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A Viewing of the Amphitheatre: A Look at the Sorbonne's Criticism of Heinrich Khunrath's Opus

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COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

A VIEWING OF THE *AMPHITHEATRE*:
A LOOK AT THE SORBONNE'S CRITICISM
OF HEINRICH KHUNRATH'S OPUS

By

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, a few items to keep in mind regarding the Sorbonne and my usage of eras. Herein, the name Sorbonne refers to the theological faculty found at the University of Paris during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alchemical scholar Lynn Thorndike details three different institutions corresponding to the name ‘Sorbonne:’ the original Collège de Sorbonne, the aforementioned theological faculty, and the modern Sorbonne University.¹ Furthermore, this paper will often forego the use of eras, i.e. Before Christ/common era, as the majority of the dates occur in the common era (I will specify when otherwise).

The historian of science Lawrence Principe, at the John Hopkins University, describes alchemy as “an endeavor of both head and hand. It was both theoretical and practical, textual and experimental, and these two aspects constantly interacted.”² Alchemy is the precursor of chemistry and was more than the reduced, material ambition of turning lead into gold that it often gets pinned as today. It was the art of turning tinctures into medicines (iatrochemistry); of finding a remedy to purify the natural world and its inhabitants; and of understanding the world in a wider sense.

During alchemy’s nearly two millennia of existence and multiple continental changes, the ancient Greek concept of matter, *Stoichieon*, or elements as we might call them today, permeated popular alchemical beliefs. Pre-Socratic philosophers (circa 5th century BC and earlier) were the first to introduce these concepts of elements, and they were later incorporated into the work of famed Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 BC). These elements were believed to be the

¹ Thorndike, "Censorship by the Sorbonne of Science and Superstition," 119.

² Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 207-8.

building blocks of the world. These were earth, air, fire, and water, and because humans are also a part of the world, these composite them too. Although, the text on the composition of humans was written centuries later by the physician Galen of Pergamon (129-179 AD), who ascribed to each element a different bodily fluid found within humans.³

Alchemy was not a purely material or chemical science; during the practice's earliest phases, it came into contact with the teachings of Gnostic Christianity. This connection is most clearly visible in the works of the Egyptian alchemist, Zosimos of Panopolis (circa 3rd century AD). Principe defines Gnosticism as:

A diverse grouping of religious movements of the second and third centuries AD that stressed the need for revealed knowledge (*gnōsis*) to achieve salvation. This salvific knowledge included the realization that man's inner being was of divine origin but had become imprisoned in a material body. Knowledge was necessary to overcome man's ignorance (or forgetfulness) of his origins, enabling him to begin liberating himself (that is, his soul) from subjection to the body and its passions, and to the material world and the evil forces that govern it.⁴

This imprisoned part of the soul is known as the “quintessence,” or literally the fifth element; it belongs to the heavens and is perfect in its construction, unlike the other four elements which exhibit some form of a flaw which prevent its ascending into the heavens.⁵

The connection of alchemy to salvation became an integral part of alchemy's purpose; it would enter into the teachings of Arabic alchemy following the Islamic conquests of former Byzantine territories in the 8th century AD. Islamic alchemists continued to look to Aristotle for wisdom, through whose wisdom they would develop their own alchemical theories; the most important theory for this paper is the “Mercury-Sulphur Theory.” This theory believed that

³ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 38.

⁴ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 20.

⁵ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 70.

alchemists could obtain salvation or purification through the creation of a universal elixir by alchemical alteration and combination of the two “exhalations,” Mercury and Sulphur.⁶

Arabic alchemical theories then entered into the continent of Europe in the 12th century, which reached their zenith during the period known as the “Scientific Revolution.” This Revolution occurred between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, when many great minds began developing new theories contradicting the older established thoughts in favor of scientific observation and calculation. Alchemy’s own growth during this time did not extend into the eighteenth century, when it fell to the wayside in favor of modern chemical studies, but it did experience a “Golden Age” during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷

This leads us to the topic of this paper, alchemy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century--more specifically, the opus of Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605) known as the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (*Amphitheater of Eternal Wisdom*) (1595-1609). Heinrich Khunrath was a 16th-17th century alchemist and theosophist born in the German city of Leipzig. He was a staunch follower of the Lutheran priest, Valentin Weigel (1533-1588), who preached for stricter following of the teachings of the father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther (1483-1546). Khunrath’s works deal in the practice of alchemy through both physical-chemistry and theo-magical arts (the usage of a sort of “heavenly magic” to invoke results).⁸

⁶ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 35.

⁷ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 4, 82-83.

⁸ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (January 26, 2020).

In the year 1595, Khunrath released his first version of what many consider his greatest work, the *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*; however, during his time, it was met with less-than-great reviews. Khunrath, unhappy with the backlash, doubled-down on his work and set about revising and adding more knowledge to it for republication. Unfortunately, he would die in 1605 leaving his work unfinished. Fortunately, Khunrath's publishers in the city of Hanau took it upon themselves to try their best to update the work Khunrath had given them, and in 1609 they released a second version. The book itself is a collection of three-hundred and sixty-five biblical verses taken from two books of the Old Testament. Khunrath presents the Latin Vulgate's versions of these quotes, but also his own Latin translations from the Greek Book of Wisdom and Hebrew Book of Proverbs. Through these translations he provides what can be called an alchemical interpretation of the Scriptures.⁹

However, what Khunrath himself believed to be the most important aspect of his book did not come from the text, which he views as supplementary and contextual, but from the nine elaborate illustrations found throughout his *Amphitheatre*.¹⁰ These illustrations come in two sets: the first set is the four circular plates found within both the original 1595 publication and the republished 1609 publication; and the second, the five rectangular plates found exclusively in the 1609 publication. The four circular plates found within the 1595 copy were originally accompanied by text around them giving further explanation, but when added to the smaller-sized 1609 version these explanations were cut. However, these plates were kept in the same order from both the original and the 1609 publication, thus giving them a proper ordering to

⁹ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 105.

¹⁰ Forshaw, "Alchemical Images," 7.

follow. The later five illustrations did not receive a proper ordering or placement in the text, due to Khunrath's untimely death; this lack of instruction is reflected in the different orderings of the plates found in each print. The content of all nine of these illustrations will be discussed later.¹¹

Although Khunrath's second publication was done as a way to address criticism levied against his work, many individuals, including the "Secretary of Europe," Marin Mersenne, were still opposed to its propositions. Marin Mersenne (1588-1648) was a graduate and scholar of the Sorbonne University and a member of the Minim Christian order—a sect of Christianity based on the teachings of Saint Francis of Paola which taught the virtues of a penitential life. Today, Mersenne's name invokes his mathematical work (Mersenne's Prime) and his friendship with the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650); but in his time, he was well known for his connecting of scholars throughout Europe known as the "Academia Parisiensis."¹² He was particularly opposed to the interweaving of science and magic, and sought ways to limit these interactions.¹³

Through these scholarly connections, Mersenne sought to replace the outdated and flawed Aristotelian system with one that was equally as powerful in emphasizing the divine intervention that created the universe. His most suitable replacement involved mathematic and scientific explanation, as this would allow for no magical or naturalistic interpretations.¹⁴ He later found this model through the works of Descartes, but this did not stop him from trying to

¹¹ Forshaw, "Alchemy in the Amphitheatre," 197-8.

¹² Hamou, "Marin Mersenne," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/merсенne/> (accessed May 22, 2020).

¹³ Dear, "Marin Mersenne and the Probabilistic Roots of 'Mitigated Scepticism'," 173.

¹⁴ Dear, "Marin Mersenne and the Probabilistic Roots of 'Mitigated Scepticism'," 174.

clean away much of the magical and naturalistic interpretations which had been building upon the Aristotelian model.

In pursuit of creating a Catholic scientific community for the good of Europe, Mersenne wrote a book in 1634 titled *Les questions theologiques, physiques, morales, et mathematiques*, in which he attempts to answer questions on the subjects of theology, physics, morals, and mathematics (the title is a French-English cognate). Under question XXVIII, he asks “can we prove, or confirm the mysteries of the Christian Religion by the operations, and the principles of Alchemy?” Mersenne’s answer is yes—but also *no*, as the pursuit of the Mysteries of Faith through alchemy can only produce *shades* of what true faith can produce. Furthermore, Mersenne claims that the pursuit of alchemy may help bolster the Faithful and he encourages Catholics in their pursuit of it; but those who are not of the Faith that believe through alchemy they may fully understand the miracles of God and Christ are fools or lost souls and need to be condemned.¹⁵

For an example of false practice in alchemy, Mersenne references a censure that he announced with the authority of the Sorbonne’s Masters of Theology in the year 1625. This censorship was applied to none other than the *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, solius verae, christianokabalisticum, diuinomagicum, nec non physicochymicum, tertrium, catholicum instructore Henrico Khunrath*—or, as referred to here, the *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. I have provided an English translation of Mersenne’s French version of his original Latin:

Censorship of the Sorbonne, regarding the book of Khunrath

I have believed that those who respect the Sacred Faculty of the Sorbonne will be pleased considering the judgement, and the censorship that it has made of the Amphitheatre of Heinrich

¹⁵ Mersenne, *Les questions theologiques, physiques, morales, et mathematiques*, 132.

Khunrath, and that we know it by this follows wherein sinful the books of chemistry, this is why I place it here.

The Sacred Faculty of the Theology of Paris, to all the Catholics.

Because the Apostle enjoins us to experience all things, and to hold that which is good, having learned that next somethings less the Catholics have a certain very pernicious book between their hands, which there is firstly some figures, and then many explanations of various passages of the sacred Scripture arranged by seven degrees, and finally some corollaries, and the title is the *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae, solius verae, christianokabalisticum, diuinomagicum, nec non physicochymicum, tertriunum, catholicon instructore Henrico Khunrath*, the above Faculty of Theology had examined the book, and examined the book wholly by a few doctors that it had specially deputized for this subject, had judged that the explanations taken to the letter, and all the corollaries taken as they are, with the same book, has to be condemned, particularly because it relies on impiety, errors, and heresies, and of a perpetual profaning sacred passages of the holy Scripture, he abuses the sacred mysteries of the Catholic Religion, and drives the lectures to forbidden and abominable arts. This is why it (the Sorbonne) has judged that a book contagious cannot be allowed, exposed there in public without a door to the Faithful, the religion and the piety.

Made at Paris in our general assembly, famous solemnly at the College of the Sorbonne, the year of our Lord 1625. The first day of March.
By the command of Monsieur le Doyen, and of Masters of the said Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris.¹⁶

Mersenne presents Khunrath as a key example of an alchemist led astray in both faith and mind; he claims that the cause of his censorship of Khunrath was in relation to “impiety, errors, and heresies, and of the perpetual profaning sacred passages of the holy Scripture.” (While Mersenne further argued that “he abuses the sacred mysteries of the Catholic Religion, and drives the lectures to forbidden and abominable arts,” he did not provide specific instances of these violations.)

Herein, I will argue that the censorship of Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* was brought on through his use of certain non-Catholic sources in combination with the practice of magic and Paracelsian alchemy. Furthermore, Marin Mersenne’s decision to censor the book was in respect to his desire for Catholic hegemony

¹⁶ Mersenne, *Les questions theologiques, physiques, morales, et mathematiques*, 133-5.

throughout France and the European continent. To present these points I will not be analyzing the text of the *Amphitheatre*, but rather limit my attention to the aforementioned illustrations found throughout his 1609 publication.

Along with the commenting on the censorship of Khunrath, I would like to demonstrate that Khunrath's *Amphitheatre* was not written on a whim. In particular, by analyzing Khunrath's original four plates, I will demonstrate that Khunrath was creating a complex system of alchemical knowledge that made sense in its own time, even if we no longer regard its chemical arguments as correct.

Throughout this paper, I will be utilizing primary and secondary sources written in eight various languages (English included). Khunrath writes the *Amphitheatre* in early modern Latin (as well as some light German), but he also features some Hebrew, and Greek. This usage of multiple languages is something which he apologizes for but ensures their importance for the arguments that he presents. I also apologize for the various languages used and for any rough translations found throughout this paper, but I similarly ensure that the languages used are important for the analysis of the *Amphitheatre*.

Before I begin my discussion, I would like to briefly address a question that may come to the mind of the reader: why was the *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* censored in France three decades after its initial publication? For the answer, I turn to work done by a current member at the Sorbonne University, Didier Kahn, who details in his 2007 work, *Alchimie et paracelsisme en France à la fin de la Renaissance (1567-1625)*, a variety of possible reasons for why Khunrath's writing became relevant again after thirty-years. Kahn concludes that the core reason is the texts possible influence over a sudden increase of alchemical writings littered with quotes

coming from the Scriptures, then entering into France.¹⁷ This is an issue that I will address again within a later discussion.

Regarding my own analysis, let me highlight several key secondary sources crucial for understanding the works of Khunrath. One core source that I utilize is the online lecture web series, “Embassy of the Free Mind,” created by Peter Forshaw. Dr. Peter Forshaw is a professor of Occult Western Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, and a primary historian on the works of Khunrath. Since “Embassy of the Free Mind” did not provide Forshaw’s sources on Khunrath, I have drawn on a range of his scholarly works on alchemy and Khunrath, which are noted in my bibliography.

Another great author whose work I could not have gone without is the University of Leeds historian, Dr. Urszula Szulakowska. Szulakowska provides an excellent look at the usage of light and the inclusion of Protestantism within Khunrath’s plates in her book *the Alchemy of Light: Geometry and optics in late Renaissance illustrations*. Her work came into my hands through a lucky break during the Quarantine period of the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak when the online database, Hathitrust, made a large portion of their books accessible for those who have a copy at their home University library.¹⁸

Nevertheless, my analysis may unfortunately be less rigorous than I would like in certain places throughout the paper, as I was unable to acquire quite a number of important writings.¹⁹ I would also like to thank the many individuals who have been working tirelessly to combat the

¹⁷ Kahn, *Alchimie et paracelsisme en France à la fin de la Renaissance (1567-1625)*, 686.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, I could not consult her work until I was nearly done with this project.

¹⁹ In particular, Adam Mclean’s *Magnum Opus Hemitic Sourceworks 7* on the *Amphitheatre*.

outbreak; as well as, offer my thoughts and prayers to those who continue to fight, as well as, to those who are now unable to fight any longer.

CHAPTER 2. THE CIRCULAR PLATES

Here begins the discussion on the four circular plates found in Heinrich Khunrath's 1595 and 1609 publications of the *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Being the original four plates bound into the 1595 first edition, Khunrath provided information in these illustrations that he considered the most important for any alchemist to know. Khunrath's primary goal within these four plates was to create an outline of the steps an alchemist needs to take to reach the ultimate alchemical goal of creating a philosopher's stone, and consequently to achieve the purification of the body in order to release the soul.

Peter Forshaw describes the first three plates of the four as being "know God," "know thyself," and "know nature;" and although he did not give to the fourth a similar name, I believe it safe to call it "know thy workshop."²⁰ The first plate will introduce the unique form of Jewish Christianity that Khunrath practices. The second plate will provide a look into the magical influence prevalent within Khunrath's work. The third plate will address Khunrath's astrological and alchemical influences, as well as introduce a wildly important mythological figure for all of alchemy. The fourth plate reasserts Khunrath's ideals and leads into the themes of the later five plates.

To describe these plates, I will be presenting an analysis of each plate starting with their outermost realms of the rings then move inward (starting always at the north cardinal direction). Because Khunrath has three of these plates shift away from their circular design toward their

²⁰ Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

center, I will give a number to the items addressed in the image to better illustrate what I am referring to (I also will use relative location for continued guidance).

SECTION 2.1: THE COSMIC ROSE

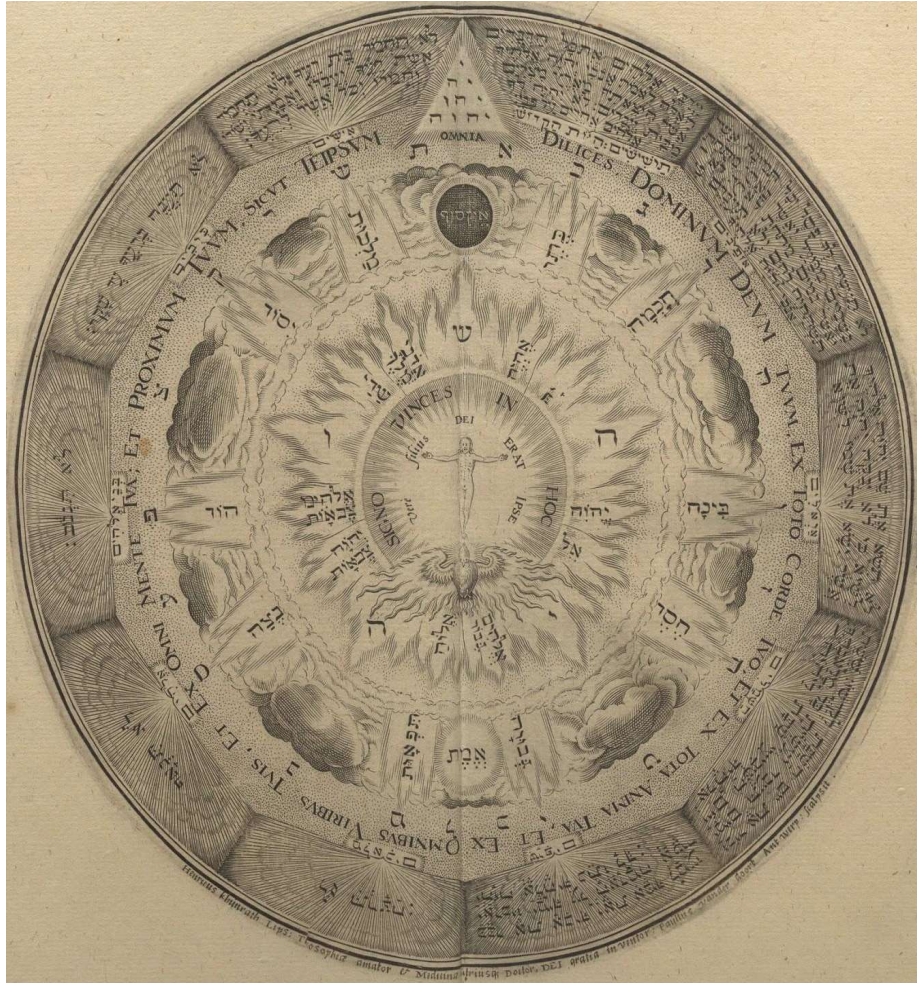


Figure 1. The Cosmic Rose from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphi theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.²¹

The first of Khunrath's original four plates, now known as the Cosmic Rose, is an illustration steeped in both the traditions of Christianity and Jewish Kabbalism—an esoteric

²¹ This, and all other plates originally included in Khunrath's *Amphi theatre*, are available in the public domain through the Science History Institute, Philadelphia, PA, at https://digital.sciencehistory.org/catalog?f%5Bcreator_facet%5D%5B%5D=Khunrath%2C+Heinrich%2C+1560-1605.

branch of Judaism which advocates for a “magical” view of the Old Testament and seeks a closer relationship with God through the understanding of his knowable presence. Importantly, this plate demonstrates Khunrath’s interest in the Christian-Kabbalist works of the late 15th/early 16th century German scholar and theologian, Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522). Reuchlin’s works on the Kabbalah formed a sect of Christian occult philosophy centered around the integration of Kabbalist beliefs and ideology into Christianity. Through Reuchlin’s experiences we will see how Judaism and Kabbalah were received in Europe. Furthermore, I will demonstrate by carefully analyzing this plate Khunrath’s presentation of God and his creations.

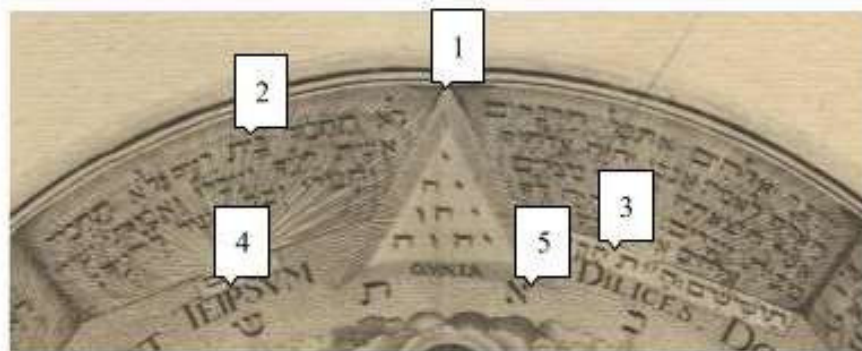


Figure 1.1. View of the top rings of the Cosmic Rose from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Starting at the top of the outer ring, Khunrath presents an equilateral triangle inside of which are Hebrew letters descending in quantity from 1-2-3-4 (Figure 1.1 Item 1). This triangle and its pattern are called the Tetractys (or Tetetratus), a concept designed by the Greek mathematician Pythagoras (of Pythagorean Theorem fame). Pythagoras (sixth century BC) and his disciples, the Pythagoreans, believed that numbers constitute the world, and symbolized this through the usage of the Tetractys. The Tetractys is a composition of two Pythagorean concepts, the decad and the tetrad. The Tetrad composes the numbers one through four. However, Pythagoreans believed that when these numbers are added together that they construct the

numbers 1-10. The tetrad equaling ten means that it is able to create the decad (the number ten), which allows these two concepts to equal any number possible. Thus, Pythagoreans believe that the tetrad and the decad constitute the world; through the placement of this concept within the Tetractys, it symbolizes the building of the world through the capacity of these two values.²²

Unlike a traditional Tetractys, the marks are replaced with a set of Hebrew letters, with the final line of the Tetractys spelling the Hebrew word “יהוה” (Latinized in some instances as “YHWH”). When translated into Latin from Hebrew, it takes on the form of Yahweh, Yahovah, or Jehovah. The word Jehovah comes from traditional Jewish belief and is the true name of God for certain Christian sects to this day (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses). The spelling of God’s name as four letters is the Tetragrammaton (Greek for four lettered word). Khunrath placed these letters inside the tetractys to illustrate his belief in the Jewish Kabbalah; within the Kabbalist *Book of Formation*, God made all of creation through usage of numbers, shapes, and Hebrew words; as such, Hebrew is the language of God, imbued with divine will and power. Thus, by placing it within the Tetractys, Khunrath is acknowledging the divine power of Hebrew.²³ At the end of my analysis of this plate’s symbolism, I will provide a detailed summary of what the Sorbonne’s attitude was toward this Kabbalist encroachment in Khunrath’s work, and more specifically, the figure who gave to Khunrath his Kabbalist influence.

Immediately displayed left and right of the Tetractys and looping around the circumference of the plate are the Ten Commandments in their original Hebrew text (Figure 1.1 Item 2). Under the commandments of Moses are the “Orders of Angels,” which deviates from

²² Taylor, *Theoretic Arithmetic*, 186.

²³ Szulakowska, *the Alchemy of Light*, 57.

the traditional Kabbalist practice, as there are typically only nine and not ten (as found here); this indicates that Khunrath is not receiving his Kabbalist influence directly from Jewish practitioners (Figure 1.1 Item 3). Following the Order of Angels, is a Latin quote that reads (Figure 1.1 Item 4):

DILIGES, DOMINVM DEVM TVVM, EX TOTO CORDE TVO, ET EX TOTA ANIMA TVA,
ET EX OMNIBVS VIRIBVS TVIS, ET EX OMNI MENTE TVA ET PROXI TVVM, SICVT
TEIPSVM

This quote indicates that it was a Christian rather than a Jew who was influencing Khunrath; when translated it reads: “You shall love your lord God with all your heart, and all of your spirit, and all of your mind. And your neighbor as yourself.” This is a composite quote created from both the New Testament and the Old Testament (the first part of the line is from the Book of Matthew, while the second portion comes from the Hebrew Ten Commandments). Underneath this quote is the Hebrew alphabet (Figure 1.1 Item 5).

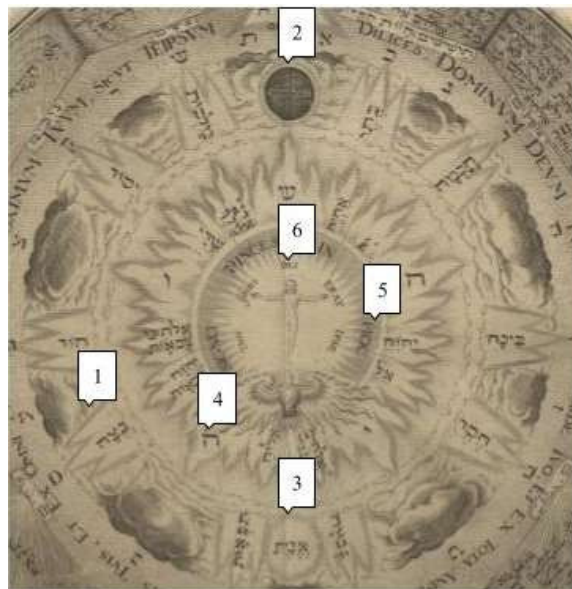


Figure 1.2 Interior of Cosmic Rose from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphi-theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

The interior circle begins with an unconventional version of the Kabbalist “Tree of Life,” also known as the “Sephilot,” written in a circle composed of light as opposed to its more common tree-like depiction (Fig. 1.2 Item 1). In between the top two flames, we see in a black circle the Kabbalist word “אין סוף” --Latinized as Ein Sof--and between the bottom two flames we see “אמת” (Fig. 1.2 item 2 & 3), Latinized as *emet*. Forshaw describes Ein Sof as being the Kabbalist belief in an Unknown aspect of God; and that through “Emet” or the truth of Christ we may become able to reach the point of understanding the hidden aspects of God.²⁴ The Sephirot is a list of qualities that the Kabbalah identifies with God; Khunrath placing these two forms of God alongside this list of qualities demonstrates that he believes in the Kabbalist view of God.

The quite literal sun (and son) at the center of the illustration comes in three parts: the fiery corona surrounding and displayed as a pentagram; the circular body representing the sphere of the sun; and the figure of the Son of God at the center of the sun. Inside the corona, Khunrath inscribes Hebrew letters inside the five long arms which spells the Hebrew word יהוה; this word is known as the “Pentagrammaton” (Fig. 1.2 Item 4). The “Pentagrammaton” translates as Yahshuah, or Jesus. Khunrath further supports this translation by placing the Latin phrase “IN HOC SIGNO VINCES,” “in this sign you shall conquer,” and “vere filius DEI ERAT IPSE,” “he was truly the son of God” (Figure 1.2 Items 5 & 6). The first quote comes from Saint Augustine of Hippo, and the second is a commonly used Latin phrase for Jesus Christ. Underneath, Khunrath places a phoenix in order to demonstrate the resurrection of Christ; finally, in the

²⁴ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

center is the figure of Christ shown in a traditional crucifixion pose. Thus, Khunrath is propagating the inclusion of Kabbalah into the most important of all Christian traditions.

However, this act of combining Christianity and the Kabbalah does not originate in Khunrath's work; by returning to the five letters found on the Pentagram, we find Khunrath revealing his primary Kabbalist source. Keen eyes will notice that this word is in fact the Tetragrammaton, but with the addition of the letter *ו* into the center. The Pentagrammaton's inclusion in the *Amphitheatrum* confirms that the source of the Kabbalist influence on Heinrich Khunrath comes from the German Catholic author of the 1494 publication *De Verbo Mirifico* (*On the Wonder Working Word*), Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522).

Johannes Reuchlin and his Kabbalist Christianity

Reuchlin's rise to fame first came in 1492 when he began an imperial investigation into Jewish texts, to determine which were blasphemous and heretical to the Catholic Faith. Prior to his investigations, he began to develop an extreme fascination with these texts, and upon obtaining a translated copy of the Kabbalah from the Italian philosopher and theologian, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), he was head over heels in love. Prior to Pico's translation, the Kabbalah was not a widely known book to the academic community, with those who did know of the Kabbalah using it as a way of converting European Jewish communities (a practice common of early modern Europe missionaries). What made Pico different was that he employed it for a quite different reason: he sought to translate it into the Latin script for academic and

theological use, as he believed it to be truly beneficial to understand God, and that it may be helpful for usage in Christian thought.²⁵

Pico was personally unsuccessful in pushing the text into the scholarly community, due to an early and mysterious death at the age of 31. After his death, Johannes Reuchlin took up his mantle and wrote on the intricacies and practices of the Kabbalah. Reuchlin would go on to write several influential books for the period, titling one of his final books *De Arte Cabalistica* (1517), which argued for the integration of the Kabbalah into Catholic practice. However, his propagating of Jewish books was not without controversy, which came as the result of an imperial approval from the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I (1459-1519) to create two seats for Hebrew studies within all German universities.²⁶

Reuchlin's initial success in implementing Jewish curriculums and Hebrew studies into universities was, unfortunately, short-lived. In the year 1514, the University of Cologne publicly condemned and burned the works of Reuchlin, denouncing his actions and reforms as being "offensive, dangerous to religion, and savouring of heresy." To further their cause, the Dominican leaders at Cologne called upon other universities to support this decision; among the group approving these charges was the Sorbonne. Two Cologne Masters of Theology, Jacob van Hoogstraten (1460-1527) and Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469-1523), presented these charges of heresy against Reuchlin; many scholars and contemporaries of the proceedings remarked that the condemnation was overflowing with anti-Semitic undertones. Pfefferkorn, an advocate of converting Jews through destroying their texts, even called into question Reuchlin's own honor

²⁵ Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 104-38.

²⁶ Barham, *The Life and Times of John Reuchlin*, 242.

by asserting that he was accepting money from Jewish individuals (sadly after 500 years we still often hear similar things). Pfefferkorn himself was a Jewish convert, who stole a great many items from his uncles then fled to the Church, where he converted to Christianity and joined up with Dominicans.²⁷ Eventually, a Papal committee took charge of this dispute and overturned the charges of heresy directed at Reuchlin; they even placed a condemnation on the leader of the opposition, Hoogstraten. Although a subsequent inquisition overturned this condemnation and reimplemented the condemnation of Reuchlin--which again was overturned--eventually public interest in the case fizzled out after a certain controversial figure by the name of Martin Luther raised his own objections to certain Catholic Church practices.²⁸

Regarding the Sorbonne's involvement in the situation, no historical documents show that the Sorbonne removed their support from the condemnation of Reuchlin; therefore, their initial compliance with the University of Cologne would imply that they shared in the anti-Semitic opposition to Reuchlin's work. Further evidence of the Sorbonne's negative view of Judaism is prevalent in Mersenne's aforementioned Question XXVIII, where he presents his skepticism of Jewish alchemists.

Overall, Khunrath's first plate is a commentary on the relation one should have with God and religion. Khunrath's presentation of the Tetractys with the Tetragrammaton infers that the understanding one must have with God is through the Kabbalah. However, Khunrath's presenting Christ in the center of the plate implies that, although the Kabbalah is correct in its presentation of God and his creations, the only way to reach God is through Christ on Earth.

²⁷ Graetz, *Influence of Judaism on the Protestant Reformation*, 2.

²⁸ Barham, *The Life and Times of John Reuchlin*, 242-246.

as the “Rosicrucians” and his efforts against them with particular focus given to the 17th century occultist Robert Fludd, who so often defended their doctrines.

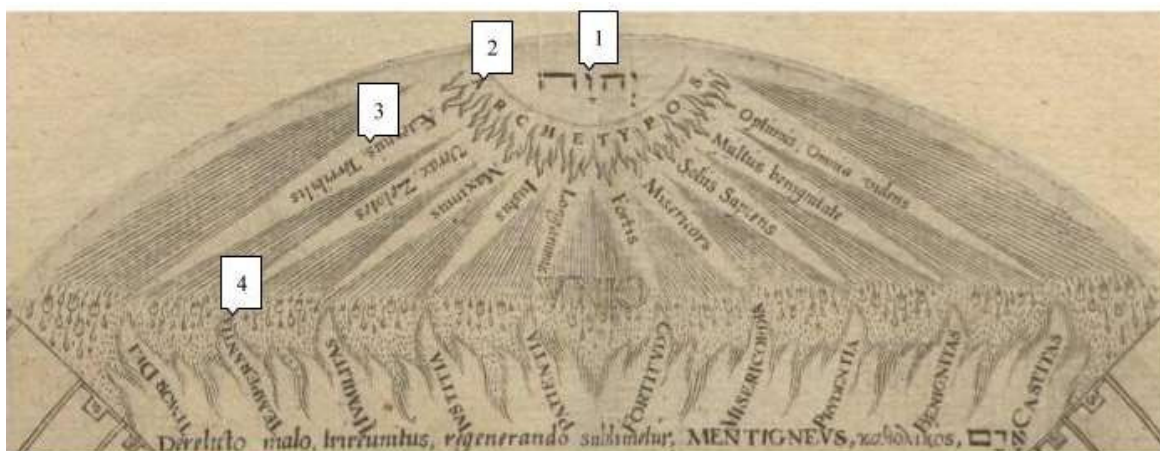


Figure 2.1 Top of “The Four, the Three, the Two, the One.” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Present at the cardinal north is again the tetragrammaton, יהוה, and although it appears to not be within the Tetractys, this is not the case (Figure 2.1 Item 1). This is because the plate itself is an elaboration of the Tetractys; and upon completion of our journey inward, I will explain this better. Underneath the tetragrammaton is the word “ARCHETYPUS,” and below which we see ten different adjectives written in Latin that are the characteristics of God (Figure 2.1 Item 2 & 3). From these we can see flames rising from below to meet the beams of light labeled with qualities of a good philosopher, (Figure 2.1 Item 4). Urszula Szulakowska asserts that the astrological images produced by the 13th century Spanish astrologist, mathematician, and Christian missionary Ramon Llull (1232-1316), was the prime influencer behind the generation of the astrological or geometric aspect of the plate, but that he also appears to have influenced various other parts of Khunrath’s plate designs.²⁹

²⁹ For more on this topic see Szulakowska, *the Alchemy of Light*, 2000.

In regard to the reception of Llull's work, the Vatican initially condemned his work in 1277 for what they viewed as a heretical influence; but by the time of Khunrath, Llull's work had received a fair bit of praise. Llull himself eventually was a favorite of Spanish King Philip I and a candidate for canonization. Rene Descartes praised the work of Llull as being a step toward a mathematic understanding of the universe, but he believed it, like many other earlier works, to be wrong.³⁰ I believe that Mersenne, being a close confidant of Descartes, would respect Llull by association.³¹



Figure 2.2. Rotated Right Side view of “The Four, the Three, the Two, the One.” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Before I discuss the outer two rings, I would like to briefly address the third ring in which Khunrath writes in part “OBJECTVM MEDIVM SENS, EXTERIORES SENS” (Figure 2.2 Item 3). Those who have studied the classics may recognize these as Aristotle’s steps for mental recognition, found in his *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*. Khunrath’s inclusion of Aristotle into this plate demonstrates his belief in not only the alchemical Aristotelian view of the world and its composition, but his view of cognition and the mind.

³⁰ Carreras and Artau, *Historia de la filosofia*, II, 299-301.

³¹ The current closure of library systems has kept me from pursuing more substantial research on this topic.

Around the exterior of the plate (minus the section with the Tetragrammaton), Khunrath writes, “REIICIATVR BINARIVS ET TERNARIVS PER QVATERNAIVM AD MONADIS REDVCETVR, SIMPLIATATEM” (Figure 2.2 Item 1). This translates as “let the Binary be rejected, and the Ternary be reduced, by means of the Quaternary, to the simplicity of the Monad.” Medieval scholar, Carlos Gilly, states that this quote is not original to Khunrath, but to Pelagius Eremita, whom Khunrath quotes directly, or indirectly quotes from the works of Trithemius, Agrippa, Paul Skalichius and Gerhard Dorn.³² From here we may say that the most likely situation is that Khunrath took this quote from Agrippa, as Khunrath’s main text proclaims Agrippa’s works as one of the core inspirations for his *Amphitheatre*.³³

Agrippa in this context does not refer to Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, famed friend of Emperor Augustus, but to the early 16th century occult magician, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. More evidence that Khunrath had Agrippa in mind comes from the ring of words found under the first quote, “FIDES MEDITATIO COGNITIO AMOR PHANTASIA ORATIO CONIVNCTIO FREQVENTIA FAMILARITAS SIMILITVDO” (Figure 2.2 Item 2). Forshaw makes mention of these concepts in his webinar, calling them the “Ladder of Conjunction and Union.”³⁴ He gives two possible sources for Khunrath’s inclusion of these terms, stating that these could have come from Agrippa or Reuchlin (although a key source is Reuchlin, as he was the original designer of the ladder).³⁵ However, because both the Ladder and the quote from Pelagius are found in the

³² Gilly, “L’Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae di Heinrich Khunrath,” 326.

³³ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

³⁴ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

³⁵ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy Or Magic*, 227.

works of Agrippa, I lean toward Agrippa as being the primary influence on Khunrath in this section.

Before I discuss Agrippa, I believe that it is worth discussing Reuchlin's "Ladder of Conjunction and Union." Reuchlin's ladder consists of ten rungs, which represent a different degree of "deification," the art of becoming one with God, with the final two steps in this ladder being Conjunction and Union. Conjunction is defined as the ability to temporarily conjoin with God, and Union is the ability to permanently join with God. As we have looked previously at Reuchlin in the previous section, we will now take a moment to review the works of Agrippa, and how they might have impacted the Sorbonne's reception of Khunrath.³⁶

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Rosicrucianism

Student to the abbot Johannes Trithemius, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa was a 16th century German occult philosopher, writer, and "magician." The primary text from which Agrippa influenced Khunrath was his *De occulta philosophia* (1533), but I will look at the reception of *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1530) as well. According to Agrippa, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* was a parody to excite sluggish minds within philosophical fields in order to bring about some actual analysis of scientific work. Regardless of its parody status, he was arrested in Brussels and his work condemned by the Church and the faculties of several universities in Europe. Among those who condemned it as heretical and favoring Lutheranism were faculty members at the Sorbonne, who identified it as heretical and favoring Lutheranism.³⁷ After the publication of *De philosophia occulta*, he was again arrested in 1535 and put on trial

³⁶ Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDIfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

³⁷ van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 115.

for trying to incite the practice of dark magic. Once again, Agrippa lost the trial and the church condemned him as a supporter of witches.³⁸

The nature of Agrippa's less than savory publications indicate that the Sorbonne would be very hostile toward anyone who cited his works, with Khunrath's magical orientation being a red flag for them. This is an idea which Mersenne reinforces in his condemnation of Agrippa as a promoter of dark magic, and even calling Agrippa an "Archimagus" for his influence in the creation of numerous magical books. Since Agrippa had died well before Mersenne's attacks were launched against him, he was unable to provide a response to Mersenne. However, through looking at previous defenses of his work, I may provide Agrippa's possible response to Mersenne, in which Agrippa would point to the ancient Sybil, whom he interprets as foretelling the advent of Christ and referring to the magic present in Aristotelian thought. Furthermore, he defended his magic as being that of the Biblical Patriarchs, that which allowed Moses to part the Red Sea and God to refuse Cain. It is worth noting that none of these defenses saved Agrippa from his various punishments.³⁹

Along with the magical tendencies of Agrippa and Khunrath, their Lutheran leanings also would have placed their texts in bad waters. This is because the year 1625—the year Mersenne condemned Khunrath's text—came amid one of the deadliest wars in Europe's history, the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). As a Catholic nation, France strongly opposed the Protestant changes occurring in the Holy Roman Empire, and the increasing number of Protestants within their own borders (famously the Huguenots). Having seen the weakened state of the Catholic

³⁸ Karolides and Green, *Encyclopedia of Censorship*, 8.

³⁹ van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa*, 136.

Church in France, Mersenne took it upon himself to clear out what he called “atheists” from wherever he could. Regarding the term atheist, Mersenne uses it not only in reference to those who do not believe in God, but also in reference to the Protestants. This is evident through his estimation of 50,000 atheists in Paris alone, which at the time is a ludicrous figure for a city of 500,000 people in a strongly Catholic nation.⁴⁰ Though the Huguenots were famously the main Protestant force in France, Mersenne chose to attack a certain magical sect of Protestantism found fervently in academic work, Rosicrucianism.

Rosicrucianism was a Protestant religious sect that is rather difficult to define; they were the inheritors of the works made by many individuals discussed throughout this paper. The Rosicrucians are an esoteric Protestant magical society, who obsess with uniting with God through the utilization of divine magics. This movement was ironically anything but unified, with many members sharing wildly different theological views and internal denouncements occurring between members. One relevant case of denouncement among Rosicrucians comes regarding the denouncement of the *Amphitheatre* in 1619 by a certain Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), who had previously praised Khunrath.⁴¹

A display of Mersenne’s disdain for these theologians comes courtesy of his altercation with a certain Robert Fludd (1574-1637). Fludd was an Englishman and, although not a member of the aforementioned Rosicrucians, he was a follower of much of their beliefs and a defender of their tenants: Fludd was a Protestant, a Paracelsian (discussion in Section 2.3), and an occult philosopher. His work dealt in the realm of astrology, and he accepted the Aristotelian view of

⁴⁰ Craven, *Doctor Robert Fludd*, 130.

⁴¹ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of light*, 80-85.

the Universe. His intersection with Mersenne began when Mersenne criticized Fludd for his magical tendencies. However, unlike the previously discussed attacks on deceased targets, Fludd was still alive. Fludd was able to provide a detailed rebuttal to Mersenne's allegations, which came in the form of his "Sophiae cum Moria Certamen, in quo, Lapis Lydius a Falso Structore, Fr. Marino Mersenno, Monacho, Reprobatus, celeberrima Voluminis sui Babylonici (in Genesin) figmenta accurate examinat" (1629). In this work, Fludd shows Mersenne tearing the Rosicrucian Manifesto the "Rosy Cross" to pieces, but also offers a response to Mersenne's accusations of heresy within his work. Fludd's core defense was that he accompanied his discussions on abominable arts with proper denunciation of their practice. Furthermore, Fludd argues that any magical art dealing with the invoking of angels and heaven are those of God and subsequently a part of the Christian Faith. Through his systematic presentation of his responses, and well-mannered behavior, Fludd received praise from many contemporary theologians and won out over Mersenne's condemnations. Fludd's victory did not stop Mersenne, however, as he continued to attack the works of Fludd and the Rosicrucians over the following few decades.⁴²

Immediately after Fludd's rebuttal, Mersenne in 1630 again mentions Khunrath, this time in a more private context as he writes when France was looking for an alliance with the Netherlands. During these negotiations, Mersenne wrote a letter to the French Ambassador to the Netherlands, Nicolas Baugy, asking him to campaign for or sponsor the censorship of Khunrath in the Netherlands. Mersenne's reasons for this censorship is that the work of Khunrath is an influence on Rosicrucianism. In supporting his claims, Mersenne, once again, gives no specific examples from Khunrath's work nor does he provides the text; instead, he refers Baugy to the

⁴² Craven, *Doctor Robert Fludd*, 131-140.

original condemnation and alludes to its similarities to the works of Agrippa, Paracelsus (see Section 2.3 for discussion), and unspecified others (most likely Rosicrucians including Fludd).⁴³

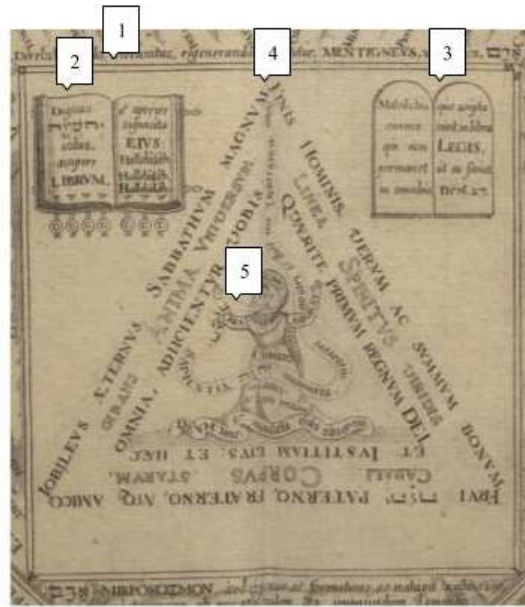


Figure 2.3. The square, the triangle, the hermaphrodite, and the union in “The Four, the Three, the Two, the One.” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Now we arrive at the center of the plate, and the reason for the name of the plate. The quotes surrounding the square detail that this is a representation of the Quaternary, a composition of four parts, or more explicitly, the four Aristotelian elements which compose the world. Inside the Quaternary is a triangle made of phrases and two “books.” These two books are the New Testament (featuring the Book of Revelation) and the Old Testament (featuring the Book of Deuteronomy) (Figure 2.3 Item 2 & 3). For Khunrath to place these scriptures within this plane, I believe, means that he proclaims these scriptures are secular and not of God and the soul.

Next, we move onto the triangle found within the square. This is Khunrath’s representation of the three Biblical components of all humans, “CORPVS, SPIRITVS,

⁴³ Tannery, de Waard and Pintard, *Correspondence du p. Marin Mersenne II*, p. 445-446.

ANIMVS,” body, spirit, and soul (Figure 2.3 Item 4). These are identified as the three-parted, or Ternary, of the plate. Khunrath is representing that, by reducing the Quaternary (the world), you may reach the Ternary (the Biblical components). Inside of the triangle Khunrath places his Binary, two parted, figure.

The Binary is the combination of a man and a woman, or a Hermaphrodite (Figure 2.3 Item 5). However, this is not any ordinary Hermaphrodite, but instead a representation of Adam and Eve; and as such, when they combine, they create Adam androgyny (Adam before the creation of Eve when he was closest with God). Thus, this depiction represents a return to closeness with God, and creates the Monad, or single-parted, aspect of this diagram. The single Hebrew letter \aleph imposed on the face of both Adam and Eve further demonstrates this, which is the Hebrew word for God (note: not the name of God, Yahweh, but the *word* God). This is a depiction of the final step of the Letter of Conjunction and Union, the union with God.

Here, Khunrath is communicating the idea that the only way to achieve the goal of unification of the soul with God is through the mind. This must be done according to Khunrath in a number of ways. The first step in this process is to match the aspects of God; then to understand the elements and the Scriptures through the steps of Aristotle; and finally, to somehow purify one’s body through the creation of Adam before Eve. This final step is not detailed greatly here but instead is portrayed in the next plate, to which we will now turn, illustrating the mental preparation required for Khunrath’s teachings.

SECTION 2.3: THE HERMAPHRODITE

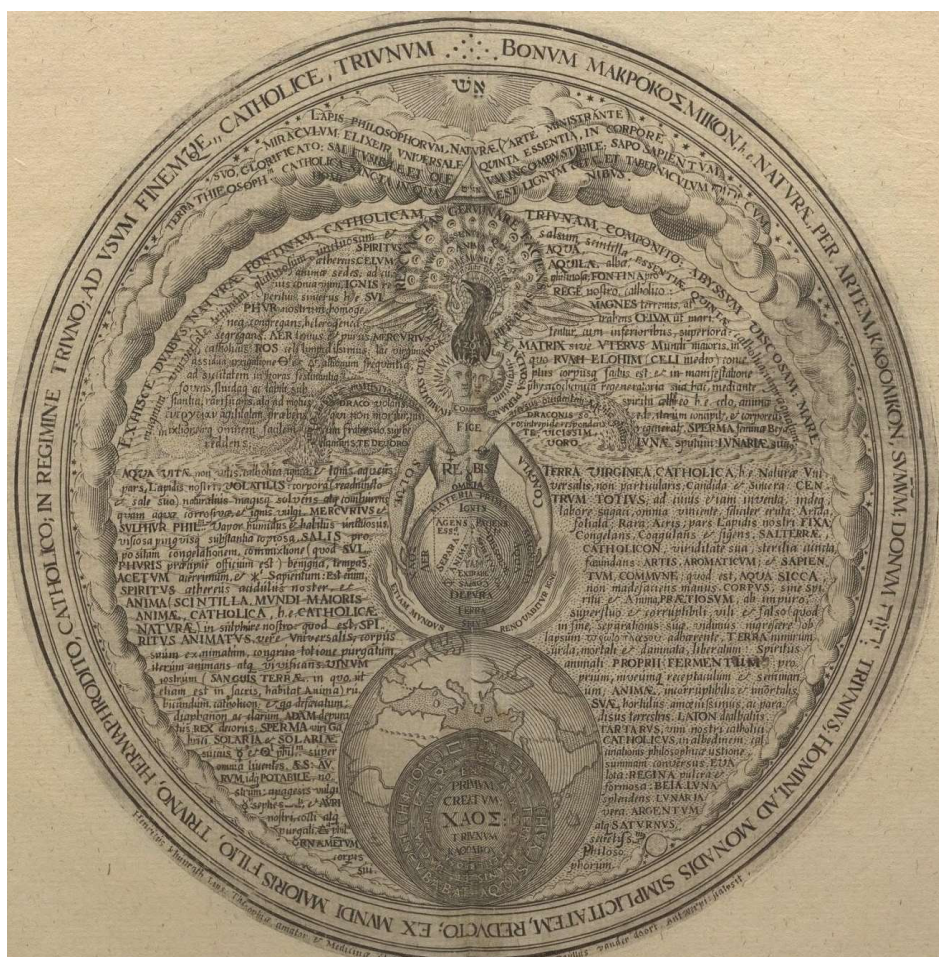


Figure 3. "The Hermaphrodite" from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphi theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Peter Forshaw describes this plate as the most alchemical of Khunrath's plates; as such, it is also the most complex to describe. Here I will discuss the alchemical and astrological concepts found within Khunrath's writings and introduce the 16th century German iatro-chemist known as Paracelsus (1493-1541). I will also provide a discussion on how Mersenne and the Sorbonne viewed the followers of Paracelsus known as the "Paracelsians." This plate will also present the concepts of the "macrocosm" and the "microcosm" in accordance to the works of Paracelsus and the Hermetic roots of these ideas.

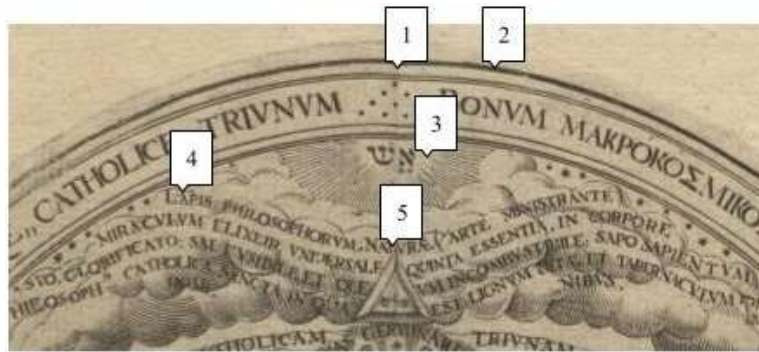


Figure 3.1. Top of “the Hermaphrodite” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Beginning as usual from the exterior, we see, in the topmost northern section, the familiar structure of the Tetractys of Pythagoras (Figure 3.1 Item 1). Visible on the right side is a quote which wraps around the entire circumference of the plate:

BONVM MAKPOKOΣMIKON, HOC EST NATURAE, PER ARTEM, KΑΘΟΛΙΚΟ SUMUM; DONUM YAHWEH TRIUNIUS HOMINI, AD MONADIS SIMPLICITATEM, REDUCTO; EX MUNDI MAJORIS FILIO, TRIVNO, HERMAPHRODITO, CATHOLICO; IN REGIMINI TRIVNO; AD VSVM FINEMQVE, CATHOLICE, TRIVNVN.

(Figure 3.1 Item 2) This quote is a description of the figure in the plate’s central area; and as such, one can appreciate the importance of the word “MAKPOKOΣMIKON” or macrocosm.

Khunrath subscribed to the belief that the world exists in two aspects: the “microcosm” (the individual) and the “macrocosm” (the universe). The microcosm is anything within the universe ranging from the humans that inhabit the world to the stones in a river. The macrocosm is the world, the heavens and all the microcosms within, it is, effectively, the Universe. Khunrath designed this plate as the macrocosm, while the previous plate (“the Four, the Three, the Two, the One”) is an illustration of the microcosm of a man. Further evidence for this being the macrocosm comes from deeper in the circle, where we see the Hebrew word for fire שׁוֹר imposed upon the Sun, with aspects typical of the sky, stars, clouds (Fig 3.1. Item 3), the moon (found in the southeastern section of the plate) and even the world (discussed briefly later in Fig 3.2 Item

1). Khunrath was a Protestant, an astrologist, and a believer in the Aristotelian view of the universe (including a geocentric cosmology).

Within the stars and clouds in this plate, Khunrath writes:

LAPIS PHILOSOPHORVM, NATURAE (ARTE MINISTRANTE) MIRACULUM ELIXEIR
VNIVERSALE QUINTA ESSENTIA, IN CORPORE SUO GLORIFICATO : SAL FVSBILE ET OLEVVM
INCOMBVSTIBILE. SAPO SAPIENTVM TERRA THIEOSOPH in CATHOLICA SANCTA IN QVA
EST LIGNVM VITAE, ET TABERNACULUM יהוה CUM HOMI NIBVS.

(Fig 3.1. Item 4). Khunrath is here proclaiming addressing the alchemical aspect of achieving purity--the philosopher's stone, or the universal elixir. However, we also see the Kabbalist Tetragrammaton once again, implying that the creation of this philosopher's stone is done through the Kabbalist understanding of the world; what's more, it is placed in the same realm as the stars and clouds, implying that the stone itself is perfect like Heaven.



Figure 3.2. The two orbs in “the Hermaphrodite” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Moving away from the outside area, we turn to the large figure found bisecting the center of the plate; we will look first at the two orbs found in the bottom half of the figure. The lower and larger of the two is Khunrath's version of the world, with part of it cut out to show the interior (Figure 3.2 Item 1). This is a reference to one of his other works, *on Chaos* (1595), where he discusses the Biblical and Greek notion of chaos, which existed before the world, and was subsequently used to construct all things in the natural world (it is shown here as the heart of the world). Khunrath is denoting the imperfections of the world in comparison to the perfection of the heavens; this is a fundamental Aristotelian notion, and worth noting. For Khunrath's purposes, it highlights the core alchemical usage of the philosopher's stone, that being to remove the imperfections of worldly matter.

Immediately above the globe, we see fire, an orb, and a figure, three aspects pertaining to the process of creating and utilizing the philosopher's stone. On the fire, Khunrath writes: "ETIAM MVNDVS RENOVABITVR IGNE" (Figure 3.2 Item 2), translated as "and also cleansed by the fire of the world," a common concept of alchemy, as fire creates most alchemical alterations. Atop this fire sits an orb that resembles the one depicted in "the Four, the Three, the Two, the One." However, when one analyzes this orb, it appears to have a much more alchemical interior.



Figure 3.3. The four, the three, the two, the one in “the Hermaphrodite” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Here we see Khunrath’s interior of the orb and its alchemical details. Starting with the outermost circle, Khunrath writes the words MATERIA PRIMA (First Matter), XAOΣ (Chaos), MAGNESIA (magnesium, which symbolizes eternity), and LAPIS (stone) written alongside the Proto-Socratic elements IGNIS (fire), AER (air), AQVA (water), AND TERRA (earth) (Figure 3.3 Item 1). Inside of the square, Khunrath writes in Latin “AGENS ESSa PATIENS V ta(?),” along with three words along the outside of the triangle within “SEPARA DISSOLVE EXTRAHE” each of which are a common practice within alchemy (Figure 3.3 Item 2). Thus, this first part symbolizes the alchemically requirements to break down the outer most layer of a microcosm.

Inside the triangle is another three words to decipher, these are ANIMA (soul), SPIRITUS (spirit), CORPUS (body), alongside the astrological signs for Mercury, salt, and Sulphur (Figure 3.3 Item 3). The association of these three astrological signs with the three Biblical components of man indicates that Khunrath is a follower of the Paracelsian Mercury-

Sulphur-Salt Theory. This theory is an alteration to the original philosopher's stone theory, the Mercury-Sulphur Theory, but with the addition of salt. This is because Paracelsus believes that just as all humans have three aspects to them, all microcosms must also have three components.

In the center of the microcosm, Khunrath has three items; first and foremost is the word YAH, a shortened Latinized form of the word Yahweh, as well as the word EXTRAHE, meaning “extracted” (Figure 3.3 Item 4). This indicates that God is present within the center of all things, and that through the philosopher's stone all things can be perfected. Lastly, we are presented an astrological symbol, which Forshaw believes to be the sign for fire, included to symbolize the fire that is ever present within all alchemical work.⁴⁴



Figure 3.4. “REBIS and AZOTH” in “the Hermaphrodite” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1595.

⁴⁴ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

Moving up from the image of the microcosm, we encounter the “REBIS,” Latin for the two-thing. This is an alchemical concept like the combination of Adam and Eve, but explicitly denotes the combining of Sulphur and Mercury to create the philosopher’s stone. However, in this case we see on the humanoid’s torso the alchemical sign for Salt (right breast) alongside the traditional two exhalations of Mercury (stomach), and Sulphur (left breast); this indicates that it is composed of not two but three “primal substances” (Figure 3.4 Item 1), denoting once again that Khunrath is a follower of Paracelsus’s Mercury-Sulphur-Salt Theory. On its arms, we see the Latin words SOLVE (dissolve) and COAGVLA (coagulate), two actions commonly found in alchemy. Upon their heads, we see the two astrological signs for the sun and the moon (the sun is found on the male half, and for the moon found on the female half). This is another indicator of this being the philosopher’s stone, as alchemists believed the marriage of the sun and the moon would result in the stone.⁴⁵

We will now look to the bird atop the Hermaphrodites’ head (Figure 3.4 Item 2), which Forshaw defines as a “composite bird,” built out of the body of a raven, the wings of a swan, the talons of an eagle (or possibly phoenix), and the tail of a peacock. Khunrath labels the rings with “AVIS HERMETIS,” or bird of Hermes (not the god Hermes, but the alchemical mythological figure Hermes Trismegistus). Overlying the raven, we can see the word AZOTH, a word whose origins are debated, as it may have comes from the earlier-mentioned Hebrew word אין סוף “ein sof,” (page 18), or possibly the first and last letters of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (Figure 3.4 Item 3).⁴⁶ Due to the Paracelsian influence on Khunrath, we can infer that this is a reference to the

⁴⁵ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 14.

⁴⁶ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

Paracelsian definition of Azoth (that which is made from the first and last letters)—and here,

Urszula Szulakowska provides a terrific definition:

A concept adopted from the late medieval theory of the ‘coelum,’ a medium between matter and soul, world and God, in other words an ‘astral’ substance, both physical and spiritual in nature. Therefore, it has the same function as the human imagination in the astral body. Paracelsus had, in fact, stated that the imagination was the ‘coelum in homine.’ Hence in Paracelsian chemical theosophy the ‘quintessence’ was not only a chemical substance, but also a psychic faculty that of the imagination or fantasy.⁴⁷

From this definition a connection within Khunrath’s illustration emerges: Azoth connects the heavens to the philosopher’s stone; the philosopher’s stone connects the microcosm to Azoth and, in effect, to the heavens; therefore, the world is connected to the heavens through the effects of the philosopher’s stone. His labeling the bird as belonging to Hermes suggests that Khunrath believes the alchemical theory that an angel brought celestial knowledge to the mind of Hermes; as the 17th century English occultists, John Everard and Hargrave Jennings, write, “he (Hermes) was believed to be the origin of everything formed or produced by the human mind. He was therefore, esteemed as the inventor of all the arts and sciences. He was the contriver of the hieroglyphics.”⁴⁸

Let me emphasize what Everard and Jennings wrote about Hermes: “he was the contriver of the hieroglyphics.” Just visible here is a strange symbol posing as the O in the word AZOTH; this symbol is the “Monas Hieroglyphica,” developed by the English Mathematician and Royal advisor, John Dee (1527-1608). Dee was a 16th century English mathematician and councilor to Queen Elizabeth I of England, and, as such, his works mostly focused upon the subject of mathematics, but like most of philosophy in the early modern period, it overlapped with many

⁴⁷ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 9.

⁴⁸ Everard and Jennings, *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus*, i.

different fields. Although his impact and status as an alchemist is often up for debate, I believe his book, the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, cements his status in alchemical writing.⁴⁹

The inspiration of Dee's work is apparent in this plate, as Khunrath placed the *Monas Hieroglyphica* not only in this vital concept of the Azoth, but throughout the entirety of his plate. This is because Dee's hieroglyphic is a composition of the astrological sign for the sun, the moon, the Earth, and fire; and if we compare this hieroglyphic with Khunrath's plate, they appear identical in design (with the sun and moon being the male and female aspects of the rebis; the Earth being the microcosm; and the sign for fire being the fire of the world).

Paracelsus and his Paracelsians

I have made mention a number of times now to the figure Paracelsus, and his alchemical works; however, I have yet to fully introduce him. Philippus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, or as he called himself, Paracelsus (1493-1541), was born to a German mine owner, and grew up learning about metals and minerals. He eventually began practicing alchemy and medicine and began to make a name for himself. However, he was not the most likeable individual. In the 16th century, the standards of how a philosopher should behave was the Nicomachean ethics of Aristotle. Aristotle believed that philosophers should pursue good things for the sake of them being good and do things with as little vice as they can; he also believed that philosophers should show restraint and be reasonable in their arguments. These are all good aspirations for philosophers to follow; unfortunately for many 16th century alchemists and doctors, Paracelsus did not care for Aristotle and opposed much of his works. Regarding

⁴⁹ For more on this debate see Forshaw, "The Early Alchemical Reception of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*," 247–69.

Paracelsus's ethics, he did not act the most level-headed or reasonably as Aristotle recommends.

His writing concerning arsenic provides a great example of his rigid and hotheaded personality.

“Some persons have written that arsenic is compounded of Mercury and Sulphur, others of earth and water; but most writers say that it is of the nature of Sulphur. But, however that may be, its nature is such that it transmutes red copper into white. It may also be brought to such a perfect state of preparation as to be able to tinge. But this is not done in the way pointed out by such evil sophists as Geber in “The Sum of Perfection,” Albertus Magnus, Aristotle the chemist in “The Book of the Perfect Magistery,” Rhasis and Polydorus; for those writers, however many they be, are either themselves in error, or else they write falsely out of sheer envy, and put forth recipes whist not ignorant of the truth. Arsenic contains within itself three natural spirits.⁵⁰”

By Khunrath's time, Paracelsus's name had not faded, and indeed continued to garner attention from many in the academic community, though his fame was more akin to infamy than to renown (courtesy of the fact that many European institutes were still followers of the many individuals that Paracelsus attacked). A look at Michael Maier's *Golden Tripod* (1618) provides evidence of the controversial beliefs of Paracelsians (here called followers of Hermetic Medicine):

Being placed in the thick of the struggle between the followers of Dogmatic and Hermetic Medicine, I thought it would throw great and unexpected light on the subject of this controversy, if I published in the Latin tongue the three great classical Tracts bearing upon the matter, viz., that of the Benedictine Monk BASILIUS VALENTINUS, and those of the two great English Sages NORTON and CREMER.⁵¹

We see from Maier that there is a prevalent and fervent controversy occurring regarding two sects of schools of thought on Medicine. The so-called Hermetic followers are the disciples of Paracelsus, or the “Paracelsians” as they are often dubbed (*Paracelsime en Francais*), while the “dogmatic” field is the Hippocratic schools of medicine commonly found in the schools of Europe and the Islamic world. Although this is not directly alchemy, medicine at this time was

⁵⁰ Waite, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, 59

⁵¹ Waite, *The Hermetic Museum, Restored and Enlarged*, 309.

reliant on other fields of science for its methods, and iatrochemistry (the medical use of alchemy) was Paracelsus's main pursuit.

In regard to the Sorbonne's reception of Paracelsian doctrines, Sorbonne University's Didier Kahn, in his previously mentioned *Alchimie et Paracelsisme en France*, provides a number of incidents revolving around the Sorbonne and their censorship of Paracelsians (among whom is Khunrath). Another case discussed by him, as well as by Lynn Thorndike, is an incident that came about one year prior to the *Amphitheatre's* censorship, when in 1624 two French figures by the names of de Clave and Villon were accused of trying to spread false medicine and alchemy. Once again, spearheading the attack on these two individuals was Mersenne, who showed special interest in attacking Villon; as Kahn states, Mersenne was "wishing to attack Aristotle and all celebrated sects of philosophy, but knowing little chemistry himself, used de Clave as a cat's paw to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him." The outcome of this case was that the Sorbonne found both men guilty of spreading false medicine, and their works were condemned.⁵² We briefly saw Mersenne's disdain for Paracelsus in his letter mentioned in Plate 2 (page 29), when he was trying to censor Khunrath in the Netherlands. However, here we see the full extent to which he dislikes the works of Paracelsus. Although he was not a fan of the work of Aristotle, he believed it to be, nonetheless, a better alternative to the teachings of Paracelsus.

I have already emphasized Paracelsus's main contribution to the work of Khunrath comes in the form of his alchemical and astrological influence. These two influences are manifest in the form of Paracelsus's views on the microcosm and macrocosm, and the addition of salt into the

⁵² Thorndike, "Censorship by the Sorbonne of Science and Superstition," 121.

traditional Mercury-Sulfur Theory. However, Paracelsus was also an important influence on the inclusion of magical practice within Khunrath's alchemy, as he was a believer in the same Kabbalist magic found in Reuchlin's and Agrippa's works, although to a lesser extent than Agrippa and Reuchlin, as he saw it as a way to connect the alchemist to the divine. Paracelsus's magical alchemy is what Forshaw believes to have caused the majority of charges against Khunrath's *Amphitheatre*.⁵³ This is an idea I support, as Mersenne's constant endeavor to censor the magical works of Agrippa and Reuchlin would have included Paracelsian works, which included both "false medicine" and Kabbalist magic.

Before moving onto the next plate, I will provide a summary of the information Khunrath has presented so far. Within this plate, we now see that the means toward the purification of the soul comes through Paracelsian alchemical processes. Through the alchemical combination of salt, Mercury, and Sulphur, we are able to free our soul from the earthly prison and purify our microcosm, a concept Khunrath presents in his portrayal of the rebis holding the microcosm atop the fires of the world. His placement of the Bird of Hermes atop the hermaphrodite illustrates that the knowledge required to make the stone is not of earth but of heaven; as such, alchemists need to utilize the information detailed in Khunrath's first two plates to invoke divine magic during the transmutation of the stone. These three plates are detailing, therefore, the knowledge required to create the philosopher's stone; however, Khunrath has yet to provide the physical means to his physical aspects of his chemical work. He does that in his fourth and final circulate plate.

⁵³ Forshaw, "Curious knowledge and wonder-working wisdom in the occult works of Heinrich Khunrath," 108.

SECTION 2.4: THE ALCHEMIST'S LABORATORY

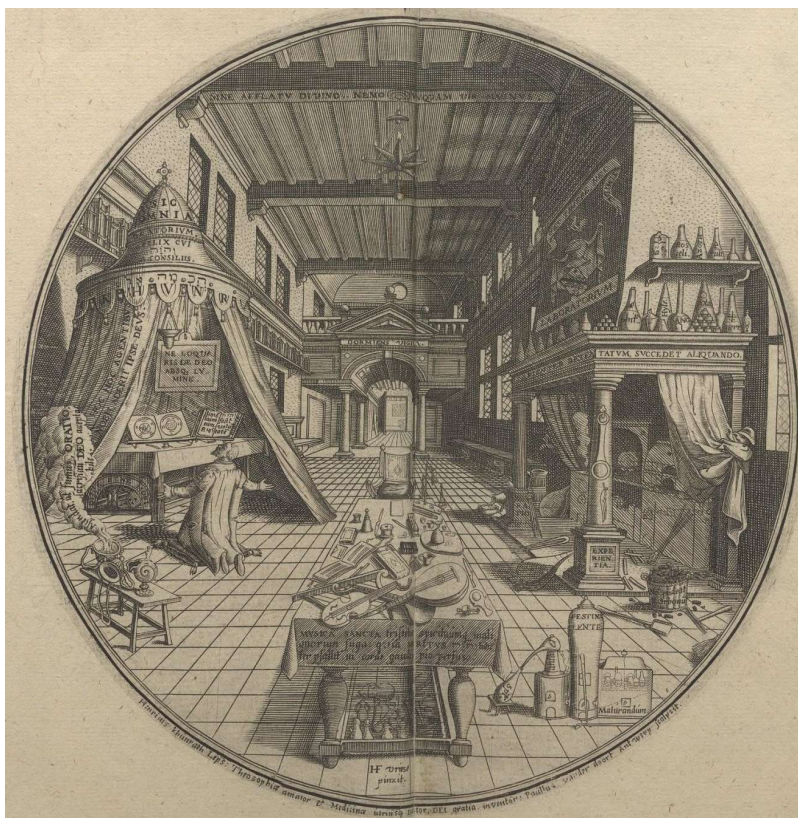


Figure 4. “The Alchemist’s Oratorium-Laboratorium” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Khunrath’s final and most famous circular engraving presents a transition, from the two-dimensional illustrations of the previous three plates, into three-dimensions. This linear perspective is of his laboratory, and it indicates a shift away from the concepts of Khunrath and toward the physical objects needed *for* Khunrath’s alchemy. To discuss this plate, I will divide the sections into three different regions (moving from left-to-right), and I will utilize once again the spectacular work done by Urszula Szulakowska in *the Alchemy of Light : Geometry and Optics in Late Renaissance Alchemical Illustrations*.

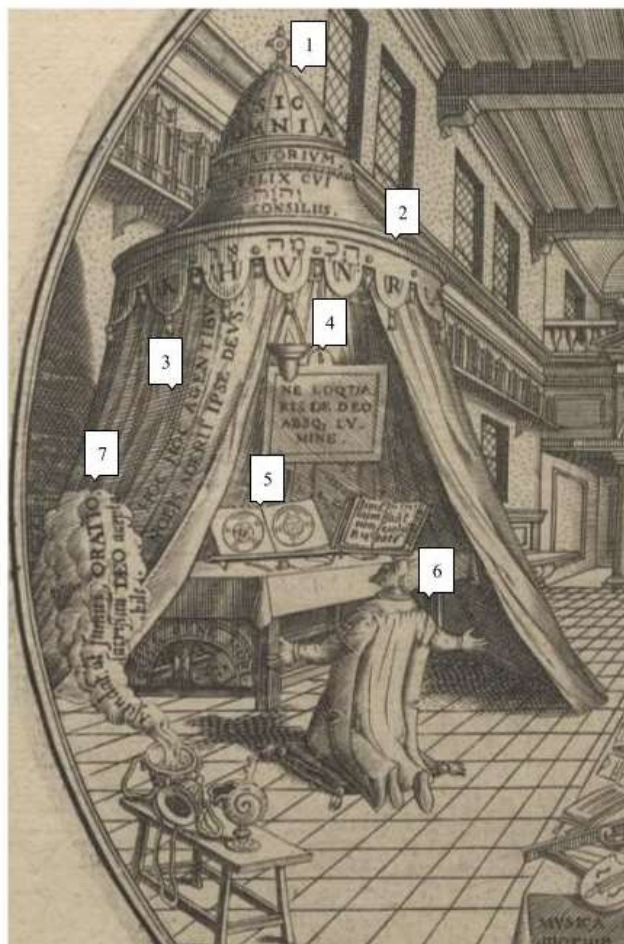


Figure 4.1 - Close up on the Oratorium in “the Alchemist’s Oratorium-Laboratorium” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

On the canopy of the tent structure (Figure 4.1 Item 1) Khunrath writes “SIC OMNIA ORATORIVM,” which identifies that this tent is an oratory, a place dedicated for private worship, commonly a small chapel. This is an important inclusion, as Khunrath follows here the Lutheran teachings of Valentin Weigel (1535-1588).⁵⁴ The next line underneath (still in Figure 4.1 Item 1) is written as “FELIX CUI יהוה A CONSILIIS,” meaning, ‘happy is whom Yahweh councils.’ This line expresses his belief in Divine knowledge or inspiration, which Khunrath

⁵⁴ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 80.

writes as being one of his driving factors in his writing. To reinforce his commitment to this workspace and its ideals, Khunrath writes, within several half circles underneath the canopy, the Latin letters “H-K-H-V-N-R-” inside of each (his own name “KHUNRATH”). On the drapery of the oratorium (Figure 4.1 Item 3), Khunrath writes “HOC HOC AGENTIBVS NOBIS, ADERIT IPSE DEVS,” which Szulakowska translates as “God himself will come to ‘our’ aid.”⁵⁵ All of these quotes indicate Khunrath’s commitment to his pursuits, and, although he may be ostracized, he is correct.

Inside of the oratorium we see multiple writings and books. At the top is a plaque that reads “do not talk of God without light,” which is accompanied by a candle to illuminate his message (Figure 4.1 Item 4). Underneath these items there are two books on a table (Figure 4.1 Item 5); the one on the right is a Psalm book, and the other has a tetractys and a pentacle, which Szulakowska identifies as being from Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia*, an indicator of Khunrath’s practice of Kabbalah and Divine Magic within a Christian environment.⁵⁶

In front of the oratorium is a man in prayer and a small table from which smoke is rising. The man is kneeling on the cushion with his head cocked back and his arms spread open as if preparing to embrace someone, most likely a representation of Khunrath himself (Figure 4.1 Item 6). To the side of Khunrath, we find a small table and a Thurible, a metal container and chain which holds incense, from which smoke (containing an expression) is rising out: “Ascendit, ut fumus, ORATIO, sacrificiu DEO acceptabile” (Figure 4.1 Item 7). Khunrath includes this quote as a reference to the Catholic practice of burning incense while in mass, done

⁵⁵ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 133.

⁵⁶ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 133.

to demonstrate the prayers of the faithful rising up to God. In including this here, Khunrath attempts to demonstrate his own Protestant Kabbalist faith as being righteous and reaching God.



Figure 4.2. Central Table in “the Alchemist’s Oratorium-Laboratorium” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

We move next to the table in the center of the room, upon and beneath which we can see several writing utensils, musical instruments, and alchemical devices (Figure 4.2 Item 1 and 3). These instruments are likely a way to demonstrate the importance of mathematics to alchemical work as, since Greek times, music was considered a part of mathematics. On the front of the table we also see a quote which Szulakowska translates as “a statement concerning the power of sacred music to deter spirits and evil-doers,” which relates to the Biblical story of David playing the Harp to drive away evil from King Saul (Figure 4.2 Item 2). Khunrath is providing an

example of how science and religion are combined in the Bible, as the musical power is able to exorcise demons and evil spirits from individuals.⁵⁷

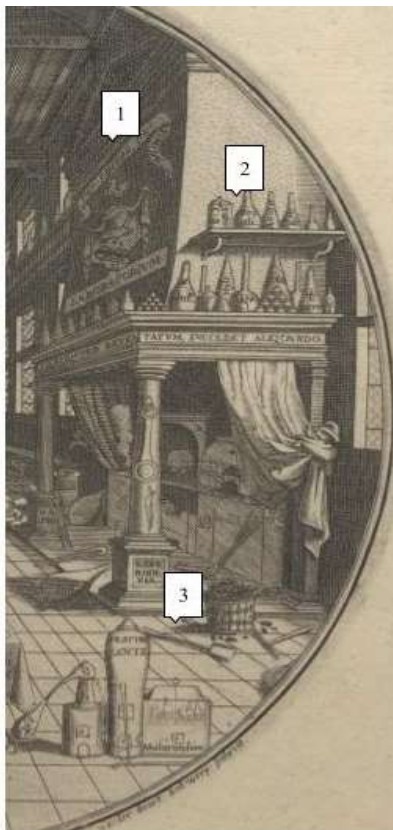


Figure 4.3. Detail from the Laboratory in “the Alchemist’s Oratorium-Laboratorium” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. Hanau, 1609.

Starting from the top left region, we first see a coat of arms with the phrase “NEC TEMERE NEC TIMIDE”(neither without design nor timidly) (Figure 4.3 Item 1). Below we also see the label for this portion of the room “LABORATORIVM,” a laboratory being a place to conduct experiments and research. The bottles to the right are all labeled with alchemical signs indicating that these are tinctures and solutions (Figure 4.3 Item 2). The remaining items on the

⁵⁷ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 130-131.

page are apparatuses related to the conducting of alchemical experiments, of what he calls “physicochymicum,” or physical chemistry (Figure 4.3 Item 3).

Khunrath’s oratorium-labortorium is a demonstration of the proper environment in which alchemists should be conducting alchemy. In including both an oratory and a laboratory, Khunrath is indicating that these both are of equal importance to his alchemical practice. The table in the center with its musical instruments represents the connection found in the Bible between the science (music and mathematics) and religion (as noted above, the exorcising of demons from King Saul through music). Through these four alchemical plates, Khunrath presents a full demonstration of his sources, goals, sciences, and processes that he believes are required to create a philosopher’s stone. Therefore, while alchemy is no longer considered a legitimate part of physical chemistry, Khunrath was not drawing connections and conclusions from the thin air; he was, for all intents and purposes, a typical natural philosopher for his time. Now that we have taken a look at his original content, we will now turn to his later five plates.

CHAPTER 3. RECTANGULAR PLATES

In this third chapter, I will discuss the five rectangular plates of Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* and their meanings. Not until the publications of Khunrath's second edition of this text did these images come into circulation, along with a number of essays by other alchemists which I will not be discussing. As I mentioned earlier, Khunrath's second edition was published because critics had attacked his first version of 1595, an issue which Khunrath sought to alleviate.

Khunrath designed these plates to resemble the journey and monumental writings that an alchemist would come across in their pursuit of the philosopher's stone; as such, we will follow along with Khunrath's alchemical journey. Although the plate ordering is unknown to scholars, as Khunrath left no specific ordering prior to his death, we turn again to the work of Peter Forshaw to provide what he believes to be an ordering system, based around the time of day, in the first three images. However, this theory only applies to the first three, as the other two do not feature a sun from which time can be told.

The overall purposes of Khunrath's plates was to reinforce his writings core alchemical knowledge and to introduce criticism against his those who slandered his original work. In the first two, Khunrath reinforces his views of Paracelsian alchemy and the works of Reuchlin. The third plate is a copy of two works attributed to the mythological figure Hermes Trismegistus and will provide a ground for discussion on his works. The fourth is a discussion on alchemical pursuits, but will not be explored in depth here as it is a reference to *On Chaos*, which I briefly discuss in Section 2.3. The final plate is a look at the religious situation within Khunrath's time, and the full discussion on the importance of Protestantism within Khunrath's works. Due to the

more irregular design of Khunrath's later plates, the pattern of analysis will be more situational and will benefit from the numbering provided.

SECTION 3.1: COLLEGE OF THE MYSTERIES



Figure 5. “Adumbratio GYMNASII” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Khunrath’s presumed first rectangular plate is a representation of the beginning situation of a typical alchemist. Within this section we will be looking at a vast landscape that Khunrath designed to represent the different careers regarding nature and material craft, with the alchemical work in Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre* being the highest of pursuits. While pursuing this journey, I will be discussing a few quotes and references to individuals found throughout this plate, but I will not be providing in-depth analysis of any particular figure, either because they

did not generate criticism from the Sorbonne or other universities in Europe, or because I have discussed them in depth already.



Figure 5.1. Close up of the bottom half of the Adumbratio Gymnasii from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

We begin by looking at the boat on the bottom left in which two figures can be discerned (Figure 5.1. Item 1). These two individuals are holding different navigational equipment, one a compass and the other a sexton. Although alchemical practice does not connect directly to these two instruments, they both rely on the macrocosm and the heavens to provide them with answers. The compass relies on the magnetic pull of the world toward the north; and the sexton utilizes the position of the stars and heavenly bodies to know direction. Similarly, alchemy uses the stars for astrological purposes and metal for alteration (the moving of the metal in the compass).

On a small island across from the boat we see a familiar figure with their arms open and eyes to the heavens (Figure 5.1 Item 2). Khunrath is depicted here again, but this time he is reading only a book of Psalms and has his eyes not fixed on a candle but toward the mountains (where we will see the sun peeking out in the next figure). This is a parallel to the depiction of

him in the “Oratorium-Labortorium,” but with the Psalms only, possibly illustrating the importance of religion and nature to Khunrath.

Above the boat there are two cave-dwelling writers; written around them are the phrases “Imulsu Spirito Sancit” and “PRECATIO. ELEEMOSYNA” (Figure 4.1 item 3). Khunrath is telling his readers that these individuals are false alchemists, who rely on being paupers and push away the spirit of God from their practice. Moreso, I believe Khunrath shows them in caves to indicate they are conducting dark and forbidden practices. Interestingly, they look as though they are very uncomfortable in their setting, with their necks crooked and their arms forced to their stomach or above themselves to write.

Across the river is a town full of people at work; their work ranges from fishing to carrying things to mining. Forshaw takes special care in reminding us of the importance of the work of alchemy, as Paracelsus’s father was a miner (Figure 5.1 item 4).⁵⁸ I believe that Khunrath places this here in reference to those cave-dwelling alchemists, who removed themselves from the world. As an alchemist is still a part of the world and reliant on the work of others, the metals from the mine, the firewood from the lumbermills, and food to sustain the body and mind; but also as a reminder to alchemists to help those who provided the means to

⁵⁸ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

achieve salvation.



Figure 5.2. Upper portion the “Adumbratio GYMNASII” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

As alchemists continue their journey upward they reach an “oratorium.” Forshaw believes that this a symbol of the permanent place of religion in alchemy, and I agree with him (Figure 5.2 Item 1).⁵⁹ If I were to go a step further, I would also point out that it is slightly recessed in the mountain, possibly indicating the oppression Khunrath might be feeling by not just the Catholic Church, but by some within the Protestant faith, an idea he expands upon in his later plates.

To the side of the oratorium, Khunrath writes in Greek “Leave no stone unturned” (Figure 5.2 item 2).⁶⁰ This phrase comes from the Dutch humanist philosopher Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), who also had a sordid history with the Sorbonne. A notable example came from the year 1526, when, despite warnings from King Francis I of France, the Sorbonne censored Erasmus’s work *Colloquia*. Luckily for Erasmus, the king desired to bring Erasmus to

⁵⁹ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

⁶⁰ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

France; following a short hearing, King Francis I overturned the censorship of the Sorbonne.⁶¹ Therefore, I assert that the inclusion of Erasmus in Khunrath's work was not a part of Mersenne's censorship of Khunrath. The phrase itself is also difficult to pin down exclusively onto Erasmus, and it refers to no particular philosophical theory.

We now move to the beam of light streaming down from the familiar Hebrew word יהוה (Figure 5.2 item 4). Although this appears to be the sun, it is not, as we see the sun is peeking over the mountains to the left (Figure 5.2 item 3). This is instead God and the light He emits, with the phrase in the light as: "CVM NVMINE LVMEN; ET, IN LUMINE NUMEN." meaning, "with God's will is light; and, in light is God wills" (Figure 5.2 item 4). Once again, Khunrath is referencing the idea of God and the light being two inseparable concepts, like the quote found within his Alchemist's Laboratory. Forshaw believes that this is a representation of Christ's permanent presence on Earth and in all things.⁶²

When the journey is finally at its end, and the alchemist has climbed the highest peak, Khunrath presents the "PORTA AMPHITHEATRI SAPIENTIAE AETERNAE, SOLIVS VERAEE" (Figure 5.2 Item 5). This is Khunrath's book manifested into physical form, and with it, all the secrets of his original four plates.

⁶¹ Higman, *Censorship and the Sorbonne*, 27.

⁶² Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).



Figure 6.1. The Entrance to the Amphitheatre from Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

The aforementioned quote is at the top of this plate and is from Virgil's *Aeneid*; it is when Aeneas meets the Sibyl for his prophecy (Figure 6.1 item 1).⁶³ This tells us two things: Khunrath is still upset with his critics, and is in fact calling them profane; but also that Khunrath is a Humanist, and as such, he knows the works of the ancient Romans and believes in the teachings of figures like Seneca and Cicero.

⁶³ Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

Within the entrance, we see seven beams of light with quotes found inside of them, as well as a staircase of seven steps which lead further into the doorway. According to Forshaw, these are both related to the works of Johannes Reuchlin and the steps to being deified, but that the quote found in the central beam of light comes from the Bible.⁶⁴ As I discussed earlier in Section 2.1 in regards to Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Kabbalah, the Sorbonne would not see Khunrath's inclusion of Christian-Kabbalah tenants into his work as a positive move. His addition of more illustrations with even more reference to the Kabbalah and Reuchlin's works would not have been treated any differently by the anti-Semitic communities of Europe; nor would Mersenne approve of Khunrath's continued integration of the occult with Christianity and science.

⁶⁴ Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

SECTION 3.3: THE EMERALD TABLE AND PYRAMIDUM



Figure 7. “The Emerald Tablet and Pyramidum.” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphi theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Presumably placed beyond the portal is this large rock upon which are the inscriptions of two different texts. Khunrath writes on this is the full text of the *Emerald Tablet* (both in Latin and German) and a quote from the *Pyramidum* (in Latin only). Both the *Emerald Tablet* and the *Pyramidum* are by the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, whom I briefly introduced in Section 2.3 while discussing the Bird of Hermes. Being a legendary figure, Hermes is difficult to date, although many in the early modern period believed him to be a contemporary of the biblical

Moses (13th century BC). As such, I will not give exact dating or eras for the writings attributed to him.



Figure 7.1. Close up on rock text in the “Emerald Tablet and Pyramidum” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus and Hermeticism

The quote which constitutes the foundation for this rock comes from the second book of *the Divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus* (today it is dated around late antiquity). The quote itself is taken from the moment that the divine being Pymander comes to Hermes Trismegistus (Figure 7.1 item 1). In this moment, Hermes, half asleep, suddenly catches sight of a mighty figure, who reveals himself as “the mind of the great *Lord*, the most mighty and absolute emperor,” that being God. Upon hearing this, Hermes asks Pymander to tell him of all the things

natural, and of all the things that are.⁶⁵ Pymander obliges and opens Hermes's eyes to the knowledge of all things. In Hermes's vision, he saw an infinite light, and from this light he witnessed fire and air remove themselves, and the earth and water as well.⁶⁶ This is the moment from the discussion on the Bird of Hermes where he receives his knowledge from the astral realm, and how it comes onto Earth. Furthermore, the presence of light is something touched upon by Khunrath throughout his plates, and now I present the source of this obsession with light as being the work of Hermes Trismegistus. The light is God's infinite being, and by showing the four elements separating from the light, Hemes is bearing witness to the construction of the world through the light of God.

The other text featured in this illustration is the *Emerald Tablet* by Hermes Trismegistus (Figure 8.1 item 2 & 3). The content of the *Emerald Tablet* relates back to the idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm, an idea Paracelsus built upon in several of his writings in the 16th century (i.e. "the Treasures of Treasures for Alchemists" and the *Coelum Philosophorum, or Book of Vexations*" (1565)), and on which Khunrath's own writings fixates. Urszula Szulakowska describes *the Emerald Tablet* as detailing "the inter-dependency and unity between macrocosm and microcosm," noting that it lent itself to alchemy as the phrase "That which is above is like to that which is below." The subject of the tablet is obscure: it is the offspring of the moon, "which is carried in the womb of the wind. It rises to the heavens above and sinks down again to the earth, repeatedly."⁶⁷ Presumably, the subject of the tablet is the philosopher's stone,

⁶⁵ Everard and Hargrave, *The Divine Pymander of Hermes*, 7.

⁶⁶ Everard and Hargrave, *The Divine Pymander of Hermes*, 8.

⁶⁷ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 15.

and through the interpretation of the tablet, alchemists believe that Hermes is describing the alchemical process required to create the stone.

For alchemists, the writings of Hermes are irreplaceable as they, like Gnosticism and Aristotelianism, provided them with fundamental philosophical beliefs from which alchemical knowledge can be sourced. Although unlike Gnosticism (which stems from Christianity) or Aristotelianism (which became ingrained into Christianity), Hermeticism was not seen as a Christian ideology, but a conglomerate of pagan teachings and beliefs relating to the religions of the Greeks and the Egyptians. Nevertheless, through its constant presence and reinterpretation by early Christians and later Muslim scholars, Hermeticism became a staple of alchemical tradition.⁶⁸ Hermeticism's main beliefs can be compared to the Neoplatonist movement of the 3rd century AD, as both posit that acquiring a closer connection with God comes through the gaining of knowledge. Gnosticism shares in this belief in a deeper bond with God, although the main difference is that Gnosticism is Christian, while Hermeticism originates in pagan traditions.

The situation of Hermeticism within alchemy provided it a safe haven against condemnation from theological authorities, as it was deeply ingrained within the traditions and indistinguishable from alchemical practice and belief; however, in situations when it was removed alchemical context, Hermeticism became an easy target for charges of heresy, blasphemy, and paganism. The case of the Italian philosopher and scholar Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) provides us with a case study of Hermeticism's fatal consequences outside of alchemy. Mersenne viewed Bruno's work as an attempt to undermine Christianity by resurrecting the "pre-Christian Hermetic Egyptianism." Bruno's defense during his life against

⁶⁸ Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 30-1.

similar charges of attempting to undermine Christianity was that he sought to implement his own philosophical changes into a Christian world and not to undermine Christianity, which he viewed as integral for his beliefs. Unfortunately for Bruno, his prosecution viewed this defense as insufficient, leading to Bruno being condemned to death and burned at the stake in Rome. Just as this defense was not strong enough to save him from the pyre, Mersenne still viewed his work as a confirmation of the dangers of Renaissance magic and as motivation to stamp it (and related fields) out.⁶⁹ In relation to Khunrath's Hermetic thought, Mersenne would have shared a similar view on Khunrath's usage of Hermetic thoughts and magic to his view of Bruno. This can be confirmed by the idea Mersenne makes clear in his support of Catholic alchemists, and his opposition to Lutheran alchemists.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Yates, *Giordano Bruno & Hermetic Tradition*, 445

⁷⁰ Mersenne, *Les questions theologiques, physiques, morales, et mathematiques*, 132.

SECTION 3.4: THE ALCHEMICAL CITADEL



Figure 8. The “Alchemical Citadel” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphi theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Dubbed the “Alchemical Citadel” by Peter Forshaw, Heinrich Khunrath’s fourth rectangular plate is an illustrated discussion of the many applications and pursuits of alchemy. Khunrath represents these alchemical pursuits through placing them along the exterior of a fortress, to which has just one opening. Due in large part to the quantity of the writing found within this section, I will not go in depth with this work of Khunrath; his full commentary on the various alchemical pursuits can be found in the previously mentioned book *On Chaos*, where along with

his discussion on matter and chaos, he provides an overview of the alchemical processes which seek to alter these substances, specifically which to follow and which not to.

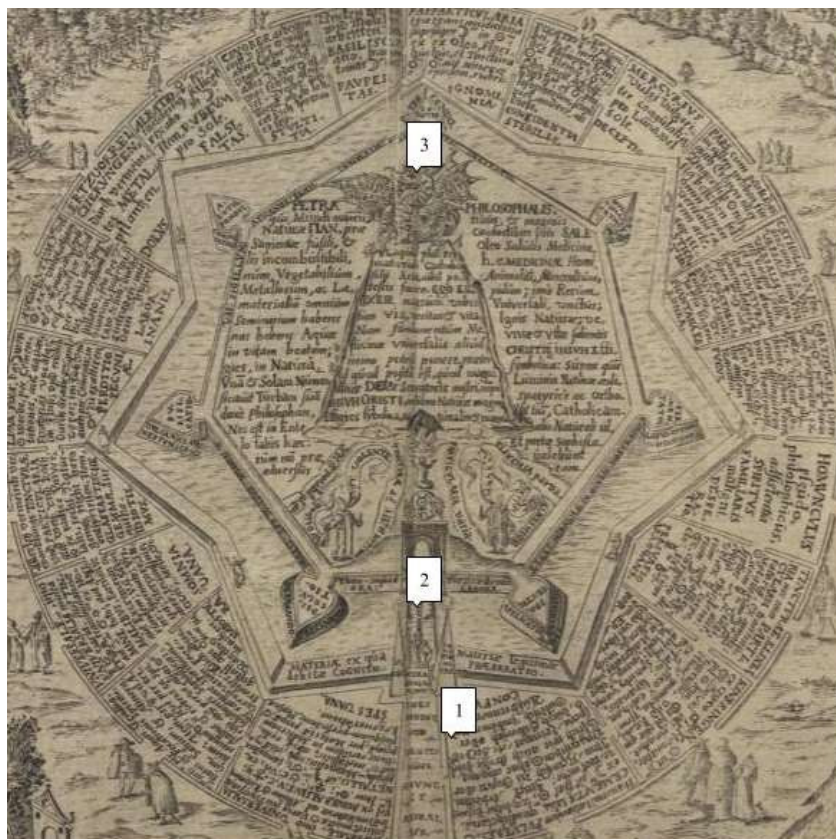


Figure 8.1. Closeup of the “Alchemical Citadel” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Equipped with a wall, a moat, a single entrance, a drawbridge, and a secondary wall, Khunrath’s citadel is the pinnacle of early modern fortress defense. Along the exterior of the citadel Khunrath presents his twenty-one possible alchemical pursuits from his book *On Chaos*; however, he identifies twenty alchemical pursuits as false and places a wall at the end of them. Khunrath’s single true entrance is found in the southern portion of the citadel, where he provides a much smaller sliver to the true pursuit of alchemy, that being the pursuit of the philosopher’s stone (Figure 8.1 item 1). He writes on this sliver: “RVDES DEREDENT, QVOD SAPIENTES MAGNI, FACIVNT, ET ADMIRANTVR,” a commentary on his critics ridiculing the truest art

of alchemy, the making of the philosopher's stone, but that it is the greatest and most admirable of all the paths.

Now at the end of the path is a figure holding a sign saying "OPERA BONA" and a Caduceus Staff, a common trope of the Greek god Hermes, but also commonly applied in alchemy to denote the figure of Hermes Trismegistus (Figure 8.1 item 2). Here Khunrath would most definitely be showing Hermes Trismegistus, as he is the originator of the alchemical practice, and would be the highest judge of alchemical pursuits, about which alchemists must presumably show knowledge. Above the entrance to the citadel we see John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* once again; and beyond the doorway is the PETRA PHILOSOPHALIS, Latinized Greek for the philosopher's stone (or rock). This indicates that the true art is once again the pursuit of union with God (Figure 8.1 item 3).⁷¹

⁷¹ Forshaw, "Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

SECTION 3.5: CALUMNIATORES



Figure 9. “Calumniatores” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphi theatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

For this final plate we have a great number of things happening, and a difficult analysis ahead.

Szulakowska and Forshaw call this plate the “Calumniatores” or Calumniators (after the term

Khunrath uses to describe the individuals in the background of this plate) meaning false

preachers or liars in essence. I will present here the influence of humanism on Khunrath and, at

long last, the influence of the Reformation and Martin Luther on the works of Khunrath. In order

to analyze this plate, I will rely once again on *the Alchemy of Light: Geometry and optics in late*

Renaissance alchemical illustrations by Urszula Szulakowska.



Figure 9.1. Close up of the “Assault on Truth” from Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*. (Hanau, 1609).

Humanism and the Reformation

The quotes surrounding the left and right peripheries of Khunrath’s final plate are from the ancient Roman writings of Seneca the Elder and Cicero; here we see Khunrath demonstrating his Humanist leanings (Figure 9.1 item 1). Khunrath’s work has referenced a variety of classical Latin quotes by this point, notably that of Virgil, and I have used the term Humanism several times, but I have yet to provide a definition or description of it. For this paper’s purpose the definition provided by German scholar Eckhard Bernstein is most suitable, who remarks that “its original and more precise sense [was] to denote that literary and educational movement that started in the first third of the fourteenth century in Italy and spread all over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Humanism was thus part of the Renaissance—an age of brilliant

accomplishments in the painting, architecture, music, sculpture, science, literature, and philosophy.” This movement is best known for its rejection of the philosophical and Aristotelian natural philosophy of the Middle Ages and a return to Roman Empire enthusiasms, where humanists believed Human ability was at its height. Interestingly, this is also a situation where Khunrath and Mersenne were not at odds, as Humanistic ideals also greatly influenced the Protestant Reformation.⁷²

Khunrath himself appears twice in this image, as the figures facing adversaries on the left and right sides of the plate (he is wearing different outfits, which Forshaw believes it to be him first in his Laboratory clothes, then in his field outfit) (Figure 9.1 item 2).⁷³ Khunrath appears in debate with a crowd of people, animal people and also demons (Figure 9.1 item 3). Before these people, Khunrath is attempting to defend the central structure labeled with a series of different alchemical signs: among them are the alchemical signs for salt, Sulphur, Mercury, the sun, and the moon. (Figure 9.1 item 4).

Interestingly, a set of flames encapsulates the entire structure; each flame spouts a different message in Latin, seemingly acting as the barrier against the demons. Khunrath sets a pentagram above these fires and between the flying demons in the sky (among which is Beelzebub); he encircles this pentagram with the familiar Hebrew word יהוה, Reuchlin’s wonder-working word indicating that this is the light of Jesus shining down onto earth (Figure 9.1 item 5.). Above the pentagram Khunrath writes “HENRICE KHVNRATH. TV, NE CEDE MALIS, SED CONTRA AVDENTIOR ITO:” “Heinrich Khunrath, do not give in to evil, but

⁷² Bernstein, *German Humanism*, 1; see full book for further discussion.

⁷³ Forshaw, “Infinite Fire Webinar I - The Alchemy of the Amphitheatrum by Dr. P.J. Forshaw.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slS3CDlfp2o> (accessed January 26, 2020).

continue more boldly against it.” From there it moves up and into the Tetragrammaton (Figure 9.1 item 6). Khunrath, here, yes, is encouraging himself; but he is also reinforcing the connection of God and light, and that God’s presence on Earth is through Jesus, an idea that Khunrath illustrates in having the fires coming from the Pentagrammaton. Furthermore, the central structure with the alchemical symbols also denotes his belief in an alchemical connection with Jesus and God.

Turning now toward the figures who appear to be verbally attacking Khunrath and the central structure: these individuals are the basis for the name of the plate the “calumniatores,” the critics of Khunrath, who spread false and seditious accusations against him. Among these individuals Szulakowska includes “Khunrath’s hostile detractors, the ‘black magicians’ and ‘sophists’ whose animosity induced him to extend his illustrative programme in order to justify himself publicly through a campaign of visual polemics.” This harassment caused many challenges for Khunrath, as his editors suggested that his death in 1605 was caused by this political harassment. Strangely, however, these enemies are unlikely to be Catholic clergymen or scholars; Szulakowska believes that they are “of the German reformed church or no church at all,” though she also believes that the portrayal of the crowd in what she calls a more Catholic style may indicate an association of certain sects found in Lutheranism with Catholicism, those who she says conducted “superstitious practices, materialism and aesthetic tendencies in the Lutheran community.”⁷⁴

Khunrath’s display of his opposition can be summarized as grotesque and inappropriate. This is because Khunrath shows his opposition in animalistic forms, with a priest in the center

⁷⁴ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 139-140.

labeled “Priest of the Anti-Christ.” Above these crowds is the figure of Beelzebub, who spews out the line “Fideles dilecti, Calumnianuni audacter, semper aliquid haeret nec parcite veritati,” translated by Szulakowska as “let us lie boldly, always adhering [rigidly] to some issue but abstaining from [seeking] the truth”--a sentiment Khunrath must have constantly felt when dealing with his critics. This illustration is most likely in reference to the Elector of Saxony, who had forced all priests to sign the “Book of Concord” of 1580 and happened to particularly vex Khunrath.⁷⁵

Among these individuals forced to sign the Book of Concord was Khunrath’s mentor, the priest Valentin Weigel (1535-1588) (mentioned in the introduction and in the Oratorium-Laboratorium). Weigel secretly opposed the signing and enforcing of this work but was unable to do anything to stop it. He viewed the conditions of the signing as unhappy for those who practiced the true faith of Luther. The defining feature of Weigel’s worship comes in the form of the eucharist, which he believes to be the physical manifestation of Christ on Earth, but that through union with Christ is achieved through the Word of God that is permanently inscribed on the human soul. Therefore, not the redemptive authority of the Church, but the inward conversion of a sinner, can absolve sin. Khunrath’s subscription to this theory is visible within the quote wrapping around Khunrath’s figure on the left side, where Khunrath writes that “no matter whether they esteem, or disparage him, he will simply continue to pray.”⁷⁶

The direct source of his belief in this union comes from Weigel’s *Dialogue on Christianity* (composed in 1584, published in 1616), where he also proclaims that Christians

⁷⁵ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, quoted on 141.; see also 139-142

⁷⁶ Szulakowska, *The Alchemy of Light*, 143.

should not condemn the works of other Christians (I do not think Mersenne got this memo).

Though I cannot find definitive evidence of this text's censorship, I believe its radical view on the church and the Eucharist did not allow it to maintain good faith with the Sorbonne or the Vatican. (I believe furthermore that a heretical text telling Mersenne not to censor texts would have been very irritating to Mersenne). In Mersenne's perspective, the work of Weigel appears equal to that of Martin Luther or any other of those he deems as "atheists" who were behind the Protestant Reformation.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

Although Heinrich Khunrath and Marin Mersenne differed in terms of their philosophical beliefs and methods, their overarching goal was the same, as they both sought to alter the restrictive and flawed Aristotelian systems to allow for the development of a better understanding of the natural world. These two individuals represent two wildly different, but important, ambitions that motivated the many characters found within the Scientific Revolution. Khunrath was the magical and spiritual alchemist who strove to accomplish the goals of alchemy through the interweaving of old and new natural philosophy with Kabbalist magic and religion. Mersenne was the rational and systematic natural philosopher who sought to create a new universal model that could validate the Catholic Faith, but not allow for magic, in its scientific discourse.

Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* provides an example of the work done by those in the Scientific Revolution who sought to achieve a better understanding of theology through the usage of natural philosophy, counted amongst these are the figures of Paracelsus and Fludd. Although not discussed in depth within this paper, the iatrochemical work of Paracelsus is often attributed as being an example of early modern medical practice. We see this scientific advancement within Paracelsus's refutation of Galen in favor of observation and sanitation. After his death, Paracelsians advocated for medical observation, seen most notably in Robert Fludd's support of the English physician William Harvey (1578-1657) and his theory on the circulation of blood.⁷⁷ In terms of theological impact, Khunrath's *Amphitheatre* is a discussion on the interpretation of the Scriptures, and the issues that he sees within the Catholic Church's use of them, making him a member of the Protestant Reformation, as well as the Scientific Revolution.

⁷⁷ Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas*, 114-117.

Khunrath labored to provide his own theological beliefs based on the influence of Reuchlin and Luther in his *Amphitheatre* through the guidance of Weigel; Khunrath also sought to create a more pious Christian faith based on the Christian-Kabbalist traditions found in Reuchlin and Luther's 95 Theses.

Meanwhile, Mersenne's *Les questions* and his censorship of Khunrath provide historians a view of Catholic theologians and scientists who sought to disparage the continuation of occult magic within the Scientific Revolution and Christian faith. Mersenne's efforts, and his work to open dialogue with fellow natural philosophers, demonstrates his commitment to the advancement of scientific thoughts that would become the foundation of modern science. These efforts are seen through his connecting of individuals such as Galileo and Descartes with the purpose of redefining scientific fields such as cosmogony and astronomy to better fit both his view of proper scientific advancement and the Catholic faith. In regard to Mersenne's impact on the Reformation, he was neither much of a help, nor a hindrance overall. Although Mersenne's disdain for the Protestants is clearly evident in his *Les questions*, his work helped shape the future paths of the Catholic and Protestant faiths, as his censorship of the magical and occult sects, such as the Rosicrucians, assisted in removing what he considered foreign elements from Christian dogma.

Above all else, I hope that this paper has shed light on the often misinterpreted craft of alchemy, demonstrating that it is not the exclusively materialistic art that modern popular misconceptions make it out to be (i.e. turning lead to gold). Instead, I hope that I have displayed alchemy as a positive force, and that the philosopher's stone, as was shown in the *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, was intended to be a tool of salvation, and that Khunrath was writing as a way to help others in acquiring their own universal elixir.

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