

THE ALCHEMY EXHIBIT AT ROSICRUCIAN PARK

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ALCHEMY



Recently Rosicrucian members and guests joined Grand Master Julie Scott and Frater Dennis William Hauck for the dedication of the Alchemy Exhibit at Rosicrucian Park. This exhibit presents an introduction to Alchemy, an important part of the Rosicrucian Tradition, and leads guests through the seven steps of the alchemical process. It also includes a reproduction of a medieval Alchemist's Workshop, a copy of *The Ripley Scroll*, and a meditation chamber featuring the "Azoth of the Philosophers" image.

This exhibit, on display in the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, will serve as the centerpiece for the new Alchemy Museum at Rosicrucian Park, once the funds for the museum are raised. The Rosicrucian Alchemy Museum will be the first alchemy museum in the United States and the largest Alchemy Museum in the world.

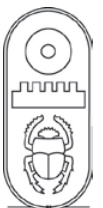
This article presents some of the text from the Alchemy Exhibit panels.

INTRODUCTION: THE EMERALD TABLET

The Origins of Alchemy in Ancient Egypt

The roots of alchemy are buried in the fertile black dirt of the Nile delta. In fact, the very word "alchemy" comes from the Arabic *al-khemiya*, which literally means "the black soil of Egypt." From Alexandria, the teachings of alchemy spread throughout the Mediterranean region, Arabia, Europe, and on to India and China. These teachings are summarized in the Emerald

Tablet, which is the core text of alchemy. In simplest terms, alchemy is the Art of Transformation. It attempts to unveil the universal principles behind growth and change. The focus of this work, known as the Great Work, is not limited to the physical world but encompasses all levels of reality, including the psychological and spiritual realms.



1. CALCINATION

Working with Fire

The first step in alchemical transformation is called **Calcination**, which is a process of decomposition in which a substance is reduced to ashes or powder by heating, drying, or crushing it. The tools of Calcination include furnaces, ovens, burners, crucibles, mortar/pestles, and grinders. The goal is to destroy the outer form of a substance to reveal its basic ingredients. In spiritual alchemy, this step seeks to get beyond ego and personality to reveal one's true identity or soul. Calcination marks the beginning of the chaotic Black Phase in alchemy, during which existing structures and habits are destroyed. A triangle pointing upward is the cipher for **Fire**.

2. DISSOLUTION

Working with Water

The second step in transformation is called **Dissolution**, which continues the process of decomposition begun in the previous operation. During Dissolution, a substance is broken down by immersing it in a liquid solvent such as water, acid, or a caustic solution. Tools for Dissolution include pots, kettles, cauldrons, baths, flasks, goblets, ladles, and jars. In spiritual alchemy, Dissolution works to free the feminine essence of Soul, while Calcination works to free the masculine essence of Spirit. Dissolution is the final process in the disruptive Black Phase of alchemy. A triangle pointing downward is the cipher for **Water**.

3. SEPARATION

Working with Air

The third step in alchemy is called **Separation**, which is a process of isolating basic ingredients in a substance and removing impurities. Methods include cutting, breaking apart, sifting, filtering, settling, skimming, evaporating, bubbling,

and layering. The tools used are knives, scissors, filters, sieves, settling jars, and evaporating dishes. The goal is to discard unwanted materials and keep only the most active parts. Separation begins the White Phase, in which substances recovered from the first two operations are purified to reveal their essences. In spiritual terms, these essences are Soul and Spirit. The cipher for **Air** is a triangle pointing upward with a horizontal line drawn through it.

4. CONJUNCTION

Working with Earth

The fourth step in transformation is called **Conjunction**, which is a merging of two different compounds to create an entirely new substance by melding, bonding, compounding, amalgamation, or precipitation. Tools used are mixing bowls, reaction vessels, compounding jars, smelters, and tanks. Alchemists viewed Conjunction as a sacred marriage of opposites that marked the turning point from the operations below in the material world to the spiritual operations above. The cipher for the element **Earth** is an inverted triangle with a horizontal line drawn through it.

5. FERMENTATION

Working with Sopic Sulfur

The fifth operation in alchemy is **Fermentation**, which is the beginning of the Red Stage of empowerment. Fermentation starts with the death and decay of plant material in an airtight container. This stimulates the growth of bacteria that convert sugars in the cells into gases, oily compounds, and alcohol. The alcohol represents the spirit of the plant, while any oil that surfaces is the soul of the plant. Its dead body is the stems and skins that sink to the bottom. These essences are known as the "Three Essentials" of Sulfur (Soul), Mercury (Spirit), and Salt (Body). They were sometimes referred to as "Philosophic" (or "Sopic") substances.

6. DISTILLATION

Working with Sophic Mercury

The sixth step in transformation is **Distillation**, in which the products of the previous operations are purified and concentrated. The tools of distillation include retorts, alembics, cucurbits, vaporizers, aludels, sublimators, condensers, stills, boilers, and heaters. Distillers consist of a lower boiling vessel, an upper condensing vessel, and a long condensing tube leading to a receiver. Vapors from a boiling liquid rise into cooler sections of the still where they begin to condense. Distillation continues the Red Phase of alchemy, in which essences are potentized and empowered. The more times a solution is distilled, the purer and more concentrated it becomes.

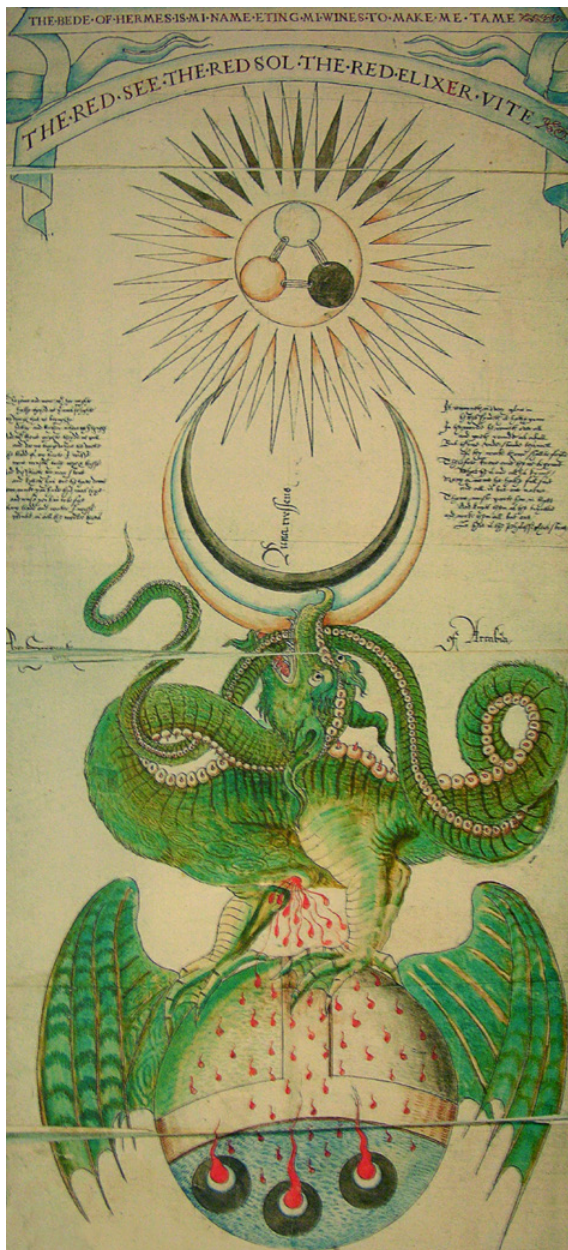
7. COAGULATION

Working with Sophic Salt

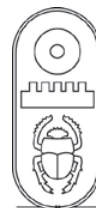
The final step in transformation is called **Coagulation**, which is a process of materialization in which substances congeal, consolidate, agglomerate, or precipitate into a solid mass. The alchemists saw this operation as working with a higher kind of Salt, a new type of spiritized matter that could not be perfected any further. “Thus you will obtain the Glory of the whole Universe,” says the Emerald Tablet of this step. The new Salt would be found in the unburnable ashes from fire or in the indissoluble crystals in water. It would come from the union of the Red and White, from the forces of Spirit and Soul. They called this magical Salt the “Philosopher’s Stone.”

THE RIPLEY SCROLL

This enigmatic scroll was created around 1450 by English alchemist Sir George Ripley. It is an illustrated allegorical poem that reveals how to make



the Philosopher’s Stone. The work starts with the First Matter, symbolized by the Black Toad in the retort. The first two panels are about breaking down the First Matter to release its essences. This makes the Black Toad discharge a venom that causes color changes and produces a series of lesser stones. The next two panels combine the products already created into a single object, which is now digested and transformed in the “blood of the dragon.” This leads to the projection of alchemical energies into the outer world.



THE ALCHEMICAL WORKSHOP

This painting below by Rembrandt (1606-1669) portrays all aspects of the **alchemist's workshop**. The interplay of light and darkness, Above and Below, spiritual and material, in this painting captures what it feels like to be in the presence of a master alchemist. The alchemist's desk is the focus of his preparation before he begins the practical work in the lab. The athanor, a tall brick or cast iron furnace, is where transformations take place. Distillation is an important process and several sizes of glass, ceramic, and copper distillers were used. Many medieval labs had dried carcasses of crocodiles, fish, and small mammals dangling from the ceiling, as well as boughs of herbs hung up to dry. Large processing equipment included fermentation crocks, digesting vats, washing troughs, soaking barrels, storage kegs, and huge boiling vessels and retorts made of earthenware, copper, or glass.

CONCLUSION: THE OCTAVE OF CREATION

The Operations of Alchemy and the Music of the Spheres

Pythagoras (571-495 BCE) believed the universe was created from a series of increasing vibrations he called the Music of the Spheres. The frequency of each note on his scale is a multiple of the perfect fifth, a 3:2 ratio that represents order out of chaos. Renaissance alchemists associated the seven notes of the Pythagorean scale with the Ladder of the Planets corresponding to successive levels of perfection in the Great Work. Each step up from the heavy dark Black Phase, through the clarity of the White Phase, to the final empowerment of the Red Phase, represents an increase in the energetic frequency of the substance. When the transmutation is complete, the substance is reborn at a higher level of vibration into a whole new octave of creation.



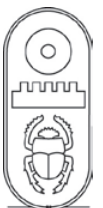


AZOTH OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

This emblem by the fifteenth century monk Basil Valentine shows the operations of alchemy as rays on a star of transformation, at the center of which is the face of the alchemist. Beginning at Calcination (black ray 1), we move through Dissolution (ray 2), Separation (ray 3), Conjunction (ray 4), Fermentation (ray 5), Distillation (ray 6), and finally Coagulation (ray 7). The roundels between the rays elaborate on each operation.

The Four Elements are indicated by the outstretched limbs of the alchemist, while the Three Essentials are depicted in the large triangle behind him. In the background can be seen the opposing forces of King and Queen (Spirit and Soul) that are united in the work. We can see that at the beginning there is just one bird, which does not discover it has a soul until the second operation reveals it. Afterwards, the birds of soul and spirit work together.

The five stars surrounding the cube in the *Corpus* ray stand for the Fifth Element or Quintessence, which is found in the body and represents spirit or life force. At the beginning of the Work, the Quintessence is trapped in black matter at the very bottom of the drawing and is raised through the purifying processes of alchemy to become the winged Ascended Essence at the very top.



MEDITATION

The *Azoth of the Philosophers* is a meditative mandala used by alchemists to apply the operations of alchemy to their personal transformation.

Focus your attention on the face of the alchemist. The triangle over his face signifies divine grace raining down, so we see within this triangle a union of the divine mind with the mind of the alchemist.

Each ray on the star shining out from the alchemist represents a metal from lead to gold. The circled scenes – called “roundels” – depict what must be done to transform the metals.

The outer ring has a Latin instruction that says: “Visit the innermost parts of the earth, and by rectifying them, you will find the hidden Stone.” The first letter of each word spells out “vitriol,” which is sulfuric acid. Alchemists believe a similar liquid fire exists within themselves and call it their “Secret Fire.”

The large triangle behind the ring stands for the three forces of creation, which we know today as matter, energy, and light. Alchemists refer to them as the Three Essentials of Salt, Sulfur, and Mercury.

Salt (or *Corpus*) is matter, symbolized by the cube. Sulfur (or *Anima*) is energy, symbolized by the Sun and salamander living in fire. Mercury (or *Spiritus*) is light, symbolized by the light of the Moon and the bird of spirit about to take wing.

The alchemist’s body emerges from the Three Essentials and is composed of the Four Elements. In his right hand is a torch of Fire, and in his left a feather, signifying Air. His right foot is planted on Earth, and his left is in Water.

To the alchemist’s right, the jovial, solar King sits on a lion and holds a scepter and shield, indicating his authority over the visible world. But the dragon of his unconscious hides in a cave, ready to attack should he grow too prideful.

To the alchemist’s left, the melancholy, lunar Queen rides a great fish in the sea. She carries a chaff of wheat, symbolizing her connection to fertility and growth. The bow and arrow she cradles represents the wounds of body and heart she accepts as part of life.

In simplest terms, the King and Queen are the polarities of our existence – aggressive and passive, masculine and feminine, our thoughts and emotions – that must be reconciled before we can achieve unity and wisdom.

Now move to the black ray number 1. It carries the cipher for both the planet Saturn and the metal lead. The smaller square denotes the Three Essentials principle of Salt. The goal is to overcome the lethargic, dark, heavy spirit of lead and begin the journey of transformation.

Moving clockwise, the first roundel is marked by the Latin word *Visita*, which means to begin a journey. The black crow sitting on a skull is the classic symbol for the Calcination operation, which uses the element Fire to burn away old structures and habits. On the personal level, the skull signifies the death of ego to reveal the true, inner self.

Ray number 2 has the cipher for both Jupiter and tin. The goal is to free the trapped energy in lead and transmute it into shiny, untarnishable tin. On the personal level, the work involves the purification and control of feelings and emotional energy.

The second roundel depicts the operation of Dissolution, which works with the element Water to dissolve materials. This step is marked by the word *Interiora*, which means to work with the innermost parts of the psyche. It shows the black crow watching its white, purified soul emerge from the dark waters.

Ray number 3 is marked with the cipher for both Mars and iron. The smaller cipher denotes the principle of Sulfur or

energy. The goal is to transmute hard, cold iron by exposing it to the feminine influence of copper.

The third roundel shows the operation of Separation, which works with the element Air to spiritize materials. We see the birds of soul and spirit pick through the remains of the previous operations to save the genuine parts. Above this roundel is written *Terrae*, which means “of the earth”, and refers to the essences being separated from the dregs of matter.

Ray number 4 has the cipher for both Venus and copper. The goal is to marry the opposing qualities of copper and iron to create something new. On the personal level, it is the formation of an integrated personality by merging our masculine and feminine sides.

The fourth roundel depicts the operation of Conjunction, which works with the element Earth to create a new incarnation. It shows the birds of soul and spirit lifting the crown of the Quintessence into the heavens. This roundel is inscribed with the word *Rectificando*, which means “to rectify or set right.”

Ray number 5 carries the cipher for both the planet and metal Mercury. An identical smaller cipher indicates the principle of Mercury as light or mind. The goal is to introduce new life into the fetus created by the union of iron and copper.

The fifth roundel depicts the operation of Fermentation, which begins the work with the Three Essentials of Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. It shows the birds of soul and spirit nesting in a tree, awaiting the hatching of their fertilized egg. The inscription reads *Invenies*, which means “you will discover.” During Fermentation, digesting bacteria create the spirit of alcohol. On the personal level, it is an influx of inspirational energy into the psyche.

Ray number 6 is marked with the cipher for both the Moon and silver. The goal is to purify materials by heating them and condensing the vapors. On the personal level, it means repeated reflection and elevation of our thoughts and feelings.

The next roundel depicts the operation of Distillation. It shows a unicorn resting next to a rose bush. The unicorn symbolizes sublimation of physical desires, and the rose is the purest flower. Above the roundel is the word *Occultum*, meaning “hidden,” since the essences at this stage are usually cloaked in vapors.

Ray number 7 carries the cipher for both the Sun and gold. The goal is to let go of old structures and allow the final transmutation to take place.

The final roundel depicts the operation of Coagulation and shows an androgynous youth emerging from a womblike grave. It is inscribed with the word *Lapidem*, meaning “the Stone”, which refers to the birth of the Philosopher’s Stone.

At the top of the ring, above the crown of Quintessence, is a winged figure known as the Ascended Essence. It signifies the completion of the spiritual work. The soul, now perfected, is ready to take flight to a whole new level of being.

Now that you understand the meaning of these symbols, you can work through the *Azoth* at your own pace. Just start with the face at the center and realize that *you* are now the alchemist.

