Lecture 15 Secunda - production of the metallic chaos

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The first step in obtaining a metallic (or mineral) oil (specifically, at this point, for ingestion), is to reduce a metal or mineral to its chaos.

In the herbal kingdom this was done (for best purposes) by fermenting the plant. This fermentation is what alchemists called a "philosophic" putrefaction. You will read statements, in classic alchemical literature, like .... "our work begins in darkness and death" .... and this refers specifically to the idea that the beginning of the spagyric process must always start off with a reduction of the substance being worked upon (animal, vegetable or mineral) into its chaos. The putrefaction is 'philosophic' because it is carried out in a sealed container so that the elements (and therefore the principals) are not lost back into the macrocosm.

"Chaos" refers specifically to the chaos of the alchemical elements that existed at the outset of creation. (ref: "The Golden Chain of Homer", http://levity.com/alchemy/catena1.html Chap's 1-3. This book is a very important reference point.)

Metallic fermentation, in relation to the type of fermentation plants can undergo in order to produce alcohol, is quite possible, although it is not at all widely known. I will not discuss this subject in public because it provides knowledge of an important secret that should not be imprudently exposed ... that is, the nature of the natural production (by metallic fermentation) of the true metallic mercury (analogous to the herbal mercury - alcohol.)

Nevertheless, just as there are two paths to the chaos in the vegetable kingdom, there are two in the metallic/mineral kingdom - the slow or fermentative path and the fast or maceration path. (ref: back in the early herbal instruction.)

It is usual to teach the fast maceration path in mineral alchemy. Part of the reason for this is that while it is a faster approach to the metallic chaos, and while it is a valid approach to the great work, it complicates and confuses the path just enough to deter mere tourists and gold diggers.

So if you are up with the play so far you will remember that in the last part (14) of the instruction I suggested the collection of a number of jars, some solvents and samples of five metals. The idea here is to demonstrate the basic principles of reducing metals to their chaos. There are two approaches to this - the acid path and the

alkali (base) path.

In the acid path it is common, although not essential, to use acetic acid. There has been a lot of argument about this subject and I will go into greater detail on it later when I discuss the difference (in al-chemistry as well as chemistry) between organic solvents and mineral solvents.

In the alkali path the common solvent is caustic soda (sodium hydroxide).

Demonstration of these two approaches to the metallic chaos requires the dissolution of the metal samples in these two solvents.

So you begin by adding enough dilute (or concentrated if you have it) acetic acid (vinegar) to five glass jars to a depth of two fingers at least.

Caustic soda is a salt so its solvent, which we call a 'lye', needs to be made up. This is done by adding (carefully and slowly) caustic soda salts to water. You want about 1/2 a metric cup of caustic to 1 litre. This has to be done carefully because the addition of caustic to water causes an exotheric reaction. This means that heat is produced, or given off. In practical terms the water will become very hot. So if too much is added too quickly the reaction will cause excessive bubbling and you may get a very corrosive liquid spilling over the jar and eating into whatever surface you have your jar sitting on. Also, if you are too quick with the addition of the caustic, your water may heat up so much that the glass jar will fracture or break, spilling the corrosive contents everywhere.

What I usually do when I am mixing strong solvents, or adding them to water, is sit the jar inside a deep pyrex or (better still) a glazed ceramic bowl. This way if the jar spills over or breaks the bowl will catch the spill and no damage will be done.

A sensible way to judge how quick is quick enough when you are adding caustic to the water is to touch the side of the jar with your hands to feel the temperature. If it is too hot to hold then you need to wait for it to cool before adding more. I usually add the salt a teaspoon at a time, stir the liquid with a glass rod, then test the temp' of the jar before I add more.

Once the lye is made up then you add two fingers depth into each of the remaining five glass jars that you have.

So now you have five jars containing dilute acetic acid and five containing your lye.

Now you add half of your copper to one jar of the acetic and the other half to one jar of lye. Repeat with the other metals. Now you have five jars of acetic with five different metals and five jars of lye containing five different metals.

These jars should be placed in a warm place (preferably) and left to macerate. I suggest swirling them daily and keeping dated notes on any changes that are observed.

(safety note: never add water to acids or alkalis when diluting. Always add the acid or alkali to the water. Remember that these solvents are corrosive and will damage metals and organc matter easily. Spills should always be washed up quickly with lots of water. Don't dispose of excess solvents down your sink. It is far better to empty them into a shallow hole in your garden and let the rain dilute them into the earth.)

General note:
I know a lot of these concepts and the words and language used in the mineral work will probably be over the head of most of you because most of you are very new to practical alchemy. For this reason once I have finished the bulk of the instruction on these processes I will go right back to the start and go over everything again with fuller and more detailed explanations.

It is helpful to understand that I find it more productive, as far as learning is concerned, to give some basic practical information first and then go back to the start and use that early practical as a basis for a deeper explanation of the work later. This helps a lot to reinforce important concepts.

~rubaphilos