Schwaller continue to work with someone who, according to Schwaller's own testimony, stole his work? And not just any work: but one of the most unique insights into the alchemical opus employing the medieval Christian cathedrals as an integrated *symbolique*; a work that holds a cult following among operative alchemists to this day. Towards the end of his life, Schwaller revealed to VandenBroeck that Fulcanelli was, in terms of technical ability, a 'great manipulator'; he was all technique, claimed Schwaller, 'but what a technique!' For his own part, however, Schwaller claimed to possess the genuine element of *doctrine*, i.e. the vital understanding of the metaphysical purpose and cosmological context in which such a work must be properly situated in order to be successful: the knowledge of the 'ambient conditions' that he considered critical to the alchemical *œuvre*. A pertinent remark Schwaller made in 1913 (in the context of his early essays on the value of authentic science) helps consolidate this point with regard to the alchemical collaboration:

A masterpiece is judged on the basis of its details. [And yet] red and green spots, forming heads, bodies and arms, or trees, do not by themselves constitute a painting. To make a masterpiece you need the *details of the method* used to reproduce the object or idea and the *hand of the artist*, that indefinable thing. So is it too with science.<sup>461</sup>

Schwaller, bringing into play his experience with Matisse (contemporary with this precise extract), again alludes to an emphasis on the vital element of life rather than the technical stultification of it. Here it must be mentioned that Schwaller and Champagne were both accomplished painters and talented laboratory alchemists. Although they were, each in their own right, fit hermetic adepts, together they complemented each other's natural strengths in a way that reached beyond the limitations of their own innate predispositions. And so, despite their overlapping

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460 For the account of the *Cathédrales* theft: *Al-Kemi*, 78-81.

461 René SCHWALLER, *Le Theosophe* (October 16, 1913), cited in BAMFORD, 'Introduction', *A Study of Numbers: A Guide to the Constant Creation of the Universe* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1986), II. Emphasis added.

capacities, it would appear that, where Fulcanelli provided the ‘details of the method’, Schwaller provided the indefinable ‘hand of the artist’. The precise nature of the work to which Schwaller and Champagne would turn their respective hands will become clearer through the examination of the stained glass *œuvre* undertaken in the final chapters of this thesis.

*Theosophy, Arithmosophy, Spagyrics*

From 1913 to 1916, Schwaller became involved with the Société Théosophique Française, the French branch of the Theosophical Society.<sup>462</sup> It is here, via a series of articles appearing in the periodical *Le Théosophe* (The Theosopher), founded and edited by the eminent Theosophist, Gaston Revel (1880–1939), that Schwaller first begins to make himself known in print. Via a series of seven articles, including a ‘Scientifico-Theosophical Catechism’, Schwaller elaborates on the general theme of ‘the value of science’, and, right from the beginning, one detects in his critiques of contemporary scientific methodology a distinct orientation towards a *sacred* or *hieratic* science.<sup>463</sup> ‘Contemporary science’, he claims, ‘is only the embryo of a science: namely, the classification of a mass of observations’.<sup>464</sup> True science, for Schwaller, must be founded upon *knowledge* (the literal meaning of the word *scientia*). It is precisely this quest for a sacred or hieratic *scientia* that drew him firstly to hermetic philosophy, and ultimately to Egypt, where he would seek to recover the ancient vestiges of the

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462 The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by H. P. Blavatsky, H. S. Olcott and W. Q. Judge, and established in France in 1899; cf. generally Joscelyn GODWIN, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (State University of New York Press, 1994), 277 ff., and Antoine FAIVRE, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 27-8.

463 René SCHWALLER, ‘La Valeur de la science’, *Le Théosophe*, samedi 1er novembre (1913); = *L’Œuvre au rouge*, 24-5; ‘Cathéchisme scientifico-thésophique’, *Le Théosophe* (samedi 16 mai, 1914), no. 108; = *L’Œuvre au rouge*, 29-32.

464 Schwaller especially criticises the tendency toward scientific ignorance of the nature of the forces with which science works; ignorance of these forces was for Schwaller ‘the secret that prevents science from truly being a science, i.e. ‘knowledge’’. He extends his critique particularly to the uncritical acceptance of academic pedagogy: ‘We limit ourselves to the given facts, which are often unverified. These are taught and, since it is easier to find students who believe what the teacher says than students who doubt, and since it is more difficult to find intuitive persons who have the soul of seekers (those who prefer to die of hunger following their path, ostracised from all intellectual classes and scientific associations) than to find young people who seek a position in life by becoming PhDs, etc. —that is why science has so often remained stationary’. See René SCHWALLER, *Le Théosophe* (October 16, 1913), cited in Christopher BAMFORD, ‘Introduction’, *A Study of Numbers*, 10. Translation modified.

primordial knowledge that, in his view, western civilisation generally, and modern science in particular, had sharply deviated from.

The first traces of this quest, however, are much more specific. They are concerned with the nondual implications of the nature of matter as revealed by contemporary atomic research, whose paradoxes hinted at the more mysterious possibilities of matter:

Physics tells us that electricity is an energy. But what kind of energy? It is that which results from an act and all that can produce an act. To produce an act requires the intermediary of a body. The movement of this body will therefore give an energy and the energy that results from this movement can once again reproduce an act. Energy is therefore something that results directly from an essential quality of bodies: inertia. Energy is something immanent to matter according to this explanation. But then, *how can the electric atom be that which produces matter when it is this matter that produces energy?*<sup>465</sup>

Here, Schwaller is directly concerned with the enigmas of matter *qua* energy. His interest is clearly guided not only by the question that he posed at the age of seven (what is the origin of matter?), it also prefigures the emphasis placed in his mature alchemical thought upon the idea of the fixed salt as a “nucleus” (Schwaller would repeatedly compare sulphur, mercury and salt to the proton, electron and neutron of the atom).

Theosophy not only gave Schwaller a forum in which to develop his early understanding of sacred science, it also provided the ideological and social fabric from which his first foray into esoteric politics would depart. Beyond its stated mission, the French branch of the Theosophical Society acted in many respects as a *de facto* nexus for the myriad occult and esoteric currents active in Paris at the time; through these intersecting milieus, Schwaller met many important figures from French esotericism, some of whom would become his close collaborators in the sociopolitical, artisanal and initiatic work that he would undertake during the coming decade. In addition to Gaston Revel and Jean-Julien Champagne, Schwaller’s known associates during this period include early radio pioneer, Carlos Larronde (1888–1940);<sup>466</sup> Lithuanian prince,

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465 René SCHWALLER, ‘La Valeur de la science: les atomes’, *Le Théosophe*, (samedi 1er novembre, 1913); *L’Œuvre au rouge*, 25: ‘La physique nous dit que l’électricité est une énergie. Mais qu’est-ce qu’une énergie? C’est ce qui résulte d’un travail et tout ce qui peut produire un travail. Pour produire un travail il faut l’intermédiaire d’un corps. Le résultat d’un mouvement de ce corps sera donc une énergie et cette énergie qui résulte du mouvement peut de nouveau reproduire un travail. L’énergie est donc quelque chose qui résulte directement d’une qualité essentielle des corps: l’inertie. L’énergie est quelque chose d’immanent à la matière selon cette explication. Mais alors, *comment l’atome électrique peut-il être ce qui produit la matière quand c’est cette matière qui produit l’énergie?*’

466 Close collaborator of Schwaller’s known for innovations in radio presentation.



diplomat and poet, Oskar Vladislav de Lubicz Milosz (1877–1939);<sup>467</sup> wealthy businessman and *Veilleurs* financier, Louis Allainguillaume (1878–1946);<sup>468</sup> dramatist, René Bruyez (1886–1969);<sup>469</sup> stained glass master, Richard Burgsthal (1884–1944);<sup>470</sup> librarian, classicist and alchemist, Pierre Dujols (1862–1926);<sup>471</sup> the great spagyricist and astrologer, Henri Coton-Alvart (1894–1988);<sup>472</sup> Synarchist, Vivian Postel du Mas (dates unknown),<sup>473</sup> and, of course, the future Madame de Lubicz, Jeanne Germain Lamy (1885–1963).<sup>474</sup>

Of the French Theosophical Society, Schwaller later remarked: ‘I was infinitely grateful to this movement for having opened my eyes to certain aspects of Buddhism,

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467 Milosz, *L'Amoureuse initiation* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1910); *Ars Magna* (Paris: Alice Sauerwein, 1924); *Arcanes (La vie des lettres et des arts, May 1926)* (Paris: Silvaire, 1994); Alexandra CHARBONNIER, *Milosz, l'étoile au front* (Paris: Dervy, 1993); Jean-Pierre LAURANT, ‘Milosz’, *DGWE*, 792-3.

468 Financier of *Les Veilleurs* and also of the project at Suhalia. Allainguillaume had two children with Jeanne (Isha) Germain, (Jeanne/Isha would become Schwaller’s second wife). According to Dufour-Kowalski (*La Quête alchimique*), the two children of Isha and Louis would die tragically during the second world war. Suzanne, born 1907, and Jacques, born in 1916, would die tragically during the second world war.

469 Cf. H. J. HUNT, ‘A Contemporary Dramatist: René Bruyez’, *Studies in French language, literature, and history: Presented to R. L. Graeme Ritchie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949; 1969), 77-106.

470 Master glass-maker who would later guide Schwaller and Carlos Larronde in the stained glass *œuvre*.

471 Dujols directed the rituals of the *Ordre de Temple Rénové*, founded by René Guénon in 1905; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 47; it was Dujols who provided Jean-Julien Champagne with the hermetic philological material that would appear in the two books published under the name Fulcanelli. See Geneviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli and the Alchemical Revival*, 31-42; Pierre DUJOLS, *Mutus Liber* (Paris, 1914); *Hypotypose* (Paris, 1914).

472 Cf. *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 48: ‘Henri Coton, grand spécialiste des « ferments », ouvrira de nouvelles perspectives en évoquant à plusieurs reprises avec son interlocuteur alsacien cette « alchimie ... liée à la tradition philosophique et religieuse de la Connaissance du corps, de l'âme et de l'esprit [...] ferment suprême, agent des métamorphoses de la vie, [et qui] a été appelé « pierre philosophale », mouvement éternel du monde révèl[ant] un rythme universel invariable par une succession de quatre états: 4 saisons (le temps), 4 directions (l'espace ou la croix), 4 éléments (la Nature), 4 âges (l'homme); l'accomplissement de ces quatre états form[a]nt un cycle entier qu'on a nommé la quadrature du cercle ». Cf. Henri COTON-ALVART, *Propos sur les « deux lumières »; Fragments d'hermétisme; Contes philosophiques* (Le Mercure Dauphinois: Grenoble, 2001), 82.

473 Vivien POSTEL DU MAS, *Schema du l'archetype social*, and *Le Pacte synarchique*; VandenBroeck discusses how the uniform of the *Veilleurs*—boots, riding pants, dark shirts—was adopted, via a purported link between Postel du Mas and Rudolf Hess, as the prototype of the of Nazi *Sturmabteilung* uniform. Cf. *Al-Kemi*, 165-6, and Massimo MARRA, *R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: La politica, l'esoterismo, l'egittologia* (Milan: Mimesis, 2008), 118 ff, n. 21.

but later I had to follow my proper path',<sup>475</sup> and in this sense he has been compared to Rudolf Steiner, who similarly began his occult career in Theosophy before departing on his own spiritual course. 'Steiner', comments Dufour-Kowalski, 'by knowing how to liberate himself from the theosophical grasp in order to follow his proper path, would therefore have a determining influence upon the future choices of René Schwaller'.<sup>476</sup>

Before Schwaller could take the first steps along his proper path, however, the First World War broke out, and in 1914 he was mobilised as a stretcher-bearer. Upon the recommendation of his father and some influential Theosophists, however, he found a post in the army chemical service at the gas factory at Sarcelles; here, with some 'eminent chemists', he made 'systematic analyses of all the [military] supplies (from canned food to the colourants of uniforms)'.<sup>477</sup> This position not only establishes Schwaller's credentials as an accomplished chemist, more importantly, it highlights the fact that facility with the methods of rationalised science was not necessarily antithetical to the adoption of spiritually integrative empirical methodologies. Here it is not irrelevant that dyeing in fact has a deep alchemical history connected precisely with the idea of the tincture as well as the persistence of colour as an index of transmutation. This period facilitated not only the development of his chemical expertise, it also afforded him abundant time for his own alchemical experiments.

Four years later, Schwaller published a small monograph called 'Numbers' (*Les Nombres*, 1917), where again he turns to the problem of the nucleus. Herein, Schwaller explores the mathematical structure of cosmogenesis according to three cycles, which are seen to underpin all phenomenal things: ideation, polarisation and formation.<sup>478</sup> Although Schwaller would later dismiss everything he wrote before

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474 Former wife of George Lamy, to whom she bore two children: Lucy Lamy, who would furnish the impeccable illustrations to all Schwaller's works, and Jean Lamy, medical doctor and developer of phonophoresis (a therapeutic technique involving the application of sound-vibrations to acupuncture points). Jeanne Germain became Isha Schwaller de Lubicz after her marriage to Schwaller in 1927. Under this name she published several Egyptosophical works. Jeanne was also intimately involved with Louis Allainguillaume, to whom she bore two children (the two children, born in 1907 and 1916 respectively, did not survive the Second World War).

475 'Letter from René Schwaller to Unknown Recipient', reproduced in Geneviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé* (2006, 137); On 'certain aspects of Buddhism', cf. SCHWALLER's article, 'Manas et Bouddhis', *Le Théosophe* (25 mai, 1916), no. 131 = *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 33-5.

476 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 22 n. 2: 'Ainsi, Steiner, pour avoir su se libérer de l'emprise théosophique et suivre sa propre voie, influera de manière déterminante sur les choix à venir de René Schwaller'.

477 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 20; *Aor*, 15: 'Puis vint la guerre de 1914, pendant laquelle Aor, avec quelques éminents chimistes, fut mobilisé dans un laboratoire de l'armée pour faire les analyses systématiques de tout le revêtement (depuis les boîtes de conserves jusqu'aux colorants des tissus d'uniformes)'.

478 The schematic employed in this early work, which plots the process of cosmogenesis

entering Egypt, in his first writings one is still able to detect some distinct guiding threads of his mature philosophy. The following passage, for instance, examines the process of the crystallisation of salt, a symbolic motif that would colour his entire hermetic *œuvre*. Here, the process of polarisation forms a neutral centre that acts as a centre of gravity for the formation of a material entity:

Then the marvellous work of organising and neutralising the different poles begins. Centres of attraction, formed by neutralisation, become the centres of whirlpools that form spirals—regular or irregular as the case may be—and so on until the polarisation corresponding to the nature of the salt is completed.

Between these different “complimentary” poles, lines of force or “energetic rivers” are established that specify the axes of the crystal to come.

At this point the energetic creation of the crystal begins. Following this, the salt molecules have only to fix themselves according to the axes that have been traced, and crystallisation enters into the phase of the third cycle, that of formative growth.

Thus sea salt, for example, grows on three regular axes—that is, it is limited by six passive poles, equal among themselves—around an active (neutral) central pole, giving the form of a cube.<sup>479</sup>

In 1940, in a conference given at Luxor, he would remark: ‘By observing the crystallisation of a salt in a microscope, one has the impression of experiencing *genesis*, the *fiat lux*: there is a liquid and then there is a cube, for example, and nothing shows how it comes to be’.<sup>480</sup>

According to Alexandra Charbonnier, arithmosophy was a topic that Lithuanian diplomat and poet, Oskar Vladislav de Lubicz Milosz, was very enthused about, and one can suppose that Schwaller and Milosz would have come into contact around this time and upon this topic, after which ‘an incontestable friendship would link them’.<sup>481</sup>

One must remember that these are the years of the great war, and the intellectual concerns that occupied Schwaller during this period give little hint as to the actual hardships he was suffering. In a 1956 letter, Louis Revel (Gaston Revel’s brother and a

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according to the progression: point-line-surface-volume, is one that would be completely reversed in his later mathematical works, where it is not the point, but the *volume* (i.e. the perfected whole), that is asserted as the originary principle.

479 SCHWALLER, *Les Nombres*; modified after LAWLOR, trans. *Numbers: A guide to the constant Creation of the Universe* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1986), 39.

480 Cited in SABLÉ, *La Vie et l’œuvre*, 20: ‘En observant au microscope la cristallisation d’une sel, on a l’impression de vivre la genèse: *Fiat Lux*; il y a un liquide et puis il y a un cube, par exemple, et rien ne montre comme il vient’.

481 Alexandra CHARBONNIER, *Milosz: L’Étoile au front*, 422: ‘Milosz s’emballe pour ce sujet. On peut supposer que c’est à cet moment-là que des contacts se nouèrent entre les deux hommes. Une incontestable amitié les lia’.

long time friend of Schwaller's), reflects nostalgically upon this period, and in doing so provides a touching glimpse into Schwaller's life:

I always remember those days, so long ago, where I was witness to your misery. It was depressing for me to see you that way. You, arriving at the Rue Dareau, soaked, shivering, my poor mother so moved by your distress, and yet in your gaze there issued the clear blue of the country, as if from a font of serenity. I remember going to see you once or twice in your little chemical laboratory on the third story of the house; you had made me some rosewater, which I would pour carefully into my handkerchief.<sup>482</sup>

Revel's letter reveals that, behind the arithmosophical and theosophical writings, there was a struggling young alchemist who had a profound and lasting impact on his friends.

The detail about the rosewater is also especially revealing, for it suggests that, beyond the kindness of the gesture, Schwaller was actively engaged in plant spagyrics. Rosewater is a hydrosol, i.e. an aromatic water produced as a co-product of the distillation of rose oil. Generally speaking, botanical spagyrics involves the separation, purification and recombination of the plant's "three essences". That is to say, the plant is separated into its "sulphur" (distillation of the essential oil, leaving hydrosol), its "spirit" (fermentation and distillation of alcohol), and its "salt" (burning of the body down to its incombustible ashes). The three separated parts are then purified and recombined to form a medicinal "tincture" believed to embody the heightened virtues and healing properties of the plant.<sup>483</sup>

### *The Veilleurs*

In 1917, towards the end of the war, Schwaller founded a group called *Les Veilleurs* (The Watchers). The genesis of the group is described in the following account:

In the beginning, in 1917, I had organised some meetings whose only purpose was to offer to each the opportunity, within this small group, to develop a theme on

482 Louis Revel à René Schwaller de Lubicz, 25 février 1956 (Songa Bagh Coonor, Inde; Archives Ta Meri, cited in DUFOR-KOWALSKI, *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 210): 'Je me suis toujours souvenu de ces jours d'autrefois où j'étais le témoin de votre misère qui me navrait. Vous, arrivant rue Dareau, trempé, frissonnant, ma pauvre chère mère si émue de votre détresse, et cependant, dans votre regard, cet éclair bleu de paix issu d'un foyer de sérénité. Au troisième étage de la maison, j'allais souvent vous voir dans votre petit laboratoire de chimie, une fois ou deux, vous m'avez fait de l'eau de rose que je versais précieusement dans mon mouchoir'.

483 Cf. Manfred M. JUNIUS, *Praktisches Handbuch der Pflanzen-Alchemie* (Interlaken: Ansata, 1982), passim.

any subject, no matter what. Very quickly the mystical character prevailed, and lead us to reunite under a completely mystical aegis—to the exclusion of all religious or political critique. When at the end of the war my old friend Gaston Revel, founder and editor in chief of the journal *Le Théosophe* [The Theosopher], proposed to place this journal at the disposal of our group, I proposed to call it *Le Veilleur* [The Watcher, the Vigilant]. Thus was born this movement of which many have spoken but which none have comprehended, for one of our aims was to assist demobilised artisans in finding the opportunity to readapt to a new life guided by a sense that was mystical rather purely economic.<sup>484</sup>

Thus Gaston Revel's *Le Théosophe* became Schwaller's *Le Veilleur*, whose contributors included (in addition to Schwaller, Revel, Allainguillaume, Larronde, Germain and Milosz) eminent figures from Parisian artistic and literary circles, such as journalist Fernand Divoire (1883-1951), Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931) and Henri de Régnier (1864-1936).<sup>485</sup>

The *Veilleurs* would cause controversy. Seeking to reverse the gains of the French Revolution, Louis Allainguillaume, in a related organ, *L'Affranchi* (the Liberated) would proclaim 'Hierarchy! Fraternity! Liberty!'<sup>486</sup> 'A journal that would call itself *The Liberated*', writes Allainguillaume, 'which has not proven the need to call itself free because it has never been enslaved, has shouted to you, right in the midst of war: Hierarchy! and you have recalled the living reality that our fathers of [17]93 have neglected. And this reality was printed at the head of the columns of this journal dedicated to *Liberated Humanity*.'<sup>487</sup> Despite the provocative manner, Allainguillaume is largely concerned with the renovation of work (*le Travail*) as a vehicle for the social and spiritual liberation of humanity. The hierarchy that he proclaimed was not based on the privileges of birth or wealth, nor on racial grounds, but on the quintessential quality of work.<sup>488</sup> For Allainguillaume, this must become not simply a means but an *end* in and of itself; 'the *joie de vivre*', he emphasises, 'must be reborn *in work* itself'.<sup>489</sup>

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484 Letter reproduced in Genviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé*, 114-9.

485 Jean-Pierre LAURANT, 'Schwaller', *DGWE*, 1046.

486 LOUIS ALLAINGUILLAUME, 'Hiérarchie! Fraternité! Liberté!' (Conférence faite à Paris, Octobre 1920); *Aor*, 21-3.

487 ALLAINGUILLAUME, 'Hiérarchie! Fraternité! Liberté!'; *Aor*, 21: 'Un journal qui s'appelait *L'Affranchi*, qui, lui, n'a pas éprouvé le besoin de se dire libre parce qu'il n'a jamais été enchaîné, vous a crié en pleine guerre: Hiérarchie! et vous a rappelé la réalité vivante que nos pères de 93 ont méconnu. Et cette réalité était imprimée en tête des colonnes de ce journal dédié à *l'Homme Affranchi*'.

488 ALLAINGUILLAUME, 'Le Travail: Travail, suprême noblesse, suprême nécessité de l'homme'; *Aor*, 24.

489 ALLAINGUILLAUME, 'Hiérarchie! Fraternité! Liberté!'; *Aor*, 21-3: 'la joie de vivre doit renaître dans le travail lui-même'.

Allainguillaume was a wealthy businessman, the head of a sizable importing and exporting business at Caen (Basse-Normandie, north-west of Paris); as Charbonnier notes in her study of Milosz, Schwaller is said to have worked for Allainguillaume, offering him judicious advice in extending his business affairs. In return, Schwaller benefited from his friend's financial aid, and upon this basis, Allainguillaume would become the chief financier of Schwaller's enterprises over the next decade.<sup>490</sup> Between the two men, an emphasis on work as a spiritual ethic would emerge, and this is the first thing one detects in the writings of the *Veilleurs*: work as a means not merely of restoring the torn social fabric, but also as a practical means of securing human liberation from an industrialised, dehumanised civilisation. In this sense it must be distinguished from the National Socialist slogan, *Arbeit macht Frei*, for the Nazi approach to work was one that *embraced* the quantitative, industrial process as a means of harnessing human labour towards economic, political and ultimately fascist ends.

In their collective 'Adresse aux Français' (Address to the French), the Counsel des Veilleurs (consisting of René Schwaller, Jeanne Germain and Carlos Larronde) affirmed that the Association of the *Veilleurs* 'is not a society, but the placing in common of vital strengths from which the weakest can draw in order to "serve" in their turn'.<sup>491</sup> In addition to the call for collective renovation, the *Veilleurs* promoted 'educational reforms', the 'instruction of women', and 'the study of Rhythm in all the manifestations of Nature, Forms, Works, Colours and Forces, and their application to the culture of the child and to the redressing of physical and moral deviations'.<sup>492</sup> They opposed 'ugliness', the 'expensiveness of life', and 'poverty', affirming in their place the 'sense of true abundance, or beauty, in the domains of work and dress'.<sup>493</sup> Through the organisation of collective efforts towards the revitalisation of society, the *Veilleurs* sought to establish communal peace through personal integrity: 'every *veilleur* wins their life; cooperation allows them to replace the principle of over-production with the principle of perfection, which, far from feeding the industrial development of the country, will rapidly produce a great number of artisans possessing a *mastery* too long ignored or forgotten'.<sup>494</sup> Literature and the fine arts were also considered a vital part of the necessary social revolution. 'A battle won may save a country', remarks Larronde in his 'Lettre aux artistes' (Letter to the artists), 'but the arts alone are its true, spiritual

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490 CHARBONNIER, *Milosz*, 421.

491 COUNSEL DES VEILLEURS, 'Adresse aux Français', *Aor*, 25: 'Notre association n'est pas une société, mais la mise en commun de forces vives auxquelles les plus faibles viennent puiser pour « servir » à leur tour'.

492 'Adresse aux Français', *Aor*, 25.

493 'Adresse aux Français', *Aor*, 25.

494 'Adresse aux Français', *Aor*, 26: 'Tout *veilleur* gagne sa vie; la coopération lui permet de remplacer le principe de surproduction par le principe de perfection, qui, loin de nuire au développement industriel du pays, donnera rapidement un plus grand nombre d'artisans d'une maîtrise ignorée depuis longtemps'.

grandeur'.<sup>495</sup> In this connection, he cites Honoré de Balzac remark that 'a masterpiece (*chef-d'œuvre*) is a French victory'.<sup>496</sup>

Balzac, it should be noted, had a special relevance to the *Veilleurs*. In 1918, Schwaller, Larronde, Allainguillaume and Milosz rallied to save the former residence of the famous writer from destruction. On 9 August, 1918, Larronde writes: 'I have the pleasure to announce to you that the group from the Journal *l'Affranchi* have taken the lease of the Maison Balzac, under conditions such that the dwelling of the great writer will remain consecrated to the cult of his memory [...] the Maison Balzac will become a centre of intellectual renaissance'.<sup>497</sup> Allainguillaume took over the debts, and on 16 March 1919 the writer's residence on rue Raynouard was renovated; on 11 October 1920 it was officially inaugurated as the Maison de Balzac.<sup>498</sup>

Curiously, the purview of the *Veilleurs* was not only hierarchical, but also socialist. Whereas Allainguillaume would address the workers, and Larronde the artists, Gaston Revel addresses the socialists, whom he evidently holds dear: 'my ardent heart beats in unison with yours', he claims, 'for you hunger and thirst for justice'.<sup>499</sup> However, he admonishes the socialists to interrogate the stones of their path lest they slip or be misled, and also to distinguish between the ways of creation and destruction, which appear similar but lead to different ends. Ultimately, Revel is socialist, but anti-egalitarian, and his evocative words are directed against an egalitarian backlash:

Weary of the turpitudes of a deceptive epoch in which the oppression of the weak masks itself under grand words devoid of truth, where egotistical ambition caresses the main of the lion of the working-class in order to better enslave it; you want to establish the reign of Justice that waits, mysterious and veiled, weighed down by all the errors of the past, but rich in all the promises of the future. [...] Beware the spirit of vengeance, for vengeance is a dangerous wine whose intoxication leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Injustice will be reborn from these ashes, and Justice will not replace it, for the errors of the past, hidden under a seductive veil, will rise suddenly before you to seize you by the throat. *This is the lie of equality* that you must watch like a thief at the first turn in the road.<sup>500</sup>

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495 Carlos LARRONDE, 'Lettre aux artistes'; *Aor*, 30: 'Or, une bataille gagnée peut sauver un pays, mais les arts seuls font sa grandeur véritable, sa grandeur spirituelle'.

496 Carlos LARRONDE, 'Lettre aux artistes'; *Aor*, 30: 'Un chef-d'œuvre est une victoire française'.

497 LARRONDE, cited in *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 56 n. 7: 'J'ai le plaisir de vous annoncer que le groupe du Journal l'Affranchi a pris à bail la Maison Balzac, dans des conditions telles que la demeure du grand écrivain restera consacrée au culte de son souvenir [...] la Maison Balzac deviendra un centre de renaissance intellectuelle'.

498 Former rue Basse, in the 16th arrondissement.

499 Gaston REVEL, 'Lettre aux socialistes'; *Aor*, 30-1.

500 REVEL, 'Lettre aux socialistes'; *Aor*, 30-1.

As a result of these kinds of statements, *Les Veilleurs* have attracted a certain amount of criticism for political agendas that Jean Saunier would later describe as Synarchist.<sup>501</sup> The connection between the *Veilleurs*, Synarchy, and elitist politics is a complex one. There is actually a curious point of connection between the *Veilleurs* and Nazism based on the one-time *Veilleurs* member and Synarchist, Vivian Postel du Mas, who is said to have influenced Rudolf Hess. The connection resides in the claim made by Schwaller that the uniform of the *Veilleurs* was taken up by the Nazis (either via du Mas, who influenced Hess, or via Hess directly). The uniform of the *Veilleurs*—which consisted of boots, riding pants, and dark shirts—was adopted, via a purported link between Postel du Mas and Rudolf Hess, as the prototype of the of Nazi *Sturmabteilung* uniform. The story is probably true, and is at least indirectly supported by the fact that Schwaller was involved in the chemical fabrication of military uniforms during the war. Be that as it may, du Mas also wrote a number of books on Synarchy, leading to the associations, since world war two, of Synarchy with conspiratorial mythography and elitist politics. Some have read this as confirmation of supposed Synarchistic, fascist, and racist agendas of Schwaller. However, the logic cannot be sustained based on fashion alone. As Godwin notes, while there is a certain synchronicity between the developments of the *Veilleurs* and Nazis, which occurred within the broader wave of messianism during this period, scholars should be careful to avoid taking moral advantage of such revelations.<sup>502</sup> As VandenBroeck notes: ‘We can blame Les Veilleurs for a lack of foresight, but we cannot convict them on the strength of an anachronism. The charges, if there were any, would not be of guilt, but of irresponsibility’.<sup>503</sup>

It is true, of course, that the Parisian occult revival of the *fin-de-siècle* in general, and the inter-war period in particular, provided fertile territory not only for anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic sentiments, but also for anti-Semitism. The deeper background to anti-Semitism in this period must be recognised as stemming from the generally pervasive, Christian-European bias against Judaism in general; largely religious and cultural in character, it is based on the belief that the Jews are collectively responsible for killing Christ (deicide). Religious anti-Semitism, or more accurately, anti-Judaism, has its roots in antiquity, but a key turning point in Europe was the

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501 Following Charles Fourier and the Saint-Simonians, the term *synarchie* was revived by Saint-Yves d’Alveydre (1842–1909) in order to express a grand synthesis of human knowledge. Later, during World War II, it became interwoven with European conspiratorial mythographies, where the term took on elitist political connotations. Cf. Jean SAUNIER, *La Synarchie, ou le vieux rêve d’une nouvelle société* (Paris: Culture, Arts, Loisirs, 1940; 1971), 167–81; *Al-Kemi*, 163 ff; Jean-Pierre LAURANT, ‘Schwaller’, *DGWE*, 1046; LAURANT, ‘Saint-Yves d’Alveydre’, *DGWE*, 1031–2; Olivier DARD, *La synarchie ou le mythe du complot permanent* (Paris: Le grand livre du mois, 1998).

502 Joscelyn GODWIN, ‘Schwaller de Lubicz, les Veilleurs et la connexion nazie’, *Politica Hermetica* 5 (1991): 101–108; *Arktos*, 54–7.

503 *Al-Kemi*, 164.



expulsion of the Jews from Catholic Spain in 1492.<sup>504</sup> By the European Enlightenment, however, anti-Semitism had died down quite considerably under the influence of increased civil and political equality, and between 1791 and 1870, European Jews experienced increasing tolerance and emancipation.<sup>505</sup> Unfortunately, the period between 1870 and 1930s saw a sharp reversal of these developments, with a resurgence of popular anti-Semitic publications, sociopolitical movements and violence. With the emergence of Darwinism and eugenics in the nineteenth century, the deeper cultural fabric of anti-Semitism begins to take on a more distinct biological and thus racial agenda. During the *fin-de-siècle* period, the Dreyfus affair deeply divided French society over the false accusation of an Alsatian-Jewish military captain for treason. On the cusp of the twentieth century, the formation of political Zionism by Theodor Herzl in 1897 formalised the Jewish claim to Israel, while, during the same period, the Russian pogroms of the 1890s caused a large influx of Russian Jews into western Europe. This coincided with the publication of the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, also in Russia, a text designed to incite anti-Semitic sedition through an alleged Jewish conspiracy. During the interwar period, these and other factors intensified the rising current of European anti-Semitism. By the 1930s, anti-Semitic attitudes gained in popularity. Because the general climate of anti-Semitism in this period would take a genocidal turn with the Nazi holocaust, and because certain *völkisch* esoteric groups in the interwar period were among the known breeding grounds for these dangerous ideologies, the *Veilleurs* have been treated with suspicion and reactive alarm by most modern critics.<sup>506</sup>

Whereas the leading lights of the *Veilleurs* would address the workers, the socialists, the artists, the occult philosophers, and the women, the one text at our disposal from this period that is attributed to Schwaller is a 'Lettre aux Juifs' (Letter to the Jews).<sup>507</sup> Here, Schwaller appears to show a distinct ambivalence towards the Jews, an ambivalence that has led to claims of anti-Semitism. However, it is very important to distinguish Schwaller's religious sentiments about Judaism from the extreme racial, cultural, economic and political forms of anti-Semitism that were also fermenting in these times.<sup>508</sup> Although Schwaller's tone is condescending, his contention appears to

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504 Ironically, Christian esotericism itself would benefit enormously from this religious and cultural influx.

505 See William BRUSTEIN, *The Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), passim.

506 On the esoteric milieus influencing Nazism, see especially Nicholas GOODRICK-CLARKE, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (Washington Square, New York: New York University Press, 1985), passim; on Thulean themes in the *Veilleurs*, see Joscelyn GODWIN, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Kempton, Illinois: Adventures Unlimited, 1996), 54-6.

507 Attributed by Isha to 'Aor' (Schwaller).

508 On types of anti-Semitism, see BRUSTEIN, *Anti-Semitism in Europe*, 49 ff. 95 ff, 177 ff, 265 ff.; Brustein identifies and examines the religious, racial, economic and political roots of

be religious, not racist. His concern is with the genuinely Judaic themes of Zionism, the Messiah and the fulfilment of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zachariah, and thus with a typically Christian religious critique of Judaism.<sup>509</sup> The ‘Letter to the Jews’ reads as follows:

To the Jews alone: it is not one of you who speaks here, but you will listen to me all the same, for I speak with knowledge (*science*) and I know who you are. Close the book of your history! What does it matter? Do you even have a history outside of this? Your race is that of a people *elected by the hidden God* and each place on earth has been your place, the exiled. But hate has hounded you and your back has bent under all manner of insult, O great people of Israel! Yes, you are a great people, Jews, but why do you not recognise your Levites? Why do you now renounce your faith in the Saviour—you who have always waited for him? Why do you not continue to leave a place at your table for “he who is to come”? The time has come, people of Abraham, Worshipper of the Eternal, of the unpronounceable name, the time has come when you must return to your promised land, and build the city that will be *yours!* Now, Jew, the hour has come when you must claim your country before the world! Go and build your country and construct at Zion a square tower. Construct a square tower at Zion and say: This is the square tower of Zion, built in honour of the *hidden God* as a sign of his *eternal presence*. Jews, if all of you had recognised the one who had departed from you, the *King of the Jews*, the cornerstone would be missing from the temple of the universal Faith, and the edifice would have collapsed. You have remained, like the Law remaining after its accomplishment, for the beginning of things is in memory of the end.<sup>510</sup>

According to VandenBroeck’s reading of the ‘Letter to the Jews’, Schwaller ‘conceded an important role to the Jews, and invites them to play it in Zion, where, left behind, they will inherit the earth, while initiates inherit the spirit’.<sup>511</sup> The

anti-Semitism.

509 *Ezekiel*, 40-45; Ezekiel has visions of a temple that will be built, and which will bring about the line of the Messiah; cf. also *Zachariah*, who mentions a tower and the themes of the Messiah.

510 ‘Lettre aux Juifs’; *Aor*, 32-3; There is a translation in VANDENBROECK, *Al-Kemi*, 268-9, n. 4; I have provided a new and hopefully improved translation.

511 *Al-Kemi*, 171. Cf. also the derivative (and somewhat sensationalistic) amplification of VandenBroeck’s claims in Gary LACHMAN, *Politics and the Occult: The Left, the Right and the Radically Unseen* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2008), 183 ff., who fails to distinguish between anti-Semitic and non anti-Semitic forms of Zionism; both VandenBroeck and Lachman also fail to discern Schwaller’s ambivalent, i.e. positive *and* negative, attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, preferring instead a reactive, one-sided, and over-simplistic condemnation of his character. That having been said, it should be noted that Lachman’s works are otherwise very edifying

implication is that the Jews are materialistic, a point that is in fact betrayed by Schwaller elsewhere. VandenBroeck suggests that Schwaller's anti-Semitism is part and parcel of the ingrained anti-Semitism of the French middle class *tout court*. Italian scholar Massimo Marra follows suit. Having explored the general climate of anti-Semitism, along with its reception in French occult circles, Marra denounces Schwaller's alleged anti-Semitism as simply a common form of right-wing intolerance:

The anti-Semitism of the Veilleurs and of Schwaller, appears, in those years, all the more unbearable because it has all the bitter taste of the commonplace. The *Veilleurs*, revolutionaries and evolutionaries, spiritualists and collectivists, the propagators of new pedagogical truths, the bearers of visions of synarchist solidarity, ready to overthrow the obsolete values of the bourgeoisie and to affirm the new inspiration of ancient esoteric and hermetic wisdom, expressed, in fact, a populist anti-Semitism of the same old-right Boulangism. The anticonformist, avant-garde spirit, the advocates of peace and union among the nations, those who made art and the artist the center of the cultural and moral renewal of society, forbid casual marriage as reactionary prejudice.<sup>512</sup>

VandenBroeck and Marra's generalisations about the French middle class are slightly problematic. Although a commonplace perception, it is not necessarily an accurate one. As Brustein remarks in a recent study, 'Anti-Semitism, as measured by acts and attitudes, reached its highest points between the two world wars, particularly in Germany and Romania. Anti-Semitic levels in both Great Britain and France were significantly lower than those in Germany and Romania':

The case of France may come as a surprise to many, in light of France's Dreyfus Affair experience and the oft-cited writings of many of France's rightist intellectuals. The conventional wisdom would have it that France, notably during the mid-1930s [...] was a hotbed of anti-Semitism. The empirical data do not support this contention, however, at least as it may apply to the French middle and lower classes.<sup>513</sup>

512 Massimo MARRA, *R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: La politica, l'esoterismo, l'egittologia* (Milan: Mimesis, 2008), 236: 'L'antisemitismo dei Veilleurs e quello di Schwaller, risultano, in quegli anni, tanto più insopportabili dal momento che hanno tutto l'amaro sapore del luogo comune. I Veilleurs, rivoluzionari ed evoluzionisti, spiritualisti e collettivisti, propagatori di nuove verità pedagogiche e portatori di visioni solidaristiche e sinarchiche, pronti a rovesciare i valori desueti della borghesia per affermarne di nuovi ispirati all'antica sapienza esoterica ed ermetica, esprimevano, nei fatti, lo stesso antisemitismo populistico della vecchia destra boulangista. Le anticonformiste avanguardie spirituali, i fautori della pace e dell'unione tra le nazioni, coloro che facevano dell'arte e dell'artista il centro di una rinascita morale e culturale dell'intera società, sposavano disinvoltamente il più vieto pregiudizio reazionario'.

513 BRUSTEIN, *Anti-Semitism in Europe*, 337.

Schwaller's specific views on race in this period are better understood within a Theosophical context. From the nineteenth century on, biological theories begin to feed and inform an esotericism of race. One of the most influential of these was that of the Theosophical Society, who put forward a complex theory of seven 'root races' in the spiritual and material evolution of humanity. This theory was developed by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (volume two, *Anthropogenesis*, 1888) and elaborated by William Scott-Eliot and Annie Besant over the coming three decades, with similar developments in Anthroposophical circles.<sup>514</sup> Both Aryans and Semites are actually classed by Blavatsky as part of the same root-race, which is itself subdivided into seven parts: 'The Aryan races, for instance, now varying from dark brown, almost black, red-brown-yellow, down to the whitest creamy colour, are yet all of one and the same stock—the Fifth Root-Race—and spring from one single progenitor'.<sup>515</sup> Although of the same stock as the Aryans, the Semites are viewed by Blavatsky as 'degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality'.<sup>516</sup> Given that Schwaller was directly influenced by Theosophy, Marra suggests that Schwaller adheres to a 'fundamentally racist, anti-Semitic vision':

a few years after the experience of the *Veilleurs* there is at least one other piece of writing that seems to have escaped general attention—this time definitely in Schwaller's hand—which clearly demonstrates the latter's adherence to a fundamentally racist, anti-Semitic vision. A passage of *Adam* (a work we have already seen as fundamental to the comprehension of Schwaller's ideological horizon), clearly confirms that the Schwallerian vision of a precise hierarchy of human races – once again possessing a clear theosophical derivation – feeds and sustains the cyclical conception of history within the occult and theosophical matrix. [According to this vision,] guiding ideas characterise the different races, directing their peoples and nations toward different physiological, ethical and cultural development. Such ideas are practically archetypal, and determine the differentiation of the original stock into the various races of mankind as we know them today. In this theory of evolution, Schwaller still has a strong racial vision that identifies the different identities of the various civilisations with the expression of original ideas that are substantiated in different, and hierarchically organised, characters and destinies.<sup>517</sup>

514 William SCOTT-ELIOT, *The Story of Atlantis* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1896); Annie BESANT, *Man: Whence, How and Whither* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1913); Steiner's theosophical ideas on race originally appeared in the Zeitschrift *Lucifer Gnosis* between 1904 and 1908. See Rudolf STEINER, *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*, in *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach 1986).

515 H. P. BLAVATSKY, *The Secret Doctrine* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1888), II, 249.

516 BLAVATSKY, *Secret Doctrine*, II, 20.

517 MARRA, *Schwaller de Lubicz*, 213-4: 'Tuttavia, a qualche anno di distanza dall'esperienza

Marra is quite correct that the conception of race advanced by Schwaller is theosophically inspired, but the contention that Schwaller holds to a 'fundamentally racist, anti-Semitic vision' is more problematic. However, Schwaller certainly repeats the Theosophical view that Aryans and Semites are hierarchically differentiated races deriving from the same stock:

It is undeniable that there are races that are very distinct from each other due to their physical, nervous and mental development. It is certain that each of these races, in adapting themselves to the climactic milieu of their development, also take on, by this fact, habitudes of life that become proper to them. However, this cause does not have any importance that suffices to characterise in a formal manner the tendency, the moral customs (*mœurs*), etc., of this race, without which there would never have been any emigrations. The fundamental cause is the physical and nervous nature that is slowly modified, determining thereby a new humanity of a very definite constitution in relation to the original race from which it departed. Thus, the Aryan race, issued in its distant origins from the Semitic race, is thereby distinct from it, such that the two types have never ceased to feel hostile to each other, as only two elements of the same nature can be hostile to each other, like two brothers, one of which is materialist and the other idealist. Of the same nature? Yes, in origin, they are the same stock; but how different are the nervous systems and the glands today!<sup>518</sup>

What initially appears as a simple biological-evolutionist hierarchy is then nuanced by the view that it is not material influences that differentiate one race from another, but the inherent *ideals* of a people:

This evolution, via lineages that separate themselves after having separated from the same stock, is revealed first of all by a way of life. And this way of life is caused

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dei Veilleurs, vi è almeno un altro scritto che sembra essere sfuggito all'attenzione generale —questa volta sicuramente di mano di Schwaller—che testimonia in maniera chiara l'adesione di quest'ultimo a visioni razzistiche dal fondo antisemita. Un passo dell'*Adam* (opera che abbiamo già visto da considerarsi fondamentale per la comprensione dell'orizzonte ideologico di Schwaller) infatti, conferma chiaramente che, nella visione schwalleriana—anche qui di chiara derivazione teosofica—una precisa gerarchia delle razze umane, sorregge ed alimenta la concezione ciclica della storia di matrice occultista e teosofica. Idee-guida caratterizzano le diverse razze, e dirigono in direzione diverse lo sviluppo fisiologico, etico e culturale di popoli e nazioni. Sono queste idee, quasi archetipali, che hanno determinato il differenziarsi dal ceppo originario dell'umanità delle varie razze così come le conosciamo oggi. In quest'ottica l'evoluzionismo schwalleriano si ancora ad una salda visione razziale che identifica nelle identità differenti delle varie civiltà l'espressione di idee originarie che si sostanziano in caratteri e destini differenti e gerarchicamente organizzati'.

518 SCHWALLER, *Adam, l'homme rouge*, 5-7.

and determined by an ideal far more than it is by climactic conditions. That one complex of circumstances intervenes to strengthen this ideal, even in order to simply make it accept, goes without saying; but the study of this question is not that which matters here. The ideal, the moral guide to life: such is the point that I want to place in light in this complex of causes that determine a people in its form and its tangible expression. And, finally, it is this ideal goal that matters, since it colours all the actions, since it excuses, counsels and imposes the way of life. By ideal I understand that which is common to a group of people or to a society; this ideal will determine the laws of their community, and fix the morale of their law.<sup>519</sup>

Marra suggests this passage consolidates Schwaller's supposed racism.<sup>520</sup> Strictly speaking, the passage only affirms the theosophical notion that Semitic and Aryan races are two different developments of an originally common stock. Moreover, if one reads the whole chapter that this passage serves to introduce, one realises that Schwaller's reason for introducing this point is not to criticise the Jewish race (although he does make an *indirect* suggestion that Jews are "materialistic", a common anti-Semitic stereotype); rather, his point is to critique the essential values of the *Christian* Occident, the "Aryan" west. Schwaller suggests that different races or lineages of the common human stock are not merely differentiated by their environment but more distinctly by their (essentially religious) ideals. The different ideals of a race provide the decisive "formula" that shapes their ethics, customs, and habitudes (and also their physiology). Because European civilisation is shaped by the Christian ideal (whether Catholic, Lutheran or otherwise), this leaves an enduring imprint on its culture: its civil laws, its ethics, its habitudes, even when these are apparently non-Christian and secular. In a somewhat Nietzschean fashion, Schwaller goes on to critique the slave-morality of western Christendom, and suggests that, although the slave "caste" has disappeared, the slave *mentality* has not, for the ideal endures in the blood; the "slave", for Schwaller, has simply become the "free citizen" (one of the "bourgeois"): 'he has transposed the need for strict laws regulating his life from religious laws into civil laws, which in large part are derived from the religious ones—the premisses posed by Christianity: the mentality of submission or of revolt resulting from the mystic conception of Catholic Christianity'.<sup>521</sup> Now, all of this is mentioned as a preface to his key point, which concerns not race or religion *per se*, but the

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519 SCHWALLER, *Adam, l'homme rouge*, 5-7.

520 It is important to note here that the so-called "Jewish question" in general is complicated by the fact the Jewish people are at once a religious and an ethnic grouping. If one critiques the culture (e.g. the ideals), one is susceptible to being labelled a racist. However, such a conflation is fraught with blatant logical flaws. One can discriminate against the cultural or religious aspect of a people, but this is not necessarily a racist sentiment (although it can certainly disguise, support or coincide with a racist sentiment).

521 SCHWALLER, *Adam, l'homme rouge*, 13-4.

relations between the sexes in general, and the esotericism of eroticism in particular (the core subject of the book). Christian morality, the ideal of western civilisation, imposes religious or civic laws to regulate the life of humankind by controlling their sexuality, i.e. by denying pleasure and restricting eroticism to a strictly procreative impulse, circumscribed by the social function of marriage.<sup>522</sup>

Such views are by no means original to Schwaller, and it is important to mention at this point that he specifically renounced this work later in his life. Although the exact reasons for this renunciation are unspecified, the views expressed therein were obviously regarded as incompatible with his mature philosophy. He actually claims to have burnt the book, and whether this is meant figuratively or literally, the book today is in fact rare.

That having been said, it is not my purpose here to either accuse or defend Schwaller based on his views, but rather to clarify and contextualise his thoughts. In this regard, the following observations can be made.

It is apparent that Schwaller displays distinct anti-Judaic attitudes, but also equally distinct anti-Catholic attitudes. He holds views on race inspired by theosophical conceptions, in which the Semites and Aryans are seen as complementary and even antagonistic expressions of one original nature. This view is also shaped by his alchemical conceptions, in which separation, conflict and interaction of any phenomenal entity is seen as vital to its greater genesis/evolution (this is the alchemical theme of the 'conflict of the two natures'). That having been said, Schwaller's strong ambivalence towards Judaism appears to betray some traces of anti-Semitic attitudes, such as the indirect suggestion that the Semites are materialistic, and this may bely deeper anti-Semitic sentiments. Such sentiments, moreover, whether stemming from cultural or racial discrimination, appear to underpin the Zionist attitudes expressed in his 'Letter to the Jews'.

Two other comments must be taken into account. Several years later, in one of his mystical texts, he reprimands his lower self for his earlier attitudes:

In the not too distant past you accused the Jew of being what you yourself have so awkwardly become today. But the Jew inherited something of the great Pharaonic Wisdom. The Jew is, furthermore, oriental: he is a gambler, he is also a destroyer. You have taken material values seriously; he has always played with them. You have destroyed without ideal; you have not, like the Jew, an unknown God, an abstraction, behind you and above you. But what can elevate, when misunderstood, can also debase.<sup>523</sup>

In 1943, before the end of the second world war, Schwaller remarks: 'the Jew has been persecuted; horribly. This merits reparation'.<sup>524</sup>

522 SCHWALLER, *Adam, l'homme rouge*, 15.

523 *Verbe Nature* §56.

524 *Revue Bozawola* (décembre 1990), 27, cited in SABLÉ, *La Vie et l'œuvre*, 90: 'le juif a été

What these various attitudes suggest is that Schwaller ultimately *struggled* with the so-called “Jewish question”. He was divided. While he disdained the Jews for the perceived materialism of their cultural habitudes, it must also be remembered that Schwaller took a Hebrew name as his initiatic appellation, regarded Judaic theological and cosmological themes as integral to his esoteric philosophy, and devoted his mature work to the study of a culture which, at least according to modern linguists, is classed as Hamito-Semitic. And as will be seen shortly, the *Veilleurs* themselves were also named after mythological figures from Judaic apocrypha. The claim that Schwaller is anti-Semitic and racist must be regarded, at best, as an oversimplistic half-truth. In reality he displays a far more complex ambivalence, and he clearly continued to wrestle with both his positive and negative evaluations of Jews and Judaism, expressing empathy at their plight. In many respects, his attitude is much more akin to the ancient Greek attitude toward the Persian *magi*: i.e. one of simultaneous opprobrium and respect, an attitude that would endure in the dual signification of the *magus* as both charlatan and sage (a signification that Schwaller himself would come to inherit in Egypt, where he would be regarded both as a misguided mage and a serious scholar).<sup>525</sup>

While such political sensitivities must be borne in mind, such statements must also be placed within the broader context of the *Veilleurs* own goals and actions. While they possessed undeniable political, social and hierarchical concerns, they were first and foremost patrons of the disenfranchised artisanal class. The overarching emphasis of the *Veilleurs* was on a *qualitative* rather than quantitative work ethic, in particular as manifested in the artisanal *métier* in which “work for work’s sake” (and art for art’s sake) was imbued with a spirit that saw labour not as a means to an end *per se*, but as a vital mode of life capable of regenerating society. The *Veilleurs* felt that post-war Paris was in danger of losing this qualitative spirit due to the increasing industrialisation of human culture. Paradoxically, although affirming hierarchy, the *Veilleurs* sought to transform society from the ground up. In this connection, Schwaller would intimate that a thriving community of artisans is in fact the soul of a traditional civilisation:

If someone were to tell you that mechanised civilisation clouds the soul, this would be an affirmation without practical impact. On the other hand, if I say to you that mechanised civilisation clouds and even kills consciousness, you will comprehend this warning: if between yourself and the object of your labour you interpose an automatic tool which eliminates your will and above all your sensibility, all living contact between you and the fashioned material is cut off. The artisan no longer “feels” (*sent*) and no longer comprehends the wood, the leather, the metal ... his work is inanimate; it cannot emanate nor radiate any life

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persécuté; horriblement. Ceci mérite réparation’.

525 On the double signification of *magos*, see A. CHEAK, ‘Magic through the Linguistic Lenses of Greek *mágos*, Indo-European *\*mag(h)*, Sanskrit *māyā* and Pharaonic Egyptian *hekā*, *Journal for the Academic Study of Magic* 2 (2004): 265.



for it has not received any. You must then resort to analyses, to statistical studies of the qualities of the material relinquished to the automatism of the machine, for you have stretched a veil between yourself and the thing; and although the thing subsists, you—the conscious living being—lose your life by suffocating your consciousness. It is the same with the doctor, who must *sympathetically* feel (*éprouver*) his patient's illness, or otherwise become a mechanic. Observe the phases of history: the most fruitful, the most genial and the most "living" epochs have always had a flourishing community of artisans (*artisanat*). The Consciousness of a people can only be renewed through the crafts and not through doctrines. Mechanised civilisation is the agony of the world.<sup>526</sup>

Here, the deeper significance of the name *Les Veilleurs*, almost invariably overlooked by their critics, is revealed. Carlos Larronde is said to have found the term in the *Book of Enoch*.<sup>527</sup> *Les Veilleurs*, which may also be translated as the 'the vigilant', is a clear reference to the ἐγρηγοροί (*egrēgoroi*), the sleepless, eternally wakeful angels of the Septuagint,<sup>528</sup> who, having descended through their desire to take human women as lovers, taught humankind the manifold arts, crafts and sciences, which, not insignificantly, included alchemy (the hieratic art *par excellence*).<sup>529</sup> As with alchemy and Pythagoreanism, it is the connection between the spiritual and the practical, between the abstract and the concrete, between the divine and the human, that is deemed to be of essential significance in the renovation of society.

In 1921, René Guénon published a cutting polemic against the entire Theosophical current from the uncompromising position of Traditionalist metaphysics.<sup>530</sup> Despite Guénon's haughty tone, the chief merit of the work for the present study lies in the fact that he provides one of the more penetrating insights into the esoteric currents that prevailed under French Theosophical auspices during this precise period. Under the rubric, 'auxiliary organisations of the Theosophical society', Guénon sketches in a few brief pages the astounding diversity of Schwaller's groups during this period:

In early 1918 a journal called *L'Affranchi* made its appearance. By its numbering it made itself out to be a continuation of the former *Theosoph*, but the word 'Theosophy' itself never appeared in it. The journal took 'Hierarchy, Fraternity,

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526 *Verbe Nature*, §38 (modified after Lawlor).

527 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 57-8, n. 27.

528 *Gen.* 6; *Enoch*, I.

529 Although the *egrēgoros* also came to take the meaning of a magically generated collective thought-form in certain occult contexts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the alchemical meaning, as has already been examined in relation to the work of Zosimos of Panopolis, must here be taken as definitive.

530 René GUÉNON, *Le Théosophisme: Histoire d'une Pseudo-Religion* (Paris: Les Éditions Traditionnelles, 1921); *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr., Cecil Bethell, Hubert and Rohini Schiff (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001).

Freedom' as its slogan, and contained only pseudonymous articles, most dealing with social questions. [...] Besides these, there were other articles treating art and its role in 'evolution', as well as bizarre decadent poems. At the same time the group 'Affranchis' [the 'Emancipated'], for whom the newspaper served as a mouthpiece, also made itself known in the most extreme modernist performances and exhibitions (there was even an 'Emancipated Punch and Judy'). Two special publications also appeared: *L'Art* and *Le Travail*, and a legal consulting service was even organized at registered offices. The *Revue Baltique*, 'devoted to the special defence of issues concerning the Baltic countries, which will hold the key to world peace', belonged to the same group, thereby showing that political and diplomatic concerns were mixed in with literature. (Furthermore, among the principle members of the group there was de Lubicz-Milosz, official representative of the Lithuanian government in Paris). In August 1918 the group leased Balzac's house, at the time under threat of demolition. Its director, Carlos Larronde, became curator and announced that it was to become the seat of an 'Artists' Corporation' and a 'centre for intellectual and artistic revival'. [...] Within the 'Affranchis' organization, and above it, were two more closed ones, the 'Mystic Group Tala' (The Bond) and the 'Apostolic Centre', both clearly Theosophist. Lastly, in May 1919, they announced 'the intention of establishing at Saint-Rémi-lès-Chevreuse a Synthetic school of education where all the faculties of a child will have parallel growth and where the particular talents will be cultivated to their full development; everyone will be placed according to his aptitudes and work'. Today, the 'Affranchis' has changed its name to the 'Watchers' [The association was registered under this name on July 19 1920. A physical education organisation called the 'Eurythmotherapeutic Institute' has been operating under the direction of Mrs Madeleine Leprince and Dr Thiers from its offices at 17, boulevard de Boulogne (Parc des Princes)] (probably with reference to the Egregori of the Book of Enoch, which has always been of great interest to occultists) and engages in attempts at community living reminiscent of the socialist utopias of the first half of the nineteenth century. It is doubtful whether they will be any more successful than the latter, for we have already heard that there are some splits (especially between the groups led by Gaston Revel and René Schwaller) which do not augur well for the future.<sup>531</sup>

In 1960, towards the end of his life, Schwaller wrote openly on these events in a letter to an unknown recipient. He not only counters some of Guénon's claims, but elucidates a number of important factors that pertain to this period. It is therefore fitting to quote his letter at length:

Cher Monsieur,

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531 GUÉNON, *Theosophy*, 253-5. JOSCELYN GODWIN, *Arktos*, 54-6, has suggested that the name *Tala* may be connected to *Thule* (homonymous, apart from the vowel).

I am indeed very late in responding to the questions in your letter of 4 August and I beg you to excuse me. You are posing to me some very difficult questions, none of which I am incapable of responding to; but what will you make of my explanations? For everything that touches upon my great brother Milosz and his new orientation since 1917 concerns me and, when people are ignorant of the causes, they invent them, and rarely are their imaginations favourable—for one is moved more by what is bad than what is good—and, moreover, one loves to embellish, as they say, in order to render the inanities more pleasant than the bare, simple truth.

As to your questions on esotericism in general, “La Colombe” will soon release a piece on this problem.<sup>532</sup> It will be a pleasure to send you a copy. In the meantime, the atomic age has seen a surge of so-called alchemists in all directions. While they talk a lot, they do not take into account that it is not a matter here of a procedure for making gold, but, to echo the noble, sacerdotal science of the ancients,<sup>533</sup> it is, rather, a science drawn from Al-Kemit (Pharaonic Egypt), written everywhere and above all on the scrolls of Thoth, whom the Greeks called Hermes, elsewhere a pharaonic word signifying “birth of Her” or Kor, the Horus of the Romans. Another work will appear, probably in Spring, which will attempt to set these things straight. I will inform you of its publication. But certainly it was I who had revealed to Milosz the most profound sense that must be attributed to the hermetic science, and this radically changed his way of viewing the world. God knows that at the time I still had much, indeed very much, to apprehend. But the poet never feared to exalt himself and released “Ars Magna,” which never pleased me. But O.W. de L.-M was like an impassioned horse, impossible to restrain once awakened to his intoxicating, Olympian dream. If I may be permitted to offer a word of counsel: do not let yourself be seduced by the modern so-called alchemical writings; they can do nothing but deceive you. This problem is very grave. [...]

Now, none of this had any connection at all to the Theosophical Society, of which I was an adherent from 1913 to 1916. [...] I am aware of the explanations of René Guénon regarding the Veilleurs and myself. He is mistaken on many points, notably that which concerns my friendship with Gaston Revel, which never weakened until his death in 1939. I have always been direct and frank and this has afforded me the value of knowing in this life unfailing friendships—and equally some enemies, but these always hidden, acting surreptitiously. Some have called me diabolical; others satanic, or they have attributed to me black masses and other stupidities. The surrealists called me luciferian, basing themselves on an essay entitled *Adam l'homme rouge* [Adam: The Red Man], an essay which I have burned. By 1921 I had broken with all these movements: The Veilleurs, The

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532 *Propos sur ésotéricisme et symbole* (Paris: La Colombe, 1960).

533 *Science sacerdotale = hieratikē technē*.

Apostolic Centre, and—overnight—I ceased the journal *Le Veilleur*, which had become a revue. In general I no longer appeared in public. It was to Carlos Larronde—also a great friend of Milosz—that I delegated the task of speaking in public, to which he was eminently suited.

The last time that I saw my great friend Milosz, who more and more took refuge in Catholicism—for personal reasons which I alone probably know—was in 1929 when he said to me in his manner, which bordered on witticism: ‘Why don’t you become Catholic? Then there would be at least two Catholics in the world’. After this he took refuge in a lay order of Trappists. O. W. de Lubicz Milosz, prince of Lusace, Count of Labunovo, chief of the clan de Lubicz with the variant Bozawola, had received me in his clan with the right to the arms and the titles. What is most precious to me in this affair is to carry the ring of the arms de Lubicz, a jewel having previously belonged to the father of Milosz, a constant reminder for me of one of my most sincere and most fruitful friendships. Since 1930 I have sought isolation and have only given my new address to a few friends; I have isolated myself here at Plan-de-Grasse; I spent two years at an old hospice dating from the time of Raymond Lulle; and then [fifteen years in] Egypt, the source of all wisdom.<sup>534</sup>

*The Name « de Lubicz »*

On the tenth of January, 1919, the Lithuanian poet Oskar Wladislas de Lubicz Milosz bequeathed to René Schwaller, then aged 31, the right to bear the noble title and arms of the clan Bozawola (*Bozawola*, ‘will of god’ = *de Lubicz*).<sup>535</sup> Milosz, a noble and diplomat, was one of Schwaller’s closest friends; together the two formed the *Centre apostolique* of the *Veilleurs* to give expression to a form of apocalyptic mysticism; Milosz was also one of the few people to whom Schwaller conveyed his hermetic philosophy at the time, reflections of which would surface in the poem Milosz dedicated to Schwaller: *Le cantique de la connaissance* (The Canticle of Gnosis).<sup>536</sup> However, it was Schwaller’s efforts in assisting Milosz in securing Lithuanian independence that most deeply indebted the diplomat to Schwaller. In the aftermath of the first world war, Milosz was deeply affected by the post-war plight of his fatherland, then in danger of being subsumed by the encroaching Bolshevik state. Schwaller assisted Milosz in devising the diplomatic strategy that successfully

534 Letter reproduced in Genviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé*, 114-9.

535 Among the various works on Milosz, see in particular Alexandra CHARBONNIER, *Milosz, l'étoile au front* (Paris, Dervy: 1993), 301-45, with Appendix 5.

536 O. W. DE LUBICZ MILOSZ, *Ars Magna* (Paris: Alice Sauerwein, 1924); *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 59-63. The content of the poem justifies the translation of *connaissance* as ‘gnosis’ rather than ‘knowledge’.

convinced the allied forces to restore the country's former borders, thereby securing the continued political and cultural identity of Lithuania.<sup>537</sup> In a moving ceremonial gesture, Miłosz officially adopted Schwaller into the clan de Lubicz and granted him the imprimatur to use the royal name and arms of his family. Reproduced below (Illustration 9) is the letter by which Miłosz conveyed the right to Schwaller to bear the chivalric title of *Lubicz*:

Bearing a right which belongs to my ancestors, it is a pleasure to bequeath unto my brother René Schwaller a mark of my esteem and a testimony of my love by receiving him into the clan and therefore making him a part of my family, and to confer to him the right to bear the arms entitled Lubicz, with the variant Bozawola, or 'Will of God'.<sup>538</sup>

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537 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 49.

538 Letter, O. W. DE LUBICZ MIŁOSZ to René SCHWALLER (10 January 1919): 'Usant d'une droit qui a appartenu à mes ancêtres, je me fais une joie de donner à mon frère René Schwaller une marque de mon estime et un témoignage de mon amour en le recevant dans le clan dont fait partie ma famille, et en lui conférant le droit d'en porter les armoiries, dénommées Lubicz, avec la variante Bozawola, ou « Volonté de Dieu »'.



Usant d'un droit qui a appartenu  
à mes ancêtres, je me fais une  
joie de donner à mon frère René  
Schwaller une marque de mon  
estime et au témoignage de mon  
amour en le recevant dans le  
clan ont fait partie ma famille  
et en lui confirmant le droit  
d'en porter les armoiries, d'usage  
Lubicz, avec la variante  
Bozawola, ou "Volonté de Dieu!"  
O. W. de Lubicz-Milosz  
10 Janvier 1919.

ILLUSTRATION 9: LETTER, MIŁOZ TO SCHWALLER, 10 JANUARY 1919

Herein, Miłosz gives Schwaller the right to bear the noble title and arms of the clan de Lubicz with the variant Bozawola (Will of God).

A description of the Lubicz arms from Kasper Niesiecki's *Herbarz Polski* ('Polish Genealogy'), the classical genealogical and heraldic reference, runs as follows:

A true Lubicz, i.e., it should have a white Horseshoe, its ends turned downward, with two crosses, one above the horseshoe, the other inside it, but below this is added a yellow half-moon encompassing the horseshoe, edges pointed upward, on a blue field, with three ostrich feathers on the helm. [...] <sup>539</sup> From the similarity of these arms to those of Lubicz, all conclude that one of the Lubicz clan earned them on the following occasion. When spies warned him in the dead of night of nearby enemies, he attacked them so safely [?] that the passing night held no threat of danger. He fell upon the foe, soundly asleep, and mowed them down; and the rising moon helped him to this victory, so a Mazovian prince added it to his ancestral arms and named him "Bozawola". Rev. Rutka derives from a certain manuscript the occasion of these arms' bestowment in the days of the Polish

539 'Bielski, fol. 134. Paprocki o herbach, fol. 345. In *Stromat. Okolski* tomo 1. fol. 67'.

prince Krakus, when the Commander fortunately led all his people across the frozen Danube to Moguncya [Mainz], for which he was awarded these arms. [Bearers of these Arms: Gasecki, Gosciminski, Jemielicki, Komorowski, Ostrowice, Reymunt, Rzeczkowski].<sup>540</sup>

The new title would be reflected a few months later in Schwaller's Parisian identity papers (April 27, 1919) (Illustration 10). Beginning in 1917 and terminating in 1921, the *Veilleurs* were short-lived. Whether due to their relative obscurity or their basic incompatibility with the prevailing *Zeitgeist*, the *Veilleurs* abandoned their ambitions to renovate of society as a whole, and shifted their emphasis to the embodiment of an elite. Thus, they chose to withdraw from society in order to embody the way of life that they had initially sought to evoke *en masse*. For this reason, Schwaller's esoteric cadre would seek isolation, and they thus began preparation for the enormous move to St. Moritz in the Swiss Alps, where they would set up the *Station Scientifique de Subalia*.

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540 Kasper NIESIECKI, *Herbarz Polski* (S. J. Lipsk, 1839-1846). Trans. William F. HOFFMAN, *Polish Genealogical Society Newsletter*, Fall 1989.

**CARTE D'IDENTITÉ**

**ÉTAT-CIVIL**

Nom *Schwaller dit*  
de *Lubicz-Schwaller*

Prénoms *Reni*

Profession ou qualité *Ingénieur-Chimiste*

Lieu de naissance *Arnières (Seine)*

Date *30 Décembre 1887*

Domicile *31<sup>bis</sup> rue Campagne Première Paris*

Pièces justificatives produites :

*Licet militaire*  
*certificat de domicile*

Témoins attestant l'identité du Titulaire :

*M Jarrige-Lemas Marcel*  
*M Morette Henri*

Signature des témoins  
*Jarrige Lem B* Va pour légalisation  
des signatures  
*le 27 Avril 1919*

*le Maire de Paris*

**SIGNATURE DU TITULAIRE**  
*R. Schwaller*

**SIGNALEMENT**

Taille \_\_\_\_\_

Cheveux \_\_\_\_\_

Sourcils \_\_\_\_\_

Front \_\_\_\_\_

Yeux \_\_\_\_\_

Nez \_\_\_\_\_

Bouche \_\_\_\_\_

Menton \_\_\_\_\_

Visage \_\_\_\_\_

Barbe \_\_\_\_\_

Teint \_\_\_\_\_

*Signes particuliers*

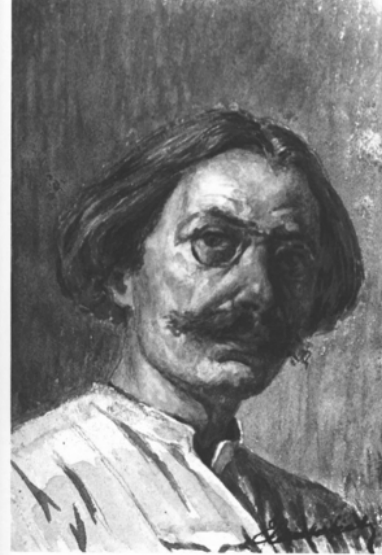
ILLUSTRATION 10: THE YOUNG SCHWALLER, SHORTLY AFTER RECEIVING THE TITLE « DE LUBICZ » (1919)



L I F E   A N D   W O R K



*Gaston Revel*



*Jean Julien Champagne*



*Louis Allainguillaume*



*Oskar Wladislas de Lubicz Milosz*

ILLUSTRATION 11: REVEL, CHAMPAGNE, ALLAINGUILLAUME, MILOSZ

## Suhalia and the Call of Fire: 1922–1929

‘6000 feet beyond man and time’.<sup>541</sup>

—Nietzsche

Schwaller’s sixth cycle coincided with his move, in 1922, to the Engadine region of the Swiss Alps. Here, Schwaller and his entourage—many of whom were committed to hermetic premises—founded the *Station Scientifique de Suhalia* at St. Moritz, where they established a small artisanal, scientific and initiatic community.<sup>542</sup> A sense of the remarkable technical purview of the enterprise at Suhalia is conveyed in the following description:

In order to have a view of the smallest as well as the greatest, an observatory (directed by M. Quénisset, astronomer to the Flammarion de Juvisy observatory) would enable the celestial movements to be observed, while on the other hand, in a laboratory highly perfected for microphotography, Isha undertook some interesting research on cells and crystals. The philosophical knowledge of the therapeutic properties of plants, and the effective manner of drawing out the subtle principles without denaturing them, enabled him to extract the pure quintessence integrally, without alcohol or any chemical products. [...] There were also important laboratories for chemistry, physics, spectroscopy, microphotography, electricity; workshops for the forge, printing press, and, for the women, carpets and fabrics; the glassery, where Aor would rediscover the quality of the glass of the ancient stained windows (*vitraux*) as well as the secret of the two ‘royal colours’ that are not able to be achieved by any chemical product: the blue and the red ‘of Chartres’.<sup>543</sup>

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541 Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Ecce Homo* (Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe: Also Sprach Zarathustra, §I): ‘6000 Fuss jenseits von Mensch und Zeit’.

542 Suhalia is currently known as Haus Languard of the Hotel Randolins complex, an evangelical retreat about an hour’s walk from St. Moritz Dorf.

543 *Aor*, 66-7: ‘Afin d’avoir une vue d’ensemble sur le plus petit aussi bien que sur le plus grand, un observatoire (dirigé par M. Quénisset, astronome à l’observatoire Flammarion de Juvisy) permettait d’observer les mouvements célestes, et d’autre part, dans un laboratoire très perfectionné de microphotographie Isha entreprit des recherches intéressantes sur la cellule et les cristaux. La connaissance philosophique des propriétés thérapeutiques des plantes, et de la manière efficace d’en tirer les principes subtils sans dénaturer, lui permit d’en extraire intégralement la pure quintessence sans alcool ni aucun produit chimique. [...] Il manque à cette description les importants laboratoires de chimie, physique, spectroscopie, microphotographie, électricité; les ateliers de forge, imprimerie, et, pour les femmes, les tapis et le tissage; la verrerie, où Aor retrouva la qualité du verre

The formation of Suhalia brought an end to Schwaller's socio-political endeavours in Paris; with the move to St. Moritz, Schwaller sought a retreat from the social domain and chose instead to work closely and directly with his closest friends and disciples upon the qualitative integration of metaphysical and concrete endeavours. Schwaller's own words suggest Suhalia was essentially intended to function as an initiatic hermitage:

Why have I made Suhalia? Is it not to create a centre where people, desiring to go this way, can find the necessary *isolation*? By isolation I mean exclusion from the *world of banality that reduces everything to its own level*. This isolation can be a paradise on earth for those who are not afraid to let go of their illusions in order to follow the way of truth.<sup>544</sup>

It is worth noting that the isolated paradise of the Engadine—long renowned for its dramatic alpine beauty and its welcome share of year-round sunshine—was also home to Nietzsche's beloved Sils Maria, a mere stone's throw from St. Moritz. Indeed, many of the letters Nietzsche wrote during the 1880s—and much of *Zarathustra*—were deeply connected to this precise region. And, just as Nietzsche spoke of the distinct difference in temperament between mountain-dwellers and plain-dwellers, Schwaller too affirmed that every region had its own spirit—its *genius loci*—which imparted to the inhabitant a corresponding spiritual mien: the 'land makes the man'. Not insignificantly in this respect, it was here, in the mountains above St. Moritz, that Schwaller would encounter a spiritual presence in the form of a tutelary Socratic *daimon*—a being that not only spoke to him, but referred to itself by the ancient Semitic name for light: *Aor*.

*The Name « Aor »*

Schwaller published a number of works at St. Moritz. One of the most intriguing came in the form of a mystical revelation: *L'Appel du feu* (The Call of Fire). Written in the winter of 1925, the work describes a revelatory communication from a being of fire and ice that Schwaller encountered high in the peaks above St. Moritz. This being or presence claimed to be non-human and called itself *Aor*:

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des anciens vitraux, et le secret des deux « couleurs royales » que ne saurait donner aucun produit chimique : le bleu et le rouge « de Chartres »'.

544 *La Doctrine: Trois conférences faites à Suhalia Noël 1926* (Édition Privée, Officina Montalia: St. Moritz), 135: 'Pourquoi ai-je fait Suhalia? N'est-ce pas pour créer un centre où les hommes, désireux d'aller ce chemin, puissent trouver *l'isolement* nécessaire? J'entends par isolement, l'exclusion du *monde banal qui réduit au lieu d'élever*. Cet isolement pourrait être un paradis sur terre pour ceux qui n'ont pas peur de laisser leur illusion pour suivre le chemin de la vérité'.

AOR! ... what is the meaning of AOR?

AOR is that which, one night at sunset, from high atop a frozen, flame-red peak, said to me—*Listen!*<sup>545</sup>

The character of this text is remarkably similar to a piece Schwaller would compose some twenty seven years later (*Verbe Nature*) a text structured as a transcript of answers to questions that are not recorded. Herein, the responses from a tutelary presence are given in a vein that sounds at once like Schwaller, and yet presents itself as a record of a conversation directed towards him—teaching him, instructing him, and clarifying his queries. The phenomenon in both texts is one of personal interlocution with one's higher nature; it is best likened to the Socratic idea of the *daimon* because of the simultaneously subjective yet intersubjective nature of the communion.

*L'Appel du feu* begins with the admonition 'listen!' The higher presence demands the need for silence, for the human mind to be stilled so that the divine mind is able to communicate—not as an "external" or disembodied voice, but more subtly: through the instrument of the human mind itself. The daimonic presence thus sounds like its human perceiver because it uses the consciousness of this perceiver as its "language". As such, it is dangerously easy to dismiss such an account as merely the product of the human mind. An effort towards more subtle distinctions must be made.

The subjective yet intersubjective nature of the phenomenon also helps explain why the name of an apparently "external" metaphysical presence would be taken as a personal appellation, for the daimonic concept is at once the most refined part of the self as it is *other* than the self. As early as 1919, Schwaller appears to have taken the name Aor as his own private and initiatic designation, sometimes employing it as a pseudonym in the publications of the *Veilleurs*.<sup>546</sup> After the revelation of 1926, he began to link it directly to his own name: thus René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz also came to be known as René « Aor » Schwaller de Lubicz.

Although he did not indulge in the Parisian alchemists' penchant for the 'phonetic kabbalah', a deep note of resonance would definitely have been struck for him between Hebrew *'ôr* (*aor*), 'light' and French *or*, 'gold' (from Latin *aurum*). In one text, gold is considered precisely by Schwaller as 'metallic Light' (*Lumière métallique*).<sup>547</sup> The fundamentally alchemical relationship that prevailed for de Lubicz between light (Hebrew *aor*) and gold (French *or*) abided deeply in the doctrine of signatures: the

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545 SCHWALLER, *L'Appel du feu*: 'AOR! ... que veut dire AOR! AOR est celui qui, un soir au soleil couchant, du haut d'une cime glacée et rouge feu, me dit :—Ecoute!' (The text of the original 1925 edition is unpaginated; the quotation is from the first page of the prologue).

The flame red peaks of which Schwaller speaks arise from the dramatic Alpine sunsets at St. Moritz, which are still visible to this day from Haus Suhalia (see Illustrations 13-14)

546 At least this is how it is presented by Isha in her biography, *Aor*.

547 SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, 'Le Naos dans le jardin', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 200.

means by which the uncreated energies—the invisible source of the visible or created energies—revealed themselves in phenomenal matter. It should be noted that Hebrew *'ôr*, from the triliteral root *'wr* (corresponding to Ugaritic *'r*, 'to be bright, illumine'; Akkadian *urru*, 'day') is precisely the word used in *Genesis* 1:3-5 for the cosmogonic *fiat lux* ('let there be light'), a text that Schwaller ranked—along with the *logos* of John (1:1)—as the most significant in the Abrahamic *symbolique*.<sup>548</sup> Although the metaphysical nature of light was regarded as separate from its phenomenal manifestations, sun, gold and fire were seen to be called forth from the realm of *physis* (*natura*) in response to the summons of the active metaphysical presence; more precisely, given that the natural world as a whole was seen by Schwaller as a reaction to a metaphysical action, phenomena such as the sun, gold and fire were accordingly seen as those physical reactions corresponding most purely to the metaphysical actions of the causal *energeia*.

### *La Doctrine*

1927 saw the formulation of Schwaller's teachings into *La Doctrine* (The Doctrine), the published material deriving from three conferences held at Suhalia during the Christmas of 1926.<sup>549</sup> The privately published text was intended solely for distribution among Schwaller's disciples, bearing an inscription requesting that it always be returned to Suhalia. Herein, Schwaller's esoteric theory of evolution receives its first systematic exposition, as does his colour theory (i.e. an extensive treatment of the colour phenomenon as a *symbolique* of the seven- (and nine-) fold process acting through all things; this crucial aspect of Schwaller's philosophy will be examined in detail in the next chapter: 'Alchemical *Farbenlehre*'). After explaining the 'law of excess'

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548 On the precise uses of *'ôr* in the Old Testament, see BOTTERWECK and RINGGREN, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004), I, 147-67. It is worth noting that in Judaic cosmogony an important distinction prevails between *'ôr* as 'light-brightness' and the celestial body of the sun, the two realities being deemed independent insofar as the 'light of day' (*'ôr*) is brought into existence *before* the heavenly luminaries, which is to say, light preexists the sun (cf. *Gen.* 1:5). The distinction is significant and may be compared to that between 'created energies' (*geneta energeia*) and uncreated energies (*ageneta energeia*) in the mystical theology of Eastern Orthodoxy. While the concept *'ôr* properly indicates 'daylight, brightness', the root *'wr* has further derivatives that widen the semantic field to include meanings such as 'fire' (when pronounced *'wr*), while in *Job*, *'ôr* indicates 'lightning'. From the alchemical purview espoused by Schwaller, phenomenal light and fire ('created energies') are to be regarded as symbols (in the precise sense, i.e. as *signatura, sympatheia*) of divine light/fire ('uncreated energies').

549 René SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *La Doctrine : trois conférences faites à Suhalia, Noël 1926 (Par Aor)* (St. Moritz: Officina Montalia, 1927); cf. critical apparatus in DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, *La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956* (Milan: Arché, 2006).

(*la loi de l'excès*),<sup>550</sup> Schwaller tabulates the 'laws of evolution' in an explicitly alchemical fashion (excess being the culmination):

- a) separation;
- b) purification;
- c) conjunction;
- d) assimilation;
- e) —excess.<sup>551</sup>

Excess is accorded a vital role for it is seen as a phenomenon in the moral domain that corresponds to processes in chemistry and alchemy: 'Now, that which in morality is called excess corresponds to that which in alchemy is called fermentation, identical to that which in chemistry is called catalysis'.<sup>552</sup> Continues Schwaller:

By this third term [catalysis] we can better comprehend the phenomenon. More and more one has noted in chemistry that this mysterious catalysis plays a preponderant role in reactions. It consists of the inexplicable action of the *presence* of an apparently strange body upon the milieu or upon the named phenomenon. For my part, I know that this body is never effectively a stranger, but, as occult atomics reveals, *it intervenes always as the excess of affinity* in the composition. Excess intervenes in the material phenomenon exactly as in the moral, or, better said, in *consciousness*. It is the instant thanks to which the present possibility is surpassed; this is also the moment thanks to which the *passage* is possible from one state to a superior state.<sup>553</sup>

The processes alluded to here lie at the heart of Schwaller's alchemy, the dynamics of which will be taken up in more detail in the balance of this thesis. It is enough for now to signal how the conception of alchemy was distinctly concerned with the universal structure of the one single process that acts through all particular domains of experience, and how knowledge from the particular domains of experience was never disconnected from its more integral ambiance.

*La Doctrine* is a revealing work. It is the first book in which Schwaller deals more or less explicitly with central alchemical concerns, and, although this is not its main focus, herein one is introduced to Schwaller's earliest articulation of alchemy as a 'science of life'. In this connection, attention has been drawn to the 'law of excess' not only because it represents the culmination of the alchemical process, but because it

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550 *La Doctrine*, 124-5.

551 *La Doctrine*, 125.

552 *La Doctrine*, 126. 'Or, ce qui est excès en moral, répond à ce que en alchimie on appelle fermentation, semblable à ce qu'en chimie on appelle catalyse'.

553 *La Doctrine*, 126.

would be restated many years later, in more refined terms, as a process of ‘qualitative exaltation’, a phenomenon related directly to the work on salt as the fixed and fixing nucleus of a species.

*L’Homme Rouge and the Metaphysics of Eros*

Some have called me diabolical; others satanic, or they have attributed to me black masses and other inanities. The surrealists called me luciferian, basing themselves on an essay entitled *Adam l’homme rouge*, an essay which I burned.

—R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, 1960.

1926 also saw the publication of *Adam: L’homme rouge*, a text which Schwaller later disparaged. The extended title gives a detailed indication of its contents: *Adam : l’homme rouge, ou les éléments d’une gnose pour le mariage parfait; Ouvrage divisé en deux parties dont la première examine la situation morale et la crise vitale créées dans la société humaine par la domination du catholicisme et la deuxième partie présente les notions fondamentales d’un enseignement occulte pour permettre au couple humaine de trouver une base philosophique et conforme à l’évolution dans le mariage dont le but est d’atteindre l’union spirituelle.* (Adam: The Red Man, or the elements of a gnosis for perfect marriage; A work divided into two parts of which the first examines the moral situation and the vital crisis created in human society by the domination of Catholicism, and the second part presents the fundamental notions of an occult teaching in order to permit the human couple to discover a basis which is philosophical and conformed to evolution in marriage, the goal of which is to attain spiritual union). In this work, Schwaller seeks to situate an erotic mysticism upon a Rosicrucian *symbolique*, polemicising against the Catholic Church, whose materialism and corruption are seen to stem directly from its loss of the true meaning preserved in the esoteric Christic mystique. Schwaller’s use of Rosicrucian Christianity provides a basis for situating his discussion of sexuality upon “cosmic laws,” the true science of which, for Schwaller, is *alchemy*. Thus, apart from the *Cathédrales* text, which although based upon Schwaller’s research, was put together by Champagne and augmented by material from Dujols, it is *Adam: The Red Man*—which appeared in the very same year as the *Cathédrales* text—that provides one of the earliest discussions of alchemy under Schwaller’s own name.<sup>554</sup>

*L’homme rouge* is a work in two parts, the first being a critique of the contemporary moral climate and in particular the influence of Catholicism, the second being concerned with the actualisation of a spiritual marriage based upon a

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554 1926: Schwaller publishes *Adam l’homme rouge* in St. Moritz, Champagne publishes *Le mystère des cathédrales* in Paris.

metaphysics of sex in which a union of sexual polarity leads to *unio mystica*. This dual emphasis on anti-Catholicism and erotic mysticism is presumably why, in Surrealist circles, André Breton later denounced the work as “satanic”, and why Schwaller himself also disparaged the work.<sup>555</sup> However, no matter how much these interests may have been a cause for moral uncertainty on Schwaller’s part (as late as 1952 he would voice his concerns to ‘Nature and her sages’ upon sexual morality),<sup>556</sup> the concept of excess (*le sense de excès*) described in *Adam L’homme rouge* forms an important precursor to the concept of qualitative exaltation that would prove central to his mature alchemical philosophy. In its earlier formulation, it is described specifically in relation to the function of the orgasm:

The sexual function, in itself, is not an excess; the orgasm properly speaking is an excess: an excess of erotic tension. This is the most natural excess, imposed by nature. Now, all excess—whatever it may be—leads to this consciousness, even if it comes about that its effect should be death. The effect is secondary. What is essential is what passes into the consciousness of this being who knows that, if it pushes such a thing to [the point of] excess, it can result in death. If his act is the consequence of a logical decision with himself, and is therefore an absolutely conscious act accomplished after mature reflection upon his desire for ecstasy, without anger, without any weakening of his faculties by intoxication or narcotics, then, even if death ensues, the act is not to be morally condemned. In this case, he does not want his death, he wants the supreme exaltation in which he hopes to find the annihilation of his I, his ego, his sensorially fascinated being.

The need for infinity exists in man: but he must learn to make the sense of excess conscious. The sense of excess leads all things from evil to the veritably mystical—that is, to the most complete abnegation, to complete fusion (*confondement*). If this is difficult or impossible in many cases for some, it is yet possible for him, in things that his nature requires or that an erotic disposition imposes, to find in these things the point of support in order that they may be exalted to the supreme. This is the sense in which eroticism is sublimated to the mystical.<sup>557</sup>

As the Italian esoteric philosopher Julius Evola (1898–1974) recognises, this passage (which he cites in his *Metafisica del sesso*), pertains to a form of erotic alchemy that is comparable to the secret ritual of the Ordo Templi Orientis (article XIV of *De arte magica*), which speaks of an initiatic ‘death in orgasm’ called the *mors justi*. ‘The limit of exhaustion or frenzy and intoxication’, comments Evola, ‘is also indicated as the

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555 On Bréton and esotericism, see Anna BALAKIAN, *André Bréton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

556 *Verbe Nature* §36.

557 *Adam l’homme rouge*, 183-4, 190.



moment of magical lucidity, of powerful trance in man or woman'.<sup>558</sup> Evola, whose *Metaphysics of Sex* is a veritable *tour de force* of the initiatory role of *eros*, also points out the pertinence of Schwaller's ideas to the tantric distinction between different types of desire (*kama*): i.e. animal desire, human desire, and superhuman desire; the latter, according to Evola, is 'capable of total and superindividual abandon', and he concludes his position by citing Schwaller's distinction between a 'Greater Desire' and a 'Lesser Desire': 'In essence', remarks Evola, 'animal desire is contrasted with that which might be called 'the Greater Desire which unites body with spirit well beyond the union of bodies in the Lesser Desire''.<sup>559</sup>

At the same time, especially with regard to the unity of 'body with spirit', such passages are also amenable to a distinctly operative alchemical interpretation. Clearly, the erotic and metallurgical interpretations must not be seen as mutually exclusive; rather, they evince the multilayered constellation of authentic alchemical symbolism and, in particular, they signal its capacity to speak to the metaphysical dynamics of *all* kingdoms of nature, from mineral to human.

#### *Alchemical References in Adam L'Homme Rouge*

Certain passages in Schwaller's *Adam l'homme rouge* moved Champagne's disciple Eugene Canseliet to write to the author of the 1926 work regarding his 'profound knowledge at the juncture of the primitive androgynous state'; Canseliet characterised these concerns as 'highly philosophical' and reveals in his letter that they were in fact 'the same as those that gripped Mr. Champagne upon his return from Plan-de-Grasse and that seemed to overturn his previous notions'.<sup>560</sup> (The return from Plan-de-Grasse was directly after Champagne had completed the glass *œuvre* with Schwaller, shortly before Champagne's death in 1932). Here one gains an intimation not only of the extent to which Champagne-Fulcanelli may have been indebted to Schwaller, but also of the particular nature of the work in which they collaborated. Canseliet continues:

In conformity with this new orientation, we both engaged once again in the study of *caput mortuum* from the first work, which we had always rejected as being useless scoria having no value. No doubt we were wrong about that because numerous philosophers assured us that this material, with its crude aspect and its

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558 Julius EVOLA, *Metafisica del sesso* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1969); *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1991), 266, 320-1 n. 145 (translation modified after Inner Traditions edition). I am indebted to Paul Scarpari for drawing my attention to Evola's use of Schwaller's work.

559 EVOLA, *Metafisica del sesso* = *The Metaphysics of Sex*, 233, 314 n. 38, citing SCHWALLER, *Adam L'homme rouge*, 242.

560 Letter from Eugene Canseliet to René Schwaller de Lubicz (December 4, 1933) reproduced in DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé* (1996, 159 ff; 2006, 102-3, 141-4).

strong odour, is the *flower of all metals*, the *flos florum*, which they regard so highly. They gave it this name because just as the flower prepares the fruit and as the fruit is virtual in the flower, this earth carries within it the invisible embryo of a new mineral essence. The *Turba Philosophorum* warns us of this in two different places. In one of these *Eximiganus* says: 'Know that our entire primary intention is the *misty Maye jacket*'; in the other reference, *Theophilus* says: 'Know, all you sons, of the doctrine that the secret of everything is a *misty covering* of which the Philosophers have so often spoken'. Indeed, Avicenna teaches that we must assemble our material consisting of droppings, filth and rot from the sun and the moon. Some philosophers, in order to characterise the impurity of the magma from which the hermetic lily is born, have given it the name *manure*. The sage knows how to recognise our stone even in the manure, claims the Cosmopolite, whereas the one who is ignorant will not be able to find me in gold.

This is a warning given to the craftsmen who might be tempted, within the natural separation or decomposition, to keep the brilliant, the dazzling, the splendid, because it seems to him to be very pure, while despising the residual manure, these faeces, 'filthy and foul', in the midst of which, however, there rests and hides the best of what he is looking for.<sup>561</sup>

Among other things, the significance placed upon the *caput mortuum* or manure of the work brings to mind the Gurdjieffian parable of the oak tree in which the abundance of acorns produced by the tree is contrasted against how many of these actually become oaks: whereas a rare few become oaks, the rest become fertiliser. In the greater ecology, this fertiliser is *necessary* for the few acorns that will become oaks to be able to do so.<sup>562</sup> Within a more strictly alchemical context, one may refer to the remark in a text entitled *A Short Catechism of Alchemy* (attributed to Paracelsus):

Q: With what is this grand and sublime operation performed?

561 Canseliet to Schwaller de Lubicz (December 4, 1933); DUBOIS (2006), 142.

562 Fritz PETERS, *Boyhood with Gurdjieff: Gurdjieff Remembered; Balanced Man* (Bardic Press, 2005): 'On one occasion, Gurdjieff told Fritz to look out of the window, where there was an oak tree, and asked him how many acorns there were on the tree. Peters responded that there were likely thousands. Gurdjieff then inquired as to how many of those acorns were likely to become oak trees. The boy guessed that perhaps five or six might, or maybe not even that many. Gurdjieff then explained the essential nature of his teaching by comparing it to the possibilities that Nature provides: 'Perhaps only one, perhaps not even one. Must learn from Nature. Man is also organism. Nature makes many acorns, but possibility to become tree exist for only few acorns. Same with man - many men born, but only few grow. People think this waste, think Nature waste. Not so. Rest become fertilizer, go back into earth and create possibility for more acorns, more men, once in while more tree - more real man. Nature always give - but only give possibility. To become real oak, or real man, must make effort. You understand this, my work, this Institute, not for fertilizer. For real man, only. But must also understand fertilizer necessary to Nature'.

A: With one single corpuscle, or minute body, which, so to speak, contains nothing but faeces, filth, and abominations, but whence a certain tenebrous and mercurial humidity is extracted, which contains in itself all that is required by the Philosopher, because, as a fact, he is in search of nothing but the true Mercury.<sup>563</sup>

Canseliet then draws attention to two specific passages from *Adam l'homme rouge* that bear distinctly upon the aspects of the alchemical work with which his letter is concerned. The first passage Canseliet cites emerges from a discussion in which Schwaller affirms number as the most precise language of all the esoteric sciences and the cornerstone of all genuine theology. Turning his attention to the Western canon, in particular to the trinity as threefold unity, the passage from one to two is identified as tantamount to the passage from incomprehensible unity (father) to comprehensible unity (son, i.e. duality), a transition that is mediated by the Holy Spirit. Schwaller then attempts to consolidate the threads of the anti-Catholic polemic advanced earlier in the book by affirming Rosicrucianism as the symbolic resister of a genuine Christian esotericism, i.e. a Christic *symbolique* heir to a sacred arithmosophical science otherwise lost to Catholicism. Adducing the Rosicrucian symbolism of the cross, he discusses the correlation of the four bars to the four elements and the significance of the septenary indicated by the seven roses of the crown. But it is his situation of the trinitarian conception within a specifically *mineral* register that penetrates to the heart of Schwaller's alchemical *symbolique*:

It is still necessary to add the material representation of the three principles of the trinity, where the father becomes the fundamental stone, the point of departure which in matter is the pivot and therefore the absolute resistance; it is also called fire incarnate and it is represented by sulphur. The son, which has a double nature, thus holding father and earth, is represented by salt, which, by virtue of being salt, is a neutral state containing solidity, the fire incarnate, and the fluid and mobile Holy Spirit which is represented by mercury.

Why this body: sulphur, mercury and salt?—Because they are typical of what is possible. Sulphur, product of the fire of the earth; mercury, water of metals, or first terrestrial body; and salt, the stable state, and naturally the most widespread. On the other hand, sulphur coagulates mercury and forms a black and red salt. It must always be remembered that the Rosicrucian philosophers have not taken the words: sulphur, mercury and salt for any other thing but the trinity. But the intellectualised mentality of today's science can scarcely comprehend this.

There is a principle which acts, a principle which receives, and the two form, by mutual love—(the successive attraction and repulsion of generation)—the perfect salt which is Three in One, God in the trinity, called in the material work of the

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563 PARACELSUS, 'A Short Catechism of Alchemy', in WAITE, ed., trans., *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus I*, 297.

philosophers: the philosophical stone. Here the word “stone” signifies symbolically the perfect form, the most enduring, the most “formal”; while the qualifier “philosophical” signifies that it is to be understood in the sense of esoteric knowledge. Now, if the philosophical stone in the work of matter is the most perfect form, if it is the most intense fire, linked by the mercurial or feminine principle in a salt—or absolutely neutral body—the most perfect stone is, philosophically, God, who is the totality of his Trinity of all possibilities. This is the *mysterium* of the Rosicrucians, or esoteric Christians, who concern themselves not with the church but only with the tradition of Knowledge based on the Gospels or legends of christic realisation. This is the ancient knowledge. And the philosophers know it so well that they ascribe everything in their science to Hermes, the ancient king of Egypt. Thus, this science is called the hermetic science that has become synonymous with the secret science commonly called, with much contempt, Alchemy. But as it has come to be pronounced, this word is common: the science of Chem, who according to legend received it as recompense for the love of the daughters of the earth for the sons of heaven.<sup>564</sup>

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564 SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Adam l'homme rouge*, 48-50: ‘Il faut encore ajouter la représentation matérielle des trois principes le la trinité, où le père devient la pierre fondamentale, le point de départ qui, dans la matière, est le pivot, donc la résistance absolue; il est encore appelé le feu incarné et il est figuré par le soufre. Le fils qui est la nature double, dont tenant du père et de la terre, est figuré par le sel, lequel, en tant que sel, est un état neutre contenant le solide, le feu incarné; et le fluide et mobile Saint-Esprit qui est figuré par le mercure. Pourquoi ces corps: soufre, sel et mercure? —Parce qu'ils sont typiques au possible. Le soufre, produit du feu de la terre; le mercure, l'eau des métaux, ou première corps terrestre; et le sel, l'état stable naturellement le plus répandu. D'autre part, le soufre coagule le mercure et forme un sel noir et rouge. Jamais, il faut s'en souvenir, les philosophes rosicruciens n'ont pris les mots : soufre, sel et mercure, pour autre chose que pour des symboles de la trinité. Mais cela, la mentalité intellectualisée de la science de nos jours ne peut presque pas le comprendre. Il y a un principe qui agit, un principe qui reçoit, et le deux forment par mutuel amour, — (attraction et répulsion successives de la génération), — le sel parfait qui est Trois et Un, Dieu dans la trinité, appelé dans l'œuvre matérielle des philosophes : le pierre philosophale. Le mot « pierre » signifie ici symboliquement le forme parfait, la plus dure, la plus « formelle » ; et le qualificatif « philosophale » signifie qu'elle est à entendre dans le sens de la connaissance ésotérique. Or, si la pierre philosophale dans l'œuvre de la matière est la forme la plus parfaite, si elle est le feu le plus intense, lié par le principe mercuriel ou féminin dans un sel, — ou corps absolument neutre, — la pierre la plus parfaite est, philosophiquement, Dieu, qui est la totalité en sa Trinité de toutes les possibilités. Ceci est la mystique des Rosicruciens, ou ésotéristes chrétiens, qui ne se soucient pas de l'Église mais uniquement de la tradition de la Connaissance en s'appuyant sur l'Évangile, ou légende de la réalisation christique. C'est la connaissance antique. Et ces philosophes le savent si bien qu'ils se réclament tous, dans leur science, de Hermès, antique roi d'Égypte. Ainsi, cette science est dite science hermétique, devenue encore synonyme de la science secrète, vulgairement appelé avec assez de mépris : l'Alchimie. Mais ce mot est vulgaire, puisqu'il devrait être prononcé : science

The second alchemical reference Canseliet draws attention to comes from the section entitled 'Mariage et Union' in which Schwaller affirms: 'Sex is a spiritual phenomenon'.<sup>565</sup> Schwaller interprets Judaic anthropogony in a fashion similar to the Platonic motif of the gendered human as divided whole.<sup>566</sup> His interpretation bears a pronounced gnostic resonance distinctly evocative of the *Gospel According to Philip* (which wouldn't be discovered for another thirty years): 'When Eve was still in Adam death did not exist. When she was separated from him death came into being. If he enters again and attains his former self, death will be no more' (68.23-6).<sup>567</sup> For Schwaller, the mystical union of male and female forms a *conjunctio* by which the complementary poles combine to dissolve their duality through reentry into their preexisting unity, i.e. the primordial Adamic (or adamantine) state (a motif he would also express through the phenomenon of colour complements). The subtext however, as Canseliet recognises, pertains specifically to the alchemical work on metals:

As to woman, she guards in herself the memory of her decline (*déchéance*) from man into woman. She can become man only by fusing herself with him. Then the two will no longer be two, but an animated body.<sup>568</sup>

As will be seen when the dynamics of Schwaller's alchemy is looked at more directly, the motif of marriage presented here is a veiled account of the ultimate hermetic cohabitation: after the reanimation, separation and purification comes the recombination of the volatile and the fixed—the intensifying reanimation of the body. Again, although there are specific referents to material processes, it is also important to recognise that the symbolism employed here was ultimately polyvalent. Because Schwaller's alchemy was distinctly, but not solely, metallurgical, and because the alchemical process was conceived integrally and applied to all phenomena, it is no

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de Chem, lequel, d'après la légende, la reçut en récompense de l'amour des filles de la terre pour les fils du ciel'.

565 *Adam l'homme rouge*, 79.

566 See Aristophanes' speech in PLATO, *Symposium*, 189a-193e.

567 'The Gospel According to Philip', in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7: Together with XIII, 2\**, *Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(I), and P. OXY. I, 654, 655: With Contributions by Many Scholars*, ed. Bentley LAYTON, *Nag Hammadi Studies; 20-21* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989); further (70. 10-22): 'If the woman had not separated from the man, she would not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because she was never united with him in the bridal chamber'.

568 *Adam l'homme rouge*, 89: 'Quant à la femme, elle garde en elle le souvenir de sa déchéance d'homme en femme. Elle ne peut devenir homme qu'en se confondant avec lui. Alors les deux ne seront plus deux, mais un corps animé'.

coincidence that this most intriguing of texts coincided not only with Schwaller's attempt with Fulcanelli to marry the volatile spirit of metals to a body of molten glass, but also with René Schwaller's actual marriage to Isha. That this was an alchemically conceived marriage is not only borne out by its coincidence with the published text of *Adam l'homme rouge* (the de Lubiczs were married at Suhalia in 1927; see figures 10-11), it was during this general period that Schwaller's wife appears to have taken the mystical name Isha (= Ishia, a form of the name Eve, hence conforming to the mythological *topos* of *Adam l'homme rouge* and its alchemy of mystical eroticism); henceforth Jeanne Germain Lamy would be known as Isha Schwaller de Lubicz

Not insignificantly with regard to the concept of excess as death, it appears likely that the culmination of the alchemical marriage of Aor and Isha was the very thing that cast the seed of Suhalia's demise. Schwaller's entire project at St. Moritz was funded by his *Veilleurs* comrade, Louis Allainguillaume, who, in 1922, bought the old vacancies of the Suvretta district that subsequently became Suhalia.<sup>569</sup> Unfortunately (yet interestingly), his patronage here only endured for seven years. Had it lasted longer, Schwaller's *Station Scientifique de Suhalia* may well have taken on a prominence similar to that of Steiner's Goetheanum.<sup>570</sup> According to Dufour-Kowalski, the very motivation for the move to the Engadine resided in Allainguillaume's desire to secure an environment conducive to Isha's health (Isha had pulmonary problems which would have been relieved by the Alpine atmosphere).<sup>571</sup> Isha, i.e. Jeanne Germain Lamy, was at the time married to George Lamy (the father of Jean and Lucy Lamy, Isha's two children; although married, they appear to have gone their separate ways). After receiving news of George Lamy's death, Isha would marry René Schwaller. If Allainguillaume had harboured his own desires to marry Isha (Louis and Isha had already had two children together), her marriage to Aor may well have soured the financier's *bonhomie* to his former comrade(s). In any event, after the marriage, many of the old *Veilleurs* disbanded, and when the patronage ended, the de Lubiczs quitted abruptly, abandoning the Alpine heights for the south of France.

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569 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 69-70. DUFOUR-KOWALSKI informs us that it was the Swiss wife of alchemist Henri Coton-Alvert who obtained the necessary authority for the enterprise at Suhalia.

570 According to a pamphlet contained in the St. Moritz Dokumentationsbibliothek, Suhalia was reopened on 1 December 1935 as an 'Erholungsstätte für geistige Arbeiter mit angeschlossenen Werkstätten für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe' (Retreat for spiritual workers with adjoining art studios and craft workshops). To this day the former *Station Scientifique de Suhalia* still retains a pale hint of the *genius* that Schwaller brought to this small collection of buildings above St. Moritz, which are presently maintained as a centre for spiritual retreat.

571 *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 69.

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ILLUSTRATION 12: RENÉ « AOR » SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ SUHALIA, C. 1926.

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ILLUSTRATION 13: HAUS SUHALIA, ST. MORITZ, SWITZERLAND  
(Photo: Cheak, 2005)



ILLUSTRATION 14: SUNSET AT ST. MORITZ: VIEW FROM SUHALIA.  
'Aor is that which, one night at sunset, from high atop a frozen, flame-red peak, said to me—*Listen!*' (Photo: Cheak, 2005)



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ILLUSTRATION 15: AOR ET ISHA



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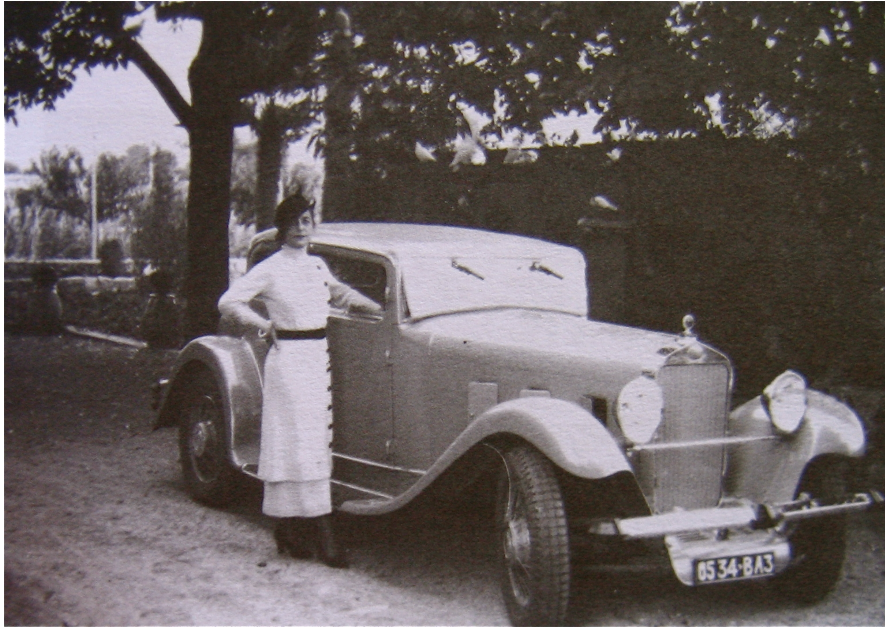


ILLUSTRATION 16: ISHA ET AOR



### Plan-de-Grasse and Palma de Majorca: 1929–1936

By the turn of the 1930s, the financial support for the enterprise at Suhalia having drawn to a close, the de Lubiczs secured a two storey villa at Plan-de-Grasse in the South of France.<sup>572</sup> Isha, who inherited the fortune of her late husband, dubbed the house ‘Mas du Coucagno’, and it was here, in 1931, that Schwaller and Champagne finally accomplished the stained glass *œuvre* that they had been collaborating on for almost twenty years.

This same year, the second and final work of Champagne’s under the pseudonym Fulcanelli appeared: *Les Demeures Philosophales* (Philosophical Dwellings). A year later, on August 26 (1932), Jean-Julien Champagne died in Paris. According to the very interesting account given in VandenBroeck’s memoir, the death of Champagne was closely linked with the mysterious alchemical manuscript lying at the heart of the colour theory.

Schwaller and Champagne had sworn an oath of hermetic secrecy regarding the work they were engaging in. It appears that the crux of this secrecy resided in the belief that the non-Newtonian constitution of matter that they were exploring through hermetic physics could be abused with unpredictable results if misappropriated for utilitarian purposes. It was ‘temple knowledge’ and ‘definitely not meant for the multitude’.<sup>573</sup> Having completed the opus, Schwaller and Champagne went their separate ways, and per their initial agreement, Schwaller suspended the monthly stipend he had been paying Champagne for nineteen years. However, Champagne soon wanted to reproduce the results, and also to speak of his knowledge. Schwaller travelled to Paris to remind Champagne of his vow. Later, he suggested to VandenBroeck that Champagne’s death was a direct result of his intent to break his vow of secrecy.

He, Fulcanelli, had continued working, and although he had not yet been able to repeat the experiment, he felt that having done it once, he would be able to do it again. It was just a matter of conditions, ambient conditions, just some detail, but with more trial and error ...

The Fool! He was talking like a doctor from the *Facultés!* But I interrupted, refusing to discuss such matters in a public place; I reminded him of our agreement, got up and left. OF course he couldn’t repeat the experiment! There were a great number of concurring conditions when we ran it, and I had chosen

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572 The house was owned by Isha’s son, Jean Lamy, a doctor of medicine who helped support his mother and step father. Schwaller, Isha, Jean and Lucy (Isha’s other child to George Lamy) thus comprised the household.

573 *Al-Kemi*, 231.

the moment very carefully. He knew nothing about all these preparations. He could only repeat the manipulations he had performed at that time, and these had so far proved insufficient for success at a different time. [...]

He was already sick when he came here [Plan-de-Grasse] that last time, limping somewhat and complaining of circulatory problems. And he persisted in this insane desire to come forth with whatever he thought he had understood. I reminded him again of his vow of secrecy and warned him that no good could come from breaking it. It was useless. Six weeks later he wrote me a line announcing a meeting he had scheduled for a limited group of adept friends: he was going to talk about our experiment [...]. He wanted to tell everything.<sup>574</sup>

Schwaller again arrived in Paris, before the scheduled meeting. He went straight to Champagne's mansard to find Champagne deathly ill. 'Gangrene had set in on his leg, and his complexion was dark grey'.

He was turning black [...] and he could barely speak. Imagine, he could no longer speak! We looked at each other for a long while, and then he shook his head. I think he understood. He pointed toward a pile of papers on a bookshelf and had me look through them. I found the six pages of manuscript he had stolen and that we had been working with, the manuscript, I am convinced, that had brought us both to this moment. He made me understand that he wanted me to have it, and that no copy existed. I put it in my pocket and left. He was dead the next morning.<sup>575</sup>

Of this period, Schwaller later remarked to VandenBroeck:

Before the age of forty-two, I myself thought there were other activities that would further the work of consciousness, activities involving people, concrete applications of the abstract ideas in the form of group organizations, esoteric schools, if you want, but once I entered the seventh cycle, I realized my error. It was during that cycle that I finished the practical work on salt, here in this house, and that I proved the work experimentally, with Fulcanelli handling some crucial manipulations. But the aftermath of all this once again showed me what I should have already learned in Paris: it is dangerous to use the *Œuvre* and the knowledge it affords in any other way than for inscribed experience. The voluntary obscurity of adepts all through history must come in part from this realization.<sup>576</sup>

These attitudes undoubtedly informed his activities during the remainder of this cycle, for in 1934 the de Lubiczs set out on the Mediterranean in a hydrodynamic

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574 *Al-Kemi*, 231.

575 *Al-Kemi*, 232.

576 *Al-Kemi*, 97.

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yacht designed by Schwaller. In the same year they settled on the Spanish island of Majorca in a hospice dating to the time of Raymon Lull, and a period of isolation ensued (a necessary balance, perhaps, to the closely knit initiatic commune of Suhalia). As a consequence of this 'voluntary obscurity', little is known of their activities during this period. In 1936 however, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the Lubiczs were forced to move on.<sup>577</sup> Their affinities drew them to Egypt, where they would remain for the next fifteen years.

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<sup>577</sup> Papers for this period are reproduced in Illustration 17.

L I F E A N D W O R K

Núm. de orden *34*

Dirección general de Seguridad

Nombre *René Adolphe*  
 Apellidos *Schwaller de Lubin*  
 Fecha del nacimiento *30 Diciembre 1887*  
 Pueblo de su naturaleza *Ormaiztegui (León)*  
 Nación *Francesa*  
 Profesión *Químico*  
 Nacionalidad actual *Francesa*  
 Domicilio *Aveo N.º 21 de las "Avenidas"*




COMISARIA DE INVESTIGACION Y FUGA  
B. L. N.

FIRMA DEL TITULAR.  
*René Schwaller*

La fotografía, huella y firma que anteceden, corresponden al titular.


Hijos menores de 15 años

NOMBRE	Edad	Sexo
<i>Palma</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>de Abril</i>
<i>Luis</i>	<i>Segorbe</i>	

Palma *20* de *Abril* de 1936.  
*Luis Segorbe*

Valedero por dos años, a menos que sea renovada.

ILLUSTRATION 17: AOR ET ISHA, 1934–1936




(Firma del titular)  
*J. Schwaller de Lubin*

**CERTIFICACION**  
 de que la fotografía y firma que anteceden pertenecen al antedicho.  
 Palma *20* de *Diciembre* de 1936.  
 El Jefe de Investigación y Vigilancia.  
*Juan Jiménez*

Las leyes Penales, las de Policía y las de Seguridad pública, obligan a todos los que habitan en territorio español.  
 (Artículo 8.º del Código Civil)

Valedero para un año

Ms. 10289020A - Palma

## Pharaonic Symbolique at Luxor: 1936–1950

The purpose of the Temple is to elevate our being towards the Being than animates all.<sup>578</sup>

—R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

As has been seen, Schwaller's earliest work was a hermetic reading of the Gothic cathedrals as alchemical texts in stone,<sup>579</sup> an opus which was "borrowed" from him in 1913 by his alchemical collaborator Jean-Julien Champagne, elaborated with material from Pierre Dujols, and published in 1926, without Schwaller's permission, under the pseudonym Fulcanelli.<sup>580</sup> In 1936, Schwaller relocated to Egypt where, from 1938 to 1950, he spent twelve years deciphering the architectonic *symbolique* of the temple of Amenemopet at Luxor, a temple whose *raison d'être* was the birth of the god Amun—the physical incarnation of the cosmic divinity—through the animation and apotheosis of the living pharaoh.<sup>581</sup>

'Each cycle', remarks Schwaller 'is brought to consciousness by a major experience, *une expérience décisive*, a crucial experiment (*experimentum crucis*) [...] Each cycle begins with a birth, with a new life that sometimes eclipses the others'.<sup>582</sup> In 1936, in the tomb of Ramses IX, René Schwaller de Lubicz beheld an Osirian mural depicting the figure of *Ka-Mut-Tef* ('the bull of his mother'), in which the pharaoh, shown as the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle, was simultaneously seen to embody both the generative and the gestative power of the cosmos (Illustration 18). This theme lay at the very heart of Schwaller's alchemical metaphysics and from that moment, he knew he had found the true *symbolique* of his magnum opus: *Le Temple*

578 *Temple*, II, 329: 'le but du Temple est d'élever l'être vers l'Être qui anime tout' (modified after LAWLOR, 954)

579 Schwaller's alchemy, it should be remembered, was a science of the *divine animation of matter*, situated within a process of continuous evolution from mineral to man.

580 See Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère des cathédrales* (Paris: Jean Schemit, 1926); the provenance of this text in Schwaller's research originally came to light in the memoir of André VandenBroek, *Al-Kemi*, and has subsequently been confirmed by documentary evidence provided in DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé*, passim.

581 On pharaonic apotheosis, Luxor and the Opet Festival, see Appendix 2. For references, see especially Lanny BELL, 'Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka', *JNES* 44, no. 4 (1985): 251-294; BELL, 'The New Kingdom "Divine" Temple: The Example of Luxor', in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. SHAFER and Dieter ARNOLD (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 127-184.

582 *Al-Kemi*, 98.

*de l'homme* (The Temple of Man, 1957), a work that would gestate over twelve years of on-site measurement, decipherment and study of the temple of Amenemopet at Luxor, Upper Egypt, confirming for Schwaller that the pharaonic lineage was indeed the font of the hermetic, Pythagorean and alchemical tradition of which he was already a seasoned (and practising) adept. Overall, Schwaller emphasised how a profound anthropocosmic philosophy was encoded in every physical aspect of the construction of the Egyptian divine temple, and, more than this, that a profoundly intuitive, a-rational intelligence, superior to our own divisive rationalism, lay at the heart of Egyptian civilisation.



ILLUSTRATION 18: KA-MUT-TEF, TOMB OF RAMSES IX

*Temple as Anthropocosmos*

Schwaller's alchemical reading of the French cathedrals—long understood as architectonic images of Christ—hermetically disposed him to approach the New



Kingdom Egyptian temple as a codification of the incarnation of god as man—the mystery of the *anthropocosmos*.<sup>583</sup> Although the conservative, mysteriophobic culture of academic Egyptology would scarcely care to admit it, the blatantly esoteric work of Schwaller grasped the precise purpose of the temple at Luxor. As locus of the *birth* of Amun, Luxor definitively establishes the meaning of apotheosis as the *incarnation* of divinity. The name of the temple itself—*ipet-rst*—attests to this by denoting the goddess *ipt* (Opet), the hippopotamus-formed divinity who presides over birth and suckling, and whose role at Luxor is as protectress over the incarnation of Amun.<sup>584</sup> In many respects, Schwaller's hermetic reading of Christian cathedrals came full circle in Luxor, not only because Egyptian theocracy was grounded in the incarnation of divinity in the figure of the pharaoh or king (thus preceding and prefiguring the Christian conception of *sarkōsis*), but also because the Hermetic-Pythagorean tradition itself, as scholars from Erik Iversen to Peter Kingsley have shown, is in fact deeply rooted in the cosmogonies and theologies of the Egyptian temples themselves (the complex at Karnak and Luxor being the largest and most significant epicentre).<sup>585</sup>

By approaching the New Kingdom divine temple from the purview of his alchemical readings of the Gothic cathedrals, Schwaller was effectively returning to the source of an architectural lineage. However, he was seeking more than a mere architectural prototype, and, as a consequence, he would discover that the ideological content of the hermetic tradition flowed through the same mineral veins that composed the temple architecture; thus, only by turning to the register of architectonic symbolique could this ancient, hermetic lifeblood be tapped.

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583 To the extent that the temple at Luxor provided the model of the Greek church, which consequently formed the basis of the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages, Schwaller's approach is in fact highly justified.

584 Depending on orthographic convention, *ipt* may be rendered *ipt*, *jpt*, Opet, Apet or Ipet. The name of the temple itself—*ipet-rst*—is actually polyvalent: *ipt* can mean (i) 'the goddess Opet'; (ii) 'the lady of the harem' (indicating Amun's consort and hence the spiritual conception of the pharaoh); or (iii) the adytum or inner sanctum. i.e. the covered temple where the spiritual conception and birth referred to above takes place. Cf. Dimitri MEEKS, 'Ipet', *LÄ* III, 173: 'C'est au temple de \*Louxor qu'elle se confond avec son homonyme Ipet, dame du harem (*jpt*) d'Amon'; Paul BARGUET, 'Luxor', *LÄ* III, 1103: 'la seconde partie, très nettement séparée de la première, constituait un arrière temple plus intime, où résidait dans son naos la statue vivant du dieu, et justifiait ainsi le nom *Jpt-rst* "l'adytum du sud" donné au temple de Louxor'.

585 Erik IVERSEN, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1984); Garth FOWDEN, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Peter KINGSLEY, 'Poimandres: The Etymology of the Name and the Origins of the Hermetica', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 1-24; 'From Pythagoras to the Turba Philosophorum: Egypt and Pythagorean Tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994): 1-13; *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); *Reality* (Inverness, Calif.: Golden Sufi Center, 2003).

Against the fine grain of conventional Egyptology, Schwaller provided an elaborate symbolic reading of the temple of Amenemopet. He maintained that the foundational teaching underpinning every symbolic detail of the temple, governing and shaping the entire structure of the temple at every level, from its foundation and its axes to its material substances and its form, was 'the doctrine of the anthropocosmos'. In no uncertain terms, Schwaller calls the temple at Luxor 'the temple of man'. This is not merely because the structure of the temple is able to be correlated with the biometrics of the royal *corpus*—the image of the pharaoh (figure 14)—but because the Egyptian divine temple itself, like the pharaoh, is *the structure which supports the incarnation of god*. The temple of man *corporifies* the divine functions or principles (*neters*), both as a physical edifice created according to divine proportions of gnomonic growth, and literally through the *embodiment* of the divine in the human. For Schwaller, human physiology is thus a physical product of metaphysical principles; reciprocally, the organs of human perception, from the physical to the subtle, are at the same time the instruments of divine self-perception.

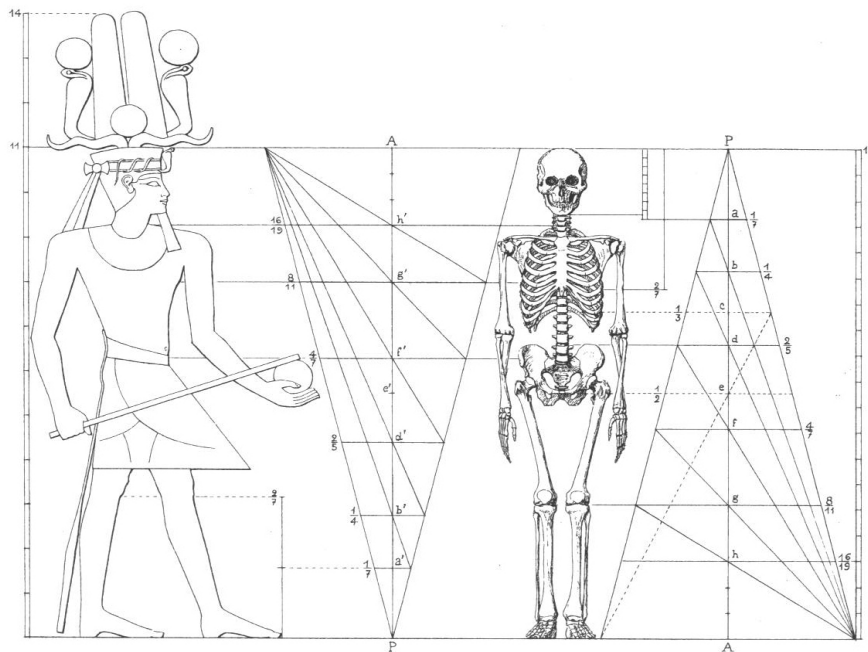


ILLUSTRATION 19: HARMONIC DECOMPOSITION OF ROYAL AND HUMAN BIOMETRICS

The proportions of the harmonic series (right) mark the location of the body's vital centres; inverted they form the proportions of the royal canon (left): 'the two harmonic decompositions having 1:1 and 1:3 for their origins, and their inversions, furnish all the proportional sizes relative to the human being and serve as the foundation for the establishment of the pharaonic canon, at the same time they give evidence for the different numbers used by the ancients'.<sup>586</sup>

<sup>586</sup> *Temple*, I, 496, 502 (Lawlor, 331, 334).

*The Milieu at Luxor*

Schwaller's associates during this period became known as the *Groupe de Louxor* (not to be confused with the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor). Among others, the *Groupe de Louxor* was comprised of the Egyptologist Alexandre Varille (1909–1951), the architect Clément Robichon, and Alexandre Stoppeläre, the official guardian of the Valley of the Kings.<sup>587</sup> The *Groupe de Louxor* supported and participated with Schwaller in the generally unknown but virulent polemic that transpired during this period between the symbolists (headed by Schwaller and his academic spokesperson, Varille) and the hostile climate of conservative Egyptology (represented in particular by Étienne Drioton).

The presence of de Lubicz had a significant impact on prominent artists and literary figures, many of whom passed through Egypt in the 1940s and perceived the significance of the symbolist method. In 1949, the avant-garde dramatist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (1898–1963) entered the milieu at Luxor and became sympathetic to the Lubiczs' symbolist cause.<sup>588</sup> Other figures who encountered Schwaller and his work in this period include André Rousseaux, Raoul Jahan, Pierre Rambach, and François Hébert-Stevens, while later, upon their return to France, André Breton would invite Schwaller to present at the Congrès de Symbolistes (1956–1959). Among other things, Schwaller impressed all who entered his circle with his tireless work ethic, a sense of which is gained from an account left by Raoul Jahan:

We are then introduced into a large, cool study. Behind a table, [there was] a man bearing an astonishing resemblance to Einstein. For three hours he spoke, answered our questions and smoked three packets of Gold Flake without interrupting himself.<sup>589</sup>

Works produced during this period include: *Le Temple dans L'homme* (The Temple in Man, 1949, a "preface" to the three volume magnum opus of 1957), and *Du Symbol et de la symbolique* (On Symbol and Symbolique), an attempt at deepening the meaning of symbolism through the concept of *symbolique*, described by Schwaller elsewhere as a 'mathematology of phenomena'.<sup>590</sup>

587 Dates for C. Robinchon and A. Stoppeläre presently unknown.

588 JEAN COCTEAU, *Maalesb: journal d'une tournée de théâtre* (Paris: Galimard, 1949); *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 156-62.

589 Raoul JAHAN, *Du Nil au Gange nous entrons en Égypte*, 1955: 'Nous sommes introduits alors dans un grand bureau frais. Derrière une table, un homme qui ressemble étonnamment à Einstein va, durant trois heures, parler, répondre à nos questions et fumer trois paquets de Gold Flake sans s'interrompre'.

590 SCHWALLER, 'La Symbolique: Son caractère hiératique (Aperçu de son but et de sa méthode)', *Notes et propos inédits II*, 9; for further texts and contexts, see DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, *La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913–1956* (Milan:

*The War between Egyptologists and Symbolists*

Although possessing no formal academic qualifications in Egyptology, de Lubicz and his entourage entered the French Egyptological scene with a remarkable sense of gravitas. Together with his circle of personal and academic collaborators, de Lubicz began making an extensive study of the temple complex at Karnak and Luxor according to methods that synthesised the gathering of hard evidence according to strict empirical standards with the drive to comprehend Egyptian culture according to its own *mentalité*. According to de Lubicz, the epistemological underpinnings of classical Egyptology were plagued by positivist, materialist-historical assumptions that explicitly devalued the Egyptian mentality as primitive (in the pejorative sense familiar to anthropologists). For Schwaller, who valued the Egyptian mentality above and beyond that of his modern contemporaries, the *clavis hermeneutica* to pharaonic culture resided in the recovery of its own epistemology and ontology (these being also the roots of hermetic philosophy). Applying this method, Schwaller and his collaborators made their own extensive documentation of the temple's architecture and symbolism, to include complete measurements, photographic documentation (including aerial photography), impeccably executed line drawings and elaborate, harmonic analyses of the temple's geometric, architectonic and symbolic structures. This exhaustive visual documentation, consisting of over 400 high quality plates, was used for decades as the standard point of academic reference right up until the Epigraphic Survey's edition of Luxor temple was published in 1994 (significantly, this now-standard reference for the temple and its inscriptions includes a key relating its new representations to de Lubicz's plates).<sup>591</sup>

Schwaller's presence in Egypt did not go unnoticed by academic Egyptology. By 1949, with the publication of *Le Temple dans l'homme* (Schwaller's first Egyptological work), a virulent polemic between de Lubicz's "symbolist" hermeneutic and the historical conservatism of classical Egyptology erupted in French academic and literary circles.<sup>592</sup> This was catalysed in 1950 and 1951 when André Rousseaux, a French literary critic who had been following the polemic, published a thorough exposé of the affair in an eminent literary gazette, detailing the rigid bias that was being perpetrated against the so-called symbolists by the classical Egyptologists.<sup>593</sup>

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Arché, 2006).

591 THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple, Volume 1: The Festival Procession of Opet in the Colonnade Hall* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1994); *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple, Volume 2: The Facade, Portals, Upper Register Scenes, Columns, Marginalia, and Statuary in the Colonnade Hall* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1998).

592 See André ROUSSEAU, 'A Louksor, la guerre froide est déclarée entre symbolistes et historiens', *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 8 avril (1950). Full translation in appendix 1.

593 André ROUSSEAU, 'La querelle des Egyptologues', *Le Mercure de France*, July 1951. *Le Mercure de France* was one of the country's most eminent literary gazettes with significant

Rousseaux's fascinating account sets the scene with dramatic effect. In Cairo, he learns that the state of affairs in archaeology is stirred by 'mysterious movements'.<sup>594</sup> He is informed of a "mage" who dwells in upper Egypt, who 'officiates through the night in the ruins of Luxor, his eye fixed on the stars, with sacred numbers on his lips'.<sup>595</sup> On guard, yet filled with curiosity, Rousseaux departs by train to see matters for himself:

Let us penetrate right to the centre of the mystery: I have seen the mage. He is not a fool, but on the contrary a man of high intellectual calibre. His personality is linked to one of the geniuses of contemporary poetry: the baron Schwaller de Lubicz, discoverer of the secrets of Luxor, had been the intimate friend of the poet O. -V. de Lubicz-Milosz. He carries the right of knighthood that Milosz gave to him when he died.<sup>596</sup> He has inherited his title, and if we had time, we could converse at length, another night, about the great mystic poet.

But no, the word "mystical" is to be avoided here. It would be a misinterpretation, and would relinquish victory to the opposite camp. One would see anew the epithets "dreamer" and "fantasist". Now, what I have observed at the leisure of Monsieur and Madame de Lubicz are most serious works: notes of plans, indexed files, a wealth of quotes, covering pages established with meticulous care.

The pavilion where the Lubicz's reside is not the villa of Mysteries, but a hive of activity.<sup>597</sup>

Rousseaux then details the tensions between the two Egyptological camps, and it is important to realise here that Rousseaux met both the classical and symbolist Egyptologists first hand. He is careful to present both perspectives fairly. Rather than taking sides, his article ends with a call for both camps to present their respective evidence on site at Luxor before an international community of interdisciplinary scholars (the article has been translated in full in appendix 1). Rousseaux focuses upon the archaeological issue of the reconstruction of monuments in order to characterise the stark differences between the two approaches. On the side of the classical

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connections to symbolist authors. Initially running throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, *Le Mercure de France* was revived in 1890 by Alfred Vallette in connection with a circle of Parisian symbolist authors who met regularly at the café *La Mère Clarisse*. Vallette's symbolist circle included Jean Moréas (who first employed the term *symboliste* to distinguish the literary movement from the decadent movement), as well as Émile Raynaud, Pierre Arène, Remy de Gourmont, Albert Samain, Alfred Jarry and Charles Cros.

594 ROUSSEAU, 'la guerre froide'; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 163.

595 ROUSSEAU, 'la guerre froide'; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 163.

596 As has been seen, Milosz gave Schwaller the right to bear the name de Lubicz in 1919. This is in fact some twenty years before Milosz died.

597 ROUSSEAU, 'la guerre froide'; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 163.

Egyptologists is the archaeologist and architect Henri Chevrier, the successor to Pierre Lacau (the French excavator of the tomb of Tutankhamun), who specialises in excavating and reconstructing the temples, and in uncovering the remains of ruined monuments in order that their inscriptions may be deciphered. Chevrier famously discovered and restored the white chapel of Sesostri I, a temple that had been destroyed by Amenophis III. ‘The fragments were scattered within the third pylon of Karnak’, comments Rousseaux; ‘The architect had found them while excavating the pylon, since straightened and assembled. It is now a ravishing little white temple, thoroughly decorated with bas-reliefs and hieroglyphs’. The contention between historians and symbolists arises precisely here. The historians tended to believe that when a pharaoh destroys a temple and builds a new one upon it (or scratches out the names of his or her predecessors to insert their own), he or she is merely doing so in order to establish political domination and exalt their ego. The symbolists, however, saw matters quite differently: ‘Is it mere chance that one rediscovers the pieces of a former temple under the bases of a more recent temple?’, asks Rousseaux.

—Not at all. The architectural and decorative elements hidden in the foundations have their definite place. They constitute a sort of secret library that the sages place under a temple. *Bien plus*. They are the germ, buried in the earth of the new temple that will grow from its principles, or the new figures of the living temple, but in correspondence with the former, will continue to accomplish the phases of a millennial evolution. [...] I must say that the sculpted blocks, the graven stones, seem to testify in favour of the symbolist revelation. On the obelisks and on the walls, the over-written inscriptions no longer speak of dynastic intrigues, but show some troubling concordances with their superimposed symbols. The whole temple appears as an immense inscription of the abstract in the concrete. Architecture here is the expression of philosophy.

Rousseaux underscores the point by drawing attention to the fact that the demolished temples are buried beneath the foundation stones (*pierres de fondations*) and under the cornerstone (*pierre d’angle*) of the new temple, and that the inability to recognise the symbolic significance of this fact constitutes the biggest stumbling block (*pierre d’achoppement*, literally ‘obstacle stones’) for the Egyptologists:

By themselves these stones are, among other things, stumbling blocks (*pierres d’achoppement*). [...] The most striking are without doubt the foundation stones (*pierres de fondations*). How else can one explain the sculpted blocks that have been interred at selected places, notably under the cornerstone (*pierre d’angle*), beneath the new materials, if they are not to play the role of inspiration that makes the temple live before our eyes? The foundation stones seem to proclaim the mysterious philosophical order that presides over the evolution of these buildings in their march through the centuries.

These stones are, in effect, those that the historians blithely disinter in order to place the inscriptions that they want to decipher in the light of day. To this, the symbolists reply that each stone of the temple has a value, a signification, not only in and of itself, but by the place that it occupies, and by the relations that it has with the rest of the monument. To raise them without first having noted with care all these relationships is, in their eyes, akin to a palaeographer who cuts a phrase from a manuscript with scissors. [...] Without a doubt, this is why the dispute has become more acute over time. We have made a racket this winter about a book by Monsieur de Lubicz, *Le Temple dans l'Homme*, which has the failing, in my opinion, of treating in a fashion too casual (*decousue*) and peremptory, themes that would require magisterial developments.<sup>598</sup>

Schwaller's chief spokesperson in this debate was a young Egyptologist by the name of Alexandre Varille (Illustration 20), who, at risk of his own academic career, courageously up-took the defence of Schwaller's methods in the academic arena. The Egyptologist, Étienne Drioton, in response to a review by Pierre Missac, would describe the symbolists theories as 'woolly [and] indemonstrable' (*Theories fumeuses et indémonstrables*) 'on the margins of Egyptology' (*en marge de l'égyptologie*).<sup>599</sup>

Despite these polemics, Schwaller's work would be reviewed and published in the most prestigious of Egyptological journals.<sup>600</sup> Aware (and weary) of the interpretations of 'pyramidomaniacs' surrounding the many unanswered questions in the study of Egyptian temples and their symbolism, Bernard Bothmer, in his review of *Le Temple dans l'homme* in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (April, 1952), nevertheless recommends de Lubicz's work as worthy of study: 'the new approach to the problem of symbolism as presented here [...] well deserves to be noticed and appreciated':

The author and his collaborators, who include an Egyptologist, an architect, and an outstanding artist, have spent the better part of a decade on a detailed examination of one of the best preserved and least rebuilt temples of the Eighteenth Dynasty, which was erected approximately between 1400 and 1250 B.C. *Le Temple dans l'homme* offers some of the findings of this undertaking. Although it is obviously a condensed presentation, it contains much new archaeological material and is illustrated with excellent drawings and photographs which lend strong support to the author's views.<sup>601</sup>

598 ROUSSEAUX, 'la guerre froide'; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 166.

599 *Critique* (June 1949) (in response to an article by Monsieur Pierre Missac, signalling the discoveries of Alexandre Varille); cited in Rousseaux, 'la guerre froide'; *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 166.

600 Bernard V. BOTHMER, (review), '*Le Temple dans l'homme* by R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz', *JNES* II, 2 (1952): 151-2; Later: Arpag MEKHITARIAN 'A propos du « Temple de l'homme »', *Cahiers du Sud* 50, no. 358 (Décembre 1960-Janvier 1961): 327-47.

601 BOTHMER, *JNES* II, 2 (1952): 151.



ILLUSTRATION 20: ALEXANDRE VARILLE

After summarising de Lubicz's main arguments and findings—including due note not only of de Lubicz's discovery of the three axes of the temple and their convergence at the threshold of Room VI, but also of its plausibility in explaining the irregularity of the angles of the inner temple—Bothmer concludes that:

Egyptian art and architecture are largely symbolic in nature, and in focusing on this much neglected aspect, *Le Temple dans l'homme* makes an important contribution regardless of the extent to which the reader may disagree with some of the author's interpretations. Because we have no written sources in which the Egyptians themselves explained the symbolism of the structure of their temples, this book cannot be compared with Stella Kramrisch's *The Hindu Temple*, with Joseph Sauer's *Symbolik des Kirchengebäudes*, or with René Gilles' *Le Symbolisme dans l'art religieux*. Nevertheless, it should be a challenge to all students of Egyptian architecture, and it is hoped that ensuing discussions of principles will be conducted on a higher plane than that of the literary polemics now raging in Egypt and France as a result of the author's views.<sup>602</sup>

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602 BOTHMER, 152.



In precisely this spirit of conducting dialogue on a ‘higher plane than literary polemics’, Egyptologist Arpag Mekhitarian (1911–2004) also made an open invitation to his Egyptological peers to attend a personal demonstration of the evidence on site at Luxor. Surprisingly, leading Egyptologists such as Drioton, who were actively condemning the symbolists’ views, ignored both Rousseaux and Mekhitarian’s diplomatic challenges and blatantly encouraged the imposition of a ‘front of silence’ against the symbolists. Varille diligently continued to counter all the unsubstantiated, disparaging claims with documented evidence. In October 1951, however, Varille, the chief spokesperson in the academic aspect of the debate, was killed in a car accident.<sup>603</sup> Schwaller and his entourage were devastated. In terms of the ideological war, it must be seen as this terrible event, rather than the Drioton’s ‘front of silence’, that effectively took the wind out of the symbolist’s sails.

*La Symbolique and l’Intelligence du Coeur*

The mind creates the abyss, the heart crosses it.<sup>604</sup>

In 1990, a large collection of letters from Schwaller to an unknown recipient was published from the private archive of the *Ordre de la Rose-Croix* A.M.O.R.C. (Chateau d’Ormonville, Le Neubourg, France). The letters, dating from the 1940s, appeared in facsimile as *Lettres à un disciple de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* (Letters to a Disciple of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz). The dates of the letters fall between 1944 and 1946, and so derive from the second half of Schwaller’s Luxor period. Many of the themes later expounded formally in his mature work appear here—e.g. *l’intelligence du coeur*, the magic of analogues, the significance of volume, and perhaps most importantly, the concept of *la symbolique*. This collection of letters therefore attests to the earliest extant expression of Schwaller’s work on the pharaonic *symbolique*. Some valuable details are also discerned on the nature of alchemy and here one witnesses the beginnings of Schwaller’s integration of Egyptian symbolic language into his hermetic parlance in order to express the underlying hieratic science that both were seen to articulate. The term ‘intelligence of the heart’ (*l’intelligence du coeur*) appears in Schwaller’s correspondence as early as May, 1946.<sup>605</sup> Here, it emerges as an expression of the Neoplatonic and Böhman epistemology of sympathies (*sympatheia*) and signatures (*signatura*), or, in Schwaller’s idiom, the ‘magic of analogues’:

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603 Arpag MEKHITARIAN, ‘Alexandre Varille’ (Necrologie), *Chronique d’Égypte* 27, 1952, 143-144; *L’Œuvre au rouge*, 146-7.

604 Sri NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ, *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta*, ed. Maurice Frydman (Bombay: Chetana Publishing, 1973).

605 *Lettres à un disciple*, 28/29.

The Magic of Analogues is that of parentage or lineage. A cause radiates and pours rays like a thread of water across different colours. It colours itself in different ways but it is the same water; the same ray. For example, one of the apparent characteristics of water will be the wave. All that undulates recalls water, even the vein in the stone. We always place [everything] in relation.<sup>606</sup>

This is, in my opinion, the true sense of the real Magic of Egypt, that is to say, not an imaginary and suggestive evocation, which is therefore hypnotic and thus always illusory, but the call to the real Cause, the origin of the natural form, *by means of this same form*.<sup>607</sup>

Schwaller's overarching concern in his study of Egyptian *symbolique* was to convey the profound difference between the modern rational mentality and the kind of epistemology and ontology that was able to apprehend 'the origin of the natural form by means of this same form'. Schwaller called this 'functional knowledge' or 'functional consciousness', and by this he indicated an ability to perceive the functional causes—i.e. the form-imposing *neteru*—which acted upon the unformed *prima materia* (ἄπειρον, *apeiron*) to produce the concrete phenomena (πειρασ, *peiras*) that ordinary science takes as its point of departure.

This 'functional consciousness' proceeded not through the rational intellect, but through what Schwaller called *l'intelligence du cœur*. Like all cardiognostic epistemologies worth their salt, this is not to be confused with mere romantic feeling or psychological affect; rather, it is equivalent to what Henry Corbin calls the *mundus imaginalis*. More precisely, it concerns the organ which corresponds to the perception of the ontological reality that mediates the purely intelligible and the purely sensory.

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606 *Lettres à un disciple*, 28/29: 'La Magie des Analogues est celle des parentés ou lignés. Une cause rayonne et verse les rayons comme un filet d'eau à travers diverses couleurs. Il se colore diversement mais c'est la même eau; le même rayon. Exemple: un des caractères apparents de l'eau sera l'onde. Tout ce qui est ondulé rappelle l'eau, même la veine dans la pierre. Nous mettons toujours en rapport'.

607 *Lettres à un disciple*, 94/95: 'Cela est, à mon avis, le sens vrai de la vraie Magie d'Égypte, c'est-à-dire non pas une évocation imaginaire et suggestive, donc hypnotique, donc toujours illusoire, mais l'appel à la Cause réelle, origine de la forme naturelle, *par cette forme même*'. See further discussion, *Lettres*, 90-102, where Schwaller distinguishes between the projected illusions and suggestions of imagination (as with Hindu magic, hypnotism, etc.), and the effect of the true Cause which, because it is incarnated in its effects, in natural things, is able to be called to effective manifestation precisely by means of its signatures'. (The "language" of magic is therefore the hieroglyphs, the sacred writings or signatures of the true Cause). Schwaller also makes mention of Schopenhauer and the world as 'Will and Imagination'; he discusses geometry and the derivation of point, line and plane from an a priori volume (contra the Euclidian progression: point-line-plane-volume); cf. the formal discussion of this as 'mysticism of space' in *Temple*, I, 106 ff; with the 'habitudes' of the cynocephale, lion, raven, jackal etc. as the analysis of the possibilities of the abstract cause. (*Lettres*, 102).

Not insignificantly, the Iranian sages who articulated the concept of the *alam al-mithal* (Corbin's *mundus imaginalis*) were philosophical heirs not only to the hieratic Neoplatonic, Neopythagorean and hermetic traditions, but also, through these channels, to the cosmological philosophy underpinning Egyptian temple cult. While the idea of an eternal golden chain linking modern adepts to ancient mysteries has always been central to the esoteric identity, it is important to recognise that the historical record does in fact bear out, at least in terms of philosophical continuity, a discernible thread of consistency among the more authentic expressions of this so-called hermetic "tradition".

Schwaller's entire project in Egypt was devoted to the recovery of the pharaonic *mentalité* that formed the original basis of this epistemological current. The distinction between two mentalities, two radically opposed types of consciousness, thus becomes the emphasis of his mature work. At the same time, it must be recognised that the distinction between what Schwaller would call unitive and divisive consciousness is clearly evident in his early material, notably in the works published at St. Moritz in 1926–1927, where the subject-object split, the abyss between "you" and "me", comes to exemplify the fragmented or 'granulated' nature of the mental ontology. Not insignificantly with regard to the simultaneously subjective and intersubjective nature of Schwaller's daimonic communion, *Aor* remarks to Schwaller:

between you and I there is a chasm and this chasm is the world, i.e. the entirety of nature—whether visible or not [...] This abyss only exists for your intelligence; but for the natural being, who is naïve, there is no dissolution of the continuity between its individuality and the world.<sup>608</sup>

These perspectives, coupled with Schwaller's background in medieval alchemy—an operative enterprise, not a mere theoretical past time—naturally predisposed him to the idea that the phenomenal forms of nature belong to metaphysical lineages through which one single spiritual cause produces different but similar effects by acting upon different material milieus. For this reason, Schwaller's epistemology, in which the entire natural cosmos played the role of a divine symbol, centred on the "reading" of this sacred writing (*medu neteru, hiero-glyphika*):

Do you like the rebus idea? Saying with pictures of things, not with words? Not with signs, you follow me, not with signs, that is important. The only usable sign is a signature. That is the miracle of the hieroglyphs: the great collection of signatures. Ah, the Pharaonic mind knows how to read in nature not only through this form, but through the abstraction, the mere signature. That's the level you

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608 *L'Appel du feu*, 1926, Première Nuit = 2002, 29: 'il y a entre toi et moi un gouffre, lequel est le monde, c'est-à-dire tout la nature, — visible ou non, — [...] Cet abîme n'existe que pour notre intelligence; pour l'être naturelle, naïf, il n'y a pas de solution de la continuité entre son individualité et le monde'.

have to feel. All you want to read are signatures. That doesn't mean the form is neglected.<sup>609</sup>

What transpires at Luxor is Schwaller's conviction that the hieroglyphic script, and the *symbolique* of pharaonic architecture as a whole, is founded precisely on such a consciousness of divine signatures. Schwaller sought to describe these via the concept of 'functional consciousness' in order to emphasise that these functions or signatures of nature cannot be read or perceived through cerebral consciousness, but only through cardiognosis. In short, for Schwaller, the intelligence of the heart was not only a mode of consciousness; it was a concrete mode of *perception*. It formed the epistemology by which the Book of Nature was able to be discerned, deciphered, and "read".

#### *Amenemopet at Luxor*

Schwaller regarded the temple at Luxor as the primordial prototype of the Gothic cathedral that his alchemical studies had already disposed him to view, like the Hindu temple, as 'knowledge bearing architecture'.<sup>610</sup> The temple as didactic edifice codifies, through the proportions of human biometrics, the birth and growth of *l'Homme Cosmique*—Cosmic Man or Anthropocosmos.<sup>611</sup> It was in this sense that Schwaller understood Christ, Purusha and Amun: as incarnations pointing to the final nature—the *ultima materia*—of the primordial cause, of which humanity is the penultimate phase. Only through the transition from human to Anthropocosmos could the primordial cause consciously return to itself.

Schwaller's doctrine of the Anthropocosmos affirms precisely this consciousness in which the primordial non-divisibility of the universal and the particular becomes vitally evident. The apotheosis of the pharaoh, for instance, is not seen as a deification of the merely human ruler, but as an incarnation of the anthropocosmic reality in human form; in other words, it is a human participation in the originary energies that generate the series of which humanity is currently the penultimate phase; a participation which vivifies and purifies human consciousness, enabling the unrestrained energy of divine consciousness to act through it.<sup>612</sup>

In attempting to decipher the geometric signatures of pharaonic *consciousness*, Schwaller sought above all the mathematical conceptions that guided the construction

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609 *Al-Kemi*, 58.

610 *Temple*, I, 356 (Axes). Schwaller distinctly compares the Gothic Cathedral to the temple at Luxor in *Le Temple dan l'homme* (1949) = *The Temple in Man*, 34-7 and further in *The Temple of Man*, I, 356-7 and II, 945-6 with fig. 283.

611 Hence the title of his *chef d'œuvre*, *Le Temple de l'homme* (The Temple of Man).

612 This penultimate nature of humanity is to some extent comparable to Nietzsche's (often misrepresented) conception of *Mensch* vis à vis *Übermensch*. Cf., however, Schwaller's remarks contra Nietzsche in *Verbe Nature* §20.

of the temple, and by so doing, sought to return to the most ancient and authentic origins of the hieratic Pythagorean and Neoplatonic traditions—i.e., the arithmosophical perception that divinity acts through the phenomenal cosmos by means of *number*, a point that would prove central to the esoteric world-view. Because this expression finds itself especially pronounced in Schwaller’s œuvre—from his very first work, *Les Nombres*, to his magnum opus *Le Temple de l’homme* (a geometric *tour de force*)—it will be useful to treat the question of the esoteric nature of number in more detail.

### Number and *Neter*

If we wish to study mathematics in a Pythagorean manner, we ought to pursue zealously its divinely-enthused (*entheon*), anagogic, cathartic and initiatory process.<sup>613</sup>

—Iamblichus

What does the Pythagorean tradition really mean when it maintains that divinity is number? According to the traditional doxographies, Pythagoras received his instruction in ‘astronomy and geometry’ and also his initiation into ‘all the mystic rites of the gods’ directly from the priests of the Egyptian temples, whom he studied with for twenty-two years; afterwards he perfected this knowledge in Babylon under the *magoi*, where he ‘was educated thoroughly in the solemn rites, learned perfect worship of the gods with them, and reached the highest point in knowledge of numbers, justice and other mathematical disciplines’.<sup>614</sup> In both cases, mathematics is mentioned in the same breath as the divine rites and they are clearly seen to go hand in hand. The same sense of mathematics as attendant to the deepest metaphysical mysteries is evident when one compares the famous inscription said to have been placed above the entrance to the Platonic academy outside Athens: ‘let no one ignorant of geometry enter’.<sup>615</sup>

While these traditions are well-known, they are just as often dismissed; yet the points are worth emphasising all the more strongly precisely because of the myopic grounds on which they are so carelessly rejected. It is symptomatic of the problem that

613 IAMBlichus, *DCMS* 69, 26-9; SHAW, 195 with n 14.

614 *De Vita Pythagorica* 13, 8-II, 14-16 (chap. 19); text: L. DEUBNER, ed., *De Vita Pythagorica Liber* (1937); additions and corrections: U. KLEIN (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1975); trans. John DILLON and Jackson HERSHBELL, *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1991); modified trans. SHAW, 196.

615 Μῆδεις ἀγεωμετρητὸς εἰσιτω μου τὸν στεγὲν (*mèdeis ageōmetrētos eisitō mou tēn stegēn*). The admonition is distinctly Pythagorean; note that Plato, too, is said to have learned geometry in Egypt.

mathematics is so often regarded as synonymous with the post-Enlightenment attitude in which “reason” is typically seen as superseding “superstition” (i.e. religion, magic etc.). Due to this philosophically specious bias, modern attitudes to mathematics are in danger of becoming psychologically arrested in a class of Victorian rationalism, a place where science and religion can in no way meet, and where the abiding connection between mathematics and religious rites can only be conceived of as a thoroughgoing absurdity (such attitudes being, in fact, responsible for the tendency in most Classical scholarship to dismiss rather than give due weight to the Egyptian and Babylonian provenance of the Pythagorean and Platonic theology of number). The deeper reality of the matter, in which the modalities of arithmosophical and religious phenomenology form an *integrum*, becomes explicitly formulated as a synthesis of philosophy and ritual in the Hieratic Neoplatonism of Iamblichus (the author of the doxographic account quoted above), and it is here that one can begin to perceive not only the deeper significance of the theology of numbers, but further still, the profound gravity which sustains a *theurgy* of numbers.<sup>616</sup>

The first step to deepening this line of inquiry is to realise that the entire approach to number received in modern secular education is completely alien to that of the ancient initiatic perception. First and foremost, the Pythagorean orientation is not quantitative at all (quantity, unfortunately, having become virtually synonymous with number), but rather possesses a distinctly *qualitative* orientation; i.e., rather than mere quantities to be enumerated, number takes on philosophical, theological and cosmological value as a metaphysical activity underpinning and permeating all manifest phenomena (hence number exercises significance as a *symbol* in the deepest sense of the word). For Iamblichus, number and mathematics were regarded as pivotal to the highest noetic *synthemata* or ‘symbols’ (in theurgy, *synthemata* refer to the ritual vehicles by which the soul is able to be reunited with its divine origin). And here one starts to note the pervading sense that number is inextricably bound to the soul, a notion which emerges repeatedly throughout the Platonic tradition, from the *Timaeus* of Plato himself, in which the world-soul is created by the Demiurge according to mathematically determined proportions, to Hieratic Neoplatonists such as Proclus, who held that ‘the soul becomes at the same time seeing and seen’<sup>617</sup> through the performance of mathematics.

Thus, within the Iamblichean hierarchy of ritual praxis, in which the soul is raised to participation in divinity through ritual intermediaries suited to the status of its own nature, the higher (noetic) *synthemata* are situated above the lower (material) and intermediate (photic and acoustic) *synthemata*. Here it must be made clear that the noetic *synthemata* were exalted as highest not because they transcended and were hence removed from the lower *synthemata* but because they were the most *encompassing*; as a

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616 SHAW, 199-215.

617 PROCLUS, *In Euclidem* 141; J. TROUILLARD, ‘La Puissance secrète du nombre chez Proclus’, *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 1 (1983): 234; SHAW, 195 with n. 15.

ritual vehicle, number incorporates the hypercosmic (creative/causal) *and* the encosmic (created/caused) realms: the immaterial and the material orders of existence. The mathematical *synthemata* were the highest vehicles because they allowed the soul to experience its integral participation with divinity by giving it access to the *entire* divine and cosmic process, from the invisible right down to the material and back again.

The Egyptian origins of the Pythagorean arithmosophical sensibility, in which number is seen as divine activity, may be sensed very distinctly in the connection Schwaller noted between the hieroglyphs for ‘god’ and ‘cubit’. While scholars to this day are uncertain as to the object represented by the hieroglyph for *neter* (the ‘god’ hieroglyph, usually described as a kind of staff or flag bound with cloth),<sup>618</sup> Schwaller points to a clear visual identity between the *neter* hieroglyph and the hieroglyph for ‘cubit, measure’, the latter depicting a forearm in a manner visually evocative of the *neter* hieroglyph’s form (Illustration 21).



ILLUSTRATION 21: ‘NETER’ HIEROGLYPH.  
‘CUBIT’ HIEROGLYPH.

This insight should not be overlooked for it is directly pertinent to the Egyptian conception of divinity as number so central to the Pythagorean tradition. Comments Schwaller:

Let us further elucidate, by means of a geometrical image, the role of the Neter as head or Principle of a lineage. From the sides of any angle (less than 90 degrees) one can, at any point, drop a perpendicular line to form similar right triangles. The angle can be likened to the Neter. The proportion or rhythm that it imposes is invariable whereas the sizes or quantities that it defines are innumerable.<sup>619</sup>

To be sure, Schwaller’s remarkable intuitions on the *neter* hieroglyph must be recognised as more edifying than the academic impasse on this question. The significance of *neter* as angle, i.e. as something having the ability to impose an invariable, qualitative proportion or rhythm upon a quantitative datum, gains much

618 See HORNUNG, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*; BAIN, ‘On the Symbolic Context of the Principle Hieroglyph for “God”’, *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, VERHOEVEN and GRAEFE, eds. (Leuven: Department Orientalistik: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1991), 29-46.

619 SCHWALLER, *Le Temple dans l’homme* (Lawlor, 65).

from being understood in a Pythagorean sense such as one meets it in the hieratic arts (theurgy, alchemy, hermeticism) which, not insignificantly, all trace their origin to Egyptian *technē*. Here, the process through which the unlimited (*apeiron*) is limited or bound through the principle of divine measure (*metron; peiras*) is the same process that creates the lineages or generations in matter that act as mirrors or living conduits of their divine origins. It is the same process that creates the divine signatures (*sympatheia, signatura*) in nature. The concept of *neter* as head of a *lineage* (cf. Greek γενη) enables creation to be comprehended as a mean term between the unlimited *proton hyle* or *apeiron* and the binding divine measures (*peiras*). Creation is, in effect, a harmony struck between chaos and order, and for Schwaller, as for the Pythagorean tradition generally, it was the sacred or golden ratio  $\varphi$  (*phi*) that embodied this:

The Golden Number does not exist solely as a function of an ideal proportion, but serves as the basis for a philosophy that makes the connection between the metaphysical state and the physical state. It is in this connection that the Golden Number's "sacred" character consists. Furthermore, the human body develops in terms of this number.<sup>620</sup>

*Phi* as a vital principle is seen to govern growth and becoming (cf. Indo-European, \**bhu-*, 'to grow'). For Schwaller, natural becoming is the basis for Pharaonic architecture, which was never regarded as 'frozen music' (Schelling), but as 'living music' (Ghyka)—i.e. continually growing and gestating.<sup>621</sup> Like natural genesis, sacred architecture was seen to expand according to the laws of gnomonic growth (i.e. the same principle governing the development of spiral-forms in nature, from the shell of the chambered nautilus to the shape of a galaxy). Here the flow of proportion and symmetry followed a rhythm (from the root *rhei*, to flow) and thus emanation, growth and rhythm were seen to mark the flow of life from origin

All of this coheres, moreover, with the significance accorded by Schwaller to the knee as both angle and generative principle (cf. Greek *gonu*, 'knee, angle, genesis'). To this idea one can furnish Schwaller's later remarks on the joints of the knee and elbow, which, following the doctrine of signatures, are understood as an arithmologically determined *symbolique*:

Elbows and knees are represented as moments in which genesis, by dualising, has created a new orientation whose relationship is precisely what we conceive of mentally as an angle. In the forearm, the humerus divides into radius and ulna; the femur divides into the tibia and fibula, both requiring an articulation that becomes what in music and arithmetic we call the mean term between One and Two. In all of nature the function of growth is an affect of dividing in two,

620 SCHWALLER, *Le Temple dans l'homme* (Lawlor, 66).

621 Cf. Matila GHYKA, *The Geometry of Art and Life* (New York: Dover, 1977), 5-6.



provoking a narrowing in the original cell that will create the separation. The relationship between the first cell and the two new cells thus generated is that which we perceive as harmony and as the “geometric and harmonic mean terms”, that is, between the first unity and the multiple that results from it. This is the universal function that the human body reveals to us through the elbows and the knees, cause and nature, and this through the vital function between the parts of the body and the essential vital centres. We need to pay attention to what the Ancients urge us to observe in their figurative language.<sup>622</sup>

*‘Nothing Marks the Spirit more than Numbers’*

For Schwaller, the arithmosophical directive was decisive to the trajectory of entire civilisations. ‘You know, *rien ne marque tant l’esprit que les nombres*. It makes a fundamental difference in the entire scientific structure whether you conceive of two as one plus one or as the dividing of one into two’.<sup>623</sup> A more formal statement of the same was elaborated in *Le Temple* as follows:

The Whole process of creation thus occurs between the numbers One and Two; and duality is the fundamental character of the created Universe. This duality is the principle of sexuality. Duality implies comparison, and this succession of phenomena produces cerebral consciousness. Unity creates by “looking at itself”; this is the unfaithful angel of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, another image of Adam’s sin in Genesis. We can call this Unity God, or nonpolarised energy, in its aspect of indivisible Unity, and God the Creator, or polarised energy, in its aspect as *Unity-conscious-of-itself*.

This incarnation, which the temple of Luxor recounts, is translated in Room IX, called the “room of the theogamy”. This indeed concerns the “incarnation of the Logos,” or of a spiritual concept, which is verified by the fact that the seed is called the “odour of the god”, and this seed, or promise, is received, not by an ordinary woman, but by a woman designated as “Mut in the barque”, in order to bring into this world a perfect being, identified with Amenhotep, the mystical name for the king Nebmaâtre. The name Amenhotep means (as translated) “the peace of Amun”, which would be more correctly expressed by “equilibrium in Amun”, because the word *hotep* (*hṯp*) is the reverse of Ptah (*ṗth*), the fire fallen to earth. It is a question of the original Fire, reversed, or turning back toward the heavens within an Amunian milieu, which causes a burning fire to be vivifying.<sup>624</sup>

622 *Temple II*, 174; modified after Lawlor, 742-3.

623 *Al-Kemi*, 82 (English and French per original).

624 *Temple I*, 458 (Sanctuary V).

Elsewhere in the same work, he emphasises the significance of volume, i.e. the integral phenomenon, as the starting point in the comprehension of number:

In order to understand numbers, know that Unity is triple in nature like the Word of God. All number is founded on this trinity of point and on the triangle of surface; but the ternary volume is constructed on the four columns of the Elements or essential qualities of things. Only the Creator can proceed from a point toward volume, and from nothing, create All. But you, as a creature, must look for the point by proceeding from volume; because every perceptible thing is volume, is space or Spirit enclosed. The logic of your brain has no power over number. Number is the Word of God and governs intelligence. Leave the numerals that count things to the intelligence of the head; search for number in the intelligence of your heart.<sup>625</sup>

It cannot be emphasised enough that the entire basis of Schwaller's approach to Luxor is informed by this qualitative rather than merely quantitative approach to measure. That he was able to perceive this is just as significant, if not more significant, than the data that derive from this approach. It may be added that those who seek to depose Schwaller's edifice by quibbling over the figures are entirely missing the meta-argument that Schwaller was making in regards to a philosophy, indeed phenomenology, of measure.

#### Return to France: 1950–1957

If you have read *Le Temple* carefully, you will have gathered quite a bit of information on what we mean by salt.<sup>626</sup>

—René Schwaller de Lubicz

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625 *Temple*, II, 3 (Architectonique du Temple pharaonique; Lawlor, II, 515): 'Pour connaître les Nombres, sache que l'Unité est triple de sa nature comme le Verbe de Dieu. Tout le Nombre est fondé sur cette trinité du point et sur le triangle de surface; mais le volume ternaire est construit sur les quatre colonnes des éléments ou Qualités essentielles des choses. Seul peut aller du point vers le volume le Créateur qui, de rien, fait le Tout. Mais toi, créature, tu dois chercher le point en venant du volume; car tout chose perceptible est volume, et espace ou Esprit enclos. La logique de ton cerveau n'a aucun pouvoir sur le Nombre. Celui-ci est le Verbe de Dieu et commande à l'Intelligence. Laisse les chiffres qui dénombrent le choses à l'intelligence de la tête, et cherche le Nombre dans l'Intelligence de ton cœur'.

626 *Al-Kemi*, 154-5.

*Verbe Nature*

The de Lubiczs returned to France in the early 1950s, retiring to Mas de Coucagno at Plan-de-Grasse. In 1952, on the day of St. John the Baptist,<sup>627</sup> Schwaller penned an intriguing text entitled *Verbe Nature* (Nature Word), perhaps one of his most deeply revealing works. Given the day of its composition, the title clearly indicates the *logos* of John 1:1 (*en arche ên logos*; the standard French translation of *logos* being *Verbe*). The subtitle of the work is: *Quelques réponses de la Nature et de ses Sages aux questions de l'auteur, porte-parole des inconnus* (Some responses from Nature and her Sages to the questions of the author, spokesperson of the unknown). Bearing, like *L'Appel du Feu*, the distinct stamp of Schwaller's mysterious *daimon*, *Verbe Nature* remained unpublished during his life. The work appeared posthumously in Isha's biography, *Aor, sa vie, son œuvre* (Aor, his life, his work, 1963). Curiously, the premise of the text is the purported transcription of a series of answers given by 'Nature and her sages' to questions posed, but not recorded, by Schwaller. It is thus composed solely of responses.

Just as *L'Appel du feu* began with the admonition: 'Listen!' (*Écoute!*), so too does *Verbe Nature* admonish the mature de Lubicz—now 64 years old and entering his ninth cycle—to listen; but this time it is more specific: 'Try to be as mentally neutral as possible and then listen, listen with your ears to what your solar plexus, the detector of your emotions, says through your heart. Have you not noticed the Sphinx's large ears?'<sup>628</sup> Schwaller not only took heed; the answers to these questions were ruminated upon over the succeeding years at Plan-de-Grasse, where Schwaller distilled, completed and published his three-volume magnum opus, *Le Temple de l'homme* (1957).

It is in the following passage from *Verbe Nature* that one finds, for the first time, the mysterious locus of the fixed salt revealed:

Where is the fixed point to be found? In the plant kingdom it is in the ashes which always retain an alkaline salt. In the animal kingdom you will find it in the bones. In man it is particularly in the femur, whence the ancient customs of crossing the femurs under the skull, in order to show and conserve, through the death of the body, the elements of survival and rebirth. Modes of burial by fire, air, water or earth indicate the esotericism of religious doctrines, since burial indicates the cyclic path the fixed grain is presumed to follow before returning to animate a seed which will transmit its characteristics. This can only occur through a milieu and in an environment which is rhythmically similar to the fixed grain, that is to say, related to it either physically or by tendency. This fixed grain is of a

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627 June 24, corresponding roughly to the summer solstice.

628 *Verbe Nature* §57.

mineral nature. I do not say that it is metal, because metal has a fixed grain which is proper to itself and unique for all the metallic metals.<sup>629</sup>

Towards the end of *Le Temple*, where it is suggested that the temples at Medamud are successively founded according to the astronomical directive of equinoctial precession, Schwaller makes some unusually revealing remarks about the fixed alchemical salt:

This is the fixed point, the “salt of the earth” of the Gospels, this corporeal solidity that attracts, repulses, or retains the spirit, this foundation, this heart of the metal, this salt in the femur in man and in the left front hoof of the four-footed animal, this black bull, origin of the white bull, Mentu, represented as a human figure with the head of a falcon, crowned by the sun and surmounted by two feathers, issued from the original twins contained in Tum—it is this fixed point that must be understood in order to glimpse the profound meaning that the four superimposed sanctuaries of Medamud reveal to us.<sup>630</sup>

For Schwaller, the axes of temple are associated with the saline, nucleic principle. Schwaller discerned three axes in the temple at Luxor and he proposed that these govern not only the orientations (at first glance, apparently skewed) of the different rooms comprising the structure as a whole, but also their symbolic directives:

There is neither defect nor incoherence in the architecture of the temple, as the rooms at acute and obtuse angles or the colonnades that are not quite parallel would lead one to believe. And even if one does not want to believe the reasons given here for those who wish to understand them, the concrete fact nevertheless remains that in the temple of Luxor the walls obey a law proper to each of the three easily verifiable axes inscribed in the platform.<sup>631</sup>

The presence of three axes in the foundational structure of the temple enabled Schwaller to discern in them a functional connection to the three principles of Hermetic-Pythagorean trinitarian metaphysics:

This ternary—male or odd; female or even; and neuter or rectangular—is found throughout nature, which survives only through procreation by means of the complements (dualisation) that characterise it. But following the stages of life, these principles take on a different aspect and their *names* change. Those who are originally Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefertum become Amun, Mut, and Khonsu in the human genesis. That which would have been Ptah, a pure fire, will be with Amun

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629 *Verbe Nature* §32.

630 *Temple*, II, 769 (Lawlor).

631 *Temple*, II, 930 (Lawlor).

a water of lunar or solar fire; that which would have been with Sekhmet a Venusian water will be with Mut a lunar water, the one warm, the other cold. That which would have been with Nefertum a heavy and red earth will be with Khonsu a subtilized and black earth that will be characterised by the bringing together of all the sceptres, except the flowering *wadj*. It is necessary then to see in Amun a coagulating liquid substance like male sperm, and in Mut a substance that is also liquid, but susceptible of being coagulated by Amun.<sup>632</sup>

*The Temple of Man*

The human Form is the supreme evidence by means of which God testifies to his Creation. It is the book He has written with His hand. It is the Temple He has built with His wisdom. It is the compendium of the disclosed knowledge of the *Tabula secreta*. It is the visible witness, answering for all that is invisible. It is the guarantee.

—Ja'far al-Sadiq

The metaphysics of *Le Temple* recapitulate Schwaller's hermetic premises. The phenomenal, material cosmos arises as a passive *reaction* to a metaphysical activity, the polarisation of nonpolarised energy. Accordingly, life is 'everything that reacts'. This metaphysical activity is the unique causal unity *acting upon itself* to cause the reaction that is the genesis of the living cosmos. The specific activity that engenders the process of creation is defined in terms of a primordial scission of the causal Unity. True to the concept of *symbolique*, the examples that Schwaller uses to illustrate this principle are not merely metaphors, but manifestations of the ever-present cosmogonic scission, which is understood to be constantly occurring at all levels of the phenomenal world, from mitosis in cells (where unity generates multiplicity by *division*), to the mathematical function of *phi* (in which the *division* into two unequal parts creates a harmonious proportion which forms the gnomonic basis of organic growth).

For Schwaller, 'rational science considers only the materialised object, whereas vital or sacred science considers the activity which creates the materialised object'.<sup>633</sup> A wider, esoteric process undergirds what empirical science knows only in narrow, positivist terms as evolution. For Schwaller everything that exists, from mineral to human, is alive, is consciousness, and is evolving towards a *telos* innate in the nonpolarised energy that is the irrational, causal, and above all unitary foundation of the phenomenal cosmos.

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632 *Temple*, II, 939 (Lawlor).

633 *Temple* I, 78 (Lawlor).

This Anthropocosmic reality is grounded in primordial matter and thus connected to the Greek *hylē*—taken in its alchemical rather than Aristotelian sense. Equated with the Egyptian *Nun*, it is likened to the amniotic waters in which existence gestates. In an undated text published in *Notes et Propos inédits*, Schwaller discusses how the three kingdoms—mineral, vegetable and animal—conceived as “revolutions” of the primordial matter or *hylē*, emerge out of their primal substrate to culminate in the genesis of the spiritual kingdom, of which present humanity is the precursor, and *L’Homme Cosmique* the finality. The entire process is given an alchemical significance:

The organic human complex has for its goal complete realisation: mineral, vegetable, animal, plus the supra-evolution (*surévolution*) of the product that liberates Spirit anew to become conscious of itself. This constitutes the four rotations, that is to say, the four complete cycles which Spirit must undergo in order to attain the supreme supra-evolution accessible to human consciousness. The first (mineral) rotation gives mercury (water) which renders Spirit corporeal. The second (vegetable) rotation gives the seminal fire (sulphur). The third (animal) rotation gives the conjunction of fire and water and its gestation towards the definitive primitive fruit. The fourth (human) rotation takes up this primitive fruit as a definitive seed in order to supra-evolve it to the point where it returns to self-conscious Energy (Spirit). Thanks to this final state, the human can consciously supra-evolve by realising the new cycles to the point of immortality (the new non-corporification of Spirit).<sup>634</sup>

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634 SCHWALLER, ‘L’Anthropocosme’, in *Notes et Propos inédits* II, 65: ‘Le complexe organique humaine a pour but la réalisation complète: minéral, végétale, animal, plus la surévolution du produit qui libère à nouveau l’Esprit devenu conscient de lui-même. Ceci constitue les quatre rotations, c’est-à-dire les quatre cycles complets, que l’Esprit doit subir pour atteindre la suprême surévolution accessible à la conscience humaine. La première rotation (minérale) donne le [mercure (eau)] qui rend corporel l’Esprit. La deuxième rotation (végétale) donne le [feu] séminal [soufre]. La troisième rotation (animale) donne la conjonction du [feu] et du [eau] et sa gestation jusqu’au fruit définitif primitif. La quatrième rotation (humaine) reprend ce fruit primitif comme semence définitif afin de la surévoluer jusqu’au retour à l’Énergie (Esprit) conscient d’elle-même. Grâce à ce dernier stade, l’humaine peut surévoluer consciemment en réalisant de nouveaux cycles jusqu’à l’immortalité (le non-corporification nouvelle de l’Esprit)’. Terms in square brackets were originally written using the respective alchemical symbols; note, however, that where the present author translates ‘mercury’, the transcribed text published in *Notes et propos II* has the symbol for Venus; context suggests that mercury, whose symbol is morphologically similar to that of Venus, is intended.

## Final Years: 1957–1961

The completion of his magnum opus, *Le Temple de l'homme*—three volumes in *quarto*, totalling over 1600 pages, emphasising the profound anthropocosmic philosophy underpinning the architectonics of the temple of Amenemopet at Luxor—marked the end of Schwaller's penultimate cycle and the beginning of his last years. André Rousseaux soon arranged an opportunity to explore the phenomenon of *Le Temple*, securing Egyptologists, mathematicians and other authorities to reassess the case of de Lubicz's symbolist interpretation of Egyptology. The results appeared in 1960, a year before Schwaller's death, in a 50 page special in the literary and philosophical quarterly, *Cahiers du Sud*.<sup>635</sup> Herein, Mekhitarian notes how, in the years since the original exchange, no Egyptologist had taken up the challenge to examine actual evidence.

Perhaps in response to the *Cahier de Sud*'s special on the 'Symbolique du temple égyptien', an article by J. P. Mayer-Astruc appeared in the 1960 edition of the prestigious French Egyptological journal, *Chronique d'Égypte* (*Bulletin périodique de la fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth*) that would engage directly with de Lubicz's mathematical ideas. In his prefatory paragraph, Mayer-Astruc makes the following remarks on de Lubicz and his œuvre which exemplify the precarious balance between respect and inquietude that was invariably struck whenever de Lubicz's œuvre was weighed against classical Egyptology:

Occasionally, outside the framework of an indisputable scientific orthodoxy, one encounters personalities or works which inspire a genuine interest: Mr. SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ and his book *The Temple of Man—Apet of the South at Luxor* is one of these. Mr. Schwaller is well known by numerous Egyptologists. No one can ignore how, over the course of a twelve year sojourn in Egypt, he has consecrated all his efforts (along with those of many technical collaborators) in pursuit of a thesis which places itself, by the author's own admission, on the margins of classical Egyptology. We know how scrupulously and meticulously the reliefs of the monuments upon which this thesis is based have been executed and reproduced; Mr. Schwaller possesses an extensive culture, and his sensitivity to the Egyptian phenomenon (*chose*) is incontestable. However, certain important aspects of this work concern us, above all by reason of the almost lyric atmosphere with which they are impregnated; the others escape us completely. What we wish to do here is to examine some chapters that are among the more accessible in these 1600 pages in-*quarto*.<sup>636</sup>

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635 'Symbolique du temple Égyptienne', *Cahiers du Sud*, no. 368 (1960-1): 323-73.

636 J. P. MAYER-ASTRUC, 'A propos du papyrus mathématique Rhind', *Chronique d'Égypte* 35, 69-70 (1960): 120 [120-139]: 'Il se recontre parfois, en dehors du cadre d'une orthodoxie

With his reference to ‘l’atmosphère presque lyrique’, Mayer-Astruc intimates that the polemics publicised by the symbolists a decade earlier were still palpable to the academic mind—and yet here one finds a classical Egyptologist attempting not merely to review but provide a constructive critique of de Lubicz’s work.<sup>637</sup> This is a much more polite attack. Although focusing only upon one aspect of Schwaller’s *œuvre*, Mayer-Astruc attempts to show that the mathematics of the Rhind papyrus is a self-contained work requiring no recourse to anything external, much less implicit geometrical proofs; as such he attempts to refute what Schwaller sought to demonstrate: ‘nothing’ comments Mayer-Astruc, ‘is more contrary to the general spirit of the Rhind Papyrus than to introduce a geometric reasoning into an arithmetical demonstration’.<sup>638</sup> And yet, in the paragraph cited above, Mayer-Astruc openly admits that certain important aspects of de Lubicz’s work as a whole thoroughly eluded him. Given the great disparity between the interpretations of classical Egyptology and Schwaller’s deeper sophiological imperative, one begins to wonder how far the greater magnitude of Schwaller’s work can be adequately judged on points of detail without first gaining an integral comprehension of it. Schwaller’s entire methodology was, after all, based on the desire to understand *the particular as an expression of the universal*. As such, to judge the parts without relating them to the whole, while it may serve the more immediate intellectual needs of a given academic discipline, will always fail to grasp the true spirit of Schwaller’s philosophical quest. In many respects, the purpose of the present thesis lies in attempting to provide such an integral understanding. It is

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scientifique indiscutable, des personnalités ou des œuvres qui inspirent un réel intérêt: M. SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ et son livre *Le Temple de l’Homme—Apet du Sud à Louqsor* sont de ceux-là. M. Schwaller est bien connu de nombreux égyptologues; nul n’ignore qu’au cours de douze ans de séjour en Égypte il a consacré tous ses efforts (y compris ceux de plusieurs collaborateurs techniques) à la poursuite d’une thèse qui se place, de l’aveu même de son auteur, en marge de l’égyptologie classique. Nous savons avec quelle méticulosité scrupuleuse ont été exécutés et reproduits les relevés de monuments sur lesquels cette thèse s’appuie; M. Schwaller possède une culture étendue, sa sensibilité à la chose égyptienne est incontestable. Pourtant, certaines parties importantes de cette œuvre nous inquiètent, en raison surtout de l’atmosphère presque lyrique dont elles sont imprégnées; d’autres nous échappent complètement. Ce que nous avons voulu faire ici, c’est en examiner quelques chapitres parmi les plus accessibles dans ces quelque 1.600 pages in-quarto’.

637 MAYER-ASTRUC, 126: ‘j’ai la faiblesse de croire que cet exposé dépasse le cadre de l’examen du livre de M. Schwaller de Lubicz, et qu’il a une valeur propre en tant que critique constructive’. (I would like to believe that this exposé surpasses the framework of a review of M. Schwaller de Lubicz’s book, and that it has genuine value as a constructive critique.)

638 MAYER-ASTRUC, 136: ‘rien n’est plus contraire à l’esprit général du Papyrus Rhind que d’introduire un raisonnement géométrique dans une démonstration arithmétique’; 138: ‘J’espère avoir démontrée que l’arithmétique égyptienne, telle qu’elle ressort du papyrus Rhind, forme *un tout*, indépendant de toute connaissance extérieure; et que rien ne contraint (comme le pense M. Schwaller de Lubicz) à faire appel pour l’expliquer à la géométrie, ni à des notions ésotériques quelconques’.



clear that such an undertaking must proceed less from the single perspective of any of the numerous academic disciplines upon which Schwaller's work touches, and more from an engagement with the esoteric core of de Lubicz's *philosophy*.

Schwaller submitted a response to Mayer-Astruc's critique but died before it was published. It appeared in the 1962 edition of the same journal with the following editorial preface:

The manuscript of this article had still not been entrusted to the printers when we had learnt of the death of its author, which occurred at Grasse, 7 December, 1961. R. A. Schwaller, whom Milosz had received by adoption into the clan de Lubicz, had been brought to the study of pharaonic thought by his vocation as a philosopher. He remained in Egypt for sixteen years, thirteen of which were spent at Luxor where, summer and winter alike, with the assistance of the late Alexandre Varille, he scrutinised the Theban monuments. If his "symbolist" theories have not convinced Egyptologists, they have nevertheless recognised that, on certain points, de Lubicz may have opened the way to some fertile areas of research. [...] These pages are therefore a kind of homage to the memory of scholars who have consecrated themselves passionately to ancient Egypt.<sup>639</sup>

Schwaller's response is marked not only by its emphasis on explicating the centrality of geometrical proofs to the problems presented in the Rhind papyrus (regarded by Schwaller to be implicit and essential to Egyptian thinking), it also displays a remarkable sense of the broader intellectual continuities of Egyptian mathematics in Pythagorean and Platonic tradition, to include a deep sense for the interwovenness of this tradition with fundamentally theological concerns. As one reads de Lubicz's response, it is evident that his thinking is not concerned merely with the particulars (although he by no means neglects them); instead, Schwaller displays a logic that works "harmonically," always placing the part in relation to its deeper historical, philosophical and theological resonances.

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639 Comte J. PIRENNE, M. M. STRACMANS, and M. Ar. THÉODORIDÈS (eds, Section des institutions et du droit pharaoniques), *Chronique d'Égypte* 37, no. 73 (1962): 77: 'Le manuscrit de cet article n'avait pas encore été confié à l'imprimeur quand nous avons appris le décès de son auteur, survenu à Grasse le 7 décembre 1961. R. A. Schwaller, que Milosz avait accueilli par adoption dans le clan des Lubicz, avait été amené à l'étude de la pensée pharaonique par sa vocation de philosophe. Il avait séjourné seize années en Égypte, dont treize à Louxor même où, été comme hiver, avec l'aide du regretté Alexandre Varille, il scrutait les monuments thébains. Si ses théories dites « symbolistes » n'ont pas convaincu les égyptologues, ceux-ci reconnaissent néanmoins que, sur certains points, de Lubicz pourrait avoir ouvert la voie à des recherches fécondes. Les remarques sur la mathématique égyptienne, qu'on lira ci-dessous, ont été grandement inspirées par le précieux ouvrage d'O. Gillain dont Jean Capart avait pressenti l'importance en le publiant dans nos éditions. Ces pages sont donc comme un hommage à la mémoire de savants qui se sont consacrés passionnément à l'Égypte antique'.

*Left and Right*

Just after his *chef d'œuvre* appeared, a Luxembourgish-American by the name of André VandenBroeck encountered Schwaller's work and, over a period of eighteen months, became his last, and perhaps most important, disciple (Illustration 22).<sup>640</sup> The account that VandenBroeck left of this period (1959-60), published some twenty-seven years later (the centenary of Schwaller's birth), remains the single most important memoir of Schwaller to date (*Al-Kemi: Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz*, 1987). In the account of the penultimate years of Schwaller's life, VandenBroeck places a distinct emphasis on the fact that they instinctively recognised in each other a 'man of the left' versus a 'man of the right'. However, the intellectual relationship was a deeply engaging one, and largely went beyond these purported political leanings (Schwaller had long abandoned sociopolitical activity before he even entered Egypt, much less after his return to France). Nevertheless, VandenBroeck seemed to sour towards the end of the relationship as he claimed Schwaller's metaphysics could not transcend his bourgeois right-wing habitudes (which, according to VandenBroeck, included a certain degree of ingrained anti-Semitism that he also attributed to the French middle class *en masse*). At the same time, throughout the memoir, VandenBroeck seems to suffer an acute longing for recognition of his own personal ideas, and one senses that it was perhaps Schwaller's essential disinterest in VandenBroeck's mathematical theories, more than his purported anti-Semitism, that provided the sharpest barb.

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640 Joscelyn Godwin informs me that, according to those keeping his [VandenBroeck's] house in South Otselic, New York, VandenBroeck died in Toulon, France, in November 2008.

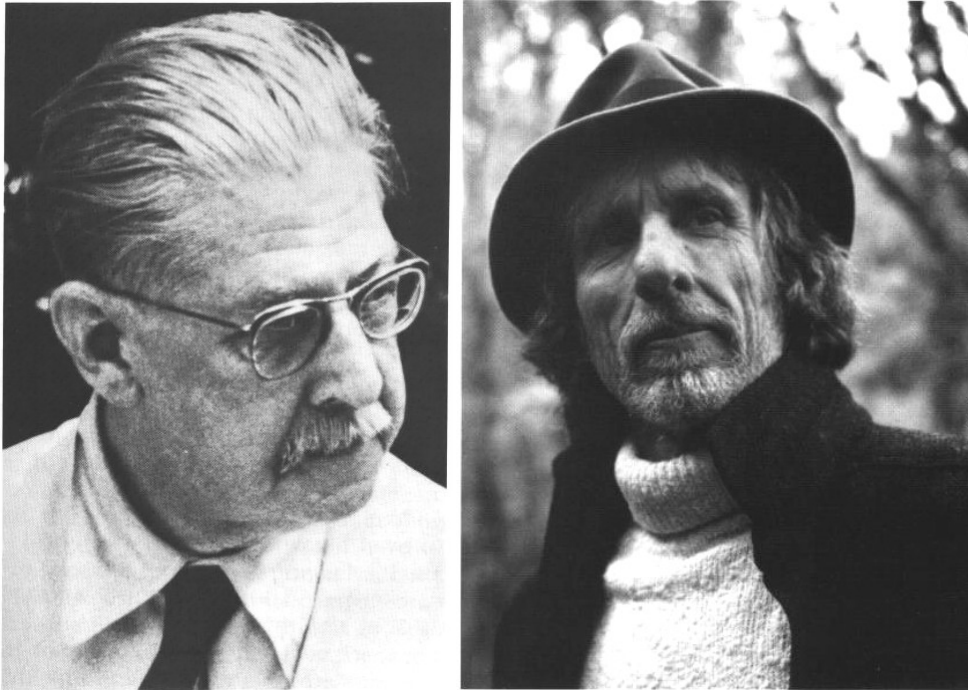


ILLUSTRATION 22: RENÉ SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ AND ANDRÉ VANDENBROECK

Despite and because of these issues, there are many insights to be gained from VandenBroeck's account, not the least of which pertains to the archetype of "master and disciple" (with all the difficulties that that entails). Ultimately, however, VandenBroeck did not take up the mantle that Schwaller subtly offered him, and he intimates how this was perhaps perceived as a failing by Schwaller. The two men, despite their philosophical affinities, were ultimately mismatched on a fundamental level, and this is illustrated in key occasions throughout the book where each in turn, having been inspired to break through their usual social moulds, is summarily defeated by the other's conservatism.

Given the broader purview of both Schwaller's and VandenBroeck's philosophical persuasions, it is nevertheless surprising that the unspoken tension between left and right was allowed to prevail. Schwaller was well aware of the complimentary nature of left and right as polar principles within the constitution of the whole (as his writings on giving and receiving, electromagnetism, and the poles of the earth attest). It is certainly uncharacteristic of his thought to fail to recognise that the social manifestation of these principles was just as complimentary. In any event, there is nothing in Schwaller's work to suggest his elitism was anything but spiritually motivated, and although it is not the intent of this thesis to gloss over Schwaller's more unpopular perspectives (such as his alchemically tempered views on gender and his

anti-Judaism), neither is it the place to weigh them against currently fashionable ideological trends.

To return to the question of his ‘letter to the Jews’, in which he admonishes them to claim their own homeland, it must be recalled that this was written at a time when he was also helping Milosz secure the borders of his own Lithuanian homeland; both projects were undertaken in the years after world war one in which the social fabric of Europe was very much torn and his main drive was to help regenerate civilisation by returning to more traditional, pre-industrial cultural forms. While such a project was by no means unique to Schwaller, it can by no means be regarded as racist form of Zionism. At the same time, an anti-Semitic influence cannot be entirely ruled out.

The polarity of left/right is a seemingly perennial one, but it is also very much perspectival, and in this respect, it will be valuable to contrast this dichotomy with Gebser’s remarks on the need for a balancing of “left” (matriarchy, the feminine) and “right” (patriarchy, the masculine). Gebser’s remarks are important not only because he consciously draws upon the political and gender-related significations of the two “orientations”, but also because he calls for the integration rather than dichotomisation of the ontologies that they presuppose:

Only when the one-sided will to displace one part of humanity and the (magically accentuated) demand for equal rights are abandoned in favour of an integration will the *human* be able to emerge. Just as matriarchy was once displaced by the patriarchy still in force today (in which negative residues of matriarchy are still dominant because of patriarchal-rational man’s lapse into *mater*-ialism), so too can this patriarchy be dissolved in turn by the *Integrum* where neither *mater*- (mother) nor *pater*- (father) but the human being in both will prevail: a human being integrated by man and woman who will then have acceptance and worth.<sup>641</sup>

Alongside Schwaller’s *chef d’œuvre*, two other final works appeared: *Le Roi de la Théocratie Pharaonique* (The King of Pharaonic Theocracy, 1956), which among other things traces the deviation and distortion of Egyptian consciousness through Greek rationality, highlighting the Egyptian rather than the Greek miracle); and *Propos sur Ésotérisme et Symbole* (On Esotericism and Symbol, 1960), a short text reflecting many

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641 GEBSER, *Ursprung und Gegenwart*, in *Gesamtausgabe* II, 362-3: ‘erst wenn nicht mehr einseitig das Wollen zu einem Platzinnehmen, noch der Anspruch auf eine magisch betonte Gleichberechtigung herrschen, sondern wenn eine Integration stattfindet, wird es den *Menschen* geben; denn so wie das einstige Matriarchat vom heute noch vorherrschenden Patriarchat (in dem hintergründig-negativ noch immer matriarchale Komponenten herrschen: der patriarchal-rationale Mann ist dem *Mater*-ialismus verfallen!) abgelöst wurde, so wird das Patriarchat seinerseits vom *Integrat* abgelöst werden, wo dann weder die Mater (Mutter) noch der Pater (Vater) überwiegen werden, sondern der Mensch in beiden: wo der durch Frau und Mann integrierte Mensch zur Geltung kommen wird’. (= Bastard and Mickunas, 262).

of the themes explored in the wealth of notes and unpublished papers he wrote throughout the 1940s and 1950s, constituting one of his most profound meditations on *symbolique* and metaphysics.

In his final years Schwaller made a brief trip to his birthplace in Alsace, and, on 7 December, 1961, René Aor Schwaller de Lubicz died.

With the destruction of form, the fixed and the volatile are separated. This is what we call death. At this time of separation, the energetic influences of the environment (such as light or sound) are able to act and create impressions, the form no longer being an obstacle.

The rebirth of a form requires the rejoining of the volatile with the fixed. The fixed is determined, the volatile is feminine and undetermined, although having a general “rhythm” similar to the rhythm of its fixed element. The fixed element must rediscover its volatile element for reincarnation to occur in whatever form, whether physical or more subtle.

The carrier of the fixed element is paternal, that of the volatile, maternal. There is, at the same time as regeneration, a rejoining of the volatile with the fixed in a determined state. It is at this moment that the influence of the environment intervenes to modify the instrument of the being’s consciousness.

Such is the Hermetic thesis—so mysterious—that claims to show that the vital destruction of a mineral can render it vegetative and therefore capable of self-nourishment and self-multiplication. This principle is correct and verifiable in the plant and animal kingdoms, and there is adequate justification for the same claim with regard to the mineral. Further atomic research will perhaps confirm this fact and make the information generally accessible.<sup>642</sup>

Each and every form is nothing but a passing instant of an aspect of God, that is, of his light, which is why things only die in their form and why every death is the source of new life. The divine light is fixed and immortal because it is bornless and eternal.<sup>643</sup>

### *Final Words*

Schwaller was survived by his wife, Isha, by one year. The biography she wrote of her husband, published in 1963, bears the following testimony of his last words:

A little later, an ecstatic smile illumined his face: ‘*Reality! ... Reality! ... Isha, look with me: I see Reality!*’ And it is not like anything one can imagine. It must not be

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642 SCHWALLER, *Temple* (Lawlor).

643 SCHWALLER, ‘Elements of the Cornerstone that was Lacking at Babel’, *Notes et Propos inédits*.

imagined: one must be quiet and listen—it must be regarded in Silence, *without wanting “to see”*—and one must accept Nothingness (*le Rien*); for that which man calls “nothing”—this is Reality. Oh! We are blind, Isha! If you can comprehend it, I will show you.<sup>644</sup>

I am a lover of the World of Causes, he said to me. My passion has been to decipher its Laws; thinking that the highest purpose of Man on Earth was to achieve Knowledge of the genetic laws of the Cosmos, I have dreamt of them by raising the Way.<sup>645</sup>

Now today I know, I see. Remember what I say to you, Isha. Sometimes this metaphysical Knowledge can be granted by an increase of that which already possesses the essential; but it is a gift more dangerous than beneficial, for it can blind the seeker with pride and deflect him from the true purpose of his incarnation on Earth. Now, this purpose is the reintegration of our spiritual nature (*être spirituel*): the total knowledge of our “Human Consciousness” and of our spiritual being (*Entité spirituelle*). You see: this is what must be known and what must be realised; this is what you have to teach. But do not fear the weight of this task: I will not leave you: I will be Present, much more than I was in my physical body, so restricting! *I know*, now, and *I see*. Look—do you see this little point of Light, minuscule, “infinitesimal”? It is the tiny nucleus of our teaching: watch it grow, enlarge itself—it extends itself—and you will be surprised now to note how it will spread: a seed of Light that can multiply itself.<sup>646</sup>

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644 *Aor*, 117 : ‘Un peu plus tard, un sourire extatique illumine son visage: « Le Réel! ... le Réel! ... Isha, regarde avec moi: je vois le Réel! ... le Réel ... et ce n’est pas du tout ce qu’on imagine ... Il ne faut rien imaginer: il faut se taire ... et écouter ... il faut regarder dans le Silence, *sans vouloir* « voir » ... et accepter le Rien ... car ce que l’homme appelle « rien », c’est cela qui est Réalité ... Oh! Nous sommes aveugles, Isha! Si tu peux le comprendre, je te le montrerai ... ’. (Elipses in original).

645 *Aor*, 117-8: ‘« Je suis un amoureux du Monde des Causes, me dit-il, ma passion a été d’en déchiffrer les Lois; pensant que le but le plus haut des Hommes de la Terre était de parvenir à la Connaissance des lois génétiques du Cosmos, j’avais rêvé de leur en montrer le Chemin’.

646 *Aor*, 118: ‘« Or aujourd’hui je sais, je vois ... Souviens-toi de ce que de dis, Isha: cette Connaissance métaphysique peut être, parfois, accordée par surcroît à celui qui, déjà, possède l’essentiel, mais c’est un don plus dangereux que bénéfique, car il peut aveugler d’orgueil le chercheur et le détourner du but véritable de son incarnation sur Terre. Or, ce but, c’est le réintégration de notre être spirituel, et la connaissance totale de notre « Conscience Humaine » et de notre Entité spirituelle. Voilà ce qu’il faut faire connaître et ce qu’il faut réaliser, voilà ce que vous devez enseigner. « Mais ne craignez pas la lourdeur de cette tâche: je ne vous quitterai pas: je serai Présent, beaucoup plus que je ne l’étais dans mon corps physique si gênant! *Je sais*, maintenant, et *je vois* ... « Regardez ... voyez-vous ce petit point de Lumière, minuscule, « infinitesimal » ? C’est le petit noyau de notre enseignement, regardez-le grandir, s’élargir ... Il s’étend ... et vous serez surpris, maintenant, de constater comment il se répandra: une semence de Lumière qui se

Several days before the end, he saw his astral being, and regarded it with pity. See here, he said: the *bonhomme*, which he must not attach himself to! He must situate his heart beyond the emotive world in order to liberate himself. I have nothing more to do with this old form.<sup>647</sup>

He then struggled against his mental being which harassed it [his astral being]; he bewailed its assault, and he could only stop it by becoming completely conscious of the role that its mental character had played in his life: ‘That one there’, he said to me, ‘has restricted me terribly!’ I see now his game: he has been my enemy my entire life—but I never believed him so fierce! I knew he was the obstacle, but I had never recognised all his tricks, all the forms which he could take in order to deflect me from the path. This is terrifying, Isha! I wish you could see it, you too, *in order to tell the others to deliver themselves from their fear*. For it is him, you see, the Mental presence, who creates not only fear, but all our doubts and all our terrors.

This was the final struggle; the victory let him enter into a radiant state of Light where, for three final hours, he would penetrate progressively. And when the moment of departure came, he looked at us deeply, and simply said: ‘Goodbye... goodbye to you’. And his great Being quit his physical body, which faded gently into an unconscious inertia.

*But the Presence dwelled.* [...] I have had the privilege of being trained by Him in this Luminous consciousness (which, just as he wrote in the text, *Necessity*, is another state of life), *and this all by keeping conscious of my physical being*. This is why I, Isha, can say, *I know, I have seen, I am certain of that*, for man dwells in his immortal soul, and death is a birth to a radiant Life by deliverance from his physical opacity. It is the *unveiling of reality*. And nothing can efface the vision of the Light of the Master that rediscovered the power to communicate to me its Joy:

Look, Isha, you see it like me, now, Reality! And you see that it is impossible to describe—impossible to explain! But I bring this to life for you so that you can affirm it, and in the same way train those who dare to accept that everything must be abandoned in order to commune with Reality. Let all facticity, illusion, and all sentimentality of the ego fall; and above all, said the Master, abandon the mental security of logical theories: prudent doctrines which only construct walls that isolate you from Reality! Then I heard the last imperative words:

*Let go of everything* in order to enter into the kingdom of Life. There is no possible compromise: *One is* or *one is not* in the domain of the vision of Reality.<sup>648</sup>

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multipliera ...»’.

647 *Aor*, 118: ‘Plusieurs jours avant la fin, il vit son être astral, et le regarda avec pitié: « Voilà, dit-il, le « bonhomme » auquel il ne faut pas s’attacher! » « Il faut situer son cœur au-delà de ce monde émotif pour s’en libérer. » « Je n’ai plus rien à faire avec cette vieille forme »’.

648 *Aor*, 118-120: ‘« Laisser tout » pour entrer au royaume de Vie. Il n’y a pas de compromis possible: On est ou l’on n’est pas dans le champ de vision du Réel’.

ALCHEMICAL FARBENLEHRE: SCHWALLER'S  
ESOTERIC COLOUR THEORY

The physicists have a mechanistic concept of the refraction of light. They believe that a material ray strikes the surface, is thrown back, and thus gives rise to the image. On the contrary, however, the reflection is an engendering (*Erzeugung*). When a ray of light goes forth, it comes back as colour. In this way, the whole of nature can be called the prism of the divine ray of light.<sup>649</sup>

—Franz von Baader

Having situated Schwaller in his biographical context, the next task of this thesis is to understand in more detail the fundamental meta/physical *process* with which Schwaller was ultimately concerned. From the numerous modalities which Schwaller employs to adumbrate the mysterious process of 'spiritual concretion' so central to his life's work, the colour theory has been selected for specific study not only because it is the most intuitive and comprehensible of Schwaller's various *symboliques*, but because it is central to the comprehension of his entire alchemical theory. The colour theory offers a model for understanding how Schwaller conceived the problem of salt in specific relation to the interaction of metaphysical principles and physical elements. These in turn were developed to explicate the formation of what in alchemy is known as the philosophical stone (a 'juncture of abstract and concrete'). In this chapter, Schwaller's colour theory is first situated in its intellectual historical context (Newton, Goethe, Cyliani); the key texts in which Schwaller elaborates his alchemical colour theory are then provided and analysed. Here, the phenomenon of visible colour is understood as an incarnation of invisible light, and the interplay (separation and unification) of the

<sup>649</sup> FRANZ VON BAADER, 'Vorlesungen über speculative Dogmatik' (fifth notebook, 1828-38), in *Samtliche Werke*, viii (Leipzig, 1855), 82: '[Einen] mechanistischen Begriff haben die Physiker von der Lichtbrechnung. Sie meinen, ein materieller Strahl falle auf die Ebene auf und werde zurückgeworfen und gebe so das Bild, vielmehr aber ist die Spiegelung eine Erzeugung. Wenn ein Lichtstrahl hingehet, so geht er als Farbe zurück. So kann man die ganze Natur das Prisma des Göttlichen Lichtstrahles nennen' (my trans.)



seven spectral hues is taken by Schwaller as a visible signature of the same invisible process that underpins the evolution of all phenomena (with particular attention being given to the planetary metals understood in both their cosmic and geological senses). The ‘hermetic problem of salt’ comes to the fore through its identification with the colour violet, understood as a juncture of red and blue (i.e. the thermal and electric ends of the spectrum, corresponding to the acid and alkaline reagents that neutralise in salinity); the formation of salt bears a hidden relationship to the phenomenon of indigo, which is seen to bear a dark yet luminous fire (i.e. redness). It is thus the hidden fire in indigo that must be united to blue to form the alchemical juncture in violet. The colour theory, through its correspondences to the planetary metals, has a specific relationship to the processes of metallurgical transmutation that will be examined in the penultimate chapter.

*Fulcanelli’s Colour Manuscript*

The key to the problem of salt rose through a manuscript that Champagne had purportedly found in a rare edition of Newton’s alchemical writings.<sup>650</sup> The year was 1913. Champagne, who was working in the bookshop of the brothers Chacornac evaluating and cataloguing books from provincial estates, discovered within the Newton volume an anonymous manuscript that proved crucial to the alchemical work he would subsequently undertake with Schwaller. The text is described in the following words:

They were handwritten notes, evidently taken by a practising adept and made during an experiment. There were oil spots on the paper. It was written on stiff drawing paper, roughly cut *in octavo* and yellowing at the edges, and the ink was *bistre* and fading.<sup>651</sup>

Champagne believed the text to date from the 1830s and saw in it a relation to Cyliani’s book of the same decade, *Hermès dévoilé* (Hermes Unveiled, 1832).<sup>652</sup> Fulcanelli apparently could not make sense of it and approached Schwaller, who slowly began to draw forth its implications for the alchemical opus:

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650 *Al-Kemi*, 79; DUBOIS, 2006, 57.

651 For the description of the manuscript, see *Al-Kemi*, 79, 131, comparing Geneviève DUBOIS, *Fulcanelli Dévoilé* (1996) = *Fulcanelli and the Alchemical Revival* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny, 2006), 54-7.

652 CYLIANI, *Hermès dévoilé dédié à la postérité* (Paris: Imprimerie de Félix Locquin, 1832). The title of Dubois’ book, *Fulcanelli dévoilé* (Fulcanelli Unveiled) is clearly a reference to Cyliani’s, which, as Dubois herself points out, was reprinted in 1915 to play a significant part in the Parisian alchemical revival.

A strange document it was indeed. The text seemed quite coherent, it had a definite beginning and a *Finis* as signature, complete as Fulcanelli found it in that valuable edition of Newton's hermetic writings. He told me he had worked on it for some time, but couldn't make head nor tail of it. He wanted me to have a look at it. Well, I did, and I realised that it was a manipulation of salt in the direction I had been looking for. But the remarkable feature of this manuscript was that it spoke almost exclusively in terms of *color*.<sup>653</sup>

A problem immediately arises in this account, which, upon closer inspection, turns out to be a key: Newton's alchemical writings were unpublished during his own lifetime, and existed only in manuscript form until they were auctioned by Sotheby's in 1936. As Dobbs, in *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, remarks:

The manuscripts had led a very quiet existence up to that time. When Thomas Pellet examined Newton's papers after his death in 1727, he marked the alchemical papers as 'not fit to be printed' and they were put back in their boxes. Nor were they included in the *Opera omnia* of Newton prepared by Samuel Horsley in the eighteenth century, and except for the mention of some of them by Brewster [Sir David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1855)], they remained largely unknown, passing to the descendents of Catherine Barton Conduitt, Newton's niece. In 1936 the family decided to sell the alchemical, theological, and other papers still in its possession, the scientific papers having already been given to the University Library, Cambridge, where they comprise the Portsmouth collection.<sup>654</sup>

After the papers had been auctioned, John Maynard Keynes was motivated to gather the dispersed papers and managed to reunite somewhere between a third and a half of them, which now form the Keynes Collection of Kings College, Cambridge. Even in manuscript form, Newton's alchemical writings have really only been available since 1936. The first actual publications, moreover, were not in any volume or edition, but only in the selected form of articles appearing, from the mid 1950s onwards, in scholarly journals for the history of chemistry.<sup>655</sup> The possibility of Champagne finding an "edition" or "volume" of Newton's alchemical writings in 1913 has to be seriously doubted, and, in this respect, a fabrication on Champagne's part is not only likely, but consistent with his character. As for Schwaller, it must be noted that the first

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653 *Al-Kemi*, 131.

654 Joey Teeter DOBBS, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy or "The Hunting of the Greene Lyon"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 12-13.

655 E.g. Frank Sherwood TAYLOR, 'An Alchemical Work of Sir Isaac Newton', *Ambix* 5 (1956), 59-84; D. GEOGHEGAN, 'Some Indications of Newton's Attitude Toward Alchemy', *Ambix* 6 (1957), 102-6; and later, Mary S. CHURCHILL, 'The Seven Chapters, with Explanatory Notes', *Chymia* 12 (1967), 29-57.

published articles on Newton's alchemy emerged scarcely a few years before he struck up his relationship with VandenBroeck (1959-60), during which the very details about the Newton volume and Fulcanelli's colour manuscript are first made known.

*Precedents for Interpretation*

It would be dangerously easy at this point to slip into a reactive condemnation of the reliability of the account—whether Champagne's, Schwaller's or VandenBroeck's. Indeed, the historically untenable nature of such a discrepancy would usually weigh sorely upon the credibility of its author. However, to succumb to this purely historicising method is to fall prey to a carefully laid hermetic trap. Hermes, after all, was not only a thief but a trickster; and yet deceit in alchemy, if approached with sufficient cunning, very often masks a modality of truth. To fail to take this into account is to miss the abiding key that is encoded in the account itself. The description of the impossible edition of Newton, along with the manuscript it allegedly contained, is not to be read as a historical reality but as an alchemical *cipher*.

Admittedly, to turn to an esoteric interpretation of the account rather than simply accept its historical implausibility at face value may seem a long bow to draw. Indeed, such an approach would normally seem like an open-and-shut case of over-interpretation. However, there is one crucial detail that cannot be ignored. It is the fact that Fulcanelli himself, in *Les Demeures Philosophales*, provides a direct precedent for precisely this mode of interpretation. In a passage dealing with the work of Nicolas Flamel, Fulcanelli offers a *symbolic* interpretation of Flamel's description of a volume that, from a purely historical point of view, can only be regarded as impossible: the so-called *Book of Abraham the Jew*. Comments Fulcanelli:

In spite of certain book lovers' opinions, we confess that it has always been impossible for us to believe in the reality of the *Book of Abraham the Jew*, nor in what its fortunate owner relates in his *Figures Hieroglyphiques*. In our opinion, this famous manuscript, as unknown as it is impossible to find, seems to be nothing more than another invention of the great Adept, destined, like the preceding one, to instruct the disciples of Hermes. It is a summary of the characteristics which distinguish the primal matter of the Work, as well as the properties it acquires during preparation.<sup>656</sup>

Thus, the invented manuscript, 'unknown as it is impossible to find', is devised for didactic purposes: 'to instruct the disciples of Hermes'. If close attention is paid to how Fulcanelli unveils the alchemical teaching hidden in Flamel's invented book, one notices that he focuses on the symbolism encoded in the *description* of the book. In particular, an emphasis is placed on the physical substances which compose (or figure

656 FULCANELLI, *Les Demeures Philosophales* (1999), 267-8.

in the composition of) the book. In deciphering the fabulous Flamel volume, Fulcanelli emphasises the gold cover, the iron stylus used to write the volume, along with a symbolic description of the characteristics of antimony; elsewhere one learns that iron and antimony are the two first matters (*prima materia* and *materia prima*, respectively), which provide the mineral gangue and the fiery seed of metals that grows in the gangue as in a womb.<sup>657</sup> Just as the value of Fulcanelli's presentation does not depend on the historical existence of the book he describes (indeed, the historicity of the book itself is a red herring), Schwaller, like Fulcanelli and Flamel before him, is providing *symbolic* clues to the alchemical work under the guise of a book description. With this symbolic approach in mind, the necessary clues to solving the cipher of the Newton volume and colour manuscript begin to become evident.

According to Schwaller, the manuscript was 'a manipulation of salt in the direction I had been looking for' that spoke 'almost exclusively in terms of color'.<sup>658</sup> Thus, rather than a description of the *prima materia* of the work, as in Flamel's account, the manuscript signals a key to the problem of salt.

Following the example of Fulcanelli's interpretation, close attention must be paid to the physical details of the manuscript. The handwritten notes were 'evidently taken by a practising adept and made during an experiment. There were oil spots on the paper'. Oil, a common enough substance, when placed in the context of the alchemical cipher, can only indicate the oils of *metals*, a point which gains more substance when the further elements of the cipher are examined.

According to the description, the edges of the paper are 'yellowing', and the ink is 'bistre and fading'.<sup>659</sup> Bistre is a transparent, water-soluble, brownish-yellow pigment made by boiling the soot of wood. It is used for pen and wash drawings, giving a hue ranging from dark to yellowish brown. Fading bistre, then, effectively indicates an ink approaching the colour *yellow*. Together, therefore, the yellowing paper and yellowing ink appear to emphasise the "yellowing" phase in the stages of the alchemical work, the process traditionally referred to as *xanthōsis* or *citrinitas*. More specifically, however, the double indication of yellow points to the dual function of this colour in Schwaller's colour theory.

In Schwaller's discussion of colour, the seven spectral colours are really a contraction of a ninefold series, and it is precisely the eighth in the series—indigo—that proves the most critical to the formation of the alchemical perfection in violet. In light of the references to *citrinitas* already adduced, moreover, it is precisely the colours yellow and blue which are divided to form the points of expansion between the sevenfold and ninefold series, as follows:

657 RUBELLUS PETRINUS adduces evidence to suggest the *prima materia* of the dry way are iron and antimony. See: *The Great Alchemical Work of Eirenaeus Philalethes, Nicholas Flamel and Basil Valentine* (Brisbane: Salamander & Sons, 2007), 18, 27 ff, 69-76. Cf. FULCANELLI, *Dwellings*, 91-5, 233-6.

658 *Al-Kemi*, 131.

659 *Al-Kemi*, 79, 131.

Red - Orange - Yellow (*warm*)  
 Yellow - Green - Blue (*cool*)  
 Blue – Indigo - Violet (*moderate*)<sup>660</sup>

Here, yellow is divided across warm and cool as blue is divided across cool and moderate to form a ninefold series. As will be seen, it is precisely yellow and blue that are central to Goethe's colour theory.

Given this context, the eightfoldness of the manuscript (*in octavo*, 'in an eighth', referring to a sheet of paper folded to form a book of eight leaves) evokes an analogy between the spectrum of colour and the musical scale, the phenomenon of the octave. A still deeper layer of significance may be discerned in the Platonic octahedron, which Schwaller relates specifically to the problem of salt (a point that will be examined in the next chapter). However, the most plausible interpretation, which is in fact corroborated by the references to Newton and Goethe that will be examined presently, remains the "octave" of colour itself: the seven colours of the spectrum culminating and recapitulated in the eighth.

According to VandenBroeck, Fulcanelli links the manuscript to the era of Cyliani—the 1830s—while Schwaller affirms that it was influenced by Goethe's *Farbenlehre*, published in 1810. Both details therefore situate the manuscript in the same general period, but if these indications are taken not as further hermetic pointers, the relevant texts and contexts must be examined in more detail.

With the double roles of blue and yellow within an octave of colour, the final details of the cipher come into play, and in order to understand this, the references to Newton, Goethe and Cyliani must first be unravelled to provide the crucial intellectual context of the cipher. As will be seen, it is deeply ironic that the manuscript was purportedly found in an edition of Newton's alchemical writings, for not only is such a tome impossible in 1913, but Goethe's *Farbenlehre* itself is an explicit polemic *against* Newton's *Opticks*. The presence of a manuscript influenced by Goethe's colour theory in a volume of Newton's alchemical writings, however impossible such a volume may have been in 1913, nevertheless makes a highly revealing symbolic juxtaposition. It will be maintained that the details of such a juxtaposition are crucial to comprehending Schwaller's *Farbenlehre*.

### Theoretical Background to Schwaller's *Farbenlehre*

Colour theories from antiquity generally sought to derive the chromatic colours from the primordial polarity of black and white; however the deeper origins of this idea, along with its finer nuances, have not always been sufficiently appreciated. In the

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660 *Temple*, II, 313 (941).

earlier strata of Greek colour perception, from the Homeric poems to the fragments of Empedocles, black and white originally connoted much more than the strict extremes they evoke today: black (*mēlan*) indicated all that was dark—the earth, the sea, wine and blood; while white (*leukos*) indicated all that was light—snow, ivory, sand, blonde hair, and so on.<sup>661</sup> Empedocles’ cosmology held that reality is composed of four elements or roots (*stoicheia*, *rhizōmata*) which are mixed together through Love (*Philotēs*) and separated (i.e. purified) through Strife (*Neikeos*);<sup>662</sup> the same process was seen to underlie the genesis of colours, such that the four elements formed into pairs of complements, *mēlan* and *leukos*, in the senses indicated, but also into two chromatic colours which scholars have not been able to determine with any accuracy.<sup>663</sup> By the time of Aristotle, these meanings were only present as connotations, and it was inevitable that, as the ideas were passed on, the finer nuances which the terms and theories originally encompassed were not fully captured or transmitted by the Peripatetics, who, unfortunately, proved the most influential. Indeed, it was not until the Renaissance, specifically, Leon Battista Alberti’s *De Pictura* (On Painting), that the classical Aristotelian view was abandoned and the quest for chromatic primaries was undertaken.<sup>664</sup> As Shapiro points out, ‘the transformation of the classification of colour from brightness or tonal value to hue is one of the most fundamental changes in colour theory that emerged in the early modern era’.<sup>665</sup>

It would take the spirit of the European Romantics, culminating in the *Farbenlehre* of Goethe (and the *Farbenkugel* of Philip Otto Runge),<sup>666</sup> for the attempt to derive all colour phenomena from a primordial darkness and light to begin to yield something of the original inspiration behind the archaic and Empedoclean colour

661 PLATNAUER, ‘Greek Colour Perception’, *Classical Quarterly* 15 (1921): 153-62; SHAPIRO, ‘Artists’ Colours and Newton’s Colours’, *Isis* 85, 4 (1994): 603 n. 6.

662 DK 31 B 6, 31 A 37; 31 B 17.

663 Though cf. J. L. BENSON, *Greek Colour Theory and the Four Elements* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 2000), *passim*, who argue persuasively for yellow and red based upon an extensive analysis of Greek painting.

664 Leon Battista ALBERTI, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of “De pictura” and “De statua,”* ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (New York: Phaidon, 1972); GAGE, 32-3, 117 ff.; SHAPIRO, ‘Artists’ Colours and Newton’s Colours’, *Isis* 85, 4 (1994): 605.

665 SHAPIRO, 1994: 603-4, citing ALBERTI, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, 44-7: ‘The painter may be assured that white and black are not true colours but, one might say, moderators [*alteratores*] of colours’.

666 On Runge, see especially Melanie ÖHLENBACH, ‘The Influence of Jacob Böhme’s Theosophical Ideas on the ‘Farbentheorie’ by Philip Otto Runge’, in *Masonic and Esoteric Heritage: New Perspectives for Art and Heritage Policies: Proceedings of the First International Conference of the OVN, Foundation for the Advancement of Academic Research into the History of Freemasonry in the Netherlands* (Den Haag, Netherlands: OVN, 2005), 57-68.

theories.<sup>667</sup> Before this is examined, the pivotal theories of Isaac Newton (1643–1727) must first be considered.

*Newton's Colour Theory*

From Empedocles to Einstein, the quest into the nature of light has motivated some of the most celebrated discoveries, and certainly one of the most pivotal of these is the demonstration by Newton that light is not homogeneous but composed of all colours, seven of which are considered primary. Refracted into the spectrum of visible light, the colours can also be reconstituted again into invisible light through refracting the coloured rays through another prism. Thus, the invisible manifests as a sevenfold series, which can be retracted again into its invisible source. Newton's demonstration provides the basic framework within which Schwaller begins to approach the mystery of light and colour.

In keeping with the prevailing *Aufklärung* spirit, Newton's *Opticks* marks a profound shift in colour theory from the received classical and medieval inheritance. This shift inaugurates the understanding of colour as *hue* rather than as brightness or tone-value (i.e. the black-white polarity was removed from hue to form the grey scale and hue proper becomes a matter of separate study and perception). The different hues were seen to correspond to the degrees of refrangibility of light and, because there were infinite gradations, there were infinite degrees of refrangibility and hence infinite colours. This went against the predominant theory of colour inherited from antiquity, which held that colour was a product of a black-white or dark-light polarity. Instead, Newton showed all colour to arise from white light alone, which was now seen as heterogeneous (i.e. composed of different colours) rather than homogeneous (pure).

Despite there being infinite gradations of colour, Newton defined seven as primary:

There are therefore two sorts of colours. The one *original* and *simple*, the other *compounded* of these. The Original or *primary* colours are, Red, Yellow, Green, Blew, and a Violet-purple, together with Orange, Indico, and an indefinite variety of Intermediate gradations.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Goethe's scientific writings and the entire method of Goethean phenomenology were thoroughly reappraised by Rudolf Steiner between 1888–1896. In Steiner's colour writings a sense is gained of how the Goethean *Farbenlehre* may be seen to recapitulate the Empedoclean *tetrachroma*: here, green and peach blossom mediate the spectral paths between the primordial polarities, blue (the colour of darkness) and yellow (the colour of light).

<sup>668</sup> NEWTON cited in SHAPIRO (1994): 613.

Strictly speaking, the denomination of seven primary colours as composing white light must be recognised as somewhat arbitrary. Careful reading of the edition history of Newton's *Opticks* suggest that Newton himself recognised that light was composed of the 'indefinite variety' of gradations of the coloured spectrum, but at the same time, for didactic purposes, he availed himself of the artists' notion (or at least language) of primary and secondary colours, a notion which itself was only just solidifying into its then existing form.<sup>669</sup> As the passage quoted above illustrates, the use of this language creates many ambiguities, for Newton's use of the terms primary and secondary differed from that of the artists'. The idea of seven primaries appears to be motivated less by the fact of seven non-arbitrary colours being distinctly present than by the desire to correlate the spectrum to the idea of the septenary, thus bringing colour into alignment with the harmonic and cosmological series.<sup>670</sup>

As will be seen, this correspondence between the colour spectrum, the diatonic scale and the solar system proves crucial to Schwaller's whole approach, and helps consolidate the emphasis placed in the cipher on the *octavo* (the 'eighth' or octave representing the resolution of the series in a new beginning). In a diagram based on Descartes' representation of the musical intervals, Newton arranged the spectrum of light in a circle, and this proved enormously influential for the subsequent representation of colour systems.<sup>671</sup> Unlike the artists' colour wheels, however, it should be noted that the seven spectral colours were distributed *unevenly* on Newton's diagram according to a septenary emphasis intended to bring light into harmony with the intervals of the musical scale (the order and proportion that the colours take in the spectrum being also uneven). In Newton's diagram, the circumference of the circle is divided into arcs proportional to the lengths of the colours of the spectrum (and the notes of the musical scale) (Illustration 23).<sup>672</sup>

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669 SHAPIRO (1994): *passim*.

670 See George BIERNSON, 'Why Did Newton See Indigo in the Spectrum?', *American Journal of Physics* 40, 4 (1972): 526-533.

671 GAGE, 171 fig. 134 (= NEWTON, *Opticks*, Bk. 1, Pt. 2, Prop. 6, Plate 3, Fig. 11) and 232 fig. 185 (= DESCARTES, *Compendium Musicae*, 1650).

672 SHAPIRO, 'Artist's Colors and Newton's Colors', 620.



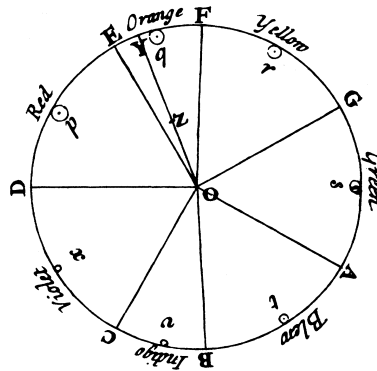


ILLUSTRATION 23: NEWTON'S COLOUR-MIXING WHEEL, MODELLED AFTER DESCARTES.

*Opticks* (1704), Bk. I, Pt. 2, Prop. 6, Plate 3, Fig. II.

Thus, Newton's discovery was ground-breaking for many reasons, but chiefly because it went against the grain of all the former assumptions about the nature of white light and the creation of colour. Whereas previously, theorists followed the ancient view and thought colour was created from the interaction of the polarities light and dark, Newton attempted to demonstrate that colour was inherent to light alone, and that it emerged through the refraction (bending) of the rays of light. His seven 'primaries' and the colours which were 'compounded' of them indicated the phenomenon of *additive colour*, by which the hues of coloured *light* mix to form white (or invisible) light; this is to be distinguished from the phenomenon of *subtractive colour*, in which the mixing of coloured *matter* tends increasingly towards darkness.<sup>673</sup>

### *Newton's Alchemy*

Although Newton kept his alchemical writings secret and restricted his published writings to purely empirical and scientific matters, his theories were consistently influenced by the doctrine of the unity and transformability of matter. 'All species are

<sup>673</sup> As anyone who has mixed paint knows, all colours blend to form a muddy brown, whereas with light, the more colours that are added, the more one approaches white light (although white can also be formed from two or three additive colours alone). The distinction between additive and subtractive colour is crucial to the different ways in which colour is represented today: i.e. via coloured light (projectors, illuminated displays, etc.) versus coloured matter (paint, printing, dying, etc.), which use different systems of reference (e.g. RGB and CMYK respectively).

from one root', wrote Newton in an alchemical context,<sup>674</sup> a point preserved in the first edition of his *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*: 'Any body can be transformed into another, of whatever kind, and all the intermediate degrees or qualities can be induced in it'.<sup>675</sup> Newton saw God as the ultimate cause in the cosmos—the sulphuric 'leaven' of the alchemists—responsible not only for the diversity but also the animation of all phenomena; what he sought in his science, however, was not the ultimate but the *proximate* cause, the *agent* through which God worked his change.<sup>676</sup> To this end, Newton employed the idea of a universal vital *aether* as the mechanical medium of divine activity. The concept's affinity with the Stoic *pneuma* was still felt in Newton's day, and Newton's aetherial mechanisms helped explain gravity and chemical cohesion (cf. the four forces in quantum physics, including weak and strong nuclear force).

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to treat Newton's alchemy in anything but the most cursory of terms, it is important to establish that Newton was indeed engaged in the royal art, and that because of this, there is a degree to which contemporary *chymical* theories influenced his *Opticks*. As Newman has shown in a recent paper, a certain amount of transferability existed between the *chymical* theory of analysis and synthesis of the constituents of chemical compounds and the theory of decomposition and reintegration of white light.<sup>677</sup> In effect, chemical compounds were not homogeneous but heterogeneous; like light, they could be broken down into their constituent parts (elements, colours) and recombined to form their wholes again. In both cases, the concern was to describe change in terms of a process of analysis and synthesis rather than of transmutation. For Newman, the origins of this analytic-synthetic tradition in *chymistry* may be traced back as far as the late middle ages, specifically to Geberian alchemy in which phenomenal change was conceived in terms of the separation and recombination of heterogeneous particles.<sup>678</sup> To what extent one may go back further to see the ideas of "synthesis" and "analysis" of constituent "elements" as merely recapitulations of the Empedoclean primordial agents, Love and Strife, will require a more detailed exposition than can be advanced here.

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674 B. J. T. DOBBS, 'Newton's Alchemy and his Theory of Matter', *Isis* 73, 4 (1982): 513-4, with n. 9; Keynes MS 12A, "Propositions", King's College, Cambridge, fol. 1r.

675 London, 1687, 402.

676 DOBBS, 515-6

677 William R. NEWMAN, 'Newton's Early Optical Theory and its Debt to Chymistry', *Lumière et vision dans les sciences et dans les arts, de l'Antiquité du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Danielle JACQUART and Michel HOCHMANN (Forthcoming, Librairie Droz).

678 Newman links the alchemical tradition to Newton via Robert Boyle, who must be accordingly regarded less as the founding father of chemistry and more in the light of contemporary (al-)chymical practice.

*Goethe's Farbenlehre*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), one Germany's most significant cultural icons, is most celebrated for his tragic masterwork, *Faust*, a work that turns an originally Protestant propaganda motif into an inspired fusion of Romantic and Enlightenment streams of culture. Despite this achievement, however, it was his *Zur Farbenlehre* (On Colour Theory, 1810) that Goethe himself regarded as his most accomplished achievement. It was certainly the work he expected to be most influential—upon scientists, *Naturphilosophen*, artists, chemists—insofar as he regarded it as a genuinely scientific contribution. Although Goethe's *Farbenlehre* never gained acceptance in the hard sciences, his method has been increasingly recognised as bearing profound philosophical and methodological significance. Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), who edited Goethe's scientific writings between 1888 and 1896, was the first to begin the rehabilitation of Goethe's method;<sup>679</sup> since then, Goethe's approach not just to colour but also to plant morphology has become increasingly recognised for its value as a *phenomenology of nature* and, as a result, the *Farbenlehre* has been recognised for its phenomenological value.<sup>680</sup>

Thus it is the different *methods* that cement their key differences, and in this connection one must recognise that because Goethean science is solidly based in observation and experiment, it is not a matter here of a rigid dualism between empiricism and mysticism. Goethe's science demanded what he called a 'delicate empiricism' (*zarte Empirie*) that availed itself of the experiment (*Versuch*) as a *medium*

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679 Rudolf STEINER, *Einleitungen zu Goethes naturwissenschaftlichen Schriften* (Dornach: Rudolph Steiner Verlag, 1973; Kürschner, 1883-1897); *Goethe the Scientist*, O. D. Wannamaker, trans. (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1950); *Goethe's World View*, W. Lindeman, trans. (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1985); *Goethean Science*, W. Lindeman, trans. (Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1988); some developments of the Steinerian approach to Goethean science include: J. BOCKEMÜHL, ed., *Awakening to Landscape* (Dornach, Switzerland: Goetheanum Research Laboratory, 1992); E. LEHRS, *Man or Matter: Introduction to a Spiritual Understanding of Matter Based on Goethe's Method of Training, Observation and Thought* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958); W. SCHAD, *Man and Mammals: Toward a Biology of Form* (Garden City, New York: Waldorf Press, 1977); T. SCHWENK, *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965).

680 On Goethean science and phenomenology, see: Fritz HEINEMANN, 'Goethe's Phenomenology', *Philosophy* 9, 33 (1934): 67-81; H. BORTOFT, *Goethe's Scientific Consciousness* (Nottingham: Russell Press, 1986); F. AMRINE, F. J. ZUCKE and H. WHEELER, eds., *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987); David SEAMON and Arthur ZAJONC, eds., *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); Joan STEIGLERWALD, 'Goethe's Morphology: *Urphänomene* and Aesthetic Appraisal', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 35, 2 (2002): 291-328.

(*Vermittlung*) between human experience and nature.<sup>681</sup> Goethe, like Schwaller, thus reconciles the double meaning of *experimentum* ('experiment' and 'experience'). Whereas mechanistic science extols the epistemological separation between subject and object—a separation that underpins the whole ideology of scientific "objectivity" in which facts are able to be dispassionately observed, tested and catalogued by a subject who always remains at a psychological distance from the observed object—Goethean science seeks to use experiment as a phenomenological interface in which human consciousness can *participate* in the processes of nature.<sup>682</sup>

Goethe likened the problem of knowing light to that of knowing a man's character: while direct knowledge of character is impossible to gain, by observing a person's deeds, one gained insight into their nature. So too light, and for Goethe, colour was nothing less than the 'acts or deeds of light' (*Taten des Lichts*), its 'activities and sufferings' (*Taten und Leiden*).<sup>683</sup> Thus, while light could not be known in and of itself, the phenomenon of colour formed the means by which the nature of light could be apprehended. Rather than devise experiments to test hypotheses, per the scientific method, Goethe proceeded with the simple but astute observation of the dynamics of colour via a method which still preserved the awe or respect for the natural phenomenon through a delicate perceptual sensitivity (including a responsibility to cultivate this perceptual sensitivity in harmony with the observed object).

As part of his *Farbenlehre*, Goethe also penned a direct polemic against Newton's *Opticks*, and here Goethe was chiefly reacting to what he perceived as the lack of *qualitative* sensitivity to natural phenomena resulting from the lack of delicate interaction between human consciousness and the natural world. Physics, Goethe argued, lacked sufficient sensitivity to the dynamic, qualitative dimension of life due to a grossly *quantitative* approach that led to an overemphasis on abstract mathematical hypotheses over direct qualitative experience. Given this, there is no small irony that Schwaller's alchemical cipher places a manuscript influenced by Goethe's *Farbenlehre* in a volume of Newton. More ironic still, it places the manuscript in a volume of his *alchemical* writings, demonstrating an awareness that Newton may not have been the mere quantitative mechanist that Goethe railed his polemic against. It would appear the matter is more complex than the simple opposition: Goethe contra Newton.

The differences and similarities are perhaps nowhere more evident than in the asymmetrical versus symmetrical colour wheels provided by Newton and Goethe

681 GOETHE, 'Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt' (1792; 1817-24; *LA* 1, 8, 305-15).

682 See especially H. BORTOFT, *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Science of Conscious Participation in Nature* (Hudson, NY: Lindesfarne Press, 1996).

683 GOETHE, *Zur Farbenlehre* (Vorwort): 'Vergebens bemühen wir uns, den Charakter eines Menschen zu schildern; man stelle dagegen seine Handlungen, seine Taten zusammen, und ein Bild des Charakters wird uns entgegentreten. Die Farben sind Taten des Lichts, Taten und Leiden'.

respectively. The arbitrary selection of seven colours as primaries by Newton, which was based not on scientific observation but upon the need to assimilate the phenomenon to pre-existing conceptual systems, resulted in the curious inclusion of indigo—one of the least intuitively obvious colours in the entire spectrum. Goethe, on the other hand, based his *Farbenkreis* on the symmetrical complements provoked by the natural phenomenon of after-images (*Abklingen*):<sup>684</sup> ‘so yellow demands violet; orange, blue; magenta, green; and vice versa. So all shades or gradations reciprocally evoke one another, the simple colours demanding the composed colours, and vice versa’.<sup>685</sup> Goethe is thus able to describe the spectrum according to three pairs of complements, totalling six colours (Illustration 24).

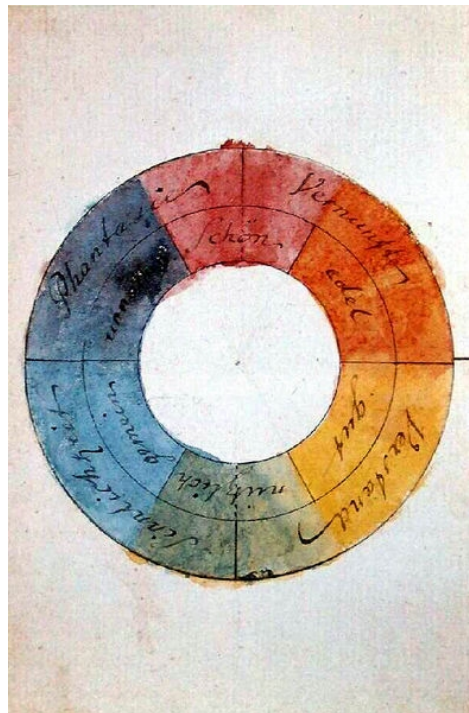


ILLUSTRATION 24: GOETHE'S *FARBENKREIS*  
(COLOUR WHEEL) SHOWING COMPLEMENTARY  
COLOURS.

Each colour evokes its opposite per the phenomenon of afterimages: magenta (*Purpur*) evokes green; orange, blue; and yellow, violet (taking into account that the material colours used by Goethe in this image have either changed or been unevenly preserved over time).

684 GOETHE, *Zur Farbenlehre*, §§39, 45.

685 *Zur Farbenlehre*, §50: ‘So fordert Gelb das Violette, Orange das Blaue, Purpur das Grüne, und umgekehrt. So fordern sich alle Abstufungen wechselweise, die einfachere Farbe fordert die zusammengesetztere, und umgekehrt’.

However, although Newton emphasised a purely mechanistic and quantitative scientific method, by making the spectrum a septenary he betrayed his hidden sympathies to the analogical mode of thinking so crucial to alchemical and hermetic epistemology. After the model of the diatonic scale, the seven (and implicitly, eight) were seen to govern the harmonic nature of all phenomenal processes. This analogical modality was also central to the phenomenological methods advanced within the tradition of German Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, such as Goethe's scientific method. The key difference in their analogical systems, however, appears to lie in the tendency of Newton towards reliance on preexisting analogical or analytical conceptual systems as contrasted with the pure phenomenological approach to nature evidenced by the Goethean approach to natural science. Moreover, given that Newton kept his alchemical work a tight secret during his own life, and that it was the mechanistic method rather than the analogical system that he chose to defend and publicise, the broader issue is one of consciously perpetuating a mechanistic and rigidly dualistic world-view rather than an organic and potentially nondualistic worldview. Clearly, Newton knew which side his bread was buttered on.

*Yellow and Blue as Urphänomene*

Goethe wasn't the first to criticise Newton's theory. In 1672/73, Christiaan Huygens wrote to Newton that blue and yellow alone can form white light.<sup>686</sup> In 1740 Louis Bertrand Castel, a Jesuit and Cartesian, made the more careful observation that the prism actually gives forth only two colours—blue and yellow—which emerge as coloured fringes at the edges of light and dark objects refracted through the prism (Illustration 25).

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686 Alan E. SHAPIRO, 'The Evolving Structure of Newton's Theory of White Light and Colour', *Isis* 71, 2 (1980): 223 ff. with n. 38; Huygens' comments were originally in French and appeared in English in *Phil. Trans.* July 21, 1673, 8 (96): 6086-7; I. Bernard COHEN, ed. *Isaac Newton's Papers and Letters on Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 136-7; H. W. TURNBALL, ed. *The Correspondence of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), I, 256.

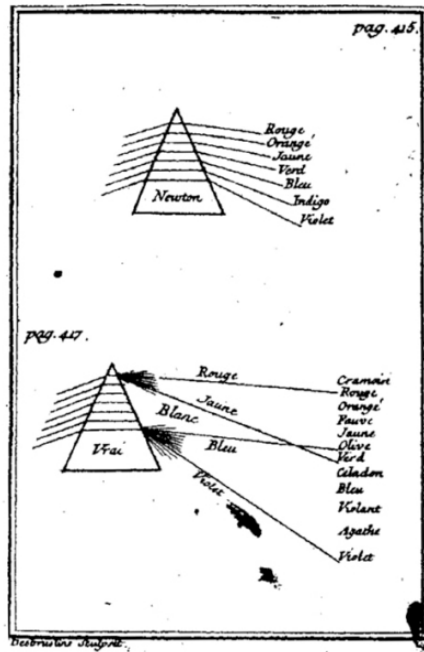


ILLUSTRATION 25: LOUIS BERTRAND CASTEL'S 1740 DIAGRAM.

Contra Newton, Castel illustrates his observation that the prism actually gives forth only two initial colours—blue and yellow—which emerge as coloured fringes at the edges of light and dark objects as refracted through the prism.

In 1810, Goethe makes the same essential observation. 'Like everyone else I was convinced', he recounts in his *Konfession des Verfassers* (Confession of the Author), 'that all colours are contained in light'.<sup>687</sup> Having looked through a prism in his youth, he remembered that everything appeared multi-coloured. Because the details were no longer present to him, however, he undertook to see the phenomenon again for himself, fully expecting to see white light broken into a multiplicity of colours:<sup>688</sup>

687 GOETHE, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*: 'Wie alle Welt war ich überzeugt, dass die sämtlichen Farben im Licht enthalten seien'.

688 GOETHE, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre* (Konfession des Verfassers): 'Schon hatte ich den Kasten hervorgehoben, um ihn dem Boten zu übergeben, als mir einfiel, ich wolle doch noch geschwind durch ein Prisma sehen, was ich seit meiner frühesten Jugend nicht getan hatte. Ich erinnerte mich wohl, dass alles bunt erschien, auf welche Weise jedoch, war mir nicht mehr gegenwärtig. Eben befand ich mich in einem völlig geweißten Zimmer; ich erwartete, als ich das Prisma vor die Augen nahm, eingedenk der

At that very moment I was in a room that had been painted completely white; I expected, mindful of the Newtonian theory as I placed the prism before my eyes, to see the light that comes from there to my eye split up into so many coloured lights. How astonished I was, then, when the white wall, observed through the prism, remained white just as before; that only there, where darkness adjoined on it, did a more or less differentiable colour appear; and that finally, only on the bars of the window panes did any vivacious colour appear, while no hint of colouring was visible in the pale grey sky outside. It did not take much deliberation for me to recognise that a boundary is necessary to produce colours, and I immediately said to myself, as if by instinct, that the Newtonian teaching is false.<sup>689</sup>

Goethe's theory proceeds directly from the fact that it is not white light but the *border of light and dark* that forms colour through the prism.<sup>690</sup> Colour thus emerges from what the Arab philosophers called the *barzakh* ('borderline', in particular, the line formed between light and shadow that was considered as neither one nor the other, and yet obviously partook of both). The cosmological ramifications of this are of more than passing significance for, metaphysically, the *barzakh* was the liminal zone between the noetic (divine) and the phenomenal (sensible) structures of reality. In a sense, light and darkness correspond to the metaphysical and proto-physical aspects of reality, the sulphur and mercury that for Schwaller neutralise in visible phenomena (the world of colour, salt).

Similarly, Goethe defines three *Urphänomene*: light, darkness and a turbid medium (*Trübe*). One must not neglect to recognise that for Goethe, the prism, like all transparent media that transmit light (and darkness), was a class of dioptrical phenomena (turbid media).<sup>691</sup> All perceivable light and darkness proceed through

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Newtonischen Theorie, die ganze weiße Wand nach verschiedenen Stufen gefärbt, das von da ins Auge zurückkehrende Licht in so viel farbige Lichter zersplittert zu sehen'.

689 GOETHE, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre* (Konfession des Vervassers): 'Eben befand ich mich in einem völlig geweißten Zimmer; ich erwartete, als ich das Prisma vor die Augen nahm, eingedenk der Newtonischen Theorie, die ganze weiße Wand nach verschiedenen Stufen gefärbt, das von da ins Auge zurückkehrende Licht in so viel farbige Lichter zersplittert zu sehen. Aber wie verwundert war ich, als die durchs Prisma angeschaute weiße Wand nach wie vor weiß blieb, dass nur da, wo ein Dunkles dran stieß, sich eine mehr oder weniger entschiedene Farbe zeigte, dass zuletzt die Fensterstäbe am allerlebhaftesten farbig erschienen, indessen am lichtgrauen Himmel draußen keine Spur von Färbung zu sehen war. Es bedurfte keiner langen Überlegung, so erkannte ich, dass eine Grenze notwendig sei, um Farben hervorzubringen, und ich sprach wie durch einen Instinkt sogleich vor mich laut aus, dass die Newtonische Lehre falsch sei'.

690 *Zur Farbenlehre*, §195; §227: 'Das unbegrenzt durch Refraktion Gesehene zeigt keine Farbenercheinung (195). Das Gesehene muss begrenzt sein. Es wird daher ein Bild gefordert; dieses Bild wird durch Refraktion verrückt, aber nicht vollkommen, nicht rein, nicht scharf verrückt, sondern unvollkommen, dergestalt, dass ein Nebenbild entsteht'.

691 Dioptrischen Farben: *Zur Farbenlehre*, §145 ff, §178 ff.



gradations of relative opacity or transparency—from the atmosphere to glass (hence the prism). For Goethe the *Urphänomene* were the means by which one could ascend and descend between the highest archetypes of sensible experience and their lower permutations in day-to-day existence:

The things that we become aware of through experience are mostly only cases that, with a little attentiveness, allow themselves to be brought under more general empirical rubrics. These subordinate themselves once again under scientific rubrics that further indicate how the indispensable conditions of phenomenal appearances (*Erscheinungen*) that we already know, can become more closely apprehended by us. From here, everything falls within or under higher rules and laws, which reveal themselves to our view not through words and hypotheses, but through phenomena (*Phänomene*). We call these primordial phenomena (*Urphänomene*), because nothing in phenomenal appearance lies beyond them; rather they are so perfectly formed that one can, by gradual steps, descend from them to the the most common cases of daily experience just as we formerly climbed up to them. We have just depicted such an *Urphänomenon*. We see on one side light and brightness, and on the other, darkness and obscurity; we bring the turbid medium between the two, and out of this opposition, with the help of the intentional mediation, the colours develop themselves, likewise by opposition and contrast, only to point back immediately again, through interrelation, to a common ground.<sup>692</sup>

Goethe showed, quite rightly, that when light is refracted to form a spectrum of colour, it is in fact light from a *circumscribed* or *edged* object that creates the coloured effect. The sun, for example, appears as a bright disk circumscribed by the darker background provided by the sky, and is thus for all intents and purposes an edged

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692 *Zur Farbenlehre*, §175: ‘Das, was wir in der Erfahrung gewahr werden, sind meistens nur Fälle, welche sich mit einiger Aufmerksamkeit unter allgemeine empirische Rubriken bringen lassen. Diese subordinieren sich abermals unter wissenschaftliche Rubriken, welche weiter hinaufdeuten, wobei uns gewisse unerlässliche Bedingungen des Erscheinenden näher bekannt werden. Von nun an fügt sich alles nach und nach unter höhere Regeln und Gesetze, die sich aber nicht durch Worte und Hypothesen dem Verstande, sondern gleichfalls durch Phänomene dem Anschauen offenbaren. Wir nennen sie Urphänomene, weil nichts in der Erscheinung über ihnen liegt, sie aber dagegen völlig geeignet sind, dass man stufenweise, wie wir vorhin hinaufgestiegen, von ihnen herab bis zu dem gemeinsten Falle der täglichen Erfahrung niedersteigen kann. Ein solches Urphänomen ist dasjenige, das wir bisher dargestellt haben. Wir sehen auf der einen Seite das Licht, das Helle, auf der andern die Finsternis, das Dunkle, wir bringen die Trübe zwischen beide, und aus diesen Gegensätzen, mit Hülfe gedachter Vermittlung, entwickeln sich, gleichfalls in einem Gegensatz, die Farben, deuten aber als-bald durch einen Wechselbezug unmittelbar auf ein Gemeinsames wieder zurück’.

object.<sup>693</sup> It is thus the visual interplay between the radiant and dark edges of a circumscribed object that creates colour through a prism, and not the light alone. When this contrasting, dark-light border is refracted through a turbid medium, it creates two elementary colours (blue and yellow: or more precisely, a cool and a warm fringe), which are *separated* by a space of white light corresponding to the surface of the refracted image. Only when sufficient *distance* exists between the prism and the surface onto which the refracted light is projected do the other colours arise, and this is because the elementary colours cross over each other and therefore mix, the convergence of the extremes forming green or magenta (*Purpur*) in the light and dark spectra respectively (Illustration 27).

Goethe's *Farbenlehre* ultimately suggests that colour is a 'degree of darkness'. In his book, a wealth of experiences and experiments are adduced in order to demonstrate that as white light is darkened, it exhibits the colour yellow (the closest colour to light), while conversely, when darkness is lightened, it exhibits the colour blue (the closest colour to darkness). Here one sees that light is "darkened" into a pale and then deep orange (*Rotgelb* and *Gelbrot*), while darkness is "brightened" into indigo and then blue (*Rotblau* and *Blau*)—an observation that goes a long way to explaining why the sun is perceived as yellow (a darkening of light), and the sky as blue (a brightening of darkness).<sup>694</sup>

Per the phenomenon of chromatic aberration well known to photographers as the red and purple "fringing" of imperfectly focused edged objects (Illustration 26), Goethe's primal colours emerge from the fringes of the dark and light spectra to mix in two different ways. This is because the light fringe is on top in the light spectrum, and on the bottom in the dark, while conversely, the dark fringe is on the bottom in the bright spectrum and on the top in the dark. Because each fringe is not pure yellow or blue, but a gradation of red, orange and yellow on one hand, and azure, indigo and violet on the other, the part of each fringe that mixes with the other is different in the light versus dark spectrum. In the light spectrum, the brightest extremes mix: the yellow edge of the bright fringe mixes with the azure or sky-blue edge of the dark fringe to produce green. The final colours projected are the composed colours: orange (*Gelbrot*, 'yellowish red'), green (*Grün*) and violet (*Blaurot*, 'blueish red'). In the dark spectrum, the darkest parts of the coloured fringes mix: the intense red-orange edge of the bright fringe mixes with the deep indigo-violet edge of the dark fringe to produce magenta (*Purpur*). The colours projected are red (*Rot*), magenta (*Purpur*) and violet (*Violette*).

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693 *Zur Farbenlehre*, §§195, 196, 306.

694 The currently accepted scientific explanation of why the sky is blue is the atmospheric scattering of light waves.

*A Note on Goethe's Colour Terminology*

When describing the *Farbenkreis* (Illustration 24), Goethe pairs the following simple colours with their composed complements:

<i>Purpur</i>	(magenta)	<i>Grün</i>	(green)
<i>Blau</i>	(blue)	<i>Orange</i>	(orange)
<i>Gelb</i>	(yellow)	<i>Violette</i>	(violet)

Here, it has been seen fit to render *Purpur* as magenta rather than red (*Rot*) as this is a more accurate description of the complement of the pure green that manifests in the space of the dark spectrum when mediating the extremes of red and violet (just as green is formed in the space of the light spectrum that mediates yellow and blue). It should be noted that as the quality of a given colour shifts, so does the quality of its complement. In regards to red, Goethe notes the time he looked keenly at a pale-skinned, dark-haired (and well-endowed) girl in a *scarlet* bodice (*scharlachroten Mieder*); he notes how the after-image of the bodice was *sea-green* (*Meergrün*).<sup>695</sup> This example shows that the general hue of red is complemented by a green of a slightly different quality, which of course depends on whether the red tends toward cool or warm. Thus, while *Purpur* and *Rot* both evoke green, the former evokes a purer, emerald green while the latter demands a cooler, sea green.<sup>696</sup>

When discussing the colour phenomena arising from chromatic aberration (i.e. via refraction through the prism), Goethe uses slightly different terminology:

Warm fringe (yellow deepening towards red):		Cool fringe (blue deepening towards red):	
Gelb	(yellow)	Blau	(blue)
Rotgelb	(reddish <i>yellow</i> = amber)	Rotblau	(reddish <i>blue</i> = indigo)
Gelbrot	(yellowish <i>red</i> = deep orange)	Blaurot	(blueish <i>red</i> = violet)
[Rot/Purpur]	(red/magenta)	[Rot/Purpur]	(red/magenta)

695 GOETHE, *Zur Farbenlehre*, §52: 'Als ich gegen Abend in ein Wirtshaus eintrat und ein wohlgewachsenes Mädchen mit blendendweißem Gesicht, schwarzen Haaren und einem scharlachroten Mieder zu mir ins Zimmer trat, blickte ich sie, die in einiger Entfernung vor mir stand, in der Halbdämmerung scharf an. Indem sie sich nun darauf hinwegbewegte, sah ich auf der mir entgegenstehenden weißen Wand ein schwarzes Gesicht, mit einem hellen Schein umgeben, und die übrige Bekleidung der völlig deutlichen Figur erschien von einem schönen Meergrün'.

696 Similarly, a hue of magenta tending towards the cooler hue of violet would evoke a slightly warmer (i.e. yellower) green.

In a fashion that evokes the Pythagorean table of opposites, Goethe expands upon the primordially of yellow and blue by articulating their moral and perceptual effects:

Considered from a general point of view, colour is determined towards one of two sides. It thus presents a contrast which we call a polarity, and which we may fitly designate by the expressions plus and minus.

Plus	Minus
Yellow	Blue
Stimulation	Privation
Light	Shadow
Brightness	Darkness
Strength	Weakness
Warmth	Coldness
Proximity	Distance
Repulsion	Attraction
Affinity with acids	Affinity with alkalis <sup>697</sup>

While the significance of the affinity with acids (*Säuren*) and bases (*Alkalien*) should not be lost in connection to the theory of salt emphasised in this thesis, the main thing that needs to be emphasised is that Goethe, by viewing the colour phenomenon as generated from a light-dark *barzakh*, effectively revived the ancient polar theory in which colour is seen as an interaction of light and darkness. Moreover, he showed that this dark-light border, when refracted through a prism, does not automatically give forth the seven colours of the rainbow.

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697 GOETHE, *Beiträge zur Farbenlehre* §696: 'Im allgemeinen betrachtet entscheidet sie sich nach zwei Seiten. Sie stellt einen Gegensatz dar, den wir eine Polarität nennen und durch ein + und – recht gut bezeichnen können: *Plus, Minus*: Gelb, Blau/ Wirkung, Beraubung/ Licht, Schatten/ Hell, Dunkel/ Kraft, Schwäche/ Wärme, Kälte/ Nähe, Ferne/ Abstoßen, Anziehen/ Verwandtschaft mit Säuren, Verwandtschaft mit Alkalien'.

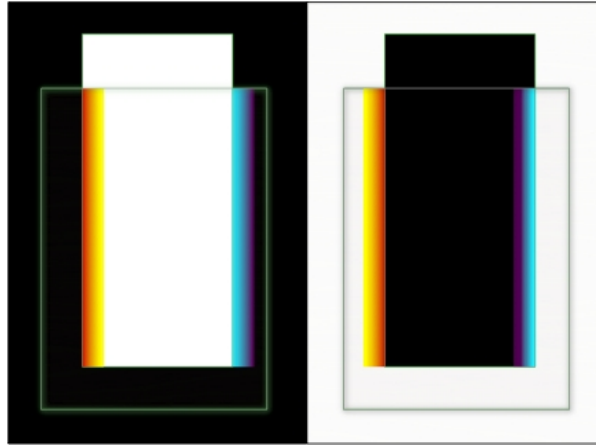


ILLUSTRATION 26: THE PHENOMENON OF CHROMATIC ABERRATION:  
 Light darkened forms a warm (red-yellow-orange) fringe;  
 Darkness lightened forms a cool (blue-indigo-violet) fringe.

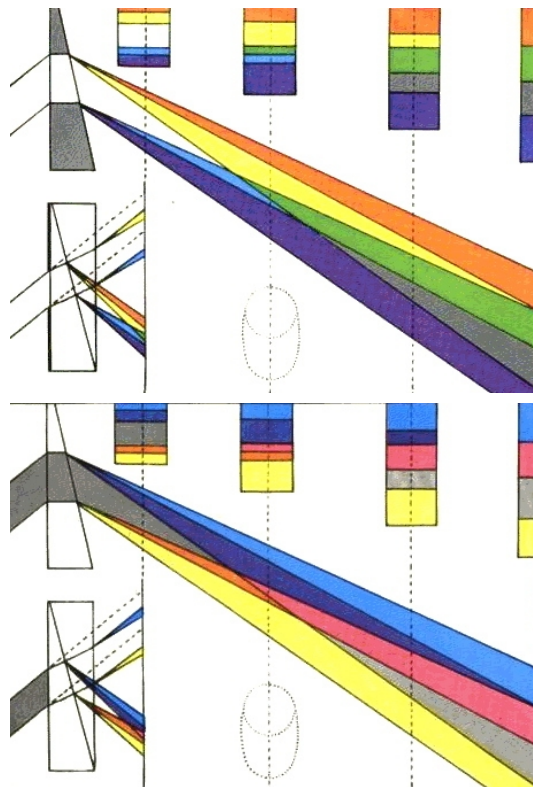


ILLUSTRATION 27: LIGHT AND DARK SPECTRA, FROM  
 GOETHE'S *FARBENLEHRE*

The warm and cool fringes formed from the borders of light and dark interact to produce green (light spectrum, above) and magenta (dark spectrum, below).

*Colour as the Body of Light*

Goethe's insight that colour is a 'degree of darkness' bears some profound connections with the colour theories of the Islamic illuminationist theosophers. It will be useful to take a brief excursus through some of these ideas in order to understand the deeper valance of the Goethean versus Newtonian theory of invisible light and colour and their implications for Schwaller's colour theory. As has been mentioned, Goethe's theory of the genesis of colour coheres with what the Arab philosophers called the *barzakh*—the borderline formed between light and shadow. The deeper context of this current brings one right to the heart of the alchemical metaphysics of colour, as well as to the ancient Greek theory of the four elements.

Of course, Arabic philosophers are by no means unified in their colour theories any more than western philosophers. Goethe's work, however, admits to a *phenomenology* of colour that strikes a certain note of resonance with the theosophical work of Shaykh Muhammad Karīm-Khān Kirmānī (d. 1870), whose *Book of Red Hyacith* (1851) broached a theosophical (i.e. Shī'ite illuminationist) theory of colour in which the phenomenon was not limited to the sensible world, but rather pointed to the metaphysical archetypes of which visible colours were the signatures or symbols. Henry Corbin elucidates on these invisible colours as follows:

So long as these transparent and diaphanous (*shaffah, shafif*) bodies remain in their subtle (*latif*) state, their colours and lights are not perceptible to our senses, for they are in too subtle a state. [...] We have been told from the start that we must distinguish between the existence of colour and its manifestation; we now learn that the invisibility of colour may be due not to its absence or to its obscuration but, on the contrary, to its extreme intensity. The same is true of all reality which is subtle and transparent; and, as we have already noted, it is here that the theosopher's perception differs from everything that the philosopher-optician could envisage.

What needs to be emphasised is the fact that it is not the darkness but extreme light that is the cause of this invisibility. We perceive these subtle realities, not when they finally emerge from obscurity and darkness but, on the contrary, when by condensation and thickening the light encloses itself in the darkness. The colours that our eyes perceive in bodies or in the most magnificent of landscapes are not present in their purity, in the state in which they are in the simple Elements which are invisible to us. They are mixed with darkness and the black colour of the Earth, because only thus are colours perceptible in the terrestrial world and to our earthly eyes. The light here is an "oriental", illuminating colour, while colour is light in a state of density, and both, as we know, are in the same relation to each other as spirit and body.<sup>698</sup>

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698 Henry CORBIN, 'The Realism and Symbolism of Colours in Shiite Cosmology according to

Kirmānī himself writes:

You must understand the concise words with which I have attempted to convey what I have conveyed. Then the exoteric will convert itself into the esoteric, and *vice versa*. For, if the esoteric dimension of the esoteric is concealed within the esoteric, it is because of its Manifestation within Manifestation itself. It is occulted because of the intensity of its Manifestation, and veiled because of the sublimity of its Light.<sup>699</sup>

In effect, the idea in *The Book of the Red Hyacinth* of colour as *barzakh* relates to what Corbin calls the *mundus imaginalis*.<sup>700</sup> More than anyone else, Corbin is responsible for elaborating the phenomenology of not only the liminal world, but the corresponding organ of perception by which this ontological *barzakh* is able to be perceived and experienced: i.e. the imagination (*phantasia, vis imaginativa*) whose essential function is mirroring and transmutational: the spiritualisation of the material and the materialisation of the spiritual (in this sense it is also theophanic). Corbin's phenomenological metaphysics thus has direct relevance to two processes of central concern to this thesis: (i) the spiritualisation of the (resurrection) body and the corporification of the spirit; and (ii) the phenomenon of invisible light becoming colour, and visible colour, light.

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“The Book of Red Hyacinth” by Shaykh Muhammad Karīm-Khān Kirmānī (d. 1870), *Temple and Contemplation* (London: KPI, 1986), 20; = ‘Réalisme et Symbolisme des Couleurs en Cosmologie Shī’ite’, *Temple et Contemplation* (Paris: Flammarion et Cie, 1980); *Eranos-Jahrbuch* XLI (1972).

699 Shaykh Muhammad Karīm-Khān KIRMĀNĪ in CORBIN, ‘The Realism and Symbolism of Colours’, 49.

700 Corbin was one of the most profound hermeneuts of the Illuminationist Sufis, whose theophanic cosmology provided the basis of what he called the imaginal world (*mundus imaginalis*, or ‘imaginal world’, a translation of the Arabic term ‘*ālam al-mithāl*’). Corbin sees this world as synonymous with the ‘eighth clime’ (Persian *Nā-Kojā-Abād*), literally the ‘city (*abād*) of non-where (*Nā-kojā*)’. Its lack of location follows from the view that, ‘rather than being situated, it situates, it is situating’. Whereas the visible and physical universe is encompassed by Mount Qāf (the cosmic mountain that marks the terminus of the material universe), the invisible zones beyond the physical universe are accordingly characterised as ‘beyond Mount Qāf’. See CORBIN, ‘Mundus Imaginalis’ in *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-2) = *Mundus Imaginalis: Or, the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1976), 3-13.

*Cyliani's Hermès Dévoilé*

In 1832 a text entitled *Hermès Dévoilé, dédié à la Postérité* (Hermes Unveiled, Dedicated to Posterity) appeared; it was anonymous, but bore the signature ‘Ci...’ at the end.<sup>701</sup> It was reprinted in Paris in 1915 by the brothers Chacornac, and thus made accessible to the Parisian alchemical milieu. The opinion current among practising alchemists of this period was that the author had actually accomplished the alchemical operations of which he speaks. Georges Ranque, for instance, an engineer reflecting upon the milieu of Parisian alchemists, makes the following remarks of Pierre Dujols (the Classicist and esotericist whose work was also appropriated by Champagne and incorporated into the works published under the pseudonym Fulcanelli):<sup>702</sup>

Based on their writings, one would think that Magophon [Pierre Dujols] and Auriger were familiar with the practice of the work. For me, who knew them well, I can state that they were acquainted with the theory, but the mystery of Mercury and bringing it to life remained for them unsolved all their lives. One of the last authors who would have succeeded is Cyliani, whose treatise appeared in 1832.<sup>703</sup>

The Cyliani text was clearly of significance to the aspiring adepts of the Parisian alchemical revival; among other things, it demonstrates a mastery of the wet way and shows an important awareness of the “exterior influences” upon the work; Fulcanelli, and later Canseliet, cite the work frequently.

The background to the Cyliani text proves more revealing still. It is linked to a manuscript entitled *Récréations hermétiques*, which, according to Bernard Husson, is ‘very likely the most important source of *Hermès dévoilé*’.<sup>704</sup> Interestingly, the current provenance of these ‘Hermetic Recreations’ is the manuscript collection of Michel

701 In *Feu du Soleil*, Eugène CANSELIET claims that Pierre Dujols created the the name Cyliani from the truncated ‘Ci...’: ‘I add then Cyliani. What a pseudonym. It was Pierre Dujols who gave him the name’. Bernard HUSSON, in *Deux Traités alchimiques du XIX siècle*, 50, adduces evidence from DE MANNE’S *Nouveau Recueil d’Evrages Anonymes et Pseudonymes* (1834), 157 (work no. 727), to show that the name Cyliani is not a pseudonym invented at the time of the twentieth century reprint (Chacornac, 1915); it existed in the 1830s. See DUBOIS (2006), 33-4.

702 Dujols’ background in classical philology is notably present in the Fulcanelli material dealing with the hermetic kabbalah, which is usually Greek, or steeped in references to classical mythology. This aspect of the Fulcanelli material is notably distinct from Schwaller’s own writings and preoccupations, which only seldom make reference to Greek philology. The Fulcanelli works may thus be understood as deriving from material originally written (independently) by Schwaller and Dujols, and then assembled, edited and illustrated by Champagne, and published under the pseudonym Fulcanelli.

703 Georges RANQUE, *La Pierre Philosophale* (Paris: Laffont, 1972); cited in DUBOIS (2006), 33.

704 CYLIANI, *Hermès dévoilé dédié à la postérité* (Paris: Imprimerie de Félix Locquin, 1832; Paris: Chacornac, 1915; ed. B. HUSSON, Paris: L’Omnium Littéraire, 1964).



Eugène Chevreul (1786–1889),<sup>705</sup> a significant figure in nineteenth century chemistry who had a particular interest in both colour and alchemy. Chevreul was the first to isolate (and name) stearic and oleic acids (important components of animal and vegetable fats). In the 1830s, he published two works on colour: *Leçons de chimie appliquée à la teinture* ('Lesson from Chemistry Applied to Dyeing', 1830), and *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés* ('On the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colours and on the Arrangement of Coloured Objects', 1839). Significantly, these two works come from the precise period in which both the *Récréations hermétiques* and *Hermès Dévoilé* appeared—the precise period which Fulcanelli, according to Schwaller's account, situates the purloined manuscript.

The manuscript from the Chevreul Collection is described as a 'collection of works and memoirs on hermeticism, probably from the hand of Jean Vauquelin des Yveteaux' (*Recueils d'ouvrages et de mémoires sur l'hermétisme, probablement de la main de Jean Vauquelin des Yveteaux*).<sup>706</sup> At this point in my research, I have not been able to avail myself of a copy of this work and so, beyond situating it in its context, I must defer any conclusive remarks until such a time as I have had occasion to examine it more fully. What can be pointed to, however, beyond indicating its strong ties to the intellectual history of Schwaller's colour theory, is the passage from this text that Champagne's disciple, Eugene Canseliet, saw fit to cite in his *L'alchimie expliquée sur ses textes classiques* (Alchemy Explained According to its Classic Texts, 1972). Here, in a discussion of the "exterior conditions" necessary for the alchemical opus—a concept no doubt cognate to Schwaller's notion of *ambiance cosmique*—one reads:

The whole world knows today that the light sent to us by the moon is but a borrowing of that of the sun, which comes to mix itself the light of the other stars. The moon is by consequence the receptacle or common source that all philosophers have understood and spoken of; it is the source of the living water. If therefore you want to reduce the rays of the sun into water, you must choose the moment when the moon transmits them to us with abundance, i.e. when it is full or when it approaches its fullness; by this means you will possess the igneous water of the sun and the moon in its greatest force.<sup>707</sup>

705 Chevreul Collection, Paris, Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, MS 358-362.

706 HUSSON, 1964; Cf. 'Alchemy V', *DGWE*, 51: 'In the 1960s, Bernard HUSSON revealed an unpublished manuscript (*Récréations hermétiques*, written after 1815) preserved in the Chevreul Collection (Paris, Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, [Ms 358-362, which bear the description: 'Recueils d'ouvrages et de mémoires sur l'hermétisme, probablement de la main de Jean Vauquelin des Yveteaux']), which was 'very likely the most important source of *Hermès dévoilé*'.

707 *Récréations hermétiques*, cited in CANSÉLIET, *L'Alchimie Expliquée* (Société nouvelle des éditions Pauvert, 1972), 127: 'Tout le monde sait aujourd'hui que la lumière que la lune nous envoie n'est qu'un emprunt de celle du soleil, à laquelle vient se mêler la lumière des autres astres. La lune est par conséquent le réceptacle ou foyer commun dont tous les

*Cosmological, Soteriological and Metallurgical Alchemy in Cyliani*

A description shall now be given of the Cyliani text itself. Herein, one finds a story of an alchemist who, at the height of a life of hardship and suffering, has a visionary dream in which the object of his life-long hermetic quest is revealed to him. Cyliani's visionary experience is inaugurated when the oak tree under which he is sitting splits open to reveal a celestial nymph. Impeccably beautiful, clad in transparent vestments, and moved by the alchemist's plight, she proclaims:

my essence is celestial, you can consider me an emanation (*déjection*) from the pole star. My power is such that I animate all: I am the astral spirit, I give life to everything that breathes and grows, and I know all. Speak: what can I do for you?<sup>708</sup>

Cyliani asks to receive knowledge of three things: the organisation of the universe, the immortality of the soul, and the means to achieve the philosopher's stone. Interestingly, the nymph prefaces her recital by stating that her description will be part figurative: 'Listen (*écoute*), unite all your faculties and engrave in your memory the recital that I am about to give by taking a part of my comparisons as figurative (*au figuré*) in order that I can render myself sensible to your intelligence'.<sup>709</sup> After describing an interacting system of worlds composed of suns, fixed stars, nebulae, comets, planets and satellites, all of the same origin and 'all swimming within the breast of eternity',<sup>710</sup> the nymph avows: 'Everything that exists in the universe that is material or physical is purely mineral; even the gasses'.<sup>711</sup> This mineral basis of matter and life is organised into living forms only when a planet takes on a 'certain metalliferous consistency' (*une certaine consistance métallifère*) after which it brings to birth on its surface 'the elements necessary to the life of animals appropriate to its nature'. The soul is described as the *link* between celestial spirit and mineral matter by

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philosophes ont entendu parler; elle est la source de leur eau vivre. Si donc vous voulez réduire en eau les rayons du soleil, choisissez le moment où la lune nous les transmet avec abondance, c'est-à-dire lorsqu'elle est pleine ou qu'elle approche de son pleine; vous aurez par ce moyen l'eau ignée des rayons du soleil et de la lune dans sa plus grande force'.

708 CYLIANI, *Hermès dévoilé dédié à la postérité*, 'Mon essence est céleste, tu peux même me considérer comme une déjection de l'étoile polaire. Ma puissance est telle que j'anime tout: je suis l'esprit astral, je donne la vie à tout ce qui respire et végète, je connais tout. Parle: que puis-je faire pour toi?'

709 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'écoute, réunis toutes tes facultés et grave-toi dans la mémoire le récit que je vais te faire, en prenant une partie des mes comparaisons au figuré, pour que je puisse me rendre sensible à ton intelligence'.

710 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'nagent dans le sein de l'éternité'.

711 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'Tout ce qui existe dans l'univers de matériel ou de physique est purement minéral; les gaz le sont eux mêmes; prends notes de cet aveu'.

which animate bodies are enformed and vivified. She thus describes the human as a being of triple composition (*composé triple*); when the soul is separated from the body, only the form perishes, i.e. the physical material is given over to the reactions of its constituent principles. Importantly, however, Cyliani is told that the bodily constituents can all be regenerated by the ‘mineralising spirit’ (*l’esprit minéralisateur*).

Overall, one learns less about colours in the Cyliani text and more about the broader spiritual and cosmogonic framework within which alchemical processes are situated and understood. Here it must be noted that the idea of soul as link or bond to the animating spirit is a point that Schwaller would also make in connection to the Egyptian symbol of the *ankh* as ‘knot of life’, which he describes in a similar fashion as forming the connection between the spirit (the power embodied in the *was*-sceptre) and the body (*djed*-pillar); the ankh, like the Neoplatonic idea of the soul, forms both the mean term between spirit and matter and the means by which matter is enformed and animated by spirit.<sup>712</sup> The idea of *l’esprit minéralisateur* also forms a key to Schwaller’s cosmogonic conception of mineralogenesis in which he explicitly maintains that the mineral-metallic entity is the first manifestation of spirit.

After furnishing knowledge of celestial processes and of the soul’s immortality, Cyliani’s astral initiatrix takes him on an otherworldly journey—a dream within a dream—in which he wakes before a temple: ‘You see before you, she said to me, the place where you must solve the following problem. Since you have been an excellent mathematician, reflect well, for you cannot achieve anything without its solution: From one by one which is only one are made three, from three, two, and from two, one’.<sup>713</sup> This, of course, is the ancient formula of Maria the Jewess. In ‘Notes et propos sur l’herméticism’ (Notes on Hermeticism, one of Schwaller’s most explicit alchemical texts), the Alsatian alchemist elaborates on a point that relates directly to the brief mathematical riddle that the nymph gives to Cyliani:

But let us return to our principal point, in which the philosophers admonish: from One make two, from two, three, from three, two, and again (anew), from two, One. As to this final One, how does it distinguish itself from the primordial One? Our answer: by consciousness. The final One is, in its nature, identical to the original abstract One, but it has tangible form. Only then does this form tend to fade into the primordial One, which it has not ceased to be, carrying with it the acquired knowledge of manifestation, the consciousness of itself, and therefore complete power.<sup>714</sup>

712 *Roi* (trans. VandenBroeck, 145 ff.)

713 *Hermès dévoilé*, ‘Tu voilà rendu, me dit-elle, au lieu où tu dois résoudre le problème suivant. Puisque tu as été bon mathématicien, réfléchis bien, car tu ne peux rien sans sa solution. D’un par un qui n’est qu’un sont faits trois, des trois deux et de deux un’.

714 SCHWALLER, ‘Notes et propos sur l’herméticism’: ‘Cette forme ne tend alors qu’à s’évanouir dans l’Un primordial, qu’elle n’a cessé d’être, empourtant avec lui l’acquis de la Manifestation, la Conscience de Lui-même, donc la Tout-Puissance’.

The significance of this will become more apparent in light of the Pythagorean metaphysics that characterise Schwaller's colour theory.

So instructed with this mathematical formula, Cyliani unlocks the gates to the temple with a chemical substance, slays the dragon guarding the entrance to the inner temple and, gaining access to the inner sanctum, beholds two sacred crystal vases 'of the same celestial origin'. Each vase contains substances crucial to the formation of the philosopher's stone: one is surmounted by a gold crown with four fleurons, bearing the inscription: 'matter containing the two metallic natures';<sup>715</sup> the other is thicker, sealed with a glass stopper, and adorned with a silver crown ornamented with nine brilliant stars. Its inscription reads: 'astral spirit or ardent spirit, which is a projection (*déjection*) of the pole star'.<sup>716</sup> Notably, this second substance is of the exact nature of the celestial nymph herself, who says to Cyliani, upon reading its inscription: 'Do you see my mirror?'<sup>717</sup>

The rest of the text concerns itself with a detailed procedural description in three parts: (i) the preparation of the azoth or philosopher's mercury, (ii) the preparation of the sulphur, and (iii) the conjunction of the sulphur with the philosophical mercury. This is also the overarching concern of Schwaller's alchemy. Overall, the Cyliani text deals with the interrelation of celestial and material processes on one hand, and with precise alchemical procedures on the other (veiling, however, the nature of the matters, the Labours of Hercules, and the fire employed in the *œuvre*). Contrary to the oversimplistic claims that post-Enlightenment alchemy is purely spiritual and devoid of operative applications, a very clear emphasis is placed on the interweaving of mineral and spiritual processes as a basis for undertaking specific laboratory procedures. In this way, Cyliani's text provides many points of connection with Schwaller's alchemical purview. In regards to its significance to the colour manuscript, however, it is the references to *oil* in the procedural description that strike the deepest note of resonance with Lubiczian alchemy. Here, the oil is no less than the *tincture* and *true colouration*. Comments Cyliani:

The oil thus obtained by separation is the tincture (*teinture*), or the sulphur, or the radical fire of gold, or the true colouration (*véritable coloration*); it is also the true potable gold or the universal medicine for all the ills that afflict humanity. [...] This oil can take all possible forms and forms itself into powder, salt, stone, spirit, etc. by its desiccation and the help of its proper secret fire. This oil is also the blood of the red lion.<sup>718</sup>

715 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'Matière contenant les deux natures métalliques'.

716 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'Esprit astral ou esprit ardent, qui est une déjection de l'étoile polaire'.

717 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'Vois-tu ma miroir?'

718 *Hermès dévoilé*, 'L'huile obtenue ainsi par la séparation est la teinture, ou le soufre, ou le feu radicale de l'or, ou, la véritable coloration; elle est aussi le vrai or potable ou la médecine universelle pour tous les maux qui affligent l'humanité. [...] Cette huile peut

In his private correspondence, Schwaller gives his most explicit and revealing discussion of the alchemical process. Dating from the Luxor period, these letters were written to an unknown recipient some ten years after Schwaller had successfully completed the glass work with Fulcanelli at Plan-de-Grasse. In one note, entitled 'Elements of the Cornerstone that was Lacking at Babel', Schwaller discusses how 'the most fixed thing in the world', after taking an earthly and then a crystallised or vitreous form, assumes two higher intensities that are marked by an *oily* form:

Now, look at the aspects of the most fixed thing in the world. At first sight it has the aspect of a (white or red) earth, an amorphous earth. Then it takes a crystallised aspect, or more precisely, vitreous; it melts in fire without smoking or burning, for fire can no longer do anything against it. The third aspect is liquid, oily, the sacred oil of the kings, the luminous oil—against which common fire can no longer do anything. The fourth aspect—and it is for this that I am giving you these explanations—is an oil or Water so fluid that the least amount of fire makes it return to its origin. Now, what is it that distinguishes its diverse *forms*? Uniquely, it is the *intensity*, and intensity is no other thing than time.<sup>719</sup>

Although the Cyliani text does not speak of colour in any way that can be related to the issues that arise in Newton and Goethe, his discussion penetrates right to the heart of the alchemical process by emphasising oil as *tincture*. This point consolidates the validity of the reference to oil in the description of the colour manuscript that was signalled at the beginning of this chapter.

### The Evolution of Schwaller's *Farbenlehre*

What Schwaller managed to tease out of the 'purloined manuscript' was the relationship between the seven colours of the visible spectrum on one hand, and the alchemical septenary formed by the three principles and four elements on the other. As will be seen, these relationships reveal the unrecognised significance of indigo in the constellation of the secondary colours, which further explicates the role of salt in the formation of the philosopher's stone and the perfection of the alchemical work in violet (royal or Tyrean purple).

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prendre toutes les formes possibles et se former en poudre, en sel, en pierre, en esprit, etc., par sa dessiccation `a l'aide de son propre feu secret. Cette huile est aussi le sang du lion rouge'.

719 SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, 'Les Éléments de la Pierre Angulaire qui a manqué à Babel', *Lettres à un disciple de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz*, 172-187 (facsimilie and transcription); *Notes et propos inédits* I, 101-6 (retranscription). Schwaller's remark that 'intensity is no other thing than time' comes very close to the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of Jean Gebser, for whom intensity and time mark the forms of consciousness.

Schwaller's main discussions of colour theory emerge in the following texts and contexts:

1. *La Doctrine* (St. Moritz, Switzerland, 1926); precise period in which Schwaller is collaborating with Fulcanelli on the stained glass *œuvre*.
2. 'La Philosophie du «Troisième»' (Luxor, Egypt, c. 1942-1944); posthumously published in *Notes et propos inédits I*.
3. 'Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs', posthumously published text in *Le Miracle Égyptien* (precise date of original composition unknown).
4. *Le Temple de l'homme* (composed at Luxor, Egypt and Plan-de-Grasse, France; published 1957); the discussion here is a concise summary of material present in the *Miracle Égyptien* text.
5. Schwaller to VandenBroeck, as recorded in the latter's memoir, *Al-Kemi* (discussions taking place at Plan-de-Grasse, France, 1959-1960); here one finds extended discussion of Schwaller's mature colour theory, fleshed out by VandenBroeck's own insights and illustrations.

The balance of this chapter will now focus on a close description of each of these presentations on colour theory with recourse to extended translations from the source texts. A summary of Schwaller's *Farbenlehre* will then be presented, and its significance to the hermetic *œuvre* established.

#### *Colour Theory in La Doctrine*

Schwaller's first systematic exposition of his colour *symbolique* occurs during the course of three conferences given at Suhalia during the Christmas of 1926, the precise period when he was working with Fulcanelli on the stained glass *œuvre*. These conferences were published the following year as *La Doctrine*, with an imprimatur that the text be restricted only to his disciples.<sup>720</sup> What is learnt from this text is the essentially Pythagorean context that Schwaller establishes as a basis for comprehending the colour phenomenon. The septenary of the colour spectrum is seen as a contraction of a nine-fold series, and the nine-fold series is seen to surround the central unity of the Pythagorean *dekad* (ten as unity, or *tetraktys*). Here, the seven-fold colour series expands itself to provide 'the nine functions of our phenomenon One'.<sup>721</sup>

Schwaller begins by affirming his conviction that all manifest things are of a septenary nature:

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720 *La Doctrine: trois conférences faites à Suhalia Noël 1926*. Edition privé (St. Moritz: Officina Montalia, 1927), 59 ff.

721 *La Doctrine*, 65.

In studying various phenomena, I have arrived at some observations which are always confirmed: it is that they are always formed of seven factors. Thus light has seven colours, the musical scale seven tones, and the spectrum of vibrations has seven groups in which one finds, among other things, heat, light and so on, groups that are as distinct from each other—from electrical oscillations to x-rays—as the individual colours are. As a consequence, and after analysis, I have found that *every phenomenon is composed of seven factors*. And in breaking down these seven factors, I have found still more.<sup>722</sup>

He then introduces the phenomenon of sound vibration as a model for understanding the septenary as a contraction of a nine-fold process:

The shock of a stick on this table gives a sound. In analysing this phenomenon, I find the following:

- I.
  - a. the stick in movement;
  - b. the collision of the stick against the resistance of the table;
  - c. the vibration of this stick on the table;
  
- II. There is:
  - a. the vibration of the shocked body;
  - b. the air which receives this vibration;
  - c. the vibration transmitted by this air in a determined ray;
  
- III. Following this there is:
  - a. the atmospheric vibration;
  - b. the eardrum, the resistance of my ear;
  - c. the vibration transmitted by the membrane;<sup>723</sup>

Schwaller's analysis of this phenomenon emphasises the *confondement* of cause and resistance at the junctures of each stage. As will be seen, this is the root of the doubling of yellow and blue in the colour phenomenon (Goethe's primordial colours).

Analysing this phenomenon superficially, we come to distinguish these simple functions into three neat groups, which, linked together, produce the effect we come to perceive as sound. Each group has three functions, making nine in total. Looking more closely, we observe that the third function *c* in the first group *I* confounds itself with the first function *a* in the second group *II*, as, likewise, function *c* under group *II* confounds itself with *a* under *III*. Seven terms thus remain, which I call the *factors of phenomena*. Thus, this phenomenon is made, as

<sup>722</sup> *La Doctrine*, 60-1.

<sup>723</sup> *La Doctrine*, 61-2.

are others, of seven factors of which study has revealed to me the existence of nine functions to determine a phenomenon, in this case sound. One can very easily push this analysis further and find, for example, that the vibration in such phenomena is itself septuple in function, and so it continues; one would finally arrive at forty-nine factors, seven of which are principle, each having seven sub-factors. *All phenomena are so constituted*, it is an absolute law of matter, the law of the *genesis of things*. It is thus that God created heaven and earth and all living things in seven days with the power of nine celestial hierarchies.<sup>724</sup>

Schwaller then underscores the fact that the active cause or energy of a phenomenon finds its resistance in and of its own nature. Here, matter that is in movement finds its resistance in matter that is moving less:

First and foremost we see once again that the existence of an ordinary cause—which in becoming is power in itself, but in matter is always *matter in activity*—finds a resistance which is of the same nature. Here the stick is active because it is moving, and its resistance is a *matter* that is moving less (the table), and by this fact is *in resistance*. Thus, what I say here in principle is confirmed in fact:

1. The resistance is immanent to the nature of the activity of the cause.
2. From this there is an active cause; there is also a phenomenon, since this active cause will necessarily find its resistance.<sup>725</sup>

This principle lies at the heart of Schwaller's mature metaphysics in *Le Temple de l'homme*, in which a homogeneous milieu separates itself into an active aspect (agent) and a passive aspect (patient) and acts upon itself to create the phenomenal world as a reaction to the metaphysical action/resistance. Not only does this process cohere with the formula of the Graeco-Egyptian alchemists ('one nature acts upon itself'), it also encapsulates the dynamics of the *tria prima* in which salt—concrete phenomenon—results from a neutralisation reaction between sulphur (active cause) and mercury (passive resistance). This understanding, moreover, feeds right into Schwaller's understanding of the *neteru* (the nine archangelic *puissances*; the Egyptian Ennead) perceived as functional activities of the apophatic unity, which, through their resistances and the reactions to their resistances, create concrete things. Ultimately, Schwaller held that cause, resistance and effect are not separate phenomena but are in fact linked in a way that is comparable to a direct lineage, a view that underpins his conception of the doctrine of signatures.<sup>726</sup> Thus, in the text presently being examined,

<sup>724</sup> *La Doctrine*, 62-3.

<sup>725</sup> *La Doctrine*, 63-4.

<sup>726</sup> For Schwaller, this was the metaphysical dynamic behind the doctrine of signatures; all created phenomena bear the nature of their cause, as, for example, the sound produced by a stick on a (wooden) table will always bear the distinct sound (signature) of wood, i.e. it

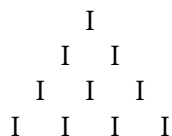


all phenomena are bound to their creative causes through the direct link of action and reaction:

There follows yet another thing; that the phenomenon properly speaking is the direct link, the direct logical function between the active cause and the effect which results from the resistance to this cause. The phenomenon is therefore the measure or consciousness, or, in our explanation, the knowledge of the thing in itself: the *I* or *ego*. *The resistance is the « lesser » activity within the causal activity, therefore it measures this activity*, and the measure is the phenomenon. [...] In effect, whether phenomenon is universal or particular is secondary [...] there is no principal difference between chaos and the original cause, since one departs from the other by necessity.<sup>727</sup>

The septenary as a contraction of the ninefold functions of apophatic unity was for Schwaller embodied in the Pythagorean *tetraktys* or *decad*, which was accorded the nature of chaos in the sense of both *prima* and *ultima materia*:

Let us now return to our *decad*. It is a triangular number which cannot be composed other than as follows:



Now, as such, this triangle is made of nine unities which surround a central unity, the *second* number of the *third* number. In mysticism, one would say Christ; they are the nine functions of our phenomenon One. If we transcribe them into the schema of genesis, we will see that, *practically*, these nine functions give seven factors.<sup>728</sup>

Here Schwaller brings the doubling phenomenon into play, in which the *vibration* (born from a cause and its resistance) is at the same time conjunct with the new *cause*, which transmits its energy. Schwaller portrays this dynamic in a diagram that he then uses to explore the colour phenomenon; for ease of reference, Schwaller's diagram has been reproduced with the colours indicated (Illustration 28):

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will not sound like metal, only wood.

<sup>727</sup> *La Doctrine*, 64-5.

<sup>728</sup> *La Doctrine*, 65.

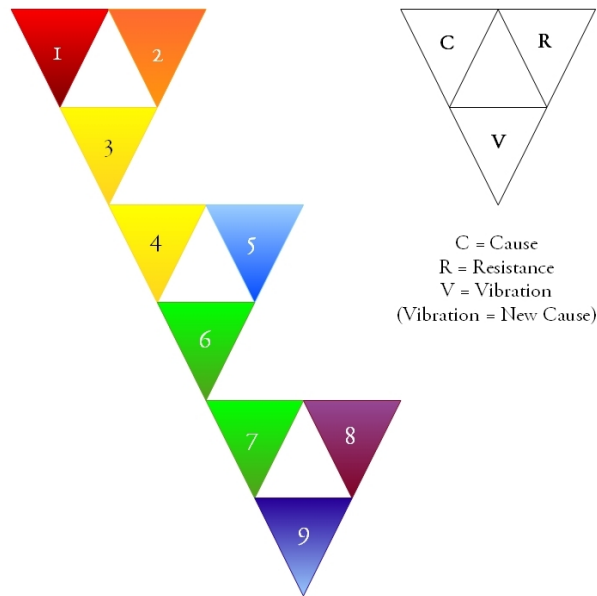


ILLUSTRATION 28: CAUSE, RESISTANCE, VIBRATION

*Cause + resistance = vibration (vibration = new cause).* The seven-fold process expands to a nine-fold process, and the process itself goes beyond the spectrum (*octave, dekad*) not through violet (8, *final resistance*) but through indigo (9, *vibration, new cause*).

Continues Schwaller:

As the most striking image of this we are going to take the spectrum of light with its colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet; and if we class them in the order of factors we will have: 1 red, 2 yellow, 3 and 4 orange, 5 blue, 6 and 7 green, 9 indigo and 8 violet. This is the order of becoming, whereas the order of appearance will be known by the phenomenon: 1 red, 2 orange, 3 yellow, 4 green, 5 blue, 6 indigo and 7 violet.<sup>729</sup>

From the spectrum of colours Schwaller distinguishes (i) the simple or elementary colours (red, yellow and blue); (ii) the mixed colours (orange, green and violet); and (iii) the complementary pairs (red-green, orange-blue and yellow-violet). This much is familiar from Goethe, for whom six colours form the definitive balance of primary,

<sup>729</sup> *La Doctrine*, 66-7.

mixed and complementary hues.<sup>730</sup> It is at this point that Schwaller introduces the problem of indigo. Here, for the first time, Schwaller advances the contention that indigo plays a unique and hitherto unrecognised role in colour theory:

It would seem that I have forgotten indigo, but I have not; everything will be explained in turn. See now how these characters correspond to the scheme of genesis. First of all the simples: 1 red, 2 yellow, 5 blue; and then the mixed: 3-4 orange, 6-7 green, 8 violet.

Now violet, corresponding to the third resistance, must be situated there by logic, and yet finds itself at a place where there is no mixture; likewise indigo finds itself at a place where there must be a mixture.

Now, observe this: Violet is only *comprehensible* for us as a mixture of red and blue, but this mixture has never given violet, one has never been able to attain anything but a red more or less purple, or a blue more or less red. In the psychology of colours, one speaks of warm red and cold blue and these two extremes have never been able to, and indeed cannot, give anything other than a neutral colour tending towards cold or heat, whereas violet is frankly neutral. From this the situation of violet follows and becomes understandable, which, figuring in the apparent mixtures, *is in fact not a mixture*, no more than *the extreme resistance in the phenomena of the world can be any other thing than the negation of all activity, composed of everything, and at the same time unique in itself*. Hence violet: dark light, cold colour, extremity of the spectrum, negation of colours, affirmation of all.<sup>731</sup>

As will be seen when the full hermetic correspondences to the colours are elaborated, Schwaller associates violet with salt, and here his remarks on the *neutrality* of violet thus become significant. It is worth noting that Schwaller also distinguishes violet, regarded as neutral, from purple, which he regards as either warm or cool depending on its balance of red and blue, colours which, for Schwaller, do not give violet. The distinction here between violet and purple mirrors that of Goethe, who distinguished *Violette* from *Purpur*. For Schwaller, red and blue are merely approximations that assist the *comprehension* of violet, not its actual components.

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730 *Zur Farbenlehre*, §60: 'Diese Phänomene sind von der größten Wichtigkeit, indem sie uns auf die Gesetze des Sehens hindeuten und zu künftiger Betrachtung der Farben eine notwendige Vorbereitung sind. Das Auge verlangt dabei ganz eigentlich Totalität und schließt in sich selbst den Farbenkreis ab. In dem vom Gelben geforderten Violetten liegt das Rote und Blaue; im Orange das Gelbe und Rote, dem das Blaue entspricht; das Grüne vereinigt Blau und Gelb und fordert das Rote, und so in allen Abstufungen der verschiedensten Mischungen. Dass man in diesem Falle genötigt werde, drei Hauptfarben anzunehmen, ist schon früher von den Beobachtern bemerkt worden'.

731 *La Doctrine*, 67-8.

Whereas purple is a mixture, violet is a culmination: simultaneously composed and unique, a negation and an affirmation.

Whereas violet is a composed colour, one of the *tria prima*, indigo is considered by Schwaller to be one of the four *elemental* colours because, like red, yellow and blue, it is not seen to result from a mixture. ('No mixture will give indigo'). Orange, green and violet are connected with the three alchemical primaries (sulphur, mercury and salt) because these are all mixed colours which, metaphysically speaking, indicates not that they are secondary but rather more primary because closer to unity. The three partake more closely of the unifying one, existing higher on the scale of being than the four elements. Thus, what is composed or mixed (orange, green, violet) partakes more of the unifying monad than that which is more separate or unmixed (red, yellow, blue and indigo). Indigo is thus an unmixed, elemental colour.

If anything, it is precisely in the ambiguous nature of indigo that its invisible mystery is evoked. Schwaller's comments, which are concerned with a precise hermetic physics, indicate that the mysterium of indigo is to be sensed in its suggestion of a principle which synthesises indigoid earth and red fire, making of the spectrum an ouroboric circle (or better, *spiral*). Like the musical scale, the recapitulation of the original tone is not a return to the fundamental note but emerges as an octave—the *octavo* of the colour manuscript—and here magenta, infra red and/or ultra violet may be evoked).

Just as violet partakes of fundamental ambiguities which lie beyond direct comprehension, so too does indigo elude direct grasp. Schwaller goes on to describe it as an effect of something that cannot be directly perceived:

And now look at indigo. It is situated at a place where, apparently, one would expect a mixture, *a continuity of function*. Now, this is the instant where the membrane transmits the sound to the ear. Without doubt the phenomenon continues, but upon completely different bases to the transmission of exterior sound. There is something else that begins which has nothing in common with what we call sound. The auditory nerve enters into play with all the mechanics of the ear. In the same way, indigo plays an equally bizarre role in colour. It is neither blue nor violet, yet nevertheless seems to depart from blue. In effect, blue is really *light-blue*, and *nothing can render it sombre*, neither mixture nor weakening of light, and hence indigo, although it seems to partake of the nature of blue, is not blue but something else: a *sombre-blue*, the continuation or consequence of which escapes us directly. This is also the case in the complementaries, where indigo was paired with orange and we replace it with blue in appearance.<sup>732</sup>

As noted, indigo is ambiguous or difficult to pin down. And here yet another ambiguity is met, for in the spectrum indigo emerges precisely at the point at which a

<sup>732</sup> *La Doctrine*, 68-9.

blend is expected: a blend of blue and violet (just as orange is a blend of red and yellow; green a blend of yellow and blue, etc.) In this sense, indigo should be one of the *tria prima*. Yet at the same time, violet cannot take its place among the elemental primaries insofar as it is a mix of red and blue (or perhaps red and indigo). Either way, indigo, from the alchemical perspective, does appear more suited to the elemental primaries than the *tria prima*, even in spite of its ambiguities.

Interestingly, the word indigo refers less to the colour itself than it does to the place from whence the colour came—India. In Sanskrit it was known as *nīla*, which means ‘dark coloured, dark blue’; more specifically it referred to the dark blue dye made from the indigo plant, *indigofera suffruticosa*, which has been cultivated in the Indus valley for some five thousand years. From there the word (and the plant) spread throughout Arabia, Central Asia, Egypt and the Mediterranean. *Nīla* was rendered in Arabic as *an-nīla* (= *al-nīla*); it came into the European vernaculars in the sixteenth century via Portuguese, entering English as ‘anil’, the common name of the indigo plant. The Greeks gave it their own name: *indikos* (ἰνδικός), meaning ‘of India’ and in this form the word continued into the European vernaculars via Latin, emerging also in the sixteenth century via Spanish as *indico*. It was shortly hereafter that seventeenth century colour theorists picked up the term, while Newton used it to crystallise the conception of the spectrum as a sevenfold entity (indigo and orange being the two colours Newton added to the previously five-fold conception of the rainbow). Indigo is typically understood as a blend of blue and violet in the same way that orange is understood as a blend of red and yellow. Because the general hue-intensity of the spectral colours lessen as they approach violet—red being the most intense, violet the least—indigo is in part a lessening of the intensity of blue; at the same time, however, it involves a shift in the gradation of its hue towards violet and hence towards red.) By the time the British had colonised India, the indigo dye was used to make an entire range of blues, spanning from dark navy to light milk blues. The spectral colour was named after colours derived from the dye, which given its range, is difficult to precisely identify.<sup>733</sup>

Returning to the diagram, Schwaller then discusses the complementaries:

Red-green would be 1 and 6-7 (complex); Orange-indigo or blue would be 3-4 (complex) and 9; Yellow-violet would be 2 and 8 (incomprehensibly complex, final resistance or dark light). Thus the first *Cause* (red) has its complement in the second effect (third cause); the first resistance (yellow) has its complement in the third and final resistance; the first effect (orange) has its complement in the final (third) effect. *Thus, in the functions, each third or final term of the same genus in a*

733 Cf. FINLAY, *Colour*, 352-89; More speculatively, perhaps it is the colour used to depict the skin of Indian divinities such as Krishna, Kali and Shiva which best evokes the numen of indigo. Indeed, the very names of Krishna and Kali indicate their colour: Krishna, ‘black’; Kali, ‘dark’; while Shiva is often related to the colour of a corpse (*shava*), besmearing himself with the ashes of the funerary pyres.

*cohesive Ego is complimentary to the first.* One is complementary to three. [...] You will remember that the cause One becomes the realisation by its proper negation, and thus determines [both] One and Two, [which] will be Three, like the first number of manifestation, of thing—the Divine cause manifested. If, at this moment, I would say to you: an irreducible is complementary to the trinity of the manifested cause, you would not believe or understand. Now you will admit that, since complimentary wants to say: *that which unites*, mutually negates itself, completes itself until the cessation of being, like red and green, etc., then *the cause and its manifestation complement themselves until the negation of the one and the other, until the affirmation of the (first) principle, such as white light is for colours.* I say therefore: from the moment that there is something, that something is active and finds in itself its resistance in its lesser activity: from the instant where this produces itself, the phenomenon appears that has a ninefold function and a septuple appearance of factors and these seven factors complement themselves from one to three to the point of a new and definitive negation of factors [...]

This is the principle from which all the applications depart, in the numbers contained in the Chaos, [and] this Chaos plays the role of a primordial, complex unity, which, thus, by successive complementation, purifies itself in order to give [rise to] the total being or cosmic Ego. The phases of this purification are, for the general families, the kingdoms, and for the species and so forth, the groups of numbers.<sup>734</sup>

It must always be born in mind that this model is not being devised for purposes of common colour theory, but as a *symbolique* of hermetic physics. Schwaller is suggesting that violet is the ultimate resistance in the colour spectrum and that it evokes indigo, which is an energy that goes beyond colour (just as the transmission of sound by the membrane of the ear into an electrical impulse goes beyond its previous vibratory form).<sup>735</sup> It is important to recognise here that because indigo is seen as a *reaction* to the final resistance of violet, indigo is not a blend of blue and violet. As will be seen when the principal and elemental correspondences that Schwaller would later give to the colours are examined—in which violet is associated with salt, indigo with

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<sup>734</sup> *La Doctrine*, 69-72.

<sup>735</sup> The electric connection in relation to indigo is not without a few significant suggestions. On the one hand, one can point out that Edwin Babbitt, in a unique work of scientific esotericism, divided the spectrum into thermal (red-orange-yellow) and electric (blue-indigo-violet) colours. On the other hand, indigo, as we will see, was connected by Schwaller to Zeus-Amun, and hence, in the planetary scale of metals, to Jupiter/tin. In antiquity there was one other association with Jupiter: electron. Electron was usually understood either as an alloy of gold and silver, or as the fossilised tree resin, amber. Now amber is significant for two reasons: first, it is a great conductor of static electricity; second, it is the exact complement of indigo. As the colour between yellow and orange, it forms the precise opposite of the colour between violet and sky blue.

earth—one is dealing here with a model for the inscription upon the incorruptible nucleus (the ‘salt of the earth’). Indigo, being the effect of the ultimate resistance provided by violet, represents something which goes beyond the spectrum as commonly understood; the impulse is transmitted, indeed, transmuted, by the “membrane” and continues in another form. It is not a mixture, but a new initiating unity.

*The Philosophy of the “Third”*

Some fifteen years later, in a collection of unpublished texts entitled *Notes et propos inédits* dating from the early 1940s, Schwaller takes up the same concerns.<sup>736</sup> In an essay called ‘La philosophie du “troisième”’ (The Philosophy of the “Third”), the same basic colour theory is situated within the context of the triangular relationship. Here Schwaller concerns himself with what he calls ‘the third term of an original Trinity’.<sup>737</sup> ‘In the final analysis’, remarks Schwaller, ‘everything reduces itself, in its original definition, into three terms’; however, the reality must be expressed in symbols, because ‘it is impossible to give a concrete notion to this Trinity’.<sup>738</sup> The relationship father-mother-child, for instance, is ‘false in its image’ because it ‘indicates a product and not a relation (*rapport*)’.<sup>739</sup> Although Schwaller’s notion of the third is abstract and qualitative, it is nevertheless seen to have concrete effects; he likens it to the axis of a sphere that turns upon itself: the axis and its two poles are abstract in the sense that there is no actual material “bar” or “pole” transfixing the earth, but at the same time

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736 *Notes et propos inédits* (Tome I) appeared in print posthumously in 2005, presumably from material contained in the *Ta Meri* archives, to which I have not had access and so must rely on the published version, which appears without critical apparatus, save for the following remarks on the back cover: ‘Les Notes et propos que nous offre ce recueil proviennent des carnets personnels de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, sous cette même dénomination. Ils sont datés de 1942, 1943 ou 1944, s’inscrivant ainsi dans la longue période où le philosophe séjourna en Égypte, entre 1936 et 1952; les douze dernières années étant consacrées à l’étude extensive du temple de Louksor. Il est certain que, de son vivant, R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz n’aurait pas été effleuré par l’idée de proposer à l’édition un ouvrage dont le but et les structures n’auraient pas été prévus et définis. C’est pourquoi ces écrits, jaillis spontanément sous sa plume, nous le font connaître sous un jour différent. Quoique d’un caractère parfois ardu, ces Propos se présentent au lecteur avec la plus grande simplicité, lui apportant, parfois des réponses à des questions encore inexprimées, mais toujours une marche à suivre. A l’intérêt très réel des Notes et Propos se joignent le privilège d’être admis à une méditation, mais aussi le charme inattendu d’une conversation qui, au détour du chemin, provoque un cœur à cœur’.

737 SCHWALLER, ‘La Philosophie du « Troisième »’, *Notes et propos inédits* I, 97-100.

738 ‘Troisième’, 97-100.

739 ‘Troisième’, 97-100.

this abstract phenomenon is ‘concrete’ with ‘direct physical effects’.<sup>740</sup> In other words, ‘the third term of an original Trinity is an abstract relation between two known terms and it belongs as much to one as it does to the other’:

To express it differently: two quantitative data of the same nature create between them a relation that is a *quality*. The quality is abstract, yet nevertheless comprehensible. In the series of colours, one could say: the composed colour is qualitative, [representing] a relation between two simple colours, non-existent by themselves.

The examples given here are simplified. One could analyse them further but the principle remains the same: the qualitative phenomenon is abstract, produced by two concrete elements. Now it is by the qualitative phenomenon that we perceive the world and *know* it (*le connaissons*); by contrast, we *grasp* it (*le comprenons*) only through a comparison of concrete data.<sup>741</sup>

It is notable that the father-mother-child image appears inadequate for Schwaller because all of the data are known and concrete; Schwaller is suggesting that the third term of which he speaks is qualitative, a cause and not a product, knowable only through the two concrete (i.e. quantitative) terms. The third term is the “existentiating” force behind the two concretely existing terms, and in this sense the concrete terms act as signatures or sympathies that express the abstract quality.

Schwaller also suggests that the abstract quality is the modality by which one knows (*connaissons*) its quantitative and concrete manifestations; thus we know the concrete quantities blue and yellow because of the abstract quality green (neither of which would exist without the quality green); conversely, one can only grasp (*comprendons*) green through one’s concrete perception of the poles blue and yellow. Abstract quality is the existentiating principle of material quantity, and through the two poles of material quantity one can grasp the hidden, third term: quality.

Energy is pure Quality, the relation between two concrete poles. Life is pure Energy, the relation between two concrete poles. It would be vain to want to give a name and a concrete definition to that which, *in itself*, is the definition of the two concrete data. The phenomenon ceases, necessarily, when one of the poles ceases to be. This alone allows [one] to *comprehend* the nature of the triad. The two poles, the known data, are therefore united together (*solidaire entre eux*) by the qualitative phenomenon and *not otherwise*.

The colours Yellow and Blue can exist each for themselves (being themselves the result of another relation), but the colour green ceases to be if the colour Blue is eliminated. Similarly, the colour Blue is not united or related to the colour Yellow other than by Green. This is the secret to the link between components,

740 ‘Troisième’, 97-100.

741 ‘Troisième’, 97-100.



but I insist on the fact that the Quality or Phenomenon, the genuine link, is abstract. It is in effect possible to isolate this qualitative phenomenon and to give it concrete existence by itself. In this case it becomes itself the pole and complement of another concrete pole, giving birth to a new phenomenon.<sup>742</sup>

Here one starts to detect the relevance of the colour theory to the alchemical opus. The work on stained glass was an attempt to do just what is said here: i.e. to ‘isolate the qualitative phenomenon and to give it concrete existence by itself’ and so ‘give birth to a new phenomenon’. Here, the dynamics of the colour theory begin to become more complex. Schwaller emphasises the complementary interplay between simple colours, which are single-natured (but are complemented by a double-natured colour), and composed colours, which are double-natured (but complemented by a single-natured colour):

If we want therefore to go from low to high, we must first, from two simple poles seek the *Relation which is double*, and then, from this new data, establish the complimentary pole in order to know the definitive relation that is, for it, simple.

Likewise, *conversely*, it is necessary to depart from a simple by drawing the poles, *of which one is necessarily double*. From this the poles, which are simple, become reestablished. And this is the complete history of Genesis.<sup>743</sup>

The principles that Schwaller is drawing out of the colour phenomenon must be understood as pointing to hermetic processes that are otherwise very abstract without recourse to the colour model as a concrete, visible framework. But the triangular phenomenon explicated here through the phenomenon of colour must be applied to the hermetic dynamic. As Schwaller would observe, the prism, as a *triangular* entity, pertained to the alchemical principle of the *tria prima*, the three primaries which constitute the *tetrastoicheia* (four elements) of all phenomenal matter, suggesting thereby the deeper reason why the four elements were symbolised in hermetic texts by triangular forms (Illustration 30). In the next text that will be examined, Schwaller translates the triangular configuration directly into the idiom of the alchemical *œuvre* proper.

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742 ‘Troisième’, 99-100.

743 ‘Troisième’, 100.

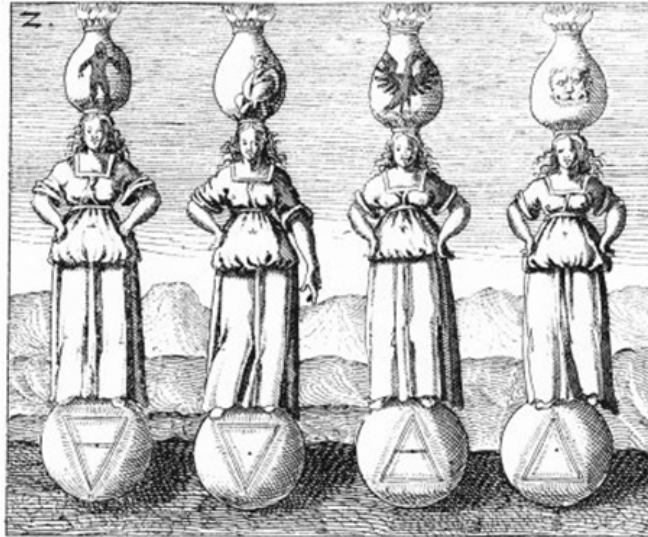


ILLUSTRATION 29: ELEMENTS AS TRIANGLES  
From H. Jamsthaer's *Viatorium Spagyricum*

*Colour Theory in 'Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs'*

The text 'Harmony, Analogy, Functions and Factors' is undated and was published posthumously by Isha in *Le Miracle Égyptien* (1963), a compilation of unpublished and previously published pieces.<sup>744</sup> References within the text give a *terminus post quem* of 1956: 'the most recent discoveries (1955) come in effect to demonstrate not only the existence of *positive* and *negative electrons*, but also of the *negative proton* or *antiproton*. [...] In 1956 the antineutron is in its turn discovered'.<sup>745</sup> The reference is to de Broglie's work. Footnotes link other passages to Schwaller's later works, such as *Le Temple* and *Le Roi*, but these may have been added later by Isha; the in-text references, however, are undoubtedly Schwaller's. What is clear from this is that the colour theory is still very close to Schwaller's heart towards the end of his life, and this is further confirmed in VandenBroeck's memoir of the period 1959–60, where the colour theory plays a central role in their discussion of Schwaller's hermeticism. VandenBroeck's

<sup>744</sup> SCHWALLER, 'Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs', *Le Miracle Égyptien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), 129-57.

<sup>745</sup> 'Harmonie', 155: 'Les toutes dernières découvertes (1955) viennent en effet de démontrer non seulement l'existence d'*électrons positifs* et *négatifs* mais aussi du *proton négatif* ou *antiproton*. [...] En 1956, l'*Antineutron* est à son tour découvert'.

account is crucial, and before one turns to it, it is important to recognise that the (circa) 1956 piece is the first text in Schwaller's own hand to bring specifically alchemical terminology into relation with the elements of the colour theory that have hitherto been developed in a seemingly independent manner.

Situating the matter in terms of the three Paracelsian principles and four Empedoclean elements, Schwaller seeks to demonstrate once again that everything is in fact a sevenfold compound or process achieved through the interrelations between three and four (the Trinitarian, hence creative/causal principles: sulphur-mercury-salt, and the quaternary of created/caused elements: fire-air-water-earth). 'There is in every phenomenon seven qualitative, compound states, three of which are double, formed every time by two simples'.<sup>746</sup> As has been seen, the septenary itself is regarded as a contraction of the ennead, the 'nine functions of the one' or 'nine archangelic puissances', conceived as surrounding the apophatic centre of the Pythagorean *dekad*. With the triangular dynamic now applied to alchemy, one begins to see Schwaller's hermetic Pythagoreanism in full swing:

The principal triangle, as we already know it, corresponds to the principles of *seed* (father), *nutritive substance* (matrix or spirit), and *resultant form* (son). By choosing their images in the first reign of creation—the mineral kingdom—the Sages, the Ancients, have adopted the following symbols: for the seed, Sulphur, for the matrix or substance, Mercury, and for the fruit, the definitive form: Salt. In effect, metallic Mercury finds itself violently coagulated by sulphur, and the product (known in chemistry as mercuric sulphide or cinnabar), is a salt. Now salt is always a final and relatively fixed product.

For this reason and for others more complex, very perfectly comprised in this image, the Ancients have thus adopted this symbolism. They say: the *Three Principles* of all things are *Sulphur, Mercury* and *Salt*. Now there is Fire and Air in Sulphur. There is Air and Water in Mercury, and Water and Earth in Salt. Therefore the Three Principles play the role of three states, each double, formed by the nature of two of the four elements, and inversely, the Four Elements are nothing but these natures separated.<sup>747</sup>

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746 'Harmonie', 142.

747 'Harmonie', 141-2.

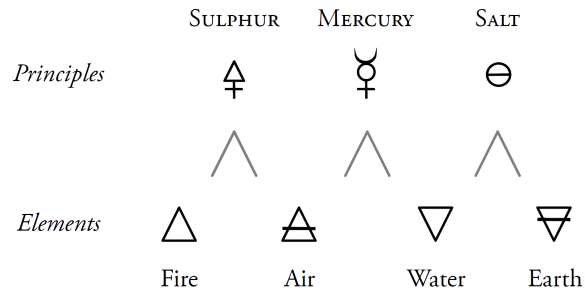


ILLUSTRATION 30: DOUBLE NATURES OF SULPHUR, MERCURY AND SALT

Each of the three principles are thus double natured, while the elements are simply these double natures separated (Illustration 30). On this basis, Schwaller introduces the idea that there are not three but four fundamental (i.e. elemental, simple) colours. In addition to the artists' primaries (red, yellow, blue), Schwaller adds indigo:

When white light is broken by a *triangular* prism (for only a triangle can reduce a phenomenon once more into its constituents), then we obtain seven colours: *Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet*, among which we find four fundamental colours and not three as one ordinarily believes: there is *Red, Yellow, Blue* and *Indigo*. For *Indigo* does not result from any melange, and *Blue*, no matter how intense, does not ever give rise to *Indigo*, which is a sombre and luminous blue.<sup>748</sup>

The distinction that should be noted here is that spectral blue is actually light blue, i.e. cerulean or sky blue, and that indigo is not simply a “darker” shade of this colour; rather, it entails a shift in *hue* and not merely tone value. Continues Schwaller:

Now as we see, these “four element-colours” must arise from the original triangle, which together form Light, but the Three Principles each give birth to two colours. Our first triangle is therefore necessarily formed by three double (i.e. composed) colours, which are: *Red* and *Yellow* = *Orange*, then *Yellow* and *Blue* = *Green*, and finally *Indigo* and *Red* = *Violet*, corresponding to the Three Principles of the colours.<sup>749</sup>

Schwaller then places the foregoing correspondences around a triangle, to give the following image (Illustration 31):

748 'Harmonie', 142.

749 'Harmonie', 142-3.

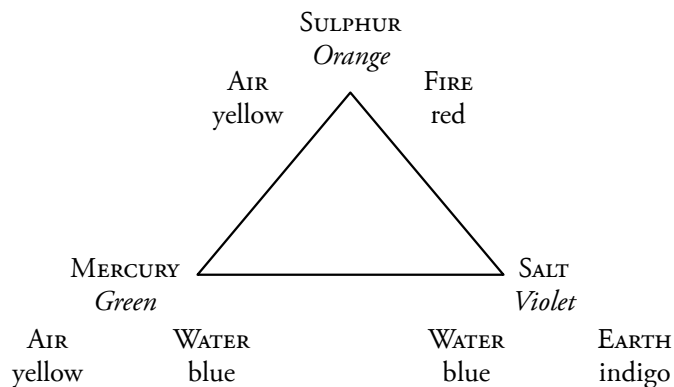


ILLUSTRATION 31: PRINCIPAL AND ELEMENTAL COLOUR CORRESPONDENCES PLACED AROUND A TRIANGLE

After SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, 'Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs', *Le Miracle Égyptien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), 143.

Here the colour correspondences are arranged to form three interlocking triads: a sulphur triad (comprising fire and air), a mercury triad (comprising air and water) and a salt triad (comprising water and earth). Each principle or element is given a colour correspondence; because the septenary is unfolded into nine aspects, however, two of the seven colours (yellow and blue) are seen to overlap. What stands out here, however, is how the imbroglio of water-earth-salt (blue-indigo-violet), deviates from the expected logic of the colour phenomenon:

Here an error occurs, for *Blue* and *Indigo* do not give *Violet*: something mysterious intervenes, for in fact it is *Blue* that rejoins itself, like an end, to the beginning. Effectively it is the *Fire of the Earth* that must link itself to *Water* in order to make *Salt*. Thus there is a sequential regularity in the numbers but an irregularity in the qualities.<sup>750</sup>

Principles	SULPHUR <i>Orange</i>	MERCURY <i>Green</i>	SALT <i>Violet</i>
Elements	FIRE Red	AIR Yellow	WATER Blue
			EARTH Indigo

In *La Doctrine*, Schwaller asserts that violet is not a mix of red and blue. As has been seen, indigo in *La Doctrine* is the vibration that emerges from the juncture of green (cause) and violet (final resistance) (figure 23). In the present text, however, he

<sup>750</sup> 'Harmonie', 143.

states that ‘*Violet* constitutes a junction of the circle between *Indigo* and *Red*. It constitutes an exact liaison just as *Orange* and *Green* form the liaison between the two elements which frame them’.<sup>751</sup> Thus, violet (salt) is the juncture that completes the cycle or octave, uniting fire to earth. Indigo, however, continues to be emphasised as the key to the problem of salt:

We see that *Blue* and *Indigo* follow each other as if *Indigo* was itself a composed colour. It is effectively a matter of an irregular interval that displaces *Violet*, which is like a call towards the *Red* of its origin. As we will observe when this is placed in relation to sound, an apparently identical irregularity exists in the musical scale and—the planetary system.

What is the nature of this irregularity? Making a fundamental analogy between the spectrum of colour and the musical scale, Schwaller points to the phenomenon of harmonics in order to suggest that the problem of indigo is a universal reality that is also present in other phenomenal systems. In particular, he suggests that when the problem posed by colours is placed in relation to musical harmony, there is an identity between the numerical functions: ‘The “height” of the sound (number of vibrations) is *en raison* inverse to the length of the vibrating string, just as the number of vibrations of colour is *en raison* inverse to their wavelength’.<sup>752</sup> Continues Schwaller:

Now *the number of vibrations of the extreme Violet colour* (the limit of Ultraviolet) *is double the number of vibrations of extreme Red* (the limit of infra-red). Thus, for the scale, in which the complete octave includes *seven* pure tones (just as light is decomposed by the prism into seven independent colours), the problem resides in the passage from *One to Two*, comprising seven fundamental steps.<sup>753</sup>

Moreover, just as three principles each decompose into two elements, and the composed colours each decompose into two primaries, within the system of the musical scale, Schwaller points to the three principal harmonies: the fifth, the fourth and the third, each of which partakes of a double nature. That is to say, each harmony is decomposed into the ratio that represents the point where the vibrating string is divided to produce the sound. The vibrations of the musical harmonies reduce to the following ratios:

1:2 ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) = octave  
 2:3 ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) = the fifth  
 3:4 ( $\frac{3}{4}$ ) = the fourth  
 4:5 ( $\frac{4}{5}$ ) = the third

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751 ‘Harmonie’, 143.

752 ‘Harmonie’, 145.

753 ‘Harmonie’, 145.

In these numbers, Schwaller also recognises the same harmonious relations that he finds in the Pythagorean tetractys and the sacred 3-4-5 triangle.<sup>754</sup>

In regards to the planetary system, he points to the seven heavenly bodies of traditional astrology (i.e. those visible to the naked eye: Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth or Moon, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn); within this septenary, he asserts that Jupiter plays 'exactly the same role as indigo'.<sup>755</sup> Jupiter, he claims, presents 'an irregularity in the system' because it possesses 'an abnormal magnitude in relation to its place'.<sup>756</sup>

What matters is that every system consists of *octaves*, i.e. the seven sounds or aspects of the "principle-element" relationship, and that seven qualitative factors always constitute the phenomenon. Perhaps one day we will come to speak of the circle, of the notions of Time and Space and of how their relations constitute the cosmic spiral; we will then comprehend directly the sevenfold character of the planetary cycles, the *enchevêtrements* of these cycles, and thus will we return to this point: to the apparent irregularity of Jupiter, of the colour Indigo, of the unknown form between ultraviolet vibrations and x-rays, and so forth.<sup>757</sup>

Despite these remarks, the problem represented by indigo remains elusive and is not clarified by this cryptic digression into the musical, cosmic and electromagnetic correlates of the septenary. The problem of indigo comes to better light through the traditional register of alchemical symbolism.

Having correlated the *principles* and *elements* to the colour phenomenon, Schwaller adds the traditional *qualities* of hermetic physics into the mix. These are: heat, humidity, coldness and dryness. The traditional framework is depicted as follows (Illustration 32):

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754 'Harmonie', 146.

755 'Harmonie', 146.

756 'Harmonie', 146.

757 'Harmonie', 147.

F A R B E N L E H R E

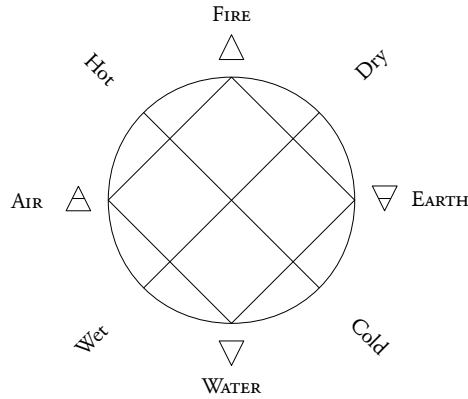


ILLUSTRATION 32: TRADITIONAL PARADIGM OF QUALITIES AND ELEMENTS

The four qualities (heat, humidity, coldness and dryness) mediate the four elements (fire, air, water and earth).

Here, the qualities mediate the elements, much like the principles do. Thus, *heat* mediates fire and air, *humidity* or *wetness* mediates air and water, *coldness* mediates water and earth, and *dryness* mediates earth and fire, thus completing the circle. Because the qualities mediate the elements, it is easy to correlate them to the three principles, which also mediate the elements. This is exactly what Schwaller does:

<i>Quality</i>	<i>Principle</i>	<i>Elements</i>	<i>Colour</i>
Hot	Sulphur	Fire and Air	Orange
Wet	Mercury	Air and Water	Green
Cold	-	Water and Earth	-
Dry	Salt	Earth and Fire	Violet

Here one can clearly see that the quality of coldness lacks a correspondence (Illustration 33):



F A R B E N L E H R E

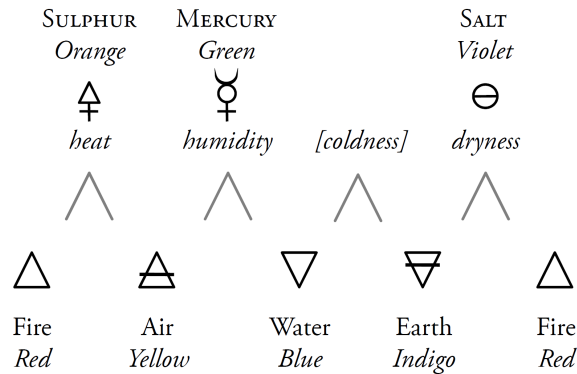


ILLUSTRATION 33: PRINCIPLES, QUALITIES, ELEMENTS  
 The quality of coldness lacks a principial correspondence.

Schwaller fills the gap with indigo, which thus plays a double role. It is both principle/quality and element::

Cold and *Indigo* show us once again this strange shift (*décalage*): *Indigo* is at the same time cold and Earth; it participates therefore in the *Element* and the *Quality*. We see therefore that *Indigo* is at the same time Earth and also the cold quality of this Earth, which is cold and dry, a Water of which the humidity or wetness has been dried by Fire.<sup>758</sup>

The next key to the puzzle is provided by the metallurgical correspondences. It is important to note that the correspondences established by Schwaller are not merely arbitrary. Schwaller's laboratory was equipped with a spectrometer, and he correlated the wavelengths of the visible spectrum with the Fraunhofer lines, the electromagnetic rays of the seven planetary metals (Fe, Au, Ag, Hg, Cu, Sn, Pb), as well as the frequencies of musical harmony.<sup>759</sup> The following table summarises the principle relationships.<sup>760</sup>

758 'Harmonie', 144.

759 'Harmonie', 147-53.

760 The values of the metallic and spectral wavelengths are derived as best as possible from Schwaller's presentation in 'Harmonie', 151, fig. 30; the values so derived are approximate; I have not corroborated his data against his scientific sources (Maxwell, Fraunhofer, etc.) This material demands to be explored in more detail, and will require a separate presentation.

F A R B E N L E H R E

<i>Planetary metals</i>	<i>Wavelength (chemical element)</i>	<i>Wavelength (colour)</i>	<i>Spectral Colour</i>	<i>Hermetic correspondence</i>
Iron	[Fe] <sup>761</sup>	630-785	[Red]	Fire
Gold	Au 528	597	Orange	Sulphur/Heat
	Au 584	581	Yellow	Air
Silver	Ag	570-581	Yellow-green	
Mercury	Hg 516	528-570	Green-yellow	Mercury/Humidity
Copper	Cu 522	528	Blue-green	Water
	Cu 511	496	Cyan	
Tin	Sn 453	431-434	Indigo	Earth/Coldness
Lead	Pb 406	406	Violet	Salt/Dryness

The thermal qualities of the spectrum were also corroborated by quantitative scientific measures. Drawing attention to the calorific intensities of the visible spectrum, Schwaller observes that the maximum heat is situated in the vicinity of amber (*jaune orange*); in indigo, it starts becoming very weak (cold), trailing off into practical insignificance by ultraviolet.<sup>762</sup>

Finally, Schwaller further indicates how the complementary nature of the colours provides an insight into the relationships between the elements and principles on one hand, and the planetary metals that they represent on the other. Here, the elemental colours (simple) complement the principal (composed) colours (e.g. orange is complemented by blue, suggesting a complementarity between gold and copper). The complementation, two by two, encompasses all spectral colours save indigo, which remains uncomplemented.<sup>763</sup>

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761 The wavelength for iron (Fe) is not provided in the original presentation. See previous note.

762 'Harmonie', 145.

763 Strictly speaking, indigo demands complementation with amber.

<i>Composed Colour Principle-Metal-Planet</i>	<i>Simple Colour Element-Metal-Planet</i>
Orange Sulphur-Gold-Sun (Fixed)	Blue Water-Copper-Venus (Volatile)
Green Mercury-Mercury-Mercury (Volatile)	Red Fire-Iron-Mars (Fixed)
Violet Salt-Lead-Saturn (Fixed)	Yellow Air-Silver-Moon (Volatile)
Indigo Earth-Jupiter-Tin (Fixed)	

*Colour Theory in Le Temple de l'Homme*

In 1957, a tight redaction of Schwaller's colour theory appeared in his *chef d'œuvre, Le Temple de l'homme*; here, the Ennead as septenary phenomenon is placed under the aegis of Amun (Zeus/Jupiter), emphasising again not only the hidden significance of indigo (tin/electrum), but also drawing attention to its *ruling* character:

*Amun* governs the number Seven, the number of nature, that is to say, the "constituting elements" of the phenomena of our world. We encounter this number in music in the seven notes of the scale that resonate harmoniously for our ear, in the seven spectral colours of white light, in the physiological cycle of the ages seven, fourteen, twenty-one, and  $6 \times 7$ , or forty-two years, characteristic of certain changes, and in the up to seven electron shells in the atom.

At the specific stage of human consciousness of our earth (as a planetary globe in the solar system), nature is septuple. In reality, this sevenfold structure is the result of nine stages, because the third and sixth of the seven appearances are divided in two. Thus, in the colours of the spectrum there are two yellows and two blues; the yellow and the blue are both the end and beginning of a series:

Red – Orange – Yellow (*warm*)

Yellow – Green – Blue (*cool*)

Blue – Indigo – Violet (*moderate*)<sup>764</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> *Temple de l'homme*, II, 312-3 (= 1998, 941): 'Amon commande le nombre Sept, nombre de

This comes very close to what Schwaller would convey to VandenBroeck in 1959-60. What is also interesting is that it is precisely *yellow and blue* that form the transition from seven to nine, the very colours identified by Goethe as emerging from the generative polarity of light (yellow) and dark (blue). These two colours cross or mix to form green, and from these three—yellow, green and blue—one can evoke the other colours as compliments (or after images): violet, red, orange. Here one approaches the full spectrum, save for indigo, which remains conspicuously elusive.<sup>765</sup>

It has been seen that yellow was doubly indicated in the cypher of the purloined manuscript, and here Wassily Kandinsky's remarks on the two movements of the colours help crystallise the dynamic role of the Goethean *Urphänomene*. Not only is there a horizontal line of movement—towards and away from the spectator (yellow and blue respectively)—there is also an *ex- und konzentrische* movement:

The second movement of yellow and blue, which contributes to the first great opposition, is their ex-centric [centrifugal] and a con-centric [centripetal] movement. If one draws two circles of the same size and colours one yellow and the other blue, brief concentration on these circles will reveal that the yellow one radiates, giving rise to a movement outward from the centre that visibly approaches the spectator. Blue, however, develops a concentric movement (like a snail retreating into its shell), and distances itself from the spectator. By the first circle the eye is stimulated, by the second, relieved.<sup>766</sup>

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la nature, c'est-à-dire des « composants » des phénomènes de notre monde. On le retrouve en musique avec les sept notes de la gamme qui résonnent harmonieusement pour notre oreille, avec les sept couleurs spectrales de la lumière blanche, dans le cycle physiologique des âges: 7, 14, 21, et  $6 \times 7 = 42$  ans, caractéristiques pour certains changements, et jusqu'aux sept couches électroniques de l'atome. Au degré spécifique de la conscience humaine de notre terre (en tant que globe planétaire du système solaire), la nature est septuple. En réalité ce septuple est le résultat de neuf étapes, parce que la troisième et la sixième des sept apparences se dédoublent. Ainsi dans les couleurs du spectre il y a deux jaunes et deux bleus, le jaune et le bleu sont en même temps fin et commencement de série:

763. Rouge – Orangé – Jaune (*chaude*)

764. Jaune – Vert - Bleu (*froide*)

765. Bleu – Indigo – Violet (*tempéré*).

765 Although it is partially evoked by orange, it is more properly evoked by amber.

766 Wassily KANDINSKY, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1914): 'Die zweite Bewegung von Gelb und Blau, die zum ersten großen Gegensatz beiträgt, ist ihre ex- und konzentrische Bewegung. Wenn man zwei Kreise macht von gleicher Größe und einen mit Gelb füllt und den ändert mit Blau, so merkt man schon bei kurzer Konzentrierung auf diese Kreise, daß das Gelb ausstrahlt, eine Bewegung aus dem Zentrum bekommt und sich beinahe sichtbar dem Menschen nähert. Das Blau aber eine konzentrische Bewegung entwickelt (wie eine Schnecke, die sich in ihr Häuschen verkriecht), und vom Menschen sich

These ex-centric and con-centric qualities relate to the functions of sulphur and salt respectively: expansion (centre of radiance) and contraction (centre of gravity). For Kandinsky they are active colours, and in green they form the life-giving phenomenon of nature. Now, in Schwaller's colour theory, yellow-green-blue are the colours identified with the air-mercury-water triad, colours which together appear temperate and thus balance the cold and warm hues. Mercury was the *primum* corresponding to unformed *substance* for Schwaller, the pre-formed, feminine mediator between coagulating *function* (sulphur: the warm triad providing the yellow) and coagulated *form* (salt: the cold triad providing the blue). But as has been seen with Goethe's theory, the warm and cool poles can balance in two ways: either in green (yellow and blue) or in magenta (red and violet). In a sense, the two hermetic paths may be seen to reflect this: one seeks a resolution of polarity within nature (i.e. green, the middle colour of the spectrum), while the other seeks a resolution of polarity beyond nature (i.e. magenta, which sits outside the spectrum proper). Magenta is the colour that the extremes of the spectrum *suggest*, but it is only manifest under the special conditions provided by the dark spectrum (Illustration 34). Thus, if green is identified with mercury and the *prima materia*, then this suggests that magenta may be equated with the phenomenon of the stone or *ultima materia*.

To the extent that violet is the closest colour to magenta, this helps approximate why, in the *alchemical* conception influenced by the colour manuscript, Schwaller has shifted the expected positions of blue and indigo. It is not indigo but *violet* that emerges as the intermediary, and for all intents and purposes is in the "wrong" place. But this is intentional. As has been seen in his earliest text on colour, violet is not composed of blue and red. In the circa 1956 text, Schwaller states that '*Violet* constitutes a junction of the circle between *Indigo* and *Red*', that is to say, between the elements Earth and Fire. It is thus in the juncture of Fire and Earth—through indigo—that the crucial step to binding the pure opposites, Fire and Water, consists.

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entfernt. Vom ersten Kreis wird das Auge gestochen, während es in den zweiten versinkt'.

F A R B E N L E H R E

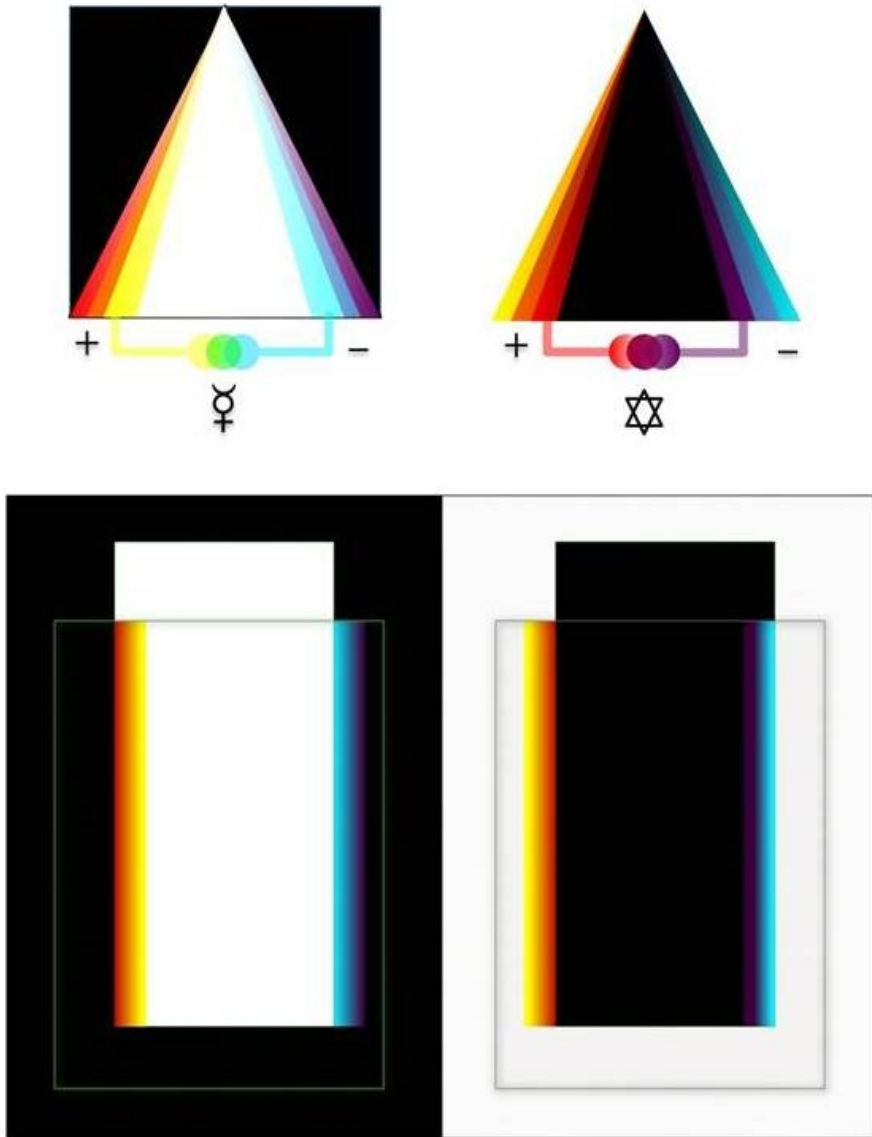


ILLUSTRATION 34: POLARITIES OF THE LIGHT AND DARK SPECTRA

The light and dark spectra resolve (balance) in green and magenta respectively. Magenta, however, is not in the spectrum. It resides beyond the extremes—after violet and before red—but is able to be evoked by these colours. Green thus represents the synthesis in nature (mercury, *prima materia*), while magenta, the perfect complement of green, represents the synthesis beyond nature (the stone, *ultima materia*).

*Colour Theory in Al-Kemi*

According to André VandenBroeck, the paper that appeared posthumously in *Le Miracle Égyptien* was an ‘obsolete version which still shows ambivalence concerning indigo, the prismatic entity central to the entire color-language’.<sup>767</sup> His account of Schwaller’s more developed theory runs through the now-familiar topics: Newton, the prism as triangular entity, the septenary of the spectrum, and the presence of indigo. Proceeding from Newton, Schwaller recounts the triangular form decomposing unitary white light into seven primary prismatic colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet (his emphasis on the *triangular* form referring to the role of the *tria prima* in the composition of all things). Of these seven, the three painters’ primaries—red, yellow, blue—are seen as fundamental, their one to one combinations giving rise to the painter’s secondaries: orange (red + yellow), green (blue + yellow), violet (red + blue). The painters’ primaries are thus neatly balanced by their compliments—except for the ‘vexing presence of indigo’.<sup>768</sup> VandenBroeck, admitting to not having considered the problem of indigo, conveys the ambiguity evoked by its presence: ‘I had always thought of indigo as a dark shade of blue, or perhaps a deep violet-blue’. Schwaller responds:

No, no. [He was smiling.] You must not look at it in that manner. You can intensify blue all you want; it will never give you indigo, which has a sombre luminosity unlike any blue. And it has no violet at all, because violet is the result of a red and blue mixture. Indigo is indigo, you cannot obtain it by any mixture. How would red occur at that place in the spectrum? But we are already in the midst of this mysterious circumstance which in fact had been the preoccupation of the adept whose papers I had come into contact with through these strange circumstances with Fulcanelli.<sup>769</sup>

Schwaller insists that indigo is not merely a deeper shade of blue. Rather, ‘indigo is indigo’.<sup>770</sup> What does this mean? The colours of the spectrum are pure. Blue in the spectrum is azure—the colour of the sky, and is thus bright (this coheres with the etymology of blue, which is in fact linked to the Indo-European words for ‘sky’ and ‘brightness’).<sup>771</sup> Indigo as a spectral colour appears midway between sky blue and

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767 *Al-Kemi*, 131.

768 *Al-Kemi*, 132.

769 *Al-Kemi*, 132.

770 *Al-Kemi*, 132.

771 Cf. Proto-Indo-European *\*bhle-*, ‘light-colored, blue, blond, yellow’ > Proto Germanic *blawaz* ‘blue’ > Frankish *blao* > Old French, *blo* ‘pale, pallid, wan, light-coloured; blond;

violet. It appears to be a slightly darker shade of blue, but it is not merely a tone of blue, for the spectral colours are pure, and while there are infinite gradations, there are no tones (properly speaking) in the spectrum of light, only hues. Indigo has a distinct affinity with blue, but also partakes of violet. But for Schwaller, indigo is not merely a melange of violet and blue. It is the colour closest to darkness but it also partakes of the royal purple that is effectively a movement towards the extra spectral magenta which neutralises the thermal (red) and electric (violet) extremes of the spectrum.

Referring to the mysterious manuscript, Schwaller once again identifies the trinity of principles with the three composed colours and the four elements with the fundamentals, indigo being included among the latter.

At least that is what I read into these notes. [...] Perhaps the text just stimulated some thoughts that had been in my head ever since I worked with Matisse. Anyhow, by the time I had arranged the prismatic colors along the lines of principles and elements, the text fell together, and I was ready for the laboratory. This man had worked on an alteration of form through salt, and he noted it down in terms of the blue-indigo-violet imbroglio I am trying to point out to you. You can see the inevitable irregularity that occurs at the end of one octave and the beginning of the next. The same irregularity occurs in the musical octave and in the planetary system. That of course was where the effort had to play, where the violet turns to ultraviolet and disappears for our vision. This is where the adept attempts to join the end to the beginning—have the beast bite its tail. Here is where a new red can be born, the red beyond violet, the one that is felt in violet and that disappears into ultraviolet. The idea may sound strange, yet when applied to the Water-Salt-Earth complex, it makes marvellous sense. Just as indigo and blue do not give violet, so Earth and Water alone do not possess the qualities to form the salt we are looking for, the fixed salt of permanence, which is an affect of spirit, of perception; *c'est l'entendement*, it is the understanding through the organ of harmony. With this instrumentation we are capable of acting on the salt of nature. The formal element can and must be manipulated. Fire and Water must be made to join, and this can only be effectuated through the Fire of the Earth. The Fire of the Earth must be bound to Water. The important lesson here is the use of the Earth-Fire to accomplish the Fire-Water combination, the seal of Sal-Amon. Indigo must be shifted to blue and become one of the components of violet. We are merely preparing a milieu for the new redness to become visible. We are working on metallic forms, of course, substances we know in their relation to color, not only by their lines in spectroscopy, but by other more intuitive ways.

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discoloured; blue, blue-gray'. Cf. Proto-Indo-European *\*bhel-* 'shine, be light/bright, flash, burn'; the sense that something is 'burnt' by something 'bright/burning' presumably explains the polar connection between *\*bhle-* ('light-coloured, blue, blonde, yellow') and the link of *\*bhel-* ('shine, bright, burn') to black in Germanic (Scandinavian *blā*, from Old Norse *blār*, 'blue-black', etc.)



Anyway, the result of the experiment is captured in glass, and here comes the difficult manipulation of the decantations which the letter in Canseliet's foreword talks about. The end result will be a glass that is red in the mass without being pigmented. We have merely prepared the milieu for the phenomenon to happen, but the new octave will be attracted to the prepared milieu. Spirit has to be caught in the net, as the Pharaonics say.<sup>772</sup>

This passage, perhaps more than any other, contains all the clues that are needed to comprehend the central mystery of Schwaller's alchemical project. Having surveyed the evolution of the colour theory, one is now in a position to begin to understand what this might mean in terms of a precise hermetic physics. Before examining this in more detail, the essential themes of Schwaller's alchemical *Farbenlehre* must first be recapitulated.

### *Summary*

In Schwaller's discussion of colour the seven spectral colours are really a contraction of a ninefold series, and it is precisely the eighth in the series—indigo—that proves the most critical to the formation of the alchemical perfection in violet. Moreover, it is precisely the colours yellow and blue which are divided to form the points of expansion and contraction between the sevenfold and ninefold series. Here, yellow is divided into warm and cool as blue is divided into cool and temperate. The septenary, which for Schwaller underpins all phenomena, was related specifically to the alchemical *tria prima* (sulphur, mercury, salt) and *tetrastoicheia* (fire, air, water, earth), i.e. the three and the four, forming seven. The sevenfold dynamic that comes into play here, along with the associated colours, is best seen in its diagrammatic configuration (Illustration 35):

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<sup>772</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 132.

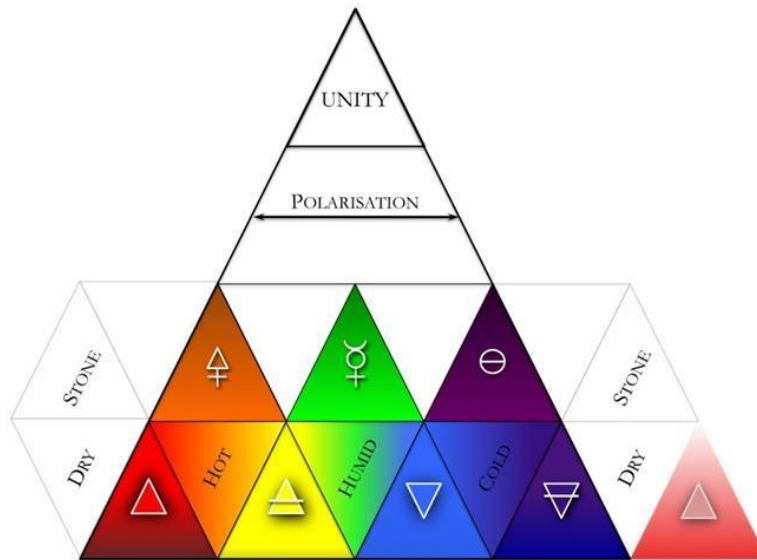
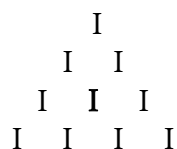


ILLUSTRATION 35: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPLES AND ELEMENTS AS TETRACTYS, (SHOWING DERIVATION OF *TRIA PRIMA* FROM POLARISED UNITY)

I. Unity. II. Polarisation of Unity. III. The interaction of the two poles providing the basis for the principal “triads” (*tria prima*). IV. The interaction of the triads to form the four elements (*tetrastoicheia*). The “stone” links the end of the spectrum to the beginning. (Diagram after VandenBroeck)

Schwaller, repeatedly emphasised the model of the scale and octave as a true *symbolique* of the harmonic nature of the *œuvre*. And of course, the seven tones of the major scale were seen to correspond not only to the seven colours of the visible spectrum, but also to the seven visible planets of hermetic astrology (Schwaller also mentions the ‘up to seven layers of electrons in the structure of the atom’ as a signature of the same process). The nine, or Ennead, was related by Schwaller to the functions of the one (Unity, God) as in the Pythagorean *dekad*, where a triangle formed of ten units is seen to represent the nine functions surrounding the one:



The intervals of contraction or expansion between seven and nine<sup>773</sup> correspond to the double nature of blue and yellow in Schwaller's colour theory. Here one discerns the influence of Goethe, which Schwaller maintained was present in the 'purloined manuscript' upon which he allegedly based his own alchemical theory. Goethe maintained that blue and yellow are the primordial colours, for indeed, when one looks through a prism, light is not broken into a rainbow, but rather blue and yellow fringes are created around edged objects, i.e. where light and dark contrasts. Hence it is the border between light and dark, and not light *per se*, that is seen to create the colour phenomenon, which is consistent with Schwaller's remarks to VandenBroeck. All of this is merely context. The central mystery is the indigo-earth, violet-salt complex in relation to the stone which, as can be seen from the diagrams, exists as the juncture between earth and fire, indigo and red (colours which evoke quite distinctly the blues and reds of Chartres—i.e. 'glass stained in the mass with the volatile spirit of metals'—the *experimentum crucis* of the alchemical colour theory.

There is certainly a logic here. Looking at the three triads—(i) red-orange-yellow; (ii) yellow-green-blue; and (iii) blue-violet-indigo—one notes that the first two triads are in a sense "perfect": i.e. the principal colour is in fact the proper mean term between the elemental colours: red + yellow = orange; yellow + blue = green; but the third triad presents an anomaly: it "should" be blue-violet-*red*. The red that "should" be there—the impulse that is equivalent to the culminating *do* (tonic/octave), the *tonos* which recapitulates the next octave—is not there. Indigo is. (Illustration 36).

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773 Cf. the "shocks" in G. I. Gurdjieff's system.

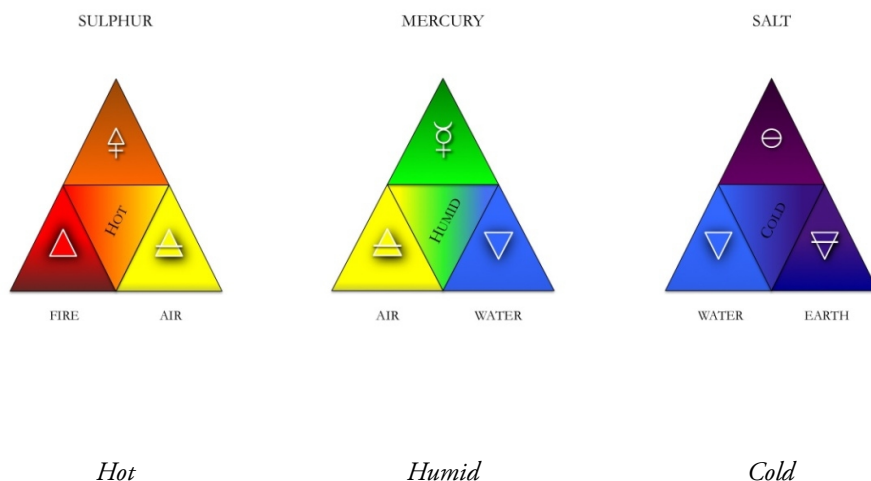


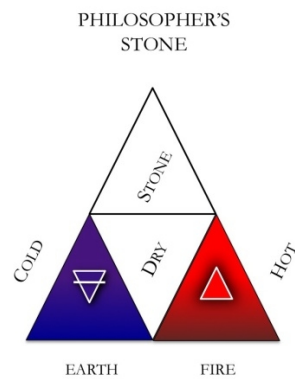
ILLUSTRATION 36: COLOUR TRIADS: SULPHUR, MERCURY AND SALT.

It would seem that if the red was present at this point, violet would be the perfect mean term between blue and red (water and fire—the Seal of Solomon [Sal-Amun]). Schwaller’s whole point with this anomaly centres on his insistence that indigo is not blue, nor a melange of blue and violet, but rather a ‘luminous blue’. The red sought at the end of the octave is present in indigo: there is a redness, a “fire”, hidden in the “earth”. This fire is present in the quality of dryness inherent in earth and salt (and here one must recall the desiccating nature inherent to natural salt). This is the hidden or secret fire that the alchemists in this tradition constantly sought and which, in the metallurgical work, indicates the animated spirit of metals.

Red should be there, but is not. If it was wholly present it would effectively link the end back to the beginning (per Schwaller’s reference to the ouroboros-like nature of reality—‘the beast bites its tail’). It would also only necessitate six colours (or eight in the expanded series, which is interesting in and of itself given the octave phenomenon). The six colours are of course the complimentary pairs, as Goethe showed: red-green; yellow-violet; blue-orange. Indigo is conspicuously missing. Effort, or struggle is required to make the beast bite its tail.<sup>774</sup> To achieve this, Schwaller points to the presence of fire (red) in the earth (indigo), indicating by this neither the fire or earth of nature, but the juncture of fire and earth beyond nature via the phenomenon of the stone (Illustration 37).

<sup>774</sup> Cf. the idea of “struggle” in the Gurdjieffian system.

Herein lies the alchemical *topos* of reincrudation: one cannot return to origin directly; one must work with and liberate the energies of origin as they are found coagulated and concretised here on earth, under the aegis of salt (solidity, materiality, crystallisation). The whole alchemical emphasis on minerals and metals would appear to be a case in point, and the stained glass *œuvre*, at least for Schwaller and Champagne, its demonstration (hence the consistent emphasis on the 'blues and reds of Chartres').



*Dry*

ILLUSTRATION 37: COLOUR TRIAD: STONE.

Here too one can see the significance of the dry way, the way which leads from the earth to the dryness of the stone via the hidden fire (indigo's secret luminosity). This helps clarify to some extent Schwaller's emphasis on 'the salt of the earth', which may be understood as the place where nature is brought to her completion through the juncture of earth and fire (indigo and red); this dries the earth through its hidden fire (shifting the humidity in earth to its rightful place, water; as will be seen in the next chapter, this is the significance of the symbolism of the receding of the waters), inaugurating the new octave (a recapitulation of the fundamental *tonos*). As Schwaller emphasises, this 'salt of the earth', this desiccating secret fire, is both a principle and an element. It is beyond the spectrum proper, situated, in the diagram below (Illustration 38), to the right of the saline triad: the only place where the end of the colour series can be joined to the beginning of its recapitulation. Its presence is felt in salt, in earth, and in fire, but it is not any of these things, and yet it must be sought through them, for they are its signatures (Illustration 39).

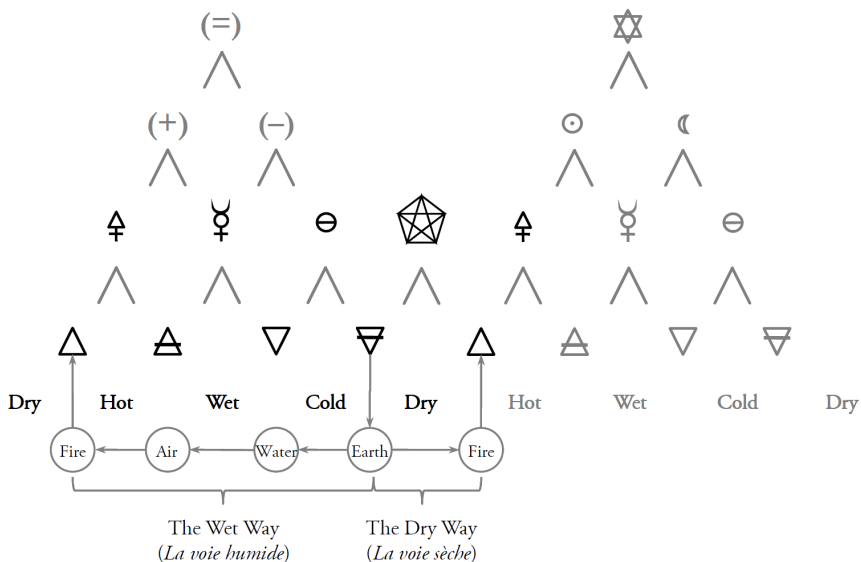


ILLUSTRATION 38: THE WET AND DRY WAYS

The unification of earth and fire may proceed via water and air (the wet way) or directly from earth to fire (the dry way); the former was characterised as long and the latter, short. Both begin the opus with earth (i.e. solid matter). In the human *œuvre*, one path equates to rebirth, the other to resurrection.

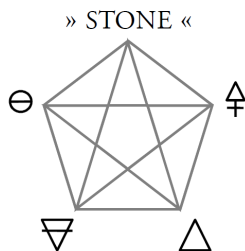


ILLUSTRATION 39: STONE AS PENTAD

The stone is at once a unification of fire and earth and of sulphur and salt (seed and fruit). The desiccating character of salt derives from its participation in fire/sulphur and therefore it participates in the stone as juncture of abstract and concrete, hence its contrary signifiers: fire/water, sun/sea, etc.

All of this implies the distinctly nondual nature of the alchemical process as apprehended in de Lubicz's hermetic *œuvre*. It is at once a material and metaphysical opus, aptly described by Schwaller as the juncture of the abstract and concrete. Material, because the hidden fire will always remain beyond the scope of mere intellectual theory; it must be the product of actual seeking and, more importantly, finding. Metaphysical, because the finding is an act of perception that renders origin integrally present—and transparent—to a correspondingly integral and transparent consciousness. Like is known by like.<sup>775</sup>

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775 Cf. Gebser's idea of *Wahrnehmung* as a means of spiritual concretion (*Konkretion des Geistiges*). Cf. also Corbin on corporification of spirit and spiritualisation of bodies. Note: the "stone" is the juncture, the point where the 'beast bites its tail' and thereby creates the phenomenal world as a phenomenal reaction to its primordial metaphysical action. In terms of the *Farbenlehre*, the two poles equate to the warm sulphuric triad and the cool saline triad, which in nature unite in green (blue and yellow) but beyond nature unite not in violet as we know it, but in the phenomenon of which indigo, violet and red are approximations or reflections (magenta, the extraspectral colour that mediates violet and red when the spectrum is closed into a circle, but which doesn't exist in the spectrum proper).

## ONTOLOGICAL MUTATION

Just as there is a neutron at the heart of the energetic atoms that preoccupy today's science, so in every form of Nature there is a salt (read: *neutron*) that nothing can destroy and which fixes the character of each *incarnation*, that is, of each changing form. The sequence that makes us speak of evolution exists owing to this "fixed point". It is a succession of living forms extending from amoeba to man without any visible transition between genus and species. This evolutive "granulation" of Being is the tangible appearance of a continuous *genesis of energy*. It takes its image from an assertion made by Hermetic texts according to which metals, each one a typical individual, are evolutionary phases *arrested* in a genesis toward silver or gold; the initial metallic state, had it remained in its matrix, could have become silver or gold.<sup>776</sup>

—R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

Having examined the framework provided by Schwaller's esoteric *Farbenlehre*, in which he sought to comprehend and engage the invisible through the visible—not just in theory, but as a model for precise hermetic practise—the final task of this thesis is to understand the dynamics of de Lubicz's alchemical praxis itself. At the bottom of the whole hermetic colour theory lies the indication of a hermetic physics in which indigo bears the presence of the *fire of the earth*. This points to an element *unknown* to nature ('nature' proper being defined in terms of the four states of matter: radiant, volatile, liquid, solid). However, this mysterious element—this fifth state—was the central subject/object of hermetic meta/physics: an element at once earth and fire, radiant and solid, dry and cold, but also hot—a hermetic perception belying the presence of the *stone*. Now, the implication of this unfolded precisely under the aegis of the *dry* way—*la voie seché*—what Schwaller calls the 'Sethian desert'. The fire which dries the earth must be sought not by turning back towards the beginning of the octave (fire), for to do this one has to pass through water (hence the wet way—*la voie humide*—the 'Osirian' path).<sup>777</sup> Rather, one *completes* the octave by seeking the fire that animates,

<sup>776</sup> SCHWALLER, *Sacred Science*, 211.

<sup>777</sup> Per Schwaller's remarks on the 'two ways'—Osirian and Horian spirituality.



indeed colours, the element *earth* (the chromatic spirit in the metallic body). This is not found in the state of radiance but in the *junction* of solidity and radiance: the fire that radiates from *below*—the central fire: the fire of the earth.

Whereas the last chapter sought to explicate the wider context of the alchemical process as envisioned by de Lubicz through the *symbolique* of the colour spectrum, this chapter focuses precisely on the phenomenon of ‘the salt of the earth’ evoked by Schwaller’s emphasis on the contractive indigo-violet end of the spectrum. Salt refers to the mysterious juncture by which the principial and elemental states close the circle and return to their origin. Following from the emphasis placed on the cold, contractive colours associated with salt and earth—which nevertheless contain a hidden fire—this chapter looks at how Schwaller’s hermetic physics would refer to salt as a ‘styptic coagulating force’ and, at the same time, how this contractive principle was also the locus of a ‘qualitative exaltation’. In effect, one begins to see how two energies or “directions” are embodied in the salt of the earth through the phenomenon of the “fixed nucleus”. This is the contracting, densifying force that was central to the formation of all bodies, from mineral to human, and which in the colour theory corresponds specifically to the cold, receding and electric end of the spectrum (in particular to indigo). Ultimately, the fixed saline nucleus, formed from dry earth-fire and humid water, is the key to understanding the hidden continuity between metallurgical, biological and metaphysical forms.

### The Two Ways

In many respects, one of the major keys to Schwaller’s alchemy resides in the question: ‘Why does Consciousness not acquire its final instrument at once?’ The implications of this question colour two fundamental approaches to alchemy—spanning its metallurgical, biological, cosmogonic and soteriological aspects—all facets of the art being bound to the same metaphysical problem. The assumption of the question is that the acquisition of the final instrument of consciousness does not occur instantly, but over time, and via intermediary stages. The bodies known through empirical phenomena, i.e. through the mineralogical and biological kingdoms, are transitional bodies, gestational phases in the genesis of the absolute instrument of consciousness—Schwaller’s ‘anthropocosmos’—the *initium* and the *integrum* of the entire process.

The dry way is characterised by Fulcanelli’s disciple, Eugène Canseliet, as a path in which ‘a very great role is played by the *secret fire*’.<sup>778</sup> Due to the attested links between Schwaller, Fulcanelli and Canseliet, who worked within the same tradition and milieu, it is no surprise that this description coheres closely with Schwaller’s emphasis on the secret luminosity borne by indigo. While the goal of the two paths in alchemy are

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<sup>778</sup> CANSÉLIET, *Douze Clefs*, 105: ‘la voie sèche, dans laquelle joue un très grande rôle le feu secret.’

identical—i.e. the unification of fire and water—the dry way joins water to fire not through the latter’s radiant form, but through its *secret* form, the fire of the *earth*. This is why, in the *Farbenlehre*, it is not blue and red that combine to form violet as would ordinarily be expected, but blue and *indigo*. Here it is not earth but the secret fire *hidden* in the earth—the secret redness—that combines with water (blue) to form the neutral saline juncture of the igneous and the aqueous (violet).

*Précis of the Process: Metallic Evolution*

The seed of metals evolves through seven phases: lead to gold. The royal metals—silver and gold—are the *teloi*. In order to grow, the seed needs a nourishing matrix: just as plants need earth, metals need a mineral gangue. This is the meaning of the “two matters” required at the beginning of the work—mineral matrix and metallic seed—the origin of the distinction made in some texts between *materia prima* and *prima materia* (the mineral gangue being the “first matter” required to develop the first matter proper: the living metallic seed). The texts suggest that the two first matters are antimony and iron: antimony for the matrix (a metalloid mineral) and iron for the seed (a lower planetary metal disposed toward the red, masculine, fiery-sulphuric principle).

Once the metal is reinstated in its revivifying, life-giving matrix, the active fire of the seed reawakens and can now act upon its nourishing milieu to effect the transformations that will eventually give rise to its innate perfection (gold). In nature this takes time. Aeons. Entire geological epochs transpire in the natural process of the metal’s purification. The alchemist’s role is to speed up this process, to act as a catalyst (per Eliade). Schwaller intimates that the way this is achieved is to affect the aspect of the metallic entity that determines its form: the fixed salt. The fixed salt is the indestructible register of an entity’s consciousness, its experience; it determines an entity’s affinities and aversions, which, in the mineral or elemental-chemical domain, is the measure of its behaviour, the expression of its “will”. Here lies the crux of Schwaller’s alchemy: the manipulation of salt—to make the indestructible but *impressionable* essence experience and inscribe in a short time what it would naturally take entire geological epochs to achieve, and then to allow this experientially inscribed essence to determine its manifestation according to its now-refined affinities and aversions. In the mineral kingdom, in metals, this will lead to a body, instrument, or vehicle that is higher (purer), and that possesses more freedom.

Schwaller seems to suggest that, in metals, the process involves the separation of the volatile spirit from the body; the body is cleansed, i.e. purified, and because the impurities are the only thing stopping the entity as a whole from manifesting its royal nature (silver, gold), when the volatile spirit is recombined with a *pure* body, it will naturally assume its innate perfection. Here the significant role of the glass work is discerned: to separate the volatile spirit of metals and, instead of reuniting it with a

pure metallic body, to create a *non-metallic* milieu—a body of glass. A metallic spirit in such an envelope takes all the qualities traditionally attributed to the stone. Here the volatile spirit that gives metals their lustre gives rise in glass to the blues and reds that Schwaller attributed to the alchemical *vitrail* of Chartres. More specifically in terms of the alchemical *Farbenlehre*, one sees that the lunar metals (lead, tin, silver) partake of the minus hues: the feminine indigos and blues; the solar metals, on the other hand (iron, copper, gold), partake of the plus hues: the masculine blood reds and fiery oranges. At the same time, Schwaller intimates that these two poles of the colour phenomenon are able to rise from one metallic substance, one that is, mythologically speaking, uncomplemented in the spectral septenary. This substance is identified by Schwaller with Jupiter (Zeus-Amun), indigo, and *tin*, which, underneath its cool, lunar nature, hides a hidden fire (the stable oxide of tin is blue-black, the metastable oxide is red).

*Précis of the Process: Biological Evolution*

The general theory for metals is nuanced importantly in the biological kingdoms. In metals, when the volatile is separated from the fixed, i.e. when the sulphuric lustre of the metal's seed is separated from its body (cf. nucleus separated from electron shell) the body is able to be purified, the salt is able to be inscribed, and when reunited the two parts are able to manifest their innate perfection. In the vegetable, animal and human kingdoms, however, when the volatile is separated from the fixed—the soul separated from the body—it spells death.<sup>779</sup> The salt, however, does not die (just as the metallic seed of extracted metals does not die). Indeed, through affinity and aversion it will find and combine with a biological (cellular) seed to determine a new body according to the affinities inscribed on the salt. For these reasons, Schwaller sees in the alchemical salt the mechanism of palingenesis. Through death and birth, inscribed experience will accumulate, moving from one body to another by the affinities of the fixed mineral salt. Just as metals move towards their innate perfection through great stretches of geological time, so too do human souls move slowly towards their innate

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779 Note that in plant alchemy or spagyrics, the separation, purification and recombination of the sulphur, mercury and salt of a plant entity is the process by which tinctures and essences are made, i.e. the plant is reduced to its essential oil (sulphur), its alcohol (mercury) and its mineral ash (salt), all of which are recombined in their pure states to form the plant's "tincture". The process is well established and is often the way budding alchemists cut their teeth in the practice of their art. See Manfred M. JUNIUS, *Praktisches Handbuch der Pflanzen-Alchemie* (Interlaken: Ansata, 1982) = *The Practical Handbook of Plant Alchemy: An Herbalist's Guide to Preparing Medicinal Essences, Tinctures and Elixirs* (Rochester Vermont: Healing Arts, 1993).

perfection through the medium of countless rebirths—linked by the chain of the fixed mineral salt. As Heraclitus said: ‘the hidden link (*harmonie*) is the strongest’.<sup>780</sup>

It has been seen that there is a catalyst in the metallic process; there is also one for the metempsychotic process. The catalytic process, however, is salvific. Rather than literally speeding up the cycle of rebirths, it opens up a path which obviates rebirth altogether. Schwaller compares it repeatedly to redemption, casting it as equally in Christian theological terms as in Egyptian (Christic sacrifice versus the constant sacrifice of Melchizedek; Horus versus Osiris; alchemically, the two paths correspond to the wet and the dry ways). Redemption liberates the soul to its divine perfection, where it is no longer required to suffer the slow purification of samsaric rebirth. Here Schwaller’s remarks on the esotericism of religious customs pertaining to death are revealing, especially when considering the great emphasis that the Egyptian pharaohs placed on preserving the body, which is effectively tantamount to preventing the fixed salt in the femur from re-entering the mineral and biological cycles, thereby obviating rebirth.

Here the process has become inextricably bound up with theological concerns, and this more than anything suggests that alchemy, when understood according to its proper scope, is not merely a laboratory phenomenon, nor a psychological process, but an integral phenomenon pertaining directly and at once to physics, biology and the fate of the soul, all of which are to be perceived as living expressions of spiritual fixation. Alchemy thus has an integral significance, and in this respect may best be understood in light of the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of Jean Gebser: a phenomenology of consciousness in which *physis*, *bios* and *psychē* cohere as ‘concretions of the spiritual’ (*Konkretion des Geistiges*).<sup>781</sup> It is here that one begins to fathom the deeper reaches of Lubiczian alchemy, and in order to understand the ultimate goals of Lubiczian alchemy as a process of spiritual concretion, it is necessary to look at the concepts of (i) the styptic coagulating force and (ii) the spherical spiral. Through this, one may grasp de Lubicz’s comprehension of the stone.

### Metallurgical Evolution: Seed and Matrix of the Seven Metals

For Schwaller, salt plays a pivotal role in both metallurgical and biological evolution. As will be seen, however, it fulfils a different function in each kingdom. In the metallic kingdom, it plays a *maternal* role while in the biological kingdom, it plays a *paternal* role. Because of this, the dynamics of alchemy are notably different in metals than in biological entities:

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780 DK 54 (Hippolytus *Ref.* IX, 9, 5): *harmonie aphanēs phanerēs kreittōn*.

781 Cf. GEBSER, *Gesamtausgabe*, vols 2-3.

To that effect, there are four steps: revive the metal, separate the fixed from the volatile, cleanse the body, and rejoin the fixed to the volatile. This is quite different from biological evolution, where the fixed salt remains the attractive focus until it is reunited with the volatile through the processes of nature.<sup>782</sup>

This is the most succinct précis that Schwaller gives of the alchemical process. In metals, the process is: revivify, separate, purify, recombine. These shall be examined in turn.

### *Revivification of the Metal*

As Eliade has shown in his study of the mythology of metallurgy, metals were traditionally conceived as embryos growing in the womb of the earth.<sup>783</sup> The same essential assumptions cohere in Schwaller's alchemy, which places the mineral kingdom at the beginning of material evolution—the first phenomenal manifestation of life—the mineral gangue (mine) being perceived as matrix (mother) of a living, gestating, metallic matter.<sup>784</sup> Here one finds the first fundamental difference that exists between alchemy and chemistry in the perception of matter. Chemically, metals in any state are dead objects to be exploited; alchemically, they are living, indeed *sentient* entities (albeit sentient in a specifically defined sense, as shall be seen). No matter how the definition is nuanced, however, this vitalistic perception of minerals and metals as living entities is clearly alien to the dualistic epistemology of contemporary science. Comments Schwaller:

All metal from the mine has been smelted and by this fact is “dead”. It is usually, therefore, absolutely impossible to transmute. Here an important nuance of the alchemical doctrine is stated. It is said: every metal, being composed of the Three Principles is, by its origin, destined to be silver or gold. Due to fortuitous or accidental reasons, the evolution of the metal has been arrested in the mine. In order, therefore, to be able to evolve it to the state of silver or gold, it must be returned to the living state of the mine; that is to say its component or composing

<sup>782</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 186.

<sup>783</sup> ELIADE, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956), passim.

<sup>784</sup> Gangue—an impure mineral from which a more precious mineral or metal must be separated—comes to English via French from the German word *Gang*, a ‘path’ or ‘way’, referring to the vein of ore in which a prized mineral is found. Interestingly, the initiatic *katabasis* or path into the underworld may be alchemically configured as an *Untergang* (*Unter-gangue*), an entry into the impure realms, the crude matter, a path away from God (or at least the gods of the transcendent heavens); what is discovered, however, is gold (or the seed of gold)—the central fire—a remaining ‘true to the earth’ (*bleib der Erde treu*). Only by visiting the interior of the earth and fixing what is found will the hidden stone be attained (*visita interiora terrae rectificando invenies occultum lapidem*).

mercury must be re-liberated;<sup>785</sup> then the ferment can coagulate it, “curdle” it into the state of gold, a state to which the metal has been destined from the very beginning.<sup>786</sup>

To begin the *oeuvre*, the alchemist must return their metal to its life-giving matrix, the conditions of which must be recreated. The first matter an alchemist seeks, then, is not a metal but the mineral that forms its matrix. For this reason there are said to be two “first matters” in the Work, and here Schwaller follows his alchemical forebears in distinguishing *prima materia* from *materia prima*. One is the maternal, nourishing matrix (the “mercury” or mine); the other is the metal itself, which contains the slumbering, coagulating seed-fire (the “sulphur”). The latter is the active principle that will coagulate the nourishing mercurial gangue and evolve itself thereby through the seven phases of increasing metallic purity, from lead to gold.

But of course, to realise this there must be a matter that bears or carries<sup>787</sup> this abstract substance, serving as a vessel, so to speak, a stomach or womb<sup>788</sup> in which it can take primitive form. Once realised or formed, the *materia prima*<sup>789</sup> (also called second) that served as an intermediary can be dispensed with.<sup>790</sup> Now isolated, this new, primitively formed matter, having in it all the elementary qualities of the first state, becomes the *prima materia*.<sup>791</sup> Thus do they play on words. This passage from abstraction to the *prima materia* is what they designate the “labours of Hercules”, making allusion thereby to the different phases of this work described allegorically in the myth of Heracles.<sup>792</sup>

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785 *redevenu libre*: ‘become free again’.

786 SCHWALLER, ‘Notes et propos sur l’hermétisme’, *Notes et propos inédits* II, 225.

787 *matière porteuse*.

788 *estomac*, literally ‘stomach’.

789 *matière première*.

790 The COSMOPOLITE (Alexandre Sethon) remarks: ‘What is sought is not so much the first matter but the second which is, of course, that from which [the first] has been conceived, and which cannot be changed into another form’. *Novum Lumen chymicum* (Coloniæ, M.DC.X) 16: ‘Non prima, sed secunda tantum quærat materia, talis nimirum, quæ simul ac concepta est, in aliam mutari formam non potest’; CANSÉLIET, *L’alchimie expliquée sur ses textes classiques* (Société nouvelle des éditions Pauvert, 1972), 137: ‘Que soit autant recherché, non pas la première matière, mais la seconde qui est telle, assurément, dès qu’elle a été conçue et ne peut être changée en une autre forme’.

791 *première matière*.

792 ‘Notes et propos sur l’hermétisme’, 210. The labours of Heracles are twelve in number and in their original forms must be reconstructed from a wealth of diverse classical sources; (Pseudo-) APOLLODORUS, *Bibliothèque* 2.5.1-2.5.12, gives the traditional order as follows: (i) slay the Nemean Lion; (ii) slay the Lernaean Hydra; (iii) capture the golden hind of Artemis; (iv) capture the Erymanthian Boar; (v) clean the Augean stables in a single day; (vi) slay the Stymphalian Birds; (vii) capture the Cretan Bull; (viii) steal the Mares of

The distinction here between *materia prima* and *prima materia* is an important one. Grammatically, the distinction is only minor. In Latin as well as French, *materia prima* (*matière première*) means ‘first matter’, while *prima materia* (*première matière*) means the same thing but with slightly more emphasis on the adjective: ‘first matter’. The alchemical significance, however, is more pronounced. Schwaller’s remarks here are borne out in his insistence to VandenBroeck that *materia prima* is not *prima materia*. The context proves illuminating:

There is an essential aspect that cannot be transmitted. It turns out to be the most obvious, the most common, so generally accepted that it becomes invisible. It is ever present and constantly visible, all texts insist on that point. Go ahead, ask me: What is ... *it*? I will sound foolish telling you that it is the *stone*, but if you knew stone, stoneness, its tremendous concentration, and its passivity, you would know that this is the material of the lode, the matrix of the mineral. It’s the starting point, yes, you start with the stone to find the stone, where else? *Prima materia* and *materia prima* are not the same; one is a beginning and the other is an end. But it is always the same stone, the stone does not evolve.<sup>793</sup>

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Diomedes; (ix) obtain the Girdle of the Amazon Queen; (x) obtain the Cattle of the Monster Geryon; (xi) steal the Apples of the Hesperides; (xii) capture Cerberus. Traditionally the tasks required to achieve apotheosis, the labours were given specific hermetic significance in the Western alchemical canon. Blaise de VIGENÈRE in his *Philostate* remarks: ‘If we want to apply this fantasy or poetic fiction to natural philosophy, we have already said in the preceding portrayal that Hercules is none other than the Sun, which by its heat and its rays, acting as arrows, exterminates the Hydra with all of its reborn heads, that is, the cold, the quality proper to water, of which this serpent is born and whose name it bears’ (Pseudo-)APOLLODORUS, *Bibliothèque* 2.5.1-2.5.12); an alchemical description of all the labours is given in NUYSEMENT, reproduced in ‘Hercules in Alchemy’ (Yves BONNEFOY and Wendy DONIGER, eds., *Roman and European Mythologies*, 221-3); Pierre Jean FABRE’s *Hercules piochymichus* was summarised in PERNETY’s influential dictionary; the labours are mentioned repeatedly in CYLIANI’s *Hermès Devoilée*, a text which Schwaller mentions in specific connection to the stained glass oeuvre that he undertook with Jean-Julien Champagne (Fulcanelli) over a twenty year period; “Fulcanelli” himself mentions the labours briefly in the *Cathédrales* text as ‘notre preparation’ (131-2).

793 *Al-Kemi*, 59. The distinction here may be compared to the relationship between the simultaneously paternal and maternal aspects of the alchemical process in which one substance or entity is both agent and patient (but also instrument) of one single act. To understand this is to understand that linear causality, being time-bound (and therefore only able to comprehend reality within temporal sequence), does not grasp how the hypercosmic creative principle is at once the meta-temporal *archē* to the material substratum, which in turn is the material matrix (womb) of the physical prime substance (a material recapitulation of the hypercosmic ‘father’, born through the material ‘mother’ as the incarnate ‘son’). Here, as in Trinitarian theology, the *logos* or ‘seed’ (*spermatikos logos*) is in fact eternal and pre-exists its manifestation; it incarnates in matter through the material mother in order to give visible form to the invisible father. It is at once seed,

Recent proponents of the dry way (*la voie sèche*), following Fulcanelli's (and Flamel's) footsteps, bring light to the œuvre as envisioned by Schwaller (who worked directly on the problem of salt with Champagne, alias Fulcanelli). A recently published work by Rubellus Petrinus interprets Flamel, Valentine and Philalethes, as well as passages from Fulcanelli, to suggest that the two matters that the practising metallurgical alchemist must begin with are antimony and iron. Here, antimony, a metalloid (i.e. a transitional substance between mineral and metal), provides the mercurial gangue, while iron provides the fiery, sulphuric, metallic seed. Although the seed is seen by Schwaller as one and the same for all metals, in iron it is already disposed toward gold due to its propensity toward redness (per not only its mineral but its mythological characteristics, e.g. Seth-Typhon, Ares, Mars). In this connection, Schwaller makes a simple but profound insight into the alchemical symbols of the planetary metals. He divides the seven planetary metals into two lineages: one solar (gold, copper and iron) and the other lunar (silver, tin and lead). Mercury, due to its double nature, stands in between, as follows:

Solar		Dual		Lunar
Gold	☉	Mercury	☿	Silver
Venus	♀		♃	Tin
Mars	♂		♄	Lead

It should be noted that the solar signs are those that contain the circle of the sun, while the lunar signs all contain the crescent of the moon; only dual-natured mercurius contains both circle and crescent. Schwaller's classification is thus supported by the nature of the symbols themselves.

In *Les Demeures Philosophales*, Fulcanelli analyses the panels of the Castle at Dampierre, furnishing the following discussion of the principle of the fiery, sulphuric seed residing dormant in "dead" or "closed" metals:

The dried up tree is a symbol of the common metals reduced from their ores and molten. The high temperatures of metallurgical ovens have caused all the activity they possessed in their natural mineral-bed to be lost. This is why the philosophers qualify them as dead and recognise them as being improper to the labour of the

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womb and fruit. This is why Schwaller was so struck by the ithyphallic image of Ka-Mut-Tef—'the bull of his mother' in the tomb of Rameses IX—in which the pharaoh (incarnation of the cosmic divinity) is depicted as the hypotenuse of the right-angled triangle, a geometric *symbolique* of the three-fold unity that Christianity would place at the centre of its theology and alchemy at the centre of its metaphysics.



Great Work until they have been revived or reincrudated, to use the expression hallowed by usage, by this inner fire which never completely leaves them. For the metals, fixed in the industrial form we know them to have, yet preserve at the very depths of their substance, the soul that common fire has caused to cave in and condense but was not able to destroy. And this soul, the sages have named fire or sulphur because it is truly the agent of all mutations, of all the accidents observed [in] metallic matter, and the incombustible seed that nothing can totally ruin, neither the violence of strong acids, nor the fire of the furnaces. The great principle of immortality charged by God himself to ensure and maintain the perpetuity of the species, and to reform the perishable body, subsists and can be found even in the ashes of calcined metals when the latter undergo the disaggregation of their parts and see the consumption of their bodily envelopes.<sup>794</sup>

In this passage, Fulcanelli is approaching the very same process that Schwaller broached to VandenBroeck: the reincrudation of metals and the awakening of the fiery sulphuric soul—the *seed* of metals. It is described as sulphuric in its capacity as seed and ferment ('the agent of all mutations'); but in its capacity as indestructible nucleus able to withstand the violence of acid and fire, it is equally a description of the fixed salt.

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794 FULCANELLI, *Les Demeures Philosophales* (Château du Dampierre IX), 155-6: 'L'arbre desséché est un symbole des métaux usuels réduits de leurs minerais et fondus, auxquels les hautes températures des fours métallurgiques ont fait perdre l'activité qu'ils possédaient dans leur gîte naturel. C'est pourquoi les philosophes les qualifient morts et les reconnaissent impropres au travail de l'Œuvre, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient revivifiés, ou réincrudés selon le terme consacré, par ce feu interne qui ne les abandonne jamais complètement. Car les métaux, fixés sous la forme industrielle que nous leur connaissons, gardent encore, au plus profond de leur substance, l'âme que le feu vulgaire a resserrée et condensée, mais qu'il n'a pu détruire. Et cette âme, les sages l'ont nommée feu ou soufre, parce qu'elle est véritablement l'agent de toutes les mutations, de tous les accidents observés dans la matière métallique, et cette semence incombustible que rien ne peut ruiner tout à fait, ni la violence des acides forts, ni l'ardeur de la fournaise. Ce grand principe d'immortalité, chargé par Dieu même d'assurer, de maintenir la perpétuité de l'espèce et de reformer le corps périssable, subsiste et se retrouve jusque dans les cendres des métaux calcinés, alors que ceux-ci ont souffert la désagrégation de leurs parties et vu consumer leur enveloppe corporelle. (Donvez-Perrin trans., 385).

ONTOLOGICAL MUTATION



ILLUSTRATION 40: THE OLD, DRY TREE

Panel from the Castle at Dampierre  
(Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures Philosophales*)

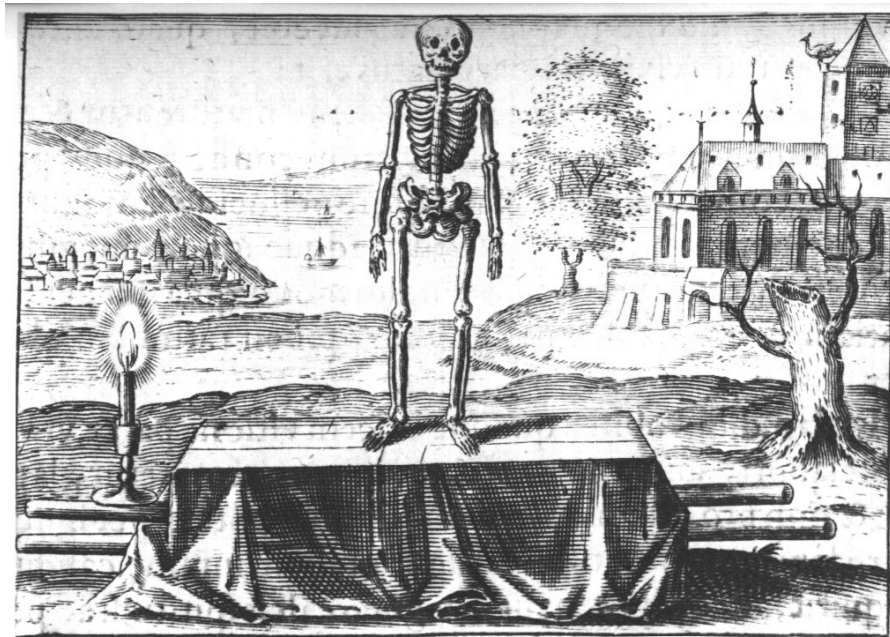


ILLUSTRATION 41: FLAME, SKELETON, TREE

Basil Valentine, Clef IV

Now, the old dry tree from the Dampierre panel (Illustration 40) recalls distinctly the image accompanying Key IV of Basil Valentine's *Zwölf Schlüssel*, in which a skeleton is depicted standing upon a casket (Illustration 41). The *squellet* is flanked on

one side by a burning candle, and on the other by an old, dry, dead tree. Here one meets the same symbolic elements as in the Dampierre panel: desiccation, death, and the secret fire. As in metals, the secret fire remains intact in the mineral core (skeleton), and even through the body may be destroyed, the mineral ashes are always indestructible.

*Separation of the Fixed from the Volatile*

Schwaller's metaphysics continually emphasises the creative role of scission not only in cosmogenesis, but in all processes, from cell division through to the harmonic series. Scission was quintessentially alchemical:

[...] there is no creation without separation, and separation is the function that presides over all. In the same manner, the alchemical art is the art of provoking this separation, or more precisely, of knowing how to separate the "pure from the impure", which is why the German alchemists refer to alchemy as a *Scheide Kunst*, i.e. the 'art of separating'.<sup>795</sup>

Separation is therefore the *conditio sine qua non* of purification. The key difference between metallurgical and biological evolution according to Lubiczian alchemy lies in the fact that the former does not involve rebirth because in metals the spirit is not separated from the body upon death as it is in biological entities:

One thing is certain: biological evolution rests on the trinary foundation of Sulphur, Mercury and Salt, or function, substance and form, where function is the creative element, the spiritual, life-carrying cause; seed the regenerator of substance; and salt the guardian of form. Metallic evolution on the other hand is not a palingenesis, and the volatile component remains indissolubly joined to the fixed after the metal leaves the mine. In fact, it is only after the conditions of the mineral matrix are recreated that we can obtain a dissolution to liberate the volatile that will appear to us as the characteristic colour of the metal. I will show this to you some day: the metallic lustre separated from the metal!<sup>796</sup>

Unlike in the biological kingdoms, where death is equal to the separation of the volatile soul from the fixed body, the "death" of the metal is brought about by its

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795 SCHWALLER, 'Notes et propos sur l'hermétisme', 215; *Scheiden*, 'to separate, divide'; also: 'to dissolve, divorce; to decide, discriminate; to depart'; in Chemistry: 'to separate, extract'. The noun *Scheide* means 'sheath, scabbard', and in vulgar usage, 'vagina'. There is perhaps a sense here in which, beyond the overt meanings, the alchemical *Diva Matrix* is covertly indicated.

796 *Al-Kemi*, 186.

removal from the life-giving mine. The fixed body and volatile spirit are still intact, but there is no longer a nourishing matrix, and therefore the growth or “life” of the metal is arrested. Upon reincrudation, however, the spirit is awakened again, and the process described by Schwaller allows the chromatic spirit to be freed from the living metal. What one begins to see is that in living metals—like seeds planted in the womb of the earth—the embryological metallic spirit is free to grow; in extracted metals, however, the spirit is arrested at a particular stage of its growth. The *liberation* of the spirit of the metal provides the first context for understanding the importance of the glass work. The ‘glass stained in its mass with the volatile spirit of metals’ appears to be a proof of the alchemical process of separating the pure metallic spirit from the metallic body, which can only ensue from a revived metallic entity. It is this liberated, volatile metallic spirit that is, in Schwaller’s parlance, ‘caught in the net’ of the vitreous body, to which it bequeaths its characteristic colour(s)—the fabled blues and reds.<sup>797</sup>

Schwaller’s reference to the net touches upon some important aspects of his pharaonic *symbolique* that pertain directly (albeit in a veiled fashion) to the dynamics of the alchemical operation under discussion. It will be useful to reproduce the relevant remarks before looking at the pharaonic *symbolique*:

We are merely preparing a milieu for the new redness to become visible. We are working on metallic forms, of course, substances we know in their relation to color, not only by their lines in spectroscopy, but by other more intuitive ways. Anyway, the result of the experiment is captured in glass, and here comes the difficult manipulation of the decantations which the letter in Canseliet’s foreword talks about. The end result will be a glass that is red in the mass without being pigmented. We have merely prepared the milieu for the phenomenon to happen, but the new octave will be attracted to the prepared milieu. Spirit has to be caught in the net, as the Pharaonics say.<sup>798</sup>

When these comments are compared with Schwaller’s discussion of the *symbolique* of the net (Egyptian *skbt*) in *Le Temple de l’homme*, the deeper alchemical nuances hiding beneath the surface begin to emerge. Indeed, one senses here that Schwaller’s *chef d’œuvre* is much more than a work of para-Egyptology; it begins to reveal itself as a subtle yet profound hermetic text in its own right, with distinct alchemical keys, and in this respect it is a mature application of the same architectonic *symbolique* that was revealed in the *Cathédrales* text published by Champagne some thirty years earlier. As such, it must be read with the same kind of conscious effort demanded by the so-called ‘good texts’ of Flamel and Valentine:

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<sup>797</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 132.

<sup>798</sup> *Al-Kemi*, 132.

The very great importance given to the net (*filet*), which is revealed upon a close study of it, prompts us to provide here, in detail, its principal elements. As always, the Ancients have chosen from among practical tools, whose functions are invariable, the image that best represented the intimate meaning of the thought they wanted to express. The “hunting of birds” with the net signifies the capturing of the spirit or of the abstraction, in other words, that which is not otherwise graspable save through the means that the net symbolises. With the image of the net, allusion is made to a primordial action—that of making spirit concrete (giving form). This is confirmed by the play of the numbers in the tomb of Ukhotep and by the intervention of the *neters*, particularly of Thoth (Hermes) at Karnak.<sup>799</sup>

Here, in the idea of “capturing that which is otherwise unable to be grasped”, an allusion is made to the same process that was described in Schwaller’s earliest remarks on the colours violet and indigo, colours that, according to *La Doctrine*, both partake of something that goes beyond the attempt to comprehend them. In the metallurgical context, this hearkens back to Schwaller’s remark that indigo (earth) must be shifted to blue (water) so that it may become a constituent in the formation of violet (fire-water juncture).

When one looks further at the section in *Le Temple de l’Homme* dealing with the symbolique of the net, some subtle and doubtless intentional references are seen that take on profound significance in light of the alchemical process that Schwaller describes in terms of the wet and dry ways. The references centre upon an explication of the word *skht*, the term used for ‘bird hunt’ and ‘marshy terrain’ in the tomb of Ukhotep.<sup>800</sup> Schwaller adduces the further meanings and uses of the word, ‘the general sense of which seems to be “to seize” with the added meaning of “to stop” or “to give form”’.<sup>801</sup> Among the meanings and uses, Schwaller makes specific remarks about water and earth that cannot be ignored in light of the dynamics of his alchemical theory:

“Placing the snare [*skht*], taking the birds into the snare [*skht* plate 56] by the best men of the marshlands [*skht* plate 55]”. The latter word, determined by a straight horizontal band topped by three bundles of rushes, designates the wetland, which, after the retreat of the floodwaters, is ready to be seeded. A feminine *neter* named Sekhet was the divinity of the land left wet after the withdrawal of the waters. Determined by a female figure holding a duck in one hand and a fish in the other,

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799 *Temple*, II, 224 (modified after Lawlor, 825).

800 Cf. ERMAN/GRAPOW, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, IV, 229-31, which glosses *skht* as: ‘das Feld, Gefilde [...] Feldgöttin’; it is used in expressions pertaining to the bird hunt (*Vogeljagt*).

801 *Temple*, II, 230 (Lawlor, 830).

her son was Heb, the “net” *neter*, and she was the protective divinity of all those who took birds and fish with nets in the flooded lands.

[...] In the ritual foundation of the temple: “Grinding to form [*skbt*] the first brick ...” in the sense of “uniting water to earth”, that is, “earth seizing the water”.<sup>802</sup>

The waters must recede so that the wetland may be seeded. Indigo (earth) is shifted to blue (water) so that the milieu may be created for seed (fire). Very cunningly, Schwaller is describing processes that pertain precisely to the formation of the *black earth* that literally defined Egypt (*km.t*, whence *al-kīmiyā*). When the floodwaters receded after the annual inundation of the Nile, they left a dark soil rich in alluvial deposits. The word for the wetlands determined the word for ‘net, seize, stop, give form’, for the marshland was the place where not only birds but also fish were captured with the net (hence the goddess Sekhet, holding/seizing bird and fish). Moreover, consolidating the alchemical subtext of Schwaller’s discussion, the hieroglyph *skbt* (*sekhet*, three reeds emerging from a horizontal band of earth) along with the hieroglyph *akbt* (*akhet*, a papyrus clump indicating ‘the first sign of life’ depicted by three shoots emerging from the earth with the meaning ‘inundation’—but with many homonyms including ‘horizon, fire, glory, splendour, the sun’s rays, etc.’) (Illustration 42) evokes the symbol employed in medieval and early modern alchemy for *la voie sèche* (the dry way): a three blossomed flower, often held by a woman (representing fertile earth) (figure 37).<sup>803</sup> (Much of this may also be seen as pertaining to Schwaller’s conception of magic, i.e. an evocation that proceeded by creating a void, space or milieu that attracts, by necessity, the desired object to manifest).

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802 *Temple*, II, 230 (Lawlor, 830).

803 On the three flowers as symbol of the dry way within the Fulcanellian tradition, see CANSELIET, *Douze Clefs*; PETRINUS, *Great Alchemical Work*, 69.

ONTOLOGICAL MUTATION

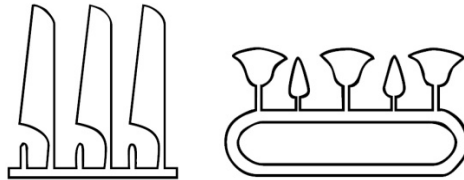


ILLUSTRATION 42: HIEROGLYPHS FOR (I) SKHT AND (II) AKHT

(i) *skht* depicts three reeds emerging from the earth and means 'wetland, marshy terrain' (i.e. land ready to be seeded = fertile black earth = *km.t*). Homonyms of *skht* include 'snare, net';  
(ii) *akht* depicts a papyrus clump and means 'inundation' (i.e. the first sign of life). Homonyms of *akht* include 'horizon, fire, glory, splendour, blaze of solar rays'



ILLUSTRATION 43: BASIL VALENTINE, CLEF I

The queen (fertile earth) holds a three-blossomed flower, symbol of the dry way. (Note also the seven peacock's feathers).

*Cleansing the Body*

Schwaller maintains the traditional view that the seven planetary metals, from lead to gold, are not independent metals but rather phases in the development of one metallic entity. This pertains directly to the idea of the seed of metals in alchemy, which holds that one seed, one sulphuric leaven, is common to all the planetary metals. Unlike the plant kingdom, where one seed gives rise to an oak and another gives rise to a pine, in the mineral kingdom one single seed is responsible for lead, tin, iron, mercury, copper and silver, all of which are phases in the evolution of gold. What stops the fiery metallic seed from becoming gold instantly is the body or envelope of this volatile spirit (i.e. the net, *skbt*, 'to stop, to form').

Only when the spirit is separated from the body can the body be purified; only when the body is pure is the metallic spirit free to shine forth in its full splendour.

In 'Notes et propos sur l'hermétisme' (Notes on Hermeticism), Schwaller situates the phenomenon of impurities within a wider cosmogonic, ethical and religious context, once again bringing metallurgical alchemy into a simultaneously cosmological and soteriological framework. Here, the precise technical procedures of the opus recapitulate the theurgic process of the redemption of nature: 'It is for this reason that the alchemists call their work the greatest *œuvre*, specifying this by a precise locution—*la plus grande Œuvre* (the greatest Work)—by which they mean: the Universe'.<sup>804</sup> The deeper implications of the alchemical opus are then discussed in theological terms:

Thus, from origin, the cause of imperfection, therefore of possible arrests or cessations [in the process of becoming] is given, and all the preparatory "Work" of the alchemist consists in eliminating this "evil", this impurity which opposes itself to the final and *conscious* reunion of separated elements. Religion seeks nothing less. In the ethical domain, Sathan [sic], his pomp and his works, is the enemy to be vanquished. In Egyptian terms, this corresponds to the struggle of *Horus* against his brother, *Seth*. [...] But there is a deeper lesson here that is more difficult to comprehend, and for the alchemists it is among the most mysterious of all. Borrowing the myth of Adam from the Mosaic *Genesis*, they maintain that Adam did not need to fall. That is, he did not need to oppose himself with his wife, Eve. He could have remained in his divine state. Words placed in the very mouth of "God" say: "chase them away so that they do not eat of the tree in the middle and thereby become one of us".<sup>805</sup> But evidently there would not have been any procreation and therefore no specification would have been possible. However the mystical ideal is the attainment of a state wherein sexuality ceases, where the "divided souls" effectively reunite and are no longer engaged in coitus, which is merely a simulacrum of Union.

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804 'Notes et propos sur l'hermétisme', 201-228.

805 *Genesis* 3:22-3.



Moreover, the alchemists say that the ultimate goal of their Work is to attain the ability to “multiply” (or procreate) their universal ferment beyond ordinary multiplication (which is merely “regeneration” and not an infinite multiplication). The alchemical multiplication no longer knows death; it is able to assimilate the spiritual nourishment directly.

Therefore, the original separation instantiates itself by a conflict that separates the high from the low, manifesting as extension (*genesis*), thus specifying an active and a passive. That which takes an active or combative character is the sulphur or seed, and is male. The other part is the passive, feminine matrix, she who rises as the other descends and he who descends carries within him, as they say, the nature immanent to duality, the opposition; therefore, he alone still carries the double nature: the light which has been carried away (*Lumière emportée*),<sup>806</sup>—akin to unity—and the corporeality of its manifestation. This fallen light, “imprisoned” in Lucifer, is the third principle, visible but intangible, like the Spirit which permeates the Father and the Christic Son. The body which imprisons this light is the salt of the alchemists; this light is their true, pure sulphur, while the high and passive element is their mercury, but only by their art have they succeeded in separating the light from the body, that which cannot manifest itself, in view of its abstract nature, other than by their mercury, which becomes the carrier (fecundated virgin).<sup>807</sup>

*Rejoining the Fixed to the Volatile*

It is clear that once the qualitative spirit is sufficiently intensified and the quantitative substance is sufficiently purified, the two aspects can be rejoined, exactly like sulphur and mercury, to produce the coagulation into its perfect form. Matter is no longer an impediment to spirit, and when the intensified spirit of a metallic nature (i.e. the “sulphur” in the sense of ferment or fire) is reunited with a pure proto-metallic substance (its “mercury”), it specifies it into a noble metallic body (its “salt”). Here, spirit and substance must be of the same nature because the metallic spirit is a *specific* seed oriented towards the metallic species; as such, it can only be effective when conjoined with a nutritive milieu appropriate to its nature (just as human seed will only develop in a human womb). It is important to emphasise that Schwaller is approaching the whole phenomenon of the seed *functionally*. According to this view, all seeds are of the nature of “sulphur”—fermenting, coagulating forces that act upon a nourishing matrix or milieu (its “mercury”). While the product of this interaction is known to be a salt, when the spiritual ferment is sufficiently intense and/or

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806 *Lumière emportée* can mean both light that is ‘carried or taken away’ or light that is ‘agitated, violent’.

807 SCHWALLER, ‘Notes et propos sur l’hermétisme’, *Notes et propos inédits* II, 214-5.

unhindered by bodily impurities, the resulting form is perfect and the product is technically able to be called the “stone” of that species. In this connection, Schwaller distinguishes between a *universal* philosopher’s stone and a *specified* philosopher’s stone.

Now this hot and dry ferment is a fire and it can be pure, solid or liquid—it doesn’t matter—for it will coagulate the metallic mercury into gold, and this will be the specified Philosopher’s Stone and must respond to the following conditions: it must be a ferment able to dry the humidity (or to coagulate it) and it must be of the specific nature of gold, just as an acorn will only give rise to an oak and not a pine. To put this in terms of our modern conceptions, if in the metallic mercury one could introduce a proton (i.e. ferment) that is able to group the number of specific ions of gold, one could coagulate the mercury into gold. This reasoning is correct and proves that the alchemical argument is unassailable in theory since all nature demonstrates that there is no generation or growth without this ferment which “coagulates into its specified nature” a given nutritive element. And one calls this ferment a seed.<sup>808</sup>

Some passages in Fulcanelli’s *Demeures Philosophales* (Philosophical Dwellings, 1932), notably published just after Champagne completed the glass *œuvre* with Schwaller at Plan-de-Grasse, reveal some important distinctions between the unification of metallic seed to metallic body, and the more mysterious process that penetrates right to the heart of the stained glass work. Here, when a metallic seed is invested with a *vitreous* body (rather than a metallic or mineral body), it appears to assume the form and nature of a much more mysterious alchemical stone. Quoth Fulcanelli:

Only the *metallic spirits* possess the privilege to alter, modify and *denature* metallic bodies. They are the true instigators of all the physical metamorphoses that can be observed here. But since these tenuous, extremely subtle and volatile spirits need a vehicle, an envelope capable of holding them back; since this matter must be very pure—to allow the spirit to remain there—and very fixed so as to prevent its volatilisation; since it must remain fusible in order to promote *ingress*; since it is essential that it be absolutely resistant to reducing agents, we may easily understand that this matter cannot be searched for in the sole category of metals. This is why Basil Valentine recommends that we take the *spirit* out of the metallic root and Bernard of Trevisan forbids the use of metals, minerals, and their salts in the construction of the *body*. The reason for this is simple and self-explanatory. If the stone were made up of a metallic body and a spirit fixed on this body, the latter acting on the former as if it were of the same species, the whole would take the characteristic form of metal. We could, in this case, obtain gold or silver or even an unknown metal but nothing more. This is what alchemists have always

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808 ‘Notes et propos sur l’hermétisme’, 206.

done, because they did not know the universality and the nature of the agent which they were looking for. But what we ask for, along with the philosophers, is not the union of a metallic body with a metallic spirit, but rather the condensation, the agglomeration of this spirit into a coherent, tenacious and refractory envelope, capable of coating it, impregnating all its parts and guaranteeing it an efficacious protection. This soul, spirit or fire assembled, concentrated, and coagulated in the purest, the most resistant and the most perfect of earthly matters, we call it our stone. And we can certify than any undertaking which does not have this spirit for guide and this matter for basis will never lead to the proposed objective.<sup>809</sup>

To create the noble metals, metallic spirits are reinrudated, separated, and reunited with purified metallic bodies. To create the *stone*, however, metallic spirits require a non-metallic vehicle, body or envelope. Fulcanelli doesn't specify the exact nature of this body, but from all that has been learnt from the overarching preoccupations of Schwaller and Champagne during the twenty year period that they worked together, it is obvious that this vehicle can only be *glass*—a body made from the high temperature fusion of wood-ash and sand (calcium carbonate and silica;  $\text{CaCO}_3$  and  $\text{SiO}_2$ ). With regard to the perennial alchemical claim that the substance of the stone is not only

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809 *Les Demeures philosophales* (La Salamandre de Lisieux III): 'Seuls, les *esprits métalliques* possèdent le privilège d'altérer, de modifier et *dénaturer* les corps métalliques. Ce sont eux les véritables promoteurs de toutes les métamorphoses corporelles que l'on peut y observer. Mais comme ces esprits, ténus, extrêmement subtils et volatils, ont besoin d'un véhicule, d'une enveloppe capable de les retenir, que la matière doit en être très pure, — pour permettre à l'esprit d'y demeurer, — et très fixe, afin d'empêcher sa volatilisation; qu'elle doit rester fusible, dans le but de favoriser l'*ingrès*; qu'il est indispensable de lui assurer une résistance absolue aux agents réducteurs, on comprend sans peine que cette matière ne puisse être recherchée dans la seule catégorie des métaux. C'est pourquoi Basile Valentin recommande de prendre *l'esprit* dans la *racine* métallique, et Bernard le Trévisan défend d'employer les métaux, les minéraux et leurs sels à la construction du *corps*. La raison en est simple et s'impose d'elle-même. Si la pierre était composée d'un corps métallique et d'un esprit fixé sur ce corps, (267) celui-ci agissant sur celui-là comme étant de même espèce, le tout prendrait la forme caractéristique du métal. On pourrait, dans ce cas, obtenir de l'or ou de l'argent, voire même un métal inconnu, et rien de plus. C'est là ce qu'on toujours fait les alchimistes, parce qu'ils ignoraient l'universalité et l'essence de l'agent qu'ils recherchaient. Or, ce que nous demandons, avec tous les philosophes, ce n'est pas l'union d'un corps et d'un esprit métalliques, mais bien la condensation, l'agglomération de cet esprit dans une enveloppe cohérente, tenace et réfractaire, capable de l'enrober, d'en imprégner toutes les parties et de lui assurer une protection efficace. C'est cette âme, esprit ou feu rassemblé, concentré et coagulé dans la plus pure, la plus résistante et la plus parfaite des matières terrestres, que nous appelons notre pierre. et nous pouvons certifier que toute entreprise qui n'aura pas cet esprit pour guide et cette matière pour base ne conduira jamais au but proposé'. (Donvez-Perrin trans., 138-9).

ubiquitous but worthless, it may be noted that quartz sand (silica) is the most abundant mineral in the earth's crust by mass after oxygen, while its parent element, silicon, is the eighth most abundant element in the cosmos). Glass itself, moreover, is neither a mineral nor a metal; for some, it is neither a true solid nor a liquid. 'Glass is strange', comment Macfarlane and Martin: 'Chemists find it defies their classifications. It is neither a true solid nor a true liquid and is often described as a 'fourth state of matter'. For a long time it even baffled scientists, who could not find any crystalline structure within it'.<sup>810</sup>

Finally, in regards to the idea of catching the spirits of metals in a "net", the following discussion from the *Summa perfectionis* (on the construction of the aludel apparatus) may be noted for its revealing remarks on the alchemical pertinence of glass:

For only glass and the like of it, since it lacks pores, is able to hold spirits so that they not flee, and be driven off by the fire. But other vessels are not adequate, because they gradually escape through their pores, and are lessened in quantity. [69rb] Nor are metals useful in this regard, since spirits, due to their friendship and agreement, penetrate into them, and are united therewith. Passing through them by this means, they escape.<sup>811</sup>

Having gained some insight into the nature of the metallurgical opus, it is now time to review the nature of the glass *œuvre* insofar as it can be reconstructed from Schwaller and his immediate sources.

*'Glass Stained in the Mass with the Volatile Spirit of Metals'*

The unique blues and reds of Chartres that survive from the mid-twelfth century are remarkably different, notably darker, than the stained glass that would predominate a century later. In this respect, some scholars have suggested that the twelfth century Abbot Suger, who describes the construction of the Carolingian Abbey Church of St. Denis (an 'incipient Gothic' church on the northern outskirts of Paris),<sup>812</sup> was influenced by the negative or apophatic theology of the Christian Neoplatonist (Pseudo-) Dionysius.<sup>813</sup> By creating an effect of sombre or "Gothic" gloom with heavy

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810 Alan MACFARLANE and Gerry MARTIN, *Glass: A World History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 23.

811 William Royall NEWMAN, ed., *The Summa perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber: A Critical Edition*, 689-90.

812 GAGE, *Colour and Culture*, 69; SUGER, *On Consecration*.

813 GAGE, *Colour and Culture*, 70-1 with refs to SUGER and DIONYSIUS; see also ISODORE OF SEVILLE, for whom glass both shuts out and makes manifest. As Gage notes, Dionysius was assimilated to the identity of St. Denis; one may detect here yet another example of how a

use of deep blue stained glass, the intent was to evoke not light and clarity but the divine darkness of the *deus absconditus*.<sup>814</sup> For the illuminates of the Parisian alchemical revival, the earliest surviving glass of the Gothic period was witness and testament to the very alchemical mastery that was encoded in the veiled symbolism of the cathedrals themselves: they did not merely describe the philosophy and techniques of alchemy—they were a physical product and proof of it. Underpinning this understanding was a deep sensitivity for both the physical and metaphysical characteristics of the raw materials used in their art.

For Schwaller, the mastery of this secret was considered a chivalric achievement, composing an *esoteric* form of knighthood heir not to a hereditary tradition but to a hidden lineage of alchemical precept and practice stemming from Egypt itself—and thus to the very origins of the hermetic tradition. While the historical course of this transmission was seen to emerge in the west with the Templars—those bridgers of east and west long revered in esoteric circles as a crucial link in the golden chain between the wisdom of Graeco-Egyptian antiquity and early medieval Christendom—Schwaller himself claimed to have found actual traces of this glass in Egypt.<sup>815</sup> His own alchemical work, which he laboured on with Champagne/Fulcanelli over the course of some twenty years, centred precisely on colour theory as a means of explicating the role of salt, considered crucial to the *œuvre* of ‘glass stained in its mass with the volatile spirit of metals’.

What is known of the traditional techniques for making stained glass? Historians of science believe glass was coloured by a process much like that used today. The key ingredients for making glass are the same as they have been since ancient times: quartz sand and wood-ash, which in high temperature furnaces eventually fuse into a molten state. When cooled rapidly, the molten silica vitrifies.<sup>816</sup> The process, which grew out of metallurgy, was known to the alchemists; so, e.g. Basil Valentine, who in his *Zwölf Schlüssel* describes how ashes and sand are transformed through fire into a glass that can withstand fire:

When ash and sand, over sufficient time, are thoroughly cooked through fire  
so the master makes a glass out of them  
which thereafter always survives in the fire  
it is like unto the colour of a transparent stone

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phonetic assimilation conceals and reveals a philosophical assimilation.

814 GAGE, 71-3.

815 This is not an unreasonable proposition. Cf. refs to Napoleon expedition in Hendrie’s comments to Theophilus bk. II.

816 Traditionally, in order to be shaped, the glass is either poured into casts, heated over moulds, or wound in partially-molten strips around shaped cores. The technique of glass-blowing, whereby glass is formed into large molten bubbles by the influx of air, appears to have been developed in the Near East sometime during the first century BCE, and later perfected by Roman artisans.

and no more ash can be detected.

To the unknowing this is a great and secret art,  
but not to the one who knows,  
for to him it has become, through knowledge and, more frequently, experience,  
a work of handcraft.<sup>817</sup>

In regards to the origin of the ash—which essentially functioned as a flux—stained glass historian Jean Lafond remarks that:

[i]t comes from the natron of Egypt, the “ashes of the Levant”, which have already been mentioned, and which the ancient French authors also call *roquette*, the ashes of kelp, sand from the sea, or more simply, salt. The soda renders the glass more fusible, therefore easier to work.<sup>818</sup>

In all cases, glass was evidently coloured by the addition of oxides, ores or other minerals during the molten state (e.g. iron oxides for red; copper oxides for green, cobalt for blue, etc.) While the practice is ancient, the earliest sources describing the actual process derive from Arabic sources, such as the texts that describe the use of silver to create a yellow glass (a point which confirms the associations of silver with this colour in spectroscopy; Swaller, following the same evidence, associates luna with yellow). However, a text written in the early twelfth century suggests a completely different method. Theophilus Presbyter (1070-1125), a German Benedictine monk who wrote a compendium of artisan’s techniques entitled *De diversis artibus* (On Various Arts/Techniques), asserts that glass attained different hues by virtue of its smelting time:

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817 Basil VALENTINE, ‘Wenn Aschen und Sand durch das Feuer wol gezeitigt und gar gekocht werden / so macht der Meister darauß ein Glas / das da im Feuer hernacher immer bestehet / und an der Farbe einem durchsichtigen Steine gleich / und vor keine Aschen mehr wird erkandt / das ist dem Unwissenden eine grosse geheime Kunst / dem Wissenden aber nicht / denn es ist ihm durch die Wissenheit und offter Erfahrung zu einem Handwerck worden’. Here we see the alchemical attitude exemplified: the mysterious rendered practical. But it should be added that the mysterious is not rendered practical in order to demystify it; rather, it is rendered practical precisely because the mysterious process is the alchemists *Handwerk*. This helps explain why the glass oeuvre for Swaller and his alchemical contemporaries represented such a significant achievement. It testified not to theoretical but to actual, practical knowledge of the mysterious process that alchemy, like all true arts, seeks to render visible through concrete means.

818 Jean LAFOND, *Le Vitrail* (Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1978), 55: ‘Elle provenait du natron d’Égypte, de « cendres du Levant », dont il a déjà été parlé et que les anciens auteurs français appelaient aussi *roquette*, des cendres du varech, du sable de mer ou tout simplement du sel. La soude rendait le verre plus fusible, donc plus facile à travailler’.

If you perceive that, by chance, any vase change itself into a tawny colour (*fulvum colorem*), which is like flesh, keep this glass for flesh tints, and taking from it as much as you want, heat the rest for two hours, namely, from the first until the third, and you will have a light purple (*purpuream levem*); again heated from the third until the sixth, it will be a red purple and perfect (*purpura rufa atque perfecta*).<sup>819</sup>

As Lafond has remarked, ‘it is true that one could instruct oneself by looking to the work of these excellent practitioners. For their *métier* has remained essentially the same throughout the centuries’.<sup>820</sup> However, the colour transformations described here, evidently due to the natural impurities in the ash of beech wood (e.g. oxides of iron and manganese), describe only inherent colour, and do not describe the crucial techniques for making the intense blues and reds.<sup>821</sup> These crucial techniques were recorded in the four chapters of *De diversis artibus* that are lacking in all of the known editions (the extant manuscripts record only the titles).<sup>822</sup> ‘Where is to be seen in the atelier of to-day the finest and peculiar “blue” traceable until the end of the fifteenth century?’ asks Hendrie. ‘Cobalt will not produce this colour’.<sup>823</sup> Knowledge of the ancient process has to be pieced together largely from Graeco-Egyptian, Byzantine, and Arabic sources, where one learns that the blues were probably created by using sapphire or lapis lazuli, while the reds were probably produced using copper filings.<sup>824</sup>

The precise technique or “manipulation” employed by Schwaller and Champagne is mentioned by VandenBroeck and appears in the foreword to the second (1957) edition of *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*—it is thus fairly recent to the Schwaller-VandenBroeck exchange (1959-60). Herein, Fulcanelli’s purported master waxes

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819 Robert HENDRIE (trans., notes), *Theophili qui est Rugerus, presbyteri et monachi, libri III, de diversis artibus: seu diversarium artium schedula; An Essay on Various Arts, in Three Books, by Theophilus, called also Rugeris, Priest and Monk, forming an Encyclopaedia of Christian Art* (London: John Murray, 1847), Book II, ch. VIII. (cf. also ch. VII, which describes transformations from light yellow to reddish yellow).

820 LAFOND, 53-4: ‘Il est vrai qu’on pouvait s’instruire en regardant travailler ces excellents praticiens. Car le métier est resté essentiellement le même à travers les siècles’. Cf. the process described by THEOPHILUS, *De diversis artibus*, book II, the initial chapters of which describe the making of the furnace, the tools required, the mixing of ash and sand etc.

821 THEOPHILUS, *De diversis artibus*, II.1 (HENDRIE, 118 ff.) prescribes ash from beech wood (*ligna faginea ... cineres*) and sand as the raw ingredients for making glass.

822 ‘Of the colours which are made from copper, lead and salt’; ‘of green glass’; ‘of blue glass’ (*de vitro saphyreo*); ‘of the glass called “Gallien” (*de vitro quod vocatur Gallien*)’.

823 HENDRIE, 163, 65-6, who suggests this blue was attained using sapphire or lapis lazuli.

824 HENDRIE’S notes to Book II of *De diversis artibus* are especially helpful. On blue see 165-6 (suggesting sapphire or lapis lazuli for blue) and for red, 168-9, where a description of the Gallien glass mentioned by Theophilus is furnished by Eraclius (*De Artibus Romanorum*), as a white glass to which copper filings are added to produce the brilliant red glass ‘that we call Gallien’ (*quem Gallienum vocamus*).

enthusiastic about Fulcanelli's success in the glass *œuvre*. The relevant extract is as follows:

what confirms me in my certainty *is that the fire goes out only when the Work is accomplished and the whole tinctorial mass impregnates the glass, which, from decantation to decantation, remains absolutely saturated and becomes luminous like the sun.*<sup>825</sup>

How does the colour theory relate to the alchemical glass work? First of all, it must be recognised that despite all the intricacies that pertain to the theory, an overarching emphasis is placed on indigo, and hence *tin*, while also suggesting a double nature. Just as Fulcanelli would unfold the intricacies of the symbolism of iron through myriad mythological associations via the hermetic kabbalah, above and beyond the details of such an exegesis lies an overarching emphasis on the metal itself, one of the first matters of the dry way. Only by seeing the “forest for the trees” in this way is one able to recognise the obvious signification that is effectively being “hidden in plain sight” according to the cunning acumen of the alchemical craft: indigo and its hidden fire. For the blue of Chartres is not azure but indigo, while the hidden fire it contains by its proximity to violet conceals the Chartres red.

Here the other metallurgical association of indigo/Jupiter must be borne in mind. Greek sources describe electrum as a mélange of silver and gold—the lunar and solar colours. However, the other meaning of electrum in Greek is *amber*, the petrified tree resin that produces electricity when rubbed against *glass*. The hue of amber, moreover, lies between orange and yellow: the exact complement of its chromatically electric counterpart, indigo (which lies between blue and violet).

The alchemical opus that Schwaller and Champagne worked upon together at St. Moritz and Plan-de-Grasse places one directly in the presence of a critical hermetic work. However, the only direct details from Schwaller about the technical process of creating these blues and reds derive from VandenBroeck's account, which, whether intentionally or unintentionally, veils the details of the procedure. Very curiously, VandenBroeck appears to have fallen into a hypnagogic state when Schwaller was relaying to him the precise details of the glass *œuvre*. The account he gives is thus akin to a synaesthetic dream.<sup>826</sup> What one learns is at first bewildering and fragmentary; a stream of consciousness one is inclined to dismiss, but which, upon closer reading, proves tantalisingly coherent. Schwaller himself, recognising VandenBroeck's state, intentionally segued into a soothing drone in order to let the details of the procedure sink deeply into VandenBroeck's hypnotically receptive psyche.

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825 Eugène CANSELIET, ‘Préface à la deuxième édition’, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (1957), 18: ‘[...] ce qui me confirme dans la certitude, *c'est que le feu ne s'étaient que lorsque l'Œuvre est accompli et que toute la masse tinctoriale imprègne le verre qui, de décantation en décantation, demeure absolument saturé et devient lumineux comme le soleil*’. (Italics in original.)

826 *Al-Kemi*, 190-6.



*‘Le verre de Chartres est teint dans sa masse par l’esprit volatile des métaux’* (the glass of Chartres is stained in its mass by the volatile spirit of metals). According to VandenBroeck, the sonorous qualities of this precise sentence ‘swept away in a majestic gesture the scattered shards of information that had littered my mind, and by a metonymical effect elusive to analysis, positioned me to witness the subtlest vision of the infinitesimal shift from sameness to difference, from identity to opposition, from self to other, from one to two’.<sup>827</sup> This perception of the movement from unity to duality clearly reflects the cornerstone of Schwaller’s cosmogonic metaphysics—creation as scission; at the same time, it is also the essence of the mysterious metallurgical process itself. ‘I continued to hear his description of the ore particularly adapted to extraction of the tincture, and of the advantages of native semi-metals in solid solution’;<sup>828</sup> next he describes a vision of an Archimedean screw which is recognised as a ‘perfect spherical spiral’, a paradoxical figuration ‘progressing while somehow remaining the same’, a paradigm of ‘simultaneous being and becoming’.<sup>829</sup>

As VandenBroeck’s consciousness continues to oscillate between his mystical visions and Schwaller’s presentation, it is clear that, for VandenBroeck, they are two poles of the same phenomenon. In order to analyse the experience, it will be useful to separate the dreamlike interweavings given by VandenBroeck into two more comprehensible halves: those that correspond to Schwaller’s description of the process, and those that correspond to VandenBroeck’s hypnagogic internalisations and identifications. The glimpses that are gained of Schwaller’s actual description may be reconstructed as follows:

Now he describes a paste of quartz and calcium carbonate from which the vase is to be blown [...] now somewhat heatedly he defends a procedure (which to my knowledge no one has attacked), a course of action toward the recrudescence of a subject wherefrom the tinctorial spirit is to be obtained. [...] Now I am drawn to the facts expounded, the news that one single subject yields both reds and blues, which seems remarkable, and that there is controversy on this very point; although the parties to the argument are not made known, I understand it having been Fulcanelli; yet I fade with the details of the copper chloride mine to be created within a tightly sealed vase where the oxidation forms a mineral matrix that could breathe life into our metallic corpse. I gather that this is all one needs to know in order to assist an azure-blue recrudescence.<sup>830</sup>

Via an ‘infinite sympathy with the subject’s inertia’, VandenBroeck also describes the sleeping metallic seed hidden in the body of extracted metals, ‘death plainly being a misnomer for this hedged demise which allows the undecayed cadaver possession of

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827 *Al-Kemi*, 190-1.

828 *Al-Kemi*, 191.

829 *Al-Kemi*, 191.

830 *Al-Kemi*, 191-3.

its spirit, albeit contracted and condensed by the ordeal of metallurgical crematoria, yet live in its innermost substance'.<sup>831</sup> The purpose of this aspect of the work is therefore to 'awaken the metamorphic agent of this subterranean evolution'.<sup>832</sup>

First it ought to be mentioned that the initial procedure of the glass work—a paste of quartz and calcium carbonate—merely describes the raw materials of glass (silica and a flux of lime). The 'copper chloride mine', the mineral homologue of spectral blue and hence the element water, is clearly the gangue or matrix to which the fire of the earth (indigo) is to be shifted in order to create the juncture of fire and water in salt (violet). Although it is difficult to be certain, Schwaller appears to be suggesting that a reincrudation of a metallic body (tin, if the hints regarding indigo and its hidden fire are to be followed) in a copper chloride matrix will not only awaken the dormant seed but will also give rise to two colours: red and blue, the components of violet (salt), but also the colours of the Chartres glass. For the crucial detail—the single substance that yields the two colours—one requires the description given by Burgsthal, the master *verrier* connected with Schwaller who taught Carlos Larronde during the St. Moritz period. In his 1933 book, *Les Précieux vitraux qui ornent ses fenêtres* (The Precious Stained Glass that Decorates its Windows), he mentions the fusion of silica with an oxide of *tin*.<sup>833</sup>

The chemistry of tin oxide (SnO, tin(II) oxide, or stannous oxide) confirms all the hints that Schwaller has given regarding this dual natured substance in his repeated allusions to its chromatic and planetary correspondences: indigo and Jupiter. The oxide of tin is a bivalent polymorph. That is to say, it has two forms: one stable—an *alpha* form, which is blue-black—and one metastable—a *beta* form, which is red:

When heated to 60–70°C in the absence of air (e.g. in a stream of CO<sub>2</sub>), tin(II) oxide hydrate is dehydrated to give *blue-black* tin(II) oxide (SnO) ("*α-tin(II) oxide*"). If a suspension of the hydrated oxide in aqueous ammonia is heated to 90–100°C in the presence of a phosphinate, it is converted into the *red* "*β-tin(II) oxide*", which is metastable with respect to the *α*-oxide.<sup>834</sup>

As has been seen, Schwaller saw the seven aspects of the metallic entity as evolutive phases of a single species; more specifically, he draws a parallelism 'between metallic genesis and vegetal genesis'.<sup>835</sup> In this vein, mercury is seen to play the role of a

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831 *Al-Kemi*, 193.

832 *Al-Kemi*, 193.

833 BURGSTHAL, *Les Précieux vitraux qui ornent ses fenêtres*; cf. *L'Œuvre au rouge*, 18: 'René Schwaller découvrit avec Carlos Larronde, quelques années plus tard, et sous le patronage de Bila Burgsthal, le mode traditionnel de fabrication des vitraux, avec ajout dans la silice de verre en fusion d'un oxyde d'étain'.

834 Egon WIBERG, Nils WIBERG, Arnold Frederick HOLLEMAN, *Inorganic Chemistry* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 904.

835 SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, 'Classification des règnes', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 141: 'Ceci

specified nourishing milieu for the metallic seed; he then likens the alkaline earth metals to the roots of the metallic entity, lead (and lead-natured metals) to the germ, while the metals of the tin family are likened to the vegetating aspect of the plant, which gives rise to two fruits: 'a direct, aerial fruit of the nature of Silver; or an indirect aerial fruit, which, in the animal phase, via the genus (*genre*) of copper (female flower) with the genus of iron (male aspect), gives the absolute seed which is Gold'.<sup>836</sup>

Parallel to these specific procedures are VandenBroeck's internalisations and identifications. At first, VandenBroeck's experience condenses the particular process being described with the primordial, universal process of which all unities and separations are but recapitulations: 'that primeval event being as close to me now as my vis-à-vis across the table with whom, in fact, I entertain a similar relationship of identity and contrast, of sameness and distinction, of equality and hierarchy'.<sup>837</sup> VandenBroeck then enters a state where he is simultaneously able to focus on Schwaller's exposition while continuing to contemplate the abstract visions of scissiparity and the creative function of *phi*, mirroring the simultaneity of being and becoming, and again emphasising the cosmogonic shift from one to two. This mystical state mirrors the metallurgical process by which 'one single subject yields both blues and reds' (the *alpha* and *beta* forms of tin oxide). After this, momentary confusion ensues for VandenBroeck involving on one hand the synaesthesia of colour and sound, and on the other a deep interaction between smell and touch. Touch being the sense corresponding to the solid element, the subtle emanations were perceived to issue from earth via an 'inherent effluvia available to heightened olfaction'.<sup>838</sup> This aspect of VandenBroeck's synaesthetic perception bears a significant connection to Schwaller's theories on the importance of olfaction in the alchemical *œuvre*. Particular attention is drawn to the divine coagulating function (compare here the Egyptian homophone *sntr*, meaning both 'to smell, to offer incense' and 'to deify', with the Greek homophone *theion*, meaning both 'sulphur', and 'divine'), which is described as 'an odiferous presence independent of any incidental smell the thing may have acquired through contact or manipulation'. Rather, it is 'the redolence inherent in to the state of

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constitue le parallélisme de la genèse métallique avec la genèse végétale'.

836 'Classification des règnes', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 141: 'Pour cela on peut classer la suite des métaux en sept étapes dont deux constituent les buts semences, l'Argent et l'Or, et le Mercure comme étant la substance nourricière mais déjà métalliquement spécifiée, cessant ainsi d'être nourriture universelle. Alors sont à considérer comme racine les métaux dits alcalino-terreux; comme germe, les métaux de la nature du plomb; comme plante végétante, les métaux de la famille de étain donnant un fruit aérien direct de la nature de l'Argent; ou un fruit aérien indirect qui, par le genre cuivre ou fleur femelle, avec le genre fer ou aspect mâle, donne la semence absolue qui est Or'. Thus, mercury = nourishing milieu; lead = germ (seed); tin = growing plant; silver = direct fruit; gold, via feminine Venus and masculine Mars, = indirect fruit.

837 *Al-Kemi*, 192.

838 *Al-Kemi*, 193.

physical existence, the fragrance of bodily being, the scent of objectivity. I have been told that divine creation manifests only through the odour which congeals substance into form, and I experience the emanation it lends forever to the earth-body, seat of resistance to touch'.<sup>839</sup> Finally, VandenBroeck concludes with a refrain on the temporally liberated nature that irrupts in the moment of such perceptions; the creative moment, being outside of time and space, is necessarily diminished when reduced to spatiotemporal terms. 'This does not happen within time, and any language concerning it not only diminishes it, it demolishes its truth from top to bottom, so that the reality of it, its permanence beyond irrational presence, exists only through experiential inscription into the major bones of the body'.<sup>840</sup>

### Biological Evolution: The Fixed Salt in the Femur

For the individual to be able to pass to a higher stage, that is, to an increase of innate consciousness, thus creating a new instrument for its phenomenal expression, which represents a *qualitative evolution*, this individual's material form must be integrally brought back (*ramenée*) to its composing energetic elements. This is the Hermetic thesis that applies to all Nature.<sup>841</sup>

—René Schwaller de Lubicz.

Most of Schwaller's *explicit* alchemical writings appeared in private notes or unpublished papers dating from the early 1940s, but as has been seen in regards to the concept of the net, veiled yet revealing traces of his alchemical *œuvre* persist in his mature (pharaonic) *symbolique*. As his correspondence from Luxor attests, Schwaller was still very much occupied with the hermetic opus throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and in VandenBroeck's account of the period 1959-60 (i.e. shortly before Schwaller's death), the 'hermetic Aor' remains irrevocably present.<sup>842</sup> Among the alchemical concepts discussed *implicitly* in Schwaller's published *œuvre* are a series of interrelated concepts that pertain specifically to the function of the alchemical salt. These are:

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839 *Al-Kemi*, 193. Further, 194: equilibrium in the inner ear, anterior to cerebral cortex; polyphony of four elements (cf. 'common sense' as *entendement*); 'the tetrad relates to the pentad: dry—Fire—hot—Air—humid—Water—cold—Earth—dry, the nine stages of phenomenal creativity'.

840 *Al-Kemi*, 194-5.

841 *Temple*, I, 83: 'Pour que l'individu puisse passer à une étage plus haut, c'est-à-dire un élargissement de la conscience innée, donc créant un outil nouveau de son expression phénoménale, ce qui représente une *évolution qualitative*, il faut que la forme matérielle de cet individu soit intégralement ramenée à ses éléments énergétiques composants. Ceci est la thèse hermétique qui s'applique à toute la Nature' (modified after Lawlor, 46).

842 SCHWALLER, *Lettrès à un disciple* (passim); *Notes et Propos inédits* I-II (passim); *Al-Kemi* (passim).

- (i) the principle of ‘qualitative exaltation’  
(which arises due to)
- (ii) the sulphuric function of the ‘leaven’ or ‘ferment’  
(which acts around)
- (iii) a magnetic ‘nucleus’ or ‘hook’ (the salt)  
(which acts as)
- (iv) a ‘styptic coagulating force’

In short, the ‘styptic coagulating force’ provides the magnetic centre of the spiritual ferment which causes the qualitative exaltation. These concepts and their interrelationships will become clearer as they are elaborated and contextualised.

### *Qualitative Exaltation*

The first concrete context for the idea of qualitative exaltation emerges in *Verbe Nature* (*Nature Word*, 1950), in which Schwaller distinguishes between exalting something through the purification of its physical substance and the exaltation of something through the intensification of its non-physical, formative force.<sup>843</sup> This formative force is described by Schwaller as ‘functional consciousness’, a term he uses to indicate the active, concretising impulse of spirit. Functional consciousness is thus the force that acts upon passive, formless spiritual substance in order to create phenomenal matter. Schwaller’s metaphysics holds that the polarisation of the primordial unity into metaphysical activity (sulphur) and proto-physical passivity (mercury) creates the two forces from which all empirical phenomena are composed as mean terms. Cinnabar as symbol of reality—i.e. the coagulation of a passive mercurial energy by an active sulphuric force into a neutral salt—once again demonstrates its pertinence to the Lubiczian worldview.

In *Le Temple de l’homme*, Schwaller makes a distinction between purification and qualitative exaltation as applied in both the mineral and the biological domains: ‘One

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843 SCHWALLER, *Verbe Nature = Nature Word* (Reflections), 138 (trans. Deborah Lawlor): ‘One can make a quality appear pure by stripping a thing of what prevents it from appearing so, but it is beyond cerebral comprehension to exalt and augment this quality, because this would lead to corporeal disintegration. Qualitative exaltation is however the mystical problem posed by what the Hindus call *Yōga*, meaning the way of return to Unity. To multiply Quality is synonymous with “to exalt the Being” from three-dimensional corporeal form to abstraction of form; it is, in some way, the return of the original impulsive energy to its source. It is almost a “Spiritual Entropy”. [...] There are different methods which facilitate, by means of exercises, this ascent and descent. The goal is spiritual concretization, but this time into spiritual substance: that is to say, the multiplication of Quality’.

can purify a metal or a chemical substance, one can select a pure race from a species; one has then isolated an existing quality, but one has neither created nor increased it qualitatively'.<sup>844</sup> Here, by understanding what qualitative exaltation is not, one begins to approach the purpose of alchemy across the kingdoms. The most detailed and revealing treatment of the theme occurs in one of Schwaller's final works, *Le Roi de la théocratie pharaonique* (The King of Pharaonic Theocracy). Herein Schwaller describes the alchemical concept traditionally known as "multiplication" precisely in terms of qualitative exaltation. Quoth le Schwaller:

There exists a concept, obvious to the sages of all times, the meaning and very possibility of which are totally beyond the understanding of rationalistic thinking: the concept of *qualitative exaltation*. This notion does not concern the elimination of impurities in order to retain the pure, unadulterated quality; instead, exaltation refers to a kind of spiritualisation of the thing's characterising quality. It is possible to bring simple chemical bodies, such as gold and silver, to states of purity that are absolute for all practical purposes. They are then perfectly *themselves*, but *only* themselves and nothing more, nothing beyond their own quality, characterised by a variety of typical aspects such as density, atomic weight, colour, malleability, etc. This silver and this gold are incapable of transmitting their quality to another metal: they have nothing to give without losing something of themselves; they are not a "leaven", as is the *heq*, one of the king's sceptres in the shape of a hook.<sup>845</sup>

Here Schwaller attempts to convey the significance of the *formative force* that creates the materialised object. The whole point here is that this formative force not only creates the material object, but if its influence is intensified, it can transform the object beyond its present morphological limitations. Only the formative force and not the materialised object can do this. Moreover, for Schwaller, '[t]he maintenance of the thing and its nourishment are of nature; qualitative exaltation is outside-nature'.<sup>846</sup>

As to the reference to the pharaoh's hook (*heq*), Schwaller identifies it elsewhere with the function of the saline nucleus that fixes the active energy of transmutation; that is to say, the hook or nucleus acts as a magnetic "centre of gravity" for the fermenting force.<sup>847</sup> Here, by a strange reversal (which Schwaller also speaks of in

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844 *Temple*, I, 82: 'On peut purifier un métal ou un corps chimique, on peut sélectionner dans l'espèce une race pure, on aura isolé une qualité existante, on ne l'a ni créée ni augmentée qualitativement' (modified after LAWLOR, 45).

845 SCHWALLER, *Sacred Science*, trans. VandenBroeck, 240-2.

846 *Verbe Nature = Nature Word*, 140.

847 *Verbe Nature* §64: '[M]anifested Nature begins and ends, a fact upon which reason can rest. Where it begins it is much closer to the original Cause, and where it ends it returns to this Cause. Between the two extremes is Life, and Life is only a ferment (the *hek* sceptre, the Pharaoh's crook), a ferment that fixes the causal Energy (the *nekhkha* sceptre, principle of reactivity) which causes the appearance of the active Fire (Min) of the

cosmogonic contexts), the magnetic or densifying function of the salt simultaneously exerts an expansive, exalting effect. One discerns in this the same juncture of opposing “directions” alluded to in the phenomenon of the ‘fire of the earth’ (a juncture of radiance and solidity) as well as the juncture of fire and water. Salt is thus the “point” around which a ‘nameless substance’ is drawn together through contraction to be coagulated into tangible, material form, giving rise to growth (volume, spatiality):

Strictly speaking, the action of fermentation concerns transmutation in its corporeal aspect. Belief in this possibility implies a radical reversal of the materialistic foundation of rational science. It must be understood that these are not the atomic “transmutations” of our catch-as-catch-can atomists who destroy one edifice in order to erect another out of the salvaged materials. The principle of true transmutation is totally different. It demands a qualitative exaltation of the *thing* and is based on the following fact: In a milieu assumed to be a substance without a body, that is, a nameless energy (unless we choose to call it “spirit”), a styptic force comes to concretise this substance in order to define it spatially, to form a body.<sup>848</sup>

In dealing with the spiritual forces that effect the formation of bodies, Schwaller is once again reiterating his conception of the *tria prima*. Here, the ‘substance without a body’ is the principle of mercury in its nourishing, proto-physical aspect, while the styptic coagulating or concretising force is the salt or nucleus in its magnetic, condensing aspect. The fermenting power is, of course, the active, creative spirit or sulphur. Salt, as the neutral term, uniquely partakes of all three, and here the ultimate significance of the saline mysterium begins to come to light. Salt requires one to come to terms with the very point where spirit creates a centre of gravity in ‘nameless substance’ in order to determine an entity’s form—it is also the point where form first starts to manifest and grow (expand) into physical existence. To work on salt is thus to work at the very juncture of the physical and metaphysical.

The biological significance of qualitative exaltation through the salt is illustrated by Schwaller in the drastic difference between the “multiplying” power of the saline ferment and biological reproduction through the seed. As Needham remarked with regard to Chinese alchemy, ‘the normal current leads to the generation of children, but going counter-current leads to the *enchymoma* (of eternal life)’.<sup>849</sup> In order to illustrate the difference within nature, Schwaller adduces some revealing botanical examples:

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Ferment. (Called Archeus [the central fire] by Paracelsus.) This is the universal function, by which the supranatural becomes natural, until it once again goes beyond the natural, having acquired consciousness of the divine Consciousness which manifests Nature. But: “Unction shows the direct path through the general death of Nature”. This is the Rosicrucian’s enigmatic answer. It is an immortal truth, but its expression is outdated’.

848 *Roi* (VandenBroeck, 240-2).

849 NEEDHAM 5.5, 243.

The only possibility of exalting the quality of the *thing*, therefore, is to exalt the concretising force which it carries but which at first had brought it only to its present characteristic state. This exaltation has no common measure with a multiplication as in the instance of one wheat kernel yielding a stalk of thirty to sixty new grains. Such multiplication is characteristic of all seed, and is nothing but regeneration, a faculty of vegetation.<sup>850</sup>

There is a kinship between the effect of a ferment and that of leaven in bread, but even more with the phenomenon of mutation. The principle of qualitative exaltation can be illustrated by the transition of the sweetbriar to the rose. This intention of modifying the ferment of the seed explains the instances of “teratological proliferation” in plants represented on the walls of the so-called botanical garden in the Sed-festival temple of Thothmes III in Karnak.<sup>851</sup>

The botanical references require some unpacking. With the example of wheat, Schwaller illustrates the *reproduction* of the species through biological seed. With the example of the sweetbriar and the rose, Schwaller illustrates the *mutational development* of an entity’s primordial potential (and thus the activity of the mysterious “ferment”).

The briar is in fact a species rose, and like all species roses, it has a highly elastic genetic propensity for free mutation in the wild. This process naturally gives rise to many variations (whence wild European roses), and through these variations, the briar (*rosa rubiginosa*) was able to transform itself into the prototypical garden rose (*rosa gallica officinalis*), a natural mutation that was subsequently accentuated by human cultivation. Given that roses are highly sensitive to temperature, the natural transition of sweetbriar to rose could well have coincided with its spread to colder climes, which notably intensify the colour, richness and fullness of the flower. From here it would have been cultivated further into a species of the old garden variety through the attested methods of cloning and seed-raising (or in more recent times, genetic modification). The traditional process, working on the cusp of nature’s creation, begins to convey the careful, attentive and nurturing work that the alchemist attempts to effect not just in roses, but through all the kingdoms of nature. As in alchemy, what nature begins, humankind finishes.

In effect, the *prima materia* of the briar, none of whose features are especially outstanding, nevertheless contains all other roses *in potentia*.<sup>852</sup> These potentials are at first unfolded by nature herself through natural genetic mutations (alias “sports”), and then by human agency—the botanist drawing forth the cultivars that accentuate the flower’s desired features. It is important to add that the habitudes of a truly hermetic cultivation would not have sought mutation for mere novelty; rather, they would have

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850 *Roi*, 292 ff. (VandenBroeck, 240-2).

851 *Roi*, 292-5 (VandenBroeck, 240-3).

852 Save for characteristics such as yellow petals or repeat flowering, which had to be bred in from species outside the native Persian and European species; cf. the yellow roses of China.



cultivated a sensitivity and fidelity to the *qualitative* potential of the entity in question, and here it must be mentioned that all the desired qualities of the rose come at a price. To develop the flowers too much drains the aroma, while if the plant as a whole deviates too far from the wild briar, it develops diseases. Nature always imposes certain limits and so, throughout this process of drawing forth the briar's qualitative expression, a fundamental balance—a golden mean—must always be sought.<sup>853</sup>

### *Teratological Proliferation*

Teratology, from τέρας (*teratos*)= Latin *mōnstrum*, 'portent, marvel, monster',<sup>854</sup> is usually defined as the study of biological abnormalities (marvels, prodigies, or monstrosities, whence the etymology). In *Le Roi de la théocratie pharaonique*, Schwaller points to instances of teratological proliferation in the plants depicted in bas-relief in the Festival Hall of Thutmose III on the west wall of Karnak (the so-called "botanical gardens") (Illustration 44); he suggests that the abnormal but marvellous examples of floral proliferation of the *Nymphaea* lotus recorded by Thutmose III attest to pharaonic knowledge of not only what Maxwell Tylden Masters called 'axillary teratological proliferation' (Engelmann's *ecblastesis* = *Durchwachsung*), but further: that this phenomenon itself is an expression of qualitative exaltation (i.e. a morphological expression of an *ontological* mutation); in short, it is the essence of the alchemical operation. For Schwaller this function was exerted in Egypt first and foremost by the king, who acts in a leavening capacity, most notably through the Sed-festival (a rite of royal renewal). The presence of teratological proliferation in the *Nymphaea* depicted at Karnak was thus evidence for Schwaller of pharaonic knowledge of the deeper principles underpinning this process of qualitative exaltation not just in plants, but in all species. As Nathalie Beaux points out in her study of the plants and animals depicted in the "botanic gardens" of Thutmose III, whereas previous scholars thought the representations of the *Nymphaea* were fantastic and without correspondence to reality, Schwaller was the first to identify the representations as real, albeit teratological, specimens (Error: Reference source not found):

The difficulty or apparent impossibility of identifying a representation cannot serve as a basis for the condemnation of the reality of the described subjects. This is supported by the additional fact that one keeps only the "strange plants" and not the typically Egyptian plants that are equally figured, but in an original manner. Now the texts furnish an explanation of these representations: the

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853 This brief discussion on the transmutation of briar into rose is deeply indebted to personal discussions with Rod Blackhirst and Maja Marinkovic (personal correspondence, August 2010). Both deserve my sincere thanks for their explanations and clarifications on this fascinating topic. Any errors in the exposition are, of course, my own.

854 Also: *mōnstrō*, 'point out, show, inform'; *mōnstruōsus*, 'unnatural'.

Egyptian plants are in fact “extra-ordinary”. Schwaller de Lubicz was the first to comprehend that the “fantastic” *Nymphaea* are not admittedly conformed to the *normative* reality but illustrate monstrous, that is, teratological and perfectly real phenomena. The teratological vegetables are indeed examples of plants that are “extra-ordinary”, a term that, as we see it, is also employed in the “botanic garden” for other realities.<sup>855</sup>

In recognising teratological proliferation as an actual biological fact, Schwaller points to a morphological phenomenon that conveys the deeper essence of alchemy: to

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855 Nathalie BEAUX, *Le cabinet de curiosités de Thoutmosis III: plantes et animaux de « Jardin botanique » de Karnak* (Peeters: Leuven, 1990), 60: ‘La difficulté, ou l’impossibilité apparente d’identifier une représentation ne peut servir de base à la condamnation de la réalité des sujets décrits. Celle-ci s’appuyait en outre sur le fait que l’on attendait seulement « des plantes étrangères » et non les plantes typiquement égyptiennes qui sont également figurées, mais de manière originale. Or les textes fournissent une explication à ces représentations: ces plantes égyptiennes seraient en fait «extra-ordinaires». Schwaller de Lubicz a été le premier à comprendre que les *Nymphaea* «fantaisistes» ne sont certes pas conformes à la réalité normative mais illustrent des phénomènes monstrueux, c’est-à-dire tératologiques, parfaitement réels. Les végétaux tératologiques sont bien des exemples de plantes «extra-ordinaires», terme qui, nous le verrons, revêt aussi dans le « Jardin botanique » d’autres réalités’; See further, 146 ff., 157, figs 14 a-b, 15 a-b; On «Représentations tératologiques», 146-7: ‘Les *Nymphaea* représentés au «Jardin botanique» ne peuvent, au premier abord, que dérouter: comment cette fleur, identifiable sans aucun doute au *N. nouchali* var. *caerulea* ou au *N. lotus* si souvent représentés dans l’Égypte ancienne sous les mêmes traits, en fleur solitaire, peut-elle être figurée de manière si curieuse, double, triple, donnant naissance à d’autres fleurs, feuilles etc...? On mit sur le compte du désir d’exotisme ces représentations qu’on considéra comme fantaisistes [SCHWEINFURTH, *Pflanzenbilder*, 468; WRZINSKI, *Atlas* II, pl. 26-33; KEIMER, *AJSLL* 41 (1925): 154; JONCKHEERE, *Cahiers de la Biloque* 4 (1954): 162]. Keimer expliqua plus tard que ces formes «contre-nature» étaient sans aucun doute fondée sur l’idée du bouquet monté. [Keimer, *AJSLL* 41 (1925): 154-5]. [...] Schwaller de Lubicz fut le première à comprendre que ces formes s’inspiraient de cas réels, mais tératologiques. [*Roi*, 292-5]. S’appuyant sur deux exemples observés au 19e siècle à Paris, [Il a été impossible de trouver le texte original narrant ces phénomènes, les références données dans le livre de SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ étant incomplètes. Mais son authenticité est attestée par le fait que NICHOLSON (*Dic.* IV, 460, fig. 704) donne en 1887 une reproduction du même dessin qui celui de la fig. 52 du livre de Schwaller de Lubicz. Malheureusement, la référence donnée par Nicholson est encore plus vague.] où des fleurs et des feuilles surgissent d’une fleur de *N. lotus*, il montre que des phénomènes de prolifération sont ici figurés’. Cf. SCHWEINFURTH, *Pflanzenbilder*, 468; WRZINSKI, *Atlas* II, pl. 26-33; KEIMER, *AJSLL*, 41 (1925): 154; JONCKHEERE, ‘Les expéditions pharaoniques et leur apport botanique’, *Cahiers de la Biloque* 4 (1954), 161-2; Maxwell Tylden MASTERS, *Vegetable Teratology: An Account of the Principle Deviations from the Usual Construction of Plants* (London: The Ray Society, 1869), 100 ff. (phenomenon of ‘proliferation’ described), 138 ff. (phenomenon of ‘axiliary proliferation’ described), 144

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exalt the quality of something, to effect an ontological mutation that shapes the morphological form of an entity. Alchemy, for Schwaller, essentially intensifies the *consciousness* of an entity in order to transmute its *form*. Only ontological mutation pushes the morphological expression beyond its natural limits; not only does this govern biological (trans-)mutation, it is also responsible for the great shifts between the kingdoms themselves—regarded as discontinuous in appearance but continuous in fact.

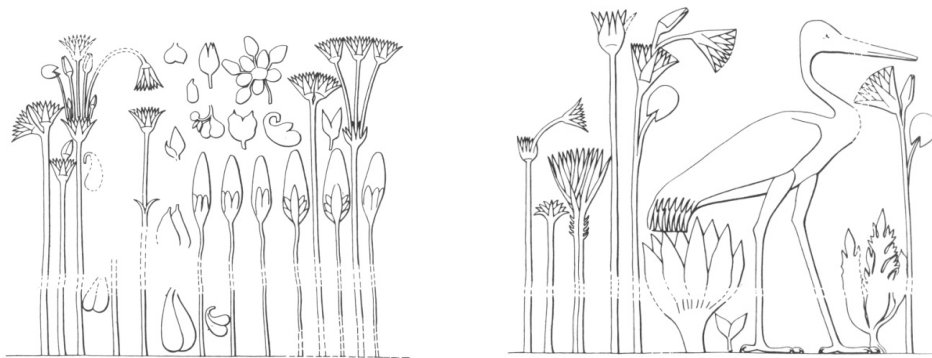


ILLUSTRATION 44: BAS RELIEFS FROM THE “BOTANICAL GARDEN” OF THUTMOSE III  
(Detail, west wall, Karnak)

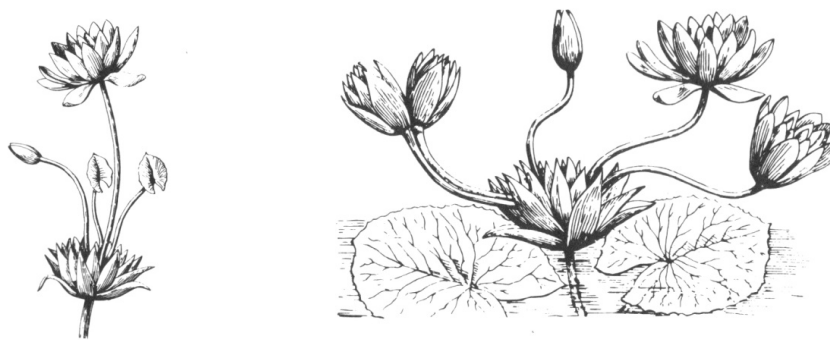


ILLUSTRATION 45: INSTANCES OF TERATOLOGICAL PROLIFERATION  
(Museum of Paris Bulletin)

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fig. 65 (the flower of the *Nymphaea* Lotus showing axillary floral proliferation; cf. SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Roi*, 292-5, fig. 50); See also Wilson Crosfield WORSDELL, *Principles of Plant-Teratology* (London: The Ray Society, 1915), II, 241; for a modern survey of general theoretical contexts: Donald R. KAPLAN, ‘The Science of Plant Morphology: Definition, History, and Role in Modern Biology’, *American Journal of Botany* 88, 10 (2001): 1711-1741.

*The Thigh and Palingenesis*

De Lubicz's reappraisal of the accepted theories of evolution proceeds upon the basis of a phenomenology of consciousness. Defining consciousness as 'formative metaphysical power' (*la Puissance métaphysique formative*),<sup>856</sup> Schwaller dismisses the contemporary philosophical meanings of consciousness inherent in the terms *Bewußtsein* or *Selbstbewußtsein* as relational. Schwaller's phenomenology is not concerned with the consciousness defined as intentional by philosophical phenomenologists such as Brentano, Husserl and Heidegger. Here, consciousness always possesses an object and is therefore dualistically constellated; for Schwaller, this merely describes ego or psychological consciousness. Rather, Schwaller is concerned with the 'formative metaphysical power' that is *pre*-relational, preceding and underpinning the process of polarisation and dualisation that gives rise not only to intentional consciousness but to *all* particular expressions of consciousness—mineral, vegetable, animal and human.

Schwaller's phenomenology is essentially a *cosmogonic philosophy* in which consciousness as formative metaphysical power is comprehended as a 'Being containing in itself its own opposition'.<sup>857</sup> This consciousness contains for Schwaller the creative function that would manifest as the 'generating power [present] throughout the becoming and transformations in all of Nature'.<sup>858</sup> Ultimately for Schwaller, consciousness—formative metaphysical power—is the mystery that underpins all the expressions of the phenomenal world: 'When consciousness is presented according to this general acceptance, divided into latent and potential consciousness, then into vegetal, instinctive and psychological consciousness, it appears as a *power* of life that seeks its final liberation through all the possible expressions of Nature'.<sup>859</sup> As a consequence, '*the Universe is nothing but consciousness*, and through its appearances presents nothing but an *evolution of consciousness*, from its origin to its end, the end being a return to its cause'.<sup>860</sup>

Schwaller in no way denies the evolutionary hypothesis; he merely situates it within a greater order of magnitude. For de Lubicz, metaphysics and cosmogenesis rather than physics and biology take centre stage in terms of first principles. Schwaller

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856 *Temple I*, 60.

857 *Temple I*, 59-60

858 *Temple I*, 60 (Lawlor, 30); On this point, cf. Schwaller's further remark at *Temple I*, 62 (Lawlor, 32): 'It is not—as Bergson would have it—evolution that is creative, rather, it is the *continuity of the creative function* that causes evolution'.

859 *Temple I*, 62 (modified after Lawlor, 32).

860 *Temple I*, 61: 'It is the purpose of all "initiativ" religions', continues Schwaller, 'to teach the way that leads to this ultimate *confondement*'.

is concerned with the laws and principles that precede, underpin, and indeed generate the empirical data that quantitative science takes as its point of departure:

The observable fact of succession in organic becoming [...] is what leads us to seek a law of evolution. But to base evolutionary theories exclusively on animal biology is to start from a given essential element and therefore to neglect the “reasons” for the becoming of the first living cell. To do this is to build an inadequate theory.<sup>861</sup>

Proceeding from the alchemical perception that the mineral kingdom is not static and inanimate but living and growing, gestating the seeds of metals within its earthly womb, Schwaller affirms that minerality is the living bedrock of all life. Crucially for the hermetic problem of salt, Schwaller suggests that this mineral foundation plays a hitherto unrecognised role in the *continuities* between the kingdoms of nature.

The origin of all things is mineral; without the mineral kingdom no plant could exist, and the plant is the indispensable intermediary for animal life. The sequence of these three *kingdoms* is undeniable, but the transition from one to the other is unknown. In this area, evolutionary theories are nothing but hypotheses to which our observations lead us, but which mechanistic logic cannot follow without leaving serious gaps.<sup>862</sup>

The essence of Schwaller’s alchemical theory of evolution proceeds from the precept that ‘every single thing and every single being contains a fixed nucleus that neither putrefaction nor fire can destroy’.<sup>863</sup> Furthermore: ‘Any body, vegetable or animal, is reduced by putrefaction into two separable states, one volatile and the other constituting a fixed residue. This fixed part, when desiccated, contains an alkaline salt’.<sup>864</sup>

Similarly, but more violently, combustion divides all vegetal or organic bodies into volatile parts, leaving behind an ash containing a fixed, alkaline salt. “Man thou art ash and unto ash thou shalt return”. Thus every thing is essentially composed of a volatile part and a fixed part, a generating principle that pharaonic theology, for example, summarises in its teachings on the *ba* and *ka*.<sup>865</sup>

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861 *Temple I*, 62-3 (Lawlor, 32).

862 *Temple I*, 63 (Lawlor, 32).

863 *Temple I*, 65 (Lawlor, 34): ‘*Toute chose et tout être comprennent un noyau fixe que ni la putréfaction ni le feu ne peuvent détruire*’.

864 *Temple I*, 65.

865 *Temple I*, 65 (modified after Lawlor, 34).

Schwaller affirms that, whereas the species is reproduced through the cellular seed, the *individual* consciousness—i.e. the *psyche*—is preserved not through biological transmission (reproduction), but through the fixed mineral nucleus: ‘The fixed salt, which compared to the chromosome is extremely fixed or even indestructible, is the true carrier of the specificity of the individual, preserving in it all his *personal* characteristics, including those acquired during his life’.<sup>866</sup>

The plant or animal cell-seed preserves the qualities typical of a species, including its adaptations; the fixed salt, by contrast, carries over—often through very long periods of invisibility—the *consciousness acquired* by an individual that requires a modification of its form in order to give to its consciousness the means to express itself. The sudden appearance, apparently without transition, of new forms (gene mutation) is, in reality, a continuous sequence in the *evolution of consciousness*.<sup>867</sup>

The chromosome, however, is not indispensable, at least for biological evolution. The mechanism of palingenesis is described as an interaction between the fixed mineral nucleus and the volatile biological seed:

For a “reincarnation” to occur, the *fixing* nucleus of an individual’s psyche must be joined with the *organic* nucleus of a cell-seed (*cellule-semence*). By itself, the fixed nucleus cannot engender a new organised being, it cannot move backward in the evolutionary lineage to start the whole cycle that leads to organic life. A kinship between the two nuclei, the fixed mineral nucleus and the animal or plant cellular nucleus, is indispensable, and metempsychosis is the history of the avatars of this fixed nucleus in search of the living being that corresponds to its own rhythm.<sup>868</sup>

Just as death has been described as the separation of the volatile and the fixed, so too is rebirth their rejoining. This is the alchemical *conjunctio* that causes the genesis of a new body. Schwaller is unusually specific about the process, intimating that the juncture of fixed salt and regenerating seed is mediated by the plant kingdom, which assimilates the fixed salt of the corrupted body from the earth; the salt is then assimilated into animal or human bodies as food, whereby it is able to merge with a cell of the biological seed:

The natural course of metempsychosis passes through the plant, for the plant is the first to reabsorb the fixed salt in the process of its growth. It is through the food that the fixed salt returns to the individual carrier of the regenerating seed. It is here that we must seek one of the causes of genetic mutation.<sup>869</sup>

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866 *Temple I*, 66 (Lawlor, 34).

867 *Temple I*, 67 (modified after Lawlor, 35).

868 *Temple I*, 66 (modified after Lawlor, 34).

869 *Temple I*, 67 (Lawlor, 35).

Even more specifically, Schwaller reveals that in the process of human ontogenesis, the salt localises itself in the thigh-bone (Illustration 46):

In man the absolute fixed salt of his being forms itself in the femur, the foundation and support of the physical body (the Egyptian *men.t*).<sup>870</sup>

Given Schwaller's decided emphasis on the salt in the femur as the permanent foundation of all bodies, it is worth mentioning that Egyptian *men.t*, 'thigh' derives from the biliteral root *mn*, 'be set, fixed, remain'.<sup>871</sup> The root forms a series of words indicating permanent, enduring things, such as statues, monuments and memorial stones (*mnw*).<sup>872</sup> Here the connection between bone and stone must be seen to inhere in their *minerality*, and for Schwaller the mineral is the first manifestation of spirit and thus the foundation of all manifest existence (cf. modern cosmology, in which the basic elements necessary to physical existence are produced through the process of stellannucleosynthesis). This connection between bone and stone (and also stars)<sup>873</sup> is in fact archaic and finds itself affirmed in a broad swath of cosmogonic and anthropogonic myths. Perhaps the most notable of these is the pan-Indo-European mythologeme in which the bones of the primordial anthropos are homologised with stones in the cosmos. In Indo-European traditions, cosmogony proceeds by the disintegration of the primordial anthropos, whose body parts then become the substance of the cosmos; conversely, anthropogony proceeds by disintegration of the cosmos, the different parts of the world forming the different parts of the human corpus.<sup>874</sup> This interplay between anthropos and cosmos forms the entire basis of the macrocosmic-microcosmic homology in ancient analogical thinking, such that anthropos and cosmos are merely alternative forms or allomorphs of one primordial substance, a point that coheres deeply with the hermetic maxim: 'god has two forms, cosmos and man'.<sup>875</sup>

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870 *Temple I*, 67 (modified after Lawlor, 35); VANDENBROECK (*Al-Kemi*, 173) translates: 'The absolute fixed salt in man is formed in the femur, the rock bottom fundament and support of the physical body (the Egyptian *men.t*)'.

871 *WÄS*, II, 61: 'Schenkel'; 'bleiben, fest an einer Stelle sein'.

872 James P. ALLEN, *Middle Egyptian*, 459: *mn* 'be set, fixed, remain'; *mnw* (noun), 'Min'; *mnw* (noun) 'monument, monuments'.

873 In many Indo-European languages, the existential nature of minerality is discernible in the close phonetic resemblance between the words for 'being' and 'bone' (cf. *asthi* and *asti* in Sanskrit, *asti-* and *asti* in Avestan, *esti* and *osteon* in Greek, *esse* and *os* (*est* and *osteo-*) in Latin). The Indo-European etymons *\*ost(h)-* (Porkorny), and *ast-*, may also be brought into association with the nature of the stars, to the extent that they are often conceived as hard, mineral substances (cf. Greek *aster-*, *sidereos*, 'iron', etc.)

874 See especially Bruce LINCOLN, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

875 *Corpus Hermeticum*, Asclepius 1.10 (SCOTT 304-5): 'Aeternitatis dominus deus primus est, secundus est mundus, homo est tertius [...] cuius sunt imagines duae mundus et homo'.

ONTOLOGICAL MUTATION

The motif as a whole has a distinct significance for alchemy, in particular to the concept of *autochthony* (genesis from the earth) and *petrogenesis* (birth from stone or minerality). For now, however, it is enough to emphasise that in these mythological homologies, bones are alloforms of stones. But within the bones lies the marrow, and this too has its homologues.



ILLUSTRATION 46: ARMS OF ISIA (EZE-SUR-MER, CÔTE D'AZURE, FRANCE)

*Moriendo Renascor* ('In dying I am reborn'). Bone, vine and phoenix represent the palingeneses of the vegetable and animal kingdoms from their mineral foundation (femur, Egyptian *men.t*). Photo: Cheak, 2005.



*Marrow, Semen, Fluid*

In addition to the motif of bone as stone, the archaic conception of the thigh also held a particular emphasis in its connection to a vital life-fluid (*aiōn*) coterminous with marrow, semen and cerebrospinal fluid. Richard Broxton Onians, in his magisterial *Origins of European Thought*, adduced a wealth of generally overlooked or misunderstood evidence to show that the thigh and the knee are key sources and repositories for the body's fundamental fluid vitalities (*aiōn*; cf. Needham's *enchymōma*). These fluid vitalities were seen as inherent to the marrow in general and the cerebrospinal fluid in particular, both of which were seen as the immediate sources of semen. It is from this standpoint that one begins to understand the dynamics of the thigh's generative and palingenetic function.

Onians demonstrates that the sense of *aiōn* as a temporal concept (*æon*, eternity), a 'period of existence', actually comes later; the primary meaning, 'marrow, fluid', is in fact foundational. Given that the *klepsydra*, a Greek time-keeping device that measured time by the flow of water (much like an hourglass uses sand), one can see how both meanings ('fluid; time') cohere.<sup>876</sup> *Aiōn*, Onians demonstrates, is not (originally) connected to Greek *aei*, *aiēi*, or Latin *aevum*, but to *aio-llō*, 'I move rapidly', *aio-los*, 'quick moving'.<sup>877</sup> The specific sense of a bodily liquid arises in connection to *aionaō*, 'I moisten, foment, apply liquid to the flesh'; *epaionaō*, 'I bathe'; *kataionaō*, 'I pour upon' etc.<sup>878</sup> Hence the employment of oils and unguents—animal fats and plant substances homologous with the human fluid life substance—was essentially used as a restorative fluid to replace the liquid strength and life substance lost through physical exertion (sweating) and sexual activity (ejaculation). Moreover, the anointing unguents were seen as penetrating, whence *chriō*, 'to anoint' but also, 'penetrate, pierce', a point that coheres closely with the alchemical conception of the vital fluid essence: the pan-seminal 'Philosopher's Mercury'; the *enchymōma* or fluid bodily elixir of Chinese alchemy; the tantric *rāsa*—all of which are so many articulations of the self same vital life fluid that permeates and enlivens all matter.<sup>879</sup> Onians also shows how the sap of plants also corresponds to the human life-fluid; in both, youth is the time of abundant liquid (marrow/sap) while age brings drying.<sup>880</sup> Overall, in humans, in plants and in the cosmos as a whole, the life-substance may be seen to have both a solid and a liquid part, both of which are fundamentally related: a base (wood, bone, mineral,

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876 ONIANS 215: 'with the *klepsydra*, time becomes water'.

877 ONIANS, 208-9 with notes.

878 ONIANS, 209.

879 Cf. in this regard *christon* as unguent; Christ as anointed one; grace/charisma; ONIANS 210-13.

880 On *genialus* vs. *aridus* (well nourished vs. dry), i.e. *genius* as seed-abundant head/cranium (cerebrospinal fluid as seed/semen) *qua* the head or seed-vessels of flowers, see ONIANS, 213, 217.

firmament), and a soft or liquid part (sap, cerebrospinal fluid, primordial ocean, cosmic effluvium).<sup>881</sup>

Onians—pointing to the fact that in Indo-European languages the word for knee appears to be cognate and even sometimes interchangeable with that for generation (e.g. Latin *genu*, Greek *gonu*, Irish *glun* etc.)—remarks: ‘with the name they bear witness that the knee was thought in some way to be the seat of paternity, of life and generative power, unthinkable though that may be for us’.<sup>882</sup> Here one may discern the essential significance of genu-flection, of falling to one’s knees/thighs, or of clasping the thighs and knees, as well as the traditions which relate birth to the knees of both the mother (giving birth on the knees) and/or placing the child on the knees of the father as seat of paternity.<sup>883</sup> In Euripides, knees are ‘generative members’ (*gonima melea*),<sup>884</sup> while according to Hesiod, at midsummer ‘women are most wanton and men most impotent’ because ‘Sirius dries up the head and knees and the flesh is dried up with the heat’. Onians, who first perceived the significance of these passages, remarks:

This suggests that the fluid or liquefiable content of the joint, its true function not being known, was classed with the cerebro-spinal fluid or liquefiable substance, the fluid of life, and thought to contribute to seed. Of this fluid, Hesiod implied both sexes feel the want in the dry season. The general structure of the joint suggesting a containing chamber might help the thought. In fact the joint cavity of the knee is the largest in the body. It is lined with the synovial membrane which secretes the fluid and it may also contain fat or ‘marrow’, thought perhaps with the cerebro-spinal ‘marrow’ to melt into the fluid.<sup>885</sup>

#### *Femur as Generative Power*

Latin *femur*, ‘thigh’, from Proto Indo-European \**dhēm-*, ‘be thick, strong, supporting’. Cf. *firmus*, ‘firm, strong’; *firmamentum*, ‘a strengthening, support’; Proto Indo-European \**dhēi-r-*, ‘bind, make firm, hard’; Sanskrit *dhīra*, ‘firm, enduring’; Greek θαιρος (*thairos*), ‘hinge’; Cym. *dir*, ‘hard, strong’; Bret. *dir*, ‘steel’.<sup>886</sup> Comments Onians:

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881 On identification of groats with the solid part of cerebrospinal life, ONIANS, 228 n. 1

882 ONIANS, 175; Cf. J. LOTH, ‘Le mot désignant le genou au sens de génération chez les Celtes, les Germaines, les Slaves, les Assyriens’, *Revue Celtique* 40 (1923): 143-52; Further refs ONIANS, 175 nn. 2-4.

883 ONIANS, 175 with notes 4-5.

884 *Electra* 1208-15; cf. *Troades* 1305-7.

885 ONIANS, 175.

886 TUCKER, 93, 97.

The thigh-bone is the largest bone in the body and the Latin name for thigh, *femur*, *femoris*, or *femen*, *femenis*, should according to its form mean ‘that which engenders’, from √*fe-*, whence *fetus*, *fecundus*, *femina*.<sup>887</sup>

The fact that *femina*, ‘woman, female’, is encompassed under *femur* ‘thigh’, has a number of important resonances when placed alongside the generative character that lies at the root of both concepts. Alongside the femur as phallus, the thigh as womb condenses in one symbol the generative organs of both sexes: the inseminating power of the lightning bolt and the gestative matrix of the womb (as suggested in the Dionysus myth in which Zeus places the unborn Dionysus in the *thalamais merō*: the ‘womb or cavity of his thigh’). Here the cavity of the knee joint is readily assimilated to a womb (indeed, it is from the *knee* of Zeus that Dionysus is depicted as being born).

Although physiologically, both genders’ generative organs are encompassed by the thighs, the underlying principle suggest a deeper generative power that acts as the *foundation* for the specific separation of the generative functions into masculine and feminine manifestations, which, as such, may be better understood as dual expressions of one underlying generative-destructive power, a bi-fold activity (phallic-vulval, creative-destructive, killing-vivifying) stemming from, and supported by, the deeper reality incarnated in the thigh. Here, Egyptian *men.t*, ‘thigh’, is instructive for in the plural (*mentj*) it indicates ‘birth’, a meaning that must be seen as connected to other usages where it indicates (and is determined by) the dual mountains which mark the rising and setting of the sun, thereby consolidating the pharaonic homology between ontogeny (birth) and cosmogony (sunrise).<sup>888</sup>

From the alchemical point of view, the principle of an androgynous power that has the capacity to take both the male and female roles in the act of generation—in which *one* being fulfils the roles of father, mother and also *child* in the act of genesis—constitutes one of the most profound enigmas of hermetic metaphysics. This is the mysterium encoded in the alchemical *tria prima* (the sulphur-mercury-salt triad), and is the reason why, in 1936, when entering the tomb of Ramses IX, René Schwaller de Lubicz was so struck by the image of the ithyphallic Pharaoh depicted as the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle. The image bears the rubric: ‘bull of his mother’ (*Ka-Mut-Tef*) and here the *ka*, as is well known, means both ‘bull’ and ‘spirit’, together indicating the active masculine force in the alchemical triad (sulphur or soul); *mut*, the mother, represents the feminine receptive force (mercury or spirit); and together they produce the son (salt or body). So in effect, by recapitulating (indeed reincarnating) his father, the son becomes the bull (spirit and inseminator) of his mother. Indeed, the son represents the integral whole of the two poles (male-female; sulphur-mercury); it exists both in a primary state, “before” the separation or differentiation into gendered polarity, and in an ultimate state, “after” the two poles have been differentiated and

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887 ONIANS, 82.

888 The term *mentj* appears again in a further layer of meaning: *amenti*, ‘underworld’.

then recombined. Just as the hypotenuse both separates and reconnects the two lines of the right-angle—effecting thereby the juncture of abstract and concrete (the vertical and the horizontal)—so too is the alchemical sulphur-mercury dyad *reconciled*—as origin and *telos*—in the integrating salt. And, as noted earlier, the presence of the bull (*ka*) as both spirit and masculine/inseminating principle points to the deeper reason behind the *thigh* of the bull in the Egyptian mouthopening ritual and the associated Typhonian symbolism underpinning this instrument of (re) generation.

*Bones, Water, Salt*

Onians’ insights into the vital-fluid concept (*aión*) allow one to better understand the physiological relationship between the femur and the volatile biological seed; it will be useful to complement these perspectives with the macrobiotic role of fluidity in ancient Taoist thought, where the body’s fluid metabolism is brought in specific relation to the phenomenon of salt.

Foundational texts of Traditional Chinese Medicine such as the *Nei Ching* describe salt as one of the five categories of taste and as such salt bears all the correspondences associated with the element of *water*—the most *yin* of all the elements. In addition to categories of taste, the Chinese elements were associated with specific viscera and bodily tissues within a complex system of meridian and organ networks. Here the salt-yin-water correspondence is further associated with the kidneys and bladder, the “water” organs and the organ functions responsible for generating and sustaining the bones, marrow, and fluid vitalities, notably semen. Here, the Chinese conception coheres not only with the Indo-Tibetan idea of *ojas* (seminal essence), but also with the ancient Homeric physiology in which semen, bone marrow and cerebrospinal fluid were seen not only as contiguous but continuous (cf. Onians; Needham). As in Lubiczian alchemy, salt functions as seed (*semence*).

The *Nei Ching* maintains that ‘the kidneys store the essence (*jing*)’. The *jing* concept, like the Ayurvedic *ojas*, is that of a bodily vitality closely associated with procreative fluids (especially the semen in males); beyond (or “before”) any differentiable physical fluid, however, *jing* is the ‘primordial organic texture’, the underlying substance of each organ’s existence.<sup>889</sup> The function of *jing* underpins the organic growth of the human body and orders its rising and declining vitalities according to distinct phases (seven year cycles for woman, eight year cycles for men).<sup>890</sup>

Although each organ-function has a supportive, nourishing or yin aspect and a dynamic, active or yang aspect, the *Nei Ching* specifically describes the kidneys as ‘the Mansion of Fire and Water, the residence of Yin and Yang [and] the channel of death and life’. Here one sees that the *jing*-essence is the *seed, root* or *source* of the very yin-yang differentiation that underpins the active and passive potencies of the other bodily

889 KAPTCHUK, *The Web That has No Weaver* (London: Rider, 2000), 84.

890 *Su Wen* §I.1, 4-6; KAPTCHUK, 56.

vitalities. The ‘Mansion of Fire and Water’ betokens the kidneys as residence and storehouse of the *jing* essence, which in its yin aspect is described as water, but in its yang aspect is called ‘Life Gate Fire’ (*Ming-men huo*). The kidneys are the ‘root of life’ because they are the source of reproduction, growth and development.

The function of salt was associated with yin and water because these were the most condensed and condensing of energies. This is evident even in its function as a common nutritional substance, for here salt is bound deeply to the metabolic and macrobiotic functions of esoteric physiology. According to Paul Pitchford, salt has the most “grounding” and descending of activities of any substance used as food, while in Ayurvedic tradition, the active quality of salt was emphasised, and was even believed to heighten and strengthen one’s energy. As in western alchemy, salt forms the essential juncture of ascending and descending energies:

As with most extreme substances, salt has a dual nature, and it oscillates between its aspects in the human body. Its *yin* nature represents the earth, and thus salt can be used to bring a person “down to earth”, or to give food an earthy, more substantial quality. It strengthens digestion and contributes to the secretion of hydrochloric acid in the stomach, an “Earth Element” organ. In the outer dimensions, salt enables one to focus more clearly on the material realm. Excess salt, in fact, is thought in Chinese folklore to encourage greed.

At first, salt is cooling. It directs the energy of a person inward and lower, the appropriate directions in cooler weather. Most people are familiar with the pattern as it occurs in nature: plants such as trees send their sap deeper within and downward in cold weather. The *Inner Classic* advises the use of cooling foods in the winter and warming foods in the summer. The appropriate food for winter, according to this theory, would encourage exterior cooling, to concentrate the warmth in the *yin*, interior, lower body areas. Salt has this action, and this may be the reason it is classified as warming by Ayurveda.<sup>891</sup>

Water was associated with winter in the annual cycle as this is the time of year when everything contracts and pulls inward. Salt was associated with this element and season because not only are salty, brothy foods traditionally considered the most nourishing in winter, but also because salt has long been the chief means of *preserving* food (fishes, meats etc.) throughout this season. All of this stems from salt’s inward-turning, downward-going, *yin* function, which not only contracts and preserves, but forms a solid support and foundation for all subsequent growth and life.

Among the viscera, the kidneys are homologised with the water-salt complex, and are considered the generators of not only bone, but also of marrow, semen and the entire generative or procreative function.<sup>892</sup> Comments Pitchford:

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891 Paul PITCHFORD, *Healing with Whole Foods: Asian Traditions and Modern Nutrition*, 3rd revised ed. (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2002), 196.

892 The *Nei Ching* (Inner Classic) states that ‘the forces of Winter create cold in Heaven and

The Water Element organs are the kidneys and the bladder. In Chinese physiology, these organs govern water metabolism and control the bladder. In addition, the kidneys are seen as the root and foundation of the body. They rule the lower part, including the sexual organs and their reproductive functions. They also provide energy and warmth. The concept of “kidneys” goes beyond that of Western physiology. To explain why these additional functions can reasonably be part of kidney function, adrenal gland activity is generally assigned to the Chinese concept of the kidney. The kidney-adrenal connection is clear since the adrenals are located directly on top of the kidneys and produce secretions that make kidney activities possible.

The kidneys, representing the roots of the body, are the foundation of all *yin* and *yang* qualities in the body. Thus, the kidney *yin* supports and affects the *yin* of the entire body; kidney *yang* acts as the foundation for all the *yang* of the body. Accordingly, traditional Chinese medicine describes the kidneys as the “palace of Fire and Water,” and in any diagnosis involving the kidneys, one considers both their *yang* and their *yin* aspects.<sup>893</sup>

These deep associations between salt and the vital textures that provide the physical and energetic foundation of the human body are highly revealing. Indeed, the deeper metabolic function of salt in esoteric physiology has been dwelt upon precisely to lend support and weight to Schwaller’s intuitions about the role of the fixed salt in the marrow of the human femur. For here the marrow—liquefiable essence of bone—was governed by water, and the essential continuum between liquefiable marrow and hard bone touches upon a subtle but powerful esoteric motif most aptly encapsulated in the gnomic remark of the *Tao Te Ching*: ‘what is softest in the world, drives what is hardest in the world’, a statement echoed in almost identical terms by Paracelsus: ‘The very hardest, therefore, derives its origin from the very softest’.<sup>894</sup>

By emphasizing organs as functions rather than anatomical structures, Taoist physiology enables one to understand the approach that Schwaller brought to his reading of pharaonic medical papyri. Indeed, the similarity in approach becomes pronounced when the following description of the Chinese organ systems is compared

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water on Earth. They create the kidney organ and the bones within the body [...] the emotion fear, and the ability to make a groaning sound’. Correspondences of the five Chinese elements were elaborated according to yin organ, yang organ, season, time, emotion, colour, and taste. For the water element these are: kidneys, bladder, winter, midnight, fear, black and salt.

893 PITCHFORD, 355-6.

894 *Tao te Ching* §43; PARACELSUS, ‘A Book About Minerals’, *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings* (Waite, ed.), I, 240.

with Schwaller's remarks on the theology of Egyptian medicine. Comments Jeremy Ross:

Structure and function represent a further Western dichotomy; structure being the material framework and function being the result of a flow of energy through that framework. Chinese thought sees structure and function as a continuum, and does not distinguish between them. They are not viewed as separate areas, and separate textbooks of anatomy and physiology are not a feature of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Western medicine tends to see everything in terms of structure, from morphology and anatomy down through histology to molecular biochemistry. Function is seen in terms of its structure, as is pathology, and diseases tend to refer to structures. Chinese medicine is completely different; it emphasizes function. Little emphasis is placed on structure, especially internal structures. Hence the *Zang Fu*, the organ systems of [Traditional Chinese Medicine], do not refer so much to structures as to functions.<sup>895</sup>

Likewise for Schwaller: in the Pharaonic medical papyri, each part of the human body is assigned a *neter* (divinity = *function*). Physiology is thus understood theologically as an incarnation of spiritual *functions*:

I think it is necessary to see in this anthropomorphising of vital functions, corporified in humanity, a reason dictated by wisdom. It is not a part of the living human body that one attributes to the *neter*, but the characteristic function of the *neter* that is embodied in the human being. Together they constitute the totality of the knowledge of the genetic work of the Universe, knowledge that is an exceptional power, rarely given and carefully protected under the superior guidance of the Temple.<sup>896</sup>

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895 Jeremy Ross, *Zang Fu: The Organ Systems of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (Churchill Livingstone), 6.

896 *The Temple of Man*, I, 429.

### Spiritual Concretion

Gravity is the root of lightness

—*Tao Te Ching*<sup>897</sup>

#### *Styptic Coagulating Force*

Schwaller describes a process of spiritual concretion in which ‘nameless’ or ‘non-polarised’ energy (synonymous with spirit) defines itself spatially. This principle of concretisation is one of Schwaller’s most crucial concepts for it lies at the root of the magnetic or affinitive power by which material forms are drawn into being through a process of specification into density. At the same time, this densification forms the basis, centre or foundation upon which growth and expansion occurs. Upon this centre or point, the processes of metallogenesis and biogenesis hinge to form the two principal modalities or lineages by which the concretion of spirit effectuates itself.

What then is this “magnet” which enables divine Consciousness to descend into the physical body and what is the *hook* which holds it there? It is the “salt of the earth” of which the Gospels speak, the concretizing Force which from origin made Being, and which subsists through all forms of concretization down to physical form.<sup>898</sup>

The coagulating or concretising force is described by Schwaller as ‘styptic’ (*styptique*), from Greek στυπτικός (*styptikos*) meaning ‘astringent, contracting’ (στυφειν, *styphein*, ‘to contract’; στυψις, *stypsis*, ‘contracting effect, astringency’); in chemistry the term indicates an astringent (such as *alum*, the soluble salts of lead or iron, and so forth) which strongly contracts the mucous membranes, blood vessels or tissues.<sup>899</sup> Interestingly, alums and salts have a history in alchemy going right back to Demokritos, where finely ground common salt is mixed with finely ground alum (στυπτηρία, *stypṭēria*) as well as vinegar in relation to an operation involving the melting of copper.<sup>900</sup> More prominently, they figure in the Arabic *Book of Alums and*

897 §26; Thomas CLEARY, trans., *The Essential Tao* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 24.

898 *Nature Word* (Conclusions), 153 (trans. Deborah Lawlor).

899 *Petit Larousse*, 998.

900 *Papyrus Graecus Holmiensis* a 12. Cf. Jackson P. HERSHBELL, ‘Demokritos and the Beginnings of Greek Alchemy’, *Ambix* 34 (1987): 7-8, with refs at 17 n. 26 (Lagercranz, Halleux, Taylor).



*Salts*, where the saline and the styptic forces are placed side by side.<sup>901</sup> It is thus no surprise to find a fundamental kinship between the two functions in Schwaller's idea of salt as a contracting centre of gravity. Among the more immediate precedents for this idea is Leibniz's (1646–1716) understanding of the material cosmos as *spiritus coagulans*—'spirit coagulated' (into matter); interestingly for the historiography of alchemy, Leibniz's conception itself was informed by his studies of Chinese theories, especially the Neoconfucian thought of Chang Tsai (1020–1077) in which *qi* (= Greek *pneuma*, Latin *spiritus*, Sanskrit *prana*, Hebrew *ruah*, etc.) plays the role of energetic substrate that condenses itself into material form;<sup>902</sup> Leibniz was also influenced by Lurianic kabbalah, and in this connection it is the concept of *tzim-tzum*—the divine cosmogonic contraction—that takes on especial relevance in regards to de Lubicz's concept of spiritual concretion.<sup>903</sup>

The phenomenon of spirit coagulating itself into matter was illustrated by Schwaller in terms of the transition of a cylinder into a sphere or a parallelepiped into an octahedron (Illustration 47).

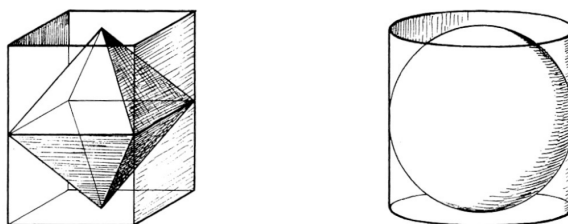


ILLUSTRATION 47: PARALLELIPED CONTRACTED INTO  
OCTAHEDRON; CYLINDER INTO SPHERE.

For Schwaller, these were geometrical expressions of the contraction of spirit into matter. The octahedron in particular represented minerality and evoked the six directions of force that define spatiality: vertically: zenith and nadir; horizontally: north, east, west, south.

With this image, spirit is understood as contracting itself into a *nucleus* which then forms the basis or root of growth (i.e. seed, *semence*). 'The nucleus of the extreme contraction  $\phi$  is octahedral', remarks Schwaller: 'It is "Eight" summarising all numeric possibilities, it is the solid, cosmic heart and it results from the impulsion  $\phi$  [=

901 Texts and translation: RUSKA, *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze: Ein Grundwerk der spätlateinischen Alchemie* (Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1935).

902 See Leon MARVEL, *Transfigured Light*, 257-8, with NEEDHAM, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 5.558.

903 Alison COUDERT, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995).

harmonic scission] but the function of five will appear only later'.<sup>904</sup> Here the process of spirit becoming matter (mineral) and mineral becoming vegetative is articulated, with the indication that the pentagonal nature of the biological kingdom is latent in the octahedral nature of the mineral. The physical nucleus is both the end result of contraction and the beginning of expansion; it is thus the fulcrum of spiritual densification and the seed of vegetative power:

Number creates the lineage or kinship (*parenté*) between the principal chaotic sphere and the corporeal octahedral nucleus (mineral origin). The function  $\phi$  in the mineral kingdom exists only in its vegetative or growing action (the mine), and only becomes apparent in the kingdom of visible vegetation (plants).<sup>905</sup>

What Schwaller describes as a mysticism of volume (*mystique du volume*) is thus provided as a basis for understanding salt as an end-point in relation to mineralogenesis and a beginning-point in relation to biogenesis. The principles underpinning the formation of volume are distinguished from all rational schematisations, such as those that view a cube simply as an agglomeration of atomic spheres.<sup>906</sup> Rather, the genesis of volume deals with powers (*Puissances*) in which the six vertices of the octahedron are identified with the six basic spatial orientations: 'It is a matter of the inspiring North and the realising South—the Zenith and Nadir for the body—and of the four vital moments that define the surface: Midday and Midnight, Morning and Night (to note this classification as a key)'.<sup>907</sup> Notably, the seventh point of orientation, the uncomplemented principle, is defined by the 'paternal, contracting power' (*la puissance paternelle, contractante*) of the nucleus itself—the centre of the cube or octahedron.<sup>908</sup> The significance of these points in relation to the colour theory, which relates six complementary colours to an uncomplemented seventh (as well as suggesting recapitulation via an eighth—the ordinary octave), should not be lost.

In terms of volumes, Schwaller describes the formless origin as a sphere and posits that from this sphere all known forms are derived as geometric "tessellations" of what lies beyond form. The coagulating principle, responsible for the movement from

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904 *Temple*, I, 177: 'Le noyau de l'extrême contraction  $\Phi$  est octaédrique. Il est « Huite », résumant toutes les possibilités numériques, il est le cœur solide cosmique, il résulte de l'impulsion  $\Phi$ , mais la fonction cinq n'apparaître que plus tard'.

905 *Temple*, I, 177: 'Le Nombre fait la parenté entre la sphère chaotique de principe et le noyau octaédrique corporel (origine minérale). La fonction  $\Phi$  dans le règne minéral, n'existe que dans son action végétative ou croissante (la minière), et ne deviendra apparente que dans le règne de la végétation visible (les plantes)'.

906 *Temple*, I, 178.

907 *Temple*, I, 178: 'Il s'agit de Puissances, tels le Nord inspirateur et le Sud réalisateur—en tant que Zénith et Nadir pour le corps—, et de quatre moments vitaux qui définissent la surface et qui sont Midi et Minuit, Matin et Soir (à noter ce classement comme une clé)'.

908 *Temple*, I, 176.

formlessness (sphere) to form (geometric solids), was thus equivalent to the transition from irrational to rational forms, i.e. from the unknown and incomprehensible to that which is known and able to be grasped:

The metaphysical theme is thus: a contracting, styptic force coagulating an undifferentiated milieu into a form that can only be a “formless” sphere containing all forms. In other words, the regular solids (*volumes*) result from the sphere and end in the octahedron and not the other way around, as logic might suggest. The passage is from the curved surface to a surface composed of equilateral triangles, and from these, which are the elements of the hexagonal planar area, to the pentagons forming the surfaces of volume. There is a contraction toward rational elements from an irrational given that cannot be separated into isolated elements.<sup>909</sup>

In this framework, the sphere and octahedron describe the extremes of a movement which passes through five geometrically “nested” or interlocked forms—the Platonic solids—: the icosahedron (twenty triangular faces), the dodecahedron (twelve pentagonal faces), the cube (six square faces), the tetrahedron (four triangular faces), and finally the octahedron (eight triangular faces). Here, each form interlocks exactly with its “lower” evolute according to the numerical relationships defined by the vertices, faces, and edges of each form.<sup>910</sup> The final octahedral form, it should be noted, contains the icosahedron, and thus implies a culmination which, like the octave, replicates the first form (just as seed results in seed).<sup>911</sup> Schwaller is explicit: all the Platonic solids—and by extension all geometric volumes—are analyses, abstractions or partial representations of the pre-existing whole represented by the sphere. All geometric solids can therefore only approximate the sphere, are only “kataphatic” attempts to grasp the “apophatic” nature of the whole.

Underpinning this process, remarks Schwaller, is a *function* (divine activity, *neter*, number): ‘this function is a *contraction* by a centre—presumably acting equally in all directions—on a “spatial” substance’. This is the point or centre of the sphere, which

909 *Temple*, II, 327: ‘Le thème métaphysique est donc: une force contractant, styptique, coagulant un milieu indifférent en une forme qui ne peut être que la sphère « informe », contenant toutes les formes. Autrement dit: les volumes réguliers résultent de la sphère pour se terminer en l’octaèdre, et non en sens inverse tel que la logique l’impose. On passe de la surface courbe à une surface composée de triangles équilatéraux, et de ceux-ci, qui sont les éléments de la surface hexagonal plane, aux pentagones formant surfaces de volume. Il y a contraction vers des éléments rationnels d’une donnée irrationnelle non séparable en éléments isolés’. (Lawlor, 950).

910 The phenomenon of dualing Platonic solids was first demonstrated in KELPLER’s *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (1595); they are conventionally designated according to the Schläfli symbols.

911 For illustrations and discussion of the interlocking Platonic solids, see Robert LAWLOR, *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 96-103.

recapitulates its origin in the same way the icosahedron recapitulates itself within the octahedron.

This *fact* exists, geometry can demonstrate it, but cerebral intelligence cannot grasp it. In principle, it is a question of the gravitational phenomenon conditioned by an energetic “density”, but of a nonpolarised Energy and not a kinetic energy. This is the obstacle to the definition of the gravitational force starting from the circuit-formula,  $E=mc^2$ , because first it is necessary that *Energy* becomes *Mass*.<sup>912</sup>

Just as mineral contraction hides latent vegetal growth, and indigo a hidden fire, so too does the nucleus contain a hidden ferment—and this is why the salt can be described as possessing a sulphuric function. Like *Ka-Mut-Tef*, the son incarnates the father and becomes the ‘bull of his mother’, and here the mother indicates the unformed spiritual substance (mercurial *prima materia*) that is coagulated by divine sulphur to produce the first manifestation of spirit as mineral matter (*materia prima*). In so far as this is a concrete product resulting from metaphysical force acting upon proto-physical substance, this is also describable as salt. And yet it is salt in its maternal aspect—mother to the fiery seed of metals (sulphur). In its paternal aspect is it seed and foundation of biological life (earth, stone, bone).

Returning to the saline ferment, one finds that the contracting power fixed in the nucleus becomes the foundation for an expansive power: biological life becomes the externalising expression of a power latent in mineral life. Vegetative and animate life thus form the modalities by which spirit liberates itself from its mineral densification. Evolution is defined accordingly by Schwaller as ‘the formal organisation (extension) of functional consciousness until the possibilities immanent in the concretising impulse are exhausted’.<sup>913</sup> The functional consciousness (*la conscience fonctionnelle*) that Schwaller places at the basis of evolution indicates no less than the universal consciousness, ‘undetermined but determining’,<sup>914</sup> the active principles of which were identified with the *neteru*, the ‘nine archangelic *puissances* surrounding the One’.

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912 *Temple*, II, 327: ‘Ce *fait* existe, la géométrie peut le démontrer mais l’intelligence cérébrale ne peut pas l’appréhender. Il s’agit, en principe, du phénomène gravifique conditionné par une « densité » énergétique, mais d’une Énergie non polarisée et non d’une énergie cinétique. Ceci est l’obstacle à la définition de la force gravifique en partant de la formule-circuit:  $E = Mc^2$  parce que d’abord il faut que l’Énergie soit devenue *Massé* (Lawlor, 952).

913 *Verbe Nature*, ‘Conclusions’ (*Aor*, 190): ‘L’évolution est l’organisation (extension) formale de la conscience fonctionnelle, jusqu’à épuisement des Possibilités immanentes à l’impulsion concrétisant’.

914 *Verbe Nature*, ‘Conclusions’ (*Aor*, 189): ‘universelle, c’est-à-dire indéterminée mais déterminante’.

*Electromagnetism and the Spherical Spiral*

Schwaller’s remark that ‘the Hermetic problem of our particular moment is Salt’ seems to indicate that the problem of the fixed (and fixing) nucleus may be comprehended as a hermetic approach to the necessity still felt by contemporary physics for a theory of “quantum gravity” (the effort to unite general relativity and quantum mechanics, and thus the four fundamental forces of nature: gravity, electromagnetism, strong nuclear force and weak nuclear force). In an essay entitled *Propops sur l’atomistique* (Concerning Atomism), Schwaller defines the electromagnetic phenomenon in terms of an esoteric/exoteric polarity constituted by an invisible cause (the esoteric *axis*) and a visible effect (the exoteric *circumference*):

Magnetism is the polar action as Electricity is the equatorial action. They are two aspects of one single energetic Intensity, neither of which exists without the other, any more than there can be an absence of an axial principle in a rotating body. The vital Reason is axial, the mechanical Reason, equatorial. One can act mechanically on the latter and not on the former.<sup>915</sup>

Schwaller goes on to qualify that the reality of the matter is not a waveform, as per the conceptualisation favoured in contemporary physics, but rather a *sphere*:

The propagation of the energetic phenomenon creates the sphere—a reality that the cerebral schema has sought to transcribe in terms of “waves”, thus giving a false notion of this “wave”. A surface separating a more dense milieu from a less dense milieu gives the illusion of waves (*l’ondes*) due to its vagaries (*vagues*). In reality the wave is an electromagnetic, axial-equatorial phenomenon, in the sense that there is a succession of periods more or less “dense” in the propagating milieu.

We have seen that “density” signifies the “styptic” contracting effect of the seed (*semence*) or nucleus (*noyau*) upon the nourishing milieu. Acting mechanically on the equatorial effect, this is a reaction to the axial effect that contracts or dilates the volume. It is this dilating and contracting alternation upon the milieu that forms the *spheres of propagation* imagined schematically as waves. Even a simple mechanical phenomenon, such as sound or resonance (*sonore*), does not occur without affecting the “Life” of the Matter, i.e. the esoteric relation of intensity to quantity, its genetic *function* (*fonction genèse*).

Now a spherical surface can neither dilate itself nor contract itself in a radiating sense, as matter can, or as the individual of a species can, i.e. in the

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915 ‘Propos sur l’atomistique’, *Notes et propos inédits* I, 81: ‘le Magnétisme est l’action polaire, comme l’Électricité est l’action équatoriale. Ce sont les deux aspects d’une même Intensité énergétique qui ne sont pas l’un sans l’autre, pas plus qu’il n’y a absence d’une principe axial dans in corps en rotation. La Raison vitale est axiale, la Raison mécanique est équatoriale. On peut mécaniquement agir sur celle-ci et non sure l’autre’.

arithmetic or enumerative sense. Therefore the quantitative dilation expresses an *elasticity*, i.e. a certain play between the magnetic or axial action of the molecules; but the lines of force go from the centre to the periphery in the form of a *spiral*—the incomprehensible spherical spiral (*l'incompréhensible spirale sphérique*).<sup>916</sup>

Here the crux of Schwaller's hermetic physics is touched upon. The movement from centre (nucleus, axis) to periphery (equator, sphere)—or vice versa—proceeds in the form of the *spiral*, thus creating volumetric form. Given that the words *spiral* and *sphere* are cognate with the word *spirit* (hence breath), it is no surprise that Schwaller draws the connection between the spiral process at the heart of his esoteric physics and the process of (re-)spiration:

The fact of breathing is thus a vital phenomenon.[...] In reality there are the two possibilities cited above which play a role in the distribution (*repartition*) of inhaled air: practically, it is a *simultaneity* of dilation and contraction, but in successive spiralling layers. The dilating coil (*spire*), at its extreme extension, offers two paths: one returns to its point of departure and closes the circle in a continuous curve; the other is a departure towards a greater extension. Inhaled air, by producing the dilation of the first spiral, has already given a part of its sustaining (*nourricière*) Energy. Now the spiral phenomenon must not be considered in a simple geometric aspect but as a vital exchange, of which the spiral's trace is merely a *symbol*, playing in every case the role of growth or development, and thus of genesis. It is the mechanical key of Life and it always has two aspects: dilation and contraction. When there is fixation in quantity, then it goes from greater volume to greater density, until it reaches energetic disintegration, as in the trunk in plants or the bone in animals.<sup>917</sup>

Density (the styptic coagulating force) is thus the basis—the esoteric foundation—of expansion (evolution, genesis). Such a perception bears a remarkable coherence with the fact that the sun—the very axis or nucleus of our solar system—is simultaneously a centre of gravity and a centre of light: one single point magnetically stabilising and energetically animating the life of the whole. What is interesting is how the two opposing activities not only unfold, but feed and inform each other: one movement 'returns to its point of departure and closes the circle in a continuous curve', while the other 'is a departure towards a greater extension'. Such a description strongly evokes what Heraclitus called a 'counterstretched harmony' (*palintonos harmonie*):

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916 'Propos sur l'atomistique', 82.

917 'Propos sur l'atomistique', 83.

they do not apprehend how being brought apart it is brought together with itself: there is a counterstretched harmony, like the bow and the lyre.<sup>918</sup>

More specifically, the ‘vital exchange, of which the spiral’s trace is merely a symbol’ may be elucidated with reference to the generative role of the double spiral as signalled in Doczi’s work on sacred geometry. Here, Doczi coins the term *dinergy* (from *dia* + *ergon*) to signify the ‘pattern-forming process of the union of opposites’:

Patterns generated from spirals moving in opposite directions are frequent in nature, as we shall see. Here they concern us as special instances of a more general pattern-forming process: the union of complimentary opposites: sun and moon, male and female, negative and positive electricity, Yin and Yang—the union of opposites has been since ancient times an important concept in mythologies and mystery religions. The two parts of the golden section’s proportions are unequal: one is smaller, the other larger. They are often referred to as *minor* and *major*. Minor and major here are opposites united in a harmonious proportion. The process itself by which the daisy’s harmonious pattern was reconstructed is likewise a joining of complimentary opposites—straight radii and rotating circles.<sup>919</sup>

The heart of the spiralling activity is double: simultaneously densifying (involving) and expanding (e-volving). Just as the numbers of the Fibonacci series alternate, *spiralling*, around the perfect but unattainable value of *phi* (tracing a convergence-divergence configuration, see Illustration 48), so too does the spiral process weave itself around the axis of the invisible, apophatic mysterium, closely adumbrating but never ultimately defining the hidden source of harmony that gives rise to the cosmic respiration of all things. These are the vital alternations by which the invisible is both hidden and revealed.<sup>920</sup>

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918 DK 51: οὐ ξυνιασιν ὀκως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῶ ξυμφέρεται παλίντονος ἀρμονίη ὀκωσπερ τόξου και λύρης.

919 Doczi, *The Power of Limits*, 3: ‘Many terms refer to aspects of the pattern-forming process of the union of opposites, but strangely enough none expresses its generative power. Polarity refers to opposites but without the indication that something new is being born. Duality and dichotomy indicate division, but do not mean joining. Synergy indicates joining and cooperation, but does not refer specifically to opposites. Since there is no adequate single word for this universal pattern-creating process, a new word, *dinergy*, is proposed. Dinergy is made up of two Greek words: *dia*—“across, through, opposite;” and “energy”. In the daisy this dinergic energy is the creative energy of organic growth’.

920 On the phenomenon of alternation, see LAWLOR, *Sacred Geometry*, 38-43.

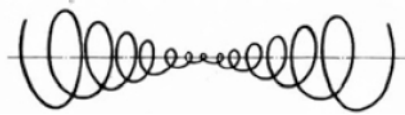


ILLUSTRATION 48: CONVERGENCE-DIVERGENCE  
CONFIGURATION

Spiral configuration created by the Fibonacci series as it converges and diverges around the exact (but unattainable) value of *phi*.

*Meditations on the Inconceivable*

In his memoir of their eighteen month encounter, André VandenBroeck reveals that the only practical exercise that Schwaller ever gave him was a meditation on the inconceivable—the spherical spiral. The description furnished in the section above is consistent with the emphasis on the significance of the spherical spiral that Schwaller gave to VandenBroeck, and it would not be fitting to conclude this chapter without attempting to convey something more concrete about the experiential dimension of this Lubiczian topology. Comments Schwaller:

Ah, [...] the vision of the spherical spiral, the true vision of space! Very elusive, must be practised. Important because it is the just representation of time-space, abstracted from the infinite flow and extension that pulls us into the facts. The spherical spiral is impossible to imagine, you must see it become in space ...<sup>921</sup>

*The spherical spiral must be seen becoming in space.* This point confirms all the more that it is not a matter of a static intellectual concept, nor of a simple graphic representation, but a dynamic experience of the structure of reality. Moreover, it is an experience through which spirit may be made perceptually present, apprehended from within its own, ever-present process, simultaneously involving itself in, and evolving itself out of, visible and invisible reality. VandenBroeck adds:

He [Schwaller] concluded with a convolution of his hands and forearms that came closer than a thousand impossible words to evoking this double helix, no longer linear and gaining dimension in contrary motion by folding the edge of its space back onto itself. When after months of practice it seemed to me that my vision of time-space was improving, it was always in the sense of this amazingly accurate gesture.<sup>922</sup>

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921 *Al-Kemi*, 52.

922 *Al-Kemi*, 52-3; 105: 'Although the idea of perceptual reeducation had come up several



This is important, not merely because such points of detail confirm beyond any reasonable doubt the genuine nature of VandenBroeck's account, but because it demonstrates that Schwaller himself sought to make this more than a mere mental conceptualisation. He sought the presentation of spirit. The effort to visualise the spherical spiral constituted a vital form of meditation which not only helped crystallise the vital grasp of the fundamental, double-spiral formed, involutive-evolutive activity of reality, but, on a deeper level, served to evoke the presence of one's own esoteric "axis" and exoteric "circumference", thus effecting, through the vehicle of one's imaginal *corpus*, a corresponding condensation and liberation of one's spiritual nature through the magnetic activity of the salt.

To understand the nature of the spherical *spiral*, it must first be realised that ordinary two-dimensional geometric forms are easily resolved into their three-dimensional equivalents: a circle becomes a sphere, a square a cube, a triangle a tetrahedral pyramid. But the spiral is not a closed form. It is an open, *evolving* form. It is *unlike* the regular polygons which, in three-dimensions, create the familiar solids. Hence, where a circle in three dimensions is a sphere, a spiral in three dimensions is something else—a sphere that is at once a vortex or helix, i.e. a volume dynamically evolving both inward and outward at the same time. The best approximations of this may be derived from mathematical topology, meteorology and physical cosmology.

The first point of reference is obviously the *loxodrome* (helical sphere): a three-dimensional spiral form that describes the volume of a sphere (Illustration 49); it also traces the rhumb lines of the earth's globe (originally used for navigation via straight lines which *spiral* around the earth's curved surface). The second point of reference is the related phenomenon of the Coriolis effect, a phenomenon usually used to describe the dynamics of wind or water vortices;<sup>923</sup> notably, vortices turn in different directions in relation to the poles of the earth, and here attention should be drawn to the different directions of the spirals forming the north and south poles of the logodrome (where one appears to spiral clockwise, the other appears to spiral counterclockwise). The third point of reference is the *Parker spiral*, an undulating, spiralling form which describes the shape of the sun's magnetic field. As this field extends from the sun out into the solar system, it is sculpted by magnetohydrodynamic forces (the solar wind)

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times, the contemplation of the spherical spiral was the only practical training he had ever presented me with'.

923 Latin *vortex*, 'whirlpool, eddying mass', from *vertere*, 'to turn'. In terms of meteorological phenomena, it is perhaps no coincidence that the noun *wind* (blowing, gust of air) and the verb *wind* (to turn, twisting, coil) have the same orthographic form (and originally, the same pronunciation, although their etymologies are different). A stronger linguistic connection inheres between 'spirit' and 'spiral', which share the same stem. In light of Gebser's sensitivity to language and his attempts toward an integral etymology, it hardly need be reiterated that the deeper nuances of the linguistic register are ever-present, shaping our descriptions of reality in a way that allows the more integral layers of a given phenomenon to become transparent.

into curving, twisting, spiralling waves (Illustration 50). Whereas rhumb lines help describe the outer form of a spherical spiral, the sun’s magnetic field helps describe the inner form, i.e. the process by which a central nucleus spirals out into a spherical volume.



ILLUSTRATION 49: LOXODROME

*Loxodrome* (Spherical Spiral, M. C. Escher). The loxodrome or spherical spiral defines the rhumb lines of the earth’s globe. At the north pole it defines a spiral that turns in the opposite direction to that at the south pole, per the Coriolis effect.

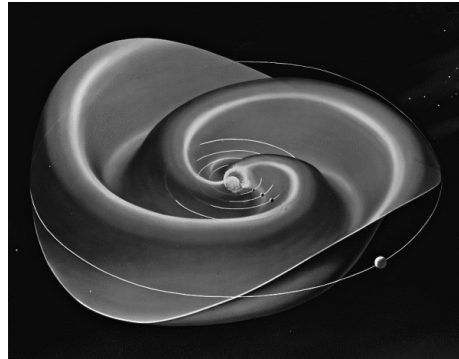


ILLUSTRATION 50: PARKER SPIRAL

*Parker spiral* (topography of the sun’s magnetic field). The sun’s magnetic field is shaped into an undulating spiral by the magnetohydrodynamic forces of the solar wind. Whereas the loxodrome describes the outer surface of a spherical spiral, the parker spiral conveys the interior form that moves from centre to circumference.

The dynamics at play may be approached by considering a *rotating* sphere, such as the globe of the earth. One can discern the following basic elements:

1. A centre or core (point)
2. An axis (pole, line)
3. An equatorial circumference (circle)
4. A surface (the smallest surface being defined by the triangle)
5. A sphere (volume)

Here one can see how the main elements of the series: point-line-surface are abstracted from the sphere (whole). Rather than the usual trajectory of point-line-surface-volume, which unfolds as a linear and hence rational-perspectival expression, Schwaller maintained that it was the sphere, not the point, which formed the origin or *archē* of the series. The sphere was the foundation: an integral, apophatic, primordial unity—whole, entire, and complete from the “beginning” (*archē*). The developments:

point, line and surface are simply limited, partial abstractions of the pre-existing, integral sphere (kataphatic attempts at “grasping” the apophatic mysterium).

Schwaller observes that the act of rotation forms the axis (the north-south pole; the beginning and end points of the globe’s spiralling rhumb lines). However the axis is invisible and, like magnetic lines of force, is known only by its effects. One of these effects is the opposing directions of (spiralling) rotation that are able to be observed from the north and south poles respectively. Viewed from the north, the direction of rotation appears clockwise; viewed from the south, counter-clockwise. And yet, the sphere is spinning in only one direction. The effect is not merely illusory, however, for the phenomenon of the Coriolis effect illustrates that cyclones and water vortices rotate towards the left in the southern hemisphere, and towards the right in the north (while “teetering” directly over the east-west line at the equator).

*Leaps and Concretions of the Spirit*

In many respects, the simultaneous double action of densification and expansion that underpins the mineralogical, biological, geometrical and topological processes discussed above are so many recapitulations of the twin forces present in the phenomenon of salt—Pythagoras’ sun and sea, the alchemist’s fire and water, the chemist’s acid and base, and Goethe’s *Urphänomene*. According to the epistemology ‘like knows like’, the integral nature of salt is only able to be comprehended by an integral consciousness, i.e. through a form of ‘knowledge by presence’ that *participates* in the nondual vision of the (incomprehensible) spherical spiral: an inward turning/outward turning, centripetal/centrifugal, esoteric/exoteric, axial/circumferential integrum in which the coincidence of formlessness and form, divinity and “earthliness”, abstraction and concretion, is made irreducibly present. For Schwaller, qualitative exaltation proceeds through densification in the magnetic salt, and, while it is a crystallisation, the word *sal* also means ‘leap, spring’, indicating the fundamental coherency between the permanent mineral nucleus and the mutational biological form: the two modalities of spiritual concretion that hinge upon the salt. The same coherency exists in Gebser’s description of the *Bewußtwerdungsprozess* as unfolding by primordial leaps (*Ur-Sprung*, origin) which at the same time are concretions (*con-crescere*) of the integral consciousness.

In Lubiczian alchemy, phenomenal nature as a whole is nothing but the movement of spirit from its virtual to its actual form. As such, metallurgical evolution and biological evolution are to be seen as so many “teratological proliferations” of this existential bedrock of spiritual minerality (mineral being the first manifestation of spirit.) The kingdoms of nature emerge through qualitative exaltations induced by the divine sulphuric ferment upon the primordial mercurial *materia*, giving rise to a neutral centre of gravity: the saline magnetic nucleus or ‘styptic coagulating force’. These shifts along the path from spirit to anthropocosmos are akin to what Gebser

calls an *Auskristalisierung*, a ‘crystallising-out’ of the visible from the invisible. Just as salts form into solid, crystalline structures from a saturated, liquid milieu, so too do all ontological structures, from the mineral to the human, “grow” from the amorphous, spiritually saturated ambiance of origin.

The goal toward which all becoming appears to be moving, but which, paradoxically, always existed, ever-presently, as its origin and foundation, is at once the homogeneous equilibrium of the originary spiritual milieu in which agent and patient are latent, as it is the neutral ground that is produced when agent and patient differentiate, interact and neutralise. This is why Schwaller can speak of an incarnation that is simultaneously a liberation from corporification:

This is the moment in which consciousness is integrally corporified and, paradoxically, in which it becomes independent of the body: the body itself becomes energy, being no longer the support of an energy, no longer the container but wholly the contents.<sup>924</sup>

Thus, when matter is no longer an impediment to spirit, but a pure instrument of spiritual concretion, the physical vehicle essentially undergoes a process of transfiguring purification until the circle of dualism between spirit and matter is closed. That is, it is transformed and refined until it reaches a point where, eventually, going beyond the mineral basis of metallic and biological evolution, *consciousness itself* becomes its own fixed point and spiritual body: both originary, determining nucleus and final crystallised form, a state which evokes the immortal *vajra* of Indo-Tibetan tradition—the inseverable, diamond-lightning consciousness that is described as both *luminous* (radiant) and *hard* (solid). From this perspective, the entire phenomenon of the physical universe and the natural world as a whole is nothing other than this self-same process of alchemical purification on a cosmic scale: matter evolving into more subtle vehicles for consciousness, until consciousness itself becomes its own binding nucleus, fixing and fixed by its indestructible salt according to the intensities of its conscious experience, from mineral to human, at once immortal *corpus* and eternal consciousness.

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<sup>924</sup> *Temple*, I, 45 (Lawlor).

## VII

### CONCLUSION

I teach you the doctrine of *the hour of the dissolution and unification of “seed and fruit”*.<sup>925</sup>

—R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

#### *“Solving” the Hermetic Problem of Salt*

Right from the beginning of this thesis, salt has been seen as the most direct symbol of the nondual process that Schwaller describes in terms of a ‘juncture of abstract and concrete’, a phenomenon ultimately identified with the philosopher’s stone. Reconciling the notions of both *initium* and *telos*, “seed” and “fruit”, salt is not an arbitrary signifier but a physical *embodiment* that belies the presence of a metaphysical *function* acting upon a proto-physical *substance* in order to produce phenomenal *form*. Just as sulphur coagulates mercury to produce a salt (cinnabar), so too does existence as a whole arise as a neutralisation reaction between a metaphysical “acid” and a proto-physical “base.” By focusing on ‘the hermetic problem of salt’, this thesis has sought to articulate and contextualise the esoteric perception that agent, instrument and patient are not separate entities but aspects of a single, nondual process.

The “solution” to the hermetic problem of salt thus inheres in seeing through its duality and ambiguity to perceive its fundamental *nonduality*. In addition to its salvific, balsamic and holistic aspect (*sal* as *salve*, redeeming balsam), salt appears to present itself under a dual aspect: it is both a ‘leap’ (*salii*) and a ‘solidity’ (*solidus*), meanings that prove integral to Schwaller’s conception of salt as the fixed imperishable nucleus (*solidus*) regarded as the hidden mechanism underpinning the ontological ‘leaps’ (*salii*) or mutations of visible evolution. For Schwaller, the seemingly disconnected leaps of biological mutation are in fact bound together by a hidden harmony grounded in the solid, mineral nucleus.

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925 *Verbe Nature* §20: ‘Or, je te prêche la doctrine de l’heur de la dissolution et unification de « semence et fruit »’.

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In essence, Schwaller's ontology reconciles the seeming contradictions embodied in the phenomenon of salt. To see existence—reality as we know it—as a physical equilibrium between active function (*logos*) and passive substance (*prima materia*); to perceive the coagulating sulphur and the nourishing mercury through the “cinnabar” of all things: this is to “find” the stone.

### *Alchemy as Nondual Process*

In this thesis, I have argued that the life and work of René Schwaller de Lubicz attests to the continued presence of a distinctly nondual current of alchemical precept and practice in which material transmutation and spiritual transmutation are not separate nor merely coincidental endeavours but two indispensably linked sides of the same coin. In order to support this, I first felt it necessary to establish the whole premise of a ‘nondual current of alchemical precept and practice’ upon sufficiently solid foundations within the historiography of alchemy.

To do this, I first re-examined evidence for the etymology of alchemy, drawing attention to Needham's work and the pertinence of wider perspectives in which far eastern evidence becomes just as pertinent to the comprehension of alchemy as middle eastern, near eastern and western evidence. I drew attention in particular to the fact that in Chinese alchemy—which is generally acknowledged as the eldest—the division between *nei tan* and *wei tan* (‘inner’ and ‘outer’ forms) are complementary, and that a purity of heart/mind was necessary to the achievement of the medicine/elixir, thus instantiating a nondual relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of the alchemical process right from the beginning. (The same distinction is also evident in Indo-Tibetan traditions of alchemy). I re-examined the evidence for the Egyptian etymology of alchemy (*kem* as ‘black earth’, but also ‘the pupil of the eye’ and the process of *melanōsis*), drawing out its Egyptian theological, hermetic and theurgical associations in the *Korē Kosmou*, Zosimos of Panopolis, and Iamblichean theurgy. In particular I emphasised the double role of apotheosis and demiurgy in which the soul of the alchemist ultimately comes to participate in the spiritual creation and regeneration of nature, thus showing how spiritual and natural aims are merely two arcs of the same soteriological and cosmogonic cycle. Given the Egyptian, Greek and Chinese evidence for the etymology of alchemy, I suggest that Kingsley's concept of ‘double’ or ‘re-etymology’, and the idea of hermeticism itself as a ‘tradition of translation’ (*hermeneus*) offers the best means of reconciling competing linguistic evidence.

Following Derchaine, I grounded the union of hieratic and artisinal *technē* in Egyptian temple cult, and examined the mouthopening ritual as an especially emblematic example of the formula ‘ontogeny recapitulates cosmogony’ while tracing the perpetuation of the telestic art—the divine animation of matter—into Islamic alchemical texts through the example of Jaldakī's commentary on (Pseudo-)

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Apollonius. Here, I emphasise how the agent and patient of any “act” reflect a divine, self-reflexive process by which, in the words of Zosimos, ‘one nature acts upon itself’.

Having shown how the fundamental unity of artisanal and hieratic *technē* that forms the basis of genuine Egyptian alchemy distinctly informs later traditions, I turned to Indian alchemy (*rasayana*), which explicitly attests to the fact that metallurgical transmutation (through the agency of a pan-seminal mercury identified with Shiva) is a propaedeutic to a spiritual transformation that is unequivocally tantamount to apotheosis. As in Zosimos, penetration of a body by a pan-seminal essence or tincture (*baphē*) is equivalent to a transfiguring “baptism” and thus redemptive *theōsis* of the soul, which in turn transforms the body into a purer vehicle for spirit. Through chiefly Islamic channels, but also through the enormous influence of figures like Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme, the motif of divine animation (and transformation) of material bodies would permeate the vitalist *Naturphilosophie* of European alchemies, informing an approach to nature that is at once empirical and spiritual, and in which the theurgic (and demiurgic) imperative to participate in the soteriology of nature is deeply evident. Despite the rationalisation of *chymistry* in the seventeenth century, many key figures in the establishment of quantitative science were also practicing alchemists—Newton, Boyle, Starkey—thus complicating the largely dualistic picture of science and spirituality, demanding once again a need for more nuanced models.

The examples I have adduced all argue strongly for a revision of rigidly dualistic biases within the historiography of alchemy and lend support to the adoption of a more nuanced, and ultimately nondual, critical apparatus. The tendency of scholars of early modern *chymistry* to set up a rigid polemic between an alchemy that is reducible to purely chemical terms on one hand, and nineteenth and twentieth century spiritual and psychological interpretations of alchemy on the other, brings us to the core issue of the present thesis: the alchemy of René Schwaller de Lubicz, which cannot be exclusively reduced to either category.

### *Schwaller de Lubicz: Leben and Sophos*

Extending upon these broader premises, I have sought to demonstrate that the life and work of de Lubicz presents a unique opportunity to examine the perpetuation of this nondual current of alchemy in modern times in a way that also gives insight into the deeper relationship between metaphysical and physical realities with which this form of alchemy is, I suggest, ultimately concerned. By means of a detailed bio-bibliographical survey, I have shown a central metaphysical concern with the nature of matter preoccupied Schwaller from a very early age (centring on the concrete perception of unity and duality as an *integrum*).

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Schwaller may be seen to possess what von Stuckrad has called the ‘multilayered nature of religious identities’.<sup>926</sup> His purview cuts across ordinary disciplinary boundaries not just in the hieratic arts, but also in the fine and artisanal arts; his various occupations in life thus demonstrate a wide polymathematical interest in which artistic, artisanal, chemical, spagyric, symbolic, geometrical, arithmosophical, metallurgical, Egyptological, phenomenological and metaphysical concerns all formed facets of a greater whole that expressed an overarching concern with the ‘juncture of abstract and concrete’. Schwaller’s experience with Matisse emphasised that the desire of the artist was not to represent static objects of perception but to capture the Bergsonian *élan vital* behind impressions; his earliest theosophical writings display not only an incipient orientation towards an *ars hieratica*, but a more specific concern to deepen the conception of contemporary science into a sacred modality in which a spiritual (and not a kinetic) *energeia* is able to be discerned as the basis of matter. His involvement with the Parisian alchemical revival sparked a living laboratory relationship with one of the most influential twentieth century alchemists: Fulcanelli (alias Jean-Julien Champagne), with whom he engaged in a twenty year project whose chief aim was to achieve a ‘glass stained glass in its mass with the volatile spirits of metals’—a demonstration of the vital, animating nature of metallic seed-tinctures. Against the scholarly caricature that views post-Enlightenment alchemy as purely spiritual/psychological and therefore erroneous, the hermeticism of the Parisian alchemical revival displays a deeply empirical *and* spiritual character with a distinct emphasis on laboratory practice based upon medieval and early modern hermetic traditions. This simultaneously empirical and spiritual character is evident in Schwaller’s first Parisian esoteric groups, which were informed by the effort to revive post-war and post-industrial society from the ground up through restoring the artisanal modality as a spiritual *métier*. Although he abandoned these projects, he set up his own small commune in the Engadine region of Switzerland to embody the coherence of artisanal and mystical principles. Laboratories and workshops dedicated to practical work were established within the context of an overarching spiritual directive (*la Doctrine*), while research into nature and material processes coincided with spiritual revelation. High in the Alps, Schwaller produced spagyric/homeopathic tinctures and alchemical stained glass on one hand, and on the other established an intersubjective communion with a Socratic tutelary entity known as Aor. Here, the principle source of Schwaller’s mystical knowledge is seen to reside in states of communion that blur the common dualistic distinction between “self” and “other”.

Preceded by a period of solitude on the Spanish island of Majorca, Schwaller’s work in Egypt attests to a deep imperative to uncover the origins not only of the medieval hermetic tradition through the divine temple as prototype of the Gothic cathedral, but ultimately of the *consciousness*—the unique ontology and epistemology—that underpins all genuine hermetic and esoteric thinking. This consciousness for

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926 Kocku von STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism*, 7-8.



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Schwaller amounted to a metaphysics of perception in which the phenomenal, material cosmos could be perceived as the living instrument of the spiritual or abstract cause that was continually acting upon it through the juncture of metaphysical and proto-physical forces. Schwaller's overarching symbolic directive was thus rooted in the methodology of the traditional doctrines of nature as *sympatheia* or *signatura* in which concrete phenomena are not merely "symbols" but the *physical incarnations* of universal functions. Schwaller thus identified *neters* with numbers (in the Pythagorean sense) as the basis of a sacred science that could be visually demonstrated through geometry and physically applied through architecture. For Schwaller, the essential function of temple and cathedral alike was to 'raise consciousness toward divinity'; however, on a deeper level it was also a didactic edifice that could continue not only to teach but to *embody* the principles of sacred science upon which it was founded—(and by which consciousness is raised to divinity)—long after its originating culture had fallen. Once again, it is the *endurance* of the fixed mineral phenomenon that is seen to preserve the knowledge that is lost by the more volatile aspects of the entity.

In these and other ways, the biographical element of this thesis has attempted to demonstrate that a desire to make the spiritual concrete and the concrete spiritual permeates Schwaller's entire life and work. The example of de Lubicz thus clearly testifies to the continued presence of a nondual alchemy in both precept and practice, and in this way consolidates the wider argument of this thesis.

### *The Fire of the Earth*

To understand the hermetic problem of salt and its role in metempsychosis, Schwaller placed an enormous emphasis on the thigh as the locus of the fixed nucleus that preserves consciousness beyond death. Upon this basis, Schwaller conceived human life in terms of cycles that were physically crystallised into the bones by vital experiences. These experiences "inscribed" entire blocks of the entity's acquired consciousness upon its most enduring part—the fixed mineral salt in the femur—which, like mineral ash, survives combustion and putrefaction to preserve consciousness beyond the physical dissolution of the entity. More permanent than the volatile genetic body, the salt in the femur was regarded as the kernel of palingenesis and resurrection; not only was it the preserver of a being's ontological mutations, it was also the instigator, over many incarnations, of a being's biological mutations. Determining the body, salt was thus *agent* in regards to biological matter; however, affected by the experience *undergone* through this body, it was *patient* in regards to *consciousness*.

If the dual yet integral nature of salt highlights a significant aspect of hermetic metaphysics, cutting right to the heart of the conception of alchemy as a nondual *integrum*, then the *colour* phenomenon—as conceived through the lens of Goethean phenomenology—presents a detailed *symbolique* illustrating the specific dynamics of this nondual phenomenon. In this sense, colour for Schwaller (and Goethe), may

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essentially be likened to a neutralisation reaction between an “acid” (light) and a “base” (darkness) forming a “salt” (the colour phenomenon). Into the Goethean paradigm, however, in which every colour evokes its complement to provide an essentially symmetrical system, Schwaller brought the ‘vexing presence of indigo’ to reconstitute the Newtonian septenary (and thus the traditional hermetic correspondences). This sevenfold system enabled Schwaller to explore the relationship between the three principles (sulphur-mercury-salt) and the four elements (fire-water-air-earth) in a way that visually demonstrated the participation of the corporeal in the non-corporeal. Inverting traditional colour mixing theories, Schwaller not only identified the composed colours (orange, green, violet) with the three primaries, he defined the “pure” colours (red, yellow, blue) as secondaries. He then added indigo as a fourth secondary and placed it in an anomalous position after violet to suggest that violet decomposes not into blue and red but into blue and *indigo*.

When understood as pure colour theory, particularly with regard to the continuum of the spectrum, this proves notoriously difficult to reconcile; however, when the mythological associations and the correspondences to the planetary metals are brought into the picture, it becomes clear that Schwaller is advancing a model of hermetic (meta-) physics. All the colours save indigo find complements, each being paired up, principle to element. Indigo remains conspicuously uncomplemented; moreover, it appears to straddle the position of both element and principle. Indigo has a dual nature and therein lies its key, and this key is drawn out by Schwaller through mythological and metallurgical associations. Mythologically, indigo is linked to Jupiter (Zeus-Amun). Metallurgically, it is linked to tin. However, it is only by looking to the *oxide* of tin that one comprehends the concrete meaning of the alchemical colour theory that, for Schwaller, provided the symbolic language of an *experimentum crucis*—to recreate the blues and reds of Chartres by staining glass in the mass with the volatile spirit of metals. Tin oxide gives rise to both a stable and a metastable form: one blue-black, the other *red*. Thus, as Schwaller intimates, indigo hides a hidden *fire*, and it is this fire—the fire of the earth—that is joined to water (blue, copper) to form the alchemical juncture in violet, thus linking the thermal (acidic) and electric (basic) ends of the colour spectrum in a way that recapitulates the ‘juncture of abstract and concrete’ in salt.

Although the glass work clearly hinges on the dual presence of the stable and metastable oxides of tin (one substance giving rise to two colours), the deeper context of Schwaller’s life and work attests unequivocally to the fact that an exclusively chemical interpretation would fall far wide of the mark; in particular, it would miss the essential point that processes in nature are signatures (*symboliques*) of metaphysical functions (*neteru*, divinities). Theologically, the concrete phenomenon in question is merely an extension of the Lubician metaphysic by which the apophatic divinity (Jupiter = Zeus = Amun) gives rise to two natures or lineages: agent and patient, acid and base, mineral and biological, solar and lunar, warm and cool, and so forth. The phenomenon of indigo thus hides a key to a deeper form of analogical thinking in

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which occurrences at the metaphysical or cosmogonic level of magnitude cannot be separated from those at the material or chemical level of magnitude (a point evidenced in VandenBroeck's own experience of Schwaller's articulation of the alchemical process, in which the material description gave rise to associations fundamentally associated with the metaphysical scissiparity through which duality is engendered from primordial unity).

### *Ontological Mutation*

The core of Lubiczian alchemy, I have argued, centres on the esoteric formation of all "bodies", to include the hidden "nucleus" of continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality. This speaks directly to the perception of alchemy as a nondual, operative-spiritual process. For Schwaller, the intensification of consciousness (being) causes the mutation of physical bodies (phenomenal form). Thus, the 'hermetic problem of salt' not only refers to the pivotal role of the 'fixed nucleus' in metallurgical and biological evolution, it centres directly upon the connection between salt as the register of an entity's consciousness (palingenetic memory) and salt as the guardian or determiner of an entity's physical form.

Alchemically, the nondual juncture of abstraction and concretion is attained through 'qualitative exaltation', a principle that lies at the very heart of Schwaller's alchemical *œuvre*. In some rare but important passages, Schwaller maintained that to exalt the *quality* of a phenomenon is to exalt the force which coagulates or concretises its underpinning spirit or *energeia* into a body; over time, the continued activity of this 'styptic coagulating force' acts to refine and define the created body through (trans-) mutations toward more subtle and essential foundations or vehicles for spirit.

Thus, in addition to the general perception that visible evolution is the material expression of the mutation of consciousness, salt is implicated as the specific instrument by which consciousness "chooses" or "determines" the forms that express an entity's ontological status in the chain of being. Within this framework, the aim of embodied life is to intensify consciousness: to make it more integral and thus liberated from duality, whereupon (as a result) the physical instrument will become more integrally (and less dualistically) constellated. To the extent that embodiment grants an instrument for perception, experience, and suffering (sweat, tears, salt), only the experiences that intensify consciousness are registered on the salt through "inscription"—nourishing or modifying the nucleus such that after it leaves the bones to re-enter nature, it is attracted, by affinity, to new (biological) forms of expression (the seed-cell), thus "evolving" matter further through (i.e. along the lines of affinitive force established by) the acquired experiential inscriptions of the being's previous, personal, embodied consciousness. Salt, for Schwaller, is thus directly bound to the *raison d'être* of embodied existence.

## C O N C L U S I O N

### *The Dissolution and Union of Seed and Fruit*

Everything for Schwaller is in a process of gestation, and his philosophy is important for its imperative to perceive reality as a living *process* rather than as an arrested product. To see everything as gestating is to see it as still participating in both a formative force (seed) and a nourishing milieu (matrix), both of which are vital to its existence. This idea was central not only to his laboratory alchemy, which was based upon archaic conceptions of metallic seeds developing in mineral wombs, but also his view of the movement of existence as a whole, which was situated within grand astronomical cycles in which the phenomenon of equinoctial precession provides a slowly shifting universal milieu, a ‘cosmic ambiance’ that colours the nature of all things that develop within its “womb”.

And yet, the “product” or “fruit” of this gestation was for Schwaller not a teleological finality but, to use the words of Jean Gebser, an ‘ever-present origin’ (*Ursprung und Gegenwart*). Just as the extremes of Goethe’s dark spectrum are resolved into a colour beyond the spectrum (red and violet form magenta—from which they may also be seen to depart), so too do the phenomena “seed” and “fruit” form a unity that, like the phenomenon of tone and octave, embodies both origin and culmination. For this reason, the concept of the stone in Lubiczian alchemy appears to lie at the root of the series that, to ordinary perception, is usually only conceivable as its final product. From this perspective, “evolution” as a movement from virtuality (seed) to actuality (telestic finality) is merely a living “analysis” of what is already present in the primordial “stone”. Material forms are thus so many articulations of an ever-present process of ‘spiritual concretion’ in which the integral whole precedes, forms and completes the manifest parts. This is why, for Schwaller, the ‘stone does not evolve’ and why, paradoxically, the alchemical *ars transmutationis* can also be consistent with a Parmenidean metaphysics of unmovingness.

The topological model for a structure of reality in which everything departs from and yet “gestates” towards a stone which ‘does not evolve’ was described by Schwaller in terms of an ‘incomprehensible spherical spiral’. By unpacking this paradoxical image I have attempted to show that Schwaller is approaching a perception of reality in which punctillar, cyclic and linear perspectives (corresponding, per Gebser, to spatio-temporal and ontological orientations) unite in a single form. Like the spiral thread of a revolving screw, this form “evolves” and yet “stays the same”. Like the alchemical salt, this structure of reality is constituted by a core or nucleus that acts simultaneously as a point of centripetal densification (*spiritus coagulans*) and a point of centrifugal expansion (*qualitative exaltation*). And yet, as Heraclitus points out, the centrifugal force curves back upon itself to join its centripetal point of departure: ‘they do not know how by going away from itself it returns to itself; there is a counterstretched harmony, like the bow and the lyre’.

The deeper philosophical valences of Lubiczian alchemy not only penetrate to the heart of primordial ontological and spatio-temporal concerns, they articulate the

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dynamics of ontological and corporeal transmutation according to a fundamentally nondual metaphysics. Because the cosmogonic and ontogenetic process with which Schwaller is concerned is seen to reach a crucial point in the embodied human soul, and because individual human effort to perceive what Abellio called the *structure absolute* was intrinsic to the very development (concretisation) of this structure, the deeper meaning of alchemy thus inheres in individual consciousness as an instrument by which the primordial ontology fulfils its innate, divine integrality. This is the moment in which 'consciousness is integrally corporified' and, paradoxically, in which it 'becomes independent of the body'. Through this process, the nature of reality, along with the organs and consciousness structures which predominate in its perception, are qualitatively exalted in accordance with a greater process of organic necessity through which the deeper nature of reality makes its hidden composition transparent.

In essence, Lubiczian alchemy is a metaphysics of *perception*, but it also has a material application or proof, and this forms the *experimentum crucis*—in the double sense of the word—i.e. both an *experiment* and an *experience*. The *conditio sine qua non* of alchemy centred for Schwaller on the perception of invisible forms through visible things (experience) but also on a material proof (experiment) that this perception was not only germane to the very structure of matter and existence, but that the deeper structure of existence could be rendered visible through conscious *participation* in its more mysterious processes. On one hand, therefore, Schwaller's work inheres in the articulation of an epistemology of signatures that sought to read the invisible, formative forces (sulphur and mercury) through a phenomenology of visible theophanies (salt). On the other hand, it inheres in the imperative to *participate* in the catalysis of the (self-) revelation of the invisible. This participation in the self revelation of the invisible is achieved through intensifying the presence of formative forces in material bodies, which in turn effects qualitative exaltation (ontological mutation) towards more integral vehicles of consciousness.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Translations

### *Notes on Hermeticism*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

«Notes et propos sur l'hermétisme»

*Notes et propos inédits* II, 201-228.

Annotated translation: Aaron Cheak

It may be of interest to have a look at the meaning and purpose of what is today commonly called hermeticism or alchemy. Without going into its Arabic and before that surely Egyptian etymological origins,<sup>927</sup> the word 'alchemy' (in the commonly adopted sense) signifies the means of transmuting base metals into silver or gold. To

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927 Now-standard etymologies for alchemy derive it from the Arabic definite article *al*, 'the' plus the root *kem-*, which may be seen to derive from (i) Egyptian *kem.t*, 'black, earth' (i.e. the dark, fertile Nilotic soil which literally defined the land of Pharaonic Egypt); (ii) the Greek transliteration of this name, *Chêm*, also the name of a mythological ancestor; (iii) Greek *chym-* 'to pour'; and, last but not least, (iv) Chinese *kim-ya* 'gold-making'. The best discussion is contained in NEEDHAM, *Science and Civilisation in China*, V. 5. Needham argues persuasively for a Chinese provenance, the term *kim* entering the Arabic-speaking world via the well-established routes of the Silk Road. Following BAIN (who adduces the significance of the Greek phrase *melanatis gê*, 'black earth' from the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*), along with Peter KINGSLEY's highly important concept of 're-etymology', we would suggest that the synthesis of precepts and practices which came together under the rubric of alchemy may very well be a hermetic synthesis and translation—a conscious hermeneutic play on semantics, phonetics and assonance—of many, if not all, of these traditions and concepts.

this is attached a still more important meaning: that of 'universal panacea', i.e. the means of simultaneously combating all evil and rejuvenating humankind (or at least conserving its health). To these marvels one may add those affirmed by the mystical alchemists—in addition to health, alchemy promises the means of acquiring illumination or wisdom: the key to all knowledge.

Considering the astonishing faculties attributed to alchemy, one may regard it as an expression of hope: a poor, suffering humanity's hope in a paradise in compensation for the innumerable miseries of life. From this point of view, there is nothing more pitiful than a humanity desolated by their current existence, the meaning of which escapes them; a humanity that cannot believe in the purpose of their life, cannot believe that this life is only explicable, only able to be supported, if there is something beyond the barriers of their ignorance. Life has no sense; physical life with its suffering is an injustice; moral life an absurdity—if there is nothing beyond what is offered in the course of our daily existence. This is the conviction that demands the search for paradise: the utopia of a Philosopher's Stone (as one has agreed to call the product of alchemy).

I see in this not a matter for ridicule but a poignant destitution of consciousness. It is the greatest sorrow to note that a pretended "evolution" of intelligence apparently satisfies present humanity, desperately materialist in the worst sense; a humanity that contents itself with purely illusory physical and cerebral pleasures; a humanity that no longer knows how to dream of a "utopia." All that this demonstrates is that one is merely a physical brute, a human animal, content to eat and enjoy its corporeal needs like a beast.

The perfect illusion of cerebral, literary or scientific pleasure is merely hypnosis, and all sincere people will one day come to admit this. It is no more relevant than playing a game of patience; in the final analysis, all that it amounts to is a passing of time. But what time? That which separates us from death? Have no doubt about it—it is exactly this. Many vanities, moreover, reside between these games of self-hypnosis: vanity for power, vanity for wealth, vanity to be the "best in the world." To shine, but to shine for whom and what? Necessarily, for those inferior to oneself. One no longer has the pride to desire one's peers and equals (*semblable chose*).

It is necessary to restore devotion: to teach, to care; and to be sure: when one removes the measure of vanity, which is often hidden, there remains one true, profound satisfaction and one true purpose. To give in order to give—"art for art's sake"—is the best definition of "mysticism," which also reveals true devotion without concern for appearance or desire for recompense. Curiously, it is the most exalted epoch in this "mystic" sense, the thirteenth century, whose grandiosity of faith and sacrifice enabled it to pass to our day the affirmation that was then baptized by alchemy as the "Philosophers' Stone," a doctrine drawn from the Islamic Moors of Spain and, by them, from Alexandria, final vestige of pharaonic Egypt.

It is certain today that the alchemical science, known among the Greeks as *chrysogony* or *chrysopoiea* (gold-making),<sup>928</sup> has its sources at the origin of our historical humanity. But humanity has become enamoured with a skeptical science—a century of materialist negation—only to take up the alchemical thought once again (albeit in an excusable, modest, and scientific form). Berthelot, Thomson, Maxwell, Bohr, de Broglie and other modern researchers do no other thing than seek the secret of transmutation. They do this (secretly and without admitting it—good Lord!) through the study of the “constitution of matter,” and they base this on the actual or supposed unity of matter. From time to time, one apprehends that a cathodic bombardment has let some traces of gold enter into mercury (hydrargyrum) and all the newspapers will proclaim it.<sup>929</sup> But what hype it is to report that the emanation resulting from the radiation of radioactive salts produces Lithium. It must be admitted: humanity has never ceased to seek the secret of alchemy, and our most modern, classical (and arrogant) scholars are in effect disguised, ashamed alchemists, daring not to admit their true purpose, which they cover under abstruse mathematical formulas.

Fortunately, humanity has never ceased to be conscious of the absurdity of ordinary existence and always seeks a higher and more genuine purpose. They still feel shame in asserting this hope, however, for they have scarcely departed from an epoch that affirms that “nothing is created and nothing is lost,” with all its “materialistic” conclusions. But this timid period of puberty will pass and a more powerful era will be revived in which we will dare once again to look utopia in the face; for it is far more dignified to be utopian than to live and die like a beast.

Incidentally, whether regarded from the a religious point of view or from a scientific perspective, there is nothing absurd about alchemy all. For whether one conceives it as an energetic proton or as divinity, it is a matter of a *unique point of departure* and therefore, in the ultimate analysis, everything is constituted by the same original energetic substance. As a consequence, and by completely normal means, every single thing can be transmuted into any other thing since, logically, only the form varies and not the constituent substance. Just as every geometric form is decomposable into triangles (the first geometric form of surface), so too every form, decomposed into its constituting triangles, allows the reconstruction of another form. In essence, all alchemical theory is the same. It is unquestionably logical, and this principle presides over the fact that alchemy is a science that concerns itself with transmutation.

If, for example, a modern scholar says that mercury is formed from a grouping of a proton and thirty ions, and that gold is formed from nineteen ions, the regrouping of these ions, drawn from the mercury, will permit (theoretically speaking) the

928 From *chrysos*, ‘gold’ + *gen-* (*gignomai*) ‘become, be born’; *poiéomai*, ‘make’ (cf. Latin: *aurifaction*).

929 In 1924, Adolphe Meithe’s claim to have accidentally changed mercury into gold while using a mercury vapor lamp was publicised worldwide. It was later recognised that the gold was already present in the mercury as an impurity.



formation of a body of gold. One can make some complex calculations to determine the necessary tension required to break this arrangement in order to reconstitute it as another. But is it wise or is it absurd to seek this phenomenon by this method? Perhaps an alchemist of the past, having achieved his "Work," would laugh at our modern scholars. But common sense allows us to express this supposition freely until it is proven that such a fortunate alchemist even existed at all. In the meantime, nothing should dissuade us from investigating, philosophically, the meaning and purpose of the alchemical doctrine, nor from attempting to see to what extent these seekers were absurd.

It is always with a degree of pity that the standard science of our day speaks of the ancient alchemical doctrines, posing their ignorance of the true nature of the "elements" as defined by modern chemistry as the source of their error. In effect the Alchemists say that that everything is made of four elements and specifies itself by the diverse compositions of the qualities of these elements. In other words, the elements of the alchemists have no relation to the elements of modern chemistry, which gives this name to those bodies that mechanical, chemical or energetic action can no longer break down or sunder into specific composing bodies.

Recent atomistic theories have nevertheless come to cloud this conception since they conclude that the composition of all things reduces itself, in the final analysis, to three energetic aspects, which, roughly speaking, one can call negative (or passive), positive (or active), and neutral. Without doubt the specified form of these chemical bodies exists but instead of calling them elements it would be better to designate them as "simple molecular bodies of chemistry." In effect, they are not really elementary since they are energetically composed.

The alchemists say more correctly that everything is originally formed of three principles: one active (sulphur) the other passive (mercury) and the third neutral (salt). Although one does not have to have read or studied in order to say it, it is curious to note that their doctrine occurred long before the recent scientific conclusions. And yet it affirms them, for these three principles are not tangible in and of themselves; they are the principles which are virtual in all things and which everything must necessarily contain in order to exist.

These principles define the four sole qualities which are able to form any thing, and these are summarized in the qualities hot and dry which take after the active state (sulphur), cold and humid which take after the passive state (mercury), while the intermediary qualities hot-humid and cold-dry are *mélanges* of the partial qualities of the extremes, and in a certain fashion take after the neutral state (salt). Now, the combination of these four qualities gives rise to the various aspects of comprehensible or tangible things, having their reflection but not their true image in the four states of matter which we call solid, liquid, gaseous and radiant, but which the alchemists call earth, water, air and fire.

Their affirmation that hot, cold and moist fires exist demonstrates well enough that the element earth, for example, does not signify a momentary solid state at all.

Rather, their elements distinguish *absolute states* and, practically, their earth can just as well appear liquid all the while remaining earth by its predominant quality of coldness and dryness. They go so far as to say, for example, that a ferment which curdles milk, because the ferment is hot and dry, desiccates the moisture or humidity of the liquid by coagulating it into that which will then be cold and dry, and it is the nature of the ferment that has the power to do this. Now this hot and dry ferment can be a pure, solid or liquid fire—it doesn't matter—for it will coagulate the metallic mercury into gold, and this will be the specified [form of the] Philosopher's Stone and must respond to the following conditions: it must be a ferment able to dry the humidity (or to coagulate it) and it must be of the specific nature of gold, just as an acorn will only give rise to an oak and not a pine.

To put this in terms of our modern conceptions, if in the metallic mercury one could introduce a proton (i.e. ferment) that is able to group the number of specific ions of gold, one could coagulate the mercury into gold. This reasoning is correct and proves that the alchemical argument is unassailable in theory since all nature demonstrates that there is no generation or growth without this ferment which "coagulates into its specified nature" a given nutritive element. And one calls this ferment a seed.<sup>930</sup>

Strengthening their reasoning, they conclude as follows: this ferment, which will include all the elementary qualities—hot and dry, cold and humid—will be the Universal Ferment or pure Philosopher's Stone, therefore a pure salt, specifiable as a ferment, into all that one could want, therefore a Universal Medicine.

This here is a synthetic or integral conception, radically opposed to the modern scientific mentality which is analytic and only analytic. This is the point where alchemy distinguishes and separates itself from the current rational science, for, when all is said and done, the more one advances, the more one recognizes that these arguments are correct. Alchemy is a philosophical science that leads from philosophy to experiment and experience, and in this respect is in opposition to our experimental science, which leads from experiment to hypotheses, which it then seeks to generalize. We are in truth empirical, whereas the alchemists, as they themselves profess, are philosophers.

Is this pretention of alchemical philosophy to realise such a universal ferment a utopia? All one can say is that it is not an absurdity, for the reasoning holds. From here to the practice, however, there is a world. But let us follow these philosophers on their path.

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930 The concept of seed (*semence*) in alchemy is explored by Schwaller in many places, but in particular, attention should be drawn to the two essays contained in *Notes et Propos inédits*: «La semence» (vol. 1, 37-46), and «Semence et forme» (vol. 2, 81-7). The relevance that this concept has in explaining the "seeds of metals" in alchemy, as for instance in the *Twelve Keys* of Basil Valentine, should not be lost. Indeed, it is to a large extent dependent on these traditional hermetic precepts.

As long as everything is composed of three principles and four elements, these qualities can be modified and equally interchanged, therefore one thing can in the end be transmuted into another and, to begin with, can be evolved from an imperfect quality into a more perfect one.

But let us look more closely at what is meant by perfection and imperfection: following the philosophers of all times, including Pythagoras and Plato, perfection is equilibrium and perfect harmony between all the composing elements. In the metallic kingdom (which is the most primitive of all, and therefore, by necessity,<sup>931</sup> the seat of the others) the alchemists say that gold is the most perfect of bodies because nothing is able to destroy it and time cannot change it. This is quite true. The ultimate test of cupellation only lets gold or silver survive, which is why the two are called noble, but only gold is perfect in time and after the action of the ordinary elements.

Evolution from imperfection to perfection consists, then, in placing all of the qualities in equilibrium such that no one predominates over the other. This pertains to corporeal perfection, i.e. arrested under a specified form. The perfection which pertains to the universal state, i.e. which is not specified in an arrested form, will be the Philosopher's Stone, and this same perfection in the human state will, for Christians or Rosicrucians, be Christ. As in the planetary system, it resides in the sun.

This is why the goal of the Philosophers, as with the mystical or moral alchemists, is perfection. The lust for gold attributed to these seekers is patently false, as any reading of their texts will clearly demonstrate. Gold for them is but a symbol; it is a demonstration of their doctrine, not a goal. It is essential to clarify this point because this erroneous opinion is the principle cause for their philosophy being misunderstood. If one eliminates this prejudice, the reasoning of the alchemists concerning the constitution of matter and the possibility of modifying it (which in the end is the aim of atomic theory and science) are singularly just and correct.

In order to pass from theory to practice, one comes up against a language which is more enigmatic and more "shocking" to the scientific spirit. To begin with, the alchemists say that the power to create is not given to man, that he must seek and provide himself with a fundamental given of nature, as universal as possible, and that it is from here that he must begin. This primitive datum is thus, formally, also the most imperfect. It would of course be in vain to undertake work on that which is already perfect. Therefore he must eliminate gold; they are very clear in this explication.

What they understand by "create" is this: from *nothing*, to be able to create the three principles and four elements. They claim that there is something in nature which has these given [requirements] and yet which is absolutely unspecified. This again must be true, for what else would nature nourish herself upon? At a given moment,

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931 *qui en ont besoin.*

which can exist only for the mineral,<sup>932</sup> it is absolutely necessary for something to be the primitive substance in which the first or premiere form specifies itself.

In our day, when our science says that origin is energy and yet cannot say what this is, they are no longer as explicit as the philosophers were. We therefore have no right to accuse them pejoratively of mysticism, or of being mere amateurs of the mysteries. They are equally more clear than us since they say that from this primitive substance one can make a humid or cold water (also called “radically humid”) which is a universal solvent (*dissolvant universel*) in the sense that it can reduce all metals to their open state, that is to say, the “mine”, releasing by this solution (*solution*) their component mercury, sulphur and salt.

But of course, to realize this there must be a matter that bears or carries this abstract substance, serving as a vessel, so to speak, a womb<sup>933</sup> in which it can take primitive form. Once realised or formed, the *materia prima*<sup>934</sup> (also called second) that served as an intermediary, can be dispensed with.<sup>935</sup> Now isolated, this new, primitively formed matter, having in it all the elementary qualities of the first state, becomes the *prima materia*.<sup>936</sup> Thus do they play on words. And this passage from abstraction to the *prima materia* is what they designate the “labours of Hercules,” making allusion thereby to the different phases of this work described allegorically in the myth of Hercules.<sup>937</sup>

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932 *ne fût-ce que pour le mineral.*

933 *estomac*, literally ‘stomach’.

934 *matière première.*

935 The COSMOPOLITE (Alexandre Sethon) remarks: “What is sought is not so much the first matter but the second which is, of course, that from which [the first] has been conceived, and which cannot be changed into another form.” *Novum Lumen chymicum* (Coloniæ, M.DC.X) 16: “Non prima, sed secunda tantum quærat materia, talis nimirum, quæ simul ac concepta est, in altam mutari formam non potest”; CANSÉLIET, *L'alchimie expliquée sur ses textes classiques* (Société nouvelle des éditions Pauvert, 1972), 137: “Que soit autant recherché, non pas la première matière, mais la seconde qui est telle, assurément, dès qu'elle a été conçue et ne peut être changée en une autre forme.”

936 *première matière.*

937 The labours of Heracles are twelve in number and in their original forms must be reconstructed from a wealth of diverse classical sources; (Pseudo-)APOLLODORUS, *Bibliothèque* 2.5.1-2.5.12, gives the traditional order as follows: (i) slay the Nemean Lion; (ii) slay the Lernaean Hydra; (iii) capture the golden hind of Artemis; (iv) capture the Erymanthian Boar; (v) clean the Augean stables in a single day; (vi) slay the Stymphalian Birds; (vii) capture the Cretan Bull; (viii) steal the Mares of Diomedes; (ix) obtain the Girdle of the Amazon Queen; (x) obtain the Cattle of the Monster Geryon; (xi) steal the Apples of the Hesperides; (xii) capture Cerberus. Traditionally the tasks required to achieve apotheosis, the labours were given specific hermetic significance in the Western alchemical canon. Blaise de VIGENÈRE in his *Philostrate* remarks: “If we want to apply this fantasy or poetic fiction to natural philosophy, we have already said in the preceding portrayal that Hercules is none other than the Sun, which by its heat and its rays, acting as arrows, exterminates

This realisation therefore recapitulates the entirety of genesis in the sense that, by an artifice, one can pass from the universal abstract substance or energy (the Gospel says: *logos*)<sup>938</sup> to its first concrete formation, giving a sort of paradisiacal earth in which, in its most primitive state, the original living thing realises itself. Now we begin to touch on the cosmic laws which, necessarily in this case, must manifest themselves experimentally (if it is given to man to follow this becoming like a chemist does in his flask). It is for this reason that the alchemists call their work the grandest *Oeuvre*, specifying this by a precise locution—the “greatest Work,”<sup>939</sup> by which they mean: the Universe.<sup>940</sup>

This is where the alchemists attach themselves to the ancient and universal doctrine of numbers, such as, for example, Pythagoras had brought back from Egypt. Genesis was the Work of the becoming of form from “formlessness”; it is an invariable and constant function. The phases are exactly known and follow a rhythm which is the revelation of the law of harmony, just as the musical scale constructs itself, in the end, following the harmonics evoked by any note. This would suggest that, as soon as the original, unique source enters into activity, the phases, times and movements construct themselves following an invariable law.

In basing themselves on this reasoning, which, the philosophers maintain, is above all an affirmation resulting from genuine knowledge, the question then imposes itself of knowing why *everything* does not realise perfection; why, to tell the truth, is such an immense variety of imperfection left to subsist in the world. The metals which are not

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the Hydra with all of its reborn heads, that is, the cold, the quality proper to water, of which this serpent is born and whose name it bears” (*Poème philosophic de la vérité de la physique minérale*, MATTON, ed., v. 1600, 99); an alchemical description of all the labours is given in NUYSEMENT, reproduced in “Hercules in Alchemy” (Yves BONNEFOY and Wendy DONIGER, eds., *Roman and European Mythologies*, 221-3); Michael MAIER (see Hereward); Pierre Jean FABRE’s *Hercules piochymichus* was summarised in PERNETY’s influential dictionary; the labours are mentioned repeatedly in CYLIANI’s *Hermès Devoilée*, a text which Schwaller mentions in specific connection to the stained glass oeuvre that he undertook with Jean Julien Champagne (Fulcanelli) over a twenty year period; “Fulcanelli” himself mentions the labours briefly in the *Cathédrales* text as “notre preparation” (131-2).

938 French *Verbe* is the standard translation of Greek *logos* (John 1). Schwaller refers to this highly significant theological passage in a number of contexts. The equation of the Word or *logos* with Christ, said to pre-exist creation (*genesis*), has direct alchemical ramifications and in fact the intellectual history of the *tria prima* itself is almost invariably bound up with the Christian trinitarian conception. Certainly this was the case with PARACELUS and DORN, and all others followed suit.

939 *la plus grande Oeuvre*.

940 The idea that the universe is the greatest work coheres precisely with the theurgical conception of participation in the creative demiurgy of the cosmos. This is why Schwaller’s alchemy is deeply coherent with its proposed Graeco-Egyptian origins, as any examination of the dynamics of theurgical cosmology and praxis will demonstrate. Cf. Shaw’s excellent study: *Theurgy and the Soul*.

gold or silver are imperfect and the perfection of gold and silver only improves the weak part among metals alone [and not among the other kingdoms?]<sup>941</sup>The response to this question is simple, perhaps a little too simple: it is the cessations and accidental impurities that constitute the imperfect varieties.

Are the cessations in becoming and the existence of impurities possible from origin? To this one responds: the impurities and the cause of cessations are immanent in the first manifestation of abstract substance; the metaphysical or “virtual” explanation is as follows: the unique or creative cause which we cannot name and which we designate by the number one—inseverable<sup>942</sup> therefore incomprehensible—does not have any logical reason to cease its absolute state, which is why it must be regarded as the universal will: all powerful on the one hand, and infinitely merciful on the other. We ourselves are issued from this source. Without its will, we would not *be*. Therefore we could not know our creator, that which is nevertheless the supreme reward of all effort (consciousness).

Under this ethical and mystical form is expressed the creative function itself; this bases itself on the consciousness that the inseverable, indivisible unity is irrational and therefore it includes in its nature the *Necessity*<sup>943</sup> to split or sunder itself in order to know itself, a process which gives birth to the number two—not the symbol of this number, but the notion of dualism. The religions of all times have never been anything other than theogonic philosophies, the revelation of the laws of genesis, along with and their mystical application, showing to human consciousness the way to follow in order to rediscover the lost unity.

Thus, while the alchemical philosophers were unique in their principles and goals, their religious expressions have been varied, some basing themselves on unity, as in Egypt, others having duality as a foundation, as for example among the Sumerians. The reasoning and the morality resulting from this fact are variable and adapted to the premise, but the general way is not modified because of this. Christianity, for its part, is based upon the trinity, leaving it up to esotericism to speak of the passage from unity to trinity. It therefore sidesteps the critical moment of duality, which is of a purely sexual nature; I would say that the sexuality throughout nature is the manifestation of duality, imposed from the origin of all things.

Perfect but abstract unity manifests itself by duality; the Other (as Plato would say) is necessarily and above all of the same nature and of [equally opposed tendencies]. If unity is good, the second principle of duality is evil, but of the nature of unity. The *Emerald Tablet* puts it thus:

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That which is above is like that which is below and

941 *Les métaux qui ne sont pas or ou argent sont imparfaits et la perfection or et argent ne représente qu'une faible partie seulement parmi les métaux.*

942 *insécable*, 'what cannot be cut or divided'.

943 *la Nécessité*, capitalised and italicised in the original text; cf. the work of the same name reproduced in ISHA SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Aor, sa vie, son oeuvre*.

That which is below is of the nature of that which is above,  
in order to create the miracle of one thing.<sup>944</sup>

For my part, I find this explication grandiose; so simple and yet so complete. The miracles cited here are the world with its infinite variety and the perfection expected and hoped for since origin. The Christian would say that Christ has been within his Father for all time, i.e. has preexisted as Christ in the virtual state before incarnating himself. He is the *hope* of Christ manifested.

Opposed to the original Unity, yet issued from it, is that which will create light (that which is manifested), and this is will be “Lucifer,”<sup>945</sup> but he will only create this light through his combat against unity, and under this form he will be known among the Egyptians as the terrible *Seth*, who became “Sathan” among the Hebrews; the alchemists call this corporeal sulphur, the enemy which opposes and at the same time will create perfection. Is it for this reason that popular thought believes that Satan smells like sulphur?

A good many truths carry themselves by locutions transmitted among the people. It is perhaps Goethe who, in his *Faust*, best transcribed this notion of reversal by making Mephisto say: “I am that force which always wants evil, yet always does good.”<sup>946</sup>

Thus, from origin, the cause of imperfection, therefore of possible arrests or cessations [in the process of becoming] is given, and all the preparatory “Work” of the alchemist consists in eliminating this “evil,” this impurity which opposes itself to the final and *conscious* reunion of separated elements. Religion seeks nothing less. In the ethical domain, Sathan, his pomp and his works, is the enemy to be vanquished. In Egyptian terms, this corresponds to the struggle of *Horus* against his brother, *Seth*.

Throughout all of nature, this duality has a sexual character, i.e., gender, separating in order to reunite for procreation and the continuation of the species. This continuity by means of procreation is, in the mystical sense, evil, and yet to lovers and

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944 *Tabula Smaragdina*: “Quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius, et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius.” Chiefly known in the West via a Latin translation of an Arabic original (*Kitab Sirr al-Asrar = Secretum Secretorum*, c. 1140), in which it is attributed to Apollonius of Tyana. In 1923, E. J. Holmyard discovered an abridged form of the *Tabula* in the Jabirian corpus, and shortly afterwards, another was found by Julius Ruska (*Kitab Ustuqus al-Uss al-Thani; Kitab Sirr al-Khaliqa wa San'at al-Tabi'a*); HOLMYARD, “The Emerald Table,” *Nature*, no. 2814, vol. 112 (October 6, 1923): 525-6; *Alchemy* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1957), 99; Holmyard states that the oldest known form of the Emerald Tablet was probably translated from Syriac as early as the fourth century, and may be based on a now-lost Greek original.

945 Lucifer: literally ‘bearer of light’ (from *lux* ‘light’ + *fer*, ‘to carry’).

946 GOETHE, *Faust, erster Teil* (Vor dem Tor, Studienzimmer I): “Ein Teil von jener Kraft,/ Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.” (A part of that power that always desires evil, yet always shapes/creates the good.)

to bourgeois society it is not displeasing at all. But there is a deeper lesson here that is more difficult to comprehend, and for the alchemists it is among the most mysterious of all.

Borrowing the myth of Adam from the Mosaic *Genesis*, they maintain that Adam did not need to fall. That is, he did not need to oppose himself with his wife, Eve. He could have remained in his divine state. Words placed in the very mouth of “God” say: “chase them away so that they do not eat of the tree in the middle and thereby become one of us.”<sup>947</sup> But evidently there would not have been any procreation and therefore no specification would have been possible. However the mystical ideal is the attainment of a state wherein sexuality ceases, where the “divided souls” effectively reunite and are no longer engaged in coitus, which is merely a simulacrum of Union.

Moreover, the alchemists say that the ultimate goal of their Work is to attain the ability to “multiply” (or procreate) their universal ferment beyond ordinary multiplication (which is merely “regeneration” and not an infinite multiplication). The alchemical multiplication no longer knows death; it is able to assimilate the spiritual nourishment directly.

Therefore, the original separation instantiates itself by a conflict that separates the high from the low, manifesting as extension (*genesis*), thus specifying an active and a passive. That which takes an active or combative character is the sulphur or seed, and is male. The other part is the passive, feminine matrix, she who rises as the other descends and he who descends carries within him, as they say, the nature immanent to duality, the opposition; therefore, he alone still carries the double nature: the light which has been carried away<sup>948</sup> (parented with unity) and the corporeality of its manifestation. This fallen light “imprisoned” in Lucifer is the third principle, visible but intangible, like the Spirit which permeates the Father and the Christic Son. The body which imprisons this light is the salt of the alchemists; this light is their true, pure sulphur, while the high and passive element is their mercury, but only by their art have they succeeded in separating the light from the body, that which cannot manifest itself, in view of its abstract nature, other than by their mercury, which becomes the carrier (fecundated virgin).

All their work consists in preparing this mercury in order that it may have the power to effect this separation, because *Seth*, or Lucifer, guards firmly imprisoned his divine memory, without which he is but a body without power, save for the ability to give corporeality to things. This is the story of the hide of Seth and the hide of the Lion in the legend of Hercules.

This trinity having been realised, all the elements necessary for a new, pure creature are then formed. At the same time this is evidence for the existence of a triple nature in the creative unity that is virtually, *in potentia*, triune. Certain theologies speak of this fact by the affirmation of the one unique cause having three natures and

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<sup>947</sup> *Genesis* 3:22-3.

<sup>948</sup> *Lumière emportée* can mean both light that is ‘carried or taken away’ or light that is ‘agitated, violent’.



calling them God or creator, and this is correct because no effective creation is possible without these three principles, as we have affirmed, and this renders comprehensible this cause which, without its unity, escapes us completely, a state which certain religions designate either as “Sat”, “That which Is,” or better, the “Ineffable.”<sup>949</sup>

There is therefore no creation without separation, and separation is the function which presides over all. In the same manner, the alchemical art is the art of provoking this separation, or more precisely, of knowing how to separate the “pure from the impure,” which is why the German alchemists refer to alchemy as a *Scheide Kunst*, i.e. the “art of separating.”<sup>950</sup> This is the mystical *oeuvre*, for it is the natural work of the life in all things, including man, to separate the pure from the impure, to make [them] ascend and descend to the point where all antagonisms cease and the profound consciousness of the soul emerges, i.e. the union of complements and opposites. But this cannot be achieved without death, i.e. the destruction of opposed things, the cessation of their *form*; for form is born from opposition and, by virtue of having form, creates opposition. And so the alchemists say: never mix things together in their corporeal form, for only their dissolved seeds—the watery state—can be mixed together as thoroughly as water with water. Whence the following aphorism: everything in its origin is water, a primordial water, the primal ocean of the world. And from this they conclude that the abstract, universal substance is a water without

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949 Theologically, the *via negativa*. In the West, the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius describes the essential nature of divinity as *apophatic* (*apo* + *phainon*, ‘away from appearances’); this sentiment may be traced, via the Graeco-Egyptian theurgy of Iamblichus, as far back as the ancient Egyptian theology of Amun, the hypercosmic divinity whose name literally means ‘the hidden one’. In the East, we may refer to the Buddha’s famous rejection of all attempts to reduce enlightenment consciousness to graspable things: (*neti-neti*: ‘not this, not that’); equally, we may trace the sentiment back to earlier, Indian sources, most notably the Upanishads in general, and the *Taittiriya Upanishad* in particular, where underpinning the concept of *sat* ‘being-existence’, we meet the ineffable concept of *asat*, ‘non-being, non-existence’. Here, AUROBINDO’s comments may be deemed pertinent: ‘The unknowable, if it is at all, may be a supreme state of Sachchidananda beyond our highest conceptions of existence, consciousness and bliss; that is what was evidently meant by the Asat, the Non-Existent or the Taittiriya Upanishad, which alone was in the beginning and out of which the existent was born, and possibly too it may be the inmost sense of the Nirvana of the Buddha: for the dissolution of our present state by Nirvana may be a reaching of some highest state beyond all notion of experience of self even, an ineffable release from our sense of existence. Or it may be the Upanishad’s absolute and unconditioned bliss which is beyond understanding, because it surpasses all that we can conceive of or describe as consciousness and existence’. (*The Wisdom of the Upanishads*, Wilmot, WI: Lotus Light, 1988, 121).

950 *Scheiden*, ‘to separate, divide’; also: ‘to dissolve, divorce; to decide, discriminate; to depart’; in Chemistry: ‘to separate, extract’. The noun *Scheide* means ‘sheath, scabbard’, and in vulgar usage, ‘vagina’. There is perhaps a sense here in which, beyond the overt meanings, the alchemical *Diva Matrix* is covertly indicated.

form, and the proof of this lies in the “Work” by which the abstract water becomes, in the first place, a concrete water, which is nothing but a condensation of the primordial water. Elsewhere, the Mosaic *Genesis* speaks of origin in terms of the separation of the waters. Our philosophers conclude, furthermore, that since it is water it is passive; it is a cosmic, virginal femininity that nevertheless carries within itself its proper spiritual seed, for everything comes from it. There is thus an identity between the notion of a cosmic fecundated virgin (*parthenogenesis*), the *logos* of the Gospel of John, and also—curiously—with the notion which our scientists have of pure energy.

Regarded thus, alchemy presents itself as a synthesis of science and religion: at once practical, experimental and philosophical; a metaphysics which *formally* realises its speculation. I still maintain here that the alchemists are not solely philosophers and that their claim to know how to put their philosophy into practice is proven. This is evidently a hypothesis, but it is nevertheless just as acceptable as Einstein’s famous affirmation of a relative universe. In regards to this, one could object that if ever a man had practically possessed this scientific knowledge, thanks to his power (on the economy, they say) he would have modified the world. I would respond: would we even know whether the world had undergone modifications brought about by men who have no concern at all to make themselves known?

One of the most disconcerting stories is that of Christopher Columbus who discovered—not America, no, but one of the small islands of the “West Indies,” with ships loaded with gold—so one says or would have believe, and this is a turning point in the history of our occident. There are many obscure dates in history that would become clear if one would admit the hypothetical reality of the alchemical science. For ancient Egypt, this would render comprehensible the profusion of gold, positively treated as a material without rarity. But none of this matters; what interests us here is the doctrine. This has a completely different sense if one considers the possible practice, or better, if one satisfies oneself with the speculative affirmation.

By the effect in which One becomes two and three (in the sense indicated), this is admissible and, moreover, imposes itself upon our understanding. But this One will be a reality proven by a controlled experimental series; thus you see what gives to the doctrine of numbers an inestimable value. Further still, this would confirm the religious affirmation, which, instead of being a superstitious expression as the socialists say, will, on the contrary, form such a basis for science and ethics that, this time, it would dramatically transform the world. Current socialist theories have no value if they eliminate the knowledge element and replace it with a materialistic science. If this is proven false, then everything is lost, including in the first case the entire mechanism of political economy. What follows is the problem of the *raison d’être* of man who is no longer only an individual citizen of a collective, but an entity who has a proper life, independent of collective laws, in the realisation of his personal purpose. This would replace in the first case the mystical problem of the social individual and the spiritual hierarchy that would necessarily influence the leveling social order at the present time because the collective good annuls the interest carried by personal good.

Alchemy affirms a hierarchy by qualitative selection and addresses itself to an elite that must concern itself with the well being of the masses. With its claim to the “Great Work” it places everything that can humanly tempt man on earth in the realm of vanities to be avoided and, instead of proposing to the philosopher-adept a pleasing material life, they incite him to look higher and to neglect the lower satisfactions. These admonitions are not there for the moral council of beneficent pastors; they are consequences which logically impose themselves by the same psychology: man is only tempted because he does not possess what the philosopher-adept, following alchemy, already has: absolutely everything that he could possibly desire—health, wealth, and light.

The eternal lament—to have both experience and youth—is nonsense, since youth (and the memories connected to it) is only youth because it lives the illusions which experience reduces to inconsistent mirages. Experience is able to see man from beyond this world, where the joys of youth seem puerile, as for instance, when a beautiful woman passes; experience will say: full of ruses!

But let us return to our principal point, in which the philosophers admonish: from One make two, from two, three, from three, two, and again (anew), from two, One. As to this final One, how does it distinguish itself from the primordial One? Our answer: by *consciousness*. The final One is, in its nature, identical to the original abstract One, but it has tangible form. Only then does this form tend to fade into the primordial One, which it has not ceased to be, carrying with it the acquired knowledge of manifestation, the consciousness of itself, and therefore complete power.

This is the problem that Christic revelation deals with, and which Saint Paul placed in parallel to the constant sacrifice of Melchizedek.<sup>951</sup> It is the constant Work in the world, for Christ is the ultimate philosophical Stone, having complete power, but not remaining on earth (in form). Thus Christ is the principle of the Philosopher’s Stone, the principle of which the material form reduces to the specified transmutational power, which alone remains on earth, and this constitutes the Stone on which the church is constructed according to the Evangelium.<sup>952</sup> It is through genuine knowledge of this esoteric, mystical problem that the alchemists call their Work, or matter, man—*Ecce homo*.<sup>953</sup>

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951 The Epistle to the Hebrews, in which Christ’s sacrifice is compared to Melchizedek’s (5:1-10:18), is sometimes attributed to Paul; Melchizedek is already a mysterious figure in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4); he is said to be a priest but is distinct from the lineage of Aaron; he is notable for offering the sacrifice of bread and wine (as opposed to a blood sacrifice), and thereby prefigures and is later linked to the sacrifice of Christ; Christ is thus considered a priest ‘of the order of Melchizedek’ because he offers, like Melchizedek, a bloodless sacrament (assimilated to the flesh and blood of Christ through the mystery of transubstantiation).

952 Ephesians 2:20: ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone’. (NIV)

953 John 19:5 (Vulgate): ‘behold the man!’

After the work of preparation, which may be likened to *hors-d'oeuvres*,<sup>954</sup> the philosophers pass to the generation of the Stone itself, i.e. to the coagulation of their primordial solution, which contains all, into a fixed and indestructible substance: male seed and female milieu, united in one thing which can no longer be separated, in which everything is equilibrated, becoming thereby the principle of justice, and known as the permanent water which will pass through all the natural phases of genesis in order to attain the indestructible fixity, white at first, but in the end, red. These colours are at once real and symbolic. The lunar-white becomes the substance that takes form, and the solar-red is the fire that gives form (without itself having form).

In the beginning, before the work (*hors d'oeuvre*)—the “red” and “white” are the components: the *bread* and the *wine*; at the end they are the “crowns of complete glory and perfection” on earth. The entire mystery of genesis, the entirety of the Work, thus gravitates around the sacrifice of the two aspects of the eternal and unique One. It is to be considered a sacrifice because nothing obliges the unique cause to descend towards form, as has already been said, for if the power is revealed to man to find, seize and reunite the two faces of the unique, as Siegfried reforges the broken sword of the Nibelungs, then this forms the highest initiation which is able to be attained by an

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954 *Hors d'oeuvre*, literally: ‘outside of the work’; in a meal, the ‘starters’ that precede the main course; by analogy, the initial phases leading to the Work proper.

incarnated being.<sup>955</sup> As such, the labour of the Work becomes the sacerdotal act *par excellence*.

The alchemists tell us that genesis, or effectively the 'Great Work', distinguishes itself in three great phases, while others divide them into four, thereby placing it in relation to the seasons. There are the Black phases of wintery destruction, the White phases of spring-like resurrection, the distinct Yellow phases of summery flourishing, and the Red phases of full autumnal maturity. One is tempted to believe that this fourfold division is ideally conformed to a natural philosophy, since all natural cycles divide themselves into four quarters (as for example the lunar cycle), and this finds its symbolism in the cross.

The alchemical philosophers affirm that all nature, in its genesis, undergoes phases like the grain that germinates (its black phase), the germ that pushes (its white phase), the flower which matures the seed (its yellow phase), and the fruit or accomplished seed (its red phase).

The development of this philosophy is complex because it tends to express the time of the phases, the principle of time, and their duration, under a synthetic form (which, they maintain, is conformed to practice). More generally it is the genesis of man, himself the microcosmic synthesis and image of the macrocosm, which serves as

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955 Schwaller was particularly taken with the transpositions between Germanic and Hermetic symbolique. In the sword of Siegfried he sees no less than the essence of the alchemical opus: the uniting of the dualities which form, in the first instance, the two aspects present at the inauguration of the Work, and in the final instance, the same two aspects raised to their apogee in the culmination of the Work. The perennial nature of these *symboliques* would still inspire him in his last years, as VANDENBROECK recounts: "After a few months of our sojourn, he invited us to a performance of Wagner's Ring by the Bayreuth Company to be given at the Nice opera house over three evenings. This rare social occasion was memorable, not least for the scenario Aor had devised, which translated Wagner's libretto into Pharaonic terms, and which we discussed on days preceding the performance. The vision also remains of his tall, straight figure, in full evening regalia, standing, or rather looming, over the fashionable crowd" (*Al-Kemi*, 46). Given these connections, the following lines from Wagner's libretto gain in significance: 'Notung! Notung! Neidliches Schwert! Jetzt haftest du wieder im Heft./ Warst du entzwei, ich zwang dich zu ganz./ Kein Schlag soll nun dich mehr zerschlagen./ Dem sterbenden Vater zersprang der Stahl./ Der lebende Sohn schuf ihn neu:/ nun lacht ihm sein heller Schein,/ seine Schärfe schneidet ihm hart.// Notung! Notung! Neidliches Schwert! Zum Leben weckt' ich dich wieder./ Tot lagst du in Trümmern dort,/ Jetzt leuchtest du trotzig und hehr./ Zeige den Schächern nun deinen Schein! Schlage den Falschen, fälle den Schelm! Schau, Mime, du Schmied:/ So schneidet Siegfrieds Schwert!' (Notung! Notung! Craven sword! Fixed again, firm in haft./ Split in two, I drew you whole;/ No strike shall ever shatter you again./ For the dying father your steel was broken,/ By living son, fashioned fresh:/ For him your brilliance shines abright, Your sharpness slices, keenly pressed.// Notung! Notung! Craven sword! Woken up to life anew./ Once you'd lain there, dead in pieces./ Now you flash sublime, defying./ Let the offenders feel your fire!/ Smite the false, fell the wicked! See, o smith, o Mime:/ Thus strikes Siegfried's blade!)

a basis for these definitions. We discover these numbers elsewhere throughout all the initiatic texts.

The death or destruction in the forty days of the deluge are the same forty days of the Black of the Work and the forty days of the conjunction of seeds in the human matrix, beyond which, according to Roman Catholic theology, abortion is criminal. It is equally at four months that the foetus has its first movement, life proper—four times four weeks, or sixteen days, or two phases of the lunar cycle—accomplishing in the Work the White phase that corresponds, following the language of the texts, to the full moon which already begins to wane. After this, for three months—the summer or Yellow of the Work—the flower is born; the plant is finished in and of itself, but is still incapable of reproducing itself. These are the seven months after which the foetus is viable but not accomplished; they are also the twenty-eight days (or sixteen, plus three times four) of a lunar cycle. Two months are still required for the foetus to be perfect (absolute coagulation) so that, by analogy, the plant carries the seed of its species. And if winter begins at Christmas, the mature fruit is perfect by the end of September, the nine months of the genesis of man. And then the preparatory cycle in nature recommences. The Egyptians situated the beginning of their season of Winter (*pert*) towards this period, and the Roman Church places their “Advent” or beginning of their ecclesiastic year, between this time and Christmas.

This is a succinct expose, and although quite rough, it results from the study of alchemical texts; it is only traced here in order to present an ensemble of the doctrine. But these times and cycles are much more precise than a short study can reveal. There is a truly disconcerting concordance for those who want to study these questions impartially.

One could say that the nine months mentioned here no longer correspond to the four lunar phases and the four seasons, since there is a disproportion between the time of duration and the regularity of the lunar and seasonal phases. This is correct, but this does not bother the alchemists, who respond that although there is an analogy between the phases and an analogy between the times, there is not an identity of durations.

Thus the preparation of philosophical mercury or, to be consistent with their language, the mercury of the philosophers (one being of art and the other of nature)—the mercury that I have spoken of above as the solvent (*dissolvent*) of the Philosophers—requires seven and nine repetitions in its preparation. It is said that, beginning with the third and the fourth, it can dissolve and “open” the metals copper, lead and tin; from the fifth to the seventh it can open silver; and from the seventh to the ninth, it opens gold.

The Egyptians say that the number of *Thoth* or Mercury, in the sense of the alchemists (and not the Greeks), is eight,<sup>956</sup> that is to say: “eight” is accomplished in its

956 Cf. the roots of the Greek Ogdoad in the Egyptian Hermopolitan theology, in which the Ogdoad is essentially an elaboration of the eight-fold personification of the Egyptian primordial waters: the inert potential which precedes and underpins creation, and out of

perfection, but among these [numbers], nine is the number of revelation. The number seven, furthermore, is for the alchemists the number that situates all transformations. Here, therefore, every single cycle incorporates the number seven such that each lunar phase, for example, comprises in and of itself seven days in round figures. Only an adept, that is to say an alchemist having “done the Work,” could tell us what the true relationships between these numbers and times really are.

The phases, as we have already seen, in their functions, are the invariable aspects of all genesis, departing from the creation of the seed (its species, according to the Mosaic genesis), but also the Universal Seed, according to the philosophers.

There is, first of all, the destruction of the form of the seeds (death and digestion); next, re-coagulation and whitening (germ; separation into chyle); after this, ripening (flourishing; fermentation of the white globules); and finally, maturity (fruit; reddening of the white globules). I place these parallels here because they are real and allow us to follow the thought of the alchemists more easily.

The Brahmins, likewise, divide the grand cycle of time into four Kalpas; Pythagoras gives us his Tetractys, formed of four numbers, of which nine surround a mysterious one. But the number four also evokes the four elements; the alchemists say further that the Work is the realization of the four elements, Black being Water; White, Earth; Yellow, Air; and Red, Fire, because the phases effectuate in an exact sense the absolute quality of the elements.

We now cast our gaze upon the general idea of the Work. This here, however, is only one of its phases, for in realising this labour (*travail*), the alchemists say that one has only obtained the Red and White seeds but has not yet truly attained “the Stone.” He must now begin everything again in order to augment the power of the seeds. Only then will they be perfect and susceptible to regeneration, each in its own way: the White for Silver, the Red for Gold. Then comes the third labour of which I have already sufficiently spoken in regard to the mystical aspect of the problem.

The whole Work therefore comprises three times four phases, or three times the four elements; in that case, “It” is three times grand, or Trismegistes. But the four phases are the terminal aspects and provide the general classification. The philosophers say that these here are the principal colours and that there are others—variations or gradations—between them. From black to white there is the “tail of the peacock,” and grey; from white to red there is green and then orange-yellow. This is the passage of the “planets” which gravitate around the secret Sun or Stone of the Work.

Mercury is the original water, black is lead, grey is tin, true white is silver, green is copper, orange is iron and red is gold; these are synonyms of Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter, Moon, Venus, Mars and Sun, respectively. They therefore class the planets or metals into two groups: the lunar (lead and tin), and the solar (copper and iron), mercury

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which creation arises. The word Ogdoad is a direct translation of the Egyptian expression *hmnyw*, ‘group of eight’, while Hermopolis (Egyptian *hmnw*, ‘eight-town’) is named after the eight divinities of pre-creation; via its Coptic form, *hmoun* (*shmoun*), the word survives down to its modern Arabic name: al-Ashmunein (Akhmim).

being of a double nature. This has given place to the medieval symbolism: ☉, ♀, ♂ and ♄, ♃, ♁, along with the double ♀ that our astronomy has preserved for its notations.<sup>957</sup> These seven “colours” present the seven factors of the Work through the four (or three times four) phases or elements. Thus, like the zodiac, the labour (*travail*) is composed of four elements distributed in twelve signs, and the ruling houses of the seven planets (following the language of astrology).

For the other “seasons” of the Work, there is said to be a philosophical year that will be its true duration. Others say that they achieve the Work in seven days or a week, making allusion to the passage of the seven globes of the planetary system. One sees by this that their language is “philosophical,” that is to say it constitutes a “kabbalah”; one must know how to hear and understand it, not just take it by the letter.

Transposing these considerations into the physical domain, the philosophers say that the mine of silver is never mixed or confounded with the mine of gold. One cannot find them together in the same mine; they are two diverse lineages (although silver can be evolved into Gold, being a fixed and very pure Mercury).

The metals, properly understood, are considered to be composed of the three principles: sulphur, mercury and salt, and, by means of their mercurial solvent,<sup>958</sup> the alchemists claim to be able to “open” them with ease, thus proving the reality of this affirmation. Upon this basis, they propose the “specific works”<sup>959</sup> (*oeuvres particuliers*) or simply the “particulars,” seeking in the “common” metals the principles of the Great Work.<sup>960</sup>

The Arab alchemists more specifically have left some tracts demonstrating the “composition” of the metals, according to which Venus or copper is seen to be very rich in red tincture—Mars or iron—rich in fixed salt, and, for example, Jupiter or tin

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957 In *Notes et Propos* II, 224, the text has the symbols for Sun, Venus and Mars, then the crescent of the Moon. It then has two crescent signs with small crosses attached (which, I suspect, may just be a misreading of the similarly formed signs for Saturn and Jupiter). Finally, the sign for Mercury is reproduced with a point in the middle. I make mention of these points here, and suggest recourse to the original hand-written notes for clarification. For purposes of the present translation, however, I have simply followed the logic of the text and reproduced the planetary signs as listed in the preceding clause; this order, moreover, appears to make the best sense of the symbols and the text taken together as a whole. Taken as such, Schwaller’s associations here reveal a simple but profound insight: that the solar signs are those in which the circle (sun) predominates while the lunar signs are those in which the crescent (moon) predominates. Mercury, being the only sign composed of circle and crescent, partakes of both natures. With the exception of mercury, this classification is further supported by the distinction between the metals that possess a warm lustre (gold, copper, red iron) and those possessing a cool lustre (silver, tin and lead).

958 *dissolvant*

959 *oeuvres particuliers*

960 On the “particular(s),” see Basil VALENTINE, CANSELIET, ed. (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1956), 85.



comprises a pure enough mercury.<sup>961</sup> In “anatomizing” the metals in such a fashion, one can extract, make the most of or benefit from the principles already corporified, and with them achieve a “Stone” or ferment that is able to transmute the metals. What strikes the reader of these texts is the accent that is always placed on the “common” character of the metals; they continually reiterate that the alchemical metal of their Work is not “common” but “quick” or “living.”

All metal from the mine has been melted and by this fact is “dead.” It is usually, therefore, absolutely impossible to transmute. Here an important nuance of their doctrine is stated. It is said: every metal, being composed of the Three Principles is, by its origin, destined to be silver or gold. Due to fortuitous or accidental reasons, the evolution of the metal has been arrested in the mine. In order, therefore, to be able to evolve it to the state of silver or gold, it must be returned to the living state of the mine; that is to say its component or composing mercury must be re-liberated (*redevenu libre*); then the ferment can coagulate it, “curdle” it into the state of gold, a state to which the metal has been destined from the very beginning.

This implies for the ferment the faculty of being able, in a short period, to effectuate the complete evolution for which nature usually takes too long. It is a fact: we see the ferments act in very little time; a chemical reaction can be instantaneous. This phase of the alchemical doctrine therefore poses an identity between the action of a ferment and regeneration. Here I distinguish genesis (generation: from *nothing* to form) from re-generation (evolution departing from a seed). The gestation of a plant or of an animal is not a genesis but a regeneration.<sup>962</sup>

The gestation or evolution of a seed towards its fruit or product is therefore identical to the action of a ferment in its specific milieu. Nothing prevents us from considering things in this manner: the grain in the earth, the sperm in the ovule—both produce their fruit by the fermentation or coagulation of the specific (mercurially appropriate) milieu, i.e. a milieu appropriate to its nature.

In this case, the time or duration only has a symbolic or “numeric” sense, and this can be eliminated in practical considerations, such as actual evolutions. The phases, by contrast, can exist; they are a matter of quality and not of duration. We note further that these are the “qualities” that the alchemists call colours, and not merely those of the apparent aspects.

In effect, the alchemists say that by art they achieve in a short amount of time what nature takes centuries to effect. And yet: so what? Nature can only attain perfection of form; art achieves more than what is perfect because the ferment is more than the thing that produced it; like the Universal Ferment, it is the perfection of all things.

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961 Compare the parallel discussion in FULCANELLI, *Dwellings*, 94: “it is possible to obtain a particular tincture by uniting the mercury with the sulphur of copper through the agency of an iron salt.”

962 The distinction between generation and regeneration equates to that between *genesis* and *palingenesis*.

These considerations throw a light on the nature of the labour (*travail*) such as the alchemists intend and understand it: the seed has within it two natures: masculine and feminine; otherwise it could not nourish itself by acting within a nature similar to itself, by which is meant: the feminine.<sup>963</sup> Therefore, before anything exists, it acts with what is provided in the abstract, natural state to create a “seed” that is the “first work” and the entirety of the great labour. This seed can then be regenerated to act, very suddenly, as a “specified” ferment.

“Specification” imposes itself because the “Stone,” since it is universal, adapts itself to the milieu. When it is taken by man, for instance, it is not taken to transmute him into gold; it is taken to act upon his animal economy according to its organic, animal nature, being specified into man. For the metals they must therefore be specified or “oriented” towards metal. Then, acting upon the metal in the molten state, it suddenly coagulates the mercury of this metal by eliminating all the impure mercuries and sulphurs in the state of scoria (slag) because, they affirm, the ferment can only act upon the mercury and not upon the sulphur. The reason for this is as follows: the Universal Ferment is a very pure sulphur, free from impure corporeality; it cannot therefore act upon sulphur (except that of gold), since it is more pure and perfect than them and because it alone suffices to produce the sought after effect.

Because of the pure nature of the sulphur of their ferment, certain philosophers also call it the perfect and fixed mercury, saying that gold is only a very pure and fixed mercury from which all impure and corporeal sulphur has been removed or excluded.

Iron is a fixed salt with a very impure sulphur; mercury flees it, refuses to form an alliance with it;<sup>964</sup> gold too refuses to ally itself with this symbol of war. Because of these hindering qualities, iron is considered in alchemy with extraordinary attention and regarded as a body rejected by the evolutive economy of the universe. It is thus to be regarded as the final thing that remains when all is destroyed or evolved, which will explain the phenomenon of meteorites of iron—or of metal “alchemically” of the same nature as iron, such as nickel, cobalt, chrome and so forth. Among these one could, in the same sense, class platinum, for example, or vanadium, and equally iridium, which are composed above all of pure or impure salt; durable and hard, to be sure, but in excess, therefore giving rise to “imperfect” and inharmonious bodies.<sup>965</sup>

There will be a relation between these considerations and the curious appellation given to iron by the ancient Egyptians, who designate it the “soul of heaven.” One can easily admit that meteorites suffice to explain this unusual name.<sup>966</sup> However their

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963 *sinon elle ne pourrait pas agir dans une nature semblables à elle—sousentendu: pour la féminine.*

964 *Allier*: ‘to ally’; also: ‘to alloy’.

965 Compare the parallel remarks, again in FULCANELLI, *Dwellings*, 94: ‘The fixed salt provides the warrior Mars a hard, strong, solid and robust body, wherefrom he gets his magnanimity and great courage’.

966 To the Egyptian perception, iron was specifically associated with the metaphysical force of the constellation Ursur Major, known to the Egyptians as the “bull’s thigh” (*khepesh*), a

profound knowledge of metals allows us to wonder, and to attempt to refine the question: witness their bronze, which allows tools which attack granite and porphyry; witness also the dagger of “Tut-ankh-amun,” made of non-oxidizing iron which resembles more a symbol hanging from the same dagger in pure, red gold, found with the mummy, which has a real weapon.<sup>967</sup> Although the question remains unclarified, I must content myself to note the importance accorded by the alchemical philosophers to this metal, so cruelly destructive in the hands of man, as if, fleeing the “mercurial” smoothness, it carries within it the fire of hate and combat—the malefic magic of the famous “Seth.” This could form the subject, on another occasion, of a curious study concerning the correspondence of the metals with their ancient allegories, with particular reference to deities and planets.<sup>968</sup>

Alchemy presents itself as a synthesis of every aspect of the world, life and existence. If it were not considered in this sense,<sup>969</sup> its study would be difficult. It presents a sort of mysterious transmission through time, and the same phrases that often find themselves among the medieval alchemists also emerge in texts recently discovered in Egypt. One sometimes has the impression of an uninterrupted thread reconnecting the most distant past to our own day by a written or oral tradition, and by folk custom.

Perhaps it is only one restless soul that always reincarnates itself anew amidst humanity and which will only find its true solace in a revelation that demonstrates to this soul the true meaning of the inanity of its animal life and the hidden purpose that underpins its imperfection: gold aspires toward its premiere destiny, which a new

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symbol of powerful strength. This constellation was also known as the thigh of Seth (*khepesh en setesh*), a god whose associations with iron run very deep. As a war god and storm god, Seth was said to have bones of iron; the metal itself was believed to be the substance of thunderbolts. As such, iron was not mined: it fell from heaven. It was therefore seen to have a celestial origin, specifically in the form of meteors that fell to earth and were therefore seen as thunderbolts. In the New Kingdom the word *khepesh* came to designate a scimitar. The most prominent role of the *khepesh* is in the ‘ceremony of the opening of the mouth and eyes’, a ritual of revivification in which the *khepesh* (as well as its symbolic extensions: instruments made of iron) was used to animate statues, to bring the dead back to life, and to create gods. In short, the strength of the stars was seen to animate.

967 *qu'à un arme réelle.*

968 SCHWALLER himself later wrote just such a study: ‘Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs’, which appeared posthumously in *Le Miracle Egyptien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), 129-57. This is the text where he lays down the keys to his alchemical *Farbenlehre*, as discussed by VANDENBROECK in *Al-Kemi* (passim). He also draws forth the connections between the Egyptian divinities, the planetary metals (as both cosmic and mineral phenomena), and their counterparts in Graeco-Roman mythology: the war-like Seth, for instance, is intimately bound to iron (as discussed in a preceding footnote), to the planet Mars, and to the gods Ares and Mars.

969 *Ne serait-elle considérée que dans ce sens.*

promise—a ferment of sudden transmutation—will reveal by rejecting the scoria of a thousand atavistic errors and rigid fetters.

Luxor, Christmas, 1941

*Elements of the Cornerstone that was Lacking at Babel*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

«Les Éléments de la Pierre Angulaire qui a manqué à Babel»

*Lettres à un disciple de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz*, 172-187

(facsimile and transcription)

= *Notes et propos inédits* I, 101-6 (retranscription).

Annotated translation: Aaron Cheak

The sole stability, the only immutable point of the world, is God—*divinity*—immanent in everything, omnipresent. His Word or Breath creates, sustains and nourishes all. Without God, there would be neither form nor life. Our error consists in wanting to give to this God and to his Word a sensible character. It is not a question here of a fluid or some other substance which somehow suffuses everything, but—to state it plainly—of pure nothingness: source and finality of all—active and conscious cause.

God does not exist among the stars. The stars, and everything else, come from God. God is light, but not the light that we see, for this is only a reflection of the true light. God is the light which shines in the darkness, the light which our mortal eyes cannot even begin to see. This is not a figure of speech but a fact: do not take these words in any other sense than what I say here.

Each and every form is nothing but a passing instant of an aspect of God, that is, of his light, which is why things only die in their *form* and why every death is the source of new life. The divine light is fixed and immortal because it is eternal, non-born.

In this consists gnosis, that divine science or wisdom which knows how to offer to this light the direct means by which it can take form. It is the seed of all things, because each individual seed is only a part of its intensity. The means or magnet which impels this mystery must afterwards disappear, be eliminated, otherwise one would be concerning oneself with a particular form—which has its proper seed—and not with the divine Word, whose activity is spirit and whose manifestation is soul, in order to create for God, *the* God, a body more fixed and valid than all fixities, since it is the light of God.

This initial manifestation creates itself in the form of Water; it is a non-phlegmatic water which does not wet the hands nor adhere to the water of a similar nature which exists in metals: the first particular form of things in this world.

It is a gelatinous, viscous, visible, tangible water, the subject and object of all divine science. It holds within itself that which is unique—like the spirit of God: three natures which are not, nevertheless, three different things. Just as the signature of God proceeds in everything that he creates, so it is with the Water: this unique thing appears under two forms: one volatile, passive, lunar, aquatic, the other fixed, active, saline and igneous.

That this is indeed the spirit of God and not anything that we know down here is proven because this Water, when submitted to heat, disappears, returning to its state of *hyle*<sup>970</sup> or unformed spirit, and this has nothing in common with anything we know. Everything subjected to the heat of common fire is either reduced, readily burnt into fumes, or evaporated. All the products of combustion can be recaptured or condensed to give anew either the thing itself or its components. But when our Water undergoes the action of common fire, it vanishes without giving rise either to recondensable vapour or to a product of combustion: it no longer exists and cannot be recaptured by any means.

It would be just as vain to attempt to analyse this substance by chemical procedures; it has absolutely no correspondence with anything known. Some traces of the magnetic substance used to originate it can be revealed but they have nothing in common with the true mass of the spiritual substance in question. They are merely its impurities.

This water in its feminine aspect only becomes stable through the *gestative action* of the Fire incarnated in it: the divine light in its male aspect—Fire, Ptah—reduced into solar, spiritual substance, i.e., male, active, fixed. *The sun in the sky is nothing else but this.*

Water is lunar in the same sense that all things are feminine, passive and nourishing to the extent that they have submitted to the action of the divine Fire, which they undergo as a seed does with its own particular Fire. Yet this nourishing, feminine milk can only be produced and manifested by this male, solar Fire, for, like the moon, it is only its reflection.

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970 Greek ὑλη (*hyle*) 'matter'.

All comes from one and creates itself by this one. All explanation is paradoxical and escapes schematic logic. A language which would maintain, for example, that the lunar mother raises the solar son, who is nevertheless the father of this femininity and is therefore older than her, can only be dismissed as nonsensical. But it is not this divine science which is an absurdity; rather it is our attempt to explicate a genuine, experimentally and experientially proven fact.

If one would now give to this feminine Water a terrestrial form, one could, so to say, “dry it into earth,” but this same earth flies away, just like its initial humid form. This would suggest that it is a matter of a Water which is the spirit of God, which, *despitewhatever appearance it may take*, is water in the philosophical sense, i.e., it has the qualities cold-humid, just as its counterpart is hot-dry.<sup>971</sup> These are the *two spirits* which will create the stable and immortal Salt when it regains its perfect equilibrium: hot-dry with cold-humid. This is the Word of God, as God alone can be in his Perfection; for nothing is stable except that which has eliminated in itself all contradictions, all discordances, and has unified all polarities—*that* is God.

Once again I say: this is not something limited to human conjecture; it is a matter of actual, not speculative, qualities. In effect, nothing can fix this divine Water into stability but its innate Fire.

This Fire, properly understood, is not the heat which we experience with our senses. It is the *mystery of the world*. It is the greatest force which exists for this Fire burns absolutely everything that has form—not with a flame but in reality. Witness gold, which is the most stable body in the world. It melts at 1250°. It volatilizes into violet vapour towards 2000°. One can push it to the arc of around 2500°—the greatest heat that we know—the vapours will always recondense themselves into metallic gold. One can dissolve the gold in regal Water, and the chloride<sup>972</sup> which results from it will return to the state of gold by heat. Nothing can burn it, nothing can make it cease to be metal, save for “our” fixed Water. In the short time it takes to place gold leaf in it, the Water “eats” it. Do not believe that this is a matter of simple dissolution. You would seek in vain to recover this metallic gold. It is now open, and with the aid of the feminine Water, one is able extract the Mercury from it with ease, leaving the other

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971 The text has hot-humid, but this is an error; the succeeding sentence picks up the correct terminology, and we have modified the translation here accordingly.

972 The handwriting in the facsimile of the letter is here slightly ambiguous (*Lettres a un disciple*, 179); the transliteration on the facing page renders the word as *Mercur* (Mercury), whereas in *Notes et propos inédits*, it has been rendered as *chlorure* (chloride). Graphological considerations, i.e. the comparison of the other, clearer instances of *Mercur* in this same letter with the passage in question, would indeed seem to favour *chlorure*. This, moreover, is consistent with the alchemical process being described (chloride of gold). See Hereward TILTON, “Of Ether and Colloidal Gold: On the Creation of a Philosopher’s Stone,” *Esoterica* IX (2007): 49-128.

aspects: its Sulphur and Salt. The metallic gold is philosophically burnt and reduced to its *mystic components* and this burning renders it black as the carbon of burnt wood.<sup>973</sup>

Place some diamond, rubies, silica, it doesn't matter what; they will be burnt to blackness and you will be able to extract its Mercury (i.e. its feminine or passive Water), its Sulphur (i.e. its tincture and *Seed*), and its Salt, (i.e. its Form) by the *reaction* of the Sulphur-Seed upon its Mercurial matrix, its water or nourishing milk.

I have spoken to you of the division of spiritual unity into two aspects, one feminine, the other masculine. I must specify, however, that when this unity divides itself into two, one of them remains double, carrying with it the soul-aspect which creates the link between the general spirit—the divine body which manifests itself in one of the two, known elsewhere as the *fall of the angel*.

This soul is no other thing than the divine light that animates everything, but by itself it equates to the *third person* (Horus)<sup>974</sup> of the mystic ternary unity, which never takes form but gives form, every thing resulting from the idea, from the abstract, spiritual form. This light is the Sulphur, the colour, the generative Fire. What may seem strange is how it is possible to speak of these abstractions, all the while affirming that it is not a matter here of speculation. But it is certain, i.e. experimentally and experientially proven, that in effect this light appears in metallic form and is of a red-purple colour. By itself it is intangible, but it becomes visible when one of the two other aspects carry and sustain it. This surpasses all reason and imagination, for this Fire has no form itself, and only a coloured appearance, unable to be isolated by itself and it is *this* and *this* alone which creates the world, the entire cosmos with all its suns, all its stars, and everything they carry.

All our science, all our power, is arrested when we know [how] to place this atom of light in its pure milieu, delivered from all the impurity which our initial work might have left remaining in this precious and sacred matter. Now this fire, nourished by its maternal milk, fixes this milk and *gestates* the universal seed that is truly the redeemer of all things.

This then gives the most fixed form in the world, since it is the divine breath, pure and alone, which *forms* the universal spirit with total elimination of all impurity, i.e. of every specified thing.

Now, look at the aspects of the most fixed thing in the world. At first sight it has the aspect of an earth that is white or red: an amorphous earth. Then it takes a crystallised aspect, or more precisely, vitreous; it melts in fire without smoking or burning, for fire can no longer do anything against it. The third aspect is liquid, oily, the sacred oil of the kings, the luminous oil—against which common fire can no longer do anything. The fourth aspect—and it is for this that I am giving you these

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973 If we compare the description of the manuscript purportedly found by Fulcanelli, which Schwaller describes almost emphatically as being written in *bistre* (an ink made from the carbon of burnt wood), the reference here must be seen to indicate a deeper, specifically alchemical meaning.

974 Here «Horus» is written in the left margin.



explanations—is an oil or Water so fluid that the least amount of fire makes it return to its origin. Now, what is it that distinguishes its diverse *forms*? Uniquely, it is the *intensity*, and intensity is no other thing than time.<sup>975</sup>

In God, all time ceases. When the Stone—the most fixed thing in the world—has exalted the divine Fire in this Stone to such a degree that it surmounts the form, it thereby approaches, more and more, its primitive, divine state. The more it acquires formal consciousness and becomes pure again—for this is its intensity—all time ceases for it. In an instant, it fixes, burns, transmutes, *erasing all the steps*—all *time*—and thus all the phases of gestation; because in God nothing is sundered. All is one, without time. This plainly shows that only time is visible, tangible and knowable according to our sciences. And time is nothing but the intensities of the divine *logos* in the forms of this universe.

At the end of the celebration of this mystery, the Godhead returns to itself with consciousness of the form of the entire universe, having thrown the spiritual balsam to every thing that has taken the trouble to approach it. This is the divine lesson and the divine Gift, and this is the meaning of the sacred books and gestures that men have rallied around for all time. Few have uncovered the veils and broken the seals.

This thing that is the origin of all things contains in itself all aspects and for this reason is called, in its natural, primitive state, Chaos. This, however, is false. For within Chaos, the idea, the structure (*ka*) of each and every thing is clearly ordained. When it appears in the Work, it invariably shows four qualities under two forms, composed of three Principles—the conductors. Its goal is the fifth state/being, all in one, the conscious God. Those who would truly apprehend this language would be able to read all the books of nature. This alone will make all confusion cease.

A.  
February 1944

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975 This remark bears profound resonance with the work of German *Kulturphilosoph*, Jean GEBSER, for whom intensity and time mark the *forms* of consciousness.

*The Purpose of Life and the Problem of Knowledge*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

La Doctrine: trois conférences faites à Suhalia Noël 1926.  
Edition privé (St. Moritz: Officina Montalia, 1927), 59 ff.  
Annotated translation: Aaron Cheak.

We have ended here on the idea of Chaos, the *final substance formed*. And I have said that from this is made the *first substance of evolution*, and we have also seen that it can only enter into evolution by the subtraction of the impure elements contained in this chaos.

Understand well. Nothing is impure in and of itself, but everything can be impure in relation to a grouping, that is to say, the constraining part in a harmony is impure for it.

How does this purification come to pass, and what is its significance?

In chaos or the final number all things and all numbers are contained. This chaos has become what it is by *the logic of causal functions*. It therefore has within it the functional force of origin, that which wants to say that the same reasons which have given birth to it were in it, go also *in it* to make it act in a purifying manner.

Up until this moment we have dealt with the abstract powers, now we must deal with the matter which, so to say, *incarnates* these powers. These powers are *bound or linked* in the form, for which form is a numeric or harmonic complex of numbers. Chaos, giving the number Ten (*mettons le nombre Dix*), has in it all the numbers that are in ten. The number Ten is composed of one times ten, followed by five times two, and so forth, a series of possibilities of which each represents a *possible* grouping, in other words, *one possible form* after the purification of chaos. Now, whatever the original number, of which the *dekad* or fourth element constitutes the final number or chaos, its function remains that of *unity* in relation to *ten*.

Now here we are about to enter upon a question which is quite abstract, and so we will depart from the number ten in order, through experience, to come back to it. In studying various phenomena, I have arrived at some observations which are always confirmed: it is that they are always formed of seven factors. Thus light has seven colours, the musical scale seven tones, and the spectrum of vibrations has seven groups

in which one finds, among other things, heat, light and so on, groups which are as distinct from each other—from electrical oscillations to x-rays—as the individual colours are. As a consequence, and after analysis, I have found that *every phenomenon is composed of seven factors*. And in breaking down these seven factors, I have found still more! For the new comers I wish to give the example which has become classic among the ancients:

The shock of a stick on this table gives a sound. In analysing this phenomenon, I find the following:

- I.
  - a. the stick in movement;
  - b. the collision of the stick against the resistance of the table;
  - c. the vibration of this stick on the table;
- II. There is:
  - a. the vibration of the shocked body;
  - b. the air which receives this vibration;
  - c. the vibration transmitted by this air in a determined ray;
- III. Following this there is:
  - a. the atmospheric vibration;
  - b. the eardrum, the resistance of my ear;
  - c. the vibration transmitted by the membrane;

Analysing this phenomenon superficially, we come to distinguish these simple functions into three neat groups, which, linked together, produce the effect we come to perceive as sound. Each group has three functions, making nine in total. Looking more closely, we observe that the third function *c* in the first grouping *I* confounds itself with the first function *a* in the second group *II*, as, likewise, function *c* under group *II* confounds itself with *a* under *III*. Seven terms thus remain, which I call the *factors of phenomena*. Thus, this phenomenon is made, as are others, of seven factors of which study has revealed to me the existence of nine functions to determine a phenomenon, in this case sound. One can very easily push this analysis further and find, for example, that the vibration in such phenomena is itself septuple in function, and so it continues; one would finally arrive at forty-nine factors, seven of which are principle, each having seven sub-factors. *All phenomena are so constituted*, it is an absolute law of matter, the law of the *genesis of things*. It is thus that God created heaven and earth and all that is living in seven days with the power of nine celestial hierarchies.

Many things emerge from these observations, all things come from this law of genesis. We proceed to observe the principle facts.

First and foremost we see once again that the existence of an ordinary cause—which in becoming is power in itself, but in matter is always *matter in activity*—finds a resistance which is of the same nature. Here the stick is active because it is moving,

and its resistance is a *matter* (the table), which is moving less, and by this fact is *in resistance*. Thus, what I say here in principle is confirmed in fact:

1. The resistance is immanent to the nature of the activity of the cause.
2. From this there is an active cause, there is also a phenomenon, since this active cause will necessarily find its resistance.

There follows yet another thing: that the phenomenon properly speaking is the direct link, the direct logical function between the active cause and the effect which results from the resistance to this cause. The phenomenon is therefore the measure or consciousness, or, in our explanation, the knowledge of the thing in itself: the *I* or *ego*. *The resistance is the «lesser» activity within the causal activity, therefore it measures this activity*, and the measure is the phenomenon. I ask you always to consider these things with me in their universal sense, for this will avoid error and the wasting of time. In effect, that the phenomenon must be universal or particular is secondary; *the function* remains the same, hence the principle of cause and effect, and finally: *if one phenomenon is ego, all phenomena are ego and the totality of all phenomena is ego*, therefore there is no principal difference between chaos and the original cause, since one departs from the other by necessity.

We have covered quite a lot of ground! Let us now return to our *dekad*. It is a triangular number which cannot be composed other than as follows:

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      I
     I I
    I I I
   I I I I
  
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Now, as such, this triangle is made of nine unities which surround a central unity, the *second* number of the *third* number. In mysticism, one would say Christ; they are the nine functions of our phenomenon One. If we transcribe them into the schema of genesis, we will see that, *practically*, these nine functions give seven factors.

Note how with the triangle too this is demonstrable, but this forms part of the study of numbers, the science of measures, and not part of the present instruction.

If we now place a well-known phenomenon, in which the seven factors are tangible, next to this schema and these seven factors, we come to apprehend something more admirable still:

C	V	R						
1	3	2						
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VC	V	R						
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VC	V	R						
7	9	8						

C = CAUSE                      V = VIBRATION                      R = RESISTANCE

We are going to take as the most striking image of this the spectrum of light with its colours: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet; and if we class them in the order of factors we will have:

1 red, 2 yellow, 3 and 4 orange, 5 blue, 6 and 7 green, 9 indigo and 8 violet . This is the order of becoming, whereas the order of appearance will be known by the phenomenon: 1 red, 2 orange, 3 yellow, 4 green, 5 blue, 6 indigo and 7 violet.

In the spectrum of colours we can distinguish:

1. the simple or elementary colours;
2. the mixed colours; and further
3. the complementary pairs of colours

Thus red, yellow and blue are simples, orange, green and violet are mixed, while red-green, orange-blue and yellow-violet are complementary pairs.

It would seem that I have forgotten indigo, but I have not; everything will be explained in turn. See now how these characters correspond to the scheme of genesis. First of all the simples: 1 red, 2 yellow, 5 blue; and then the mixed: 3-4 orange, 6-7 green, 8 violet.

Now violet, corresponding to the third resistance, must be situated there by logic, and yet finds itself at a place where there is no mixture; likewise indigo finds itself at a place where there must be a mixture.

Now, observe this: Violet is only *comprehensible* for us as a mixture of red and blue, but this mixture has never given violet, one has never been able to attain anything but a red more or less purple, or a blue more or less red. In the psychology of colours, one speaks of warm red and cold blue and these two extremes have never been able to, and indeed cannot, give anything other than a neutral colour tending towards cold or heat, whereas violet is frankly neutral. From this the situation of violet follows and becomes understandable, which, figuring in the apparent mixtures, *is in fact not a mixture*, no more than *the extreme resistance in the phenomena of the world can be any*

*other thing than the negation of all activity, composed of everything, and at the same time unique in itself.* Hence violet: dark light, cold colour, extremity of the spectrum, negation of colours, affirmation of all.

And now look at indigo. It is situated at a place where, apparently, one would expect a mixture, *a continuity of function*. Now, this is the instant where the membrane transmits the sound to the ear. Without doubt the phenomenon continues, but upon completely different bases to the transmission of exterior sound. There is something else that begins which has nothing in common with what we call sound. The auditory nerve enters into play with all the mechanics of the ear. In the same way, indigo plays an equally bizarre role in colour. It is neither blue nor violet, yet nevertheless seems to depart from blue. In effect, blue is really *light-blue*, and *nothing can render it sombre*, neither mixture nor weakening of light, and hence indigo, although it seems to partake of the nature of blue, is not blue but something else: a *sombre-blue*, the continuation or consequence of which escapes us directly. This is also the case in the complementaries, where indigo was paired with orange and we replace it with blue in appearance. We now pass to the complementaries:

Red-green would be 1 and 6-7 (complex); Orange-indigo or blue would be 3-4 (complex) and 9; Yellow-violet would be 2 and 8 (incomprehensibly complex, final resistance or dark light). Thus the first Cause (red) has its complement in the second effect (third cause); the first resistance (yellow) has its complement in the third and final resistance; the first effect (orange) has its complement in the final (third) effect. *Thus, in the functions, each third or final term of the same genus in a cohesive Ego is complimentary to the first.*

One is thus complementary to three. If you would now recall the teaching from yesterday,<sup>976</sup> you will remember that the cause One becomes the realisation by its proper negation, and thus determines [both] One and Two, [which] will be Three, like the first number of manifestation, of thing—the Divine cause manifested. If, at this moment, I would say to you: an irreducible is complementary to the trinity of the manifested cause, you would not believe or understand. Now you will admit that, since complimentary wants to say: *that which unites*, mutually negates itself, completes itself until the cessation of being, like red and green, etc; then *the cause and its manifestation complement themselves until the negation of the one and the other, until the affirmation of the (first) principle, such as white light is for colours*. I say therefore: from the moment that there is something, that something is active and finds in itself its resistance in its lesser activity: from the instant where this produces itself, the phenomenon appears which has a ninefold function and a septuple appearance of factors and these seven factors complement themselves from one to three to the point of a new and definitive negation of factors, in order to affirm an initial (*principielle*)

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976 The material translated here is derived from the second of three conferences held at Suhalia over the Christmas of 1926.

totality which is [comparable to] the Ego, [i.e.] the apparent, momentary Me of an Ego to the total Me.

This is the principle from which all the applications depart, in the numbers contained in the Chaos, [and] this Chaos plays the role of a primordial, complex unity, which, thus, by successive complementation, purifies itself in order to give [rise to] the total being or cosmic Ego. The phases of this purification are, for the general families, the kingdoms, and for the species and so forth, the groups of numbers.

And there you have it: just now I have responded to the problem left in suspense since yesterday: the problem of evolution. *Evolution is necessary, immanent in the original principle which determines becoming. It determines the Ego of the elements which become the Ego of the Organs, which proceed to give the Ego its organics [des organiques], or intelligence.*

Since we know now that there is materia prima [*matière première*] in Chaos, and that there is evolution, [let us see] how it generates itself:

Before everything, therefore, Chaos divides itself. Thus everything which is not homogenous, always, abandoned to itself, divides itself. It divides itself into two states, of which one is affirmative in relation to the other, which is negative. It doesn't matter what this affirmation is, as long as in its totality it is affirmative or is of the form of the absolute cause. Affirmation of the form is also the will of the continuation of the form; this affirmation is therefore, for the creature, its heaven, its ideal, its supreme desire. The two divided states thus constitute between themselves the ultimate and extreme complements, of which one is unity and the other trinity. What results is what the ancients [would] call the four elements. During the separation from Chaos, *one of the parts forms one element*—the spirit of God as in Genesis, since One is also the cause of all, the irreducible absolute—; *the other part forms three elements*, the waters of Genesis, which contain air, water and earth; these symbols are taken in their absolute signification as fluid, aqueous and solid principles. And yet they are still contained in the part which is Three. Now, we know that this part designated Three is *Unity realised*, the *number of form*, the material cause of things, just as One is the spiritual, eternal or absolute cause. In relation to One, Three is heavy (or rather, we designate as 'heavy' that state which possesses a tendency opposed to the nature of One). We *could* call One 'heavy' and Three 'weightless', and this would be the same thing, but then out mentality would be entirely different to that which it is: *perhaps in place of the word 'reasonable' we could say 'mystical'*. For it must remain logical within itself, and if we agree to call Three heavy, then everything which follows from it has weight. This is matter. What is the meaning of weight? Us, concerning ourselves with a word a little too far. So, Three, which is heavy, is below, and One, which is weightless, is above: thus separation manifests itself. Now this One above is the cause. Its greater desire is to find its complement, that which is more heavy, below. But its compliment is separated and linked to two other numbers. Therefore the desire for complementation of One, separated from Chaos, goes to tender to seek the complements provisionally responding, more or less, to its call, least of all [moins d'abord], more ensues [plus

ensuite], until the total of that which best complements itself to its nature, and which, still separated, is below. [Veuillez], I bid that you accept this imaged explanation of evolution, such as I give it to you. I refrain from giving defined, hence restrictive, names to the terms of this explanation, but I certify to you that one can indeed apply it no matter what the nomenclature, *if* one is logical in the following denominations; it is the exact phenomenon, absolutely true of evolution. To return to this complementation of One with all the heavy parts surrounding it, it creates itself, and thus always produces anew the triple unities which are *heavy* and proceed downward, joining themselves to the already separated heavy totality. This is how *quantity* creates itself, by the mere addition of parts of the same nature. This continues until all of Chaos is exhausted, therefore until the moment where there is no longer anything between One and Three, that is to say that the total mass of Three fulfils all the Chaos and that One enters into contact with the product of its separation. Thus *One* seeks in *Three* the pure term of its complement. I mean that among One, Two and Three constitute the heavy weights of separation, the absolute *One* proceeds to separate, for its complementation, the number Three, such as the red light proceeds to seek the green light, *to provoke it*, until in complete purity it responds to the desire of its nature. Now, I have called Three the ensemble of three elements separated from the One, and among these three elements the number Three corresponds to earth, the number Two to water and the number One to air, such that the absolute One corresponds to fire. This fire is inexhaustible for it doesn't represent any weight-bearing quantity.

I = Eternal Cause = [Fire]

I = [Air]

I I = [Water]

I I I = [Earth]

Next fire proceeds to conjoin itself to Three and forms *igneous earth by separating itself from the water*. This is what one calls desiccation, corresponding to the separation of the waters from the dry earth in *Genesis*. The number Two or water rejects, in a formal fashion, this complementation with One, or fire, and this must now seem completely natural to you if you recall that it corresponds in the spectrum to the colour yellow. Yellow is not complimentary to red because two is the *splitting of One*, or *One face to face with itself*, i.e. red face to face with itself. This is because yellow is the brightest colour, because in mysticism the number Two corresponds to Christ, because water is the contrary or *incarnated* aspect of fire, and this fire cannot at any moment link itself to water. But the fire is now linked to earth, One to Three; it has *taken body* in earth *by animating it*.



*The Philosophy of the Third*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

La Philosophie du « Troisième »  
*Notes et propos inédits I*, 97-100.  
Trans. Aaron Cheak.

In the final analysis everything reduces itself, in its original definition, into three terms.

Theology expresses this by images or symbols but lets the mystery of the ternary Unity subsist because it is in fact impossible to give a concrete notion to this Trinity. The relationship of Father-Mother and child, or Father-Spirit-Son is false in its image, for it indicates a product and not a relation (*rapport*).

Only the mathematical expression approaches the abstract sense by the notion of Relation (*Rapport*). But here still, one must say that the relation defines *a quality* and not a concrete quantity.

Take for example the axis of a sphere that turns regularly around itself: poles and axes are abstract and yet they are nevertheless concrete data with direct physical effects. The poles are the locations that are not displaced in relation to a given point in space: this is concrete. These poles define the axis, ideally represented through the totality of identical polar points from the periphery to the centre. They are infinite, therefore incomprehensible, and together they are supposed to be like a rigid and somehow material bar.

The axis is completely abstract, representing the principle element of this rotation, the support of the system. The sphere turns around the axis, or so reason tells us. Analysis shows us that there are two poles which define the axis. In other words: the third term of an original Trinity is an abstract relation between two known terms and it belongs as much to one as it does to the other.

Father and Son are the known terms that are esteemed in the Christian triad, while Spirit is the abstract relation between them, belonging as much to the Father as to the Son and vice versa. To express it differently: two quantitative data of the same nature create between them a relation that is a *quality*. The quality is abstract, yet nevertheless comprehensible. In the series of colours, one could say: the composed colour is qualitative, [representing] a relation between two simple colours, non-existent by themselves.

The examples given here are simplified. One could analyse them further but the principle remains the same: the qualitative phenomenon is abstract, produced by two concrete elements. Now it is by the qualitative phenomenon that we perceive the world and *know* it (*le connaissons*) ; by contrast, we *comprehend* it (*le comprenons*) only through a comparison of concrete data.

[When] something appears *large* to us, we experience and *know it (connaissons le)* as such. At the same time, we seek to *comprehend (comprendre) this grandeur*, then we compare in order to measure, that is, to know (*savoir*). In this example resides the entire explanation for the difference between the two types of knowledge—*Connaître* and *Savoir*—to know (*connaitre*) and to comprehend (*comprendre*).

Nature addresses itself to us by its Quality and we can know (*connaitre*) it by not letting ourselves be seduced by the need to comprehend (*comprendre*). The animal and the naïve child are closer to this nature than the cerebrally educated human. They only let themselves be impressed by the Quality.

Energy is pure Quality, the relation between two concrete poles. Life is pure Energy, the relation between two concrete poles. It would be vain to want to give a name and a concrete definition to that which, *in itself*, is the definition of the two concrete data. The phenomenon ceases, necessarily, when one of the poles ceases to be. This alone allows [one] to *comprehend* the nature of the triad. The two poles, the known data, are therefore united together (*solidaire entre eux*) by the qualitative phenomenon and *not otherwise*.

The colours Yellow and Blue can exist each for themselves (being themselves the result of another relation), but the colour green ceases to be if the colour Blue is eliminated. Similarly, the colour Blue is not united or related to the colour Yellow other than by Green. This is the secret to the link between components, but I insist on the fact that the Quality or Phenomenon, the genuine link, is abstract. It is in effect possible to isolate this qualitative phenomenon and to give it concrete existence by itself. In this case it becomes itself the pole and complement of another concrete pole, giving birth to a new phenomenon.

Example: the colour Green becomes the complement of the colour Red and the Qualitative Phenomenon which results is, in this case, Black or White:

[Sun] being emitted light, will be white.

[Moon] being composed or reflected colour, will be black.

Departing from the inverse, we say:

White Light gives (or contains) Red and Green: two absolute complementaries, of which one is simple and the other composed. The double [i.e. composed] colour, here Green, is itself a sort of *inferior* white light, reversed, and results from the relation of Yellow and Blue, two opposites, [but] no longer absolute complements. We cannot go too far, the play of qualities is created by departing from this moment through Comparison and not through the pure Quality. In effect, we are made such that all pure quality is unsupportable for us and we measure it immediately into quantity: “big” becomes more or less big, “Red” becomes more or less red, etc. Thus our possibility of Knowing (*Connaître*), that is, our intelligence of Quality, ceases *with the second relation*: the first of the “Thirds” is Quality or pure Energy, the second of the

“Thirds” is Quality or composed Force. Only the first of the “Thirds” is completely incomprehensible by itself, the second is a sort of image of the first, an incarnation.

In the vital phenomenon, both triads are always at play but only the second triad is sensible for us: it presents this characteristic by Relation, the Quality or Force is of a *double nature*, such that in the first triad, the Relation, the Quality, the Energy, is *simple*, but one of the poles is double. If we want therefore to go from low to high, we must first, from two simple poles seek the *Relation which is double*, and then, from this new data, establish the complimentary pole in order to know the definitive relation that is, for it, simple.

Likewise, *conversely*, it is necessary to depart from a simple by drawing the poles, *of which one is necessarily double*. From this the poles, which are simple, become reestablished. And this is the complete history of Genesis.

*Harmony, Analogies, Functions and Factors*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

‘Harmonie, Analogies, Fonctions et Facteurs’ (Extracts).  
*Le Miracle Égyptien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1963), 129-57.  
Trans. Aaron Cheak

In this way the principal triangle, as we already know it, corresponds to the principles of *seed* (father), *nutritive substance* (matrix or spirit), and *resultant form* (son). By choosing their images in the first reign of creation—the mineral kingdom—the Sages, the Ancients, have adopted the following symbols: for the seed, Sulphur, for the matrix or substance, Mercury, and for the fruit, the definitive form: Salt. In effect, metallic Mercury finds itself violently coagulated by sulphur, and the product (known in chemistry as mercuric sulphide or cinnabar), is a salt. Now salt is always a final and relatively fixed product.

For this reason and for others more complex, very perfectly comprised in this image, the Ancients have thus adopted this symbolism. They say: the *Three Principles* of all things are *Sulphur, Mercury* and *Salt*. Now there is Fire and Air in Sulphur. There is Air and Water in Mercury, and Water and Earth in Salt. Therefore the Three Principles play the role of three states, each double, formed by the nature of two of the four elements, and inversely, the Four Elements are nothing but these natures separated; there is therefore:

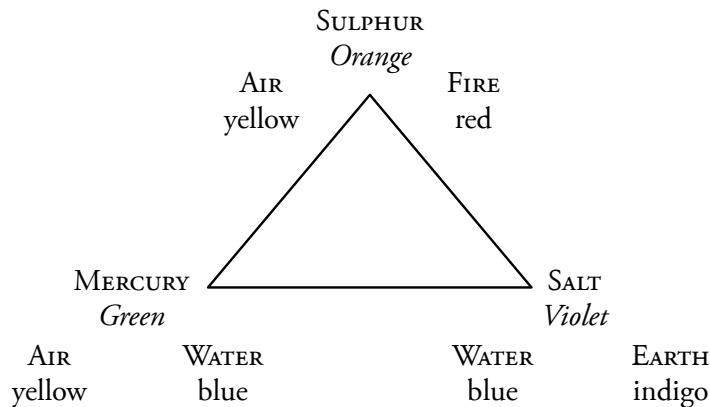
Principles:	SULPHUR	MERCURY	SALT	
Elements:	FIRE	AIR	WATER	EARTH

The general consequences will be: there is in every phenomenon seven qualitative, compound states, three of which are double, formed every time by two simples. [...]

When white light is broken by a *triangular* prism (for only a triangle can reduce a phenomenon once more into its constituents), then we obtain seven colours: *Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet*, among which we find four fundamental colours and not three as one ordinarily believes: there is *Red, Yellow, Blue* and *Indigo*. For *Indigo* does not result from any melange, and *Blue*, no matter how intense, does not ever give rise to *Indigo*, which is a sombre and luminous blue [pure blue is light, cerulean blue, i.e. sky blue]

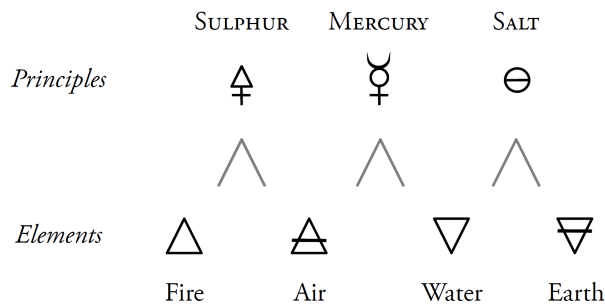
Now as we see, these “four element-colours” must arise from the original triangle which as an ensemble is Light, but as each of the Three Principles gives birth to two colours. Our first triangle is therefore necessarily formed by three double (i.e.

composed) colours, which are: *Red* and *Yellow* = *Orange*, then *Yellow* and *Blue* = *Green*, and finally *Indigo* and *Red* = *Violet*, corresponding to the Three Principles of the colours; now, maintaining the disposition adopted here around the triangle, we find:



Here an error occurs, for *Blue* and *Indigo* do not give *Violet*: something mysterious intervenes, for in fact it is *Blue* that rejoins itself, like an end, to the beginning. Effectively it is the *Fire of the Earth* that must link itself to *Water* in order to make *Salt*. Thus there is a sequential regularity in the numbers but an irregularity in the qualities.

*Violet* constitutes a junction of the circle between *Indigo* and *Red*. It constitutes an exact liaison just as *Orange* and *Green* form the liaison between the two elements which frame them:



We see that *Blue* and *Indigo* follow each other as if *Indigo* was itself a composed colour. It is effectively a matter of an irregular interval that displaces *Violet*, which is like a call towards the *Red* of its origin. As we will observe when this is placed in relation to sound, an apparently identical irregularity exists in the musical scale and—the planetary system. Recalling now that each element participates in two qualities, and

seeing how, comparatively, the four simple colours behave, while considering that each of them participate in the composed colour which precedes it and also that which follows it:

FIRE—the radiant state—participates in dryness and heat.  
*Red* participates in *Violet* and *Orange*.  
*Heat will be Orange*.

AIR—the volatile state—participates in heat and humidity.  
*Yellow* participates in *Orange* and *Green*.  
*Humidity will be Green*.

WATER—the liquid state—participates in humidity and coldness.  
*Blue* participates in *Green* and *Indigo*.  
*Coldness will be Indigo*.

EARTH—the solid state—participates in coldness and dryness.  
*Indigo* participates in *Blue* and *Violet*.  
Dryness will be *Violet*.

Coldness and *Indigo* show us once again this strange shift: *Indigo* is at the same time coldness and Earth; it participates therefore in the *Element* and the *Quality*.

We see therefore that *Indigo* is at the same time Earth and also the cold quality of this Earth which is cold and dry, a water of which the humidity is dried by fire.

*Notes on Atomism*

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz

«Propos sur l'atomistique»

*Notes et propos inédits* I, 81ff.

Annotated translation: Aaron Cheak

Magnetism is the polar action as electricity is the equatorial action. They are two aspects of one, single, energetic intensity, neither of which exists without the other, anymore than there can be an absence of an axial principle in a rotating body. The vital reason is axial, the mechanical reason, equatorial. One can act mechanically on the latter and not on the former.

[...]

This is the cosmic respiration which we cannot comprehend other than by cutting. Let us “imagine” the increasing volume of the lungs: each cell only has a very weak elastic quantity at its disposal. Its dilation will be very small. That there is [en ait] much, this will not change the possible volume of dilation. The envelope, by contrast—the thorax—could dilate itself enormously by the addition of very small parts which, forming a line, join themselves arithmetically. This is the bark or skin encompassing a cavity implying a division, i.e. of “lines.”

Now this becomes nonsense: due to the increasing volume of the interior mass of cells there will be an action of rupture on the exterior cells. Two possibilities therefore remain: either a spiral-formed transmission from the interior to the exterior of the sphere (assuming everything to be a sphere), making each coil (*spire*) play the role of a linked [continuously unfolding] bark or hide; or we must admit that a part of the cells contract themselves while the others dilate themselves.

In other words, one can pose the problem of the relation of volume to the cubic root, and the latter only increases by a very small fraction, relatively. Now this amplification is a relation of space to movement. And this relation is genesis.

[...]

The propagation of the energetic phenomenon creates the sphere—a reality which the cerebral schema has sought to transcribe in terms of “waves,” thus giving a false notion of this “wave.” A surface separating a more dense milieu from a less dense milieu gives the illusion of waves (*l'ondes*) due to its vagaries (*vagues*). In reality the wave is an electromagnetic, axial-equatorial phenomenon, in the sense that there is a succession of periods more or less “dense” [in] (*du*) the propagating milieu.

We have seen that “density” signifies the “styptic” contracting effect of the seed (*semence*) or nucleus (*noyau*) upon the nourishing milieu. Acting mechanically on the equatorial effect, this is a reaction to the axial effect which contracts or dilates the volume. It is this dilating and contracting alternation upon the milieu which forms the *spheres of propagation* imagined schematically as waves. Even a simple mechanical phenomenon, such as sound or resonance (*sonore*), does not occur without affecting the “Life” of the Matter, i.e. the esoteric relation of intensity to quantity, its genetic function (*fonction genèse*).

Now a spherical surface can neither dilate itself nor contract itself in a radiating sense, as matter can, or as the individual of a species can, i.e. in the arithmetic [enumerative] sense. Therefore the quantitative dilation expresses an *elasticity*, i.e. a certain play between the magnetic or axial action of the molecules; but the lines of force go from the centre to the periphery in the form of a *spiral*—the incomprehensible spherical spiral.

[...]

It is absolutely impossible to modify a volume without acting on the energetic Elements constitutive of this matter. The mechanical enlargement of the volume of the lungs—i.e. breathing—*can only occur by absorbing the energy*, returned partially, but deteriorated, in the moment of *systole*. Is this the same energy, only degraded? The fact of breathing is thus a vital phenomenon, more mechanism than it appears to us to be. In reality there are the two possibilities cited above which play a role in the distribution (*repartition*) of inhaled air: practically, it is a *simultaneity* of dilation and contraction, but in successive spiraling layers.

The dilating coil (*spire*), at its extreme extension, offers two paths: one returns to its point of departure and closes the circle in a continuous curve, the other is a departure towards a greater extension. Inhaled air, by producing the dilation of the first spiral, has already given a part of its nourishing, sustaining (*nourricière*) Energy. That which it can give to the second coil is no longer identical. During this time the first coil closes its cycle and returns deteriorated energy which comes, in part, to aid the mechanical working of the diastole. This last phenomenon can produce itself in the lung but not in the heart because in the heart the effected milieu—the blood—finds itself to have been nourished in the lung by air, so has received a provision of Energy while in the heart the vital phenomenon plays on the blood alone and has another solely analagous function.

Now the spiral phenomenon cannot [must not] be considered in a simple geometric aspect but as a vital exchange, of which the spiral’s trace is merely a *symbol*, playing in every case the role of crossing (*croissance*), and thus of genesis. It is the mechanical key of Life and it always has two aspects: dilation and contraction. When there is fixation in quantity, then it goes from greater volume to greater density, until it reaches energetic disintegration, as in the trunk in plants or the bone in animals.

One has wanted to compare an atomic, energetic system to a solar system. But there are many “solar species” and the image is false, while cutting the trunk of a tree



or a bone gives an image which is really very close to a solar system such as ours. The energetic atoms are also [more] varied than the Species for they depend on the “seed,” or Centre, very differently from one another—because Unity has no variety. But the energetic Atom is no longer Unity since it is “something” [i.e. a particularised thing], and variety, evidently, cannot comprehend, consist of or include (*comprendre*) Unity.

*At Luxor, the Cold War is Declared between Symbolists and Historians*

André Rousseaux

‘A Louksor, la guerre froide est déclarée entre symbolistes et historiens’

*Le Figaro Littéraire*, le samedi 8 avril (1950);

*L’Œuvre au rouge*, 163-7.

Annotated trans. Aaron Cheak.

It is at Cairo, before my departure for upper Egypt, that I hear the rumour: archaeology there is not a serene science; mysterious movements disturb it. With a shrug of the shoulders and an amused wink of the eye, serious people inform me of a mage who officiates through the night in the ruins of Luxor, his eye fixed on the stars, and sacred numbers on his lips. It would have been ironic if their tone was bantering, but it had the effect of placing me on guard against the danger of bewitchment ... On the train that takes me to Luxor, I am filled with curiosity.

A SPIRITUAL SON OF MIŁOSZ

Let us penetrate right to the centre of the mystery: I have seen the mage. He is not a fool, but on the contrary a man of high intellectual tenor (*tenue*). His personality is linked to one of the geniuses of contemporary poetry: the baron Schwaller de Lubicz, uncoverer of the secrets of Luxor, had been the intimate friend of the poet O. -V. de Lubicz-Milosz. He carries the right of knighthood that Milosz gave to him when he died. He has inherited his title, and if we had time, we could converse at length, another night, about the great mystic poet.

But no, the word “mystical” is to be avoided here. It would be a misinterpretation, and would give victory to the opposite camp. One would see anew the epithets “dreamer” and “fantasist”. Now, what I have observed at the leisure of Monsieur and Madame de Lubicz are most serious works: notes of plans, indexed files, a wealth of quotes (*cotes*), covering pages that have been established with meticulous care.

The pavilion where the Lubicz’s reside is not the villa of Mysteries, but a hive of activity. Every morning, a young girl departs to give herself to the temples. This is the daughter of Madame de Lubicz, Mademoiselle Lucy Lamy. [ ... ] Yes, Monsieur de Lubicz works on Numbers, but with an undeniable scientific rigour. However, what is he seeking?

Let us stop for a moment. Proceed with order. We must be serious too. What would be the attraction of the discovery, beginning with traditional archaeology. I have already visited Karnak under the direction of M. Chevrier.

Here, I open a parenthesis. Ideas can clash in the excavation sites of Upper Egypt; they can even cause sparks. We must avoid opposing these people at all costs. They are too admirable—and too accommodating to the traveller. The salon of Madame Chevrier, two hundred meters from the temple of Amun, is, for the Parisians who come through every winter, the most amiable terrain of exchange between the news of France and the introductions to archaeology. Elsewhere, we are received by some true ascetics of the desert, like Clement Robichon, pioneer of the French digs at Karnak, or Alexandre Stoppeläre, *portier* of the Valley of the Kings, whose lunch succeeded in making us forget the challenge of aridity and solitude. Egyptology is not just a science, it is a passion that devours lives and absorbs destinies.

This day, like all others, Monsieur Chevrier had passed an afternoon of six or seven hours on his building site. He is the architect of the digs. For a quarter of a century he has worked on the consolidation and restoration that has made the giant colonnades of Karnak impose their prestigious magnitude upon us (and which has also made us regret that he had used cement between their blocks).

He did not only build, he dug. From the soil, or from the spaces between the pylons, he would extract tonnes of graven blocks, which he aligned in full light for the epigraphers to come and decipher. He came from the long ranks that would expect the future visit of M. Lacau, member of the Institute, dean of traditional archaeology. The masterpiece of Monsieur Chevrier is the reconstitution of a temple of Sesostris I, which another pharaoh, Amenophis III, had demolished.

The fragments were scattered within the third pylon of Karnak. The architect had found them while excavating the pylon, since straightened and assembled. It is now a ravishing little white temple, thoroughly decorated with bas-reliefs and hieroglyphs.

—But why, I had asked, had it been demolished?

I do not believe that the historians attach a large enough significance to this question. Is universal history not made from successive destructions and constructions? In Rome, Christians have built many churches with columns from pagan temples.

The historians of Egypt see the pharaohs more as over-prideful despots who affirm their domination by any means, including the abolition of what has preceded and the construction of magnificent novelties.

The new king, too, will attempt to efface the inscriptions of his predecessor from the monuments that he protects, or more simply, the name of his predecessor, placing his own name in his place, usurping thereby the praises and hymns composed for the former.

At the foot of an obelisk that carries some traces of these scratchings and additions, Monsieur Chevrier has told the story of one of these episodes. It is five

thousand years before our era, a complicated tale of a bastard prince who married the legitimate heiress, only to rule abusively. If one would believe the historians, there would be chapters from Saint-Simon in the hieroglyphs!<sup>977</sup>

Does one have to believe them? At the very least one could bypass a vertiginous path, if we enter into another world, that which the symbolists begin to open for us.

#### THE SYMBOLIST REVELATION

The scholar who is introduced to me is Alexandre Varille. We ought to remember his name: he is one of the shining lights of Egyptology, perhaps equal to Mariette and Champollion. The epithet of amateur that one pits against Monsieur de Lubicz (with whom he works in close liaison), cannot be attributed to him. He is a highly qualified Egyptologist, whose titles are recognised by his peers. He reasons in a rigorously scientific fashion, with an ease and an authority of great spirit. The fire of discovery animates his impressive demonstrations.

The temple of Luxor, covered slowly with him, suddenly revealed its prodigious life to me. Enlightened by symbolism, this is a work which, century after century, has followed the curve of an immense becoming, and whose design has not ceased to unfold according to a mysterious order. The idea of the symbolist scholars is that, in pharaonic civilisation, the temple carries in its lines, its volumes, its sculptures, and its inscriptions, a complete play of correspondences with the rhythms of nature: and not the rhythms vaguely approached by the human senses, but precisely those that have been lost to human understanding. The rhythm of the world is inscribed in the movement of the stars. This is why the symbolists say that the Egyptian temple is the image of heaven, through its connection to the astronomic periods and its placing in harmony placement with the revolution of the stars. It is in constant evolution.

—Then, I say, the destructions and constructions?

—This is the explanation: When a new epoch comes, which the astronomers determine, the ruling king dares to destroy the monuments of his ancestors in order to recreate them more vigorously. He demolishes completely the splendid edifices, but in doing this he does not make a point of error (*point de tort*), for he conserves their essential elements in the foundations of his new constructions.

—Is it mere chance that one rediscovers the pieces of a former temple under the bases of a more recent temple?

—Not at all. The architectural and decorative elements hidden in the foundations have their definite place. They constitute a sort of secret library that the sages place under a temple. *Bien plus*. They are the germ, buried in the earth, of the new temple that will grow from its principles, or the new figures of the living temple, but in

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<sup>977</sup> Claude Henry de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), who influenced a philosophy of history that viewed epochs as ruled either by antagonism or association (i.e. war, egotism and anarchy versus obedience, devotion and association).

correspondence with the former (*anciennes*), will continue to accomplish the phases of a millennial evolution. There is more, you will see.

I am going to see marvels. For I must say that the sculpted blocks, the graven stones, seem to testify in favour of the symbolist revelation. On the obelisks and on the walls, the over-written inscriptions no longer speak of dynastic intrigues, but show some troubling concordances with their superimposed symbols. The whole temple appears as an immense inscription of the abstract in the concrete. Architecture here is the expression of philosophy.

The most striking are without doubt the foundation stones (*pierres de fondations*). How else can one explain the sculpted blocks that have been interred at selected places, notably under the cornerstone (*pierre d'angle*), beneath the new materials, if they are not to play the role of inspiration that makes the temple live before our eyes? The foundation stones seem to proclaim the mysterious philosophical order that presides over the evolution of these buildings in their march through the centuries.

#### STUMBLING BLOCKS

By themselves these stones are, among other things, stumbling blocks (*pierres d'achoppement*). The reader least informed about these things already comprehends them, I imagine.

These stones are, in effect, those that the historians blithely disinter in order to place the inscriptions that they want to decipher in the light of day. To this, the symbolists reply that each stone of the temple has a value, a signification, not only in and of itself, but by the place that it occupies, and by the relations that it has with the rest of the monument. To raise them without first having noted with care all these relationships is, in their eyes, akin to a palaeographer who cuts a phrase from a manuscript with scissors. What do the reconstructions, to which the architects devote themselves, say? They make no sense for the symbolists, since they restore nothing of that which they have destroyed in essence, i.e., this synthetic universe of symbols that only takes into account the signification of pharaonic monuments. Depending on whether one takes the approach of symbolism or of traditional Egyptology, the very orientation of archaeological work is altered through and through.

Without a doubt, this is why the dispute has become more acute over time. We have made a racket this winter about a book by Monsieur de Lubicz, *Le Temple dans l'Homme*, which has the failing, in my opinion, of treating in a fashion too casual (*decousue*) and peremptory, themes that would require magisterial developments. An incomprehensive article has exhausted it (*l'ereinte*) in the Cairo review; following this, it has been strongly remarked that Monsieur Etienne Drioton, general director of Egyptian antiquities, had, from his high authority, protected the author of the article in question. At Cairo, we do not know for sure whether Monsieur Drioton had already taken his position at Paris. It is in the review *Critique* (June 1949), in response to an article by Monsieur Pierre Missac that would signal the discoveries of Alexandre

Varille. “Woolly, indemonstrable theories” (*Theories fumeuses et indémonstrables*), Drioton had said, “on the margins of Egyptology” (*en marge de l'égyptologie*).

Such is the tone, moreover, of the views held by the historians on the symbolist discovery: a *vieillesse* that renews badly the fables of the *Magic Flute*, a system that has no standing ... To this the symbolists reply: “We have only made in Egypt a new Viollet-le-Duc!”<sup>978</sup>

The symbolists, say the historians, do not even know how to read the hieroglyphs; they make gross mistranslations. To this the symbolists respond: “the Egyptologists who work in the tradition of the brilliant discoveries of Champollion have defined the grammar of the usual (*courant*) language and established its evolution. But in excluding the possibility of a symbolic interpretation of the writing, they have closed themselves off from comprehending the origin of the hieroglyphic system and its profound meaning. In order to decipher the hieroglyphs, there needs to be not only philology, but also, above all, philosophy”.

This, I believe, clarifies the whole debate: neither the one or the other are speaking the same language.

#### AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE WORLD

We must also see what gives the quarrel its amplitude (*ampleur*) and its importance. It is not solely a matter of a dispute among scholars on a particular point that has little interest to other cultivated milieus. The entry into the metaphysics of pharaonic civilisation, if the symbolist Egyptologists hold the key, represents the revelation of a world of ideas and of a consciousness whose discovery could perhaps clarify the mysteries of antiquity. It is not solely the interior truth of the Egyptian world that would open up extraordinary perspectives.

—Do you not hold in the same strike, I said to Monsieur Varille, the key to the mysteries of Eleusis?

—It is probable, and perhaps, too, certain secrets of Plato that one has still not pierced ...

And I know that I am not the only one among the visitors to Upper Egypt to be struck by the unprecedented widening of knowledge that a renovated Egyptology could furnish today.

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978 Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) was a famous “restorer” of medieval architecture who was opposed to faithful conservation, often adding his own creative innovations. ‘To restore an edifice’, he writes in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (vol. 8), is not to upkeep, repair or rebuild it, it is to reestablish it in a complete state, which may not have ever existed at a given moment’. (Restaurer un édifice, ce n'est pas l'entretenir, le réparer ou le refaire, c'est le rétablir dans un état complet qui peut n'avoir jamais existé à un moment donné).

This is why it must be (*faudrait*) that the quarrel of the Egyptologists would have a worthy resolution (*denouement*) of such stake. It must not embitter itself with irritating and sterile oppositions. I dream of a solution here.

The respective theses have now been established strongly enough and are rich enough in contradictory arguments that there would be interest to engage them in a wider discussion. A congress could be arranged this coming winter, and it could be held at Luxor itself, where the demonstrations could be made upon the monuments to which they pertain.

Historians and symbolists would be invited to sustain and defend their theories completely. The most qualified scholars from diverse countries could be called to be the witnesses of this tournament, and to intervene if need be. It would be good if this circle of specialists was enlarged by the presence of some eminent humanists and philosophers, fit to judge *la portée* (the range) of the evolution of Egyptology.

It seems to me that such a discussion is sustainable in all respects. French science, of which Egyptology is one of the flourishes (*fleurons*), merits that we focus all the light on a discovery that could be for it the source of a new glory. Egypt, for its part, is interested in the first *chef* by the possibility of finding in its patrimony some unsuspected treasures. Finally, from the point of view of things of the spirit, we need to know if Egyptology is on the way to giving to human knowledge the occasion to cross a considerable threshold.

## Appendix 2: Violet and Gold

This is the purple for which the Roman fasces and axes clear a way [...] it illuminates every garment and shares with gold the glory of triumph.<sup>979</sup>

—Pliny

Witness gold, which is the most stable body in the world. It melts at 1250°. It volatilizes into violet vapor towards 2000°.<sup>980</sup>

—Schwaller de Lubicz

While Latin *viola* bears a number of revealing cognates that have already been pointed out with regard to the culminating alchemical process of *iōsis* (Latin *vīs*, Sanskrit *virah*; Greek *ios*, *hērō*), Isodore of Seville derives *purpura* from *puritae lucis*, ‘purity of light’.<sup>981</sup> More strictly, Latin *purpura* indicates the famous ‘purple dye’, while Greek *porphyra* indicates its source: ‘the purple fish (murex)’ from which the renowned Tyrean hue is derived. In Greek, the related terms *phoinis* and *phoinix* indicate both ‘Phoenician (purple)’ and ‘phoenix’, cementing the royal colour associations to the process of palingenesis. Here the ability to rise from the ashes indicates both the unity of ending and beginning through death and rebirth, as well as the alchemical salt (ash, potash, calcination) which acts as the mysterious, physical mechanism of this process.

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979 PLINY, *Natural History*, 9.36, 126 (trans. Bailey): ‘That precious colour which gleams [*sublucens*] with the hue of a dark rose ... This is the purple for which the Roman fasces and axes clear a way. It is the badge of noble youth; it distinguished the senator from the knight; it is called in to appease the gods. It brightens [*illuminat*] every garment, and shares with gold the glory of the triumph. For these reasons we must pardon the mad desire for purple, but why the high prices for the conchylian colour, a dye with an offensive smell and a hue which is dull and greenish, like an angry sea’; 9.28, 134-5: ‘The buccine dye is considered unsuitable for use by itself, for it does not give a fast colour, but it is perfectly fixed by the pelagian [*purpura*], and it lends to the black hue of the latter that severity [*austeritatem*] and crimson-like sheen which is in fashion [*nitoremque qui quaeritur cocci*]. The Tyrian colour is obtained by first steeping the wool in a raw and unheated vat of pelagian extract and then transferring it to the one of buccine. It is most appreciated when it is the colour of clotted blood, dark by reflected and brilliant by transmitted light [*colore sanguinis concreti, nigricans adspectu, idemque suspectu refulgens*]’.

980 SCHWALLER, ‘Les éléments de la pierre angulaire qui a manqué à Babel’, *Notes et Propos inédits* I, 104.

981 VICTORIA FINLAY, *Colour: Travels through the Paintbox* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 394.



Gage's important remarks suggest that Tyrean purple derives its revered status from its connection both to darkness and lustre, transparency and changeability, and ultimately, to the sacred-dynamic quality of both radiant and reflecting light:

The most valued purple cloth was probably the deepest double-dyed variety, such as in Theodora's imperial robe at Ravenna, yet we have seen from Pliny and many other writers that it was the brilliance and lustre of the colour that was most noticed; it may well have been that, like Apelle's dark varnish, it was the miracle of purple to incorporate within itself darkness and light and hence the whole world of colour.<sup>982</sup>

In this description, the appeal of imperial purple is based on the same essential ambivalence, the same straddling of opposites, that one meets in the phenomenology of salt. Schwaller's connection of the saline principle with violet therefore brings about a remarkable sense of coherence with the deeper nature of the two phenomena. Given that violet is complemented by yellow, in light of the foregoing observations, the deep lustre of royal purple must obviously look not to ordinary yellow to find its true complement but to the timeless lustre of *gold*. This helps explain certain phenomena, like the capacity for emerald green to complement certain facets within the dynamic purview of royal purple (to the extent that emerald green pushes the envelope of yellow in a manner that is bound to its own lustrous dynamism); and to the connections between the sun, gold and emerald; moreover, the divine and royal significations of Tyrian purple attested to so strongly among the Persians, Romans, Egyptians, and Jews finds its balance among the ancient Chinese Emperors, whose own royal customs gave them exclusive rights to attire themselves in yellow/gold, the colour accorded to the symbolism of the centre, which, in the Chinese elemental system, was the colour of the earth, the pivot of the five elements.

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982 John GAGE, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 25. Cf. also the summary in FINLAY, *Colour*, 414.

### Appendix 3: Luxor Temple—Opet of the South

As has been seen in chapter three, the rites of statue animation—which ripple through not only alchemical but also Mithraic, Hermetic and Theurgic practices—are clearly rooted in an Egyptian theological and cosmological context.<sup>983</sup> It remains, however, to be more precise about the nature and source of this theology and cosmology. One must go further to ask the question of historical provenance. Texts such as the *Greek Magical Papyri* point to a Theban priestly milieu, and this small piece of information allows one to converge upon the specific theology with which one is concerned. The only logical place where Theban priestly traditions would have been cultivated is in the Egyptian institution of the divine temple: religious, political, economic and ultimately ideological centre *par excellence*.<sup>984</sup> A priestly milieu could scarcely have existed without it. What is unique about Thebes, however, is that its divine temple encompassed two important and fundamentally related religious structures—two temples—which together embodied the polar aspects of the presiding cosmogonic god of New Kingdom Thebes. This god was Amun: ‘the hidden or completed one’.<sup>985</sup>

#### *The Opet Festival*

The two temples—Karnak and Luxor—were not only conceptually related, but were ritually bound together by the longest and most important religious festival in the Theban calendar. This was known as the *Opet*-festival, where Amun-Re visited the shrine of Amenemopet at Luxor. Performed annually, it began with a royal procession leading out from the sanctuary of the great temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak the largest temple complex ever built by mankind. Advancing South along the Avenue of Sphinxes, the king escorted the barque of Amun-Ra to the temple at Luxor (Illustration 51). At this juncture, the *raison d'être* of the procession occurred, pivoting on an encounter with the god Amenemopet—the *hidden* form of Amun—in the innermost sanctuary of Luxor temple. Here, the pharaoh *approaches* the god, moving to the southernmost chamber of the temple; the pharaoh *merges* with the god, effecting a conjunction of king and deity; finally, the pharaoh *turns away from* the god,

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983 For Ancient Near Eastern influences on early Greek religion, magic and cosmology: BURKERT, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek culture in the Early Archaic Age, Revealing Antiquity*; 5 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

984 See generally: SHAFER, ‘Temples, Priests, and Rituals: An Overview’, in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Shafer and Arnold (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

985 On the relation of Amun to Thebes, see: HORNUNG, *Conceptions*, 223. On “the completed one”, cf. the Theurgic *telesthai*.

emerging from the inner sanctum vivified with divine power. Having done this, the pharaoh proceeds North, back to Karnak, a fully-fledged god-king.<sup>986</sup>

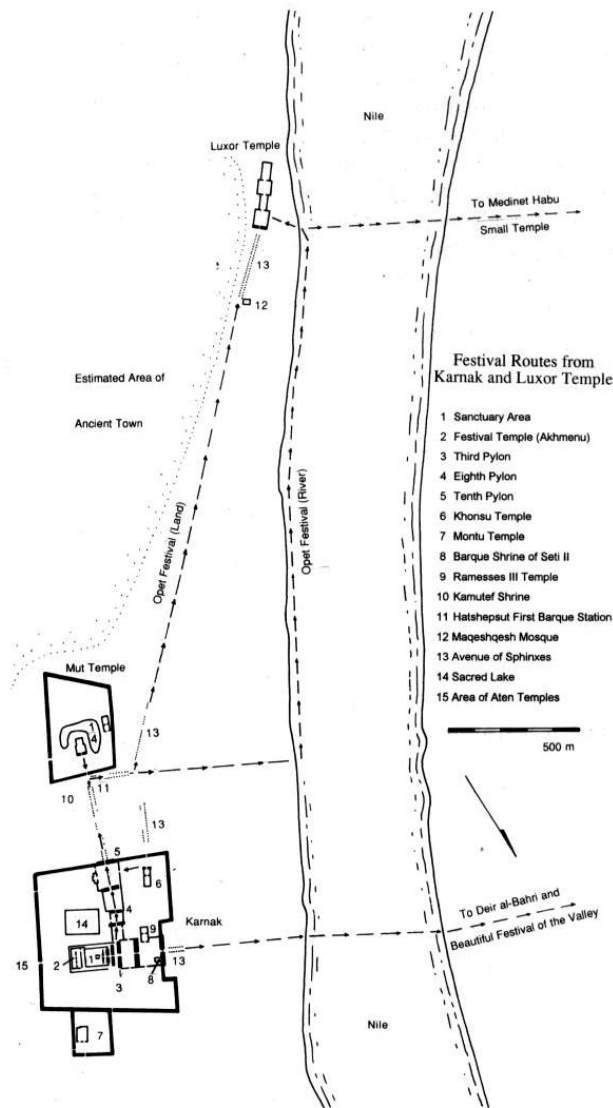


ILLUSTRATION 51: PROCESSION ROUTES OF THE OPET FESTIVAL: KARNAK AND LUXOR (AFTER BELL)

986 BELL, 'The New Kingdom "Divine" Temple: The Example of Luxor', in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Shafer and Arnold (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

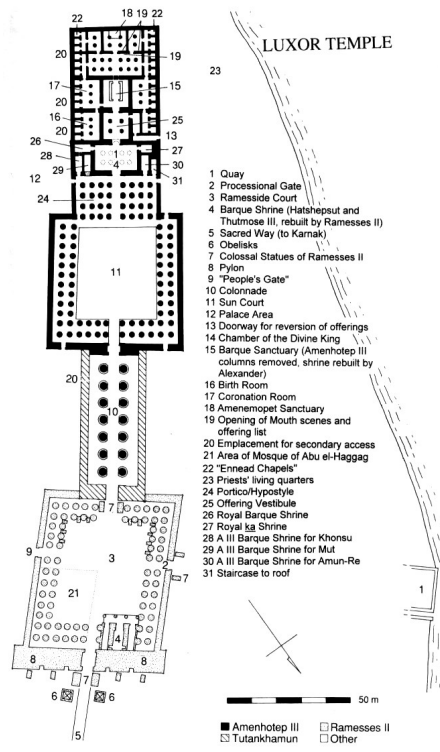
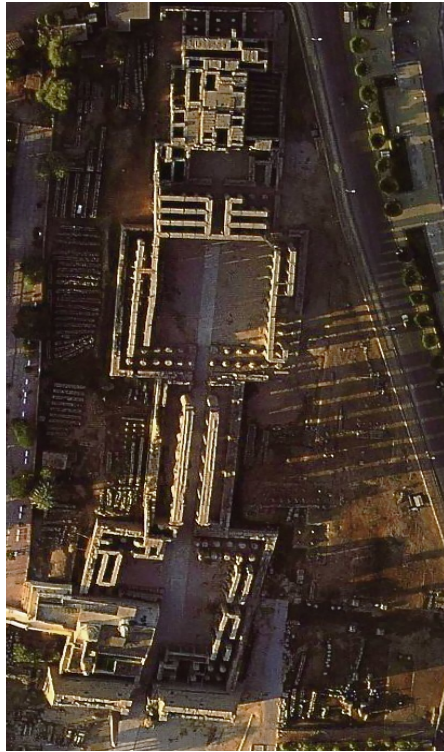


ILLUSTRATION 52: VIEWS OF LUXOR TEMPLE

(i) Aerial photo of Luxor temple (WILKINSON)

(ii) Diagram marking structures and functions of the temple (BELL)

The entire process thus forms a cycle which may be usefully described in terms of an ascending and a descending current. One is a penetration to the very font of existence: an immersion into the vivifying powers underpinning the genesis of the cosmos; the other is a return from this reality, imbued with the numinous power at the font of creation, serving to express and embody it in manifest, phenomenal form. Karnak and Luxor mark the two poles upon which this cycle pivots, the turning points (Karnak, the beginning and end of the journey; Luxor, the peak or summit). The god Amun-Ra, whose residence was Karnak, represented the earthly embodiment of the god Amun, a function which was physically incarnated in the figure of the pharaoh: image and son of Amun. The god Amenemopet, residing at Luxor, personified the primordial, unknown *source* of Amun, which the pharaoh—earthly embodiment and phenomenal *manifestation* of the god—had to merge with annually in order to be reborn as the *son* of Amun. By merging with the hidden god of the inner sanctum at Luxor (Error: Reference source not found (ii) 18), the pharaoh effectively enters the

numinous source of creation. This is a force bordering on the very chaos which threatens to destroy known existence (in the underworld books this chaos is embodied as the serpent Apep); yet at the same time it constitutes the vital source which regenerates and nourishes the existent cosmos (Nun).

The *Opet*-festival, then, was a rite of royal as well as cosmic rebirth. The foremost Luxor scholar, Lanny Bell, who studied at Luxor for twelve years (the same length of time Schwaller spent on site at Luxor), suggests that at the pivotal moment of the *Opet*-festival an actual mouthopening ritual was performed upon the image of Amenemopet prior to the pharaoh's divine re-emergence (apotheosis).<sup>987</sup> The most obvious evidence for this lies in mouthopening scenes located on the walls of the innermost chambers of the Luxor temple (Illustration 52 (ii) 19), the very fulcrum upon which the death and apotheosis of the pharaoh revolved. However, what further consolidates this view is the fact that the *Opet*-festival, like the mouthopening ritual, ultimately conflates death, royalty and divinity in a way that is fundamentally bound to the mysteries of chaos and cosmogony. Comments Bell:

The cosmic significance of the *Opet*-festival was tremendous. Beyond its role in the cultus of the king, it secured the regeneration of the Creator, Amun of Luxor, the rebirth of Amun-Re of Karnak, and the re-creation of the cosmos. Gods became weary by the end of each year, when the agricultural cycle had run its course. They and their creation needed a recharge, a fresh input of energy. The dying gods needed to step outside the created world to tap the pure, uncontrolled power of the boundless chaos surrounding the cosmos, the seething miasma whence the cosmos had originated. Opening the door to the uncreated was no simple operation and it was fraught with danger. Improperly done, it could unleash the full destructive potential of disorder. But properly done, through the prescribed rituals of the *Opet*-festival presided over by the divine king, the opening could produce rebirth and re-creation.<sup>988</sup>

All of this is to suggest that the primordial element into which creation descends and out of which it emerges is ultimately revealed as a *bivalent* force: it both endangers and regenerates the cosmos, yet without it nothing would exist. While the role of Seth as liminal initiator between life and death has already been noted in this regard, the fuller nuances only become comprehensible when understood in relation to the nature of a very specific goddess: one who gives the temple at Luxor its very name—*Jpt rst* (*Opet reset*, or 'Opet of the South').

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987 BELL, 'Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal *Ka*', *JNES* 44, no. 4 (1985). Further on LUXOR: BARGUET, 'Luxor', in *LA*, ed. Helck and Otto (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972).

988 BELL, 'Divine Temple', 157. Cf. HORNING, *Conceptions*, 182.

### *The Goddess Opet*

Opet is a hippopotamus-formed goddess presiding over birth and suckling. In her Theban context, she serves as protectress over the birth of the god Amun.<sup>989</sup> The goddess Opet is a threshold being; typical of the liminal divinities who inhabit regions far from established order, she takes on a monstrous appearance: to her hippopotamus form are added the tail of a crocodile and the paws of a lion. In many respects Opet partakes of the same animal forms as Seth; it is therefore appropriate that, in exploring the function of Opet, the presence of Seth is naturally evoked. Indeed, Seth himself was often depicted as a (male)hippopotamus, an animal vilified and hunted because of its devastating power to decimate precious crops. As such, Seth forms a destructive complement to the generative (female) hippopotamus goddess, Opet (much as Apep forms the destructive compliment to Nun).

*Opet* is also the Egyptian term for ‘opening’, as we have seen through the *opet-re*, the ‘opening of the mouth’.<sup>990</sup> The connection to the mouthopening rite is by no means accidental, for the hippopotamus goddess herself is known to play a significant role in restraining the destructive valence of the *meskhetiu*, the Sethian constellation of the bull’s thigh which kills and revivifies. In doing this, she functions to hold back the murderous force of Seth in order to facilitate the creative valence of rebirth.<sup>991</sup> Opet thus possesses a close relationship to the bull’s thigh, a fact which is further evident from their depiction together at the centre of the famous astronomical ceiling from the temple of Hathor at Dendera.

We have seen how Seth clearly participated in the rites of cosmic and royal rebirth by slaying Apep and cutting the umbilical cord. However, he also played another, perhaps more fundamental, role in the process of birth. Seth is often invoked in the magical papyri and depicted on magical gems in contexts which link him specifically with the opening of the womb, an act which could have both negative and positive connotations. As Ritner has shown, Egyptian gynaecological conceptions saw opening

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989 The temple complex at Karnak contains a temple to Opet, located near the temple of Khonsu (Error: Reference source not found (ii) 28). For a more detailed plan, see WILKINSON, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 155.

990 *Opet* in the sense of ‘opening’ also has specific connotations in regards to the goddess Opet and the process of birth. Cf. the opening and closing of the womb.

991 Cf. MEEKS, ‘Ipet (*Jpt*)’, in *LÄ*, III, col. 173. ‘Occasionnellement *Jpt* incarne la constellation de l’hippopotame ayant un crocodile sur son dos et dont la fonction est de retenir la Grand Ourse (*Mskhtjw*), constellation sethienne, afin qu’elle ne puisse retourner dans l’autre monde troubler Osiris’. (‘Occasionally *Jpt* embodies the constellation of the hippopotamus having a crocodile on its back, whose function is to detain the Great She-Bear (*Mskhtjw*), the Sethian constellation, so that it is not able to return into the other world to disturb Osiris’).

and closing as two necessary activities which regulated the normal functioning of the uterus:

Opening is required for expulsion of the menses, conception, and birth. Negatively, it may signal hemorrhaging and abortion. Closing may halt such menorrhage and stabilize the egg, but it may also prevent delivery. Neither activity is inherently positive or negative. Both must be regulated to ensure the health of any woman.<sup>992</sup>

What these various mythic contexts suggest is that Opet's restraining of the bull's thigh at the celestial pole acts to facilitate birth in a very specific way: by preventing the Sethian disruptions of hemorrhaging and abortion and thereby regulating the opening of the womb in order that it may dilate at the opportune time. In the context of Luxor, then, Opet functions to ensure that the dangers which beset the birth of Amun—the apotheosis of the pharaoh—are allayed.

### *The Royal Ka*

We must take one more step to fully penetrate the precise significance of Luxor to the question of apotheosis. The key lies, as Bell notes, in the very element which is given extraordinary significance at Luxor, a significance which has no parallel elsewhere in Egypt, and which unites all of the ideological complexities of Luxor temple.<sup>993</sup> This element is the royal *ka*.

It is no coincidence that we have already encountered the *ka* in the mouthopening ritual, where it signifies the placenta from which the infant must be separated. Like the placenta, the *ka* is created at the same time as the entity it is connected to, where it is usually described by scholars as kind of double or *Doppelgänger*. The *ka*, however, is a multivalent reality. The etymology of the term connects it firstly with a bull—an animal generally venerated for its vital, physical and procreative power—and secondly with upraised, open arms—a gesture of embracing which, as will be seen, is in fact used to depict the transmission of *ka*-power.<sup>994</sup> The unifying concept behind these individual meanings is well-described as a “generative, reproductive or life-sustaining power.”<sup>995</sup> From this we can begin to see that the deeper meaning of the *ka*—one which equally describes the mouthopening ritual—is *nourishment*. Erik Hornung

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992 RITNER, 'A Uterine Amulet in the Oriental Institute Collection', 221.

993 BELL, 'Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal *Ka*', 256, 259; 'Divine Temple', 157.

994 See KAPLONY, col. 275, who in addition to the bull and the embracing arms, lists the *Henkelkorb* (basket with handle) as etymologically connected to the word *ka*.

995 BELL, 'Divine Temple', 282 n. 2. On the *ka* as generative, note especially *ka* as 'bull' (written with a phallus) and also in this connection the feminine *kat*, 'vulva'. See SCHWEITZER, *Wesen des Ka*, 20 n.3.

perhaps comes closest to a concise encapsulation of the concept when he says that “the *ka* is all that enlivens.”<sup>996</sup>

A broader picture begins to emerge of the *ka* as a non-corporeal and immortal life-giving force which only becomes *temporarily* associated with a given physical form. It joins the body at birth and is separated from it at death. However, unlike the soul-concept (*ba*), the *ka* was understood as a *collective* force: the vital sense of continuity and immortality underpinning one’s entire ancestry and kinship, to include divine descent. The individual was merely a particular manifestation of this. To be born, then, was to be a temporary incarnation of this collective, ancestral life-force. Conversely, to die was to rejoin the collective *ka* from which one derived, to return to the greater matrix of life from which one emerged as a particularisation.<sup>997</sup> As is to be expected in a theocracy, however, not all *kas* (*kaw*) are created equal. The royal *ka*—the *ka* of the pharaoh, epicentre of temple cult at Thebes—flowed directly from the primordial creator: Amenemopet of Luxor.

The pharaoh’s merging with Amun entails a specific process which has remarkable bearing upon the question of apotheosis. The process entails a transmutation which finds direct expression in the pharaoh’s *ka*-names, titles which are increasingly assimilated to the divinity the closer the pharaoh approaches the bark shrine of Amun, thereby signifying his or her divine identity.<sup>998</sup> Significantly, the pharaoh makes an offering of incense and fresh flowers, which, while they might seem commonplace ritual accoutrements, actually possess a distinct connection to the process of manifesting his or her divinity.<sup>999</sup> The very word for incense—*sntr*—explicitly mirrors the word for deification—*sntri*—, ‘being made a god’.<sup>1000</sup> Yet the connection between incense and deification goes beyond paronomasia (punning or word-play); it only becomes clear when we realise that, for the Egyptians, the essence of a god was perceived—quite literally—as a *smell*, a divine aroma.<sup>1001</sup> The offering of flowers, too, provided not only scent but added another layer of dual meaning: *rnpi* meant both

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996 HORNUNG, *Idea into Image*, 175.

997 BELL, ‘Divine Temple’, 137-43.

998 On the pharaoh’s *ka* names: BELL, ‘Cult of the Royal *Kā*’, 276-81, 85-90. On the gender of the pharaoh: the example of Queen Hatshepsut attests that it was apparently no impediment to royal apotheosis, though cf. Bell’s comments on the possible connection between Hatshepsut and the extraordinary emphases of the Luxor temple: ‘Cult of the Royal *Kā*’, 290-91.

999 ‘Cult of the Royal *Kā*’, 281-84.

1000 Recalling that the Egyptian word for god is *ntr*.

1001 On the divine aroma, cf. HORNUNG, *Conceptions*, 133. ‘The manifestation of the god produces a pervasive aroma ‘like that of (the incense land) Punt’. The divine aroma is well attested elsewhere, among Christian martyrs, for example, and it is the ‘ozone of a god’ that Dr. Riemer in Thomas Mann’s *Lotte im Weimar* senses around the great prince of poets, Goethe’.



‘flowers’ and ‘to become young’.<sup>1002</sup> The offering of fresh flowers was thus bound to a general symbolism of rejuvenation, a symbolism which is explicitly reinforced in scenes depicting the pharaoh as a child being suckled by a goddess. These scenes explicitly demonstrate that qualities such as divinity and royal strength were *ingested* as milk from the goddess’ breast, a fact which points directly to the ceremony’s emphasis on the pharaoh being integrated into the divine family as a child and nourished on the divine/royal *ka*.<sup>1003</sup> Bell notes how at this point in the procession, right where the conjunction of god and pharaoh occurs, the rites of offering become fully self-reflexive. That is to say, what the pharaoh offers to the god, the pharaoh receives.<sup>1004</sup> By offering incense, the pharaoh evokes the presence of god, which, in turn, he or she is able to *breathe in*; by offering flowers, the pharaoh secures his or her own rejuvenation. Ultimately, this whole process of offering, which is intended to provide *nourishment* to the god, is reflected back upon the pharaoh through a transmission of rejuvenating, divine power. Up until this point the pharaoh has faced the god, who looks out from the southernmost recess of the temple; however, when the nourishing power of the god flows forth into the pharaoh, the pharaoh turns away from the god, such that his or her orientation is now identical to the god’s. And it is at this point that the pharaoh—turning ‘away from god’ (cf. *apo-theosis*)—is coronated, embraced by the god’s two open arms to be nourished by the gesture of the vivifying royal *ka*, a metaphysical transmission of power from ‘father’ to ‘son’.<sup>1005</sup>

#### *The Path Up and the Path Down*

Luxor, then, provides a key which enables us to bring together many of the seemingly disparate elements with which we have been dealing. We have seen that the very word apotheosis—literally, ‘from god’—first arises in the context of Alexander the Great, where it is ultimately implicated in the ideology of divine filiation. Alexander is the divinely descended son of Zeus, and, as reigning king of Egypt, he was proclaimed the son of Amun by the oracle at Siwah. Consequently, he was depicted with the curved horns which have long been identified as those of the ram-headed Amun. In the context of the royal ideology epitomised at Luxor, however, these details take on an added significance. As Bell notes, the ram’s horns signify Alexander’s formal acceptance by and possession of the royal *ka*.<sup>1006</sup> Although Alexander was coronated at Memphis,

1002 ‘Cult of the Royal *Ka*’, 266 with refs at n. 76.

1003 Ibid., 265-6 with fig. 3. For ingesting divinity through the breast of the goddess: ROTH, ‘Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth’, *JEA* 88 (2002): 136.

1004 ‘Cult of the Royal *Ka*’, 281; ‘Divine Temple’, 173-74.

1005 ‘Divine Temple’, 173.

1006 ‘Cult of the Royal *Ka*’, 269-70 with refs at n. 91. Bell also notes that it is quite normal for Egyptian oracles to legitimise a pharaoh’s divine status after the fact (i.e. *subsequent* to the pharaoh’s ascendancy and coronation). Thus, the Egyptian oracle need not adhere to linear

a specific and significant connection to Luxor is nevertheless present, one which has specific bearing upon the royal *ka*. Like the pharaohs before him (and the Roman emperors who followed him),<sup>1007</sup> Alexander was responsible for architectural modifications to the temple at Luxor, modifications customarily undertaken as an open expression of the pharaoh's role in the extension of the cosmos. In the fourth century B.C.E., the central shrine and bark sanctuary of Amun-Re was reconstructed and decorated under the aegis of Alexander.<sup>1008</sup> This was the very room where Amun-Re was revived through the autochthonous power of Amenemopet, deified and coronated through his merging with Amun-Re, and enlivened with the theocratic strength which flowed from Amun-Ra in a metaphysical transmission of power from father to son. To come 'from god', then, ultimately suggests the manifestation of a divinity through the process of human genesis, a physical incarnation of god through birth. In this connection, we have noted in some detail the distinct assimilation of apotheosis to the process of human ontogeny, and it suffices to add one further point: pharaonic apotheosis, culminating in coronation and emergence from the temple—corresponds quite clearly to the child's 'crowning' before birth.

The magical papyri, too, which derive from a Theban priestly milieu and thus point toward the theology of Luxor and the *Opet*-festival, explicitly situate the word apotheosis in prescriptions for ritual death by drowning. We have seen how this must be contextualised in terms of the Egyptian theology of descent into the primordial waters which underpins the cosmology of the magical papyri, where it directly implicates the process of apotheosis not only in the mythology of Osiris, but also in the cosmology of solar descent into and reemergence from the primordial waters. It should now be obvious that this very process is identical to the one we have seen at the heart of the *Opet*-festival: the rejuvenating yet dangerous descent into primordial chaos in order to tap the vivifying powers which underpin creation and inundation.

We can see, then, that apotheosis signifies a *descent* in more than one sense: on the one hand it signifies a descent *from* divine origins through divine filiation; on the other hand it signifies a *katabasis*, a decline *into* the primordial origin. However, at the same time—and no contradiction is involved here—we can see that apotheosis signifies an *ascent* to divine origins through divine encounter (*pr ntr, systasis*). In this connection we note that the inner sanctum of Luxor temple is conceived as the primordial mound, the *prima materia* or first matter which *rises* from the formless waters as the foundation for all creation. The royal procession advances South, that is, to *upper* Egypt (the source of the Nile), as the floor of the temple at Luxor *inclines* to approach the high ground where the Creator resides. The processional path to Luxor is

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conceptions of time, a point which obviates any reason to doubt the purported legitimacy of the Siwah revelation due to its timing.

1007 Ibid., 274 with refs at nn. 113-17.

1008 Furthermore, Bell suggests that in order to become pharaoh, Alexander would have had to have petitioned the enormous *ka*-statues of the deified Ramesses at the entrance to the collonade hall at Luxor.

simultaneously a submersion into the sea of chaos—i.e. death—just as it is an emergence from the sea of chaos—i.e. birth: the affirmation of life. What this means is that, in the final analysis, apotheosis must be considered as occurring at the most fundamental of *turning points*, and in this respect we must note Onians' comments on the Greek word *telos*, which, while commonly taken to mean 'end, finality', is more precisely understood to have the meaning 'turning'. We would aver that in initiatory contexts, the "end," "perfection" or "completion" of initiation (Greek *telesthai*) is ultimately itself a turning point in the sense indicated by a *reversal of orientation* and a consequent *return to the source* from which the impetus ultimately sprang. In other words, the initiate's innate divinity is realised precisely when ascent, culminating in assimilation to deity, reverses its orientation to become *descent* (incarnation, genesis). For having become god, it stands to reason that one must *act* as god: as a creator and a destroyer, which, like a bolt of lightning, strikes from heaven to earth. And the converse is equally true: the divine can only come into being when the descent to the most dangerous of nadirs, culminating in the utter chaos of non-existence, reverses its orientation to seek its *apex*.

In order to achieve the highest peak, the deepest abyss must be embraced. The theme is borne out in many subsequent religious and literary sources, not the least of which is Dante's *Inferno*. Here the descent into Hell (*katabasis*), located at the Earth's core (underworld), becomes the locus of a literal reversal: Dante pivots as upon an axis, turns upside down and from that uttermost nadir—Hell, the core of the Earth—begins his ascent to Heaven. For the polarities are seen to be fundamentally connected, a point which finds its most dramatic expression in Nietzsche's Zarathustra:

Ah this sorrowful, black sea beneath me! Ah this brooding reluctance! Ah destiny and sea! Now I have to *go down* to you! I stand before my highest mountain and my longest wandering: therefore I must first descend deeper than I have ever descended,—deeper into pain than I have ever descended, down to its blackest stream! So my destiny will have it. Well then! I am ready.

Whence arise the highest mountains? I once asked. Then I learned that they arise from the sea.

This testimony is written into their stones and into the walls of their peaks. The highest must arise to its height from the deepest.<sup>1009</sup>

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1009NIETZSCHE, *Werke : Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Colli and Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), 191. *Zarathustra*, III, *Der Wanderer*: 'Ach diese schwarze traurige See unter mir! Ach, diese schwangere nächtliche Verdrossenheit! Ach, Schicksaal und See! Zu euch muss ich nun h i n ab steigen! /Vor meinem höchsten Berge stehe ich und vor meiner längsten Wanderung: darum muss ich erst tiefer hinab als ich jemals stieg:/—tiefer hinab in den Schmerz als ich jemals stieg, bis hinein in seine schwärzeste Fluth! So will es mein Schicksaal: Wohlan! Ich bin bereit. /Woher kommen die höchsten Berge? So fragte ich einst. Da lernte ich, dass sie aus dem Meer kommen./Diess Zeugnis ist in ihr Gestein schreiben und in die Wände ihrer Gipfel. Aus dem Tiefsten muss das Höchsten zu seiner

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Höhe kommen.—'