

The Angelic Stone in English Alchemy Dan Merkur

A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery, anonymously published in London in 1850, claimed that alchemists had never been so foolish as to attempt to make gold through chemical processes, but had always and only used coded language to discuss transformations that were spiritual.¹ In *Remarks on Alchemy and the Alchemists*, Ethan Allen Hitchcock brought a similar thesis to public attention in the United States in 1857.² The English occultist Arthur Edward Waite, who himself published a work of spiritual alchemy³ and was responsible for republishing *A Suggestive Inquiry* under the name of its author, Mary Anne Atwood, nevertheless insisted in his pioneering writings on the history of alchemy that the secrets of the Hellenistic, Muslim, and medieval Latin alchemists had been chemical rather than mystical.⁴ Waite attributed the origin of spiritual alchemy to “Henry Khunrath and the anonymous author of the treatise concerning Mary of Alexandria, with a few Rosicrucian philosophers” in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.⁵ Reviewing Waite’s *Secret Tradition in Alchemy*, the historian of chemistry Erik Holmyard wrote: “Mr. Waite has, in short, finally and irretrievably demolished the fantastic thesis set up by Mrs. Atwood and others, and has proved beyond refutation that early and medieval alchemy was almost entirely concerned with physics or physic.”⁶ John Read, another historian of chemistry, identified Paracelsus (1493-1541) as the originator of a form of alchemy that had both chemical and spiritual ingredients.⁷ Citing the example of Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), yet another historian of chemistry, F. Sherwood Taylor, noted that “alchemical terminology was used in purely mystical writings as early as the sixteenth century.”⁸ Whether historians defined “spiritual alchemy” in terms of a spiritual component that was additional to the chemical, or in terms of the later development of an exclusively spiritual concern, they reached a consensus in the mid-1920s that Western spiritual alchemy originated no earlier than the Renaissance.

The consensus was abandoned, however, after the analytic psychologist Carl G. Jung began publishing on alchemy in 1929. Jung acknowledged that some alchemists had engaged in chemical activities, but he maintained that “a parallel psychic process” had been the more important activity.⁹ The psychic process took the form of mystical visions. “While working on his chemical experiments the operator had certain psychic experiences which appeared to him as the particular behaviour of the chemical process.”¹⁰ “During the practical work certain events of an hallucinatory or visionary nature were perceived, which cannot be anything but projections of unconscious contents.”¹¹ In Jung’s view, the visions were induced while alchemists watched the alchemical processes in their apparatus. Once the visions commenced, the hallucinatory materials obliterated the field of sense perception. The alchemists no longer saw the chemical processes. The symbols that they presented in their writings were products exclusively of their visionary states. On Jung’s hypothesis, spiritual concerns were programmatically to be read into alchemical texts, no matter how exclusively chemical the texts might seem to be.

Because the symbolism of many alchemical texts makes them extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to understand, historians of both religion and chemistry were silent in face of the popularity of Jung’s hypothesis; and it was not until the rise of academic research on Western esotericism that normative historical methodologies began to be applied to alchemy once again. I have been remarking since 1990 that there is simply no evidence of Western spiritual alchemy in the history of religions prior to the Renaissance.¹² I find myself in agreement with a passing remark by Frances A. Yates, who suggested that the revival of Hermeticism in the Renaissance assumed an alchemical form in northern Europe. Yates wrote:

Hermes Trismegistus, the secret patron of Renaissance Neoplatonism, was associated with the ‘Egyptian’ science of alchemy, as the supposed author of alchemical texts.

The part played by alchemy in the Hermeticism of the Italian Renaissance is not yet clear, but in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in northern Europe alchemy may be said to have been a dominant form of the occultist tradition.¹³

Approaching the puzzle of spiritual alchemy from their own disciplinary perspective, the historians of alchemy and early chemistry Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman have similarly found themselves obliged to insist on the dearth of evidence to support conventional assumptions of the high antiquity of spiritual alchemy. Limiting their discussion to alchemists who worked with chemical substances in laboratory procedures--in contrast with my own interest additionally in spiritual writers who used alchemical imagery-- Principe and Newman have drawn attention to what they call a school of "supernatural alchemy" that existed in seventeenth-century England. "This school held that certain alchemical products had supernatural effects either upon the external world or upon the possessor."¹⁴ It is my present claim the English school can be traced back to the Elizabethan period and concerned itself with psychoactive substances.

An alchemical manuscript, entitled "The Epitome of the Treasure of all Welth," was written in 1562 by "Edwardus Generosus Anglicus Innominatus." The text attributed an alchemical teaching to St Dunstan.¹⁵ Historically, Dunstan was the abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Glastonbury in Somerset from 940 to 956. He was briefly driven into exile by Eadwig, king of England, only to be persuaded by Edgar, king of Mercia and Northumbria, to return to England in 957. Dunstan was successively bishop of Worcester (957) and London (959) and lastly archbishop of Canterbury from 960 until his death in 964. During his exile, he stayed for a time at the monastery of St Peter of Ghent. On returning to England he reorganized English monasticism on the continental model, which included teaching, writing, illuminating and craftwork in addition to prayer and meditation. Dunstan also oversaw extensive fundraising and constructions at Glastonbury.¹⁶

Because Dunstan lived two centuries prior to the first translations of alchemy from Arabic into Latin, his reputation as an alchemist lacked historical foundations and may instead be treated as symbolic. Reference to St Dunstan would have reminded anyone familiar with the legends of Glastonbury of several fabulous associations. Glastonbury abbey had been dissolved in 1539, but the site boasted legends that were congenial to the Church of England's rejection of the authority of Rome. An anonymous life of St Dunstan, written around 1000, had claimed that the first Roman missionaries to England found a church already in place at Glastonbury: "the first neophytes of the Catholic law found...an ancient church, built, it is said, by no human skill, but prepared by God for man's salvation, which afterwards the maker of the heavens himself by many stories of miracles and many mysteries of virtues showed that he himself had consecrated it to himself and to the holy Mary, mother of God."¹⁷ St Joseph of Arimathea, whom late twelfth and early thirteenth century romances credited with bringing the holy grail to Britain, was said, beginning a few decades later, to have come specifically to Glastonbury,¹⁸ which again made Glastonbury the oldest and most authoritative church in England. Beginning in the late fourteenth century, the legend of St Joseph's foundation of Glastonbury was cited in international church affairs as grounds for the precedence and independent position of the English church.¹⁹

Glastonbury was also connected with Arthurian romance in a second manner. Glastonbury had suffered a fire in 1184, and its reconstruction included the discovery of an ancient graveyard that had been buried by landfill, possibly in St Dunstan's era. The excavations enjoyed the patronage of Henry II, who wanted to diminish the importance of Canterbury by aggrandizing Glastonbury; and the project continued despite his death in 1189. The announcement in 1191 that two coffins contained the remains of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere is generally regarded today as a hoax that aimed both to discourage Celtic political hopes in Arthur's return and to raise funds for the abbey through the tourist trade.²⁰ The identification of Arthur's grave was soon taken up by romance writers. Geoffrey of Mon-

mouth, writing around 1136, had written that Arthur, severely wounded at the Battle of Camlan, was carried by boat to the paradise Isle of Avalon to be cured of his wounds.²¹ In *Vita Merlini*, written around 1150, Monmouth had called Avalon the *insula pomifera*, "Isle of Apples,"²² presumably deriving the name from Celtic *avallo*, "apple,"²³ and referring to the fruit of the tree of Eden. It was only after the ostensible exhumation of Arthur at Glastonbury that Gerald of Wales in *De instructione principum*, written about 1194, added that Avalon was Glastonbury.²⁴ The name Glastonbury presumably derived from the Welsh name for the location, *Ynyswitrin*, "Isle of Glass," which is earliest attested in a charter, no longer extant, that bore the date 601 and was quoted by William of Malmesbury in *Gesta regum Anglorum* in the early twelfth century.²⁵ In "The Spoils of the Otherworld," a Welsh poem of uncertain but pre-Norman date, in which Arthur led an expedition to the otherworld, in order to rescue a prisoner and carry off the otherworld's treasures, one of the epithets of *Annwn*, the underworld, was "the Glass Fort."²⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, the principle plunder was the appropriation of the motifs of the pagan Celtic otherworld for allegorical use in reference to the terrestrial paradise of Celtic Christianity.²⁷ Where the pagan Celtic otherworld was located underground or under lakes, the terrestrial paradises of Celtic Christianity were islands in the Irish Sea, where solitaries communed with God. Glastonbury's designation as *Ynyswitrin* even though it is not an island, but a tall conical hill in the middle of a flat plain, invoked the Christian version of the motif. The abbey had been British (Old Welsh) until the seventh century, when the English conquest of Somerset placed its leadership in English hands. The persistence of Celtic traditions were reflected in the translation of *Ynyswitrin* as Glastonbury and may have been reinforced, possibly by an Irish bishop in the early ninth century, and certainly by Irish pilgrims in the same period.²⁸

Because the presence of God might transform any location into a terrestrial paradise, Avalon would have been equivalent to *Ynyswitrin* from the time of its first mention by Geoffrey of Monmouth; but its identification with Glastonbury awaited the abbey's appropriation of Arthurian romance through *The High History of the Grail*, which was written around 1210. Around 1235, the Old French *La Mort Artu* repeated Monmouth's tale of Arthur being placed in Morgan la Fée's boat, but added that she brought him to Glastonbury for burial there in a chapel.²⁹ Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Mort D'Arthur*, first published in 1485, repeated the Old French account of Arthur's end, making it definitive in the English-speaking world. Due to the legends that surrounded Glastonbury, an Elizabethan alchemist's citation of the name of St Dunstan, its most famous abbot, alluded additionally to Avalon, the terrestrial paradise where the fruits of Eden were to be found.

"The Epitome of the Treasure of all Welth" maintained that St Dunstan had departed from the standard tripartite description of the philosophers' stone as animal, vegetable and mineral—which is to say, as the single substance or common matter of all things. St Dunstan had introduced the concept of a fourth and angelic stone that was "preservative to the state of mans body." It induced what we may recognize as ecstatic religious experiences: "by this stone shall mans body be kept from corrupcion also he shalbe [*sic*] endued with divine giftes & foreknowldge of things by dreams and revelations." Although the angelic stone was invisible, it could be smelled and tasted. "Therefore in St Dunstans worke itt is said that Solomon King David's sonne did call itt the foode of Angell, because a man may live a long time without any food having som taste of this stone."³⁰ In the Bible, it was manna that was called the bread or food of angels (Psalm 78:25). Here, in an early Elizabethan alchemical text, the angelic stone, that was the fourth part of the philosophers' stone, was identified with manna.

In *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), Elias Ashmole related the following story about Dr John Dee and Edward Kelly.

'Tis generally reported that Doctor Dee, and Sir Edward Kelly were so strangely fortunate, as to find a very large quantity of the *Elixir* in some part of the *Ruines of Glastenbury-Abbey*, which was so incredibly *Rich* in *vertue* (being one upon 272330) that they lost much in making *Projection*, by way of *Trialk*; before they found out the true *height* of the *Medicine*.

And no sooner were they *Masters* of this *Treasure*, then they resolved to *Travell* into *Forraigne Parts*, where falling into acquaintance with one *Albertus Lasky* a *Polonian Prince* (which came into *England* the beginning of *May, An. 1583*) on the 21. of *Sept.* following, They, their *Wives, Children, and Families*, went beyond *Sea* with the said *Prince*.

And whether they found it at *Glastenbury* (as is aforesaid) or howsoever else they came by it, 'tis certain they had it.³¹

Because Ashmole was a personal friend of Dee's son Arthur, it is possible that this coded narrative stemmed from Dee himself. The tale narrated the derivation of the alchemical elixir from the ruins of Glastonbury. It traced the holy grail of alchemy, the mysterious elixir, not to the Roman Catholic traditions of the Benedictine house that was dissolved in 1539, but to the older Celtic traditions of Ynyswitrin and Avalon, the terrestrial paradise where the fruits of Eden were to be found. Dee was himself of Welsh descent and a cousin of the royal Tudors, his ancestor having come up to London with Henry VII in 1485. Ashmole's tale dated Dee and Kelly's mastery of "Projection" shortly prior to their activities in the 1580s at the court of Rudolf II of Prague. However, Dee's acquisition of the elixir in the ruins of Glastonbury presumably occurred before he developed the paradigm of spiritual alchemy that he published in 1564 under the title *Monas Heiroglyphica*,³² making Dee's explorations of the terrestrial paradise precisely contemporary with Edwardus' legend of St Dunstan and the angelical stone.³³ I have been unable to discern spiritual concerns in these tracts, whose subtexts discussed metallic procedures for producing sulphuric acid and making a copper-lead alloy that counterfeited gold.»

Simon Forman was a London astrologer, magician, and alchemist of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He owned a text that discussed "mana or angells food" as a medicine that Moses had administered to those who repented of rejecting God's commandments.³⁴ In a text that Forman wrote, entitled "Of Appoticarie Druges," he credited Hermes with the animal or angelic stone; Moses, with the magical or prospective stone; Solomon, with the vegetable or growing stone; and Lull, Ripley, and others with the mineral stone.³⁵ Forman disclosed his understanding of the angelic stone in a transcription of the "Life of Adam and Eve," a text that was not alchemical. In his additions to the traditional story about Adam and Eve, Forman specified that when Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, "they did feed and eat angelically of divine food, wherin ther was noe corruption poison nore infection of mortallity nor eternall death. For they eat of all the trees of the garden that wer good, after their nature, and ther was noe tre evill nor infected with dedly poison, but the tree of good and evil. For Adam & Eve were made good and did knowe nothing but good."³⁶ Upon their expulsion from Eden, Adam said to Eve: "Our lorde god delyvered meate to beastes but to us he delivered meate of angells, the which he hath nowe deprived us of; and given us over to feed with the beastes of the filde."³⁷ Forman attributed Adam and Eve's consumption of the food of angels to the period of time when they were able to converse with God in Eden.

In the Prolegomena to *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), Elias Ashmole presented a coded discussion of psychoactives and spiritual alchemy. It is a substantial passage, but it repays examination in full.

I must professe I know enough to hold my Tongue, but not enough to Speake; and the no lesse Reall then Miraculous Fruits I have found in my diligent enquiry into these Arcana, lead me on to such degrees of Admiration, they command Silence, and force me to lose my Tongue. Yet, as one greatly affecting my Native Countrey, and the satisfaction of all

Ingenious Artists, I have published (for their use) these ensuing Collected Antiquities; and shall here say something more then they speak of.

He who shall have the happinesse to meet with S. Dunstans works--De Occulta Philosophia, (a Booke which E. G. A. I. made much use of, and which shall chiefly back what here I am about to say) may therein reade such Stories as will make him amaz'd to think what stupendious and immense things are to be performed by vertue of the Philosophers Mercury, of which a Taste onely and no more.

And first, of the Minerall Stone, the which is wrought up to the degree that hath the power of Transmuting any Imperfect Earthy Matter into its utmost degree of Perfection; that is, to convert the basest of Metals into perfect Gold and Silver; Flints into all manner of Precious Stones; [as Rubies, Saphirs, Emeralds, and Diamonds, etc.] and many more Experiments of the like nature. But as this is but a part, so it is the least share of that Blessing which may be acquired by the Philosophers Materia, if the full vertue thereof were knowne. Gold I confesse is a delicious Object, a goodly Light, which we admire and gaze upon ut Pueri in Junonis avem; but, as to make Gold (saith an incomparable Authour) is the cheifest intent of the Alchemists, so was it scarce any intent of the ancient Philosophers, and the lowest use the Adepti made of this Materia.

For they being lovers of Wisdome more than Worldly Wealth, drove at higher and more Excellent Operations: And certainly He to whom the whole Course of Nature lyes open, rejoyceth not so much that he can made Gold and Silver, or the Divells to become Subject to him, as that he sees the Heavens open, the Angells of God Ascending and Descending, and that his own Name is fairly written in the Book of life.³⁸

Ashmole's discussion of the mineral stone affirmed that the perfection of material things was possible. At the same time, he insisted that the production of gold, silver, and precious stones was the least of alchemists' aspirations. Regarding "more Excellent Operations," Ashmole asserted that a person for whom "the whole course of nature lies open" has less interest in the magical command of devils, than in mystical visions of heavenly angels ascending and descending.

Having introduced the topic of alchemical operations that involved demons and angels, Ashmole went on to discuss psychoactive substances.

Next, to come to the Vegetable, Magical, and Angelicall Stones; the which have in them no part of the Minerall Stone (Quatenus a Stone, Fermented with Metalline and Earthy Nature) for they are marvelously Subtile, and each of them differing in Operation and Nature, because Fitted and Fermented for several Effects and Purposes, Doubtlesse Adam (with the Fathers before the flood and since) Abraham, Moses, and Solomon, wrought many Wonders by them, yet the utmost of their Vertues they never fully understood; nor indeed any but GOD the Maker of All things in Heaven and Earth, blessed for evermore.

For, by the Vegitable may be perfectly known the Nature of Man, Beasts, Foules, Fishes, together with all kinds of Trees, Plants, Flowers, etc. and how to produce and make them Grow, Flourish & beare Fruit; how to encrease them in Colour and Smell, and when and where we please, and all this not onely at an instant, Experimenti gratia, but Daily, Monethly, Yearly, at any Time, at any Season; yea, in the depth of Winter, and therefore not unlike, but the Walnut-Tree which anciently grew in Glastenbury Church-yard, and never put forth Leaves before S. Barnabies Day, yet then was fully loaded with them, as also the Hawthorne there, so greatly fam'd for shooting forth Leaves and Flowers at Christmas, together with the Oake in New-Forrest in Hampshire that bore greene Leaves at the same Season; may be some Experiments made of the Vegitable Stone.³⁹

Ashmole indicated that differing from the mineral stone, and so from metallic alchemy as a whole, are three further stones: vegetable, magical, and angelic. Because he had

already contrasted magical conjuring with touring heaven among the angels, he had already introduced the topics of the magical and angelic stones. The vegetable stone, by contrast, was introduced here for the first time. Ashmole may have been indicating that the magical and angelic stones were both vegetables. He affirmed that the stones differed in their operations and natures. The attribution of the stones to Adam possibly indicated their equivalence with the two trees of Eden. If so, the further references to Abraham, Moses, and Solomon would have served to indicate that use of the stones was permitted. Although their association with Adam might encourage uncertainty, they had the endorsements also of Abraham, Moses, and Solomon. In stating that the vegetable stone accomplished miracles that included several fabulous growths of vegetation in the dead of winter, Ashmole was indicating that what he was calling the vegetable stone had been discussed in legends that used death and resurrection motifs in connection with trees.

Continuing to discuss the vegetable stone, Ashmole explained that it has two aspects. The duality implicitly corresponded to, and continued the encoded discussion of, the difference between the magical and angelical stones.

Besides the Masculine part of it which is wrought up to a Solar Quality, and through its exceeding Heat will burne up and destroy any Creature, Plant, etc. That which is Lunar & Feminine (if immediately applyed) will mitigate it with its extreme Cold: and in like manner the Lunar Quality benums and congeals any Animall, etc. unlesse it be perfectly helped and resolved by that of the Sun; For though they both are made out of one Natural Substance, yet in working they have contrary Qualities; neverthelesse there is such a naturall Assistance between them, that what the one cannot doe, the other both can, and will perform.

Nor are their inward Vertues more than their outward Beauties; for the Solar part is of so resplendent, transparent Lustre, that the Eye of Man is scarce able to indure it; and if the Lunar part be expos'd abroad in a dark Night, Birds will repaire to (and circulate about) it, as a Fly round a Candle, and submit themselves to the Captivity of the Hand: And this invites mee to believe, that the Stone which the ancient Hermet (being then 140 Years old) tooke out of the Wall in his cell, and shewed Cornelius Gallus, Ann. 1602, was of the Nature of this Vegitable Stone: For, (upon the opening his Golden Box wherein it was inclosed) it dilated itse Beames all over the Roome, and that with so great Splendor, that it overcame the Light that was kindled therein; Besides the Hermet refused to project it upon Metall (as being unworthy of it) but made his Experiment upon Veronica and Rue.⁴⁰

Ashmole distinguished a masculine, solar, and burning hot aspect of the vegetable stone, from a feminine, lunar, and extremely cold aspect. Because the solar part had a resplendent, transparent luster, whereas the lunar part was associated with darkness, it was presumably the solar part that was associated with the light emitted by the golden box. These motifs connected with visual experiences of light were implicitly to be associated with the visions of angels ascending and descending that Ashmole had mentioned earlier. It is an intriguing question whether the references to veronica and rue were meant to be symbolic or literal. Syrian rue contains a potent psychoactive.

Having introduced the idea of masculine and feminine aspects of the vegetable stone, Ashmole continued by contrasting the magical and angelic stones. Implicitly, the first aspect mentioned, the masculine, was to be equated with the first of the stones, the magical.

By the Magicall or Prospective Stone it is possible to discover any Person in what part of the World soever, although never so secretly concealed or hid; in Chambers, Closets, or Cavernes of the earth: For there it makes a strict Inquisition. In a Word, it fairely presents to your view even the whole World, wherein to behold, heare, or see your Desire. Nay more, It enables Man to understand the Language of the Creatures, as the Chirping of Birds, Lowing of Beasts, etc. To Convey a Spirit into an Image, which by observing the Influence

of Heavenly Bodies, shall become a true Oracle: And yet this as E. A. assures you, is not any wayes Necromanticall, or Devilish; but easy, wonderous easy, Naturall and Honest.⁴¹

The magical stone's capacity to present "to your view even the whole World" indicated its psychoactivity. Ashmole made no reference, however, to tasting, eating, or drinking it. The magical stone was psychoactive; but there is no evidence that it was edible. It may conceivably have been a drug, it may instead have been a crystal or gem stone that was used for scrying. A "transparent stone or crystal," allegedly used by Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly, was given by Arthur Dee to Nicholas Culpeper and purchased from Culpeper's widow by the astrologer William Lilly. Ashmole joined Lilly in experiments at conjuring; they succeeded in summoning "a female devil lewd and monstrous."⁴² Staring at a crystal in order to induce a vision had earlier been recommended by Paracelsus⁴³ and employed by Dee and Kelly in spirit conjuring.⁴⁴ The metaphysical poet John Donne called such a crystal a "specular stone/ Through which all things within without were shown."⁴⁵

Ashmole's reference to conveying a spirit into an image referred to a magical operation that had been discussed in a text of late antique Hermetism, the *Asclepius*. In this way, Ashmole resumed his discussion of commanding devils and identified the masculine, solar stone with the practice. Because he had previously told us that touring heaven among the angels was an alternative to conjuring, we may fill in the blank and associate the masculine, solar plant with visions of heavenly angels as well as with clairvoyance on earth.

Turning to the topic of the "Angelical Stone," Ashmole drew on Edwardus' treatise on St Dunstan⁴⁶ and characterized it too as psychoactive.

Lastly, as touching the Angelical Stone, it is so subtile, saith the aforesaid Author, that it can neither be seene, felt, or weighed; but Tasted only. The voyce of Man (which bears some proportion to these subtile properties,) comes short in comparison; Nay the Air it selfe is not so penetrable, and yet (Oh mysterious wonder!) A Stone, that will lodge in the Fire to Eternity without being prejudiced. It hath a Divine Power, Celestiall, and Invisible, above the rest; and endowes the possessor with Divine Gifts. It affords the Apparition of Angells, and gives a power of conversing with them, by Dreames and Revelations: nor dare any Evil Spirit approach the place where it lodgeth. Because it is a Quintessence wherein there is no corruptible Thing; and where the Elements are not corrupt, no Devill can stay or abide.

S. Dunstan calls it the Food of Angels, and by others it is tearmed The Heavenly Viaticum; the Tree of Life; and is undoubtedly (next under GOD) the true Aichochodon, or Giver of Years; for by it Mans Body is preserved from Corrupting, being thereby inabled to live a long time without Foode; nay 'tis made a question whether any Man can Dye that uses it, which I doe not so much admire, as to think why the Possessors of it should desire to live, that have those Manifestations of Glory and Eternity, presented unto their Fleshly Eyes; but rather desire to be Dissolved, and to enjoy the full Fruition, then live where they must be content with the bare Speculation.⁴⁷

Ashmole asserted that the angelical stone was edible. It could neither be seen, felt, nor weighed, but only tasted. It was equally explicitly psychoactive. It "affords the Apparition of Angells" and provided "a power of conversing with them, by Dreams and Revelations." The angelical stone was called "the Food of Angels"--a biblical designation of manna. It was incorruptible, in the sense that the spiritual gifts of the angelical stone retained their integrity as gifts against the fire. Because the sun is fiery, the fire against which the angelic stone was proof were presumably the magical beliefs that the solar, masculine, magical stone encouraged. Ashmole also remarked that tasting the angelical stone provided access to eternity, implicitly meaning the Eternal. His claim that its manifestations of glory were present to fleshly eyes indicated that these several spiritual gifts were experienced in the body.

His curious remark, "'tis made a question whether any Man can Dye that uses it, which I doe not so much admire, as to think why the Possessors of it should desire to live," required close analysis. The statement "any Man can Dye" alluded to experiences of mystical death. The clause, "I doe not so much admire," acknowledged the unpleasantness of a mystical death. At the same time, his question "why the Possessors of it should desire to live," affirmed that he found mystical death desirable despite its unpleasantness. He considered mystical death a prelude to "Manifestations of Glory and Eternity," which could be "presented unto their Fleshly Eyes" in this life.

Ashmole briefly remarked that he so admired the angelical stone that he was content to use no other.

After Hermes had once obtained the Knowledge of this Stone, he gave over the use of all other Stones, and therein only delighted: Moses, and Solomon, (together with Hermes were the only three that) excelled in the Knowledge thereof, and who therewith wrought Wonders.⁴⁸

In the concluding paragraphs of this passage, Ashmole discussed the Red-stone. The trope was presumably intended as a challenge to his readers. To which of the four stones-- mineral, vegetable, magical, or angelical--did he refer?

That there is a Gift of Prophesie hid in the Red-stone, Racis will tell you; for thereby (saith he) Philosophers have foretold things to come: And Petrus Bonus avers, that they did Prophesie, not only Generally but Specially; having a Fore-knowledge of the Resurrection, Incarnation of Christ, day of Judgement, and that the World should be consumed with Fire: and this not otherwise, then from the Insight of their Operations.

In Briefe, by the true and various use of the Philosophers Prima materia (for therre are diversities of Gifts, but the same spirit) the perfection of Liberall Sciences are made known, the whole Wisdome of Nature may be grasped: And (Notwithstanding what has been said, I must further adde) There are yet hid greater things than these, for we have seen but few of his Workes.

Howbeit, there are but a few Stocks that are fitted to Inoculate the Grafts of this Science on: They are Mysteries Incommunicable to any but the Adepti, and those that have beene Devoted even from their Cradles to serve and waite at this Altar: And how rarely such have been heard of, may appear by Norton:

For few (saith he) or scarcely due

In fiteene kingdomes had our red stone.

And they perhaps were (with S. Paul) caught up into Paradice, and as he, heard unspeakeable Words, so they, wrought unoperable Workes; such as it is not lawfull for to utter.

Of such as these therefore will I glory, yet of my self I will not glory, but of mine Infirmities. And truly whether such were in the Body or out of the Body I cannot tell, GOD knoweth, doubtlesse they were not far from the Kingdome of GOD.⁴⁹

In the context of what Ashmole had written previously, we might assume that the color red alluded to the fire of the sun, so that Ashmole was introducing a new term for the magical stone, which he had earlier characterized as masculine and solar. In alchemy, however, red also alluded to the color of gold that signified the end of the metallic work. The symbolism dovetailed with the opposition of green and red, which signified unripe and ripened in apples, and led in alchemy to a contrast of green and red lions, signifying weak and strong acids at the beginning and end of the distillation (or "circulation") process. Because Ashmole had just told us that he was content with the angelical stone alone, so that his program ended with death and resurrection and did not go on to involve either conjuring or touring heaven, we are to understand his red-stone, the end of the work as he performed it, involved the lunar, angelical stone.

Ashmole associated the red-stone with verbal experiences: prophecies, wisdom, knowledge of mysteries, and words unspeakable because not lawful to utter. The notion that the red-stone was the stalk onto which other things were grafted referred possibly to the position of the angelical stone with respect to the magical stone that was its adjunct.

In a text entitled "Dialogue on the Converse with Angels Aided by the Philosophers' Stone," Robert Boyle (1627-1691) echoed Ashmole's language, stating that it was "possible or lawfull...by the help of a red powder which is but corporeall and even an inanimate thing to acquire communion with incorporeal spirits."⁵⁰ An anonymous alchemical text of the mid-seventeenth century referred to a single Philosophers' Stone whose "rare virtues" included both "the perfect knowledge of all Nature & of Heavenly wisdom by way of a mirror" and "Communication with good Spirits & Angels."⁵¹ With these phrasings, the biblical motif of manna gave way entirely to secular tropes about alchemical powders and stones.

These several references to a psychoactive substance, able to induce ecstatic religious experiences of various sorts, were limited to English alchemists of the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Knowledge of the biblical trope persisted, however, as late as the beginning of the occult revival of the nineteenth century, when the English occultist Francis Barrett asserted that "the true *aqua vita*" filled the alchemist with the grace of God and opened his spiritual and internal eye.

An adept, therefore, is one who not only studies to do God's will upon earth, in respect of his moral and religious duties; but who studies, and ardently prays to his benevolent Creator to bestow on him wisdom and knowledge from the fulness of his treasury; and he meditates, day and night, how he may attain the true *aqua vita*-how he may be filled with the grace of God; which, when he is made so happy, his spiritual and internal eye is open to a glorious prospect of mortal and immortal riches:-he wants not *food, raiment, joy, or any other thing*-he is filled with the celestial spiritual manna-he enjoys the marrow and fat things of the earth-he treads the wine-press, not of the *wrath*, but of the *mercy* of God--he *lives* to the glory of God, and *dies* saying "Holy, holy, holy Lord of Sabaoth! blessed is thy name, now and for evermore! Amen."⁵²

Barrett explicitly identified the alchemical elixir with "the celestial spiritual manna." His reference to the wrath of God may have pertained to an acute adverse reaction to psychoactive drug use. The death while pronouncing "Holy, holy, holy" almost certainly alluded to a drug-induced experience of mystical death.

Barrett provided further information about his elixir in a later passage.

Therefore, to be an adept, as we have before hinted, is to know thyself, fear God, and love thy neighbour as thyself; and by this thou shalt come to the fulfilment of thy desires, O, man; but by no other means under the scope of Heaven.

When thy soul shall be made drunk by the divine ambrosial nectar, then shall thy understanding be more clear than the noontide sun;--then, by thy strong and spiritualized intellectual eye, shalt thou see into the great treasury of Nature, and thou shalt praise God with thy whole heart;--then wilt thou see the folly of the world; and thou shalt unerringly accomplish thy desire, and shalt possess the true Philosophers' stone, to the profit of thy neighbour. I say, thou shalt visibly and sensibly, according to thy corporal faculties; not imaginary, not delusively, but real.⁵³

Here drinking "divine ambrosial nectar" was claimed to cause a kind of drunkenness that was characterized by a "strong and spiritualized intellectual eye."

To conclude: at least some English alchemical writers openly discussed psychoactive drugs that they associated with mystical deaths, verbal revelations, and prophecies. The earliest contributions on the topic derived their knowledge from St Dunstan and Glastonbury,

which referred esoterically to the Celtic Christian tradition of the terrestrial paradise. Various terms such as the angelical stone, red stone, red powder, philosopher's stone, elixir, and *aqua vita*, the fruit of paradise was regularly also called by its biblical designation, manna, the bread of angels.

For English Protestants, the alchemical tropes rescued the psychedelic sacrament from the Eucharistic theology of the Roman Catholic Church that had surrounded the holy grail in Arthurian romance. The move into alchemy relocated the mystery of manna within a non-denominational context, the "natural magic" of Renaissance esotericism.

Notes

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