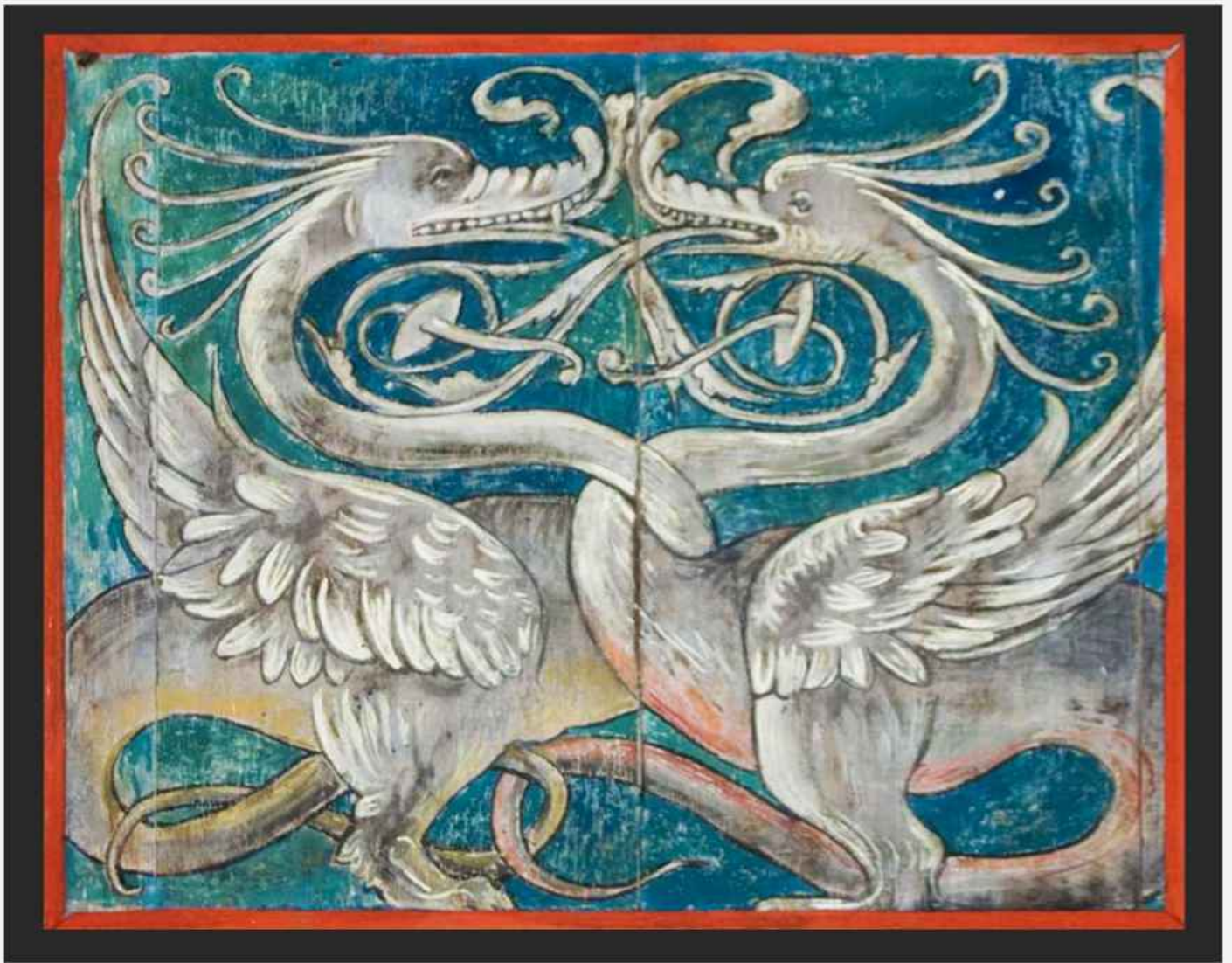


# TWO ALCHEMICAL ABODES

*On the Fringe of Science and History*



Eugène Canseliet F.C.H.

**TWO  
ALCHEMICAL  
ABODES**

**On the fringe of Science and History**

*Illustrated with eleven plates taken from original  
drawings and photographs*

**Eugène Canseliet**



**Inner Garden Press**

L012

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## **Inner Garden Foundation**

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**Original French Edition**

**DEUX LOGIS ALCHIMIQUES**

En Marge de la Science et de l'Histoire

Eugène Canselier

Paris

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1946

*To researchers, to the curious, to students of all ages, for the purpose of providing a little of this virtuous salt which makes studies pleasant and fruitful.*

# Foreword

At the start of summer in 1939, foreseeing the war, we decided to settle in this small village [of Blicourt]. Little did we know the dark hours we were to experience there during the infinite distress of the whole country. A year later and after a brief stint in the T.M. in its two lowest ranks, in Bourges, this 'Pyro'<sup>1</sup> through which the old capital of Berry was populated with jaundiced men in uniform, we returned home to the sad sight of a pillaged house.

Over the course of the long years that followed, we found great consolation and solace in the studies that are dear to us and, which more than any other, do not permit an occultation of the mind. So apart from the inevitable chores of country life we spent our spare time compiling our notes about the Palombara Villa that we had gathered over a period of six years and our more recent notes relating to the Castle of Plessis-Bourré which we had slowly but surely continued to compile despite the tribulations of war. It was in light of the constraints that war had placed upon us that we chose to give priority to the castle of Anjou in favour of to the Roman abode, that order being in accordance with its more advanced age and the more laborious documentation required for its redaction. We steadfastly continued this work since we were eager to offer Mr. Jean Schemit the completed part of our work for perusal since he had kindly promised to edit it.

Five months after the death of our old friend, who remained a living symbol of sagacity and professional integrity until the end, our work honours his memory and reminds us of his profound bond with the noble profession that

he practised with such finesse. A fine connoisseur in the art of librarianship, he combined authority and taste with great modesty. Moreover, under the tough, almost bad-tempered impression he gave at first contact, he hid a good heart.

This takes us nearly twenty years back, to the day we entered for the first time into the old shop on Lafitte Street on the side walk opposite to number 52. As the reader may know, we had the coveted honour and privilege to present to the public by way of a preface, the two books from the Adept our Century was allotted with according to God's plan and Its all-powerful will of an unbroken transmission of initiation. Like those who came before him, Fulcanelli hid his identity with such care that there are sides to him that even we, as Fulcanelli's only disciples, do not know. In the narrow-minded pursuit to provide an exact civil identification, some persist in taking the philosophical pseudonym for a real name while others, in purely gratuitous assertions or with even obviously dishonest pretensions for reasons of mere personal gain, have sought to paint a banal picture of the departed man that was far removed from his actual merit.

A few people perpetuate the notion that Fulcanelli was no other than Pierre Dujols, a Parisian bibliophile and scholar who died in the spring of 1926 — five years before *Dwellings of the Philosophers* was published. We had no relationship with Pierre Dujols whatsoever, even though he was an intimate friend of Julien Champagne. Conversely, the authorship of the two books is also attributed to the artist who illustrated the books with as much intelligence as talent and scrupulous dexterity. He died soon after, in August 1932. It was thought, without good reason and surely mistakenly, that this remarkable artist had succumbed to bewitchment practices. It is certain that he was the victim of a terrible condition which kept him confined for nearly

two years, panting and crippled, to an apartment on the sixth floor on Rochechouart — the street where we both had our workshops and laboratories; our garrets to carry out our operative work..

There are also those who think that we ourselves are the author behind the name of Fulcanelli without taking due notion of the fact that, for instance, our young age at the time was no match for the wisdom and literary maturity that is apparent in *The Mystery of the Cathedrals*. After all, we were barely 27 years old when *The Mystery of the Cathedrals* was first published. It is undoubtedly for this reason that recently an occultist in the most pejorative sense of the term, feigning to ignore us completely, attempted to transpose Fulcanelli's alchemical hermeticism to the domain of magic of the worst kind in a diffuse and copious book. The result is nothing more than a grotesque and pathetic parody. If we would attempt to describe this caricature more accurately, we would not know what predominates: the author's pompous self-righteousness or their discourteous acrimony towards others and the Church in particular. In the same vein we do not understand why there are those who attempt to make alchemy a part, small as it may be, of the predominantly social preoccupations and so-called secret teachings of modern Free-Masonry. How is it possible by associating chemical Philosophy to magic and its dark practices that they can come up with such a stupefying misconception that alchemy would have been used to commit political murder and ritual crimes? A number of tinhorns, wise-ish men and charlatans gave rise to this confusion through the misguided application of their vague notions of a generally renowned science. Hence in the years leading up to the French Revolution which came with so much deceit, despoliation and scandal, the Casanovas, the Cagliostros, the Montfaucon de Villars, the Gleichens, etc., stood out. Yet how different these shady characters prove to be from the adepts we know so well through

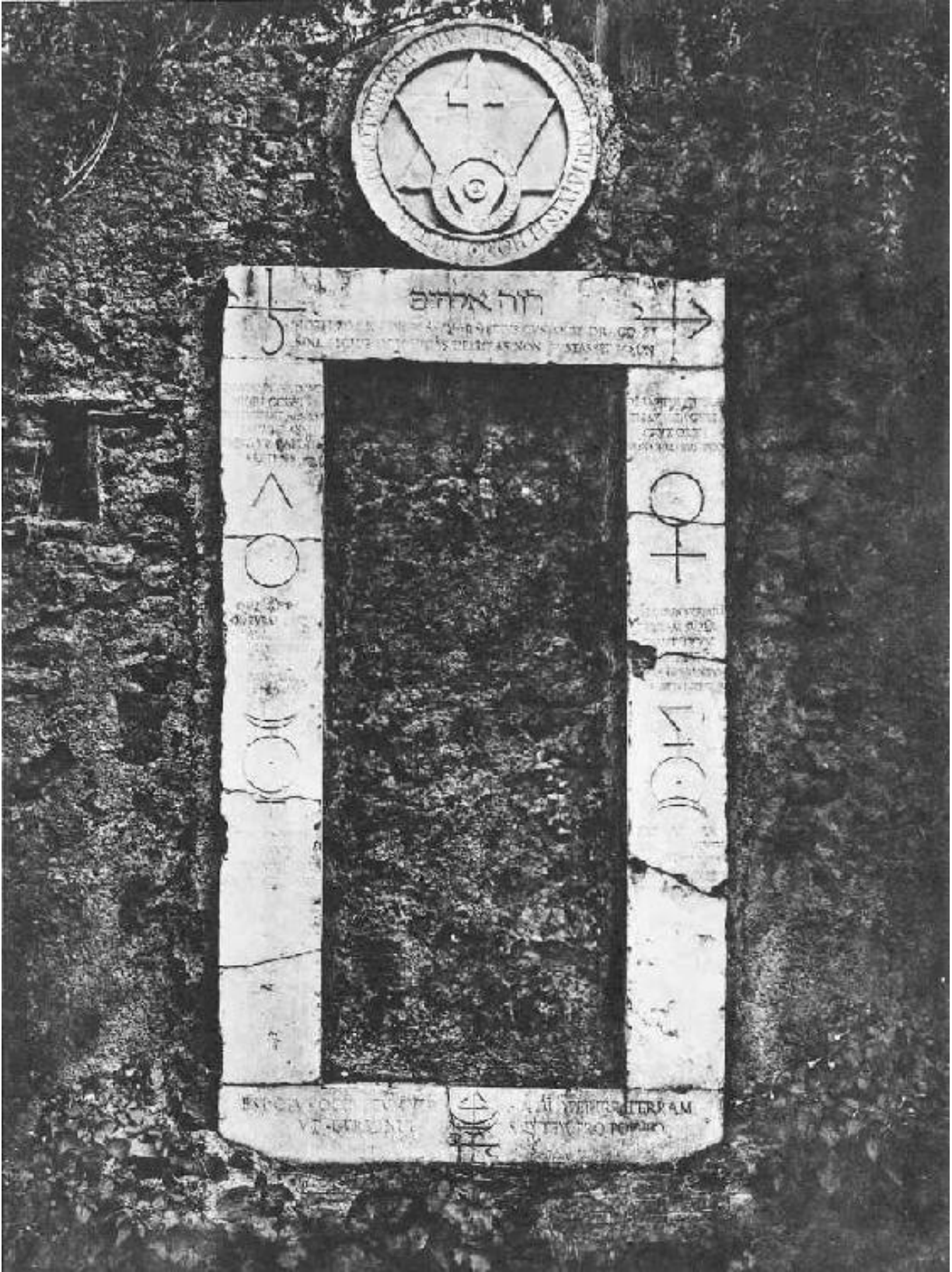


their writings; whose noble figures are found, unceasingly, in the perennial continuation of untainted transmission.

In the same vein, where possible we aim to promote a better understanding of alchemy and its qualified representatives by exhuming their mementoes from the past where, in an unjust repudiation, science and history have altogether buried them. In doing so, we will not let ourselves be overly intimidated by those who try to discredit us or bear us ill will, be it by ignorance or envy. In our view, the quality of the work is paramount as is its potential for the advancement of human knowledge. As such, we prefer to think modestly of the pages we have written and offer them in good faith to the benevolent curiosity of the reader. The publication of these pages does not demand any precaution of a mysterious nature since such precautions often become more obtrusive the less attention one wishes to draw to them. Such was the case for Fulcanelli as it was for Jonathan Swift whose strange and immortal Gulliver was thrown anonymously, through the door of a carriage, onto the doorstep of the shop of the editor.

Blicourt (Oise), June 1945.

**PART 1**  
**THE PALOMBARA VILLA IN ROME**



*Rome — Victor-Emmanuel Square*  
*The Alchemical Door — 1680*

Picture by Alinari, Florence (Italy)

# PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Some things go beyond reason. They may captivate or trouble our sense of reason which, enslaved by ignorant prejudice and ingrained scepticism, immediately rejects them, condemns them, or suppresses them after having subconsciously accepted them. Even though the facts may be convincing, if they cannot be verified down to the smallest detail, one is better off keeping one's convictions to oneself in order to avoid falling prey to harsh criticism and glib mockery. Alphonse Daudet knew this well and invited the naysayer to close the book in which, inspired by his intimate observations of reality as well as his lively and delicate spirit, he presented his best talents as a painter and a poet, stirring the soul's sensitivity to the greatest extent: 'Reader, if you are more sensible than a child, if your dreams make you smile, if your heart never leaped by the premonition of things to come; if you are a positivist, one of these hard-headed men who are impressed only by reality and who do not allow the smallest seed of superstition into their minds; if you have the least desire to believe in the supernatural or to acknowledge the unexplainable, do not bother to read these memoirs.'

For example, does the fact that the subconscious can act whilst asleep, resulting in precise efforts which memory later fails to explain, not fall in the realm of *the accursed sciences*?

This is the sort of fact that we had the opportunity to verify in a young friend whose rudimentary knowledge of Latin and hermeneutics could not have enabled him to formulate the specific sentence that he managed to trace onto the page of a notebook by hand during the night. He was in for a surprise when he awoke in the morning to find these lines of perfect

composition on his bedside — lines of wisdom in broad and firm handwriting so dissimilar to his! Some twenty years later, when he got involved in the science which is associated with the specific Latin Aphorism he had unconsciously transcribed during his nocturnal vision, he encountered in his study of the lapidary teachings of old buildings the abstruse sentence which had remained a haunting figment of memory:

*Quando in tua domo nigri corvi parturient alhas columbas tunc voca heris  
sapiens.*<sup>2</sup>

This strange case, to which we ourselves owe the discovery of the existence of Rome's *alchemical door*, could not have provided the physical proof of the soul's transmigration more accurately except perhaps for the unsettling genius of child prodigies. As for them, it is difficult indeed to deny their possession of prior knowledge, perhaps as a result of a pathological cause, as Jean-Philippe Baratier's short but meaningful career shows. It is officially verified and too recent to be debatable.

Born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1721 in Schwabach near Nuremberg, in the Principality of Ansbach, being the son of a father of French origin, he displayed prodigious precociousness from his early childhood even though he was pretty much deprived of books. At the age of four he knew French, German and Latin, to which three years later, he added the perfect knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. This feat alone is reason to be amazed since, as any other student who has gone through Latin-Greek exams, we ourselves know how hard it is to enter the sanctuary of these two dead languages. But what to think of this child who, at the age of nine, was to complete two dictionaries of 400 pages each, in quarto, one Greek, the other Hebrew, of the rarest and hardest words! At the age of eleven, he translated

Benjamin of Tudela's book of travels, offering us the only translation into French directly from the original Hebrew text. What is more, at that same age he knew the Chaldaic, Syriac and Rabbinic languages. If any book dropped into his hands, he would invariably find some way of criticizing it, either because he recognized a falsity, an error, an inaccuracy or plagiarism. In 1735, Jean-Philippe Baratier had become *magister* from the University of Halle and was a member of the Berlin Academy. Author of several scholarly dissertations on literature and astronomy in particular, he had just published a very important study on the succession of Roman pontiffs<sup>3</sup> when he died in a state of languor at the age of nineteen.

In any case, Rome's *alchemical door*, this beautiful historical vestige, an undeniable trace of the knowledge that is so often despised or debased, appeared to be of great interest to us right from the start. As soon as we encountered it, we were eager to conduct a study about it, as complete and comprehensible as possible. We did not rest until we had found a photographic image of a quality good enough to allow us to meticulously examine its alchemical cryptograms and to easily read the inscriptions which were engraved next to them.

Despite the difficulty of communicating with Italy via post due to the state of war, we finally came in possession of this essential document. We owe this to the unremitting help of Professor Mario Mazzoni of Sienna who has the same passion for the ancient sciences as we do and who offered, on his own account, to provide a manuscript entitled: *La Porta Alchimica di Roma* for the benefit of this edition. We have added the engraved drawing (2<sup>nd</sup> plate) to the reproduction (1<sup>st</sup> plate) so that the reader can compare one with the other and refer to them when necessary. The drawing shows a small work by Francesco Cacellieri<sup>4</sup> who was a knowledgeable Italian

archeologist. In the same spirit of sincerity and exactitude that we intend to continue to uphold, we will regularly refer to this author's work and with due credit also to the *martinist* Borna Pietro who after him examined the same subject in a long journal article<sup>5</sup>.



# THE MONUMENT AT VICTOR-EMMANUEL SQUARE

The *alchemical door*, as it is commonly referred to, is preserved at the Victor-Emmanuel square in Rome. Sadly it is now reduced to the rectangular frame that outlines the doorway. Although it is of little artistic interest, it will conversely and immediately draw the attention of anyone passionate about the unique symbolism of the secret science. Given its symmetry, it still belongs to the Renaissance, the period after which all of the arts except for music were soon to disappear or perish in Italy. We certainly appreciate its symmetrical form, no simpler in its shape than it is rich in meaning. A medallion is shown above the door frame, in line with the custom in the 16th Century. This medallion in this case does not contain a human effigy but rather a *cruciferous globe*. The design is in stark contrast with the strange compositions, without either soul or spirit, made by Francesco Borromini, the father of the Baroque style who filled 17<sup>th</sup> Century Rome with his extravagant architectural specimens! If Fulcanelli would have known about this door, he would certainly have included it in his *Dwellings of the Philosophers*. This travertine frame, adorned with nothing but a curious marble emblem placed on the lintel, contains hieroglyphic signs and inscriptions that run all the way down to its stone doorstep and which constitute a body of knowledge that could fill a voluminous treatise. These signs are each underscored by a Latin aphorism and correspond to the notations commonly used in old works. They complete one another to form a true alchemical formula. The words are understandable for anyone who has so much as flipped through any ancient alchemical book; and even if one would not understand the meaning, one

would certainly immediately recognize that the style and terminology belong to a vast collection of works which, as obscure as it may seem, has its classics just like any other form of literature.

# THE OUTER INSCRIPTION

There is no precedent of anything ever exposing in such a transparent manner and so overtly, the teachings that so many adepts, especially in ancient times, discretely transmitted in their abodes under the veil of allegorical tales and painted or sculpted iconography. The villa of Marquis Palombara, from whence came the frame which miraculously escaped the demolition of the villa, stood out by a number of other inscriptions of which one was a lengthy inscription written on the outer enclosing wall itself. It is thanks to François Cancellieri that they have been preserved because he made them the subject of a dissertation written by his hand in which he had taken particular pride — one dissertation amongst the many in which he showed such great flair and scientific thoroughness that there were those who dared to proclaim him the new Varro.

He was born in Rome in 1751 and died there in 1826, when he was received in the sepulchre that was normally reserved to cardinals only, in the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran. Each of these epigraphs as transmitted by the learned priest will here be presented along with their secret meaning.<sup>6</sup> The erudite abbot, however, was little inclined towards the idea of alchemy and denigrated it as a concept of fraud for the gullible, lured by the triple promise of the transmutation of metals into gold, the prolongation of human life, or the assured certainty of winning numbers at the lottery: *Sedotta (la credula Gente), ed illusa dalle vane speranze di trovare le Arti chimeriche di rinvenire la Pietra Filosofale, d'indovinare i Numeri del Lotto, e di prolungare la Vita, non solo per Anni, ma per Secoli ancora.*

So let us begin with the text which was engraved on the outer wall, — Nel muro fuori del Casino, whose disyllabic metre has been readjusted by Cancellieri in accordance with its meaning, into an easier readable punctuated prose:

Hoc in Rure, Cæli Rore, fuisis Æquis, Physis Aquis, Solum fractum, reddit fructum, dum cum Sale Nitri, ac Sole, surgunt Fumi sparsi fimi. Istud Nemus, parvus Numus, tenet forma emper ferma, dum sunt ortæ sine arte Vites, Pyra, et Poma pura. Habens lacum, prope Lucum, ubi Lupus non, sed Lepus sepe ludit; du non Ledit mites Oves, atque Aves; Canis Custos inter castos Agnos Feras mittit foras, et est ægri hujus Agri Aer solus vera salus, replens herbis vias Ubris. Sulci sati dant pro siti Scyphos Vini. Intro veni, Vir non vanus. Extra Venus. Vobis, Fures, claudio Fores. Labe lotus, bibas lætus Meri Mare, Bacchi more. Inter Uvas, si vis, ovas, et quod cupis, gratis capis. Tibi paro, corde puro, quicquid putas, a me petas. Dant hic Apes claras opes dulcis mellis, semper mollis. Hic in Sylvæ umbra salve. Tu qui lugens. Nunc si leges notas istas, stans hic Æstas, verre mista; fronte mœsta nunquam fleres, dum hic flatus auræ spirant, unde sperant mestæ mentes inter Montes, inter Colles, inter Calles, et in Valle hujus Villæ, ubi Vallus claudit Vellus, Bonum Omen, Semper Amen. Etiam Petræ dum putre surgunt Patre, ita notas, hic vix natus, in hac Porta, Luto parta, tempus ridet, brevi rodet.

*In this country house, by grace of the dew of heaven, the vast plains and the waters of nature, the laboured soil yields its fruit, whilst vapours rise from the scattered dung, with the help of salt nitrate and the sun. This field is but small change [petite*

*monnaie] yet always seems to look the same, whilst grape vines, pears, and pure apples grow, without the application of our art. There is a lake near the fields where not the wolf but hare comes to play, while he does not offend the sweet ewes and the birds; the guardian dog, among the chaste lambs, drives away the wild beasts and, the air of this field replenishes the streets of the town with herbs and is a true medicine for the sick.*

*The sown furrows provide cups of wine to quench one's thirst. Inside, one finds men without vanity. Outside, Venus! To you, thieves, I close the doors. But you, cleansed of sin, may drink, happily, from the sea of wine meant for Bacchus. Amongst the vines, if you wish, you can be happy and may freely take whatever you desire. I will prepare for you, with a pure heart, whatever you think and ask me. Here the bees provide the unremitting resource of an ever delicate and sweet honey. Greetings to you who cry here in the shadow of the trees. Now, if you have read these lines, the summer being intertwined with spring here, you shall never cry of sadness again; if you were to remain amongst the flowers, you would never shed tears, since here blow wind and breeze, here where tired souls emerge full of hope, between the mountains, the hills, the pathways and the valley in which one finds this villa, and where a fence encloses the fleece. Good omen, so be it forever.*

*More specifically, while stones grow from the putrefied father, time will always smile upon us, rapidly eroding the signs just marked on this portal made of daub.*

The ingenuity of the Adept<sup>7</sup> who wrote in four syllable verses in a formidable poetical challenge meant to veil the philosophical scope of his text further increases the impenetrability of the allegory. In addition, the text is interwoven by expressive alliterations that provide a curious rhyme of the sounds of the final syllables, as is common in French, with an abundance and regular occurrence of perfect consonance. Cancellieri did not provide a translation of this long epigraph — nor did he provide one of any of the others — in his own language. Therefore we have tried to provide a translation ourselves, in a most literal sense, staying as close as possible to the meaning of the Latin words.

We thereby preserved its sometimes unclear or ambiguous odd phrasing which, as mentioned, is as much a result of the literary acrobatics as it is of the care taken by all great masters to abide by philosophical discretion. The text concerns, as one can see, pastoral poetry which glorifies the celestial agriculture with grand Italian emphasis. In accordance with a very old circumlocution, this celestial agriculture designates the art of alchemy. At the same time, the poem also paints an enchanting picture of the bucolic life of the Adept who has the immeasurable peace of mind and the absolute security of limitless resources thanks to this philosophical gem. Indeed, this gem profoundly exonerates the lucky possessor of all vicissitudes and hazards to which health and wealth are ordinarily subject on this Earth. In this respect, if the sage would restrict use of the Medicine in his surroundings to exclusively physiological matters, he would on the other hand be able to make limitless use of its temporal riches, easily accessible and inexhaustible unlike any other. The Marquis of Palombara depicts a peaceful retreat and, being sympathetic and helpful, thereby generously offers the Edenic hospitality to the wandering and less fortunate fellow

hermetist. This enchanting field is without doubt a Gift from God: *the small change*: Istud Nemus, parvus numus.

In obeying the precautions of the most elementary prudence, however, the marquis-philosopher veiled his hermetic remedies under name of more conventional botanical matters. The *air*, for example, is the ancient epithet for the *mercury of sages*, replenishing the streets of the town with plants: the present participle *resplens*, in the nominative, corresponds with *aer* in the same case, and not with *agri*, which is in the genitive. There would have been no lack of opportunity to apply his medicines, so close to that insalubrious part of mount Cœlius where malaria raged, all around the sacrosanct Church of Lateran, queen and mother of all the Churches of the City and the World — *sacrosancta lateranensis Ecclesia omnium Urbis et Orbis Ecclesiarum caput et mater*.

Why then was this joyful and charming abode, on the road linking this basilica to the basilica of Sainte-Marie-Majeure, sacrificed without a second thought to the destructive urbanisation of large modern cities? It is true that nothing would have made it stand out amongst similar houses, numerous in the eternal city in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, had the owner not been so gifted to decorate it, with impunity, by inscriptions that are equally heretic as unique and which recognize the ineffable fragility of all things human that is without remedy: *Ita notas, hicvix na'tas, in hac: Porta, Luto parta, tempus ridet, brevi rodet*.

As we have noted, before us Bornia Pietro tried to penetrate the mystery of the Palombara Villa using the notes of Francesco Cancellieri who well recognized that *'these Enigmas and Inscriptions are the Recipe for the*

*making of Gold; as he put it: questi Enigmi, ed Iscrizioni sono le Ricette per la manifa'ttura dell'Oro.*

Bornia Pietro, by way of an imperfect translation of Cancellieri's notes, did not succeed in disproving the statement concerning these legends and their ideograms, '*which to this day nobody has been able to interpret, as nobody ever will be able to — le quali niuno finora ha Saputo interpretare, nè saranno giammai interpretate.*' His article was published in a bulletin of occultism in 1895<sup>8</sup> and indeed has nothing to offer that cannot be found in the work of the savant archaeologist. The only exception may be a highly debatable and unsatisfactory explanation about the hieroglyphs and the Latin epigraphs which are often translated without the precision one would hope for. This can be observed in the text which we have just provided by comparing my translation with Bornia's version. Such comparison will shed light on some notable differences. We have chosen to respect the layout of the text with its short lines and frequent indentations, its underlined sections and parentheses:

*'In this villa, which has heaven's dew, worked fields and running water, the toiled soil bears its fruits whilst the saltpetre and the salt disperse vapours from the scattered dung.*

*This little farmland, little god, always perfectly maintains the same appearance, whilst the vines, pears and superb apples grow without human intervention.*

*Near the field, there is a lake, and in this field the hare — and not the wolf — often comes to play, without harming the sweet lambs and the birds.*



The guard-dog stays near the chaste lambs and chases off wild animals.

Only the air above this field could return health to a sick person.

The kitchen garden fills the streets of the town with grass.

The cultivated furrows give up cups of wine to quench thirst.

Enter ye, if you are not vain!

At the door, Venus!

The doors are closed to you, thieves.

You who are pure, drink merrily of the wine (Meri) as much as you like (Mare), as Bacchus drank in times past.

If you like, enjoy yourself amongst the vineyards, and take what you desire for free.

I prepare whatever you ask of me with pleasure.

Here the bees offer sweet honey, in ample amounts, and it is always tender.

Greetings to you, crying beneath the shade of the woods!

If you are currently reading these words, you would not cry with sadness between the flowers, for in this place summer is intertwined with spring.

If you were to stay here, you would not cry when the wind blew.

Melancholic souls keep hope in the mountains, between the hills, on the paths and in the valley where one finds this villa, where a wall encloses the

fleece.

I hope that it will always be so.

It is written in stone: generation follows putrefaction (*a putre patre surgunt*). — Here lived (the generation?), in this house, built from daub. — Time smiles, but wears away in a little (corrodes).

*Vellus*, in particular, has never had the meaning of grass unlike what Borna Pietro seems to have arrived upon in this unusual variant, after having declared that ‘practically the entire inscription is nothing more than praise for the villa Palombara’. And thus he remarks: ‘The famous herb (*Vellus*), which could transform metals into gold, is mentioned only in these words: in Valle hujus Villae, ubi Vallus claudit Vellus. He continues that, ‘They do not explain which herb is being referred to, and moreover this interpretation is quite dubious, since in Latin the term *vellus* is used figuratively to designate any kind of herbage ...’

Where then, in which scholarly glossary, did our *martinist* discover this unknown meaning of the substantive *vellus* and why does he think it is a herb that would have an essential role in the metallic transmutation when there is not one line, not a single word, to be found among the epigraphs of the hermetic villa that alludes to any kind of plant, not even symbolically, which would be endowed with this marvellous capacity?

At any rate, Borna Pietro tells us that in 1871 when he was a child, he had the opportunity, whilst in the company of his father, to examine at length ‘the white marble frame of a door, set into the outer wall of an orchard’ in the same way Francesco Cancellieri must have seen it, at the dawn of the

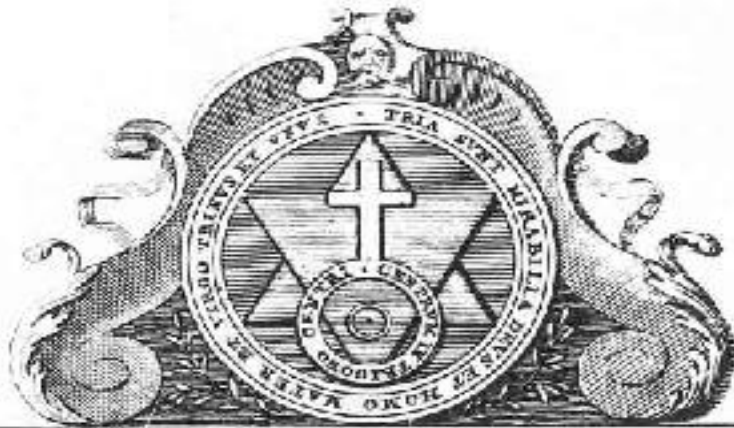
same century, facing the Church Sant' Eusebio. Being in his fifties, Cancellieri had come upon this little door at a time when it was open to reveal the villa's iron gate: 'prima del Cancellio di ferro della villa Palombara.'

Bornia Pietro was fortunate enough to live in Rome seventy years ago — a Rome in which one could step from a lively, bustling street filled with the clatter from its rough little convex cobblestones, right into some deserted, grassy *vicolo*. At Esquiline hill, if one wished to travel from Saint-Jean-de-Latran to Sainte-Marie-Majeure, one would wander at length between luscious vegetation, gardens and orchards with their sweet fragrances, along a large, rustic pathway with a nearly perfect alignment from north to south.

At about a third of the way, one would encounter the unique door alongside the road which the young Pietro noticed when strolling at his father's side. In this place filled with wild magnificence of nature, one would not expect to come across anything other than raggedy groups of pifferari, donkey-drivers with long gaiters and peasants hoisted on top of their carts.

The levelling of the terrain by the cut and fill of modern road construction had not yet reached this Eastern part of the hill. It had remained the same, with all its pastoral charm, safeguarding the rich properties of the countryside behind the outer walls of the city and being filled with silence and mystery. One might perhaps experience a sense of yearning or melancholy when, peeking through the large bars of the gate, the abode with its grand rooms could be made out underneath the secular foliage. Through the tranquil humid shade, the abode would have exhaled an aged atmosphere, dulcet and pervasive, as custodian of an unchanging tradition that is both gracious and time-honoured.





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**רוהאלתים**

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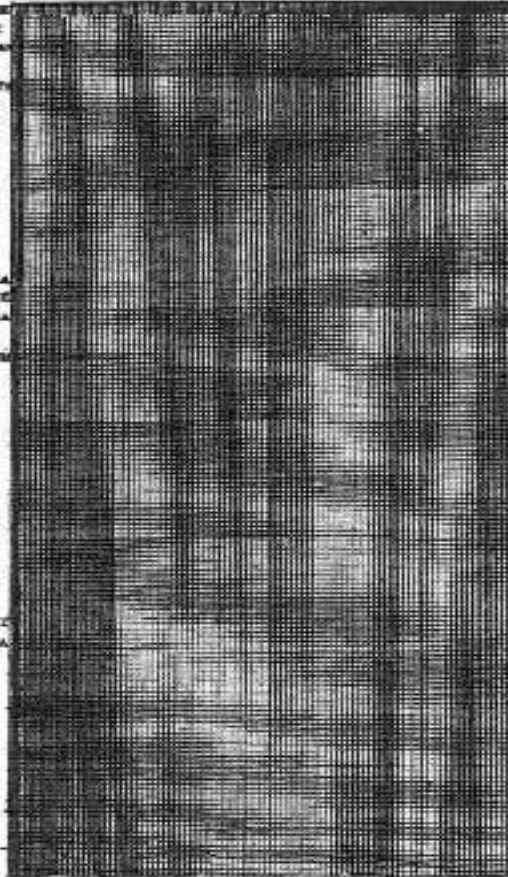
QUANDO IN TERRA  
 VITAE SOLET  
 CALTELLUM ATRA  
 COLCHICAS  
 TUNC VORACITER  
 ALPESVS



QVI SOLID  
 COLCHICAS AQVA  
 ET LASON TOME  
 FACIT DE VERRA  
 CLEVM  
 ET TRICOSTO  
 VITAE TORAM



ADDE ET IURE  
 DEATRANTIC  
 LASONAE VITAE  
 VITAE TORAM



QUANDO IN TERRA  
 VITAE SOLET  
 CALTELLUM ATRA  
 COLCHICAS  
 TUNC VORACITER  
 ALPESVS



QUANDO IN TERRA  
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SI SEDES VOS IS



QUANDO IN TERRA  
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 ALPESVS



QUANDO IN TERRA  
 VITAE SOLET  
 CALTELLUM ATRA  
 COLCHICAS  
 TUNC VORACITER  
 ALPESVS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

N. de. P. de. m. de.

*Plate II: the alchemical door as depicted in Francesco Cancellieri's  
engraving — 1806*

# THE SMALL DOORWAY

When Borgia Pietro wrote his article, however, the Palombara Villa had already been taken down and nothing was left of it except the little door in the wall. The signs and inscriptions engraved on the architrave and the gateposts — *sopra l'Architrave, e gli stipiti della Porta murata* — indicated that the narrow entryway was reserved only to the chosen few. 'Try your best to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I can assure you, will try to enter and will fail.'<sup>9</sup> Four Latin words engraved on the doorsill of the threshold expressively underline this. The words can be read in boustrophedon without changing the meaning: SI SEDES NON IS or SI NON SEDES IS, — *not this one if you fall*.

For Borgia Pietro, or rather for his brother Alexander who was his Latin translator, this two-directional reading of the hermetic apophthegm yielded a double meaning that Mr. de la Palice would certainly have approved of: *If you sit you do not walk; if you do not sit, you walk*. Clearly, they both believed that *sedes* is the present indicative of *sedere* and that *is* is the second person singular of the verb *eo*, also in the present indicative. We beg to differ and believe that in the second phrase, the pronoun *is* should be read as nominative and in the first as the subjunctive of *sedere*. Obviously, from a philosophical point of view, both readings would be valid. We nevertheless believe our interpretation more closely corresponds to the secret intentions of our philosopher who played with 'doubling' the meaning of the short sentence as reflected in the 'back and forth' of its writing.

Thus the philosophical purpose of this little doorway as a passageway towards an inner courtyard is underlined. This is further complemented by a second maxim engraved on the riser which acts as a reminder of the fundamental disinterest the candidate should have to acquire supreme knowledge. His only goal would be the alleviation of mankind's misfortunes and misery, and to bring into practice the virtues of charity and mercy towards his neighbour. This practice would be in accordance with the central precept of the chemical operation which, when brought to its logical conclusion, would ensure the material means to achieve this goal:

EST OPUS OCCULTUM VERI SOPHI APERIRE TERRAM UT  
GERMINET SALUTEM PRO POPULO;

*The hidden work of the true Sage, is to open the earth so that it may bring  
salvation for the people.*

This is the reason why these two lines are written on either side of the alchemical sign that is placed in their middle — a symbol that presents a complete ideogram of the first and most important phase of the Great Work. This phase consists of the opening of the philosophical earth with iron like a ploughshare cleaves the soil to fertilize it. Hence the spear of Mars splits the lunar crescent, evocative of the dual quality of the initial matter of the alchemist which is both frozen and liquid. Three horizontal lines cross the symbol's vertical stem, signifying the three consecutive reiterations of the same purification technique with iron. The last of these horizontal lines shows two half-circles on each end which represent the two saline components of the mediating agent.

In our view this best illustrates these two precepts that this narrow threshold offers for contemplation by the philosopher, accustomed as he may be to look down upon the earth on which his feet tread. These precepts are



worthy of the greatest master. Together with the other axioms, they demonstrate the mastery of its author and his most certain accession to the physical and absolute truth. An inscription which now has disappeared confirmed this truth in an alluring and precise way, with the same archetypal quality as the abundantly flowery epigraphs that are found around the doorway. This inscription would once have been visible on a marble plate above the main entry before it fell off and broke to pieces during the winter of the year 1801. These pieces subsequently found their way to the garden of the villa:

VILLAE IANUAM  
TRAHANDO  
RECLUDENS IASON  
OBTINET LOCUPLES  
VELLUS MEDAE  
1680

*Jason, opening the door to the villa, discovers and conquers the precious  
fleece of Medea.*

# CHRISTINA, QUEEN OF SWEDEN, G. F. BORRI AND THE HERB OF TRANSMUTATION

La villa Palombara harboured a legend which was handed down by Francesco Cancellieri and which somehow impelled Bornia Pietro, apparently without good reason, to dwell upon the important influence that a wandering spagirist, dressed as a pilgrim, had on the Marquis Maximilian. Bornia Pietro, collaborator of *L'Initiation*<sup>10</sup>, recognizes Giusèppe Francesco Borri, born in Milan, in this anonymous and mysterious pilgrim. He does not, however, provide the slightest bit of evidence for this conclusion and ignores the fact that the poor visionary had been imprisoned in a dungeon of Saint-Ange Castle by the tribunal of The Holy Office where he had been withering away for ten years when, in 1680, the Marquis Palombara adorned his country house with the inscriptions. Subsequently Pietro digresses into ample detail about the family name of the Milanese adventurer and provides a rather pointless adumbration on the different ways of spelling it.

Cancellieri, on the other hand, does not mention the name of the *spagyric traveler* since he most likely did not know it. However he does reveal that this pilgrim used a herb, the name of which is equally mysterious as that of the pilgrim, in his transmutation experiments. He even adds that this plant was mentioned in an epigraph that was on the main door. Is it not strange therefore, unexplainable even, that this specific inscription was the only one that our meticulous researcher did not copy, even when taking into account his disdain for alchemy? Allegedly two inscriptions would have decorated

this particular great door, for the one we studied in the previous article could not in any way be interpreted differently from the way we did. Whatever the intention of the scholarly yet biased man, we cannot add anything more by way of conclusion apart from the fact that, in our opinion, the legend here stands apart from reality: ‘O stulti, et tardi corde...’<sup>11</sup> Cancellieri exclaims to those he believes are followers of the chimerical art. As for Bornia Pietro, it appears that he assumed the inscription on the outer wall contained this enigma from which he wished to derive, by any means necessary, the missing indication for the vegetative agent of the empirical blower.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted though that the experiments of the practitioner undoubtedly involved a process of direct transmutation which is characteristic of ancient spagiry. What the villa teaches, however, with its perfect harmony, stands in stark contrast with such methods; not only in view of its elegance, but also in light of its expression of wisdom and pure tradition.

We will now summarize the anecdote that is related by Cancellieri and complement this with a number of historical details. The anecdote was later completed by Bornia Pietro, albeit not without imagination, and both attempted to legitimate the anecdote in their own way. In truth, two of the main characters in this story maintained regular contact with one another, in particular in Rome. They are Giuseppe Francesco (G. F.) Borri and Christina, Queen of Sweden, the daughter of Gustave-Adolphe.

After the intractable Christina, whose intelligence and knowledge remain a subject of wonder, had resigned from her *royal* throne in 1658, she came to settle in Rome where she would remain for good. She was known to enjoy priceless artistic collections which were acquired by the Vatican after her death, and she founded a new academy known as the *Academy of Arcadia*.

And while she was known for her great knowledge of the world and of men as well as her cautiousness and insight, all of this did not prevent her from also entertaining a circle of alchemists in her palace. And whereas she was a true sceptic and not the least devout, as she herself declares, she presided in person over the study of problems related to the Great Work. The abstruse information that surrounded it did not fail to enthral her enlightened mind which had been familiarized, since childhood, with ancient languages and sciences.

Cancellieri tells us that the Marquis of Palombara was passionate about hermeticism and attended these learned meetings. Furthermore, on the basis of his social status he was allowed to have private discussions with the Queen:<sup>13</sup> ‘Frequentava la conversazione della Regina il Marchese *Massimiliano Palombara*, che fu *Conservatore* nel 1651e nel 1677 (*Galletti Inscript. Rom. T. II*, p. 128–142), e che pure studiava l’Arte di far l’Oro.’ Cancellieri then tells us that both of them met an alchemist who was passing through the eternal city who to his amusement astounded them by artificially producing precious metals in their own houses within a short space of time. Each time the stranger disappeared discretely after having started the operation by use a certain herb. So all that was left in the room to which he had been assigned was the convincing result of his clever methods: the gold and the silver collected in the alchemist’s vessels. This gold and silver as left in Queen Christina’s palace and in Maximilien Palombara’s laboratory turned out to be of perfect quality. The Marquis was even more impressed when he found, near the cooled kiln, a sheet of paper covered with cryptographic signs and obscure phrases.

Francesco Cancellieri makes note of the arcane symbols as contained in the hermetic lessons that were found in the laboratory and those of the long

epigraph outside, and believes that the symbols in the lesson were copied onto the small doorway. He believes that the lesson was the basis for the inscription which, by all appearances, would have had something to do with the famous herb that supposedly was able to reunite the science of Hermes with the basic empiricism of the secret books. It should be noted that Cancellieri identifies this herb between parentheses so it is hard to explain Borgia Pietro's confusion especially since the text is written in his mother tongue: *'Il Marchese Massimiliano, in memoria di un tale avvenimento, oltre varie Iscrizioni messe nella Sala, et nel muro esterno del Casino, nel 1680, li fece incidere in marmot, parte sul Portone posto sulla strada, la quale, come si e detto, conduce da S. Maria Maggiore a S. Giovanni in Laterno, (e questa Iscrizione riguarda l'invenzione, e l'esistenza dell'Erba, accenata di sopra in quel sito); parte intorno ad una picciola Porta sulla strada incontro a S. Eusebio. — In 1680, the Marquis Maximilien Palombara, in honour of a certain event and in addition to the various inscriptions placed in the living room and on the outer wall of the villa, copied the enigmas on this sheet with an engraving onto marble. Part of it was situated on the great doors which gave out onto the road which, it is said, ran from Saint-Marie-Majeure to Saint-Jean-de-Latran (this inscription concerns the discovery and the existence of the herb indicated above it) and another part was circumscribed on the outside of a small doorway which led to the road facing Saint-Eusèbe.'*

# MATTER AND SPIRIT

In order to commemorate this extraordinary event, the overjoyed and very grateful Palombara would have entrusted his skilful and fastidious stonemason with Borri's grimoire. At this point we refuse to acknowledge this version of the origins of the inscription, especially because Cancellieri does not provide any proof himself. As we have mentioned earlier, the philosophical teachings that emanate from the whole entirely refute such an assertion and would certainly not match an erroneous recipe of a *blower* that would include the use of a herb that was gathered on site. In their discourses on the *materia* of the Stone, none of the good authors ever failed to confine the difficult selection thereof to the metallic kingdom. None of them have neglected to condemn any other idea as a monstrous absurdity, for that would contradict the principle that no subject, no matter what it is, can give birth to anything other than its own kind: 'They shall see, I said, how it is. They will see that each thing carries its own seed, the plants in each species, like wheat makes wheat, rye makes rye, barley makes barley, and so on for other plants, in the same manner that men make men; dogs make dogs, and each animal preserves its species in its seed and through its seed. So if you want to make gold and silver by way of Nature, supported by art, sow gold and silver in the Garden of Philosophers.'<sup>14</sup>

The foundation of hermetic work is based on a judicious selection of the matter and the idea that it must be treated at length. This treatment is often likened to that of farmed soil in light of the many similarities. The Marquis Maximilien gave a charming description of this, inspired by the magnificent and enchanting house on Mount Esquilin which, during the second half of the 17th Century, would have looked out over the vast countryside. He was

evidently a gardener like Ortolanus (Hortulanus) as is evident from his Commentary on the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus and his 'maritime Gardens'. New Jason, as indicated on the architrave of his small door, to whom the garden should be the real object of the efforts so alike those of Hercules in terms of risk, harshness and scope: HORTI MAGICI INGRESSUM HESPERIUS CUSTODIT DRACO ET SINE ALCIDE COLCHICAS DELICIAS NON GUSTASSET<sup>15</sup> JASON: *The dragon guards the entrance to the magical garden of Hesperus and without Alcide<sup>16</sup> Jason would not have tasted the delights of Colchis.*

Directly above this inscription, also on the lintel, one can read in Hebrew: RUACH ELOHIM, which can be translated as the Spirit of God, without which hermetic operations would be no different than the experiments commonly performed by chemists in laboratories. 'Lapis Philosophorum (the Philosopher's Stone) is RUACH ELOHIM'<sup>17</sup> writes the German alchemist Khunrath whose biblical hermeneutics, mystical abstractions, bombastic style and love for rare words all compete to make his writing impenetrable.

The *Spirit*, emanation of the Father, enables man to closely collaborate with God in the microcosmic creation in which the *virginal matter* (mater virgo) is the original chaos. From there is born the trinity expressed by the epigraph of the circular emblem:

TRIA SUNT MIRABILIA DEUS ET HOMO MATER ET VIRGO  
TRINUS ET UNUS; *the three are admirable, God and man, the mother and the virgin, triple and one.*

The hieroglyph on the mineral virgin is part of the physical trinity and is placed above the *Seal of Solomon* whose two superimposed triangles represent the perfect marriage of water and fire, earth and air. Together these triangles form the six-pointed star which constitutes the symbol of the completed Philosopher's Stone. In the centre of the globe that is crowned by a cross, one can see the symbol for gold, a circle with a point in the middle. It is the symbol of the philosophical gold that is deep within the matter and which is made by the isolation of, in a state of purity, the three principles: *salt, sulfur and mercury*.

CENTRUM IN TRIGONO CENTRI; *The centre in the triangle of the centre.*

The same scientific thought, expressed in different terms, can be found on the first page of a little treatise written by the chemist, Adrian Mynsicht<sup>18</sup>, to whom we owe the discovery of potassium sulphate and emetic tartar or antimony potassium tartrate. One can see here that underneath the title there is, first of all, an exact copy of the only motif which decorates the Roman vestige and on the other side, offered as explanation of the author's symbol, *symbolum autoris*, is the following caption which illustrates its meaning:

CENTRUM MUNDI, GRANUM FUNDI; *The centre of the world, the seed from within.*



# SATURN OF THE PHILOSOPHERS AND ITS PURIFICATION

The cruciferous globe is both a symbol of the *prima materia* as well as that of the philosophical vessel, the mythological ship that Jason steered into the conquest for Medea's fleece. According to some ancient legends, this ship was *round*, representing both the container and its contents, the *matter* (mater) is its own *vessel* (matris):<sup>19</sup> 'In the same way that God is omnipresent as single most powerful archetype of this world, this mediating Nature can be found everywhere in the little world of the Philosophers, in other words it is always present in his spherical vessel.'<sup>20</sup>

The cruciform outline of the primary subject of the operations, designating alchemical purification, is reminiscent of the arrow of the symbol of Mars which tells us the operation was carried out with iron. The Italian gentleman who was the confidante of the incredible Christine included this symbol in an aphorism which, at first glance, may seem incoherent. The circle is divided by a horizontal diametric line that is surmounted by a vertical radius together forming the letter Tau turned upside-down. Lastly, on the outside, a Greek cross is positioned on top. In the characteristic enigmatic style of our Adept, he conveys a warning against the temptation to use gold in the work — knowing that gold is symbolized by the circle, usually completed by a central dot:

DIAMETER SPHERÆ  
THAU CIRCULI  
CRUX ORBIS  
NON ORBIS PROSUNT.

*The diameter of the sphere, the tau of its circumference and the cross in the circle are of interest, and not the circle itself.*

The technical realisation of this aphorism is presented on the jambstone that faces this graphical charade directly opposite on the left-hand side. This technical realisation is essential to the artist from the very start of the work and bestows eternal wisdom. The sign of Saturn, engraved above it, gives an indication of the true nature of the mysterious matter that the Adepts often designate as the *lead of the sages*:

QUANDO IN TUA DOMO  
NIGRI CORVI  
PARTURIENT ALBAS  
COLUMBAS  
TUNC VOCABERIS  
SAPIENS.

*When in your house the black crows have given birth to white doves, then you will be called a Sage.*

The frontispiece of a rare little book attributed to Nicolas Flamel shows a sphere and to its right a dead raven lying next to it and to its left a dove taking flight with open wings. Above them one can read: *Ad altiora non aliter*; upwards, not otherwise.<sup>21</sup>

Hence it appears that the phrases of Marquis Palombara each cover a certain aspect of the Alchemical doctrine and have been arranged in pairs. The pairs are shown at the same height on each side of the doorway, each captioned by a sign borrowed from an old alchemical notation. The linking

in pairs and the combination with this old notation provides quite a clear indication of the meaning of the phrases.

# THE CONVERSION OF ELEMENTS

The two following symbols are those of Mars and Venus. The symbols are completed with the axioms concerning operations which, in alchemy, are the object of their allegorical love. The two Latin inscriptions refer, in this first work, to *igneous water* and *aqueous fire* as well as to the conversion of elements so often referred to by various authors:

QUI SCIT  
COMBURERE AQUA  
ET LAVARE IGNE  
FACIT DE TERRA  
CAELUM  
ET DE CAELO TERRAM  
PRETIOSAM.

*He who knows how to burn with water and wash with fire can make heaven  
from the earth and precious earth from heaven.*

SI FECERIS VOLARE  
TERRAM SUPER  
CAPUT TUUM  
EIUS PENNIS  
AQUAS TORRENTUM  
CONVERTES IN PETRAM.

*If you make earth fly around your head with its feathers, then you will  
transform the water of torrents into stone.*

AVREVM SECVLVM  
REDIVIVM,

QVOD NVNC ITERVM APPARVIT,  
*suaviter floruit, & odoriferum aureumque  
semen peperit.*

Carum pretiosumque illud semen omni-  
bus veræ Sapientiæ & Doctrinæ Filiis  
monstrat & reuelat

HENRICVS MADATHANVS.



ANNO M.DC.XXV.

Plate III: Adrian Mynsicht's seal — 1625

On this same subject, let us return to the sculpted medallion above the architrave. It is likely that Palombara borrowed it from the drawing of Adrian Mynsicht<sup>22</sup>. Following the epigraph which we have presented earlier, Cancellieri noted that the lapidary teachings of the villa date from 1680. The German chemist had illustrated his works with this particular motif as early as 1625, that is to say, more than half a century before the Marquis had the idea to use this motif. Be that as it may, the paternity of this symbol is not particularly important. There are two peculiarities on the printed version, however, which deserve our attention. One is the difference that can be observed in the shading of the triangles of the star: the dotted field and the horizontal shading. The other difference is in the letters B. S. which are placed inside the downward pointing triangle — the alchemical symbol for water. These are complementary pieces of information which have to do with the *modus operandi* of the Work and which specify the initials of the two mineral agents used at the beginning. They also highlight the conversion of elements which can be so detrimental for those researchers who all too often take the writing of philosophers at face value. The peculiar result of this first and decisive stage of work is here represented by heraldic gold and azure, purposely substituted for one another. The symbol for water is gold-coloured, as fire should be, whilst the triangle of fire, on the other hand, has been given the azure colour that is generally attributed to water (plate III).

The same hermetic concept can be found in Henri de Linthaut's manuscript,<sup>23</sup> valued above all for its quill drawings, in which the author has condensed a vast knowledge. The text itself, with its clear writings in the form of spagyric recipes, at first sight contests the existence of such knowledge. We made a copy of this precious treatise in the days when we frequented the charming reading room at the Arsenal Library in our

methodical study of the priceless collection of manuscripts left by the Marquis of Paulmy, Antoine-René Voyer d'Argenson.

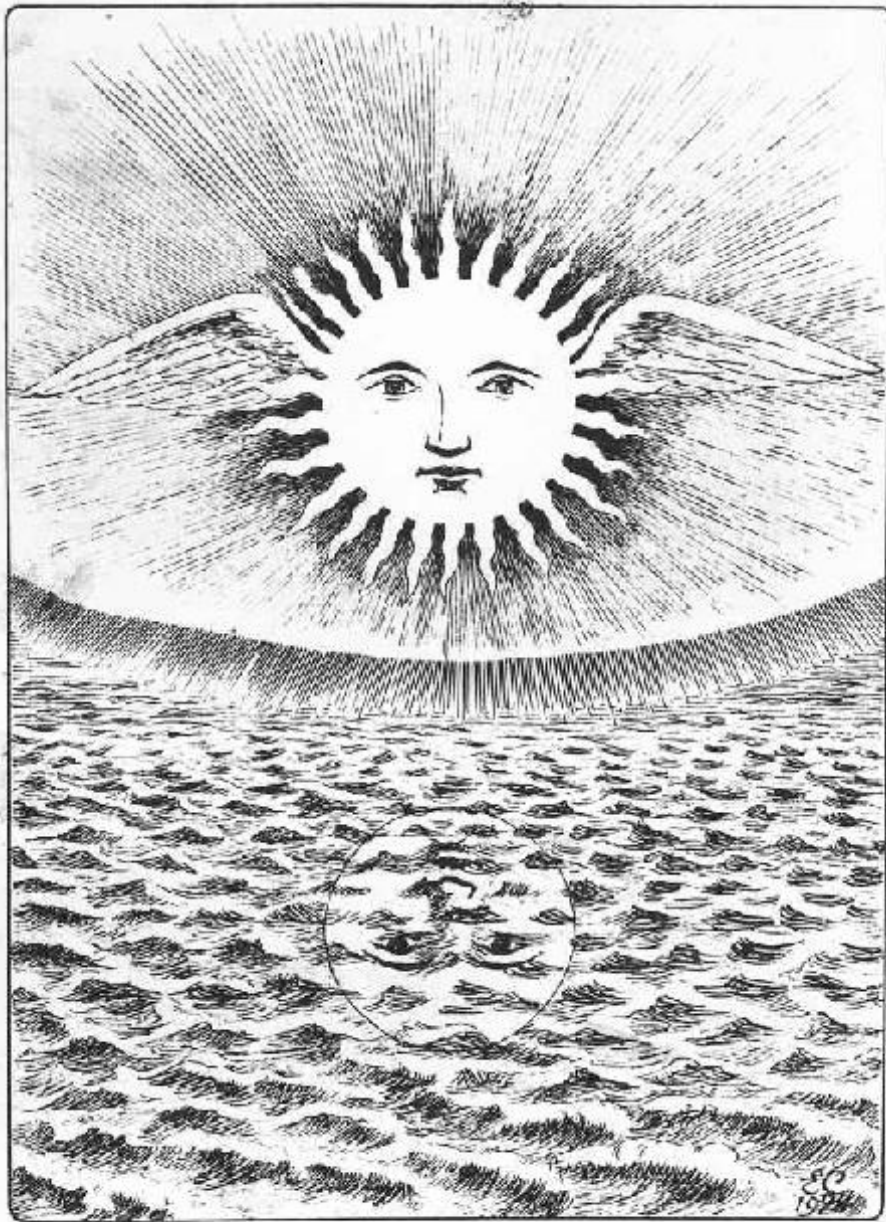
We did not neglect to carefully copy Linthaut's drawings. Two of his drawings are related to the change in nature that we have spoken of earlier. On the first drawing, the soul of a crowned woman lying dead on a slab rises from her in the form of a small creature. With legs and wings outstretched, the creature flies towards a lantern<sup>24</sup> placed in the sky in the middle of a circle of radiating light: 'Fac fixum volatile, *make the volatile fixed*' reads the well known formula. The imperfect matter, watery and frigid, has given up its pure, fiery and spiritual part. It has thereby become *the lantern of the philosophers*, of which Rabelais speaks at length in his *fifth and last book*:

*Passant icy ceste po'terne,  
Garny toy de bonne lanterne.*

[When passing through this little door,  
Equip yourself with a good lantern.]

'I am prepared for this,' states Pantagruel, 'for in the whole region of Lanternites, there is no better and more divine lantern than ours.'

As the reader may ascertain, the second composition is even more significant as it is in accordance with the chemical operation that it allegorically presents and which is determined by the same precept written backwards: '*Fac volatile fixum* (volatilize the fixed).' Indeed, the sun or philosophical gold, dry, sulphurous and fixed, takes the wings associated with mercurial volatility and rises up from the wave to which it owes this new quality (plate IV).



FAC VOLATILE FIXUM

*Plate IV: Henri de Linthaut — The dawn — Manuscript from the Arsenal  
Library*



What we see here therefore is an image of the *conversion of elements*, of this *igneous water* and *aqueous fire* that the adepts pose to be at the basis of their operations. Experience undeniably legitimises philosophical tradition as it confirms the writings of the ancients. Among these writings are the famous words of Hermes himself, so often misunderstood in their essential meaning — one that corresponds to the metallurgic feat that was accomplished at the house of the Marquis: ‘What is below is akin to what is above, and what is above is akin to what is below.’ Therefore, you will understand that, in the alchemical microcosm, earth and fire take the place of water and air, and the former are positioned above the latter as the inverse of their natural situation in the divine macrocosm.

As one can see, this is not about changing earth into air and water into fire which a superficial reading of ancient treatises might lead one to believe. Such an interpretation has been the single biggest cause of the desperation among the numerous alchemists that were impatient rather than wise. Once understood, however, there is nothing simpler than this *separation*, this *conversion*, miraculously happening all at once without requiring any exceptional efforts or complicated manipulations from the artist other than the perfect knowledge of the appropriate ‘hand’s turn’, the choice of the precise moment and the solid mastery of execution.

This applies to the matter, the replica of the torment inflicted upon Saint Peter, *crucified upside down*, as much as it applies to the coming of Jesus on Earth with all His peregrinations which has its reflection not only among men but also in the two other kingdoms, the vegetable and mineral kingdoms. In the latter Christ remained,<sup>25</sup> built His indestructible Church, and assured the apostles of His eternal pre-eminence as is amply demonstrated by the Gospels: ‘And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter,

and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’<sup>26</sup>

Let us take note furthermore, before returning to the two pairs of elements, of a house in the old city of Poitiers that is rich in monumental curiosities. Located at the corner of the streets of the Ancienne Comédie and Colonel Denfert, the ancient façade of this house shows a bearded man who holds an uprooted tree in his right hand. The interest of this sculpture lies in its oddity; in particular is the view of the abnormal positioning of the vegetation, as presented by the protagonist, with its foliage pointed downward and with its roots up in the air. This presents a unique testimony left by some modest Poitevin Initiate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the surprising and secret means to ensure the spiritual nutrition of the hermetic *tree of life*.

# THE HOMUNCULUS OR THE SON OF MAN

‘AZOTH et ignis tibi sufficiunt; *The Azoth and the fire are enough for you*’ is proclaimed by the alchemical axiom after Basile Valentine was commented upon by Pierre-Jean Fabre de Castelnaudary, a 17<sup>th</sup> century doctor. He commented as follows:

‘Azoth is a mysterious word here. Apart from the fact that in Castilian it means mercury, it contains four letters that represent the beginning and the end of all alphabets and all languages of the world. All alphabets start with A and the Latin languages finish with Z, the Greek with @omega, and the Hebrew languages with Th. All other languages follow one of these three. In this manner Azoth, which signifies mercury, encompasses all that is taught by the Latins, Greeks and Hebrews, and all that is derived of it. Hence the beginning and the end of natural things is contained in, and circumscribed by it.’<sup>27</sup>

The Marquis of Palombara in turn underlined the importance of the two hermetic terms by engraving them on his initiatory doorway and by adding that by *whitening Latone, Diane will appear without garment*:

AZOT ET IGNIS  
DEALBANDO  
LATONAM VENIET  
SINE VESTE DIANA.

This operation is essential, as is testified by the Latin legend at the top of an engraving by Theodore de Bry, namely the eleventh of the fifty beautiful engravings that are the true masterpieces that illustrate Michel Maier's treatise<sup>28</sup>.

A woman can be seen in the company of two children, representing the sun and the moon, and a man washes her black hair and clothes:

Dealbate Latonam et rumpite libros.

*Whiten Leto and tear your books*<sup>29</sup>

Daughter of *Latona*, in whom the alchemists recognize their *laton* (brass), Diane is the white and adamant purified mercury, whose symbol is to be found on the opposite part of the door frame but upside down and with its cross augmented by the sign of life. The inscription below it completes the one we have just read and also relates to the *second work* and its secret of fastidious and lengthy operations. It is during this second work that the king, born of fire, plunges into the water of the *Sea*<sup>30</sup> *of the Sages*, where he consummates his wedding. This union resuscitates the dead metal and gives birth to the little fish, the *remora* of the alchemists, who truly is the *son of man*:

FILIUS NOSTER  
MORTUUS VIVIT  
REX AB IGNE REDIT  
ET CONIUGIO  
GAUDET OCCULTO.

*Our dead son lives,  
the king comes back through fire*

*and rejoices in the secret wedding.*

This is the metallic embryo that Paracelsus named *homunculus*, and which gave rise to the ignorant preconception that is still popular today, that alchemists entertained the monstrous hope to achieve artificial animal procreation. The goal pursued by those worthy of the designation of philosopher is certainly different. Even though the Great Work is a true ontogeny, with unexpected phenomena and signs, this does not, however, justify involvement in dark practices or an admitting to the horrific imagery that legend has all too often complacently ascribed to it: ‘And the Queen’s melodious voice will be greatly pleasing to the ears of the King of fire, he will embrace her passionately in the great affection he has for her, and will unite with her until both of them disappear and become but one body.’<sup>31</sup>

# ALCHEMY AND MAGIC

We will not try to contest the fantastical reputation the alchemist has in the eyes of the general public and whose only remaining credit in our present day is but a remnant of former glory. Fulcanelli has applied himself to contest this reputation in his two books and there is no need for us to return to the subject. Nevertheless we are compelled to include a few notes on the book written by Mr. Robert Ambelain, *Dans l'Ombre des Cathédrales* [*In the Shadow of the Cathedrals*], which is illustrative of the disturbing image the hermeticist, or better put, the alchemist is ascribed to in dime novels.<sup>32</sup> In this book the designation of 'hermetic' — a term that should never be used for anything other than that which pertains to alchemy — is used synonymously with black magic in, as a matter of speech, a diabolically haphazard way. As such, the book strays far from the clear doctrine professed by Fulcanelli — a doctrine which Mr. Ambelain presents as his posthumous disciple in a dedication which reads:

IN MEMORY OF  
FULCANELLI

Artist of the Great Work,  
Philosopher of Fire (sic),  
whose wonderful teachings  
have enabled us to present  
this incomplete outline  
of Hermetic Esotericism.

As far as we are concerned, we can only conclude that these ‘wonderful teachings’ would have yielded its ardent beneficiary, as a consequence of his profound incomprehension, an abundance of fruit rather than any real fruit. To justify this sentiment, let us suffice to compare two passages borrowed respectively from the Master and the would-be disciple where the first, with an almost religious undertone, affirms the necessity of faith<sup>33</sup> while the second negates it with a sceptical mind that is fitting of the most profound materialism:

‘In truth we cannot know anything without the help of faith, and whosoever does not possess it cannot undertake anything. We have never seen scepticism and doubt build anything stable, noble or durable. We must often call to mind the Latin saying: *Mens agitat molem*, since it is the deep conviction of this truth that will lead the wise worker to the happy end of his labour. It is from there, from this @stout faith, that he will draw the virtues indispensable for the resolution of this great mystery.’<sup>34</sup>

Thus reads the indisputable observation by Fulcanelli on the words of Jesus to Peter as repeated by the unknown philosopher of Dampierre-sur-Boutonne — *Why have you doubted, man of little faith?* His purported pupil, however, promulgates the following stern and disconcerting antithesis: ‘That which distinguishes, in effect, the Magician from the average priest of any formal religion, lies in the spirit of inquiry and research. The magician seeks to observe and understand first in order to *believe afterwards*. The other one believes first and subsequently makes no attempt to verify, as his faith suffices for him. ‘Even towards the nonsensical’, said Saint Augustine, ‘the Adept is above all else a man of science rather than of faith.’<sup>35</sup>

Belief and faith did not present an obstacle to freedom and artistic license as seen in medieval art, the expression of which unfolded without control on our churches and cathedrals. In fact, nothing shows itself to be more edifying than old alchemical texts, and nothing exudes a deeper and more sincere attachment of the adepts to God. Among them the proportion of high ranking ecclesiasts is considerable including, for example, the wise but unfortunate monk Roger Bacon and Pope John XXII who left in the caves of the Avignon palace a treasure worth 25 million in money at that time, a sum equally fabulous as unexplained other than *per artem philosophicam*.<sup>36</sup>

On which basis did Mr. Amberlain feel justified to associate, against all common sense, the *chymical art* with the dark practices of sorcery, revised and augmented by his hands? In this regard, it is hard to tell whether these secrets and revelations are the result of an extraordinary and vain credulity or a vast and pernicious mystification. The experiences he thus offers, with imperturbable seriousness, are indeed of a much more debatable veracity than their assured effect on the unfathomable weakness of mankind. Mr. Amberlain acts quite contrary to what he professes and does so, for heaven's sake, with complete ease of mind much like the ill-advised who shows a mischievous child how to light a match and then enjoins the child, before he leaves him alone, to make sure not to touch it.

Anyway, this is not the place to include a complete review of this hodgepodge. According to its author, 'a certain eroticism necessarily accompanies any material, generative and fertile magical operation.' He subsequently admits to substantiate his assertion in his distinctive style which lends the least ornament to his book: 'Low magic, indeed, but extremely active and efficient magic.'<sup>37</sup> If he had not added this peremptory and stupefying remark as a form of badly disguised erotic Satanism, all in



praise of Hindu *Kundalini*: ‘No doubt, the *Muladhara-chakra*, centre situated near the anus, would seem less noble than *Sahasrara-padma*, situated in the brain. However, it is on the awakening of the first that the awakening of the last depends, and hence complete illumination!’<sup>38</sup>

Is it not in the same magic-erotic spirit of perverse *symbolism* that Verlaine wrote, to the genius *seer*, the *inverted* sonnet which was retrieved from Rimbaud’s wallet after the sad incident in Brussels?<sup>39</sup> This poem, with all its intentional embarrassment and erudite Bonheur in two tercets that precede the quatrains, conveys an image that, alas!, leaves little to the imagination. Here is the piece, with all its disarming imprudence, quite beautiful and befitting the tormented poet, both cynical and naive at the same time, in its passionate and painful expression:

#### THE GOOD DISCIPLE

I am saved, I am lost!  
Mysteriously tempest-tossed  
Oh Terror! Spare me, Oh Lord!

What cruel angel batters me  
in the back just as I  
fly off to Paradise?

Deliciously wicked fever,  
Fine delirium, blissful dread!  
I am martyr and I am king,  
Falcon I fly and swan I die!

You, the Jealous one, beckon me,  
...<sup>40</sup> here I am, take all of me!  
I crawl to you, still unworthy!  
Mount my rump and stomp!

May 72<sup>41</sup>

Falcon! There is no need to dissect this homophone so as to better understand the obscene word from the colloquial of the two friends that resonates so well with the exceptional vulgarity of their letters.<sup>42</sup>

As for M. Amberlain, he celebrates his *black mass* ‘on the rump or belly of a naked woman’ assuring us — shame on those who would think otherwise — with the aim to help *the real adepts* on the *Path*: ‘The position on the belly (with the altar on the buttocks) radiates negative, feminine and earthy energies.’<sup>43</sup>

Please excuse this long digression as here included for various reasons under the common denominator of respect, dignity and duty. In view of the subject of this book this digression is neither entirely useless nor completely beside the point.

# THE PHILOSOPHER'S DEW AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Let us return to the country house of the Marquis Massimiliano Palombara. With the help of Francesco Cancellieri's opusculè, let us further investigate the strange maxims of the Italian archaeologist. Having foreseen the impending disappearance of the building, on the basis of his professional inclination, he was the last visitor who took the time to reproduce the maxims in his plates, thus saving them from oblivion.

Above the entrance door leading to a room on the ground floor, a disc was present. The disc was held by two winged spirits<sup>44</sup> and read:

Aqua  
A qua Horti  
Irrigantur  
Non est Aqua  
A qua Horti  
Aluntur.

*The water, with which the gardens are watered, is not the water that fertilises them.*

The alchemical earth, in effect, at the moment when it has to be generously watered, will only become fertile when it has been watered with the *astral and humid spirit*, also called *celestial dew*. Many people have been mistaken about the actual meaning of this *dew*, and thus did not hesitate to repeat the laborious operation shown on the fourth plate of the *Mutus Liber*,

without taking due note of the modus of depiction by analogy, where two characters are busy twisting, above a large container, the cloth they had exposed to nocturnal condensation.<sup>45</sup> In this regard they were probably greatly influenced by François du Soucy, Sir of Gerzan, who in his treatise has stressed the virtues of the *dew* and its essential role in the Great Work. He concludes as follows: ‘I will suffice to say that greatly fortunate is the one who has the intelligence to understand the nature of the true Dew of the Sky ...’<sup>46</sup> It is true that many philosophers suggest that it would be in vain to select any other matter as a basis for the hermetic work. Among them is Hermes Trismegistus, the progenitor, who designates the dew as the unique matter from which all others are born: ‘The *Thelema*<sup>47</sup> if the entire world is here ... It ascends from the earth to the heaven and once again it descends to the earth and receives the force of things superior and inferior ... *It is the force of all forces ...*’ We are all aware of the authority of the Emerald Tablet which, according to father Kircher himself, would contain the secret of the Philosopher’s Stone: *Certissimus est*, he asserts. The words of the Emerald Tablet are even more evocative in view of the fact that the authors gave the dew — *Ρῶσις*, *rôsis*, *strength*, — the name of *philosopher’s emerald*. The latter is green like the precious stone it borrows its name from and it is in line with this resemblance — a semblance in colour as much as in vitreous consistency — that it furthermore has been given the name of *vitriol*, a term commonly used by the ancients for iron sulphate. Hence, on the basis of this irrefutable wisdom we dare state that the universal spirit is *green*, that it is this *immature gold* the alchemists talk about, that is to say, the *spiritual gold* or *Gold of Christ*:

‘Skies, send from above your dew; and may the skies pour down the Righteous; and may the earth be opened, and may it bring

forth salvation, and may righteousness spring up together. I am the lord who created it.’ (Isaiah, 45:8)<sup>48</sup>

Among the litanies of Lorette, the ones we recited in choir in catechism, there is one in particular that comes to mind here: *Gideon’s Fleece*. As a child, we recited a simplified version in French which, as part of the fastidious routine of the time, stood miles away from its complete reading to which we would later take on an interest: *Gideon’s Fleece, watered by the dew of the sky; Vellus Gedeonis, rore coeli perfusum*. The miracle provoked by Joash’s son is the same that the alchemist became the beneficiary of, through his nocturnal work and which provides the *celestial water* that is essential to his works. This water, also called *blessed water* by the authors, finds its equivalent in the *holy water* of the Churches. In religious esotericism and in its purest form, this water is kept in large shells that serve as stoups as we can see in Sarcelles (Seine-et-Oise).

‘Factumque est ita. Et *de nocte* consurgens, expresso vellere, *concham* rore implevit; And this is what happened. Having risen at night, he wrung out the fleece and *filled* a shell *with dew*.’ (Judges, 6:38).

In this respect we would like to stress how rewarding it can be to return to the original text. In this case, one would find the translation from a Bible, however renowned, to be quite different from ours and surely devoid of the initiatory teachings that it should have kept: ‘What Gideon had suggested happened. Since, having woken *very early in the morning*, he squeezed the fleece, and filled *a cup* with the dew that came out of it.’<sup>49</sup>

It is the chemical phenomenon of which the ram Chrysomalos — *Χρυσός*, Khrysos, and *μαλλός*, mallos, *golden fleece* — represents the instrument in

the Argonauts' mythical expedition. One will understand, consequently, why the goal pursued by the student of the centaur Chiron is brought to the fore in such a central place in the epigraphs of Palombara's villa. The long inscription was meant to be visible from the street, to be read and to be meditated upon by the literate or informed passer-by, revealing that here, *a fence enclosed the fleece; ubi vallus claudit vellus.*<sup>50</sup> How seductive, how tempting for the modern-day Jason now standing a few steps away facing the carriage door, deciphering at the very top of the pediment the invitation to the great chemical adventure of which Colchis' hero would not have shunned the tribulations and the dangers!<sup>51</sup> Is it not to the glory of the same natural truth, from the same ancient tradition, that the order of the Golden Fleece was created, the most famous in Christianity? Such nonsense in this respect has been written about this institution and its founder Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy: according to some he chose this symbol in honour of his thriving wool trade! The promiscuousness that this great prince is accused of, is it not belied by the powerful assertion of his short motto: *Aultre n'auray* [I'll have no other], pronounced, like a vow, to the most beautiful of all women.<sup>52</sup> What lady other than the Virgin Mary would have occupied the knight's noble thoughts; he who wanted the costume of his order be *red* and lined with *white* satin: the hood, the robe, the coat, the stockings all the way down to the shoes. The two colours are reminiscent of the two philosophical gems and this resonates with the knight's primary occupation. The picture is complete by the necklace to which the fabulous hide is suspended: *Pretium laborum non vile ; Price of the works not to be disdained*, states the inscription on the golden jewel. The jewel is adorned with a little scene where a knight fights a dragon in the shelter of a palm tree that is so dear to the Christian legend. Judging from the medal that the son of Philip received from Charles the Bold,<sup>53</sup> it is to be presumed that he

applied himself to the same work as his father. This is at least what we deduce from the declaration in old French on the back of this coin which takes on its full meaning in conjunction with the image of the crouching ram and flanked by the words *aureus vellus* or golden fleece.

JE LAI EMPRINS BIEN EN AVIENGNE.

*I have undertaken it, may good come of it.*

Charles the Bold was hard-working and well educated; he spoke five languages and was thoroughly familiar with Latin, a language that princes of his rank generally ignored. As we will see later, much work was done at the court of Philip the Good where the future Louis XI would seek refuge. However, let us not get ahead of ourselves but continue our peregrinations around the enigmatic abode on Mount Esquiline.

# THE MINERAL TRINITY AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL SECRET

The large living-room on the ground floor (*nella sala a Pian Terreno*) included a side door on the right of the entrance and above which two sentences were written. The first sentence read as follows:

CUM SOLO  
SALE ET  
SOLE SILE.

We interpret this as: *With the earth, the salt and the sun, keep quiet.*

Unfaithful to the words and fanciful, this is how we would best describe the translation of Bornia Pietro and his brother. The parentheses specify nothing, explain nothing, nor do they compensate for inaccuracy:

*Be content (sile) of the salt (wisdom) and the sun (light, science).*

Often the same meaningless words that are so characteristic of occultists of the spiritual Great Work are applied to fallacious and illusory speculations about their work. The aim of this work is not very well defined and remains as fleeting for them as was the meaning of the hieroglyphs on the small alchemical door were for Bornia Pietro. This explanation does not manage to disentangle a complicated picture in which obscure correspondences multiply based on the colours of the Work. Therefore in the interpretation presented in his essay, both disjointed and frivolous, he draws inspiration



from the theories of Papus and Wronski, re-edited with the *Hieroglyphic Monad* by Jean Dee.

The symbolism presented by Marquis Massimiliano Palombara is far more reliable and constructive. His maxims are all related to the same chemical philosophy. We would like to repeat that they offer, when correctly read, an understanding that is beyond question. An unique feature of these lapidary texts is that they underline the different phases of the philosophical work and that they signal the obstacles encountered on this difficult way. This is why the Roman Adept figuratively names, with the terms appropriate to his *agriculture*, the three mineral actors of the Work which react with one another at the very beginning of the work: the *earth*, the *salt* and the *sun*. That is so important that he does not neglect to adjoin the imperative piece of advice of discretion. This is much in line with numerous old authors of whom Jacques Cœur has left us an expressive and amusing picture in his rich palace in Bourges. The image illustrates the motto of the powerful minister of finance and portrays, on the great chimney of the sumptuous abode, a *fool* wearing his hood with ears and who is depicted with his forefinger to his mouth, locked by a padlock:

‘Closing the mouth  
Not a fly can enter’

In his cabalistic play with words with disyllabic paronyms, Palombara substituted *solum* to *terra* to refer to the earth, that is to say the *materia prima*, which is the *basis*, the *foundation* of the Great Work. The first Latin term precisely signifies those two last senses. It joins with the *sun* — *the philosopher’s gold* and not the precious metal, — in the initial conjunction, through the intermediary of *salt*, in the same way that women marry men

through the mediation of the priest. This is what the sixth key of Basile Valentine teaches us. The engraving shows a mitred bishop blessing the union of king and queen.<sup>54</sup>

In the blissful Rome of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, did these matters have to be kept so secret that the order to keep quiet (*silere*) had to conclude the expression? Probably, and this is underlined by the unfortunate experience of Jean du Châtelet at around that same time, as a result of some imprudent propositions by his wife Martine de Bertereau to King Louis XIII and his minister Richelieu. Being a mine inspector for the Roman State and later counsellor at the court and general commissioner of the mines of Hungary, it is not without reason that this knowledgeable mineralogist took the title of Baron of *Beausoleil* [Beautiful Sun] when he published his opusculum in 1616 — an opusculum much sought out, but nowhere to be found — *Diorismus, id est definitio verae philosophiae de materia prima lapidis philosophalis; Diorismus,*<sup>55</sup> *that is to say the definition of the true philosophy and of the materia prima of the Philosopher's Stone.*<sup>56</sup> He was arrested and locked in the Bastille on the Cardinal's order, to whom the baron had presented a second statement after a first one to the King remained unanswered. Here are the titles of these two curious and equally rare pieces:

*La Véritable Déclaration faite au roi et à nos seigneurs de son conseil des riches et inestimables trésors nouvellement découverts dans le royaume de France.* Paris, 1632, in-8°.

[The True Declaration made to the king and our lords of his counsel of the rich and priceless treasures recently discovered in the kingdom of France. Paris, 1632, in-8°.]

*La Restitution de Pluton au cardinal de Richelieu des mines et minières de France, cachées et détenues jusqu'à ce jour au centre de la terre.* Paris, 1640, in-8°.

[Pluto's restitution to the cardinal Richelieu of the mines and underground mines of France, bought and owned until this day in the centre of the earth. Paris, 1640, in-8°.]

Jean du Châtelet, Baron of *Beausoleil*, died in the infamous state prison in the year 1645. Was this tragic fate of the unfortunate gentleman related to the famous decree against alchemists issued by Cardinal Richelieu which is still spoken about yet without ever having produced its source? As far as we are concerned, we very much doubt its existence after the investigation we conducted to retrieve it from the section of special works. However, an article from the magazine *Je sais tout* which was dated 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1905 and entitled *Les Faiseurs d'or* quotes from Alphonse Jobert these words of the unobtainable text as 'forbidding anyone, being in the kingdom of France, to make precious metals and try to sell them, at risk of life imprisonment, confiscation of goods to the State's profit, etc. ...' The modern alchemist that was being interviewed by journalist André Ibels expressed his fears regarding this edict which, according to him, 'has not been abrogated and can still be enforced in our present day.' It is rather unlikely that Jobert had to suffer the penalty of this edict even though he suddenly disappeared in 1918. The same year René Schwaebélé, who had confirmed to strict Catholicism and denied and burned everything he had once adored, felt inclined to ridicule this valuable man in a last book.<sup>57</sup> With barely covered animosity, he transformed this unusual and strong person into an outlandish figure who was saturated by alcohol and incessantly smearing his nose with tobacco powder.

The inscription we have just examined is the counterpart of the following inscription above the inner side door which agrees with it and completes it with regards to the moral conditions demanded of the philosopher:

SOPHORUM LAPIS NON  
DATUR  
LUPIS.

*The Stone of the Wise is not given to the wolves.*

We take the explanation for this aphorism from the Cosmopolite on page 7 of the first of the twelve treatises *of Nature in General*: ‘The inquirers of Nature must be like Nature itself, that is to say, true, simple, patient, constant, etc. ... and the main point: piety and fear of God, not harming their fellow man in any way.’<sup>58</sup>

The last sentences of the treatise of Henri-Corneille Agrippa from Nettesheim comprise an identical declaration and at the same time account for the allegorical darkness of old books that is also closely observed in the villa’s teachings: ‘May no one be *resentful* towards us, if we have hidden the truth of this science under ambiguous enigmas, and if we have scattered it in diverse places in this treatise. Since it is not from the sages that we have hidden it; it is from the perverts and the mean; and we have taught in such a style, that, necessarily, the layman cannot see a thing, but the sage will have no trouble grasping it.’<sup>59</sup>

# WISDOM AND NOBILITY

On the other side of the door, towards the left (*sopra l'altra porta laterale alla sinistra*) there were also two inscriptions:

QUI POTENTIS  
NATURAE ARCANA  
REVELAT  
MORTEM  
QUERIT.

*Those who reveal the mysteries of the power of nature seek death.*

This statement seamlessly connects with what has been mentioned in the previous paragraph; it underlines the danger of divulging which goes against wisdom to an even greater extent than it goes against discipline: 'Hide this work before the eyes of all, writes Senior Zadith, both the words that come from your tongue as the fire in your eyes, do not even discuss this Work within yourself, so that your words will not be carried on the wind to anyone else, which could bring great inconvenience to you.'<sup>60</sup>

The second precept derogates, in no uncertain terms, the nobility acquired through the power of fortune:

HODIE PECUNIA  
EMITUR SPURIA  
NOBILITAS SED  
NON LEGITIMA  
SAPIENTIA.

*Today with money we buy fake nobility but not true wisdom.*

Within the state of the Church and by this remark, the Marquis Massimiliano Palombara already ascertained, not without bitterness and sadness: What makes you noble does not always ennoble you.

‘Those who obtain letters of nobility declare where their wealth comes from’ the saying goes. It is certain that originally nobility was bestowed only on the basis of valour and wisdom. Only valour and wisdom, being an *Absolute* for men, bestows the inaccessible and true nobility. According to F. Noel ‘Geta’s medal shows her in a long dress, holding a spear in one hand, and a figure of Minerva in the other: an image of the two means through which nobility was acquired.’<sup>61</sup>

The blazon showing the nobility of *extraction* has no other source and speaks no other language than that of the *hermetic* science, always and everywhere similar in its pure expression. Just like in the symbolical iconography and the veiled text, its ideas are inscribed in heraldic art. This iconography may appear mute but this is in line with the etymology of the term *blazon* which, although often claimed to be unknown, comes from the Greek *βλαισός*, blaisos, *stammerer, one who does not speak neatly*. In this way it warns us against the difficulty we will experience to be able to hear it. It is the same language as that of Rabelais’ *Oracle of the Bottle*, which does not fail, in any event, to guard us against any ignorant and vain interpretation:

‘What drives you? What stirs you? Who made you believe or who told you that white signifies faith, and blue constancy? An old paltry book, say you, sold by the pedlars and scandalmongers, entitled *The Blazon of Colours*.

Who made it? Whoever it was, he has shown wisdom that he has not attached his Name to it. But otherwise, I know not whether I ought to wonder at most his Presumption or his Stupidity.’[62](#)

# ODON AND MASSIMILIANO PALOMBARA

The year 1680, as engraved on the marble over the carriage door, is most certainly the year in which the villa's inscriptions were engraved. However, it is not necessarily the year when their fortunate author became the possessor of the gem that bestows complete human felicity. In this respect, it is most interesting to note the few things that Francesco Cancellieri reports about the villa's past or at least from the time just before Massimiliano Palombara became its owner: 'Si tratte neva il Marchese nella sua *Villa* sull'Esquilino, che Oddone Palombara, *Marchese di Pietra Forte*, il quale nel 1611. sposò la Nipote di Mons.*Nicolino*, avea acquistata fin dal 1620. dal *Duca Alessandro Sforza* con lo sborso di Sc. 7000. per le Fabbriche, e trenta Pezze di Terra, che allora la componevano, e che poi sono state aumentate.' There is no reason to doubt these notarial details as given by the learned priest since in Rome he held the position of director of the propaganda printing press. This placed him in a privileged position toward sources and means of investigation. The value of his works is further strengthened by his intelligent and methodical ways. From his notes we can therefore conclude that Marquis Massimiliano inherited the country house on Mount Esquiline from Odon Palombara who himself had acquired it for 7000 crowns from the Duke Alessandro Sforza towards the end of the year 1620. The estate comprised the buildings and thirty plots of land and later would be expanded. Francesco Cancellieri does not mention through what line of kinship Odon Palombara is linked to Marquis Massimiliano. In any case after having married Mr. Nicolo's niece in 1611, the question whether Odon Palombara was the father of Massimiliano or merely an



uncle does not matter very much. What does matter for our study, however, is that for him the name Palombara<sup>63</sup> was accompanied by the title of nobility as Marquis of the *Strong Stone*. Notwithstanding the remarkable harmony of these two names from a philosophical point of view, we do not question whether the surname is real and whether it belonged to one of the branches of the very old house of Savelli. We are convinced that the fictional name of the estate, *Strong Stone*, was chosen by Odon Palombara with the aim to express in a cabalistic way the great alchemical truth of a spiritual principle that underlies life in everything: ‘*Mens agitat molem, et magno se corpore miscet*’,<sup>64</sup> We read these same words in Virgil’s verse in which, based on the same pantheistic world view, the three first words were the basis of the pleasant sounding phrase that has a different ring to it. On the basis of the most rigorous logic, two deductions become self-evident. Odon was, to say the least, very learned in the science and being older than Massimiliano he was his initiator well before the pilgrim knocked on the door of the villa.

# THE LADY OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

The wood pigeon [in French: *Palombe*] that is evocative of the name *Palombara* also represents the *dove*, that is to say, the emblem of spirit. Did the Italian philosopher know about the singular work of his fellow countryman from a century earlier, from the cavalier *Cyprian Piccolpassi*? This pottery master from Castel-Durante spoke as much about *the art of fire* as he spoke about maiolica<sup>65</sup> and his name is no less evocative and eloquent than that of *Palombara*, Marquis of the *Strong Stone*. When considering Cypris as a nickname of Venus, one easily arrives at *Cabaliere* [Cabal] of *Venus in small steps (piccoli passi)*. Just as easily one will agree that Cyprian Piccolpassi did not merely concern himself with the common problems of his art and that we should consider, in line with Michel Maier's advice: 'That the potter's work, who operates in dryness and dampness, serves as instruction.'<sup>66</sup> This might be the answer to the question about the strange portrait of his lover being among his notes and formulas about the art of pottery. This portrait, so graciously and dexterously traced, assuredly is worthy of its model the *Venus* whom the sages loved so much:

'This happened to me I say, as I tried to deliver myself from amorous thoughts, by paying attention to lead and tin, as in my soul often and many times, I saw the proportionate limbs of my beautiful lover. Whatever the colour was, I could not make them so lustrous, so flamboyant, that they might compete with her beautiful golden hair. Neither is there any black that does not remain inferior to her beautiful lashes. Her divine eyes; filled with grace and joy, are mixed with a certain venerable majesty, to which nothing can compare but the rays of the sun. When I arrived at the entrance of the Duke of Ferrare, who resembles silver with his flexible arms and

delicate hands, he seemed to me of a rough and vulgar black. I cannot find an art, a diligent goldsmith or dexterous jeweller, who arrived at the summit of excellence and merit, who would not be able to destroy this contentment expressed by the gentleness of her very soft smile and the greatest modesty and solemnity of her tread.'<sup>67</sup>

The learned Leonardo da Vinci could not have done better with his *Mona Lisa*, painted by his prestigious brush. The feminine beauty, with its multiple physical attractive traits, has always been, for Christian philosophers, the human symbol of the *materia prima* and their *rough stone*. It naturally follows that the Great Work features in the same way, these mineral actors with their passion, irresistibly attracted one towards another, two individuals of opposed sex to each other, and which in truth, gives birth to the hermetic rose:

Thus is the vermilion rose  
And the day came, and I awoke  
to elucidate the Romans the Rose  
where the art of love is all enclosed.<sup>68</sup>

## THE SHORT PATH

The symbolical idea of spirit acting upon matter — cabalistically speaking for the Marquis Odon the *Dove of Strong Stone* — was materialized by the cavalier Cyprian Piccolpassi in a small drawing. It is full a page that is included without number as part of a series of plates at the end of the text. A dove is depicted as taking flight, its feet securely fastened to a heavy and shapeless stone. Above the bird, a phylactery in the Italian version of the original manuscript<sup>69</sup> bears the phrase (not included in Claudius Popelin's modern edition) of IMPORTUNUM, which reflects the enormous difficulty of alchemical *sublimation*. The banner is topped by a heraldic Florence cross that is reminiscent of both the crucible and that of the *dry way* which makes use of it without the use of any other utensil (plate V).



*Plate V: the dove attached to the stone*

On the facade of the Ferté-Macé church (Orne) and above the tympanum of the gate of the Saint Denis tower, a curious symbol can be made out from amongst the mosaic of little motives that fill the gable. With all its detail, it is evocative of the clay container in which the different phases of the Great Work take place: *separation, calcination, sublimation, dissolution, distillation, coagulation and coction*. Undoubtedly in modern day the hermetic relevance of this cross is not immediately obvious. However, the simple parallel lines which curve and unite at the top extremity outline a retort or alembic. Under the horizontal branches, two openings seem to lend passage for the Greek letters Α and Ω, the *beginning* and the *end*. At the same height two other ornaments, an owl<sup>70</sup> and a *fleur-de-lis*,<sup>71</sup> accompany the cruciform sign of the container. They relate to it in the scientific trilogy of philosophical labour, being *wisdom*, the *matter* and the *vessel*. These three images constitute the exact confirmation of Hermes' precept: 'In una via, una re, uno vase et una dispositione; *by means of one way, one thing, one vase and only one disposition.*'

Whether we owe the cryptograms and legends engraved in the villa to the Marquis Massimiliano or through him to Odon Palombara it is certain, in any case, that they apply to the same path that is honoured by the great adepts and thrice qualified by them as *dry, short* and *easy*. On the first day of his wedding, Christian Rosencreutz<sup>72</sup> clearly indicated the path that he had chosen with the seal that closed his letter. This seal was ornamented with a cross and underlined by the inscription: 'In hoc signo + vinces; *you will vanquish with this sign +.*' The renowned Rosicrucian provides confirmation hereof on the second day: 'I did not dare to hope either, that among thousands I would precisely be the one who could chose the *royal path.*' Pulled by a *dove* and a *raven*, one chasing the other, he patiently carries his *cross* thanks to the compass which, although he does not mention

this, we assume to be the instrument with which he navigated towards the *northern star*.

Grillot of Givry, who was a greatly intuitive person, recognised in the philosophical elaboration of the crucible, '*the non vulgar path*, unknown to the crowds and reserved to a select few wise.'<sup>73</sup> The small doorway of the Palombara abode offers us an abridged version of this operation in its hieroglyphic expression. The Latin sentences are the paraphrases and the commentary. Between our notes that escaped the debacle of June 1940 in which our papers were scattered, we have found the same chemical formula with cryptographic elements that are very similar to those of the stone bay in the Roman square, gathered and arranged from left to right, in the order in which we have read them ourselves, guided by the linear procession of manipulations at home. We had made note of those signs in the past, in the National Library, in a manuscript in which they are preceded by these two words: *Chemical syllables*. The unknown author of this treatise that was translated from Latin mentions that 'they are like little rays that should lead us to the true light of knowledge.'<sup>74</sup> Just as well, we cannot say which one served as a prototype for the other, the exemplary one engraved in the travertine or the one written with a quill by the copyist in the manuscript. We must in fact ignore the time in which the original text was written, 'communicated to the lord of Moloux' since we have not found it in libraries or in bookshop catalogues. In our searches we have certainly been more of an assiduous than a profitable client. As early as 1920 when we began to build our library, we privately received the interesting bibliographies by Emile Noury and the two brothers Dorbon, the eldest and Lucien, who remained competitors and the second even granting us the courtesy to communicate his notes before the catalogue appeared in print.

# THE ETERNAL TRUTH

All of this is already so far away in the past! How propitious is our present day in particular when compared to our days which were so deeply painful but to which the mind's primacy imprints a temporary and transitory characteristic; how propitious is our present day in this disappeared era in which people are living the good life, seemingly happy and prosperous; how propitious is our present day for the independent Bohemia that remains inseparable from the fertile efforts in the free domain of arts. How many pleasant and sweet hours have we spent in the National Library's manuscript department, studying old treatises remaining unpublished, often copying some beautiful symbolical plate with quill and brush, fixating the book to stand up vertically and opened with the help of index cards planted vertically under the reglementary protective glass case!

Those memories are interwoven with the memory of a very old ecclesiastic, an extraordinary linguist and palaeographer, whose personality was enchanting. He was a living anachronism, in perfect harmony with a face of another age, as impressive as his surprising archaism. With a keen interest in Latin, he liked to converse with us in this language and much to our surprise, despite being 90 years old, he could read without glasses the most disorderly medieval cursive script larded with abbreviations and acronyms. His response to our surprise is something we have always remembered: '*Scientia servat.*' *Science saves and preserves.*<sup>75</sup> This closely aligns with our thoughts on the brilliant career of certain books with a reputation to be difficult to penetrate. Studied only by a small elite, their wide distribution and universal success according to us are solely due to their attractive and spiritual radiance of positive truth that lies enclosed in their pages. Among



so many French and foreign works that gain the esteem and admiration of men in this manner, would this not hold true to a certain extent for François Rabelais' work for instance?

In any case, there is no doubt about it, the small door that is preserved at Victor-Emmanuel square in Rome owes its sovereign longevity to the same spiritual radiance. It is for this same reason that it has not been destroyed, despite the precarity that is inherent in human matters as underlined by its savant decorator. With regard to the perpetual progression of mineral nature, the door assures us: *'Precisely, while stones grow from the putrefied Father, likewise here time smiles, rapidly eroding the signs just borne on this portal of daub.'*<sup>76</sup> Thus ends, as we have seen earlier, the unique and long epigraph that was found on the outer wall of Palombara villa, in a resigned and sad manner marking the material aspect of the aristocratic abode, inexorably fragile and perishable:

*Sic transit gloria mundi.*

**PART 2**  
**THE CASTLE OF PLESSIS-BOURRE**



*Plate VI: Plessis-Bourré (Maine-et-Loire)  
The Castle (15<sup>th</sup> century)*

# JEAN BOURRÉE

# I

The Plessis-Bourré Castle isn't nearly as well-known as it deserves to be. Over time, it has faded from our collective consciousness to the extent that any trace of its builder is now almost completely forgotten. His name cannot be found in any scholarly or popular encyclopaedic resources, though numerous criminals and thieves feature prominently therein. One searches in vain for the surname Bourré in the biographical texts of Firmin Didot and Michaud at the National Library. Nor is this rejected name to be found anywhere in the Bouillet dictionary on Conversation and Reading, the Grande Encyclopédie, the Pierre Larousse, or even the abridged popularized version which, in eight illustrated volumes, devotes seventeen lines to Lacenaire, twenty to Mandrin, and thirty to François Ravailac, the murderer of good King Henry.

Were it not for the skilful efforts of three authors who, in the last quarter of the century restored the honour of his memory, Jean Bourré would have faded into complete oblivion. These authors are Paul Marchegay, Joseph Vaesen and Georges Bricard. The first dedicated a number of short articles to the Angevin Minister in the Bulletin de la Société Industrielle d'Angers.<sup>77</sup> The second, a biographical note which more or less reproduced the work of Marchegay and was followed by a catalogue of manuscripts of the Bourré collection in the National Library.<sup>78</sup> The third author makes mention of Bourré within a thorough text summarising the reign of Louis XI.<sup>79</sup> Although we have included footnote references to these works, unfortunately they are now out of print and out of circulation. Nevertheless, they serve to reinforce our point of view in good faith. And so, this leads us to present a thesis which none of these scholars were able to elucidate and

which we conceived through truth alone. We will substantiate this thesis and its relevance on the basis of nothing but established historical fact and the irrefutable artistic document, with the sole aim of safeguarding its exceptional value in regard to its philosophical scope.

What elusive human motive has aligned itself to eternal, conspiratorial fate in this way, enveloping the unknown author in a conspiracy of silence? We are not exaggerating matters and are far removed from the state of mind that may be ascribed to us — that of perception through the distorted mirror of an overactive imagination. Nor are we alone in our convictions about Jean Bourré in that we have in our possession a courteous and kind handwritten note by the Baron of Fontenay whose postscript presents the same conclusion:

‘Like you, I believe that Bourré does not have the place in history he deserves.’

This letter, from the former president of the City Council of Paris, dated 21<sup>st</sup> September 1937, came in response to one we wrote regarding the fact that Jean Bourré’s portrait was not in his Jarzé castle any longer, but in the home of Mr. Vaisse in Plessis-Bourré, Cheffes (the French department of Maine-et-Loire).

Alas. No one is better suited to the isolation of this magnificent abode than the misanthropic couple who now inhabit its immense, muted space. The unfortunate domicile has been dragged into an existence of morbid boredom and irrational acrimony, one of such fierce silence that nothing could budge its occupants beyond the point of obstinate and final refusal. Any request for information regarding the castle or a visit thereto (irrespective of how well-presented or well-recommended this request may

come) was invariably opposed. Unfortunately, there is no law obligating the owner of a historically valuable monument to comply, even under special circumstances. The two letters we addressed to Mister Vaisse outlined, with all due politeness, why this subject deserves some consideration. Both letters remained unanswered although we carefully noted our return address on the back of the envelope and thereby ruling out any possibility that they were lost. There is simply no excuse for such an attitude: no ordeal, no matter how cruel or painful, justifies hiding behind the veil of noble and salutary Christian resignation and exacting revenge for mishaps of the past on those living in the present day.

In our attempts to obtain illustrations of those rare works consigned to the Plessis-Bourré Castle, we exhausted every possible avenue! This is due to the fact that we are wary of the medium of print reproduction: in its obfuscation of detail, it can render misleading illusions and erroneous interpretations.

That said, one monograph did prove useful to us. Its coloured plates together with brief explanatory notes comprise a complete reproduction which perfectly captures the enchanted soul of the majestic abode. Thanks to the monograph's author, Canon Charles Urseau, who kindly provided us with original photographic cuts four years ago, we have been able to furnish our text with two reasonable images.<sup>80</sup> Annotated alongside these two fragments of the castle's admirable artwork which are to be found a little further on, we were shocked to read a saddening but judicious commentary offered by the good priest. It relates to the threat facing the castle which, in the case of many other marvels, has all too often come to pass:

‘The Plessis-Bourré castle, the most elegant, the most exquisite, and most perfect of all the castles of Anjou, has been for sale for almost a year. The beautiful tapestries and ancient furniture, so tastefully matched by an owner in the second-half of the past century, have already been sold to antique dealers. Tomorrow, the ceiling of the Guard’s Room, with all the beautiful paintings that decorate it, could become the property of any of those rich Americans who come here to get their supply of art and history. The buyer will be free to take apart this harmonious and fragile artwork, plank by plank. If it so pleases him, he will be able to transport it to the suburbs of New York or Chicago, and install it under a new ceiling, under aggressive lighting, where it will lose its vibrancy and life.’<sup>81</sup>

In fact, the castle’s splendid stained-glass windows were sold a hundred years ago and have since been shipped to England. This is deeply concerning, especially when considering the precedent of the Biron Castle in the Dordogne whose owner also obstinately refused entrance to the castle and who, it was later learnt, had sold the interior masterpieces to Americans. These artworks were classified by the Beaux-Arts: two magnificent 15th century altarpieces, a Pietà, and an entombment primitively placed alongside two mausoleums in the castle’s two-floored chapel. For almost forty years now they have been sitting out their exile in the Metropolitan Museum — such a lacklustre exile!

Is it commonly known that monuments of priceless historical value have literally been pulled out of our soil, stone by stone? They were shipped across the ocean to the new world, to cities without a past. We could cite numerous such cases but we suffice to refer the reader to Achille Carrier’s



journals which are specially intended to report, and fight against, the mercantile vandalism being unleashed on our beautiful country.<sup>82</sup> We cannot praise this superb publication enough, in both its quality of writing and pictorial richness, for it has served to defend our national heritage and provide tourism information with as much intelligence as it does sincerity and accuracy. It is to Mr. Carlier's credit and honour that he has realised such a work of idealistic and objective grandeur. The work speaks to its founder's profound selflessness and we hope to see him reappear in better days.

## II

Fortunately, the unthinkable example of Pontaut in Les Landes, in which the Cistercian abbey's chapter-house was dismantled and transported away in blocks,<sup>83</sup> could never come to pass in the case of the enormous Plessis-Bourré castle. Its sheer mass means the castle is protected against all such attempts of this kind (in a way that its fine art objects are not) with its 1300m<sup>2</sup> ceremonial courtyard and four big towers flanking each corner which have been built into the two-metre thick wall.

In its imposing fortitude, the edifice leaves an impression of unshakeable power. It is surrounded by a moat, and crossed by a stone bridge over 40 metres long which was once separated from the entrance gate by a drawbridge. Responding to the possibility of military operations the peaceful builder's primary concern had clearly been to construct an impenetrable fortress.

Despite the 470 years which have passed since its excavation from the Boullay quarry, the beautiful and clear colour of the stone used remains untarnished to this day. This is truly what gives the castle its strikingly youthful appearance and immediately makes a profound impression on the tourist. In awe and wonder, we can but imagine the huge scale of the preparatory work undertaken by Jean Bourré which included the digging of a pond and subsequent creation of the artificial island on which the planned building went on to be constructed (plate VI).

A letter from his wife, Marguerite de Feschal, offers some insight into this colossal undertaking. She kept an eye on proceedings from a distance, at the

Vaux castle, where she was held back by a troublesome pregnancy — her first after eight years of waiting. This charming epistle which she respectfully and submissively signed, ‘your very humble and obedient girl and friend’, was written on the ‘last day of May’. In its touchingly naïve tone, it bears witness to her feminine sensitivity and provides us with various amusing domestic and gynaecological details:

‘My friend, I bring myself to your attention as humbly as I can, ... Lord, I send you this messenger to bring you news, which I think will not upset you, and also to learn of your news, since I do not want to go back over there at the moment. Sir, from Saturday, after Jehan Milles left, I realised that my child was moving, before now he has always moved so little that I did not let you know, but thank God, he is getting stronger and stronger. God has sent joy to you and me, and God willing you will be here, so you can feel it move too, like my sister does every day ... Lord, regarding your Plessis house, I am doing the best I can to progress it without being there ... Lord I can’t wait for the said Plessis house to be finished; and look forward, if it is your wish, to bringing your little child there ... Regarding the pond, men are working on it every day, and regarding the court wall, that you formerly wrote about, it has not been touched yet; but the associates can barely provide enough material for the pond, and are still waiting for it to be finished to start work there; it would be crazy to start it before there is enough stone. Also, your tenants, whose land was drowned by your pond, have come to ask me to buy them hay this year; they need some ... Lord, God willing you will be here, even just so you can take care of your work, because since my arrival, I have found myself so ill that I

can't see to it as well as I would have wished ... I find myself getting better than I've come to expect, but in the mornings I am nauseous: and if I cannot enjoy wine, you will return to find me very thin with just a big belly, since I only have an appetite for bad meats ...'<sup>84</sup>

This must certainly have upset the lord of Plessis. Being so in love with life and his wife who was bearing forth new life into the world, for his own sake he would have wanted her to be comely, robust and healthy. His beloved spouse signs her name, using Bourré's quill, at the top of an inner layer of vellum manuscript dating from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Its appearance is extraordinarily fresh and it has been magnificently illuminated and calligraphed in Gothic script:<sup>85</sup>

'The chaste husband's yearning  
Was a rich and large lady  
A fresh lady was granted him'

Each line of this tercet contains the letters that spell out the name Marguerite de Feschal. In the last one, the personal pronoun has received a 't', which was uncommon in writing at the time, to perfectly complete this triple anagram. Alongside this versified puzzle there is a second one, written by the same hand and offering the same poetic gratification. It delivers, by way of the book-plate, the owner's name and surname:

Rie bon heur a; *Iehan Bourré.*'

This kind and noble lady was fully understanding of Bourré's situation and her love for him did not diminish. Nonetheless, she lamented his absence when he received hasty summons and royal orders and had to leave to

attend important missions. For his own part, Jean Bourré suffered from loneliness when he was far away from home, where his heart faithfully remained:

‘Lord, since it does not please you to give me a leave of absence to travel home, I beseech you to allow me just eight days, so that I may have time to return and arrange my circumstances and my household, for I have some needs there to be taken care of. This done, I will no longer petition you to go there. Please see that it is done as you wish, since there is no business more pressing to me than that of doing your will.’

But Louis XI was as tough on others as he was on himself:

‘Lord Duplessiz, I have seen your letter. You will not go to your home.’<sup>86</sup>

In this home, the artistic and scholarly tastes of the wealthy lord were fully satisfied. In addition to a rich collection of tapestries and paintings, he had assembled a precious library which satiated his constant desire for knowledge and to which several now-famous manuscripts belonged. It seems that Bourré drew the strength to serenely submit to the demands of destiny from Jean de Meung’s translation of *De Consolatione Philosophica*. Revealing Boetius’ true genius, this is his most authentic work in which Providence is opposed to *Fatum* and divine foreknowledge is reconciled with human freedom. Is the austere and virtuous Roman patrician’s book even read anymore? He was one of the first philosophers of the middle age and died an awful martyr’s death. After being flagellated at length, his head was forced into a hoist until his eyes popped out and at which time the poor man raised his hands in a pitiful gesture as if he was trying to put them back in his eye sockets.

### III

Jean Bourré has not been immune to the effects of human malice which, even when not influenced by name, rank or fortune, always serves to debase and besmirch the origins of famous men. His father, the lord of Brosse, belonged to the Castle-Gontier bourgeoisie and his mother, Bertrande Briand de Brez, was of noble origin. The negative and slanderous assertions which were cast on Bourré's name were almost certainly the result of Louis XI disgracing the prelate and chronicler at his father's death. The first of these, that 'the king had a secretary named Barré, from Angers and of low birth; *Habebat rex quemdam secretarium cognomento Borre, natione Andegavensi, infimae sortis et conditionis hominem*'<sup>87</sup> was passed on by Thomas Basin to the influential minister.

Two modern authors, V. Godard-Faultrier<sup>88</sup> and J.-F. Bodin,<sup>89</sup> continued in this same spirit of denigration, baselessly claiming that Jean Bourré was the son of a cobbler. A similar origin story has been almost unanimously attributed to Jacques d'Euse, who later became Pope John XXII, for no other reason than the famous prophecy attributed to Saint Malachy<sup>90</sup> which designates him with the following motto: *De sutore osseo*, of the Ossa cobbler. 'Sutor' was used to refer to people of the lower class. Surely it would have been more logical to translate this prophetic legend from a symbolic point of view and afford sutor its figurative meaning of settler, repairer? Such an interpretation would have aligned itself perfectly to John XXII's efforts in battling the schism between the Duke Louis II of Bavaria and the antipope Nicholas V.

Undoubtedly, if Jean Bourré had belonged to such a low social class, he would not have been able to meet the dauphin and influence the young prince's choice in his favour. From 1442, Bourré entered into the service of the future Louis XI who he would firstly follow as the dauphin and then into exile at the court of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy.

It is easy to imagine the resources that the founder of the Order of the Golden Fleece's 'library' would have offered this industrious man from Angers. This also explains the source of the secret knowledge which he concealed behind the Plessis-Bourré painted emblems. We know that the opulence and sheer volume of books left by the four Dukes of Burgundy gave birth to the Library of Burgundy (so named by Belgium in their gratitude). In his prologue for the Naples Chronicle written in 'the year fourteen sixty three of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ', David Aubert revealed Philip the Good's great passion for books — luxurious masterpieces being produced from the art of the time.

Let us turn to Manuscript 92 from the French National Library collection, a work which is distinguished as one of the most beautiful from the collection of John the Fearless' son. Approximately fifteen of these are preserved on the shelves of our Richelieu Street establishment:

‘And notwithstanding that it is the prince, above all others, who possesses the richest and noblest library in the world, if he is inclined to keep growing it by the day, why are there daily and in several regions, great clerks, orators, translators and writers who are busy with their own wage?’

Another manuscript, which is no less splendid than the aforementioned, supports our opinion with regards to Philip the Good's motto: *Aultre*

*n'auray*<sup>91</sup> (I will have no other). It offers an overview of its illustrious owner's search field which was undoubtedly the most vast and fertile. This two-volume copy bears the shelf number 9198-9199 and the text is richly ornamented in perfect calligraphy. Its opening title reads: 'Vie et Miracles de Notre-Dame'. This French prose was arranged by Jean Miélot, the first canon of Saint Peter of Lille who later became secretary to the duke of Burgundy.

We refer to John of Berry's library, one of the cornerstones of our national manuscript collection, only in order to highlight the '*Book of Marvels*' which John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy and Father of Philip the Good, presented to his uncle.<sup>92</sup> This is indicated in a note by Jean Flamel, the youngest brother of the popular alchemist, secretary to the Duke of Berry and likely author of this volume's magnificent calligraphy. That said, in terms of the beauty and richness of execution, it does not yield in any way to those we have just discussed. We also find in folio 226, with the coat of arms of John the Fearless, the Flemish motto *Ich sviighe* (I remain silent) repeated several times as the prince pledges his philosophical vow of silence.

This same mysterious concern appears to have preoccupied some of Philip the Good's loyal companions. It is manifested in the singular motto of his chancellor Nicolas Rollin, and presented in a semi-rebus: *Seulle* ☆.<sup>93</sup> It was visible on the enamelled tiles of the magnificent Beaune general hospital, built on Rollin's order, and can be seen today on the 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish tapestries which are kept there. It is made complete by the precise placement of a dove perched on an oak branch.



According to Paul Marchegay, Joseph Vaesen and Georges Bricard, the King of France's treasurer died in his 80s as did the chancellor of the Duke of Burgundy. Nothing in the work of these authors contradicts the preamble of the unknown copyist who wrote Jean Bourré's will, according to which he lived for a century: 'Here can be seen the pious and good-natured character of the high and powerful lord Jehan de Bouré, born in Castle-Gontier, who, in his lifetime achieved several memorable things that are worth remembering ... He reached the age of around a hundred years old.'<sup>94</sup>

In 1498, the lord of Plessis resigned his functions as treasurer of the Order of Saint-Michel explaining that he is doing so, 'in consideration of his old age.' According to the three authors cited above, the energetic and vigorous man, who was at this time 73, did not cite illness or infirmity but rather his extremely old age which was such 'that he simply could not attend to, hear or take on the required work.'

In this same year, 1498, Bourré was present at the burial of King Charles VIII. He had been at his side during the King's weak and sickly youth in Amboise castle where, living in constant fear of Louis XI, a sentinel kept watch night and day over the curtained wall. The distrustful monarch who was constantly preoccupied with protecting the dauphin from illness and enemies of the kingdom, knew the man to choose for his delicate mission. He himself had been abducted from his father Charles VII and used as an instrument in the revolt, 'when he was only eleven years old, by lords of the kingdom, in the war called the Praguerie.'<sup>95</sup>

## IV

It is touching to know how deep Louis XI's love was for his son. To a certain extent, this has been misrepresented as the case of a political man seeking pleasure and reassurance in the strength of his masculine lineage. Because of his governing duties, the father/son relationship was long distance. Louis, more than anyone else, was susceptible to the child's charms and worried about his son's weakness. These feelings are expressed in the poet's admirable verse:

He is so beautiful this child, with his sweet smile,  
His soft good faith, his voice that wants to say everything,  
His quickly appeased cries,  
Letting his eyes wander, delighted and surprised.  
Offering from all sides his young soul to life  
And his mouth to kisses!<sup>96</sup>

Whether the King's concerns were self-interested or did indeed stem from the purity of fatherly feelings, the tone of the correspondence which he addressed to Bourré regarding his son's health remained pressing and anxious. Since the little prince was very ill in the spring of 1480, Louis XI spent the year on high alert. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, in the winter months, he requested that his confidante and the doctor Claude Molins did not take the lord of Dauphin to the fields and that they report back to him the next day regarding 'how he fared in night.' Apparently this was not enough and, three days later on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, he also sent Bourré the following letter to make sure:

‘Lord of Plessis, I am sending the lord of Saint Valier to Amboise tomorrow; I kindly ask you to go down-town to take him to dinner, and after dinner, take him to see the lord of Saint Valier to Amboise, making sure he goes back immediately. Farewell. Written to Pleissis du Parc, on the sixteenth day of November. Louis.’<sup>97</sup>

Robert Gaguin, who was a historian, poet and General of the Order of the Redemption of Captives, makes mention of the King’s worries in an excellent written Latin work:

‘Credo Ludovicum providere Caroli fragilitate voluisse ; cui infantiam non satis firmam esse conspiciebat. Teneris enim atque imbecilibus membris primo Carolus fuit, ita ut sedulo duci illum et gestari molliter ...’<sup>98</sup>

I believe that Louis, in the face of Charles’ weakness, wanted to demonstrate his foresight, being struck by the fact his childhood was fragile. Indeed, Charles had been delicate at first, with such frail limbs that even his very best attempt to move and feel caused him pain...’

Indeed, no one was better equipped than ‘the lord of Plessis’ to look after the royal heir. Nor was there anyone else qualified to offer, in this capacity, the required moral qualities of prudence, moderation and balance, suitable to ensure the body’s perfect health: ‘Mens sana in corpore sano — *a healthy mind in a healthy body*’. In the harmonious consideration of Juvenal’s maxim, everything appointed Bourré to this eminent role which was ultimately closer to that of father than tutor: his conscience, his attention to detail, order and methodical nature, all the way down to his culinary

penchants. The last part of a note he sent to his collector in Vaux bears witness to his love of good wine and the meticulous attention with which he cultivated this passion (we have provided the facsimile, plate VII):

Je me souviens bien de l'heure où j'étais  
 assis de ma chaise. J'ai écrit en quatre lignes et quatre chapitres  
 de mes devoirs et de mon état. J'ai écrit aussi de mes livres et de  
 que je lui ai écrit de l'histoire de la vie de mon père et de son  
 aïeul, qu'il me veut bien, afin de ne pas perdre ce que je  
 veux en la faire rendre public, et non pour d'autres fins  
 et mes absences de son pays et de son pays. Je suis au  
 d'aujourd'hui dans le mois d'octobre //

Jean Bourré




Plate VII: Autograph of Jean Bourré

‘I received your letters and also the response to the ones I wrote to the lord of Marbone. I also had four rabbits and four capons that you sent me via this porter. Send to the lord of Brez a note that I have written to him. The lord of Champigné told me that he had good white wines in Vaux. Look after it for me until I go there, and make sure that none is taken. Close it and store it properly, so that there is no air, and if necessary make a little hole next to the cork. Written at the Plessis-Bourré, this Sunday twelfth of October.’<sup>99</sup>

From the time he ascended to the throne, Charles VII treated his former tutor with appreciation and respectful affection: feelings which had grown over time and which the regent and the lord of Beaujeu shared with deference. The young sovereign faithfully guarded the memory of Jean Bourré’s merits and dedication to Louis XI in addition to his ‘great care for me as the Dauphin; as well as in Amboise, where he had been, by order of my late sovereign and father, for more than five years’.

## V

As the dead King's servants fell from grace, and most of them such as Olivier le Daim were sent to the gallows, France's treasurer saw the rise of his own credit and influence, not only within the new government, but throughout the kingdom. This in itself provided the most scathing refutation of those slanderous accusations made by the venomous Thomas Basin. According to him, Jean Bourré had abused his privilege and committed the most sordid of acts:

‘Because those in office relied on him to mail their letters, for the signature of one single letter he would extort fifty crowns, sometimes a hundred, or even more — as much as he could. He never demanded fewer than ten crowns for the smallest duty, not including the gifts which he accepted on behalf of the agents under his command. They were like wolves driven by the rage of hunger, taking everything they could.’<sup>100</sup>

Having patiently, and at length, reviewed the files from these times, we were unable to find anything which could substantiate these accusations. On the contrary, they provided more than enough to refute them! God knows the impartiality and piously savoured pleasure with which we consulted these old parchments and yellowed papers, probing both the private and political existence of this powerful minister. But alas, these thick volumes of manuscripts, layered in dust and with their crabbed cursive and ageing words and syntax, ultimately conspired to refute history and offered no insight into this Middle Age period.

On Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1475, Jean Bourré received a visit from Amaury Doucharon at the Plessis castle. She handed him a plea from the lord of Beauvau who was in great need of money. It was urgent and he wrote, ‘since I am in debt and you are one of my good friends, I kindly ask you to do me a favour, and lend me two hundred and seventy crowns in gold.’ He was honest and by way of scrupulous guarantee ‘until such time as I have paid you’ adjoined to his request ‘a little golden cross with six diamonds.’<sup>101</sup> But the soul of the good and rich lord of Plessis was far from that of a pawnbroker. He handed the 270 crowns to ‘this Amory’ and refused the cross.

Jules Quicherat, who published the works of the historian, held a somewhat reserved appreciation. In the Latin edition of *La Vie de Thomas Basin* which he wrote in French, he writes bluntly, ‘He was known as the ‘denigrator of Louis XI’,<sup>102</sup> but a designation of ‘critic’ would have been more fitting... Nothing is favourable in his eyes, not even the undeniable merits of the King’s sworn enemies. He does not credit him with any spirit, persuasiveness or discernment. He compares him to the ancient tyrants, although in his opinion, each one of those monsters possessed some virtue alongside their vices, whereas the search for a single atom of perseverance in Louis XI would be in vain. Such personal enmity indicates a mind not in control of itself.’<sup>103</sup> In any case, this is an accurate snapshot of the dark portrait left by Basin who loyally concluded: ‘*In this genuine Louis, even though we worked for a long time to discover something that would be worthy of merit and praise, absolutely no such thing appeared — In hoc vero Ludovico, cum diu multumque laborassemus ut aliquid laudi merito esset, nihil prorsus tale nobis occurrere potuit.*’<sup>104</sup>



Would a corrupt and rule breaking Jean-Bourré, with the entire Treasury at his disposal, really have been content with usurious remittances when embezzlement would have a much easier and more profitable option? On this point, Bourré proves himself once again above suspicion. When Charles VIII embarked on his Italian escapade, he entrusted him with the kingdom's finances. He would write to Bourré to inform him of his victories and request funds for the continued pursuit of his conquests. It was by way of this correspondence that the young monarch gave his secretary the highest title he ever received, that of President of Accounts. On the other hand, the Duke of Orleans who would later become Louis XII, deigned to call him 'his friend' and went on to solicit valuable advice from the retired man at Plessis-Bourré who 'knew the most about the deceased king's business.'[105](#)

All of this aligns with the testimony of another chronicler, Jean de Bourdigné, the Canon of Angers. His sincerity was not distorted by imagination, and his stories offer an abundant source of information and testimonials that are as amusing and unexpected as they are valuable and accredited. From our point of view, the opinion he presents about the lord of Plessis is interesting. His rare folio states: 'In those days, he says, there was in the service of the king a very prudent and noble knight from Angers, my lord Jehan Bourré, by the order and advice of which the highest affairs of the kingdom were governed, and who dealt with matters so discretely that he was never reprimanded.'[106](#)

## VI

The authoritarian and deeply distrustful Louis XI conveyed to Jean Bourré the contents of all his orders to his captains, and did not undertake anything serious without the prior approval of the 'lord of Plessis'. Bourré was often the sole confidante of his plans and decisions, and was among the most dedicated and skilful of partners: 'And since you know more about my business than others, and I fully trust you, I am writing to only you on this matter.'<sup>107</sup>

The wise and wealthy treasurer was both patronising and generous. He settled all the royal expenses no matter how considerable, accompanied the monarch on his travels, assisted him in difficult negotiations and countersigned important formal documents such as the treaties of Conflans and of Péronne. When Louis XI was imprisoned in the city, he asked his counsellor to join him. The risk adverse Bourré responded, through a reliable friend, that he was fearful of what would happen. Thus the King learnt that Bourré, who was in 'the greatest bewilderment any poor man has ever been in', was not concerned with sharing in his misfortune. However, after the dutiful intermediary had specified 'and because of this sir, if it pleased you, he could wait for you in Meaulx or Paris,' the uncompromising Louis XI didn't think to reprimand his secretary but simply, with benevolence and solicitude, exonerated him in advance, assuaging his worries and jokingly reassuring him. This was communicated by the obliging scriptwriter in the same letter (a tear along the bottom corner of the page has rendered this latter anonymous):

‘The king was pleased with you and says that he knows very well you would come if summonsed, even if it was to the other side of the world, but that if he did so you would die of fear on the way.’<sup>108</sup>

Around ten years later, the King discharged Bourré from the military obligations for which he was in no way suitable. In his defence, it should be acknowledged that Bourré’s ideals and philosophical works did not easily accommodate the continuous threat of having to don chainmail and saddle up a horse. Louis XI sent him the letter that we are going to read and of which the meticulously organised Bourré kept his own hand-executed copy. ‘Copy of my war exemption’ it says on the back of the paper and in a note written by the same hand:

‘To our beloved and loyal counsellor, master of the accounts and treasurer of France, master Jehan Bourré, lord of Plessis.

Monseigneur du Plesseys, as I have ordered you to remain and carry out the tasks and activities I have charged you with, you are exempt from being sent to war this year, and cleared of any and all pre-existing summons. I forbid all bailiffs, seneschals and commissioners who have been, or will be tasked by me, from questioning you or your family, now or at any time, in any way, for any reason, or from impeding any of your property. Ordered at Selommès, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of March in the year 1477.’<sup>109</sup>

Louis

All of this demonstrates the extent of Bourré’s influence on the King and the regard that the King held for his close accomplice. Bourré was the only one permitted to write and sign letters of collation and function, no matter

what they were. As Basin declared, and since this time his assertion is aligned to historical documents, we will not contradict him: ‘Illi soli licebat litteras collationis quorumcumque officiorum signare et conficere.’<sup>[110](#)</sup>

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that when Louis XI felt death was near he wanted his lifelong confidante — his associate, one might say — to be present for the dictation of his final instructions. These instructions, written to the King’s young son, formed a kind of political will. They were signed by Jean Bourré, whose name so often found itself adjoined to the royal signature.

It is difficult not to feel shocked that a character of such stature has not found his place in even the humblest of history books whilst the names of Olivier le Daim and Tristan l’Ermite are taught from primary school! In quite a remarkable contrast, Bourré’s immediate predecessor, Jacques Coeur, features quite prominently in our school books. Is it because the great financier of France fell into disgrace and was persecuted before going on to receive a universal nullification at the Roman courts from the Pope? On this matter, history is unclear. As we’re unable to confirm anything, however, at the very least we may call to mind the case of friendly Callixtus III<sup>[111](#)</sup> who, in the manner of John XXII, left a tremendous sum of gold in his safe and was later accused of disgracefully hoarding money.

In any case, much like the illustrious man of Bourges, Jean Bourré surrounded himself in magnificence without pomp, the source of which appears to have been both marvellous and prestigious. Although the spoils of his office were considerable, they do not satisfactorily account for this vast fortune which formed something of an annex to the Royal Treasure. Louis XI constantly turned to it without ever having to check availability

beforehand. He had absolute trust in the man who maintained this inexhaustible source.

‘Lord of Plessiz, I am sending you what the lord of Crusol asked for. Go to Paris tomorrow, and you and Mister President will find no shortage of money for what is necessary in the sorcerer’s box. Written at Puyset, this Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> day of January.’[112](#)

Louis

*The sorcerer’s box!* Here it is, the historical expression which evokes supernatural powers and the inexplicable, coming from none other than the King. In our opinion, this reveals itself in the iconographic teachings of a savant artist who has been relegated to the shadows of history and shunned from the minds of conspiratorial men.

# THE PAINTINGS OF THE GUARD'S ROOM

It may seem surprising that we have not offered any detail in the above biographic overview which might help to understand the philosophical activities of Louis XI's financier. It is difficult enough to obtain precise data from those lesser-known followers who left irrefutable and historical proof of their accession to divine truth; but when it comes to high-ranking characters who were linked to their national governments, such data disappears completely. Jacques Coeur, who worked for Charles VII in the same capacity as Jean Bourré for Louis XI, (Bourré was, in a sense, Coeur's disciple) appears to have left no trace of his efforts in the area of chemical philosophy. In accordance with the traditional principles generally adhered to by followers however, he did leave a veiled message obscured beneath the sculpted interiors of his numerous abodes. In the same way, Jean Bourré was careful to remove anything positive or revelatory regarding the great secret of his existence and instead concealing its essence within the painted walls of his most beautiful castle. As such, he obeyed the collective spirit of the times, marked by medieval society's fine and universal taste for symbolic images. This bloomed in the gothic blaze of the 15th century and its spiritual perfection heralded the reactionary art of the Renaissance which lacked these same philosophical ideals. In this way, hermeticism left the building and sought refuge in the printed book: in the words of Victor Hugo, *ceci tuera cela*; the printed book would destroy the building. This is also the name of a fine chapter in this great writer's most beautiful book.[113](#)

It was in the Guard's Room of his 'Plessys house' that Jean Bourré was able to expose, through iconography, the occult preoccupations that he had hidden beneath his official persona. The reader will be the judge, but we cannot possibly subscribe to the commonly held opinion that the paintings decorating the ceiling of this large room simply depict 'wild boar hunts, lovers' rendezvous, unusual animals, jests and proverbs in action.' This list comes from Georges Bricard, who continues: 'Several paintings contain French legends in verse, characterized by their daring wit.'<sup>114</sup>

Of the eighty-four illustrated niches, eight feature characters accompanied by versified remarks. Evidently these form a separate series and we willingly concede that they may be ascribed some moral or satirical meaning by the corresponding text. As such, we will refrain from examining and analysing these works. It is important that in spite of everything, we do not run the risk of being accused of outrageous pragmatism or of being the victims of some sweet, incurable mania. For the same reason that the vulgarity of these paintings seems to offer a common or simpler meaning, Georges Bricard described them in his notable work and accompanied by brief and contentious analyses.<sup>115</sup> He neglects all the other scenes in which one may possibly identify unusual animals but would be hard-pressed to encounter nothing more than 'wild boar hunts' and 'lovers' rendezvous'.

For the purposes of this study, the scope of which will expand to become the main object of our work, we shall respect (though modifying it a little) the order indicated by the Canon Urseau. This is the order the visitor sees when entering from the ceremonial courtyard then raising their eyes towards the ceiling. On either side of the middle line there are six big panels made of four boxes each, in two groups: twenty-four paintings strongly

influenced by medieval realism in their skilful and lively execution. Painted directly onto juxtaposing boards, these absolute masterpieces are among the rarest relics of their kind. They are framed within large protruding mouldings which give each compartment the outline of an irregular hexagon.

We head towards the back of the room following stage-left and take each subject one after the other, from left to right, as they would naturally be read. And so, after having seen three panels, we arrive at the fireplace on which we turn our back and examine the three others before returning to our starting point and this time walking all the way along the external wall with its two windows looking out onto the vast moat waters. The two panels which, as stated, we will deliberately not examine, are together on the other side of the room, next to the fireplace and flanking both sides of the central beam.



# THE TWO RAMS



*Standing on their hind legs, two rams clash violently.*

The struggle between the two depicted subjects of the artwork is secondary and their violence does not preclude the irresistible affinity pushing them towards each other: something which could only be deterred by external and negative influences. Jean Bourré has cleverly rendered the impression of this encounter, of irrational shock and emergence from the alchemist's

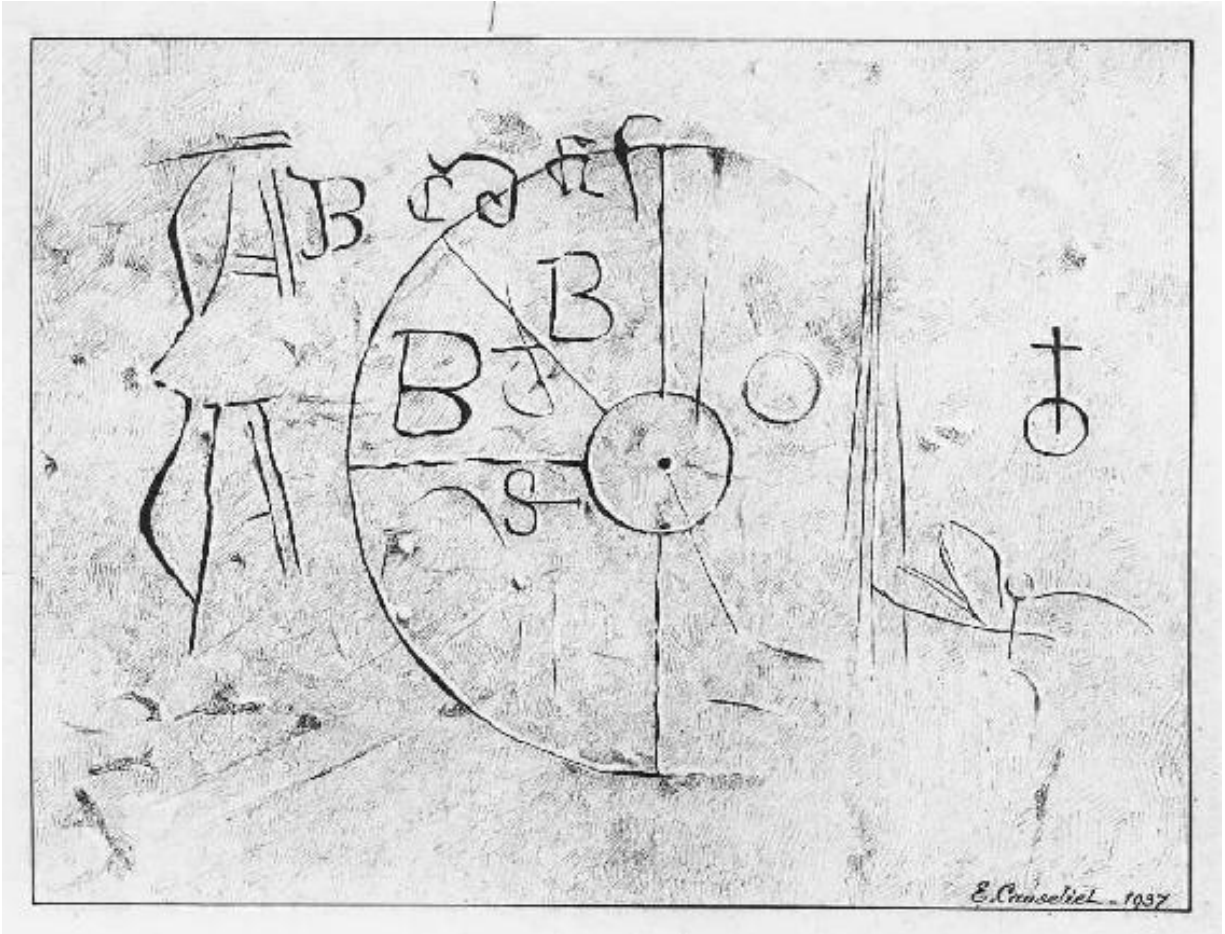
natural phenomenon, for the second time in this work. Without understanding its cause, he notes its convincing and marvellous effect. The terrestrial and celestial rams join in the propitious season of their zodiac sign. Their force of attraction is such that, throughout the operation, the ancients have named it ‘magnet’, their mercury. Charged with its spiritual equivalent it corresponds to the mythological symbol of the Criophorous Hermes. For Christian alchemists, this is the incarnation of Jesus on Earth, of God’s Lamb who erases the sins of the world; *agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*.

The enigmatic Eirenaeus Philathetes, whose master work represents utter perfection of the classical treatises through its literary form and didactic value, neatly established this difference between the two rams, as presented to him by the ‘lord of Plessis’ via the evocative brush of an anonymous illustrator.<sup>116</sup> Let us see what the great follower says about it, in chapter IV, § I, of the *Entrée Ouverte au Palais Fermé du Roi; Introitus apertus ad oclusum regis palatium*. The Latin comes from Lenglet-Dufresnoy’s excellent and extremely rare 1669 English edition in which the translation suffered from a number of interpolations which the scholar was not qualified to make: ‘In the same way steel is attracted to the magnet, and the magnet spontaneously turns towards steel, so the Magnet of the Sages attracts Steel; *Quemadmodum Chalybs ad Magnetem trahitur, Magnesque sponte se ad Chalybem convertit, sic et Magnes Sophorum trahit illorum Chalybem.*’<sup>117</sup>

Representing both the terrestrial subject and celestial influx, the ram owes its symbolism to the constellation which bears its name and into which it passes on the first day of spring crossing the equator. By the way, this concordance is no longer manifested: due to precession, the March equinox

now lies in the Pisces constellation. ‘The miracle of the world, the arrangement of superior virtue within inferior virtue’<sup>118</sup> which could not be affected in its realisation and remains philosophically subjected to the ancient symbols, was borne in distant times along with science itself.

Whether one believes that it is the sphere of stars or the Earth’s axis which rotates around the ecliptic axis (the first theory belonging to Hipparque and the second to Copernicus), the tracking of the equinoctial shift across known data points certainly allows us to tell the age of buildings and the date of past events. This is a matter of a simple and accurate calculation, often confirmed by manuscripts, which shows that humanity is not nearly as old as we have come to believe.



*Plate VIII: Keep of the Castle of Chinon*  
*Semi circle with year mark of the Templars.*

Imprisoned and awaiting torture in the Keep of Chinon, the Knights of the Templar left, amongst other interesting murals, an abbreviated schema depicting the cyclical traverse of nature (plate VIII). In the window frame, a neat circle has been engraved with a stylus on the soft stone, its incomplete right side deliberately crossed through with vertical lines. In fact, from the four quadrants occupying the circle, the Golden Age and Silver ages were already over when, in 1308, the initiated Templars yielded to posterity and transfixed this merciless march of time. The gnomon is the centre point ray emerging from a smaller circle where 'S' indicates it is the sun. This is why, when projecting onto the cosmic quadrant, the Bronze Age top sector is separated into two equal slices: one representing the past 300 years, the other representing the 300 to come. Each is marked with a 'B' which carried the same numerical value in Latin. These six centuries are once again expressed by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, on the top left of the drawing. The first, which is bigger, is linked with a brace to another similar A that is placed directly below and in reference to the two ages. To the right of the sun and slightly higher-up, we see the moon, then the earth: the globe topped by the cross whose destiny will be momentarily stopped with the end of the Iron Age and then captured in the circle's bottom quadrant. From there, the unknown Knight of the Templar's hand continues its inexorable progression until, reaching the vertical point, indicating the Great Tribulation by roaring storms. Then, the elected ones will be able to repeat the prophetic words of Pathmos' vision: 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.'<sup>119</sup>

# THE BEAR AND THE TWO MONKEYS



With a leaf hanging out of its short nose, this bulky quadruped may have the look of a good-natured frugivore, but there is no doubting that she belongs to the ursine tribe. Of plantigrade posture and with long claws, the beast has two primates chained to her back: one by the neck, the other by the belt. The first sits astride the bear's shoulders and holds a long stick in

its left hand to which is attached a rope that serves as a noseband. The second is kneeling on the beast's rump and blows into a long trumpet.

In the same philosophical spirit which runs through and animates his work, or rather his message, we believe that this huge animal chosen by Bourré is a female bear. In the language of poets, which is also the language of the gods, the female bear indicates *the pole* or *the polaris star* which the alchemist must follow on his path. This is the recommendation of Philathetes who adds: 'The wise man will rejoice, but the fool will pay small heed to these things, and will not learn wisdom, even though he sees the outward-turned central Pole marked with the notable sign of the Almighty.'

We have already explained why we do not hold Lenglet-Dufresnoy's translation in high esteem. Having shared our own version, we will now illustrate this for the reader through presenting the savant abbot's translation, followed by the original text in Latin: '*The wise man will rejoice, but fools and the ignorant people will neglect this sign, and will not learn from the wisdom, even though they might be able to see this essential mark, printed by the hand of the Almighty* — Sapiens gaudebit, stultus tamen haec parvi pendet, nec sapientiam discet, etiam licet Polum centralem extraversum conspexerit notatum signo Omnipotentis notabili.'<sup>120</sup>

Combining the notion of primordial matter and the seal of the divine imprint, the Greek word 'Ἄρκτος, *Arktos*'<sup>121</sup> denotes both the female bear and the North. According to Euripides and Aristophanes, it was also the name of a chaste young woman in Athens. Therefore, Jean Bourré's female bear is the mineral virgin, the sage's mercury, the real architect of the Great

Work. She is inextricably linked to her creation and imitates it like a monkey in her activities. In this explanation, our anthropoid is simultaneously the conducted and the conductor. In the same half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, an unknown follower sculpted her on the pillars of the manor, picking and eating the apples of the Hesperides. Alas! What has become of this superb medieval abode now that the finest of our national heritage has been destroyed in a hurricane of iron and fire? The *profanum vulgus* which, in its raucous charlatanism, recalls the image of du Plessis' second monkey frantically blowing into its huge trumpet will never realise the extent of this vast and irreparable loss.

# THE DONKEY SAYING MASS



Squatting at a pulpit where a heavy antiphonary lies open, master Buridan, pages under his hoof, deciphers the plainsong music. His intelligent and amused gaze shows that the animal is evidently taking pleasure in this exercise and gives his face an incredibly human quality. This is not undermined by the length of his ears which hang in nonchalant and immeasurable serenity.



Without any trace of doubt or possible controversy, the scene recalls the medieval celebration of the Nativity. It was the Donkey Festival from which the edifying solemnity of religious ceremonies was banned to make way for the foolish parody of their mysteries. There were no irreverent intentions behind these jubilant rituals which exalted for the ‘Fools’ or, more precisely, the ‘Wise Men’, *the mulish virtue which brought the gold of Arabia and the incense and myrrh of Sheba to the Church.*

Aurum de Arabia,  
Thus et myrrham de Saba  
Tulit in ecclesia  
Vertus asinaria

What greater virtue could there be than that of the donkey who, bearing the sign of the Saviour on his back,<sup>122</sup> was to bear him in person firstly with his mother in Egypt and later on in his triumphant arrival into Jerusalem? In the *Donkey’s Prose* which was preserved by Du Cange<sup>123</sup> and whose sixth verse we quoted above, the very first lines sing of a donkey arriving from the countries of the East saying the beast was *beautiful, courageous, and suited to bear his burden:*

Orientis partibus,  
Adventavit asinus,  
Pulcher et fortissimus,  
Sarcinis aptissimus

Inspired by this text which we owe to the initiate Pierre de Corbeil, on the Octave of the Epiphany, the clergy and people of Beauvais escorted the town’s most beautiful girl from the cathedral to the parish church of Saint-

Etienne. She held a young child in her arms and rode a donkey fitted out in a luxurious caparison.

Much better than the divine drama which goes to the heart of the serious matter through a lively re-enactment are Charles Perrault's *Stories or Tales from Times Past*, in *The Tales of Mother Goose*. They allegorically demonstrate the spirit's ability to endure as it remains the source of the temporal wealth and pleasures of this world. This charming story, whose hermeticism is less questionable than its morality, was first published in mediocre verse and then in exquisite prose. Long before this, however, the ingenuous La Fontaine who was so practical and wise and deeply enamoured with simple truths in all things had written:

Would have been told the tale of *Donkey-Skin*  
I would have taken great pleasure in it. [124](#)

It was through wearing the animal's skin which 'made her dirty and disgusting' that the young princess, described as 'beautiful and ravishing', was able to escape her father's plans to marry her. The King, willing to sacrifice anything to satisfy his daughter's demands, had offered her three humanly impossible dresses: one was the colour of time, the other was the colour of the moon, and the third was the colour of the sun. And so it was that he did not hesitate to kill the donkey whom he loved with a passion and which was the source of his wealth. This was a complex and bad path where metallic mercury and gold, one in an active state and the other in a passive state, were in assation for nearly two years creating a progressively coloured illusion in three main sections: blue, white and red. This is what justifies Jacques Tollius' imprecatory tone in his scholarly brochure: 'Come now, you who are meticulously searching for the diverse colours of matter

in glass ... Come, you who are looking for the Philosopher's stone in the fixed; *Ite jam, qui varios materiae colores anxia sollicitudine quaeritis in vitris ... Ite, qui lapidem Philosophorum fixum quaeritis.*'<sup>125</sup>

For Tollius, this fixed thing (*fixum*) refers to gold: the sun or king of metals which alchemists in ancient times cooked for many long months after dissolving it in quicksilver. *Philosophical gold* is, in reality, young and immature which is why in the personality of the royal prince it is gold alone to match the *mercury of wise men* as represented by the beautiful princess of the same blood. If their union was realised thanks to *the emerald* which veils *the philosopher's vitriol*, the power of this union was secondary to the role played by the black donkey skin in which the noble and virginal fugitive was wrapped. Yet, this was no common animal (or, as we were about to say, no common person). The *master donkey* was accommodated in the royal palace, in the most obvious of places: 'It was not out of fantasy, but with good reason, specifies the storyteller, that the king gave him a distinguished and particular place. The virtues of this rare animal merited such distinction; nature had made him so extraordinary that every morning, his litter, instead of being dirty, was profusely covered in beautiful gleaming crowns, and golden coins which were collected when he awoke'.

After all, a donkey was able to receive honours worthy of a prince and so many men perfectly identified with him in the manner of Sancho Pança and his donkey! They possessed the same common sense, cold selfishness, and same ingenuous contempt for the law. Maybe this is what caused the donkeys on the Ile de Ré, who refuse to go to work without being dressed in their pants, to be so proud. Nothing surprised or amused us more than seeing these donkeys walking so seriously and peacefully with their front (and occasionally hind) legs covered all the way down to the hoof and held

up by real braces. The curious memory of seeing this play out in such a charming and insular setting has remained with us, as have our memories of the trusty and friendly hospitality we encountered on this vacation in August 1933.

# THE SUBMISSIVE STAG



A stag, lying on its stomach, extends its neck and rests its antlered head on its forelegs.

Wild and shy, exceedingly difficult to approach, this fawn finds here in the cabalistic homonymy of its generic name, the Latin *cervus*, its direct analogy with the expression by which the authors refer to their mercury: *Servus fugitivus*, the *fugitive servant*. '*Id est mercurius*', Rulandus states

and further specifies, ‘Hermes propter humiditatem fugitivam sic nominat — *Hermes so names it because of the volatile humidity.*’ [126](#)

We know the philosophers are unanimous in declaring that their mercury is the sole matter that composes the Stone. This is also what one reads on one of the one hundred and sixty curious little medallions that are engraved on copper, which constitute Daniel Stolcius’ very rare ‘garden’: ‘Lapis in hoc Opere necessarius, de re est animata — *The Stone required in this Work, comes from that which is alive.*’ Within this circular inscription we see a naked man lying on his back. Near him there are three blooming flowers on one central stem and at his feet is a stag that stands erect and one which is endowed with a large set of antlers. The nine branches of the antlers are marked with a star. Left of it and in the sky in the center of a triangle there is a small candle that radiates a light which pierces through the clouds. [127](#)

*That which is animated* seems fittingly symbolized in this manner by the stag since the position of the above mentioned person indicates sleep or death, and thereby the figure is imposed with the same inertia as the plant that flowers beside it. This medallion, which Stolcius attributes to MUHAMMAD, PHILOSOPHER, is accompanied by a quatrain that begins with a recitation of the birth of the Stone among living beings. The last two lines praise the *triple light* of the sun whose philosophical quality is expressed by the triangle of sulfur and the gentle heat that is elegantly symbolized by the candlestick: ‘*Thanks to it are known the starlit man, the lilies of the fields, and the stag.*’

Hinc Homo sydereus, camporum lilia, Cervus  
Nota tibi trino lumine Solis erunt. [128](#)

Jean Bourré had knowledge of the *stag* — this restless and fugitive stag<sup>129</sup> — and on the basis thereof was able to tame and immobilize it. This is what he meant to convey by depicting the docile and submissive attitude of the animal. With this image he thus expresses the fulfilment of the Hermetic aphorism that was cited earlier: *Fac fixum volatile; fixate the volatile.*

Is not the children's *kite* [*flying stag* in French] that echoes this very same philosophic-chemical truth? We believe it does, since the memory of this toy that deeply impressed itself on the soul of the child that we were at around the turn of this century was first and foremost its strangeness. Imagine a large isosceles triangle, the tip inverted, the base curved outwards in an arc and folding out along its median axis to form a second smaller triangle called the *head of the kite*. Above this, on top of the decorated paper that covered its entire surface, a young face could be seen which was surrounded by rays. In addition, the acute angle of the triangle showed the moon, positioned among the stars, *in its first quarter*.

All was well; in their hieroglyphs and opposite proportions, *water* and *fire*, each less important in the eyes of the other. These opposite proportions form however, above all, the major condition of execution as laid out by God and as the insurmountable obstacle to the greed of men. In the same vein, would it not be this same Hermetic thought that moved the alchemist Jacques Cœur to carve kites on the tympanum of one of the doors of the main room of his palace in Bourges?

# THE INDECENT FOUNTAIN



A six-faceted fountain that is ornamented with a kind of central baluster is reminiscent of the almost equally shameless *Manneken Pis* in Brussels. This image represents the water flowing through the natural conduit of a young woman who lifts her skirts.

Two naked figures are seen standing on her right and to her left; one receives the liquid in a bowl, the other leans on the edge of the pool.



We are here in the presence of the fountain of the sages whose *hexagonal* basin evokes, in essence, the as of yet invisible union of opposing elements that is always depicted by the assembly of two opposing equilateral triangles. After this first and imperfect mixture, the *shameless* Venus surrenders her pontic water actuated by *harmoniac salt\**. It must be collected with care now that she has received the best part of the male metal that is here represented by the man tottering with fatigue.

This scene, salacious to say the least, quite naturally draws attention to *urine*, a term by which the elders at times refer to their *mercury*. Géber and Raymond Lulle, as well as the *Turba*, gave cause to mindless puffers<sup>130</sup> to use this human excrement as a base material. The *Turba* reads: ‘I wish to say a few words regarding diet. In man there are two digestions: the first is done in his stomach and is white, the second is done inside the liver and is red: For when I get up in the morning and I see my urine is white, I go lie down again, and stay three or four hours more, and my urine when I look at it at noon is red like blood: because it is well cooked. The first was cooked only three hours, and for this reason is still white and raw: but after 4 hours it is well cooked and sanguine. I have told you what I did. Who has ears, let him listen and open them, and who has a mouth, let him close it.’<sup>131</sup>

Was it not this text in particular that provided the Freemason Duchanteau, — presumed author of a rather obscure allegorical treatise<sup>132</sup> — with the baneful idea of the practice of physiological spagyrics which, we venture to say, in 1786 in the Parisian Lodge *Les Amis Réunis*, led to his death. With the aim of demonstrating the new qualities acquired by such same material, when subjected to multiple cohobations, Duchanteau chose himself as both athanor and alembic with regard to his own urine. Even though he succeeded in proving the high degree of concentration that could be attained

with a liquor thus treated, he was unable to see his repugnant trial through to the end, as it ended tragically for him at the sixth repetition.

# THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE DRAGON AND THE LION



A dragon, part eagle and part snake, with its chiropteran wings spread wide, attacks a lion with its beak and talons while the lion bracing itself on its four clawed paws seeks to seize the dragon with its powerful jaws.

This image is a variant of the classical allegory of the *battle between the two natures*, which the pious Nicolas Flamel represented with other sculpted and polychrome ‘hieroglyphics’ in the Cemetery of the Innocents. His representation can be seen on the fourth arch that was built at his expense, immediately to the right when entering by the great gate of Saint-Denis Street. This is where the charnel-house used to be that was donated by the alchemist. It was found at the edge of the old Parisian street not far from the fence of the current square. There, around the Pierre Lescot fountain, sickly children would play and tread the same soil that had received until 1780, for over a millennium, almost all the dead of the old capital. In 1786, the same year that the arcade gallery which was serving as a mass grave was demolished and the bones carried to the catacombs, one could still see the coloured carvings of the wise Adept. These sculptures were preserved as woodblock images by the gentleman, Arnauld de la Chevalerie, in their entirety and in detail on an unfolding page with each inserted in the text in the proper place.<sup>133</sup> These very clearly reproduced figures raise serious doubts about the sincerity of Abbot Villain who had, in the end, no other goal than to discredit the philosophical personality of Nicolas Flamel. This rigorous critic lived in close enough proximity to examine the carvings at his leisure. He may have described three motifs quite exactly but totally transformed the other five by splitting, in the form of a frieze, the base of the decorated blind arcades at both extremities which would not easily lend themselves to a theological interpretation.

At left are shown two dragons, one winged and the other apterous, who engage in battle. At right is shown a man, half lying on his back, who holds back a winged lion. Curiously, never has any of the ancient authors who were able to do so at the time inspected the stone carvings at the Cemetery of the Innocents. Never has anyone, not even the Abbot Villain we dare say,

ever reported the slightest inaccuracy in the drawings of the Poitevin gentleman which otherwise appear to be in perfect agreement with the text of the Adept. Was it disingenuity or a form of extraordinarily absent-mindedness on the part of Flamel's biographer when he linked these depictions to the evangelical zoolatry when he stated that these depictions were 'very mysterious to the eyes of the alchemists', yet as far as he was concerned their interpretation was profoundly obvious: 'These are the symbols of the four Evangelists. The Man symbolizes the Evangelist St. Matthew, supporting the winged Lion of St. Mark, this is the right-hand scene; in the other at left the Ox of St. Luke and the Eagle of St. John, and there is nothing else that can be seen here.'<sup>134</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the tract elsewhere speaks of a 'purple-red man holding the foot of a red lacquered Lion, which has wings',<sup>135</sup> we cannot possibly go along with the idea of an ox with the muzzle of a lion and without horns, or a beakless eagle with a reptilian body.

'Contemplate well these two Dragons, for they are the true principles of philosophy that the sages did not dare to show to their own children. The lower one without wings is the stable one or the male one; the upper one is the volatile, or the dark and obscure female ... The former is called Sulfur, or heat and dryness, and the latter quick Silver, or cold and humidity.'<sup>136</sup>

Jean Bourré's allegory, moreover, is even more telling in this respect. His hybrid monster, half eagle, half serpent, clearly conveys the volatile and frigid quality of *mercury* whereas the lion is no less meaningful and evocative of the igneous and dry nature of *sulfur*. According to Plutarch, it was indeed this animal that was devoted to the sun for the same reason that

in Egypt it was devoted to Vulcan, namely because of its fiery temperament.

# THE YOUNG GIRL AND THE LARGE TAILED TORTOISE



An enormous tortoise, endowed with a long eel-like tail that is tucked in a loop behind her, carries a young girl who is dressed in nothing but a short petticoat and who sits on its back. With her hands extended, she holds a garland of flowers in front of her. Her beautiful long hair waves horizontally, as if carried by an impetuous wind.

In fables, the tortoise was often a symbol of the god Mercury who, having found the tortoise *near a den, eating grass, put it to death by iron, and with help of the lyre (testudo) that was fashioned from its shell, gained infinite riches*. In light of the common substitution of mercury by the alchemist, this also briefly but precisely depicts the Magnum Opus or *the art of music* in its essence: the extraction of the material from the mine, his eagerness towards *the universal spirit* which is green, and the *impassioned* exaltation thereof by iron.

The tortoise therefore accurately represents the coarse subject of the philosophers whose quality, eminently mercurial, is emphasized here by the long, serpentine tail of the unique chelonian that gives it a monstrous appearance. ‘*The snake,*’ Ruland tell us, ‘*is the spirit of chastity, that is to say, mercury — serpens spiritus castitatis, id est Mercurius.*’ This spirit, elevated above primitive matter, is incarnated by the young girl from whom the virginal crown that she has ostensibly been offered attests of her purity. This also explains her hair waving in the wind which is expressive of the volatility of the worldly part, henceforth drawn to its heavenly source — something that all spiritual things have in common — and which is in stark contrast with the exceptional and proverbial slowness of her remarkable mount.

The tortoise also served as an emblem of the mineral subject that the sages also referred to as *Saturn* and which, by the same token, evoked the image of the distant and slow planet lost at the periphery of the world. The emblem of the tortoise was fittingly used in this sense by a little-known author who was certainly an initiate of high degree. Jacques of Senlecque, a typesetter by profession, brought to light a most curious work which gave him the opportunity to dissertate knowledgeably on science and to broaden



the horizons rarely opened before him.<sup>137</sup> This is what clearly follows, at the end of this treatise, from the explanation he gives of a symbolic emblem serving as his professional trademark.<sup>138</sup> It addresses the problem of the Magnum Opus in its multiple meanings, both from a spiritual perspective and from a material one. Nothing could have surprised us more than finding expressed therein, in a style representing *diplomacy*,<sup>139</sup> the major concern of our troubled times relating to the foremost system of economic exchange:

‘With regard to the currency sign, I would have much to say, but it would lead to a long digression on the subject of *Typography, on PRINTING on paper and on BOOKSTORES*. I must restrict myself in this sense and I will suffice to say that I remember I once conceived a little *Dialogue Between Three Sisters* about their happy meeting at the Louvre Castle, whose conclusion was that *Paper Typography* very much rejoiced at finding herself such a close neighbour of her sister *Money Typography* ; and humbly besought *Wax Typography* (Chancellery) to kindly contribute with all its strength to the restoration of the ancient trade routes of old, and frequent visits of her Sister Money: promising herself that if she could often obtain happiness from some of her visits, she would take from it very great consolation. I have many things to say on this subject that I will have to reserve for another occasion.’<sup>140</sup>

Let us now examine the engraving that was made by *Jacques of Senlecque, Parisian typographer, at his expense and under his direction* — *sumptibus et studio Iacobi de Senlecque, Parisini, Typo,* — and which he included with the treatise of Jean Brouaut (Brevotius), Protestant alchemist and physician who was born in Normandy around the year 1556.

Separated vertically into two equal rectangles, this intaglio shows us a laboratory setting that fits the philosophic-scientific ambiance in which two great adepts are represented who each shone their light on alchemy and who were the undisputed patrons of the art, each in his own time and place. The first is *Hermes Trismegistus, Philosopher from the Orient* — Hermes Trismegistus Orientalis Philosophus — who was the founder of the sacred science in Egypt and whose books passed on to us in the first centuries of the Christian era. The second is *Brother Basil Valentine, Western philosopher* — F. Basilius Valentinus Occidentalis Philosophus — who cultivated the art, not without glory and success, during the best time of our Gothic Middle Ages.

In a context that relates more specifically to the *wet way*, Hermes is shown wearing a fur-lined coat and a cap and holding an armillary sphere in his right hand at face level.

With his left hand he holds the neck of a cucurbit that is connected to a large flask that is being subjected to the heat of a brick furnace. The tube of the device, which is partly hidden but which can be made out to be a *pelican* or *circulatory*, spews a thick black smoke. This black smoke contrasts with the sun that is depicted adjacent to it and which has a human face surrounded by tongues of fire. The radiance of this celestial body, reflected by a glowing mirror, seems to reinforce the furnace's activity in which we see the fuel in ignition beneath its open arch. In front of the furnace, a *black tortoise* is shown which carries the sign of *Saturn* on its back and which sits on a grill that is exposed to the slow calcination of scattered embers.

To the left, Basil Valentine stands facing the viewer, beardless and generously tonsured, showing a robust neck emerging from a thick brown mantle. In his left hand he holds a small, covered cup, while, he strongly squeezes a *bunch of grapes* with his right hand. The juice that is pressed out pours abundantly on a *tortoise* which is black like the one previously mentioned and which is also adorned with the alchemical symbol of *lead*. Thus watered, this tortoise also undergoes cooking; but this one in a basin and on a small stove, near which is placed a plate filled with *bunches of grapes*. All this is arranged on a table in front of the famous Adept, whose *practice* is symbolized by four earthen utensils that are stilled out on the left behind him. The utensils placed there on a small shelf are a cup, *têt*, and crucibles — all relevant in particular to the *dry way*.

Incidentally, for Jacques of Senlecque, the *tortoise* is not only the symbol of the primary material of the Philosophers but it is also the image of the alchemist that is dedicated without respite to the pursuit of his ideal. For this endeavour the alchemist often receives nothing but contempt and imprecations from his fellow men, his brothers:

‘Firstly if one would consider the tortoise, one would first and foremost have to see it as the hieroglyph of a man of laborious and *Saturnian* nature, who by way of the pace of the tortoise has slowly and judiciously completed the Circle of revolution and vicissitudes of many hours, the circular path of the *Sun*, the repeated endeavours according to the principles of his ART, whose perfection depends on the precept of *tarda diligentia*, on diligent labour and assiduity of body and attentive mind, on being without distraction secluded within his *Shell*, which is marked in this respect with the sign of *Saturn*. And (following the precept):

*Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis.* [141](#)

‘He is represented by this *Tortoise*, having taken *his experiments* or *spirit* and solitary reflections *beyond* this *shell*, and beyond the domain of domestic affairs, with the intention to traverse the reign of MERCURY, inventor of music, in order to repose for a while in the shadow of the GRAPEVINE.’ [142](#)

# THE SOW MUSICIAN



A sow that is seated and adorned with a pellegrina plays the bagpipes and makes its two piglets dance.

The word sow, which also signifies the *droppings of black beasts*, in a cabalistic sense brings to mind the alchemists' *caput mortuum* which alchemists often considered to be the useless and worthless faeces of the *philosopher's mercury*. According to mythology, the wild boar that was

once designated by the expression *the black beast* was sacrificed to Diana. Thus, the concept of the mysterious *dead head* of the adepts is associated with the triple evocation in the image itself where our three pachyderms indulge in their pleasant choreography. Choreography, as designated in the *priestly art* by the ecclesiastical *pellegrina*, in fact brings to mind simultaneously the *art of music, harmony* and *children's play*. These three find their expression particularly in the final phase of the Work which draws its material essence from the *caput* and which all the good authors state to be the easiest.

Philalethes calls this third part of the operation *the regimen*. He further specifies the following regarding this phase: '*And I swear, in all honesty, that if it were ever shown with clarity, even fools would laugh at the art — Et juro tibi sub bona fide, quod si hoc solum proponeretur palam, stulti ipsi artem riderent.*'<sup>143</sup> In accordance with Jean Bourré's allegory, the Scottish philosopher continues: '*Hence for the one who knows, all is naught but women's work and child's play, namely the process of cooking — Eo namque cognito, totum nil aliud est, quam opus mulierum, ludusque puerorum, hoc est decoquere.*'<sup>144</sup>

All writers of the Middle Ages were familiar with this metaphor and hence it is not surprising to find it among the painted panels in the Plessis castle. Moreover, it would neither be surprising if the artist who so wisely made this phrase part of the decoration had not read it, for example, in a copied manuscript of *the secret book of the very ancient philosopher Artephius concerning occult art and the philosopher's stone*. This book was published in 1612 by Pierre Arnauld, Chivalric Lord in Poitou, after having translated it from Latin for the first time and in an irreproachable manner. Indeed, on page 30 of this compilation, the Arab Adept from the twelfth century

declares that the work 'is so brief and so easy, that it could rightly be called the work of women, and the play of children.'<sup>145</sup>

Some very old games have developed as symbolic representations of the Magnum Opus as is the case with the *noble game of the goose* which originated with the Greeks. Another example is the game of *cup-and-ball*. It is a remarkable example of an entertaining exercise which replicates the reciprocal role of the philosophical materials upon contact. The very etymology of the name of the game reveals both materials: one is *passive*, by the very symbol it receives in alchemy, the other is *active*, in its appropriate form and common name. The French word for cup-and-ball, *bilboquet*, is in fact formed from the radical bil, for *ball* and from bocquet, *spearhead*. 'Determined to conquer or perish I seized with fury my spear in one hand and the substance in the other', Cyliani tells us in his short treatise describing the dream he had while asleep at the foot of a large oak.<sup>146</sup>

The penetration of frigid matter by the igneous spirit, the *globe* by the *iron*, the *flick of the hands* that Nature requires of the artist that copies and is aided by, these all translate into the game of cup-and-ball, the basic elements for success.

For this reason, our attention was drawn in 1938 to the enormous *sphere* placed near an obelisk which stood over 200 meters in height and that together meant to express both the theme as well as the 'key' of the New York World's Fair. 'Cup-and-ball for giants!' wrote the author of an article in the *Paris-Soir* daily paper, undoubtedly unconscious of the depth of his exclamation.

From the same Hermetic point of view and in a related sense, one could say that the double and colossal American symbol, embracing in the name of

'Democracity' the surprising spectacle of impending affairs, was evocative of the approaching hour of trial and tribulation. What could be more striking than this gigantic sword ready to penetrate the terrestrial ball in the immense and tragic game of human powers subjected to their inevitable destiny!



# THE DARK AND PREGNANT MERMAID



A mermaid perhaps, but most extraordinary, having a tail covered with large, raised scales and with ventral and caudal fins like bat's wings, the tail fin is raised behind her with flair and she only barely resembles the body of a fish. When viewed as a whole, the dark shade of the torso and head in contrast to her long tresses, conveys the image of the cutaneous

pigmentation of a negress. The perky breasts match with the pregnant belly, the swollen hemisphere indicating the approach of parturition. This majestic creature holds a large mirror in her right hand. The mirror is circumscribed by a snake and the mermaid seems to look into the mirror to see her face. Her left hand rests near her belly holding an object which unfortunately is difficult to identify.

This last detail is identified by Canon Urseau as the comb which indeed is often depicted together with the mirror in the hands of coquettish round-breasted and long-haired mermaids. Still, in our ignorance of what would justify the affirmation of the object being a comb, we are not quite convinced about it and we ourselves tend towards another attribute altogether as is suggested by both the design as well as the obvious symbolism of the composition. We leave it to the reader to form an opinion for themselves, after examination of the photograph we owe to Canon Urseau and which he briefly describes in his short work as follows:

‘A voluptuous mermaid, naked to the waist, spreads her long fishtail.

She holds a comb in her left hand and a mirror in her right.’

Without dwelling too long on this matter which only a visit to the castle’s interior could elucidate, we will suffice to add that the *black* and *pregnant virgin* corresponds to the symbol of the *closed book* in the same way that the *white* and *maternal virgin* corresponds to that of the *open book*. The book contains in its *pages* the same scientific truth that is expressed by the scales, deliberately exaggerated, which cover the monstrous body of our *gravida*.<sup>147</sup> Jean Lallemand depicted the book *open amidst the flames* on the carved ceiling of his oratory in his house in Bourges. Without doubt it was there that Jean Lallemand fulfilled the inescapable necessity which is

expressed in Latin by the Adept's favourite symbol — a symbol comprising a *closed book* and its appended seals: *Delear prius; I shall perish first*. Thus the *primary matter* begs for the harsh treatment *by fire* that the alchemist must apply in order to *open* it. This crucial operation of which Jean Lallemand depicts both the instrument and the result by two attributes is most personal as well. These two attributes are the *cross* as hieroglyph of the crucible and a *severed golden knot* which relates to the *swift hand* of execution as taken from Alexander. Both of these symbols, as well as the *sealed book* with its inexorable motto, appear on each of the miniatures that illustrate manuscript number 666 of the Royal Library of The Hague. These are the Hours of Jean Lallemand, in the service of Bourges, on the frontispiece of which the philosopher declares: '*I have broken my bonds, oh Lord; I will offer you the sacrifice of praise and I will invoke your name — Dirupisti, Domine, vincula mea; tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis et nomen Domini invocabo.*'

See there, clearly indicated, the only means of accession to the Absolute is by the painful intercession of Notre-Dame [Our Lady] on-Earth, the *Virgin that is about to give birth* — *Virgo paritura* — of the dark and humid crypts.

*I am dark but I am beautiful*, says the ideal wife in the first chapter of the *Song of Songs*. At Plessis-Bourré she observes her dark beauty in the *mirror of art*. This beauty radiates from her and is expressed by the symbol of the *cornucopia* [Horn of Plenty] as that which the chemical artist may rightfully expect to receive.

Will he not be surprised by all of nature's secrets in accordance with *The Parable* of the Cosmopolitan? 'Congratulating me on this happy encounter in the Garden of the Hesperides, (Neptune) showed me a mirror in which I

saw all of nature uncovered.’<sup>148</sup> In this way, through the circle of the *ouroboros*, we are better able to comprehend the ‘transcendence’ of material at this stage: the Grecian image of the snake biting its own tail is accompanied by Marcelin Berthelot’s motto *En to Pan — all is one*. In revealing his *Collection of Greek Alchemists* and the two in octavos that encompass it, the 55-year-old pioneer of thermochemistry did not hesitate to resume the idiomatic study which he had renounced for nearly 40 years. This finally brought about the recognition of the accuracy of the ancient philosophy of nature, ‘a theory’; he states, ‘founded on the hypothesis of the unity of matter, and as fundamentally plausible as the most reputable of modern theories.’<sup>149</sup>

While researching one of the most precious collections in the National Library, we were fortunate to discover the existence of an alchemist whose name is, in our opinion, a pseudonym glorifying the Christian prophetess Isis. Who was he? What was his destiny, particularly in light of the dangerous missive we are about to read? The origin is revealed less by the signature than through the inscription and wax seal which remain intact on the back of the letter’s fold.

Addressed to the Great King’s Minister, the letter appears in the *Mélanges de Colbert* along with all of the correspondence he received. This has proven an inexhaustible source of reference for the period from 1661 to 1674. Thanks to the care taken by the Minister a great number of priceless historical texts, of which the originals have been lost, have been preserved; following his orders, copyists and compilers went through the treasury of the charters as well as the archives of the sovereign courts. But let us consider the accusatory letter which, having passed through the Porte Saint-

Martin and entered the capital through the ancient Roman road of Senlis, must have proven an unpleasant surprise for *Belbrune*:

Noyon, 12 August 1664

Sir,

I boldly inform you that, this week or next, a surgeon named Belbrune will arrive in Paris via the Porte Saint-Martin, who has found a way of changing silver and copper coins into gold. Verily, he has performed this feat in front of one of my friends. If there were any means of capturing him, he would enrich His Majesty. So that you may recognize him, he has a fairly tall grey horse carrying two sacks of red leather of a foot and a half long on the back of his saddle. He himself has a long, rather thin face, chestnut hair, a short-brimmed hat, a grey-white coat, a dark brown doublet and worn canvas breeches. He wears a white cravat around his neck, and he is soft spoken. In the event that you are able to capture him, I implore you to take care of his wife and children and compel him to work, as he has said that if he was captured, he would only reveal his secret under duress.

I remain,

Your humble and loyal servant

Louvet<sup>150</sup>

# THE FLYING CHARIOT AND ITS FEMININE GUIDE



A chariot is propelled forward by the wind, as shown by its opened sail. Suspended from a mast at the front, it is rigged at all four corners with lines which are held by a young woman. Resisting the driving force, she hangs

on with her body arched back and, in this way, she trims the sheet that was meant to preserve her modesty.

Rigged this way, this strange vehicle associates the idea of navigation with that of a uniquely terrestrial journey. This image hence is a representation of the Great Work relating both to the way it is taught and its realization; the former adhering to necessary tradition, the latter being nature's only possibility.

It is hardly our intention to affirm that *The Humid Way*, or the long way, with the glass flask set above the flame of the lamp, is false and fictitious. It is undeniable, however, that the authors made use of this to allegorically describe the mysteries of their *dry* or *short way* — the way of the poor. As Cyliani discloses in his work *Hermes Unveiled*: 'At this point, I must warn you to never forget that only two matters of the same origin are needed: One volatile, the other fixed, and that there are two ways, the dry and the humid. I follow the latter out of preference and duty, even though I am more familiar with the former.'<sup>151</sup> In actual fact, he followed both ways — we found evidence in his practice of the contingent and erroneous clarity by way of the flask after having found, in the fifteen pages of his allegory, some of the best instructions on the work by way of the crucible. All in all, it is a most modern take on the work of Nicholas Flamel from 400 years earlier with regard to the two ways that are always found in the writings of the Sages and the Philosophers: 'Of which there are two ways, one is true, the other is false: the true has been articulated by these obscure words, so that they may be understood clearly by the wise, and hidden and concealed from the wicked who would desecrate this science.'<sup>152</sup> In the initiatic dream of the virtuous yet ill-fortuned Cyliani, his divine protectress appeared immediately. Apart from her beauty, she incarnates all the qualities of

perfection and that which amounts to wisdom. In fabled times, for Jason this was the magician Medea whose image Jean Bourré depicted on *The Argo* of another genre. This is an even more poignant symbol than the prow made from the oak of the Dodona forest. In the manuscript which belonged to him and of which we have previously spoken, the pilgrim has a guide named *Grace of God*:

‘Whose beauty made me joyful,  
resembling the daughter of an Emperor  
some mighty King or governor’<sup>153</sup>

This brings us to another modern book which is quite different from this momentous and magnificent volume — in which hermeticism is easily discerned from old academic philosophy — quite different in both the eccentricity of its literary form and the minimalism of its physical form. Perhaps intentionally this book was influenced by the purest form of Dadaism that had emerged from the other war and features the name of the same noble and beautiful creature, *Grace*. We were astonished to discover a similar symbolism in this disjointed text, which sometimes assumes a telegraphic style in pidgin language. This linguistic style was flourishing in 1919 as a result of the bars, jazz, and dance clubs which were in fashion, along with cubism. The cover is illustrated with geometric figures conceived by esoteric concepts guiding the artist’s hand and it carries these few words above the editor’s mark: ‘With a title and thermometer designed by Van Dongen’. This makes one forget all that is greatly humorous and amusing in this book. Certainly there was no need for a master painter to trace these lines, whose primitivity, in the case of the thermometer, has the look of a child’s work.



Despite all appearances, despite the lack of seriousness which is in profound discord with the transcendent subject matter at hand, this book disappeared from the market the year following its publication. It was in fact during the summer of 1920 that we learned of its existence and yet we were unable to find a single copy, let alone one of the limited edition copies printed on paper of vergé d'Arches that were numbered 4 to 21. A happy coincidence (or rather, a bibliophile's calculated intuition) led us to discover our copy during a quayside stroll — a gem in the hopeless inventory of a poor bookseller.

Despite a lack of sufficient evidence, could the book's suppression be linked to the mysterious death of its author, Mrs. Hillel-Erlanger? We cannot confirm anything in this respect but note that alchemists have often been the victims of hate, jealousy and avarice. Cyliani avoided such a death but not without suffering in the flesh a perpetual torment resulting from harm which he does not specify: 'Having obtained this new knowledge, my days were happy: friendship was lavished upon me and I could now, to some extent, come to the help of my family. However, as soon as they thought that they had obtained everything they knew from me, they abandoned me under meaningless pretexts. Some even went to the extent of giving me a strong dose of corrosive sublimate in order to destroy me and rob me of my writings. I came to know the human heart at great cost and I had to be alert at all times. I immediately recognised the fire which burned in my stomach and the taste, and ran to seek an antidote. This resulted in a year of illness and my being deprived of the one pleasure I had on this earth.'<sup>154</sup>

Whatever had become of Mrs. Irène Hillel-Erlanger, her strange work reveals an obvious hermetic teaching which was disjointedly assembled in

the ancient and traditional way and adapted by her in line with the literary leanings of the day. The images the book evokes are astonishing and multi-faceted in their language as well as their typographical arrangement and could not be any better reiterated than by the title which is reproduced on the cover with its two telling syllables: *Voyages in Kaleidoscope*.

The hero of this book, Joel Joze, his mind brimming with extraneous knowledge, struggles to get his amazing invention to work and has to make an appeal for help to the young Gilly — the salt of the Earth or, to be precise, the Loyal Servant.<sup>155</sup> He thereby follows the advice of *Grace* who tells him, ‘Why don’t you try entrusting your Kaleidoscope to a child? His keen and sensitive eye might bring things into focus.’<sup>156</sup> Previously she had freed him from his enslavement to earthly temptations and leading him to her house where we, in turn, will now pay an instructive visit:

‘Few friends have seen the entire house, tall and vast behind its ancient façade. Special permission is required, and rarely granted. It is said that after the Oasis, where we have just entered, there is — passing a cobalt window after the Palms — a staircase of pure crystal, polished and smooth. This leads to a magnificent rotunda — with walls and tiles of lazulite — and a dome carved from a single Sapphire.

It contains 3 curtains in front of one another. Tall, reaching all the way down to the tiles:

Curtain of Wool

Curtain of Silver (silver-cloth)

Curtain of Fine-Gold (long fine-gold threads)

and

The Treasure Room

- such magnificent diamonds and pearls are found among the soft  
and everlasting rose bushes humid with dew! —

Devout people have climbed the crystal stairs,  
High-born guests have lifted the Curtain of Wool;  
some of them, of noble birth, have half-opened the Curtain of  
Silver.

The Curtain of Gold is very secret  
and only the humble have entered the Treasure Room,  
Grace talks to them with her face uncovered.

In front of others, regardless of their pleas, she always wears her  
mysterious veil.’[157](#)

Irène Hillel-Erlanger could not have more accurately described the ideal image of feminine purity. Herein are made manifest the inner qualities which are required for the alchemist to be able to progress in the stages of the work. According to her, he will find peace in his soul, tenacity of spirit and physical strength. *Grace* verily is St. Paul’s *Χάρις*, *kharis*, which the Vulgate incorrectly translated as Charity and which brings together, according to the apostle, all of the virtues aligned with philosophical perfection. Most certainly this relates to the grace of God rather than to the feeling which compels us to help our neighbour. This distinction is clearly articulated by St. Paul where he says: ‘Even if I bestow all my goods to the poor, and even if I give my body to be burned, if I do not have *kharis*, it profiteth me nothing’[158](#).

# THE PHOENIX



A large bird that somewhat resembles an eagle stretches its wings amidst a group of other birds. The image of the large bird is striking because of the strangeness of its crooked, chubby head flanked by two fin-like pointed ears. The bird's hooked appendage (more of a nose than a beak), is flanked by two frontal brows, seemingly unfit for a bird, and the glaring stare of two hallucinatory pupils.

This unquestionably is a depiction of the marvellous Phoenix. Standing apart from the other birds, it connotes all meaning that alchemists have ascribed to it, aside from the symbolism of the Resurrection when it is perched on its pyre. And so it affirms, in addition to its pre-eminence amongst all birds, the importance of understanding the language used in the *mystical world*. The Phoenix, states Martin Ruland in his *Lexicon of Alchemy*, is the 'Quintessence of Fire, or the Illustrious Philosopher's Stone; Phoenix, quinta ignis essentia, vel lapis philosophicus celebratissimus.'

It is the Phoenix, this 'small world balanced in its own centre', according to Savinien de Cyrano Bergerac, which led the philosopher to the *Republic of Birds*. This profound Cabalist, author of *The Other World*, is worlds apart from the verbose, quarrelsome, amorous and resigned writer made popular through Edmond Rostand's comedy in verse! And so, who would not be surprised to learn that Cyrano the poet, contrary to all historical evidence, is an actual and homonymous person with so little Gascon in his blood as to have been born in Paris, in the old parish of Saint-Sauveur? This man, the real person, was at first entirely absorbed by his armament work for which his courage and bravery made him famous. He took a terrible full-body hit by an arquebuse at the Mouzon siege, and a blow to the throat at the Arras siege before renouncing this audacious career at the age of 21. He then embraced the pursuit of arts and the peaceful passion for study...

Was it really an accident that a beam detached itself from the roof rack at the exact moment when Cyrano Bergerac entered the house of the Duke of Arpajon, the Marquis de Severac? Knowing that this gentleman abandoned his unfortunate guest after the terrible head injury he sustained coming through the door, as Cyrano lamented, we cannot help but establish a

disturbing link between this sudden ignominy and his flight from the scene. Le Bret, the editor of *Cyrano Bergerac*, speaks in his preface of the pillaged trunk of his stricken friend and expresses his regret for the subsequent loss of an unpublished manuscript. This was one of two manuscripts in the trunk which were, without a doubt, the occult motivation behind the robbery.<sup>159</sup> Of these two pieces, one piece, *The States and Empires of the Sun* was recovered, albeit with long passages excised. It was nevertheless published in 1662. The other, *The History of the Spark*, was never retrieved and for Le Bret remained but a memory of the title which, in our opinion, is an evocation of *the fire and the spirit*.

In this era of gloom and unhappiness, with its trials and collective suffering, the only thing saving us from despair is the promise of a future of peace and justice. Like the immortal Phoenix rising from the ashes, we envisage the re-birth of a stable and prosperous society from a world which is slowly destroyed by relentless war.

Heralding the convulsions which would shake the foundations of civilisation, the meteor of 24 January 1938 comes to mind. Not long after sunset, we were moved by an inexpressible emotion as we witnessed the phenomenon from the small apartment we were staying in Deuil in the northern suburbs. From there, the windows of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor overlooked the roofs of the city and embraced the horizon. Was this perhaps one of the *signs* of which the Scriptures speak, this aurora borealis filling the nocturnal sky with an immense flaming fire? In this grandiose and apocalyptic vision, long green luminous fibres irradiated from the north and were hurled across the red canvas of the sky that seemed to mirror the martyred blood which humanity was about to spill. Thus it ensued, delineated against the charming hillside of Montmorency imbued with the pastoral memory of

Jean-Jacques and sharply contrasting the winter trees while we were unaware of the emerald shaded dismal and distressing dawn that awaited...

# THE TWO DOGS



Two dogs appear to be playing. One, which appears to be a greyhound, is crouched with its head raised and a collar around its neck; the other is very small and stands on its hind legs, trying to lick the muzzle of its gigantic companion.

The significant disparity between the two animals and their different breeds, as Bourré intended to have it, underlines the difficulty of uniting them. In



this way we are presented with an image of seemingly impossible accord between two contrary principles, *sulfur and mercury*, which are first and foremost resolute enemies. This way of veiling the age-old chemical difficulty as expressed by the antagonism between the *Corascene* or *Khorassan dog* and the *Armenian dog*<sup>160</sup> could not have aligned better to the allegory of the old authors. The latter, symbolising mercury and expressing volatility, has here been granted the tall stature of a particularly agile and quick species. The *fugitive servant* is mercury who, according to Rulandus and Philalethe, highlighted in this periphrasis the propensity of their passive subject matter to evaporate into vapour. In this light, it is necessary to contain this fugitive water and it is in recalling the well-known precept — *Fac fixum volatile* — that the dog has been provided with a collar.

The dog that represents the opposite principle, fixed and fiery, has been depicted smaller than the dog he tickles, as *sulfur* is in miniscule proportion compared to the mercurial mass which keeps it prisoner. The word *Khorassan*, from the Greek *Κόραξ*, *raven*, is indicative of the origin of this metallic spirit which is derived from *caput mortuum* also designated by alchemists with the term *raven's head*. Black and stinking, this may be regarded as the *faeces* of mercury and renders the unnumbered tarot card opening the deck of 22 figures philosophically enigmatic. Dressed in the traditional costume of a court jester, the alchemist's personification of *mercury* walks, breeches backwards and with bare-buttocks, towards a small dog.

Without a doubt, the subject matter of this cabalistic play on words would not have led to the gross error or malice of certain individuals were it not for certain authors of great authority who identified therein an evident

mystic meaning. The treaty of Pope John XXII, who left irrefutable proof of his alchemic knowledge, was written in this way in order to defer the puffers<sup>161</sup> away from the central enigma as opposed to his papal bull, *Spondent Partier*, which vilified them. This is evident in the passage of a remaining chapter in Latin, in the French translation of *l’Ars transmutatoria*: ‘*The powder of human excrement dried in the sun, then washed in water and that which is not dissolved and remains at the bottom of the vase, is a good elixir to teint lead into gold; Pulvis de stercore humano desiccatus ad solem et post modum lavatus in aqua, et quod non retrorsum est remanens in fundo vasis est Elixir bonum tingens Saturnum in solem.*’<sup>162</sup>

Such precise and explicit descriptions prompted the naïve scholar, eager to try his hand at the flask and the stove, to throw himself head-first into the abominations of messy experiments. In this respect, Morien states in his dialogue with King Calid, ‘What need is there for so much discussion, oh King, it is from you that this thing is drawn: you are the mine, it finds itself within you, and to tell you the sincere truth, we take and receive it from you?’<sup>163</sup>

The image comes from above and it was Hermes the first who seems to have created the misleading qualification, or as we call it, an insidious allusion: ‘Because the work is within you, and in such a way that on finding it within yourself, where it continuously remains, you always have part of it wherever you are, whether on land or sea.’<sup>164</sup> This is more or less what is revealed in the first *Distinction* in the *Allegories des Sages* of the *Livre de la Tourbe Latine*: ‘In the same way, by the God of the sky and earth, I swear that the stone I have described will always remain with you, through land and sea, and will not be separated from you in any way.’<sup>165</sup> One cannot fail

to pick up on the incongruous riddle which lies beneath this insinuating advice. It is reminiscent of the detractors of *Sacerdotal Art* who, in regards to the *universal spirit* of the alchemists' *spiritus mundi*, expressed themselves under the disguise of similitude: 'Soon, I will faithfully reveal to you the place where you will take our stone. Go, secretly and attentively, in complete silence: approach the world's end and you will hear thunder, you will feel the wind blow and see the hail and rain fall on the ground. That is what you are looking for: the end-point is enlightenment and fertile earth, at the heart of this is our excrement, which by nature's action of moving everything circularly, repays in food and assures the growth of our bodies. How admirable and salutary this is for the man who knows.'<sup>166</sup>

# THE CENTAUR



For the purposes of this section, we cannot be more explicit than the Canon Urseau, whose succinct words we quote: ‘A centaur, the wind in its mane, brandishes a club in its right-hand’. This fabled being, in which the man and horse are unified, takes its initiatic significance from the omniscient and mythological figure of Chiron. It is the same symbol of the hermetic cabal which is important not to conflate with the Hebrew *kabbale*. These stem

from distinctly different etymologies and must be spelt in their own proper way. In fact, the first word refers to the Greek *kaballès* meaning *beast of burden* while the latter comes from the Hebrew *kabbala* meaning *tradition*.

According to scientific etymological laws, the *cabal* inclines towards speculative resolution always as a harbinger of material realisation. This is why we may rightly infer that the *cabal* is to *clarity* what algebra is to arithmetic. Through the spiritual game of phonetics and semantics it forms a secret language that is detached from idioms in its exchange of vocabulary with ancient languages that takes place within narrow Greco-Latin parentage, particularly in French. Contrary to opinions expressed in schools and upheld with so much passion and talent by our most learned philologists, it is obvious that our dialect is not derived solely from Latin. The examples history gives us of the survival of mother tongues in long enslaved peoples expressly opposes the notion that the Gallic nation of nearly six million souls abandoned their own language at the moment of conquest in order to learn that of their Roman invaders. It is unthinkable that this tour de force was accomplished throughout the comparative unity of tribes subjugated by Imperial Rome. Just as easily, our finest dictionaries would like us to believe that a number of things did not exist for the Gauls or that, at the very least, they did not have the words to describe them.

This unwavering determination to extricate Latin etymology from the French lexicon that is the common denominator of all of our great lexicographers is exemplarily manifested in the Littré Dictionary. For Littré, all is well from the moment that Greek roots are excluded, at all cost, in favour of Latin. He does not hesitate, however, to invent desired vocabulary and calmly justifying it in a manner which is equally disconcerting: *fictitious, suspicious* and *hypothetical*. Let us consider this work which is so

well celebrated and open the first volume at random. Here is the substantive *age*, derived by the philologist doctor from a Latin base which he declares *non-conserved*: *Ætaticum*! As a matter of fact, this word does not appear in any glossary. Nor does *aviolus*, which we find eleven pages later with a noted origin of *aïeul* and the conciliatory note — non-Latin word! How can one be satisfied with such decisions and would it not have been easier to borrow from the Greek etymology of these two words? Therein we find, Aion, *age*, which according to Henri Estienne presents the meaning of *a very long time* — *longissimo tempore* — which is to say, *a long duration, of great age*; in the first case, pronouncing the ‘i’ as a ‘j’ we have *ajon* and, in the second case observing the common permutation of ‘v’ with ‘A’, the word *aiol* which is an exact reproduction of the old French word.

By placing a club in the hand of the centaur, the adept of Plessis wanted to express the relationship between the theoretical and practical and the dependence between one and the other. The alchemist would not be able to achieve anything in the laboratory which had not previously been conceived in accordance with the clarity of pure philosophical concepts — making sure not to fall into the blind empiricism of the *puffers*. Now, there is no one wiser or better able to ‘handle’ the club than the horseman<sup>167</sup> — ‘*the man of cabal*’ — to handle the club which Hercules, in accordance with mythological tradition, consecrated to the god Mercury. Like the rod of Aaron, this dry and knotted stick which was meant to deal blows took root and became a great tree. This is the symbol of dead metal which could cause water to spring forth and cleanse the sterile philosophical earth as well as the spear or sword of the knight (cavalier) and the threatening Sagittarian arrow. Plate 104 in the work of the *cavalier Cyprian Piccolpassi* depicts a tree laden with leaves and fruit which derives its extraordinary vitality from a dry rock. A banderol streaming in a circular arc above the

image bears three Latin words that go without further adumbration — as such adumbration would be beside the point from an alchemical perspective — but with an addition meant for the layman to emphasise the singularity of the composition: ‘Sic in sterili; *thus in sterility.*’<sup>168</sup>

The word club, *massue*, is an example of phonetic harmony that is the common source from which living languages derive their primitive and secret value. It evokes the idea of *combat*, like the Greek substantive μάχη, *makhe* that was transmitted via the two ancient French forms of *macue* and *machue*, in which the χ was either hard or a sibilant. Specifically, matter is produced as the result of a violent struggle, which in our opinion is the *key* to ‘metallic prisons’. This is no doubt why the idea of the *key*, stemming from the Greek root *kle*, phonetically lives on in the various translations of the term *massue*: in Latin, *clava*; in Spanish, *clava*; in Italian, *clàva*; in English, *club*; in German, *kolbe*, or by *klobe* in metathesis.

Moreover, we have no doubt that the admirably beautiful woman who Christian Rosencreutz drew on the basis of his profound meditation on the first day of his ‘chemical wedding’ is a reminder of the universality of our *cabal*: in her right hand she holds a golden trumpet bearing a name which the famous *Rosicrucian* did not reveal. In her left hand she has a large bundle of missives *written in every language.*<sup>169</sup>

# THE ANGUIPED AND THE SPINSTER



A man whose torso is connected to the body of a snake holds a young naked woman in an embrace. Her pregnant stomach is swollen. He holds her close while she is seated on his monstrous rump from which a giant vegetable leaf extends. This leaf for a large part covers his long cylindrical tail. Perched on the tail is a young chubby toddler who holds the thin end of the tail in his mouth. Defeated, the young woman is not afraid to submit to her



partner's audacious ardour; her arms are relaxed and right in front of her, a long distaff passes between her crossed legs.

Apart from the strangeness of this image, it surprises the practitioner of science by the secret object that contains such allegorical detail. These effectively apply to the third and final phase of the Great Work of which authors have spoken much more explicitly than would have been desirable if we are to believe their constant and unanimous consensus. By their own admission, it is in particular when their thoughts are most clearly expressed — that is to say, stripped of all figment and fiction which veils the frankness of truth — that these thoughts should be questioned the most. This is what the monk Roger Bacon, perhaps the greatest mind of all time, tells us — and not without humour: ‘o son, when I swear to tell you the truth, believe that it's a lie if you take it literally: when I speak to you of cabbage, understand lead.’<sup>170</sup> And likewise, Philalethes' regime offers beginners the misleading appeal of a long and detailed description but its apparent sincerity could not come close to the spiritual play of Plessis' painted scenes.

In these scenes the serpent-tailed creature plays the main role of elementary fire. The control of this fire (according to the majority of authors) is the main difficulty in the final coction of the Great Work. Skillfully aligned to the natural rhythm of the seasons, it aspires towards the secret or divine fire which is represented by the giant leaf — green being the colour of the materialised spirit — and with it feeds the small chemical child here taking the form of a voracious human baby. Occupied with suckling on his powerful aliment, this precocious infant illuminates and completes the idea that the naked spinster whose stomach is swollen into a hemisphere is indeed pregnant. According to the instructions of the adepts, *the child was*

*to be returned into its mother's womb.* Her distaff brings to mind the lightness of the physical effort as well as the feminine delicacy that this operation involves.

At this point and following the example of Hercules, the *artist* is now delivered from the most difficult of labours. Like Hercules, he now throws off the lion skin and picks up the distaff from the feet of *Omphale*. Here tradition speaks of and recalls the abdomen where the philosophical hermaphrodite will come to perfection and will be reborn as a new and radiant superhuman...

At the very end of the last century, Huysmans visited the church of Saint-Etienne in Beauvais and there was surprised, with good reason, by the sight of an amazing life-size crucifix. With his down-to-earth way of observing, this instilled an impression with a number of concrete and fascinating details:

‘This being had waist length women’s hair, a wolf-life mask covering the upper part of her face, a soldier’s beard, a smooth throat, and the belly of a person several months’ pregnant.’<sup>171</sup>

Around two years later, Joris-Karl returned to Beauvais. His first priority was to go to Saint-Etienne and revisit Saint Wilgeforte. What he saw led to astonishment and indignation:

‘... she has changed, the mask has disappeared, her face is smooth and clean-shaven. Seen in this way, with her distended belly and smooth throat, she is repulsive.’<sup>172</sup>

Miraculously, the statue can still be found in the beautiful but defaced church. The novelist had never able to see it with a full beard and wearing the wolf-mask owing to the fact that in 1823 the latter had been removed and the other shorn. From this we may surmise that Huysmans was not too strict in his story-telling — a fact which was also brilliantly borne out at times in his personal life.[173](#)

It is no less true that, for us, *Wilgeforte* is the *strong virgin* and her androgynous simulacrum does not justify her name. Together, however, they approach her esoteric personality as discussed earlier in relation to the Plessis painting.

# THE ELEPHANT AND THE MONKEY



A monkey which is seated on the back of an elephant sits between two rounded bahut chests holding onto a rope wrapped around the trunk of his colossal mount.

In antiquity the elephant was a symbol of eternity and of sovereign power. In this sense, it is an expression of the marvellous faculties that the adept acquires from the Philosopher's Stone: the attainment of perfect health,

inexhaustible riches and innate wisdom. From this triple provision flows the unlimited prolongation of life and the immense power of wealth and knowledge combined. As we have already seen, Jean Bourré emphasised this transparent evocation of material means through two iron chests worthy of the most legendary treasures which the fortunate alchemist derives from his success. We rediscover Bourré under the guise he previously assumed which, notwithstanding his initially ungracious-seeming character, portrays him accurately as a *rigorous imitator of nature*.

It is difficult to determine in what way a man with such such riches could maintain complete peace of mind. The scruples of man's conscience are too easily appeased through the innate attraction which human nature, eternally envious, experiences towards gain and betterment. The doubt which arises from this tarnishes legitimate rewards gained through effort, undermining and threatening individual freedom. However, the marvellous development of the alchemist is of such an exalted nature that it would not suffer from this. He owes his inexhaustible fortune, which can be increased at will, to God alone. The tangible emanation of the *Philosopher's Stone* has, for that same reason, received the name *Gift of God*.<sup>174</sup> The alchemist earned his due, in accordance with the universal law, through carrying out essential virtuous acts — acts which concern primarily the soul but also the instrument and its ties; faith, courage, patience, chivalry. Until divine payment was received, the alchemist would never cause the slightest harm to those around him, would never take advantage of trust or weakness, nor base his success on lies or hypocrisy.

In the monastery of the Frères Mineurs of Cimiez (Alpes-Maritimes) and on the first floor of the cloisters, a series of medallions were painted above the cell doors at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These small scenes, flanked by

Italian or Latin mottoes, are the main curiosity of this Franciscan monastery where they remain an unsolved and perplexing mystery. For us their symbolic quality in relation to the hermetic science is evident. This interpretation would be as difficult to dispute as it would be to explain the content of these medallions in an entirely different manner. Amongst these images is found a *blooming rose* that is coupled with two Latin words, 'Innoxia floret', which surmises the point of the doctrine that is covered in this place. The rose is in fact a symbol of the *Philosopher's Stone*, also called *Rosa hermetica*, and nothing bears stronger witness to this argument than the short legend which describes the immaculate conception. The term *innoxia* in this respect is most topical in its connotation of *inoffensive, honest, innocent*:

She blossoms without harm

# THE UNICORN



A unicorn, lively and powerful, rests on its folded legs. This fantastic animal is a symbol of purity and it has a black horn in the centre of its forehead that measures two cubits in length in accordance with Pliny the Elder's description in his *Natural History*: 'Uno cornu nigro media fronte cubitorum duum ominente.'<sup>[175](#)</sup>

In the Middle Ages, this horn was attributed with the marvellous qualities of a universal antidote, and was preserved, either as a whole or in fragments, in the treasuries of cathedrals and abbeys. Are we really sure that this was an illusory epidermal formation — a fraudulent use of the narwhal's tooth? Herein lies an example of the physical application of this medieval philosophy that Jean Bourré was familiar with and which had provided him with the arcana to establish the perfect accord between faith, dogma and science. Saint Bonaventure, Minister General of the Franciscan Order, considered that earthly things are merely degrees of accession to Divinity and applied his theology to science: *Reductio artium ad theologiam*.

In accordance with the chemical process of the Great Work and in accordance with the tradition that a unicorn can only be captured by a virgin, the *Seraphic Doctor* chants in the very person of the Blessed Mary: '*Blessed is the Queen and the mother of the God of Israel, who, through you, visited her people, was redeemed, and raised the unicorn of your salutary chastity; Benedicta sit Domina et mater Dei Israel qui per te visitavit et fecit redemptionem plebis suae, et erexit unicorn salutaris castitatis tuae.*'<sup>176</sup>

If the unicorn, as its name suggests, is the *emerging light of mercury*,<sup>177</sup> it is the process through which alchemists *in frequent reiterations* collect and assemble this *igneous spirit* elevated from the essence of mercurial matter. In the complete commixture of the two principles, *spiritual* and *material*, the latter, symbolised by a cerf,<sup>178</sup> takes on the magnificent green colour of the former. This explains the allegorical role of the *forest* which is inextricably linked to hermetic fiction. We could not attribute any other possible meaning to the legend which accompanies the beautiful engraving



in the *Book of Lambsprinck*: in the foreground, a *cerf* and a *unicorn* stand side-by-side, in a clearing formed by a pond and surrounded by thick fronds:

‘Deinceps sine cura scitote  
In Sylva cervum et unicorn latere’[179](#)

In the same way, we encounter the esoteric words of Saint Thomas of Villanova, Chaplain to Charles V, in a sermon on the Holy Nativity: ‘*Love like the son of unicorns. What resembles the son of God more closely than the son of unicorns; Dilectus quasi filius unicornium. Quid filio Dei similis quam filius unicornium.*’[180](#)

All art springs from divine love in which heaven is united with earth through the chaste incest of *sulfur* and *mercury*. In our view, this does not exclude God but rather glorifies him through his most beautiful work. To bring us closer to this idea, let us consider a painting by Martin Schongauer which is preserved in a museum in Colmar. Under the aegis of the Eternal Father, the youthful and dreamy Virgin Mary holds in her right hand a long and twisted horn of a unicorn which delightfully twists to its ineffably light yoke. The scene is charming and, by way of the innocence and purity expressed by the lily, is evocative of the mytho-Christian allegory of the Great Work. If one were to perceive this as an image of *Annunciation*, one would at the very least have to agree that the image has a rather profane and equivocal character. In this light, it would be difficult to derive an exclusively religious meaning from this composition in which harmony and precision of detail offer strong evidence of hermetic inspiration. The crenelated parterre is evocative of an alchemic bastion and to the left of the seated Virgin shows a sheepskin and a pail filled to the brim with round

fruits. These indicate the price of the endeavour of which the fabled unicorn is the decisive milestone. Two short Latin invocations, taken from the Litany of Loreto, are included alongside a number of others with a much more edifying religious perspective. Each is illustrated in Gothic letters on a banner and they read as follows: 'Vellus Gedeonus, *Fleece of Gideon* and urna aurea, *golden urn.*' In this pail the reader will thus recognise the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides which were the object of Hercules' twelfth and final labour (Plate IX).



*Plate IX: Museum of Colmar — The Virgin and the Unicorn.*

# EPILOGUE

Having dealt with the last ceiling compartment in the guard's room, our work is complete. Have we done well, have we solved the double enigma at the heart of this matter which, separated by two centuries and very different circumstances, forms the basis that unites the humble vestige in Rome and the magnificent Angevin castle? The reader must determine for him or herself to which genre it belongs. Perhaps it will not be our alchemic interpretations that leave an impression but it should be noted that our work has been the result of the rigor of science and scholarly research. In keeping with the exigency of the subject, we have observed the proper language of the adepts without any personal vain desire to assume the pontifical and authoritative tone of the 'occult'. Had we not been concerned with philosophical humility, we would have been entitled to a certain authority on the issue of *matter* — which we have cracked open in both the literal and figurative sense of the word — and we might have elaborated a number of metaphorical problems which are viewed with suspicion and considered to be quixotic and unsolvable.

Being subject to the inflexible laws of mundane matter, man is unable to conceive eternal time and infinite space. It is impossible to explain the fire which burns without aliment at the centre of the earth, or the movement which makes the earth turn on itself and which translates eternally across space. These unfathomable mysteries imbue the mind with an imprecise conception of the supernatural and, as a result, a stronger belief in the Divine. Saint Paul speaks of this *fourth dimension as* belonging to a substrate buried deep within man in the same way that there is a flammable *sulfur* at the core of imperfect metals. This is what the apostle of the Gentiles called the *interior self* from which the term *caritas*<sup>181</sup> came and

regarding which the Vulgate was unable to express the powerful philosophical virtues that would reveal ‘with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth...’<sup>182</sup>

This *depth* is the very essence, reason and goal of existence. It is easy to encounter it in art if we closely examine a classical statue or even one from the most beautiful medieval period. How striking, for example, is the life-like impression that emanates from the Khmer statues in the Guimet museum, with their smooth, non-muscular forms off which merciless rays of light refract and reflect. How marvellously animated with a breath of life are these works of humble, unmarked suppleness — a suppleness which could never be contained within Michelangelo’s tormented marble?

In the manner of the alchemist, the sculptor must obediently follow nature, *building* with the aid of the *square* and *compass*; firmly rejecting ocular interpretation and, consequently, the erroneous perceptions of humanity. Perspective is the adversary of the sculptor in the same way as reflection is the obstacle of the painter. Both have nothing else to fear, if they are not aided by the *spirit*, except the danger of destroying before they have even begun to create.

An anonymous but extraordinary author illustrates this through a number of incisive reflections in ancient form rather than through chemical analysis. Vulgar distillation, in fact, is most opposed to the hermetic concept meaning that *the artist starts his work where nature leaves off*. ‘The alembic, with its serious and sober appearance, attracted a strong chemistry-based following. However, it cannot be relied upon: it’s an untrustworthy depositary and an usurer’. Entrust it with a perfectly healthy object, endowed with incontestable natural virtues and of intact form; it will return it to you as

dust or gas and claim to have given you back everything when it has in fact retained everything, minus its weight, which is meaningless because it sprang from a different root. And the scientific community sanctions this awful usury! Give it wine and it will return tannin, alcohol and water in equal weight. What is missing? The taste; the very thing that makes it wine, its essence. Just because you have extracted three things, dear chemists, you say: wine is made up of these three things. Do it again, or I will say to you myself: are these the three things which make up wine? You can undo what you have made yourself but you will never recover that which you have undone in nature. Substances only resist you in accordance with how strongly they are bound to each other, and you call all those which resist you *simple substances* — vanity!<sup>183</sup>

Indeed, vanity — because not only does it stray from the truth but the end result is often used for the greatest evil. This is why, up until the Renaissance, discoveries made through experimental scientific practice did not occur outside monastic dispensaries and secular laboratories. It is also why, in the same prudent spirit of secrecy, explicit language was excluded from books and scholarly discussions.

Roger Bacon suffered persecution and imprisonment because of the revelations in his *Letter Concerning the Marvellous Power of Art and Nature*. On reading this book, we were not surprised to come across specific descriptions made by this illustrious 13<sup>th</sup> century monk about important discoveries which would not come to fruition until long after his time. Everything is featured therein: steam-craft, scuba-diving, the suspension bridge, telescope, microscope, tank and plane. ‘*And it is certain, the ‘admirable doctor’ tells us, ‘that there is a flying instrument that I have never seen, nor have known any man to see, but I know very well the sage*

*who invented this work of art.*<sup>184</sup> He proceeds to paint a terrifying picture of the general application of this war machine and continues prophetically in his descriptions of aerial night-time bombings under which our civilisation currently crumbles: *'So that they may completely perish, in this way infinite terrors may be unleashed on every town and army, caused by or coming from a multitude of emergent stars with men assembled on them.'*<sup>185</sup> We cannot help but to think of the German 'robots' flying over our heads from the north-east when the erudite monk continues in the same horrifying manner: *'For sounds like thunder can be made in the air, of a greater horror than that created by nature ... and this is done in several ways, through which each town and army is destroyed in the manner of Gédéon the artist.'*<sup>186</sup>

Let us no longer be fooled by the absurd legend of the *darkness of the Middle Ages* as is disproved by the testimony of art and Gothic philosophy. These people were not necessarily living in ignorance; according to the proverb, the absence of history would in fact prove that they were profoundly happy.

**NIL NOVI SUB SOLE.**<sup>187</sup>

# Notes

[1](#) [Editor's note: the author here refers to the *École Centrale de Pyrotechnie Militaire* in Berry. The abbreviation 'T.M.' in this sentence probably refers to military training: (en)entraînement militaire.]

[2](#) When in your house black crows give birth to white doves, then will you be called wise.

[3](#) *Disquisitio chronologica de successione antiquissima episcoporum romanorum, inde a Petro usque ad Victorem ... Accedunt quatuor dissertationes, duae de constitutionibus apostolicis dictis, una de scriptis Dionysii Pseud-Areopagitoe et una de annis Agrippae junioris, Judaeorum regis. Auctore : Iohanne Philippo Baraterio ...* Ultrajecti, apud S. Neaulme, 1740. In-4°, XXII,314 p. with indices.

[4](#) *Dissertazioni epistolari di G. B. Visconti e Filippo Waquier de la Barthe sopra la statua del Discobolo scoperta nelle villa Palombra, e con le bizzarre iscrizioni della villa Palmobara* made by Francesco Cancellieri, in Rome in 1806. Press Antonio Fulgoni. Annotations by Francesco Cancellieri, pp.42–45.

[5](#) *L'Initiation, Revue philosophique des Hautes Etudes*, year 1895, n° 27, April-June, Paris, in-8° *Nota bene*: We indicate here, once and for all, that the reference of these two authors, understanding that the Italian text, cited in ours, is borrowed from the first.

[6](#) *Vide infra*, p. 23.

[7](#) The term 'Adept' is reserved exclusively for the alchemist who has achieved The Great Work and possesses its tangible and marvellous fruit. It is only by analogy that this term has been used to designate those who are initiated into the mysteries of a sect or the secrets of science and, by extension, applies to the partisan of a doctrine, system or idea: 'I, Philosopher/Adept, known by the pseudonym Philalethes', declares the famous alchemist, from the very first lines of his magisterial treatise: *Introitus apertus ad occlusum Regis Palatium, ex manuscripto perfetiori in linguam anglicanam, versus et impressus*. Londen, 1669. — *Open entrance to the Closed Palace of the King*, taken from the manuscript completed in English, written and published in London, 1669.

[8](#) Cf. *Supra*, p.7.

[9](#) Saint Luke 13:24.



[10](#) Cf. The periodical L'Initiation of June 1895.

[11](#) [Editor's note: The Latin translation here would be: 'Oh fools, slow of wit ...']

[12](#) Cf. *Supra*, p. 25.

He was part of the gentry of her court. According to Pierre-Louis Galletti, cited by Cancellieri, the name Maximilianus Palombara appeared in the palace of the

[13](#) Conservatives — *in palatio Conservatores* — on the marble tables of the *Fasti consulares capitolini*: Table II, column 1, first of April 1651; Table III, column IIII, first of January 1677.

[14](#) *Le Filet d'Ariadne, pour entrer avec seureté dans le Labirinthe de la Philosophie Hermetique*, Paris, Laurent D'Houry, 1695, p. 23.

[15](#) Gustasset, second ending for gustavisset.

[16](#) Hercules' nickname.

[17](#) *Amphitheatrum Eternoe Sapientioe*, Henrion Khunrath, Hanovioe, 1609, p. 193.

*Aureum Seculum redivivum*, in *Museo Hermetico*, Francofurti, 1625. — the author

[18](#) Henricus Madathanus is Adrian Mynsicht, (Lenglet-Dufresnoy, *Hist. de la Phil. herm.*, tome III, p. 41.).

[19](#) Translator's note : the word in French is 'matras' hence the link made to 'matris.'

[20](#) *Commentary* by Henri de Linthaut, sieur of Mont-Lion, on Christofle de Gamon's *Tresor des Tresors* Lyon, Claude Morillon, 1610 p. 60.

[21](#) *Le Grand Esclairissement de la Pierre Philosophale*, by N. Flamel, Paris, Louys Vendoemes, 1608.

[22](#) Cf. *supra*, p. 19.

[23](#) Henri de Linthaut. *L'Aurore*, mss. du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, n° 3020.

[24](#) The Latin term *crucibulum*, from which the word crucible [in French 'creuset'] is derived, and the old French *crucible*, *cruzol*, *croiset*, also meant *lucerna*, lamp, lantern, according to Ambrosius Calepinus. This erudite monk devoted his whole life to his *Dictionarium* which had such a great reputation among the wise — Calepinus recensui — that it became a true vade-mecum and that, by analogy, the name of 'calepin' [notebook] became generalized all the way to the simple pocket notebook. Although this

dictionary has been more or less abandoned nowadays, we highly appreciate its usefulness; in particular, for the understanding of medieval alchemical texts in Latin language.

[25](#) 'Jesus is in agony until the end of the world; he cannot sleep until this end of times' wrote Pascal in a kind of scapular which after his death was found sewn into his clothes and by which his secret quality as *Philosopher of Fire* was revealed. (*The mystery of Jesus*, a part attached to the *Pensées*).

[26](#) S. Matthew, 26:18.

[27](#) Pierre-Jean Fabre. *L' Abrégé des Secrets chymiques*. Paris, P. Billaine, 1636, p. 176.

[28](#) *Atalanta Fugiens hoc est Emblemata noua de Secretis Naturae chymica*. Oppenheim, 1618.

[29](#) The scientific truth is illustrated by the mythological allegory of the pregnancy of Leto and the birth of Diane on the island of Delos; what was hidden becomes manifest: Δηλος , delos, *visible, manifest, clear, obvious, certain*.

[30](#) [Translator's Note: the author points at the phonetic similarity between *mer*, sea and *mère*, mother]

[31](#) *Azoth ou le moyen de faire l'or caché des Philosophes*, Paris, 1659, p. 175.

[32](#) The *Cabal*, not to be confused with the Hebraic *Qabalah*, is no less discredited and debased. This is illustrated in a very comical way on p. 136 where the book reads: 'Note here the symbolism of the thigh [cuisse] of the hermetic cabal ... *The thigh is the way of Fire*.'

[33](#) We would like to make mention in this respect of the short yet admirable definition given by Saint Paul: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.' (Hebrews, 11:1)

[34](#) Fulcanelli. *Les Demeures philosophales*. Paris, Jean Schemit, 1930, p. 200.

[35](#) Robert Ambelain. *Dans l'ombre des cathédrales*. Editions Adyar, 1939, p. 27

[36](#) *Eighteen million florins in gold and seven million in accessories, sacred objects, precious stones and Church goldsmithery; pecuniam cusam fuisse octodecim millionum florenorum auri, valorem gemmarum ac vasorum Ecclesiarum sacraque suppellectilis septem millionum*. Pagi (P. Franciscus), *Breviarium historico-chronologico-criticum de*

*gestis Romanorum Pontificum*. Antverpia, J. Van der Hart, 1727, in lomo IV, p. 105. Vide primum: Joannes Villanius, Lib. II, ch. 20.

[37](#) *Dans Dans l'ombre des cathédrales*, op. cit., p. 189.

[38](#) Ibid., p. 140.

[39](#) [Editor's note: During Verlaine's public trial for the shooting in Brussels, his sonnet to Rimbaud, as included below, revealed the two men as lovers.]

[40](#) A tear in the paper, most likely as a result of being paperclipped to the files that are part of the unfortunate trial, eliminated the monosyllable opening this twelfth line.

[41](#) For more on this poem and the irregularity of its construction, cf. the opusculum by André Fontainas, *Verlaine-Rimbaud*, Librairie de France, 110 Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris, p. 59ff. An excellent study, apologetic but scrupulous.

[42](#) [Translator's note: the word *faucon*, French for falcon, is a homophone of *faux con*, literally 'fake cunt.']

[43](#) *Dans l'ombre des cathédrales*. Op. cit., p. 188 et 189.

[44](#) 'Sopra la Porta dell'ingresso nella Sala al Pian Terreno, entro un Disco sostenuto da due Geni alati.'

[45](#) *Altus. Mutus Liber, in quo tamen Philosophia hermetica, figuris hieroglyphicis depingitur*, Rupellae, 1671.

[46](#) *Le Projet du Plan de la Création du Monde, containing incredible curiosities*. Paris, published by the author, 1653, p. 215 to 268.

The versified enigma in ch. LVIII of *Gargantua*, 'found at the foundation of the Thelemite Abbey' relates to the chemical Great Work:

O he is to revere

[47](#) The one who will finally be able to persevere!

After having heard this long poem, without understanding its obscure meaning, brother Jean des Entommeures asks: 'What do you think is designated and meant by these enigmas, according to your understanding?' — 'What?', said Gargantua, 'The discourse upholds the divine truth.'

[48](#) Cf. supra p. 28, the epigraph on the threshold: 'The hidden work of the true Sage, is to

*open the earth so it produces salvation for the people.'*

[Translator's note: The King James version is slightly different: 'Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.']

[49](#) Taken from *La Sainte Bible*, in Latin and French, by Monsieur le Maistre de Saci. Paris, Guillaume Desprez et Jean Desessarlz, 1717.

[50](#) Cf. supra, p 13.

[51](#) Cf. supra, p 16.

Isn't she also the heroin of Mistral, this beautiful and noble creature, of whom only the name has survived from the legend. This enchanting name, made of perfume and light is *Mireille*. — *Sèmblo la bello Mirèio, mis amour!* Here again, the Greek etymology is revelatory of the chemical entity veiled under the ideal personification of femininity, at the same time smooth, humid, luminous and hot: *μύρον*, Myron, *liquid perfume, aromatic oil, essence; that pours drop by drop, drips, distils*.

*Ἥλιος*, Elios, *sun*.

[53](#) His name is found in the *Nouveau Larousse illustré*.

[54](#) *Les Douze Clefs de Philosophie*. Paris, Pierre Moët, 1660.

[55](#) *Diorismus* is the Latinised Greek term *Διορισμός*, *Diorismos*, which means *definition, explanation*.

[56](#) We have a second Latin treatise from him: *De Suflure Philosophorum Libellus*.

[57](#) *La Divine Magie*. Paris, in all bookshops, 1918, *passim*.

[58](#) *Cosmopolite ou Nouvelle Lumiere chimyque*. Paris, Jean d'Houry, 1660.

[59](#) *De occulta philosophia libri tres*. Coloniae, 1533.

[60](#) *Azoth*, p. 52, op. cit. This treatise is attributed with more verisimilitude to Senior Zadith. In effect, we do not find it in the German volume of Basile Valentin's works.

[61](#) *Dictionnaire de la Fable*. Paris, Le Normant, An XII, — 1803.

[62](#) *Gargantua*, IX. \**Gargantua and Pantagruel, Complete Five Books of the Lives, Heroic Deeds and Sayings of Gargantua and His Son Pantagruel*. Translated into English by Sir Thomas Urquart of Cromarty and Peter Antony Motteux.

[63](#) Mistral was one among many who saw ‘a horoscope in the destiny of surnames and the mystery of conference.’ *Mes origines. Mémoires et récits*. Paris, Plon-Nourrit et Cie, p. 7.

[64](#) [Editor’s note: This could be translated as, ‘The mind moves matter and affects the whole body.’]

[65](#) [Editor’s note: Italian tin-glazed pottery dating from the Renaissance period.]

[66](#) *Atalanta Fugiens*. Op. cit., axiome XV.

[67](#) *Les Troys Livres de l’ Art du Potier* du Cavalier Cyprian Piccolpassi. Paris, Librairie internationale, 1861, *Libvre second*, pp. 62 and 63.

[68](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fr. n° 19156, XIV<sup>th</sup> century.

[69](#) *I Tre libri dell’ Arte de Vasajo*, Pesaro, A. Nobili, 1879.

[70](#) This bird, devoted to Minerva by the ancients, is the emblem of wisdom, *since it sees in the dark*.

The first chapter of the memoirs of Frédéric Mistral is especially impregnated with hermetic esotericism that clearly underlies it. Frédéric Mistral there interestingly remarks: ‘It is to believe that even the flower of the golden lily, coat of arms of France and the Provence which glowed on the azure background, were only gladiolus flowers: ‘fleur de lis’ comes from ‘iris flower’ since the gladiolus is an iris and the azure of the blazon represents the water in which the gladiolus grows.’

[71](#) This confirms the aqueous and mercurial symbolism of the lily flower which is supported on the other hand from the cabal’s point of view by the initial and phonetic source. *Glai* and *glaiëul* do not stem from *gladius* or *gladiolus*, as our best lexicographers have unanimously decided upon. According to etymological fact as we have established ourselves, these two terms indisputably derive from the Greek γλαιός, glaios, Aeolic Greek for γλοιός, gloios, *viscous humour, mud*. We find in our old language the term *glaië* attached to the meaning of mud.

[72](#) *Les Noces chimiques de Christian Rosencreutz*, by Jean-Valentin Andreoe. Paris, Chacornac Frères, 1908.

[73](#) Grillot de Givry, *Le Grand Oeuvre*. Paris, Chacornac, 1907, p. 27.

- [74](#) Volume from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; *Du Menstruë universel*, folio 89. Bibliothèque nationale, ms. français N° 123351.
- [75](#) In the *Dialogue* of the ‘*Disciple de Sapience*’ and ‘*Sapience*’ (Bibliothèque nationale, ms. fr. 12439, folio 39, having belonged to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy) the first tells the second: ‘since you have perfectly shown me how I could live with you perdurably.’
- [76](#) Cf. supra, p. 9.
- [77](#) Year 28, Issues 3 and 6.
- [78](#) Extracts from the ‘Bibliothèque de l’ecole des chartes’, 1882–1885.
- [79](#) *Un serviteur et compère de Louis XI. Jean Bourré, seigneur du Plessis*. Paris, Alphonse Picard et fils: 1803.
- [80](#) Kindly authorised by the Canon Mr. G. Fabricius, director of l’Institution Urbaine Mongazon in Angers in his capacity as executor of the will of Father Charles Urseau, d. August 4, 1940, Canon of Angers Cathedral and member of l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.
- [81](#) Canon Charles Urseau, *Les Peintures du plafond de la Salle des Gardes au château du Plessis-Bourré*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit et Cie: 1909.
- [82](#) *Les Pierres de France*, Organe de la Societe pour le Respect et la Protection des Anciens Monuments Français.
- [83](#) *Les Pierres de France*, no. 3, p. 153.
- [84](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6603, fol. 85 recto and verso.
- [85](#) This is No. 823 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, entitled *Le pelegrinage de la vie humaine de l’âme de Jesus Christ*, by Guillaume de Digulleville , and is adorned with countless and prodigiously diverse lettrines, and a multitude of curious and beautiful miniatures which are, for the most part, obviously hermetic. In these the hidden object of the literary work is revealed; the first lines forming the incipit: ‘Une nuit avoie leu / Considerere et bien veu / Le tres bel rommans de la Rose / Je croy bien que ce fu la chose / Qui plus m’esmut a ce songier / Que cy apres vous vueil noncier.’ A second manuscript copy of the same work, also from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, no. 12662, has the different title in red: *Le Pelerinage du vieil moinne exposé sur les rommans de la Rose*.
- [86](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6602, fol. 8.

- [87](#) Thomas Basin, *Histoire des Règnes de Charles VII et de Louis XI*, édition J. Quicherat, Paris: 1855. *Historiarum de rebus a Ludovico XI...*, Liber primus, ch. VII, p. 23.
- [88](#) *L'Anjou et ses monuments*, Angers: 1840, Vol. II., p. 357.
- [89](#) *Recherches historiques sur l'Anjou et ses Monuments*, Saumur, 1821: Vol. I., p. 490.
- [90](#) Arnoldus Wion. Lignum Vitoe, Ornamentum, et Decus Ecclesioe, in quinque libros divisum, Veneliis, apud Georgium Angelerium, 11595, liber secundus, p. 307–311.
- [91](#) Cf. supra, p. 54.
- [92](#) Bibliothèque nationale, manuscript fr. 28vo, folio I verso.
- [93](#) There is no better refutation of the claim that the Seal of Solomon is a purely Israelite emblem than this. Add to this consideration the decoration of Frederic Mistral's final resting place in Maillane. There one will find a six-pointed star carved onto the keystone of the semi-circular bay which opens the hexagonal tomb.
- [94](#) Maine-et-Loire archives, Série G, 1328.
- [95](#) Commynes, *Mémoires*, edition Mlle Dupont, Paris, 1843, Book VI, ch. X, p. 253.
- [96](#) Victor Hugo, *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, XIX.
- [97](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6602, folio 37., original document.
- [98](#) Roberti Gauguini, *Rerum gallicarum annales*, ... Francofurti ad Moenum, A. Wechelus, 1577, Lib. undecimus, ch. 1., p. 282.
- [99](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6603, folio F.22, original document.
- [100](#) 'Ad quem (Dourré) cum illi, qui sibi donata putabant officia, pro suarum expeditione lilterarum, concurrerent, pro signeto unius litteroe interdum quinquaginla scuta, interdum centum et amplius, qutmlum poterat, exlorqnebat; nec minus pro minimo offldolo decem aureis exigebat, proeler honoraria quoque ministris, quos sub se assumpserat, etiam dari oporoobat, qui, foporum more famis rabie, proetereuntium, omnia quoque capere poterant, assumebat.' Op. cit., Lib. I, oh. VIII, p. 24.
- [101](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6602, folio 84, original document.
- [102](#) Roberti Gauguini, *Rerum gallicarum annales, cum Huberti Velleii supplemento, op. cit.*, Lib. X, ch. VIII, p. 254: 'et morum Ludovici conlempto.r'

- [103](#) *Histoire des Règnes de Charles VII et de Louis XI*, op. cit., tome I, p. LXXVI and LXXVII.
- [104](#) Ibid., *Historiae Ludovici*, lib. VII, ch. XVII, p. 196.
- [105](#) Letter from ‘Loys de Graville à Monsieur du Plessis de Gerrezay (Jarzé) mon amy’, Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 20429, folio 23. Gaignières copy.
- [106](#) Charles de Boigne et Clement Alexandre, *L’Ystoire aggregative des Annales et Chronicques d’Anjou...*, Angiers: 1529, folio 167.
- [107](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 6602, folio 1, original document.
- [108](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 20855, folio 106, original letter
- [109](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 20483, folio N1, original document
- [110](#) *Historiae Ludovici*, op. cit., p. 23.
- [111](#) The famous prophecy of Saint Malachy gave this pope his motto: *Bos pascens*. This image of continuous and obstinate work symbolizes the gradual harvesting of the fruit of one’s labour. Thus, these two words call to mind the consistency and knowledge of Callixtus III, as well as his love of science and determination to draw out its secrets.
- [112](#) Bibliothèque Nationale, manuscript fr. 20429, folio 3, 18<sup>th</sup> century copy.
- [113](#) *Notre Dame de Paris*, Book V, II.
- [114](#) Un serviteur et compère de Louis XI, op. cit., p. 341.
- [115](#) Op. cit., p. 341–344.
- [116](#) ‘These two same animals, confronting each other face-on, were sculpted on a gray marble basin which, before 1750, was visible at the far-end of Saint Hilaire le Grand Church in Poitiers’ (*Memoires de la Société des Antiquaires de l’Ouest*, 1942, Tome IX.)
- [117](#) *Histoire de la Philosophie Hérmétique*, Paris, Coustelier, 1742, Tome II.
- [118](#) Ibid., tome II, *Le véritable Philalèthe*, ch. III, § II: ‘mundi miraculum, virtutum superiorum in inferioribus systema’.
- [119](#) Book of Revelation, 21:1.
- [120](#) *Histoire de la Philosophie hermétique*, op. cit., *Introitus*, ch. IV, num. III.



- [121](#) The deriving adjective ‘artikos’ also signifies *northern* and *clean*.
- [122](#) Its coat, with two darker intersecting bands, forms the shape of a cross.
- [123](#) *Gloss.*, 5<sup>th</sup> festum asinorum.
- [124](#) Book VIII, Fable IV.
- [125](#) Jacobus Tollius, *Manductio ad coelum chemicum*, Amstelaedami, apud Janssonio-Waesbergios, 1688, p. 14.
- [126](#) *Lexicon Alchemiæ*.
- [127](#) *Hortulus Hermeticus, cum figuris, juxta unius cujusque Authoris opinionem*, Francofurtum, 1627, p. 41.
- [128](#) *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- [129](#) Qualified: *alipes, fugax, fugiens*, respectively by Lucrece, Ovid and Horace.
- [Translator’s note: French ‘*sel harmoniac*’, see pp. 185 and 457 of Antoine-Joseph Pernety’s *Dictionnaire Mytho-hermétique*, 1758.]
- Among these empiricists who took, against all common sense, human urine as a primary material, we count the two Germans, Kunckel, father and son. The first as a result discovered ammonia salt, that is to say ammonia hydrochloride, or our chemists’ ammonium chloride; the second discovered phosphorus. This was during the very time when Brandt, his compatriot and colleague in spagyrics, isolated phosphor from the same medium.
- [130](#)
- Despite the fact that Kunckel did not manage to find the Philosopher’s Stone, he is known for the infamous enthymeme regarding alkahest that went like this: ‘If the alkahest, said he, dissolves all bodies, it must dissolve the vessel which contains it.’ This seemingly logical and irrefutable statement is further proof that for this author our philosophy would forever remain closed. Kunckel had failed to see that the solvent by the adepts was not viewed as universal except in their microcosmic world or philosophical microcosm.
- [131](#) The *Turba Philosophorum*, which is called the code of truth in art, and in addition to the Latin version, in *Three Treatises on Natural Philosophy*, unpublished, Paris, by Jean Sara, 1618, p.16.
- [132](#) *The Great Book of Nature or the Philosophical and Hermetic Apocalypse*, New edition, Paris, 1910.

[133](#) *The Hieroglyphic Figures of Nicolas Flamel, in Three Treatises on Natural Philosophy*, not yet published, in Paris, at Guillaume Marette's, 1612.

[134](#) *Critical History of Nicolas Flamel and of Pernelle His Wife*, in Paris, at G. Desprez', 1761, pp. 108 and 109.

[135](#) *The Hieroglyphic Figures, op. cit.*, p. 92.

Ibid., p. 68.

[136](#) Jacobus Tollius in the same vein tells us that '*there are two chemical Dragons, one, winged, which is the mercury of the Philosophers, the other, wingless, which is sulfur; Dracones chemicis duo sunt, alatus, qui Philosophorum mercurius; et sine alis, qui sulfur.*' (*Fortuita. In quibus, præter critica nonnulla, tota fabularis*, Amstelædami, apud Janssonio-Wæsbergios, 1687, p. 252.)

[137](#) *Treatise on Eau de Vie or Theoretical and Practical Anatomy of Wine*, in three books, previously written by Ms. I. Brouaut M.D. In Paris, at Jacques de Senlecque's, at the Hotel de Bavières, near the door of Saint Marcel. 1646.

It is a little cartridge engraved on wood and in the shape of a French 'banner' shield, where a square covers nearly the entire field with the exception of a receiving margin: tapering, *musical scores*, the *number 7*, a *Pan flute*, and a *viola of love*; featured, running right, centre, and left, the motto: '*In ipsis, et ex ipsis omnia: All things are in these emblems and originate from them.*'

[138](#) Drawn in this square, from which it takes the lower side as a base, an equilateral triangle conserves two spaces containing, from top to bottom, at left, the *moon*, a *black-shelled turtle decorated with the symbol of Saturn*, and the *lunar (lunaria)*; at right, the *sun*, a *bunch of grapes*, and the *solar plant (helianthus annuus)*. In turn, this triangle encloses a circle which, touching its three sides, leaves the angles free; the top one, with the sign of *mercury*, the other two, each with a *palm leaf*. Inside the circle are inscribed the symbols of *lead*, *tin*, *iron* and *copper*, the first overcoming the other three. Crowning the whole as an exterior ornament, a phoenix stands on this shield with its wings outspread and at the heart of the blazing flames of its pyre.

[139](#) Double science: *Δπλόος*, *diploos*, *double*, and *μάθος*, *mathos*, *science*.

[140](#) *Treatise on Eau-de-Vie*, in fine, the printer to the reader, p. 7.

[141](#) The Adept nevertheless also advises: '*At times combine pleasure with labour.*'

[142](#) *Traité de l'Eau-de-Vie [Treatise on the Water of Life]*, *op. cit.*, in fine, p. 17.

The Marquis Maximilian Palombara, thirty-five years later would also speak of his vine, his wine and ‘the practices of Bacchus’. Cf. *supra*, p. 21.

[143](#) *Introitus*, *op. cit.*, ch. XXIII, num. I.

[144](#) *Ibid.*, XXIII, II.

[145](#) *Three Treatises on Natural Philosophy*, Paris, 1612, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[146](#) *Hermes Unveiled*, Chacornac, Paris, 1915, p. 23.

[147](#) [Translator’s note: *Gravida* is Latin for a pregnant woman, ‘large with a child’.]

[148](#) *Cosmopolite ou Nouvelle Lumiere de la Phisique Naturelle*, Paris: Pierre Billaine, 1629, p. 73.

[149](#) *Les Origines de l’Alchemie*, Paris, Georges Steinheil, 1885. Preface, p. x.

[150](#) Bibliotheque Nationale, *Melanges Colbert*, 103, folio 302.

[151](#) Op. cit., p. 4.

[152](#) *Thresor de Philosophie ou Original du Desir désiré de Nicolas Flamel*, Paris: Pierre Billiane, 1629, p. 113.

[153](#) Cf. supra, p. 54.

[154](#) *Hermès dévoilé*, op. cit., p. 11 and 12.

[155](#) Irène Hillel-Erlanger, *Voyages en Kaleidoscope*, Paris: Georges Crès et Cie, 1919, p. 9. First published in English by Inner Garden Press, 2015, as *Voyages in Kaleidoscope*.

[156](#) Ibid, p. 74.

[157](#) Op. cit., p. 58–60.

[158](#) 1 Corinthians 13:3.

[159](#) Cyrano Bergerac, *histoire comique, contenant Les Estats et Empires de la Lune*, Paris: Charles de Sercy, 1657.

[160](#) Cf. *Le Livre des Figures Hieroglyphiques*, Nicolas Flamel, op. cit., ch. III, p. 69.

[161](#) [Editor's note: the original French here is *souffleur*, which is a derisive reference at both the literal transmission of what is written by these individuals such as a prompter would do, and their hard labour in 'blowing' the fires in their laboratories. In English the depreciative name of 'puffer' is used in this context.]

[162](#) *L'Art transmutatoire*, Paris: Pierre Billaine, 1629, p. 17.

[163](#) *Entretien du Roy Calid et du Philosophe Morien*, in the Bibliothèque des Philosophes chymiques, Paris, 1678, second volume, 3<sup>rd</sup> treaty, p. 113.

[164](#) *Sept Traictez ou Chapitres dorez*, Hermès Trismégiste, ch. 1.

*Theatrum Chemicum*, Argentorati, 1660, volume 5, Allegorioe Sapientum, supra Librum  
[165](#) Turboe, Distinctio prima, p. 59: ‘Item per Diem coeli et terrae jurans testor, quod lapis a me  
descriptus, vobiscum est permanens, terraque marique et nullo modo a vobis separatur.’

*Theatrum Chemicum*, 1661, sixth volume, Epistola Haimonis, p. 499: ‘*Jam ostendam vobis  
fideliter locum ubi lapidem nostrum tolletis: Ile secretè et morosè cum magno silentio, et  
accedite postera mundi, et audietis tonitrum sonantem, sentietis ventum flantem, et videbitis  
166 grandinem, et pluviam in terram cadentem. Et haec est res quam desideratis, cujus finis est  
cultura et fertilitas terrae, in qua excrementum illud nostrum beneficio naturae circulariter  
omnia moventis redit in nutrimentum nostrum, et ex nutrimento incrementum corporis nostri.  
O quàm mirabile et sultare homini haec scienti.*’

[167](#) [Editor’s note: the original French here is *homme-cheval*.]

[168](#) *Les Troys Libures de l’Art du Potier*, op. cit.

[169](#) *Les Noces Chymiques de Christian Rosencreutz*, op cit., p. 3.

*Fili, quando juro tibi dicere verum, credas esse mendacium scilicet ad literam: et ideo quando  
170 tibi dico caules, intelligas plumbum.* (Sanioris medicinae magistri D. Rogeri Baconis Angli, *de  
Arte Chymioe scripta*, Frankfurt, 1603, ch. 8, p. 56).

[171](#) J.K. Huysmans. *De Tout*, Paris, P-V. Stock, 1902, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p. 274.

[172](#) Ibid, p. 275.

[173](#) Maurice Garçon, Huysmans inconnu, Albin Michel: s.d., p. 7–21.

This is the title, preceded by the superlative very precious, which Georges Aurach of  
[174](#) Strasbourg gave to his unpublished treaty. With twelve colour illustrations, ‘written and  
painted by his own hand, in the year of our Lord 1415.’

[175](#) Plinii Secundi, *Historiae Mundi*, libri triginta septem, Lugduni: 1548, ch. XXI, col. 194.

[176](#) *Cantique à la Vierge*.

*Αύχη*, Lyke, aube [dawn, cock] and *Ορνις*, Ornis, bird, specifically rooster; the bird evokes the  
[177](#) great volatility of mercury of which the rooster is a well-known symbol. Unicorn also used to  
be written lycorne.

[178](#) Cf. supra, p. 107.

[179](#) Lambspringii. *De Lapide Philosophico*, Frankfurt, 1677 in Museo hermetico, p. 347, plate 3.

[180](#) Sermon IV in Nativit. Domini.

[181](#) Cf. supra, p. 129.

[182](#) Ephesians 3:18.

[183](#) *Comment l'Esprit vient aux tables, par un homme qui n'a pas perdu l'esprit.* Paris, New Library, 1854. p. 150.

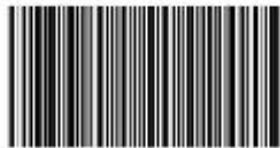
[184](#) Fratris Rogerii Bachonis anglici. De mirabili potestate artis et naturae, Libellus. Lutetiae Parisiorum, Apud Simonem Colinaeum, 1542, p. 42: 'Et certum est quod sit instrumentum volandi, quod non vidi, nec hominem qui vidisset cognovi, sed sapientem qui hoc artificium excogitavit explicite cognosco...'

[185](#) Ibid., p. 42: 'Sic omni civitati et exercitui possunt fieri terrores infiniti, ut vel propter multitudinem apparitionum stellarum, vel hominum super ipsos congregatorum dispereant...'

[186](#) Ibid., p. 44: 'Nam soni velut tonitruui, possunt fieri in aëre, immo maiori horrore, quam illa quae fuit per naturam... : et hoc fit multis modis, quibus omnis civitas et exercitus destruat ad modum artificis Gedeonis'

[187](#) [Translator's note: Nothing new under the sun.]





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