

ALCHEMY - THE STRUGGLE FOR IMMORTALITY

The word Alchemy is composed of three different words originating from the three cultures that contributed to its practice and development.

Alchemy as an actual science probably started with the Egyptian's effort to preserve the body after death. Hence, the root of the word is found in the ancient name of Egypt: Khem, alluding to the fertility of Egypt after the Nile floods.

The Greeks dominated the development of mathematics and theoretical formulas for the nature of the Universe. Following Alexander the Great, the Egyptian methods were united with Greek principles to develop the form of science then called "Khemia," which loosely translated means to pour out or mix.

When the Arabs occupied Syria and Egypt in the 7th century, they inherited the work of the Greeks, and as a result of that knowledge their scientific beliefs were augmented by the extensive alchemical studies of the Byzantines. The Arabs supplemented the word "Khemia" with: "Al", an Arab word meaning "The."

For hundreds of years the Arabs were the exclusive guardians of this accumulated wisdom. Alchemy was preserved and enriched by Arab explorers, as they added their own experiments and experiences. In fact, in later years, the Greeks received much of the credit for what Arab alchemists accomplished. The Arabs took this knowledge and expounded on it. The word "elixir" (from the Greek *al-iksir*) was popularized as an alchemical term by the 7th century Arabian Alchemist: Abu Mussa Jabir Ibn Hayyan, known in the Latin by the name Geber, who described a white powder which was capable of transmuting lead, and other less precious metals; to gold. In his time he was so popular, that at least one fellow scientist (who remains unknown today, and is referred to only as the "false Geber") wrote very meaningful and concise manuscripts in Gerber's name in order to guarantee the publication of his work.

After conquering Egypt, the Arabs brought this knowledge to Morocco, and it was thus that in the eighth century, it managed to reach Spain; where it thrived greatly. Many colleges sprouted in Seville, Cordova, and Granada specifically geared towards the alchemical sciences.

Despite of the historical fact that alchemy gave birth to chemistry, the modern scientific community has ignored the work of well deserving alchemists under the assumption that this ancient knowledge could not have contributed anything but superstition and mythology to what should be a concise practice.

This neglect is logical, since alchemy originated in Egypt with mummification it has had much religious value attached to it. This, coupled with the number of phonies, quacks, and posers of the time, who in pursuit of wealth and fame profaned alchemy to the point of extinction: by the late 1800's it had been all but forgotten.

The modern scientist has overlooked the fact that alchemy is a multi-purpose system: We will briefly discuss its application in the three different categories which are of interest to the Magician.

We will leave its scientific applications to be argued by students in the schools of science, and hope that credit is given where credit is due. We will, however, list a few of these men in an attempt to illustrate to the reader how important the work of alchemy has been to the development of science as we know it today.

SOME WELL KNOWN ALCHEMISTS

The Greek alchemist **Zosimus**, lived in Panopolis Egypt around 250 A.D. The date of his death is unknown. He is credited for having saved what little remains of the Greek-Egyptian writings. He composed an encyclopedia of 28 tomes containing much of what is today known about mummification and ancient mathematical formulae. It is to him that we owe the survival of the description and principles of the Four Elements: Fire, Water, Air, and Earth; from which all substances were believed to be composed. His scientific contribution is his discovery of arsenic and lead acetate.

He believed that all substances were composed of the same four elements, each substance differing in proportion to the four. Later, modern science discovered that all sixty elements relate to four elemental substances they call Oxygen, Carbon, Azote, and Hydrogen. Yet, no one in the scientific community will give credence to the possibility that these were the same elements the alchemist called Fire, Water, Air, and Earth.

Abu Musa Jabir Ibn Hayyan, (known to the Europeans as Geber) the Arabian Alchemist, lived in what is now considered Iraq about 721 A.D. The date of his death is also unknown, although some scholars suggest it may have been in 815. He picked up where Zosimus left off.

He was the son of a druggist; he was also a Sufi who may have had some allegiance with the infamous Assassins (the Hashim), who fed on hashish and committed political assassination. He is credited for his contribution of Mercury, Sulfur, and Salt as Elements.

He believed that the base of all metals were Mercury and Sulfur, and by breaking down worthless metals, (such as Lead) to these components; Gold could be made by recombining these elements in the right proportions. This could all be accomplished by via a substance he called "Elixir."

Now, this Elixir could not change Gold into another metal, but by adding it to Gold one could produce a liquid or substance believed to confer (among other things) immortality. It seemed perfectly logical to assume that a substance so miraculous could also have other medicinal properties; such as restoring youth, prolonging life, or curing all disease. Hence, he popularized the idea of the Philosopher's Stone or Elixir of Life which would obsess the minds of alchemists and magicians for hundreds of years.

His offerings to science were his discovery of ammonium chloride, and illustrated how to process white lead. He pioneered the use of weak acids, such as vinegar and nitric acid; and made many advances in metal refining. Perhaps his most important contribution is the care he took in recording his chemical experiments. It is for this reason that the importance of the diary emphasized in magical work.

Arnold of Villanova was born in Valencia Spain about 1235, to parents who were converted Jews; and this gave him an edge, as he was capable of speaking Arabic and Greek. He was accountable for bringing the work of the Arabs to the European mind. He was a controversial writer with strong views that sometimes challenged the teachings of The Church; this tended to get him into trouble. It is believed that the only reason church officials tolerated him was his medicinal expertise.

He successfully treated Pope Boniface VIII, and the wealthy Pedro III of Aragon. He prospered by treating the illnesses of the rich and powerful. He found no conflict between mysticism and science, and often reconciled them in his works. He understood and wrote about the transmutation of the elements and commented on Geber's theory of Mercury and Sulfur, saying that only Mercury was necessary.

His scientific discovery was carbon dioxide, and he is credited for being the first to develop pure alcohol. He died September 6, 1311.

The False Geber: the year of his birth is estimated about 1270, his real name is unknown. He wrote under the pseudonym "Geber," perhaps to gain respect for his own experiments or to assure the publication of his works at a time when book publishing was a difficult and expensive task, which only the wealthy and well known could afford it.

It is believed that he was a Spaniard, and ironically, the originator of the most significant discovery of the Middle Ages: sulfuric acid. Previous to this discovery, the strongest acid available was vinegar.

The date of his death is unknown.

Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim was an unconventional individual who was forced to do much traveling due to his inability to keep his mouth shut, and his opinions pertaining to the character of others to himself. He used his intelligence to belittle others, and as a result he made many enemies. His arrogance is indicated by the name he chose for himself: Paracelsus which means "better than Celsus," whose work had deeply persuaded many of his contemporaries.

He was born May 1, 1493 to a professor, and he began his studies at University of Basel in 1510. He was another of those men of knowledge, who reconciled mysticism with science. He loved astrology, and believed that the purpose of alchemy was not to transmute metals, but to heal disease; and he is perhaps solely responsible for alchemy entering into mainstream chemistry. He emphasized the need of minerals to cure sickness, and he developed opium for medical purposes, calling it "laudanum".

He applied the four elements of the Greeks (Fire, Water, Air, and Earth) and the three Arabian principles (Mercury, Sulfur, and Salt) to the art of healing. He dedicated much of his time to the development of The Philosopher's Stone, which he claimed to have found, and he may have succeeded in living forever were it not for the nasty fall he took while drunk which caused his death. He debunked demon possession as the cause for mental illness, correctly related respiratory disease to mining, and was the first to diagnose congenital syphilis. Furthermore, he linked head injury with paralysis and retardation. He was the first to use zinc to treat illness.

Admittedly, this list is very limited; there are many more who deserve recognition, who due to the limited scope of this paper, have been ignored all together. It is hoped, however, that the contributions of the individuals mentioned and the work they pioneered will illustrate to the student how the alchemical metaphors pertain to spiritual work. Science, in its attempt to debunk certain spiritual principles almost always yields some discovery which can be applied towards improving the human condition. Today Science has successfully divorced itself from the Magical Arts, perhaps without the realization that the evolution of one depends on the vision provided by the other.

THE MAGICAL APPLICATION OF ALCHEMY

No matter how dead, worthless, or inactive a substance is believed to be, the alchemist analyzes the object in question until such a time that they can recognize its sleeping potential; the point of infinite energy that Thelemites call Hadit.

The object in question is exposed to the appropriate amount of stress until The First Matter (Hadit) is brought to the surface of the object where it can be scrutinized, studied, proliferated and collected.

Aristotle states: "Bodies cannot be changed except by reduction into their first matter."

There are many definitions associated with the practice of Alchemy, three of which are:

SEX MAGICK: Subconscious manipulation. The practice of using sexually produced fluids and/or energy to enhance or awaken ones magical or physical abilities, or to animate inactive or inoperative objects such as talismans, extend life, etc. This substance is called "The Elixir of Life."

Hermes states: "Join the male to the female in their own proper humidity, because there is no birth without union of male and female." Plato mentions: "Nature follows kindred nature, contains it, and teaches it to resist fire. Wed the man to the woman, and you have the whole Magistry."

In this operation, the essence of the Creative Source (Hadit, Kether, etc.) is manipulated and attached to a specific physical representation of something which does not yet exist, or which is lifeless, in order to awaken its archetypal potential.

It is particularly important that the student know that the most valuable texts pertaining to sexual alchemy are of Eastern origin; and that the Western Schools have borrowed freely from them, without giving them credit in their works. Many times, what is shrouded by mystery in the Western texts is openly discussed in the writings of the Chinese, Hindu, and Arabians.

If I were to recommend only one book on the subject, it would have to be "*Sexual Secrets*" by Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger (Destiny Books, 1979). This is one of the most thorough and complete publication dealing with the subject of human sexuality and sexual alchemy (both Eastern and Western) I have ever seen. Everything is explained in a candid and honest manner, all of the veils

of mystery are removed so to allow the reader to gaze for the first time upon the Pearls of Wisdom which have only been accessible to the initiated or privileged for thousand of years.

SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY: This is another form of subconscious manipulation. It is the science of causing spiritual transformation by using ritual, fasting, meditation, and other practices engineered to cause phenomena to occur within the psyche of the practitioner conducive to spiritual attainment. The desire result was The Stone of the Philosophers, which was not only believed to extend the life of the scientist, but was credited with the powers of Creation.

It is said that Alchemical Gold is not a metal, and that man is already in possession of the Philosopher's Stone, therefore, men and women are the vessels for the substances needed to create this rare matter; or the phenomena it represents. During the inquisition, many Alchemists escaped doom by appealing to the greed of religious figures; disguising this type of alchemy in the guise of Alchemical Metallurgy.

ALCHEMICAL METALLURGY: The process of turning base metals, such as lead, steel, copper, etc., into gold, silver, or other precious metals. In alchemical legend, some are credited with turning lead into gold; this form of alchemy has never evolved beyond its mythological form. I must point out that, while these three categories may appear to differ greatly from one another, they are exactly the same things. They are different expressions of the alchemical experience as it manifests itself in different planes of existence.

There is much literature on the subject, most of it in French, and written in riddles, probably to avoid persecution by the Church. Most of what is available is either the experiences in the journals of people such as Paracelsus, Albert the Great, Nicolas Flamel, Artepheus, Helvetius, Basile Valentin, Francis Bacon, Bernard Le Trevisan, Arnauld de Villeneuve, Eyrenee Philalethe, Raymond Lulle, Fulcanelli, etc.

What is written in modern times is often just as difficult to read, either because the authors are scholars who have no real experience with Alchemy other than what they have read. Oftentimes, these principles are cloaked in obscure symbology by those who are under Oaths of Secrecy imposed on them by the Orders that attempt to preserve this Knowledge. I should point out, that this information was nearly lost, and that what we presently possess are only fragments of what may have been available to our predecessors.

It would be easy to blame groups that bind their adepts to terrible oaths of secrecy for the fact that Alchemy has barely survived. The fact of the matter is, that the material is readily available for those who have eyes to see. The truth is, as mentioned above, that charlatans trying to fill their pockets with gold turned a noble, mystical art capable of freeing the individual utterly form into a circus sideshow.

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