



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
A U S T R A L I A

Light Broken Through the Prism of Life:

René Schwaller de Lubicz and the Hermetic Problem of Salt

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

The University of Queensland in December 2011

School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics

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None.

Acknowledgements

Research for this thesis was undertaken with the invaluable assistance of the Bibliotheque Nationale Strasbourg, the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica (Amsterdam), the Basel Universitätsbibliothek, the München Universitätsbibliothek, the Saint Moritz Dokumentationsbibliothek, and the Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship.

Thanks are due first and foremost to my immediate family for their undying support: My parents, Bob and Lyn Cheak; Natalie Rivière, Morgana Rivière-Cheak and Anna-Marie Cheak.

Secondly, a very special thanks must be given to the friends, mentors, co-conspirators and kindred spirits whose genuine interest in and support for my work played a crucial role: Conan Fitzpatrick, Alison Grenfell, Raenold Parkin, Timothy Johannesson, Rod Blackhirst, John Dotson, Robert Lawlor, Mick Neal, Leon D. Wild, Nikolas and Zeena Schreck, Michael and Kate Lujan, Sabrina Dalla Valle, Caroline Hème, Leon Marvell, Andrea Gallant, David Zuckerman, Zenobia Frost, Anya Smirnova, Jade Gillam, Trey Spruance, Kris Hendrickson-Testanier, Buster Virata, William Kiesel, Gwendolyn Toynton, Michael A. Putman, Mirco Mannucci, Dan Mellamphy, Kim Lai, Darren Anthony Win, Andrea Chaos, Paul Scarpari, Rik Danenberg, Jeannie Radcliffe, Ischel Bianco and anyone I've forgotten.

Finally, for a variety of different reasons, thanks are also due to: Richard Hutch, Hereward Tilton, Joscelyn Godwin, Wouter Hanegraaff, Melanie Öhlenbach, Michaela Boenke, Daniel Burnham, Denis Crozet, Tom Cheetham, Merril J. Fernando, Sonny Crockett, Martin Crotty, Rick Strelan, Jodie Caruana, Serena Bagley, Sara Nedderman, Janine Rivière, Dorothy Rivière, Serge Rivière, G. Huber, and Paulette from the Eze-sur-mer Post Office.

Keywords

rené schwaller de lubicz, alchemy, nondualism, salt, colour theory, ontological mutation.

Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)

220499 Religion and Religious Studies not elsewhere classified 50%

220299 History and Philosophy of Specific Fields not elsewhere classified 50%

Abstract

The life and work of the Alsatian hermeticist and Egyptosophist, René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887–1961) attests to the continued presence of a distinctly nondual current of alchemical precept and practice in which material transmutation and spiritual transmutation are not separate nor merely coincidental endeavours but two indispensably linked sides of the same coin. The link, for Schwaller, was perceived as a juncture of meta-physical and proto-physical forces, a process conceived in terms of an alchemical “salt” (a neutralisation reaction between an “acid” and a “base”). This thesis demonstrates that Lubiczian alchemy, by centring on the esoteric formation of all “bodies,” to include the hidden “nucleus” of continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality, speaks directly to the perception of alchemy as a nondual, operative-spiritual process.

Before examining Schwaller’s work proper, part one of this thesis deals with methodological and historiographical considerations at some length. I begin by detailing the “hermetic problem of salt” through cultural-historical, mythographical, chemical and alchemical lenses in order to introduce the phenomenon of salt as an “abstract concretion” resulting from polarised opposites (acid and base, fire and water, sun and sea, sulphur and mercury, etc.) The juncture of opposing principles perceived in the “hermetic problem” of salt anticipates the methodological discussion, which examines the dichotomy between history and phenomenology, along with the materialist and metaphysical sympathies of these methodologies. Form mirroring content, the method employed in this thesis seeks to establish a “neutralisation reaction” between such extremes, encompassing both empirical-historical and eidetic-phenomenological approaches. The guiding model for this synthesis is the Heraclitean *palintonos harmoniē* (counter-stretched harmony), in which inherently opposed tensions are viewed as integral rather than antithetical to the deeper vitality of the whole. Following from this, the broader argument of this thesis is based upon the perception that the modern academic caricature of alchemy as either operative (reducible to chemical explanations) or spiritual (reducible to psychological explanations) is in many respects a false dichotomy. In support of a more integrative premise, detailed examples are adduced from both eastern and western branches of alchemy (i) to argue for the revision of rigidly dualistic biases within the historiography of alchemy and (ii) to lend support to the adoption of a more nuanced critical apparatus that is able to come to terms with nondualistic currents within the plurality of alchemies. Upon these premises, the life and work of Schwaller de Lubicz is turned to as a modern exemplar of this nondual current in alchemy.

Part two of this thesis focuses on Schwaller de Lubicz’s life and work, his colour theory, and his alchemy. Through a detailed bio-bibliographical survey, the keys to Schwaller’s intellectual development are presented and situated within their relevant contexts. I examine his artistic, Theosophical, socio-political, initiatic, alchemical and Egyptological milieus. As a student of Matisse, Schwaller had a life-long interest in colour and light. For this reason, the colour phenomenon is presented as a guiding thread for the dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy in general and the “manipulation of salt” in particular. The colour theory is examined with reference to Newton’s *Opticks*,

Goethe's *Farbenlehre* and ultimately to the operative work on stained glass that Schwaller undertook with Jean-Julien Champagne (alias Fulcanelli).

The work on colour, metals and stained glass is for Schwaller a propaedeutic for understanding the process by which spirit (light, colour) transforms the bodies in which it is incarnated (matter, substance). Ultimately, the "hermetic problem of salt" is seen to centre directly upon the mineral register of an entity's consciousness (palingenetic memory); because this imperishable register of consciousness is also the determiner of an entity's form, salt is consequently regarded as the mechanism of evolution, resurrection and palingenesis. The deeper dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy thus concerns the role of this "fixed nucleus" in the formation of bodies, from mineral to human. In particular, I examine the principles of Schwaller's metallurgical alchemy in order to understand how the "spirit of metals" acts as a fiery metallic seed (sulphur) that "coagulates" a nutritive substance (mercury) into a bodily form (salt). This understanding is applied to the stained-glass work. I then look at his meta-biological alchemy, in which it is not the genetic seed but the palingenetic mineral salt that forms the determining principle in the biological entity's evolution. In essence, Schwaller's "hermetic problem of salt" is understood as the fulcrum not only of individual immortality, but also of the qualitative mutations (leaps) between kingdoms and species. More specifically, the kingdoms of nature are seen to emerge alchemically through 'qualitative exaltations' induced by the divine seed-ferment (sulphur) upon the primordial *materia* (mercury) giving rise to a neutral centre of gravity: the saline magnetic nucleus or 'styptic coagulating force', the spiritual locus of physical form.

In the final analysis, Schwaller's alchemy is quintessentially nondual in the sense that it encompasses both operative and spiritual processes. These are not separate but deeply interrelated realities. Through the idea of salt, Schwaller offers a holarchical explanation for the continuities between mineralogical, biological and spiritual bodies, and thus a theory for the material mechanism by which consciousness transforms phenomenal form. To approach this kind of alchemy as exclusively chemical or psychological is thus completely inadequate and reinforces the necessity for a nondual critical apparatus.

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Abbreviations

<i>Al-Kemi</i>	VANDENBROECK, ANDRÉ. <i>Al-Kemi : Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R.A. Schwaller de Lubicz</i> , Inner Traditions/Lindisfarne Press Uroboros Series v. 1. Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987.
<i>Aor</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, ISHA. <i>“Aor”: Sa vie—son oeuvre</i> . Paris: La Colombe, 1963.
<i>CAAG</i>	BERTHELOT, MARCELLIN and C. E. RUELLE. <i>Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs</i> . 3 vols. Paris: Georges Steinheil, 1888-1889.
<i>DGWE</i>	HANEGRAAFF, WOUTER J. ed. <i>Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism</i> , Leiden: Brill, 2005.
<i>DK</i>	DIELS, HERMANN and WALTHER KRANZ, <i>Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und deutsch</i> , 6. verb. Aufl. Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1951.
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> .
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> .
<i>KGA</i>	NIETZSCHE, F. W. <i>Werke : Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , ed. Colli and Montinari. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967.
<i>LÄ</i>	HELCK, WOLFGANG and EBERHARDT OTTO, eds. <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> . Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972.
<i>L'Œuvre au rouge</i>	DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, EMMANUEL. <i>Schwaller de Lubicz: L'Œuvre au rouge</i> , Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 2006.
<i>LSJ</i>	LIDDELL, HENRY GEORGE, ROBERT SCOTT, HENRY STUART JONES, RODERICK MCKENZIE, and ERIC ARTHUR BARBER. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Rev. and augm. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
<i>PGM</i>	BETZ, HANS DIETER, ed. <i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells</i> . 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
<i>PT</i>	FAULKNER, R. O. ed. <i>The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
<i>Quête alchimique</i>	DUFOUR-KOWALSKI, EMMANUEL. <i>La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956</i> . Milan: Arché, 2006.
<i>Roi</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, R. A. <i>Le Roi de la théocratie pharaonique</i> . Collection Homo Sapiens. Paris: Flammarion, 1956.
<i>Temple</i>	SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, R. A. <i>Le Temple de l'homme: Apet du Sud à Louxor</i> . 3 vols. Paris: Caractères, 1957 (Reprint Dervy, 1999, 2 vols).
<i>WÄS</i>	ERMAN, ADOLF and HERMANN GRAPOW, eds. <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache</i> . 7 Bänder. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971.
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache</i> .
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i> .

Preface

This thesis originally began as a much wider project whose aim was to examine the broad question of apotheosis as a process of ontological mutation. A dual emphasis was placed on the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of German *Kulturphilosoph* Jean Gebser and the hermetic philosophy of Alsatian *Ägyptosoph*, René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz. During the course of the project, the research and its methodology grew beyond the limits of a PhD thesis and, as a compromise, a decision was made to temporarily circumscribe the broader project by presenting the Schwaller and alchemy based material as a stand-alone thesis. What is presented here is thus a historical-biographical study of Schwaller de Lubicz focusing on his hermetic and alchemical thought. Aspects of the original, broader project have surfaced by way of numerous conference papers given between 2004 and 2010, some of which are now beginning to emerge in publications.

The title of this thesis is taken from a passage in Schwaller's 1926 work, *L'Appel du feu* (The Call of Fire): '*tu es lumière, mais lumière brisée à travers le prisme de la vie*' ('you are light, but light broken through the prism of life'). This serves not only as a metaphor for the biographical study of de Lubicz undertaken in this thesis, but also as a reference to the specific role of his *Farbenlehre* (colour theory) in his alchemical *œuvre*. The imperative to comprehend the living relationship between the invisible and the visible aspects of existence was, for Schwaller, most emblematically manifested in the phenomenon of light and colour. In regarding the colour phenomenon not only as a "body" or "act" of light (per Goethe), but as a crucial signature of the hermetic process that acts through all things, Schwaller conveys the nature of existence in terms of a juncture of metaphysical and physical forces. Like the interaction of light and darkness in Goethean theory, two opposed forces (light and darkness; sulphur and mercury; acid and base) interact and neutralise to constitute the phenomenal world (colour; cinnabar; salt).

Applique à ton travail les principes vrais et ton progrès sera ta récompense, non l'appréciation de se semblables. Lorsque le fruit de ton travail est mûr, renie-le, car c'est l'effort et la conscience acquise qui ont valeur réelle et non l'objet matérialisé. Applique l'acquise de ta conscience à l'ouvrage d'un nouveau but. N'est-ce pas qu'à travers tes incarnations tu ne cesses de faire—inconsciemment? Fais-le consciemment en cette vie, afin de progresser plus vite. Ainsi tu appliqueras dans son vrai sens le principe de la « révolution constante » .

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, *Verbe Nature* §58

PART I

THE HERMETIC PROBLEM OF SALT

I

INTRODUCTION

Every individual rises again in the very form which his Work (in the alchemical sense) has fixed in the secret (esoteric) depth of himself.¹

Shaikh Ahmad Ahsā'i

The enigma that lies at the very heart of this thesis crystallised around a remark made by the Alsatian alchemist and *Ägyptosoph*,² René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887-1961): '*The Hermetic problem of our particular moment is Salt*'.³ René Schwaller, who received the chivalric title 'de Lubicz' in 1919 from the Lithuanian poet and diplomat, Oskar Vladislas de Lubicz Miłosz, is in many respects the epitome of what Kocku von Stuckrad has called a 'multilayered religious identity'.⁴ From Alsace to Egypt, Schwaller's esoteric quest took him through a number of diverse roles: artist, social

1 Commentary on the *Hikma al-'arshiya*, 187, 227; Henry CORBIN, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 102-3.

2 Backformed from *Ägyptosophie* (*Ägypt*, Egypt + *sophos*, wisdom, 'wisdom of Egypt'), modeled after *Philosoph*, *Philosophie*; *Theosoph*, *Theosophie*, etc.; see Erik HORNUNG, *Das geheime Wissen der Ägypter und sein Einfluß auf das Abendland* (C. H. Beck, München, 1999; Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2003), 9: 'Bereits in der Antike wurde eine Meinung begründet, die das Land am Nil als Quelle aller Weisheit und als Hort hermetischen Wissens sieht. Damit begann eine Tradition, die bis heute reicht und die ich als *Ägyptosophie* bezeichnen möchte'.

3 André VANDENBROECK, *Al-Kemi: Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* (Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), 81 (emphasis mine): 'The Hermetic problem of our particular moment is Salt, but we have no good and complete texts from that point of view; we have good texts from the point of view of Sulphur and Mercury, but the shift in emphasis on the problem of Salt is recent, since around the turn of the century, and in direct relationship with post-Newtonian physics and the crisis in Darwinism'.

4 Kocku von STUCKRAD, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, London: Equinox, 2005), 7-8.

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revolutionary, chemical engineer, spagyric researcher, hermetic philosopher, neo-pythagorean mathematician, and Egyptologist. However, the stable form uniting these shifting facets is his vocation as *alchemist*. The central focus of Schwaller's alchemy, and thus the central point underlying the different aspects of his esoteric vision, is the alchemical concept of *salt*. This he conceived as a kind of Hegelian 'concrete universal' (*konkretes Allgemeine*): a cosmic juncture of abstraction and concretion, of the universal and the particular, of the metaphysical and the proto-physical.⁵

In the language of western alchemy, salt embodies the ligature between the primordial polarities, sulphur and mercury, mineral theophanies which, together with salt, represent the three formative metaphysical principles that create the phenomenal world.⁶ Just as sulphur and mercury react to form a salt (cinnabar; mercuric sulphide), so too, for Schwaller, do meta-physical and proto-physical forces react to form the concrete world of visible, physical reality. Whereas sulphur was traditionally seen to impart soul, and mercury spirit, salt imparted *but also embodied* the principle of fixedness and solidity. Salt was conceived as the bedrock of physical existence, both the immutable principle and corruptible "body" of any phenomenon. According to this schematic, salt is both the formative force and physical product, noumenon and phenomenon, straddling the realms of eternity and transience. The meaning of the hermetic problem of salt thus inheres in its role as *juncture* between metaphysical and physical realities. This, it is argued, cuts to the very core of the conception of matter in alchemy, irreversibly complicating the dualistic notions of "spiritual" versus "material" so central to empirical-historical dichotomisation. Comments de Lubicz:

with the notion of salt, we are reaching a point that represents the limit of rational and irrational, where metaphysics and physics meet; it is a moment that can only be described as transcendent, yet it must remain inseparable from the concrete. It is not something that can be explained. But it can be shown, yet there is no guarantee that even when shown, you will see. For actually, the entire universe and every detail of it is such a juncture of transcendence with concreteness. So why don't you see it right here and now?⁷

For Schwaller, the 'Hermetic problem of Salt' hinges upon a metaphysics of *perception*, and germane to this perception is the observation that the mineral kingdom

⁵ Cf. Glenn Alexander MAGEE, *The Hegel Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2010), 61-2.

⁶ While sulphur and mercury have an alchemical history extending into antiquity, the addition of salt—forming the *tria prima*—is usually attributed to Paracelsus (1493–1541 CE). The deeper roots of the concept, however, remain to be examined in the course of this thesis. On Paracelsus and the *tria prima*, see in particular Andrew WEEKS, *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541): Essential Theoretical Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 15-19, 29; Walter PAGEL, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: S. Karger, 1958), 101.

⁷ *Al-Kemi*, 182-3.

is a spiritual presence. The mineral kingdom, the most “material” of all phenomena, was for Schwaller the maternal, nourishing matrix of metallic life (the “womb” of metallogenesis), as well as the paternal foundation for biological life (the “skeleton” of biological genesis). As such, the most enduring part of the animate body—the incorruptible mineral ashes of the bones that endure the death of the entity to survive all putrefaction and combustion—were seen to contain the agent of all transmutations. These alkaline salts, mythically identified with the phoenix that rises from its ashes and the alchemical salamander that ‘lives in fire and feeds on fire’, were regarded as the key not only to individual immortality, but also to the qualitative mutations (leaps) between kingdoms and species.⁸

With unusual specificity, Schwaller held that the human femur contains an incorruptible nucleus upon which the most vital moments of human consciousness could be permanently “inscribed”. The fixed salt, ‘which compared to the chromosome is extremely fixed or even indestructible’,⁹ was seen by Schwaller as more permanent than DNA and accorded a key role in his esoteric theory of evolution (*genesis*). Contrary to the Darwinian theory (where only the characteristics of the *species* are able to be preserved through genetic transmission), Schwaller maintained that the salt located in the femur is the precise mechanism by which *individual* characteristics—the vital modes of consciousness—are able to be preserved and transmitted beyond the death of the individual. This salt was therefore central to the alchemical process of rebirth (*palingenesis*). Within the wider framework of Schwaller’s cosmology—in which material genesis is conceived as the visible index of the evolution of consciousness—the alchemical salt forms the “magnet” that draws primordial matter through the existential vehicles of the mineral, vegetable, animal and human kingdoms towards the *ultima materia* (or *telos*) of ‘spiritual concretion’. As such it formed the hidden link—the invisible bond in the chain of continuity—in the otherwise apparently discontinuous process in which the generation and corruption of evolving forms is situated.

8 On the alchemical salamander, cf. FULCANELLI, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales et l’interprétation ésotérique des symboles hermétiques du grand œuvre* (Paris: Société Nouvelle des Éditions Pauvert, 1979), 105: ‘la Salamandre « qui vit dans le feu et se nourrit du feu »’; ‘Ce lézard fabuleux ne désigne pas autre chose que le sel central, incombustible et fixe, qui garde sa nature jusque dans les cendres des métaux calcinés, et que les Anciens ont nommé *Semence métallique*. Dans la violence de l’action ignée, les portions ajustibles du corps se détruisent; seules les parties pures, inaltérables, résistent et, quoique très fixes, peuvent s’extraire par lixiviation’; Swowerd, trans., 81: ‘This fabulous lizard stands for nothing else but the incombustible and fixed central salt, which preserves its nature even in the ashes of the calcinated metals and which the ancients called *metallic seed*. The parts of the body which can be burnt are destroyed in the violence of the igneous process; only the pure, unalterable parts resist and, although they are very fixed, they can be extracted by percolation’.

9 René SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Le Temple de l’homme*, I, 66/I, 34: ‘Le sel fixe, qui est très fixe—ou même indestructible par rapport au chromosome’.

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As will be seen, salt for Schwaller acts as a centre of gravity, a point of densification which condenses primordial, unformed energy into solid materiality to form a “core” or “nucleus” that evokes, in proportionate reaction to the force of densification, a force of energetic expansion. These two “directions of force”—one inward and contractive; one outward and expansive—share a common centre, a nexus of centripetal and centrifugal activity. Simultaneously, these two forces constitute a unified whole that exists as a balance or neutralisation of the two energies. This bi-fold energy is reflected in all kingdoms in the dense inner and soft outer levels of all bodies: the nucleus versus electron cloud of the atom (mineral); the trunk or stem versus the leaves (vegetable); and the bones versus the organs and flesh (animal).¹⁰ The salt in the femur is thus the primordial link in the chain of being.

To the strictly positivist consciousness, this position may appear strange. However, it is suggested that the logic that operates at root of the motif—salt, thighbone, *palingenesis*—is not only consistent with an entire complex of ancient initiatory symbolism, but ultimately that through this, a deeper consciousness—with its own epistemology—is implicated in the esoteric perception of reality. In order to understand this on its own terms, rather than reduce it to the perspectives of positivist science, efforts to see beyond our own dualistic logic must be made.

It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate that what Corbin says of Jaldakī and Islamic alchemy—i.e. that alchemy is a hieratic art whose spiritual finality was no less than the creation of an immortal *corpus resurrectionis*—applies equally to the alchemy of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz and that, by understanding the esotericism of Schwaller in this sense, one may be granted an insight not only into some of the more profound currents of twentieth century alchemy and hermeticism, but, through an exposure to Schwaller de Lubicz’s *clavis hermeneutica*, one may in fact gain a deeper understanding of the defining characteristics of alchemy itself (or at the very least, those of a distinct current within the plurality of alchemistries in general).¹¹ In brief, the aims of alchemy, as integrally conceived by Jaldakī or de Lubicz, possess a fundamental theological directive and in a very specific sense form a hieratic *ars* or *technē* (art, science, technique); whether practised on sensible species or on the human soul, the aim of this *hieratikē technē* is to liberate the consciousness of an entity by rendering its body—its vehicle of expression—increasingly immortal. In a general sense, then, this thesis addresses itself to a series of definitional issues in the historiography of alchemy and hermeticism. Availing itself of an interdisciplinary critical apparatus, Schwaller de Lubicz is taken as an object of empirical-historical and philosophical study, but also as

¹⁰ As such, each kingdom, in its own way, reflects the essential mysterium of the phenomenon of the sun—i.e., a juncture of gravity and light in perfect equipoise. Moreover, the symbolic image of the sun used in hermetic and alchemical texts (a central point within a circle), perfectly encapsulates the phenomenon by representing it as centre and circumference.

¹¹ Henry CORBIN, ‘Le « Livre des sept Statues » d’Apollonios de Tyane, commenté par Jaldakī’, *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L’Herne, 1986), 71-3.

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a *guide* to understanding alchemy phenomenologically, i.e. from the perspective of a modern, practising, spiritual and laboratory alchemist.

In a general sense, the method employed in this thesis is itself a juncture of the more “dense” and the more “expansive” methodologies offered by the academy (e.g. empirical history and phenomenology); these are engaged in order to provide a “double” mode of access to the principle *underpinning* the alchemical *sal philosophorum*: the fixed yet elusive nexus in which abstraction and concretion cohere as an irrevocable unity. Schwaller provides a finite point of access to this principle, and through him one begins to understand how the alchemical salt is able to be conceived not only as the key to the dynamics of metallurgical and biological evolution, but also as the pivot of two “ways” within the physical aspect of the hermetic opus—*la voie humide* (the wet way) and *la voie sèche* (the dry way)—which in turn mirror the two paths of liberation in the *œuvre’s* spiritual aspect—*palingenesis* (metempsychosis) and resurrection (creation of a spiritual *corpus*). By studying the history and phenomenology of the alchemical salt in the work of Schwaller de Lubicz, this thesis ultimately seeks to consolidate a nondualistic approach to the conception of alchemy in which the physical, laboratory or operative aspect of the work was not merely a stage for psychological projection (à la Jung), nor a mystification or obfuscation of merely chemical techniques (à la Principe and Newman), but rather a process that engages deeply with the principles by which consciousness is incarnated in various bodies, from mineral to human (to include the ‘hidden harmony’ underpinning mutations between kingdoms).¹²

In a more concrete sense, this thesis seeks to provide biographical, philosophical and phenomenological modes of access to Schwaller’s life and work. In doing so, it seeks not merely to situate, contextualise and *explain*, but also to elucidate, interpret and *understand* the esoteric precepts and practices that inform de Lubicz’s alchemy. In presenting a circumscribed study of the alchemy of Schwaller de Lubicz, however, this study also makes a broader point. The simultaneously operative and spiritual nature of Lubiczian alchemy highlights an important but neglected current within western alchemy generally. This current, which I have termed “nondual”, only comes into proper focus once both eastern and western alchemical currents are taken into account.¹³ This requires a broader historiographic purview than is usually accorded to

12 On the ‘hidden harmony’, cf. fragment 54 of HERACLITUS (Hyppolytus, *Ref.* IX, 9, 5): ‘The unapparent connection [*harmonie*] is stronger than the apparent’; G. S. KIRK, J. E. RAVEN, and M. SCHOFIELD, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192.

13 In order to emphasise the idea that material and spiritual aspects of alchemy are not necessarily separate endeavours, I have termed this current of alchemy “nondual”. This term is employed to help establish a conceptual apparatus capable of emphasising the simultaneity of physical and metaphysical concerns. It should be emphasised that the purpose of offering such a nondualistic critical apparatus is not to engage in sweeping universalistic claims about western or eastern alchemies, but rather to offer a descriptive

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studies of alchemy by scholars of western esotericism. The broader, nondual current of alchemy, of which Lubiczian alchemy is a modern representative, may be seen to have its most explicit points of reference within the alchemical traditions of the east. It takes its obvious points of departure from Chinese, Indian and Tibetan alchemy, where operations on material bodies form a propaedeutic to the formation of a divine body. Here, the more operative aims (e.g. metallurgical transmutation, macrobiotics, iatrochemistry) are subsumed within the context of a deeper spiritual imperative: liberation in life (*jivanmukti*).¹⁴ While it would be a gross mistake to suggest that Lubiczian alchemy is identical with eastern alchemies (or that eastern alchemies themselves are essentially identical), the point that I wish to emphasise here is that both eastern alchemies and Lubiczian alchemy both necessitate a more integrative conceptual apparatus in which metallurgical, biological and spiritual process of transmutation can be regarded not as separate currents to be isolated, but as intimately related aspects of a nondualistic whole.

It must also be added that premises for a nondualistic alchemy are also equally, if less explicitly, present in western and middle eastern alchemical traditions. Schwaller's alchemy, I suggest, should be situated and understood within the broader contexts provided by these currents of alchemy. Hence, before approaching Schwaller's work proper, this thesis offers a detailed survey of both eastern and western alchemies; in doing so, it seeks to furnish sufficient evidence for alchemy as a nondual process.

The structure of this thesis will proceed as follows. First, the balance of this chapter will circumambulate the "problem" of salt from the perspectives of philology, mythography, chemistry, and alchemy in order to sufficiently crystallise the idea that salt is not merely a 'hermetic problem' but also a problem worthy of academic attention. The next two chapters comprising the first part of this thesis will be concerned with methodological issues in the study of religion and esotericism in general, and historiographical considerations in the study of alchemy in particular. Upon these bases, the second part of this thesis will then turn to the life and work of de Lubicz proper. The three substantial chapters of part two will focus on (i) a detailed biographical and bibliographical survey of Schwaller de Lubicz's life and work; (ii) an examination of his colour theory (along with its intellectual-historical foundations in Newton and Goethe's theories) as a symbolic, visual model for the dynamics of alchemical transmutation; and (iii) the dynamics of Lubiczian alchemy proper, focusing on Schwaller's precepts and practices within the domains of metallurgical,

vantage that is better positioned to perceive and articulate those cases in which the operative and spiritual aims are integrated within a greater conceptual unity.

- 14 Properly speaking, nondual or integral alchemies are, in fact, ultimately spiritual, but it is a spirituality that *encompasses* rather than denies the practical or operative aspects of alchemy. Just as the One in Neoplatonic metaphysics encompasses the many (but the many does not encompass the one), so too do the nondual or integral expressions of alchemy integrate the operative and experimental aspects of alchemy; the purely operative alchemies, however, do not necessarily encompass the spiritual alchemies.

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biological and spiritual transmutation, and how these are understood as three broad modalities within a nondual process of ontological mutation.

Thesis Statement

The life and work of the Alsatian hermeticist and Egyptosophist, René-Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887–1961) attests to the continued presence of a distinctly nondual current of alchemical precept and practice in which material transmutation and spiritual transmutation are not separate nor merely coincidental endeavours but two indispensably linked sides of the same coin. The link, for Schwaller, was perceived as a juncture of meta-physical and proto-physical forces, a process conceived in terms of an alchemical “salt” (a neutralisation reaction between an “acid” and a “base”). This thesis demonstrates that Lubiczian alchemy, by centring on the esoteric formation of all “bodies,” to include the hidden “nucleus” of continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality, speaks directly to the perception of alchemy as a nondual, operative-spiritual process.

Contribution and Significance

Apart from possessing an arguably profound *inherent* interest, a few remarks are necessary on why de Lubicz has been chosen as the focus of this study. Beyond the fact that Schwaller is often regarded as a “giant” in modern philosophical esotericism, and beyond the fact that the study of his work has been sorely neglected in the English academic literature on alchemy and esotericism, de Lubicz is especially pertinent as a focus for demonstrating the nondual premise of this thesis because he is one of the most recent and important representatives of this current in alchemy in the West. The relative historical proximity of Schwaller has the advantage of making him more comprehensible in so far as the shifts in culture and consciousness that separate our own era from those that precede it is not so pronounced; obviously, the further back one goes, especially with esoteric and alchemical figures, the more difficult it is to truly “understand” where a given writer is coming from, much less what they are actually saying. In regards to the idea of salt, it should be pointed out that Schwaller was deeply cognisant of contemporary quantum physical, chemical and biological theories (his official profession was chemical engineer); because of this, his insistence on an operational *and* spiritual alchemy becomes all the more revealing because he was not undertaking alchemy as a quantitative science, but as a *hieratikē technē*. By examining his work on salt, which he constantly compared to a nucleus, an especially deep insight is gained into just what it is that distinguishes operative spiritual alchemy from processes that can be reduced to quantitative science.

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Historically speaking, by presenting a contextualised study of a highly important but sorely neglected figure of twentieth century esotericism, the most immediate value of this thesis lies in bringing to light the life and work of a figure whose project is vital to the understanding of alchemy and many other currents of esotericism in twentieth century Europe. The first contribution of this thesis is thus to the biography and history of de Lubicz, and in so far as a detailed academic study of his life and work has yet to appear in English, our study is unique.¹⁵

In terms of sources, too, it should be noted that all the primary and, wherever possible, many of the secondary sources used in this thesis are drawn upon in their original languages; to aid the reader, however, copious, extended translations of many of the most pertinent of these primary and secondary texts have been offered by way of course. This is intended not only to give insight into the fascinating esoteric world of de Lubicz, but to make thereby many of the most important sources for the study of de Lubicz available to English readers for the first time.

In terms of the sociology of esotericism, Schwaller's connections to well-known figures such as Henri Matisse, Jean Cocteau and André Breton (among others) are touched upon; but more specifically to influential alchemists such as Fulcanelli (alias Jean-Julien Champagne) and other figures from the Parisian alchemical revival. This alchemical milieu and the influence it has had on a distinctly operative yet spiritual alchemy—and continues to have on contemporary alchemy and parachemistry¹⁶ into the twenty-first century (especially via figures such as Eugène Canseliet, Jean Dubois, Albert Riedel/Frater Albertus, and their many students), continues to make the figure of Schwaller de Lubicz a significant key to understanding the persistence of the phenomenon of alchemy in a supposed age of science.

In terms of intellectual history, the most important traditions that inform Schwaller's nondual concept of salt, his alchemical colour theory, and the dynamics of his hermetic physics are elaborated. Through this it is hoped that the nature of

15 Some short but insightful introductory studies of de Lubicz's life and work have appeared in the English translations of Schwaller's works. These include: Christopher BAMFORD, 'Introduction', *A Study of Numbers: A Guide to the Constant Creation of the Universe*, trans. Robert Lawlor (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1986), 9-19; Deborah LAWLOR, 'R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz and Nature Word', *Nature Word*, trans. Deborah Lawlor (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 1990), 47-68; By far the most extensive study of de Lubicz's thought in English so far is that of John Anthony WEST, *The Serpent in the Sky* (1979); Although not an academic study, West produces a cogently argued and thoroughly referenced work focusing on Schwaller's Egyptological ideas. West's aim is to revive de Lubicz's symbolist methodology and his book is distinctly embroiled in an extension of the same polemics that Schwaller himself was involved in throughout his Egyptological work. The details of this polemic are addressed in chapter four under the rubric: 'The War between Symbolists and Egyptologists'.

16 The prefix *para-* (from Greek *para-* 'beside, near, from, against, contrary to', cf. Sanskrit *para* 'beyond, ultimate') indicates a current of chemistry beyond or beside that of ordinary chemistry.

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Lubiczian alchemy, along with its connections to an admittedly bewildering complex of neopythagorean, Egyptosophical and hermetic philosophy, are clarified. From a methodological point of view, it is hoped that the present thesis has contributed to the conceptual apparatus in the historiography of alchemy by providing theoretical reference points that are able to come to terms with (i) alchemy as a contemporary *hieratikē technē*, (ii) the perception of reality as a *nondual process*, (iii) the centrality of salt as a metaphysical ‘corporifying’ principle, and (iv) the hidden continuity between metallurgical, biological and spiritual corporeality.

Finally, the philosophical significance of this thesis must be seen to lie in the phenomenological method of Schwaller de Lubicz himself, in whom one finds an epistemology and an ontology of great subtlety and sophistication; a philosophy to which mere academic historicism would not do justice unless it was able to come to terms with the deeper metaphysics of perception that underpins Schwaller de Lubicz’s entire *œuvre*. For this reason, this thesis also hopes to contribute an eidetic, empathic engagement with de Lubicz in order to come to a proper hermeneutic understanding (*Verstehen*) of his alchemical *Weltanschauung*.

Sources for the Study of de Lubicz

De Lubicz’s original writings are all in French, and appeared from the early 1910s through to the early 1960s (with some posthumous works surfacing intermittently after 1961). Save for the small text, *Les Nombres*, none of the works published by Schwaller before 1949 have appeared in English translation. In 2005, copies of de Lubicz’s principle untranslated texts were secured from the Bibliothèque Nationale Strasbourg, the Basel Universitätsbibliothek, and the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica in Amsterdam. Since then, study of de Lubicz’s collected *œuvre* has been undertaken by the present researcher, to include translation of significant portions of this material. In 2006, Dufour-Kowalski released his two editions of selections from de Lubicz’s writings with important critical apparatus; the same year, two volumes of unpublished notes were released with no critical apparatus. This new material significantly increased the primary sources available to the researcher. The chief primary and secondary sources for the study of de Lubicz are detailed in the bibliography, and contextualised in chapter four.

The first source for the biography of Schwaller is that of his wife: Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, “Aor”: *R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz—sa vie, son œuvre*.¹⁷ Isha’s biography appeared shortly after her husband’s death (December 7, 1961). Brief surveys of Schwaller’s life and/or work are contained in Pierre Mariel, *Dictionnaire des sciences occultes en occident*,¹⁸ and more recently, Jean-Pierre Laurant’s entry, ‘Schwaller de Lubicz’, in the

17 Henceforth *Aor* (Paris: La Colombe, 1963).

18 Paris: Culture Art Loisir, 1971, 392-396.

Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism.¹⁹ Useful introductory materials have also been furnished for the English translations of Schwaller's works, in particular: *Nature Word*, *Numbers*, and *The Temple in Man*. Recently, Erik Sablé's *La vie et l'œuvre de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz* has provided an attempt to situate Schwaller's life and work in terms of his consistent emphasis on the esoteric laws of genesis, which are discernible from his earliest writings to his last.²⁰ However, the best critical apparatus to date has been provided in 2006 by Emmanuel Dufour-Kowalski's two compilations of Schwaller's material: *Schwaller de Lubicz: L'Œuvre au rouge* and *La Quête alchimique de R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz: Conférences 1913-1956*.²¹ Dufour-Kowalski avails himself of the significant documentary evidence preserved in the Ta Meri Archives, Schwaller's *Nachlass*. This body of material seems to have passed to Dufour-Kowalski's care after previously being tended by Olivier Robichon and Thérèse Collet.

A particularly important source for this study is André VandenBroeck's memoir, *Al-Kemi: Hermetic, Occult, Political, and Private Aspects of R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz*,²² in which the author describes eighteen months he spent in more or less daily contact with Schwaller in 1959–1960 (shortly before Schwaller's death). Herein, VandenBroeck recounts their fascinating philosophical dialogues in great detail, providing much important information; he also makes some genuinely startling claims (most notably, Schwaller's crucial connection with the work of Fulcanelli). In many respects, part of the task of this thesis has been to pursue in more detail, with scholarly rigour, many of the points that VandenBroeck broaches from the point of view of a personal memoir. Especially germane to this thesis are his discussions of Schwaller's hermetic philosophy, his relationship with Fulcanelli, his alchemical colour theory, and the centrality of the fixed salt to Schwaller's entire *œuvre*.

With respect to questions of source criticism, it is important to mention that VandenBroeck's account presents highly detailed, verbatim accounts of their complex philosophical dialogues. Although he made notes at the time, which he later fleshed out, the feat of memory required for the memoir is formidable. On this, VandenBroeck himself remarks: 'I have a painter's memory for moments and a musician's memory for tone (rather than a storyteller's for duration), and although twenty-five years have passed and it is difficult to define the complexity of my first reaction, I do know exactly what was said and in what spirit'.²³ The research presented in this thesis corroborates the authenticity of VandenBroeck's account on many points of detail, and for this reason it is to be regarded as a highly reliable source vital to the study of de Lubicz's life and work.

19 Ed. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1045–6.

20 Paris: Dervy, 2003.

21 Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2006 (henceforth *L'Œuvre au Rouge*); Milan: Arché, 2006, (henceforth *La Quête Alchimique*).

22 Rochester, Vt.: Lindisfarne Press, 1987 (henceforth *Al-Kemi*).

23 *Al-Kemi*, 166.

Salt: Linguistic, Mythographic and Chemical Perspectives

Heaven knows a civilised life is impossible without salt and so necessary is this basic substance that its name is applied metaphorically even to intense mental pleasures. We call them *sales* [wit] ... But the clearest proof of its importance is that no sacrifice is carried out without the *mola salsa*.

—Pliny²⁴

Since Paracelsus (1493-1541), salt has played a role in alchemy as the physical “body” which remains after combustion, the corporeal substance that survives death to inaugurate new life. It was both ‘corruption and preservation against corruption’ (Dorn); both the ‘last agent of corruption’ and the ‘first agent in generation’ (Steeb).²⁵ As such, the alchemical salt functions as the fulcrum of death and revivification. The idea that the agent, instrument and patient of the alchemical process are not separate entities but aspects of one reality prefigures the significance accorded in this thesis to ‘the hermetic problem of salt’. Just as in chemistry a salt may be defined as the product of an acid and a base, alchemically, salt is the integral resolution to the primordial polarities embodied in the mineral *symbolique* of cinnabar (HgS), the *salt* of sulphur and mercury. In the alchemy of Schwaller de Lubicz, salt forms the equilibrium between an active function (sulphur, divinity, *peiras*) and its passive resistance (mercurial substance, *prima materia*, the *apeiron*), aspects which are latently present in the primordial (pre-polarised) unity, but crystallised into physical existence as “salt”. With Schwaller’s concept, one is dealing with a juncture of the metaphysical and proto-physical. As will be seen, however, this also inheres in the body as a fulcrum point of death and palingenesis.

Leap, Salve, Balsam

In order to understand the nature of alchemical salt one must first understand the nature of common salt. In doing this, however, it is soon realised that salt is anything but common; like many everyday things, salt is so familiar that its singular peculiarity

²⁴ *Naturalis Historia*, XXXI, XLI; cf. PLUTARCH, *Moralia*, *Table Talk*, IV, 4, 668.

²⁵ Gerhard DORN (fl. 1566-1584), ‘Speculativae philosophiae, gradus septem vel decem continens’, in *Theatrum Chemicum* (Strassbourg: 1602-61), 307; Johan Christoph STEEB, *Coelum Sephiroticum Hebraeorum* (Mainz, 1679), 29: ‘sal sit ultimum in corruptione, sed & primum in generatione’; De Lubicz reformulates the bivalence of the alchemical salt in terms of ‘a ligature of concreteness and abstraction’.

is taken for granted. Visser, in an extraordinary study of the elements of an ordinary meal, aptly encapsulates the cultural purview of salt in the following words:

Salt is the only rock directly consumed by man. It corrodes but preserves, desiccates but is wrested from the water. It has fascinated man for thousands of years not only as a substance he prized and was willing to labour to obtain, but also as a generator of poetic and of mythic meaning. The contradictions it embodies only intensify its power and its links with experience of the sacred.²⁶

European languages derive their word ‘salt’ from Proto-Indo-European **sāl-* (**sēl-*) reflected directly in Latin as *sal*, ‘salt, salt water, brine; intellectual savour, wit’, Greek *hals*, ‘salt, sea’ (cf. Welsh *halen*) and in Proto-Germanic as **saltom* (Old English *sealt*, Gothic *salt*, German *Salz*). In addition to its mineral referent, *sal* also gives rise to a number of cognates that help crystallise its further semantic and symbolic nuances. *Saltus*, *saltum*, ‘leap’, derives from the verb *salio*, ‘leap, jump, leap sexually’, whence *Saliī*, ‘priests of Mars’ from the ‘primitive rites (practically universal) of dancing or leaping for the encouragement of crops’;²⁷ *saltāre*, ‘dance’, *salmo*, ‘salmon’ (leaping fish), (*in*)*sultāre*, (‘insult’, literally ‘leap on, in’; figuratively, ‘taunt, provoke, move to action’), all from Indo-European **sēl-*, ‘move forth, start up or out’, whence Greek ἅλλομαι, ἄλτο, ἄλμα (*hallomai*, *halto*, *halma*), ‘leap’; Sanskrit *ucchalati* (**ud-sal-*), ‘starts up’.²⁸ Importantly for the alchemical conception, alongside ‘leap’ one finds the meanings at the root of English ‘salve’ (balm, balsam), derived from Indo-European **sel-p-*, **sel-bh-*, and giving rise to Cyprian *elphos* (butter), Gothic *salbōn*, Old English *sealfian*; in Latin: *salus*, ‘soundness, health, safety’; *salūbris*, ‘wholesome, healthy’; *salūtāre*, ‘keep safe, wish health, salute’; *salvus*, ‘safe, sound’; *salvēre*, ‘be in good health’; *salvē*, ‘hail!’; cf. also **sēl-eu-*; Avestan *hvarva*, ‘whole, uninjured’; Sanskrit *sarva-*, *sarvatāti*, ‘soundness’ and Greek ὅλοιται, ὅλος (*holoeitai*, *holos*), ‘whole’. These meanings are further connected to *solidus*, *sollus*, *sōlor*, with an ultimate sense of ‘gathering, compacting’, hence ‘solidity’.²⁹

In addition to its salvific, balsamic and holistic aspect, which must be regarded as the meaning most central to the alchemical perception, the significance of salt as both ‘leap’ and ‘solidity’ must also be recognised as integral. In particular, it pertains to Schwaller’s conception of salt as the fixed imperishable nucleus (*solidus*) regarded as the hidden mechanism underpinning the ontological ‘leaps’ or mutations of visible evolution (contra the Aristotelian dicta, *natura non facit saltum*, ‘nature does not

26 Margaret VISSER, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal* (Toronto, Ont.: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 75.

27 T. G. TUCKER, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (Chicago: Ares, 1976), 212.

28 TUCKER, 212.

29 TUCKER, 212.

proceed by a leap').³⁰ For Schwaller, the seemingly disconnected leaps of biological mutation are in fact bound by a hidden harmony grounded in the saline alchemical nucleus.

Although it is the intention of this thesis to explore the deeper meaning of salt in Schwaller de Lubicz—alchemically configured as the determiner of an entity's form—a number of studies have pointed to the crucial role of salt as a significant shaper of civilisation.³¹ Perhaps the earliest point of departure for this is the fact that salt only rises to especial prominence with the emergence of an agricultural economy. Salt intake, initially bound to blood and meat, had to be supplemented.³² Comments Darby:

When man first learnt the use of salt is enshrouded in the mists of the remotest past. Parallel to the Ancient Greek's ignorance of the seasoning, the original Indo-Europeans and the Sanskrit speaking peoples had no word for it. This apparent lack of salt-craving in early people could have been a result of their reliance on raw or roasted meat. Later, when with the invention of boiling the sodium content of meat was reduced, and when the shift to an agricultural economy introduced vegetables in increasing amounts, sodium chloride became a basic need to provide an adequate sodium intake and, more important still, to counterbalance the high potassium content of plants.³³

Commodity histories show that salt was not always the easily available resource it is today; it had to be striven for; it required effort and ingenuity (perhaps even *wit*). It created trade and war; it was used as pay and exploited as a tax. Nor did salt have the current stigma of being an unhealthy excess (a problem symptomatic of modern surfeit).³⁴ Quite to the contrary, salt was typically a sign of privilege and prestige. 'Salt

30 Although attributed to Aristotle, the phrase *natura non facit saltum* comes from Carl Linnaeus's *Philosophia Botanica* (1751); Linnaeus's expression itself is a Latin rendering of a French expression from the preface to Gottfried Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703): '*La nature ne fait jamais des sauts*' ('nature never makes a leap'); it continues in the idea of phyletic gradualism versus punctuated equilibrium in evolutionary theory.

31 Victor HEHN, *Das Salz: Eine kulturhistorische Studie* (Berlin, 1873); Matthias Jacob SCHLEIDEN, *Das Salz: Seine Geschichte, seine Symbolik und seine Bedeutung im Menschenleben: Eine monographische Skizze* (Leipzig, 1875; Weinheim, 1983); Jean-François BERGIER, *Une histoire du sel* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1982); S. A. M. ADSHEAD, *Salt and Civilization* (New York: St. Martins, 1992); Pierre LASZLO, *Salt: Grain of Life*, trans. Mary Beth MADER (New York, 2001 = *Chemins et savoirs du sel*, 1998); Mark KURLANSKY, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2003).

32 VISSER, 65.

33 William J. DARBY, Paul GHALIOUNGUI, Louis GRIVETTI, *Food: The Gift of Osiris* (London: Academic Press, 1977) I, 444, though cf. evidence and remarks at 445.

34 Cf. MENEELY et al. (1957) cited in DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 447.

like speech is essentially semiotic', Adshead remarks; 'As such it could convey a variety of meanings, of which the clearest in early times was social distance: high cooking, low cooking, above and below the salt'.³⁵ Considerations such as these help contextualise many of the ancient values surrounding salt, some of which have become proverbial. In the *New Testament*, for instance, but also elsewhere, the sharing of salt (often with bread at a table), represented a deep bond of trust, of communal solidarity, while the spilling of it was considered a grave *faux pas*.³⁶ Indeed, if salt was as freely available for liberal exploitation as it is today, such ethical and social implications would scarcely carry any weight at all.

Most of salt's social meanings reflect its deepest functional value as a *preservative*. Just as salt keeps the integrity of plants and meats intact, so salt was seen to keep the integrity of a body of people together. As a prestige substance that could preserve food through the death of winter and bind people in communal solidarity, salt was highly regarded; during Roman times, salt even became a form of currency, whence our word 'salary' (from Latin *salārium*, 'salt money') after the Roman habit of paying soldiers in pieces of compressed salt (hence the phrase: 'to be worth one's salt').³⁷ Because of its integrating character, salt bridges opposites. Paradoxically, however, the more one attempts to pin salt down in a strictly rational manner, the more the contradictions it embodies abound.

'There are totally different opinions concerning salt', writes Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE),³⁸ who preserves a number of contemporary beliefs, including the view that salt possesses not only preservative qualities, but animating and even generative power:

Some include salt with the most important spices and healing materials, calling it the real 'soul of life', and it is supposed to possess such nourishing and enlivening powers that mice if they lick salt at once become pregnant.³⁹

Consider also whether this other property of salt is not divine too [...] As the soul, our most divine element, preserves life by preventing dissolution of the body, just so salt, controls and checks the process of decay. This is why some Stoics say that the sow at birth is dead flesh, but that the soul is implanted in it later, like salt, to preserve it [...] Ships carrying salt breed an infinite number of rats because,

35 Cf. ADSHEAD, *Salt and Civilization*, 24.

36 DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 444; cf. Michael LATTKE, 'Salze der Freundschaft in Mk 9 50c', *Zeitschrift f. d. neutest. Wissenschaft*, 75 (1984); VISSER, 76.

37 PLINY, *Nat. Hist.*, XXXI, 88, 89; the *Codex Justiniani*, lib., XXXIX, IV, II, makes it illicit 'to sell to the enemy the whetstone to sharpen iron; as well as iron, wheat or salt'.

38 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV (4) 3; V (10) 4; trans. Edmund O von LIPPMAN, 'Chemical and Technical References in Plutarch', *Ambix* 3.1-2 (1948): 7.

39 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV (4) 3; V (10) 4; (LIPPMAN, 7).

according to some authorities, the female conceives without coition by licking salt.

⁴⁰

The connection of salt to the soul, a balsam to the body, will be explored in more detail when the alchemical contexts of salinity are examined. Its fertilising, generative power, on the other hand, bears obvious comparison to salt's known capacity to stimulate the growth of the earth—a leavening function extended to the role of the Apostles in the Christian Gospels: 'Ye are the salt of the earth'.⁴¹ And yet too much salt will make the earth sterile.

In ancient times, offerings to the gods were made with salt among the Israelites: 'with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt',⁴² but without salt among the Greeks: 'mindful to this day of the earlier customs, they roast in the flame the entrails in honour of the gods without adding salt'.⁴³ The Egyptian priests favoured rock salt in sacrifices as purer than sea salt;⁴⁴ and yet 'one of the things forbidden to them is to set salt upon a table';⁴⁵ they 'abstain completely from salt as a point of religion, even eating their bread unsalted'.⁴⁶ Although the Egyptians 'never brought salt to the table', Pythagoras, who according to the doxographic traditions studied in the Egyptian temples, tells us that:

It should be brought to the table to remind us of what is right; for salt preserves whatever it finds, and it arises from the purest sources, the sun and the sea.⁴⁷

The understanding of salt as a product of sun and sea, i.e. of fire and water, *ouranos* and *oceanos*, touches on its broader esoteric and cosmological implications, not all of which were peculiar to Pythagoras.⁴⁸ These aspects become central in alchemy, where, as will be seen, salt acts as the earthly ligature between fire (sun) and water (sea), the arcane substance whose patent ambiguities stem from its role as embodiment

⁴⁰ PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 685.

⁴¹ *Luke* 14:34; *Mark* 9:49; *Matthew* 5:13.

⁴² *Leviticus* 2:3; cf. *Ezekiel* 43:24; *Ezra* 6:9, 21-2; 4:14; Homeric poems do not mention the addition of salt in sacrifices; cf. the explanation in ATHENAEUS, *Deipnos.*, XIV, 23, 661; DARBY et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 443.

⁴³ ATHENAEUS, *Deipnos.*, XIV, 23, 661.

⁴⁴ Egyptian: *hmat*, Coptic: *hmou*; ROLF GUNDLACH, 'Salz', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* 5, cols 371-374; Rock salt deposits known in Siwa: PLINY, *Nat. Hist.*, XXXI, 39; STRABO I, 3, 4, ch. 49; ARRIAN, *Anabasis Alexandri*, III, 4, 3-4; HERODOTUS IV, 181-185.

⁴⁵ PLUTARCH, *Iside et Osiride*, 363, 32.

⁴⁶ PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 684-5.

⁴⁷ DIOGENES LAERTIUS, VIII, 35.

⁴⁸ Cf. TACITUS, *Annals*, XIII, 57, remarking on the Hermunduri and the Chatti: 'It is they think through the bounties of divine power, that in that river and in these forests salt is produced not as in other countries by the drying up of an overflow of the sea [...] but by a combination of two opposite elements, fire and water'.

and juncture of opposites: purity and impurity, eros and enmity, wetness and desiccation, fertility and sterility, love and strife. One thing that the present discussion of the mythological and historical aspects of salt hopes to emphasise is that none of these ideas are really born of speculation or abstraction; rather, they are all intimately linked to the basic phenomenology of the substance itself.

Above all, salt is ambiguous. While some of these ambiguities may be attributed to the unevenness of the sources, and while some points of contradiction may be cleared up upon closer examination (the negative Egyptian views on salt, for instance, mainly seem to apply to times of ritual fasting), this does not eclipse the overarching sense that salt, by its very nature, defies strict definition.

Brine-Born Aphrodite

From numerous ancient sources describing the nature of salt, one arrives at the view that salt's piquant effect was seen to extend beyond the sensation on the tongue.⁴⁹ Salt stimulated not only the appetite but desire in general.⁵⁰ And because desire polarises the religious impulse more than anything else—a path of liberation to some, a hindrance to others—it is understandable why the Egyptians, according to Plutarch, 'make it a point of religion to abstain completely from salt'.⁵¹ Equally, one can understand how salt, as an aphrodisiac, was connected specifically to the cult of Aphrodite, the goddess of desire *par excellence*. As Plutarch notes, the stimulating nature of eroticism evoked by the feminine is expressed using the very language of salt:

For this reason perhaps, feminine beauty is called 'salty' and 'piquant' when it is not passive, nor unyielding, but has charm and provocativeness. I imagine that the poets called Aphrodite 'born of brine' [...] by way of alluding to the generative property of salt.⁵²

Plutarch is referring to a tradition preserved by Hesiod, which will be looked at presently, but before the origin of the 'brine-born' goddess is examined, it is worth noting that our own language still preserves this deep association between salt and provocative beauty. Latin *sal* lies, phonetically and semantically, at the root of words such as *salsa* and *sauce* (both meaning 'salted'), whence the deep connection between sexuality and food implicit in the habit of referring to provocative objects of desire as

49 Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, for instance, both prescribe salt as a digestive stimulant.

50 PLUTARCH, *Iside et Osiride*, 352, 5: '[The Egyptian priests] use no salt with their food during their periods of holy living, [because salt] by sharpening their appetite, makes them more inclined to drinking and eating'.

51 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk* IV, 10, 684-5.

52 PLUTARCH, *Table Talk*, IV, 10, 684-5.

‘saucy’ or ‘sassy’ (both derivations of *sal*). And so the most stimulating flavours—the saltiest, those that make us *salivate*—are the ones most readily appropriated to express our desire.

The ancient etymology of Aphrodite as ‘brine-born’ (from *aphros*, ‘sea-spume’) is deeply mired not only in desire but also enmity, the twin impulses that Empedocles would call ‘Love and Strife’ (*Philotēs kai Neikos*).⁵³ Aphrodite, one learns, is born from the primordial patricide (and perhaps a crime of passion). Hesiod’s *Theogony* tells us how the goddess Gaia (Earth), the unwilling recipient of the lusts of Ouranos (Heaven), incites the children born of this union against their hated father. Not without Oedipal implications, Cronus rises surreptitiously against his progenitor and, with a sickle of jagged flint, severs his father’s genitals:

And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam (*aphros*) spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. [...] Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and the foam-born goddess [...] because she grew amid the foam.⁵⁴

As will be seen, these two primordial impulses prove pivotal to the alchemical function of salt that is met in Schwaller—the determiner of all affinities and aversions. And if Aphrodite is connected to salt’s desire-provoking aspect, it will come as no surprise to find that her ultimate counterpart was associated with just the opposite: war and strife. As is well known, Aphrodite is paired with Ares among the Greeks (as Venus is to Mars among the Romans), but the origins of her cult are intimately bound to Ancient Near Eastern origins;⁵⁵ moreover, in her Phoenician incarnation (Astarte), she embodies not only eros and sexuality, but war and strife. Presumably because of these traits, the Egyptian texts of the early Eighteenth Dynasty saw fit to partner her with their own untamed transgressor god, Seth-Typhon—a divinity who, like Aphrodite, was associated specifically with sea-salt and sea-spume (*aphros*).⁵⁶

Typhon’s Spume

‘Sea’, writes Heraclitus, ‘is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious’.⁵⁷ For the

53 EMPEDOCLES, fragment 17 (SIMPLICIUS, in *Phys.* 158, 1); KIRK, RAVEN, SCHOFIELD, 287.

54 *Theogony*, 189–200; H.G. EVELYN-WHITE, trans. *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, Loeb Classical Library Volume 57 (London: William Heinemann, 1914).

55 Aphrodite took the bi-name Cypris from the island Cyprus, the ancient cult centre of the Sumerian goddess Ishtar (= Inanna = Astarte).

56 *The Conflict of Horus and Seth*.

57 HERACLITUS, fragment 61 (= Hippolytus *Ref.* IX, 10.5); θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθάρωτατον καὶ

Egyptians, anything connected with the sea was, in general, evaluated negatively. Sea-salt in particular was regarded as impure, the ‘spume’ or ‘foam’ of Typhon (ἀφρος τυφωνίς, *aphros typhónis*).⁵⁸ Plutarch explains this by the fact that the Nile’s pure waters run down from their source and empty into the unpalatable, salty Mediterranean.⁵⁹ This natural phenomenon takes on cosmological ramifications: because of the southern origin of the life-giving Nilotic waters, south became the direction associated with the generative source of all existence; north on the other hand—culminating in the Nile delta where the river is swallowed by the sea—was regarded as the realm in which the pure, living waters were annihilated by the impure, salty waters. Comments Plutarch:

For this reason the priests keep themselves aloof from the sea, and call salt the ‘spume of Typhon’, and one of the things forbidden to them is to set salt upon a table; also they do not speak to pilots; because these men make use of the sea, and gain their livelihood from the sea [...] This is the reason why they eschew fish.⁶⁰

While sea salt was avoided, salt in rock form was considered quite pure: Egyptian priests were known to access mines of rock salt from the desert Oasis of Siwa.⁶¹ Arrian, the third century BCE historian, remarks:

There are natural salts in this district, to be obtained by digging; some of these salts are taken by the priests of Amon going to Egypt. For whenever they are going towards Egypt, they pack salt into baskets woven of palm leaves and take them as a present to the king or someone else. Both Egyptians and others who are particular about religious observance, use this salt in their sacrifices as being purer than the sea-salts.⁶²

Thus, like the arid red desert and the fertile nilotic soil, the briny sea was contrasted with the fresh waters of the Nile to oppose the foreign with the familiar, the impure with the pure, and, ultimately, the Sethian with the Osirian. So too, sea salt and rock salt.

The deeper implications of the Typhonian nature of seawater emerge in the *Greek Magical Papyri* where the Egyptian deity Seth-Typhon is found taking on many of the epithets typically accorded by the Greeks to Poseidon: ‘mover of the seas great depths’;

μιαρώτατον, ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον, ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον. trans. KIRK-RAVEN-SCHOFIELD, 188.

58 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363).

59 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363).

60 PLUTARCH, *De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 32 (363), with further remarks and citations in DARBY, et al., *Food: The Gift of Osiris*, I, 447.

61 Notably, Siwa was the locus of the Egyptian oracle that affirmed Alexander the Great as ‘Son of Zeus-Amun’.

62 ARRIAN, *Anabasis Alexandri* III, 4. 3-4.

‘boiler of waves’; ‘shaker of rocks’; ‘wall trembler’, etc.—all intimating the vast, destructive powers deriving from the ocean’s primal depths. This numinous power must be understood as the potency underpinning the *materia magica* prescribed in the invocations to Seth-Typhon, where, among other things, one finds the presence of seashells or seawater in Typhonian rituals.⁶³ One does not have to look far before one realises that magic employing shells from the salt-sea forms part of a wider genre within the magical papyri—spells that have the explicit aim of effecting intense sexual attraction. The role of Typhon in such spells is clear: he is invoked to effect an affinity so strong that the person upon whom this agonistic and erotic magic is used will suffer psychophysical punishments (e.g. insomnia: ‘give her the punishments’; ‘bitter and pressing necessity’, etc.) until their desire for the magician is physically consummated.

⁶⁴

Interestingly, the premiere substance sympathetic to Seth-Typhon was iron: the metal most drastically corrupted by salt. Moreover, iron and salt-water are the primary constituents of human blood, a microcosmic recapitulation of the primordial salt ocean (mythologically conceived: the cosmogonic waters; evolutionarily conceived: the marine origin of species). Blood is the symbol *par excellence* for intense passion, and its two poles are love and war, a fact which precisely explains Seth-Typhon’s overwhelming functions in the magical papyri: eros and enmity. Again, it is no surprise that intense sexual attraction (desire, affinity, union) and intense hatred (repulsion, aversion, separation) evoke Empedocles’ principles of ‘Love and Strife’—the functions governing the unification and separation of the four elements. Moreover, the connection of Seth with redness, blood, eros, war and the like equates with everything that the Indian sages placed under the rubric of *rajas*, the excited passions, which, as has been seen, are distinctly associated with the stimulating power of salt.⁶⁵ Be that as it may, the same divine *energeia* fed and informed the functions of the Greek and Roman war gods, Ares and Mars, both of whom take the association with iron in the scale of planetary metals, as did Seth-Typhon among the Egyptians.

Seth is not only connected to salt, but to the power of the bull’s *thigh*, the instrument by which the gods are ritually killed and revived. Here the connection of Seth to the power of the thigh suggests the pivotal role played by this god in the quintessentially alchemical process of death and rebirth, of slaying and nourishment. This theme will be reiterated more than once in the course of this thesis, and it should be pointed out that any deliberations on this mythologeme are intended as so many historical and phenomenological “circumambulations” around the deep resonances generated by de Lubicz’s emphasis on the role of the fixed femoral salt in palingenesis.

⁶³ PGM VII. 374-6; PGM VII. 467-77.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Poseidon* (hymn 22); *Orphic Hymn to Poseidon* (hymn 17); AELIAN, *On Animals*, 12. 45; PGM, passim (spells to Typhon).

⁶⁵ In the *Rig Veda*, cf. Rudra, ‘the red one’.

Between Acid and Alkali

In the middle ages, the meaning of the term ‘salt’ was widened to include substances that were seen to resemble common salt (e.g. in appearance, solubility and so forth).⁶⁶ Chemically speaking, a salt is a neutralisation reaction between an acid and a base. The two have a natural affinity for each other, one seeking to gain an electron (the acid), the other seeking to lose one (the base). When this occurs, the product is a salt. While more complex chemical definitions of salt can be given, this one, advanced by Guillaume Francois Rouelle in 1744,⁶⁷ allows one to perceive the broader principles that motivated the alchemists to select salt as the mineral image of the interaction of sulphur and mercury (cinnabar, HgS, a salt in the chemical sense formed from sulphur and mercury). As Mark Kurlansky points out:

It turned out that salt was once a microcosm for one of the oldest concepts of nature and the order of the universe. From the fourth century B.C. Chinese belief in the forces of yin and yang, to most of the worlds religions, to modern science, to the basic principles of cooking, there has always been a belief that two opposing forces find completion—one receiving a missing part and the other shedding an extra one. A salt is a small but perfect thing.⁶⁸

More precise chemical definitions specify that a salt is an electrically neutral ionic compound. Here, the same principle of perfect equipoise between opposing energies prevails. Ions are atoms or molecules whose net electrical charge is either positive or negative: either the protons dominate to produce an ion with a positive electric charge (an anion, from Greek *ana-*, ‘up’), or the electrons dominate to produce an ion with a negative electric charge (a cation, from Greek *kata-*, ‘down’). When anions and cations

⁶⁶ F. Sherwood TAYLOR, *Inorganic and Theoretical Chemistry* (London: William Heineman, 1944), 194.

⁶⁷ William B. JENSEN, ‘The origin of the term “base”’, *The Journal of Chemical Education* 83, 8 (2006): 1130; Mark KURLANSKY, *Salt: A World History* (London: Vintage, 2003), 300. Cf. the contemporary definition in N. LEMERY, *Cours de chymie* (ed. Theodore Baron d’Henouville, Paris, 1675; reprinted 1756), 733-4: ‘The acid is always a solvent, when it is put in large enough quantity on the matter which we wish to dissolve; but it always makes a Coagulum, when as it is in too small a quantity its points have got stuck in the pores of the matter, and are far from having the strength to separate it in order to come out of it; this is what is seen when we pour some spirit of vitriol on liquor of salt of tartar; for if we put on only what is necessary to penetrate the salt, the acid points remain as if sheathed and they weigh down the body, which is why a coagulation and precipitation occur; but if we add to the liquor as much again of the spirit of vitriol as we had put on to it, or more, the Coagulum will disappear, because the little bodies, which when assembled together were holding up the acid and preventing its movements, will be separated and dissolved by the acid which has become stronger’.

⁶⁸ KURLANSKY, *Salt*, 300.

bond to form an ionic compound whose electric charges are in equilibrium, they neutralise and the result is called a salt.

The chemical definition opens up the conception of salt beyond that of mere sodium chloride. Chemically, the coloured oxides and other reactions of metals—of especial significance to the alchemical perception—are often salts (the metal itself taking the role of base; oxygen the acid).⁶⁹ Alchemically, or at least proto-chemically, because the reactions of metals were coloured, they were important signifiers of the metal's nature, often seen as an index of its spirit or tincture (*ios*, 'tincture, violet/purple'). The seven planetary metals were often signified by their coloured salts or oxides: e.g. lead is white; iron, red (rust); copper is blue/green; silver is black. Gold remains pure (unreacting) but its tincture was identified with royal purple (seen in the red-purple colour of colloidal gold, gold dust, ruby glass etc.)

Alchemical Salt

Salt in Alchemy before Paracelsus

Although the purview of hieratic alchemy was far wider than mere proto-chemistry, chemical and technical processes were undeniably integral to the alchemists' *savoir-faire*. As such it is no surprise to find salts of various kinds figuring in the earliest strata of alchemical writings, east and west. In the Greek "proto-chemical" texts that Marcellin Berthelot brought together under the rubric of alchemy, several different salts are distinguished and listed in the registers alongside the lists of planetary metals and other chemically significant minerals. In addition to salt (*halas*), one finds common salt (*halas koinon*) and sal ammoniak (*halas amoniakon*).⁷⁰ More importantly, however, is the significant prefiguration of the *tria prima* and *tetrastoicheia* (four element) relationship that is found in Olympiodorus (late fifth century CE).⁷¹ Olympiodorus depicts an ouroboric serpent to which some important symbolic nuances are added (Illustration 1). In addition to the usual henadic (unitary) symbolism of this ancient motif, the text displays its serpent with four feet and three ears. The glosses to the image inform us that 'the four feet are the *tetrasōmia*' (the four elemental bodies) while the three ears are 'volatile spirits' (*aithalai*). As will be seen in the balance of this thesis, this relationship of unity to duality, duality to trinity, and trinity to quaternary is pivotal to the hermetic physics that Schwaller would attempt to convey in terms of an alchemical *Farbenlehre* (cf. the Pythagorean tetraktys).

⁶⁹ Here, metal provides the cation; oxygen the anion.

⁷⁰ BERTHELOT, *CAAG*, 108-9. Note also alums (*styptikon*).

⁷¹ Paris MS. 2327 fol. 196.

INTRODUCTION

[illegible]

ILLUSTRATION 2: SIGNS FOR SALT, COLUMN TWO, LINES 15-20

Marcellin BERTHELOT, *Introduction à l'étude de la chimie des anciens et du moyen âge I*, 108.

In Arabic alchemy, salt figures most prominently in an alchemical text that became influential in the West via its Latin translation: *The Book of Alums and Salts*

(Arabic: *al qawl fil 'l-milḥ*, 'a tradition on salt'; Latin: *Liber de aluminibus et salibus*).⁷⁴ This text appears to be a practical handbook describing various substances and operations, such as alum, different kinds of salt (including the use of alkaline and ammoniac salts), the preparation of arsenic for laboratory use, the comparison of arsenic and sulphur, as well as the features of silver, tin, lead, iron, copper and glass.⁷⁵ Contrary to the habit of many scholars of alchemy to attribute the sulphur-mercury-salt theory to Paracelsus, the triad in fact emerged as an alchemical motif *before* Paracelsus. As both Eberly and Haage inform us, it was Abu Bakr Muhammad Zakariyya Ar-Razi (d. 925)⁷⁶ who added the third principle of salt to the primordial alchemical principles (sulphur and mercury) inherited from Greek antiquity (implicit in the exhalation theory of metallogenesis), and already existing in Jabir's system.⁷⁷ This and related traditions must be recognised as clear precursors to Paracelsus's conception of the *tria prima*. Comments Eberly:

Razi had an extremely well equipped laboratory and followed all of the essentials of Jabir's systems. In one area in particular, he expanded upon Jabir's theory. Razi added a third principle, philosophically representing Spirit [Sulphur] as Mind, and Mercury as Soul, while adding Salt as the principle of crystallization or body. [...] Razi's descriptions of alchemical processes were closely studied and put into practice by later European alchemists including Nicolas Flamel and Paracelsus.⁷⁸

In the earliest strata of medieval hermetic texts, such as the *Turba Philosophorum* and *Rosarium Philosophorum*, salt is already accorded an abundance of alchemical significations.⁷⁹ In the *Turba*, salt water and sea water are synonyms for the *aqua permanens*.⁸⁰ In the *Rosarium*, Senior tell us that mercurius is made from salt: 'First comes the ash, then comes the salt, and from that salt by diverse operations the Mercury of the Philosophers'.⁸¹ Arnaldus de Villanova (1235?-1313) reveals that

74 J. RUSKA, *Das Buch der Alaune und Salze: Ein Grundwerk der spätleinischen Alchemie* (Berlin: Verlag Chemie, 1935).

75 Gabriele FERRARIO, 'Origins and Transmission of the *Liber de aluminibus et salibus*', in Lawrence M. PRINCIPE, ed., *Chymists and Chymistry: Studies in the History of Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2007), 140.

76 Ar-Razi, as EBERLY points out, must not be confused with other well-known Razis, such as Najm al-Din Razi; one must also be cognisant of the fact that the name bore more than one western transliteration (e.g. Rhazes and Rhasis).

77 John EBERLY, *Al-Kimia: The Mystical Islamic Essence of the Sacred Art of Alchemy* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 27-9; Bernard D. HAAGE, 'Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th Century', *DGWE*, 29.

78 EBERLY, *Al-Kimia*, 28.

79 Cf. texts adduced in JUNG, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. (trans. R. F. C. Hull, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 188 ff.

80 JUNG, *Mysterium*, 283.

81 *Rosarium philosophorum, Art. Aurif.*, II, 210.

‘Whoever possesses the salt that can be melted, and the oil that cannot be burned, may praise God’.⁸² (The idea of salt in connection to an oil that cannot be burned will be seen to persist in de Lubicz’s alchemical texts). Salt is both the ‘root of the art’ and ‘the soap of the sages’ (*sapo sapientum*) and is described as ‘bitter’ (*sal amarum*).⁸³ Perhaps the most interesting signification in the *Rosarium*, in light of the role salt would take as the pivot of death and revivification, is the description of salt as ‘the key that closes and opens’.⁸⁴

Here one begins to meet the same duality of function that gives salt its inherent ambiguity. However, its identification with the function of a key (*clavis*) helps considerably in conceiving salt with more clarity. The *Gloria Mundi* would later reveal that salt ‘becomes impure and pure of itself, it dissolves and coagulates itself, or, as the sages say, locks and unlocks itself’.⁸⁵ Here one gains a good intimation of the function that salt would be later accorded in the traditions that emerge in Schwaller. Perhaps the most concise encapsulation, in relation to the idea of salt as the pivot of death and palingenesis, is Johan Christoph Steeb’s remark that *sal sit ultimum in corruptione, sed & primum in generatione*, ‘salt is the last in corruption and the first in generation’.⁸⁶

Paracelsus’ Balsam and the Tria Prima

As has been mentioned, the keynote of alchemical precept and praxis pertaining to salt was struck by Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, alias Paracelsus (1493–1541). Although it is important to recognise that the essential structure of the *tria prima* was already in place before Paracelsus (indeed, it is inherent to the composition of cinnabar), it is undeniable that the triad of sulphur, mercury and salt is raised by Paracelsus to a previously unparalleled prominence.

Of course, Paracelsus was hardly one to follow ancient authorities merely at their word. Indeed, it is imperative to recognise from the start that Paracelsus learnt much of his knowledge about minerals directly from the mines. While Paracelsus travelled widely, he lived and worked chiefly in southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland. If anywhere is to be regarded as “Paracelsus country”, it is the Alpine regions of Salzburg and its surrounds. Now, Salzburg, as its name (‘salt mountain’) attests, has long been the chief source of sodium for the surrounding regions: that is to say, rock salt, mined from the mountains, not sea salt. To this day in Austria and southern Germany common table salt is sold in an iodised form (*Jodsalz*) because its rock form, which is

82 *Ros. phil.*, 244.

83 *Ros. phil.*, 222: ‘the root of the art is the soap of the sages’. On salt as soap (and also bitter), cf. the Egyptian use of natron.

84 *Ros. phil.*, 225. JUNG points in this connection to the *Aurora Consurgens*, 141, where the bride calls herself the ‘key’ (*clavicula*).

85 ‘Gloria mundi’, *Museum Hermeticum*, 216 (= WAITE, I, 177); JUNG, *Mysterium*, 190.

86 Joh. Christophi STEEB, *Coelum Sephiroticum Hebraeorum*, 29.

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pure sodium, lacks the beneficial “impurities” that accrue to sea salt (iodine being an essential nutritional mineral).

In Paracelsus’ writings, the *tria prima* are often compared to the three aspects that are present during the process of combustion (i.e. fire, smoke, ash): ‘Whatever burns is sulphur, whatever is humid is mercury, and that which is the balsam of these two is salt’.⁸⁷ Paracelsians also employed the *tria prima* to represent the composition of the human microcosm: spirit (mercury), soul (sulphur) and body (salt), and this correlation was extended to some extent to the Christian trinity: father (sulphur), holy spirit (mercury), son (salt).⁸⁸ ‘In this manner’, states Paracelsus, ‘in three things, all has been created [...] namely, in salt, in sulphur, and in liquid. In these three things all things are contained, whether sensate or insensate [...] So too you understand that in the same manner that man is created [in the image of the triune God], so too all creatures are created in the number of the Trinity, in the number three’.⁸⁹

Given the foregoing, it is tempting to oversimplify the meaning of salt as the “physical body”, but if this were the case, if salt was merely representative of corporeality, any mineral could have served the function of “body”. It does not answer the question: why salt? One key to answering this question—while also avoiding the narrow bind of oversimplification—lies in Schwaller’s observation that salt is the ‘*foundation and support* of the body’ and the ‘*guardian* of form’.⁹⁰ This is underscored by the fact that Paracelsus describes salt as a *balsam*:

God, in his goodness and greatness, willed that man should be led by Nature to such a state of necessity as to be unable to live naturally without natural Salt. Hence its necessity in all foods. Salt is the balsam of Nature, which drives away the corruption of the warm Sulphur with the moist Mercury, out of which two ingredients man is by nature compacted. Now, since it is necessary that these prime constituents should be nourished with something like themselves, it follows as a matter of course that man must use ardent foods for the sustenance of his internal Sulphur; moist foods for nourishing the Mercury, and salted foods for keeping the Salt in a faculty for building up the body. Its power for conservation is chiefly seen in the fact that it keeps dead flesh for a very long time from decay; hence it is easy to guess that it will still more preserve living flesh.⁹¹

⁸⁷ WAITE ed., I, 258-9.

⁸⁸ Cf. PARACELSUS, ‘Concerning the Nature of Things’ (WAITE ed. I, 125): ‘For Mercury is the spirit, Sulphur is the soul, and Salt is the body’.

⁸⁹ PARACELSUS, *Theologische und religionsphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Kurt GOLDAMMER (Wiesbaden and Stuttgart: Steiner, 1955), 63.

⁹⁰ *Temple* I, 67; *Al-Kemi*, 186. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ PARACELSUS, *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings*, ed. A. E. Waite (Edmonds, WA: The Alchemical Press, 1992), 98 = *The Economy of Minerals*, Ch. 9: ‘Concerning the Virtues and Properties of Salts in Alchemy and in Medicine’.

Moreover, in German, *Balsam* possesses the meaning of something that heals or preserves, and it is easy to see how this balsamic function is specific to salt, a substance which is still used widely to preserve the flesh of plants and animals. Indeed, salt is a *salve* (from Latin *sal*), and it is worth noting in this connection that *Balsam* forms the German word for mummification (*Balsamierung*, ‘em-balm-ing’), and that one of the main substances used by the Egyptians for preserving their mummies was a salt (natron), which served as an anhydrous (drying) agent, desiccating the flesh and therefore preventing putrefaction.⁹² Once again, the function of salt to preserve, and yet at the same time, salt also corrodes or is corrosion.⁹³

Sal Philosophorum

Quite apart from common table salt, or any other purely chemical salt for that matter, the medieval alchemists refer to the ‘Salt of the Philosophers’ or ‘Salt of the Sages (*Sal Sapientie*)’. One thing that distinguishes what is often designated as “our Salt”—i.e. “philosophical salt”—from common chemical salts is the fact that it is seen to possess the ability to preserve not plants but *metals*. Basil Valentine, in Key IV of his *Zwölf Schlüssel*, states:

Just as salt is the great preserver of all things and protects them from putrefaction, so too is the salt of our magistry a protector of metals from annihilation and corruption. However, if their balsam—their embodied saline spirit (*eingelebter Salz-Geist*)—were to die, withering away from nature like a body which perishes and is no longer fruitful, then the spirit of metals will depart, leaving through natural death an empty, dead husk from which no life can ever rise again.⁹⁴

92 Natron was used in Egypt for its cleansing properties and imported by the Greeks for the same purpose. See Robert K. RITNER, ‘Innovations and Adaptations in Ancient Egyptian Medicine’, *JNES* 59, 2 (2000), 107-17, at p. 116 with n. 55; Warren DAWSON, ‘A Strange Drug’, *Aegyptus* 12, 1932, 12-15.

93 The corrupting reaction to oxygen that often forms the salts of metals is usually poisonous; its *colour*, however, was considered the ‘flower’ of the metal; the specific colour of this flower was understood as a vital signature of the metal’s spirit.

94 Basil VALENTINE, *Zwölf Schlüssel*, ed. TANCKIUS, vol. II, 657-8: ‘Gleich wie das Saltz ist eine Erhalterin aller Ding / und bewahret für der Fäule / Also ist das Saltz unserer Meister auch ein Schutz der Metallen / daß sie nicht können gar zu nichte gemacht und verderbet werden / daß nicht wieder etwas darauß werden solte / es sterbe dann ihr Balsam / und eingelebter Saltz-Geist von Natur ab / als denn wer der Leib todt / und könnte nichts fruchtbarliches weiter darauß gemacht werden / Denn die Geister der Metallen werden abgewichen / und nur durch natürliches Absterben eine leere todte Wohnung verlassen / darinnen kein Leben wieder zu bringen’.

Once again, through its dual nature—preserving and corrupting—a fundamental ambivalence adheres to the reality embodied in salt. And yet, the key to salt resides in its ultimately integrating function. It is the *clavis* which binds and unbinds, preserves and corrupts. It itself does not undergo the process which it enacts, embodies or disembodies. Importantly, however, as one learns from Schwaller, salt acts as the permanent mineral “memory” of this eternal process of generation and corruption.

Perhaps the most interesting and influential synthesis of esoteric theological and cosmological ideas on salt are those that crystallise in the tradition of Jacob Boehme, where salt emerges as a spiritual-material integrum central to a trinitarian *theosophia*. Here one learns that earthly or material salt recapitulates a heavenly potency called by Boehme *salliter*; this heavenly salt is an explosive force of light and fire likened to gunpowder (*sal-nitre*, cf. Paracelsus’ ‘terrestrial lightning’).⁹⁵ For Boehme, this heavenly and earthly salt are indicated by the two “halves” of the conventional salt symbol, which resemble two hemispheres, one turned upon the other (one “giving” and the other “receiving”). These theories reach a magnificent depth of expression in Georg von Welling’s *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum* (1721). Welling (1655–1727), an alchemist for whom the books of theology and nature were thoroughly complementary, worked as a director of mining in the town of Baden-Durlach (a position that allowed him to explore his extensive knowledge and passion for both the practicalities and the mysteries of geology). His monumental *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum* explores how the rich relationship of salt as fire/air/sulphur on one hand, and water/earth/mercury on the other, is played out in all its intricacies to convey the mysterious dynamic of the fire-water juncture embodied in heavenly and earthly salt (Welling uses the Hebrew term for heaven, *schemajim*, literally, ‘fire-water’ alongside the superimposed alchemical triangles of fire and water to form the Star of David). In his initial chapters, Welling describes the common symbol of salt as a ‘cubical’ figure and thus the figure of an ‘earthly body’; ‘its form is diaphanous or transparent, like glass’; it is ‘malleable and fluid and all bodies penetrate it with ease’. ‘Its taste is sour or acidic and a little astringent’; it is of a ‘desiccating nature and character’; moreover, it is ‘cooling’ and yet ‘in its interior there is a natural or genuine fire’.⁹⁶

95 Lawrence M. PRINCIPE and Andrew WEEKS, ‘Jacob Boehme’s Divine Substance *Salitter*: Its Nature, Origin, and Relationship to Seventeenth Century Scientific Theories’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 22, 1 (1989): 53–61; PARACELUS (Waite ed.), I, 263.

96 Georg von WELLING, *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum: Der Ursprung, Natur, Eigenschaften und Gebrauch des Saltzes, Schwefels und Mercurii*, Andre Auflage (Frankfurt und Leipzig: in der Fleischerischen Buchhandlung, 1760), 2 (I, § 3), 40 (II, § 1): ‘Droben ist § 3. gesagt worden, daß des gemeinen [Salz] Figur (1) sey cubisch, die da ist eine Figur der irdischen Körper, und diese Eigenschaft habe es im Durchstreichen der Erde bekommen. In eben demselben §. wird gesagt, (2) seine Form sey diaphan oder durchscheinend, gleich dem Glas. (3) Das es sey güssig und flüssig, und alle Körper ganz leichte durchgehe. (4) Sein Geschmack seye sauer, und ein wenig zusammenziehend; (5) Es

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As Magee has demonstrated, hermetic influences in general, and Paracelsian and Boehmian ideas in particular, fed into and informed the work of G. W. F. Hegel. 'According to an ancient and general opinion', writes Hegel, 'each body consists of four elements. In more recent times, Paracelsus has regarded them as being composed of mercury or fluidity, sulphur or oil, and salt, which Jacob Böhme called the great triad'. To this, Hegel adds: 'It should not be overlooked [...] that in their essence they contain and express the determinations of the Concept'. According to Magee, this admission is highly significant, for Hegel is saying that 'if the alchemical language of Paracelsus, Böhme, and others is considered in a nonliteral way, its inner content is, in essence, identical to his system' (i.e. the 'determinations of the Concept').⁹⁷

Interestingly, despite Boehme's known influence on mainstream academic philosophers such as Schelling and Hegel, it is Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* that emerges from the modern German academic tradition with the most abiding insights into the phenomenon of salt. Curiously, although it possesses no apparent connections to esoteric or alchemical discourse, *Zarathustra* as a whole is nevertheless pervaded with a pronounced hermetic ambiance; somehow, Nietzsche's remarks on salt penetrate right to the heart of its mysterium. At the end of book three, Zarathustra not only speaks of salt as binding opposites, but also connects this to a desire for eternity which cannot be satisfied through simple procreation:

If ever I drunk a full draught from that vessel of foaming spice, in which all things are well-blent:

If ever my hand fused the nearest to the farthest, fire to spirit, desire to suffering and the worst to the best:

If I myself were a grain of that redeeming salt that makes all things in the vessel well-blent:—

—for there is a salt that binds good with evil; for even the most evil is worthy to be a spice for the final over-foaming—

O how should I not be rutting after eternity and after the conjugal ring of rings—the ring of recurrence!

Never have I found the woman by whom I wanted children, for it would be this woman that I love: for I love you, O Eternity!

*For I love you, O eternity!*⁹⁸

sey austrocknender Natur und Eigenschaft; (6) Kühlend; Und (7) daß es in seinem Innersten sey ein wesentliches Feuer'.

97 Glenn Alexander MAGEE, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 209, citing Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Philosophy of Nature*, § 316 = M. J. PETRY, trans. *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, 3 vols. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), vol. 2, 117; cf. also MAGEE, *Hegel Dictionary*, 58–60.

98 NIETZSCHE, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* ('Die sieben Siegel', 4 = *KSA*, 289): 'Wenn ich je vollen Zuges trank aus jenem schäumenden Würz- und Mischkrüge, in dem alle Dinge gut gemischt sind: Wenn meine Hand je Fernstes zum Nächsten goss und Feuer zu Geist und

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Salt as the redeeming juncture of opposites is framed by Nietzsche in terms that evoke the themes of autonomous morality expressed in his *Jenseits von Gut und Bösen*. Running deeper, however, is the surprising link that Nietzsche makes between salt and a desire for eternity that cannot be met through procreation; here one recognises not only the Indo-European ‘path of the fathers’ versus the ‘path of the gods’, but also the two paths in alchemy known as *la voie humide* and *la voie sèche*—the wet and the dry ways. Nietzsche taps directly into the crux of the human *œuvre*. Genetic continuity, i.e. continuity of and through the species, does not satisfy the soul’s desire for eternity; only the desire that is fixed in the salt, deep in the bones, has the capacity to survive biological generation and corruption. Nietzsche’s love for eternity expresses the same reality that Schwaller articulated in terms of the saline nucleus in the femur: the path of eternity, *palingenesis* and *resurrection*, hinges not on the chromosomes but upon a fixed mineral salt.

Salt in Schwaller’s Alchemy

Unity manifests itself as Trinity. It is the “creatix” of form, but still not form itself; form emerges through movement, that is, Time and Space.⁹⁹

—Schwaller de Lubicz

Sulphur, Mercury and Salt

Schwaller’s understanding of the *tria prima* as the creatrix of form is essentially consonant with the trinitarian conceptions of Egyptian (and later Pythagorean) cosmogonic theology. Here, the creator’s divine hypostases—Hu, Sia and Heka—manifest as the extra- or hyper-cosmic forces that exist *before* creation; they are the forces necessary to the establishment of creation rather than creation *per se*. This may be compared to the identical conception that emerges in Iamblican theurgy, which distinguishes between hypercosmic and encosmic divinities, or the same essential

Lust zu Leid und Schlimmstes zum Gütigsten: Wenn ich selber ein Korn bin von jenem erlösenden Salze, welches macht, dass alle Dinge im Mischkrüge gut sich mischen: — denn es giebt ein Salz, das Gutes mit Bösem bindet; und auch das Böseste ist zum Würzen würdig und zum letzten Überschäumen: — Oh wie sollte ich nicht nach der Ewigkeit brünstig sein und nach dem hochzeitlichen Ring der Ringe, — dem Ring der Wiederkunft? Nie noch fand ich das Weib, von dem ich Kinder mochte, sei denn dieses Weib, das ich lieb: denn ich liebe dich, oh Ewigkeit! Denn ich liebe dich, oh Ewigkeit!’

99 SCHWALLER, ‘Le monde de la trinité’, *Notes et Propos inédits* I, 64: ‘L’Unité se manifeste comme Trinité. Celle-ci est «créatrice» de la forme, mais non encore forme elle-même, laquelle va apparaître par le mouvement, c’est-à-dire Temps dans l’Espace’.

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principles as carried through into the trinitarian theology of Eastern Orthodoxy, which distinguishes between uncreated and created energies. Beyond these general point of orientation, Schwaller's hermetic metaphysics accorded the *tria prima* some very specific characteristics:

The Trinity, that is to say the Three Principles, is the basis of all reasoning, and this is why in the whole "series of genesis" it is necessary to have all [three] to establish the foundational Triad that will be[come] the particular Triad. It includes first of all an abstract or nourishing datum, secondly a datum of measure, rhythmisation and fixation, and finally, a datum which is concrete or fixed like seed. This is what the hermetic philosophers have transcribed, concretely and symbolically, by Mercury, Sulphur and Salt, playing on the metallic appearance in which metallic Mercury plays the role of nutritive substance, Sulphur the coagulant of this Mercury, and Salt the fixed product of this function. In general, everything in nature, being a formed Species, will be Salt. Everything that coagulates a nourishing substance will be Sulphur or of the nature of Sulphur, from the chromosome to the curdling of milk. Everything that is coagulable will be Mercury, whatever its form.¹⁰⁰

The image of coagulation—with Sulphur as the coagulating agent, Mercury as the coagulated substance, and Salt as the resulting form—is used repeatedly by Schwaller.¹⁰¹ The formal articulation of this idea, as published in his mature œuvre, connects the motif to the embryological process:

In biology, the great mystery is the existence, in all living beings, of albumin or albuminoid (proteinaceous) matter. One of the albuminoid substances is coagulable by heat (the white of the egg is of this type), another is not. The

100 SCHWALLER, 'Le monde de la trinité', *Notes et propos inédits* I, 65-6: 'La Trinité, c'est-à-dire les Trois Principes, sont la base de tout raisonnement, c'est pourquoi dans toute «chaîne de genèse» il faut avant tout établir la Triade de base qui sera le Triade particulière. Elle comprend toujours d'abord une donnée abstraite ou nourricière, une donnée de mesure, de rhythmisation, de fixation et, finalement, une donnée concrète ou fixée comme semence. C'est ce que les philosophes hermétiques ont transcrit concrètement, symboliquement, par Mercure, Soufre et Sel, jouant sur l'apparence métallique où le Mercure métallique joue le rôle du substance nourricière, le Soufre étant coagulant de ce Mercure, le Sel est le produit fixe de cette fonction. En généralisant: tout dans la Nature étant Espèce formée, sera Sel: tout ce qui coagule une nourriture sera Soufre ou de nature de Soufre, depuis le chromosome jusqu'au caillé du lait. Tout ce qui es coagulable sera Mercure, quelle que soit sa forme'.

101 On the development of the idea of salt as neutralisation reaction between an acid and a base in chemistry and alchemy, see the numerous texts and contexts cited in A. M. DUNCAN, 'Styles of Language and Modes of Chemical Thought', *Ambix* 28, 2 (1981): passim (83-107).

albuminoid substance carrying the spermatozoa is of this latter type. The albuminoid sperm cannot be coagulated because it carries the spermatozoa that coagulate the albuminoid substance of the female ovum. As soon as one spermatozoon has penetrated the ovum, this ovum coagulates on its surface, thus preventing any further penetration: fertilisation has occurred. (In reality, this impenetrability is not caused by a material obstacle, the solid shell, but by the fact that the two equal energetic polarities repel one another). The spermatozoon therefore plays the role of a “vital coagulating fire” just as common fire coagulates the feminine albumin. This is the *action* of a masculine fire in a cold, passive, feminine environment. Here also, there are always material carriers for these energies, but they manifest the existence of an energy with an active male aspect and a passive female aspect that undergoes or submits to it. Ordinary fire brutally coagulates the white of an egg, but the spermatozoon coagulates it gently by specifying it into the embryo of its species. This image shows that the potentiality of the seed passes to a defined effect through the coagulation of a passive substance, similar to the action of an acid liquid in an alkaline liquid, which forms a specified salt. Now the sperm is no more acid than the male albumin, but it plays in the animal kingdom [*animalement*] the same role as acid; ordinary fire is neither male nor acid and yet it has a type of male and acid action. This and other considerations incline the philosopher to speak of an Activity that is positive, acid and coagulating, without material carrier, and of a Passivity, a substance that is negative, alkaline, and coagulable, also without material carrier. From their interaction results the initial, not-yet-specified coagulation, the *threefold Unity*, which is also called the “Creative Logos” (Word, *Verbe*) because the Logos, as speech, only signifies the name, that is, the definition of the “specificity” of things.

102 *Temple I*, 77-8/I, 42: ‘En biologie le grand mystère est l’existence, chez tout être vivant, de l’albumine ou des matières albuminoïdes (protéïniques). L’une des substances albuminoïdes est coagulable à la chaleur (le blanc d’œuf en est le type), l’autre ne l’est pas. Le type de cette dernière est la substance albuminoïde portant le spermatozoaire. Le sperme albumonoïde ne peut pas être coagulable puisqu’il porte le spermatozoaire coagulant la substance albumonoïde de l’ovule féminin. Dès qu’un des spermatozoïdes a pénétré l’ovule, celui-ci se coagule à sa surface et empêche toute autre pénétration: la fécondation a eu lieu. [Cette impénétrabilité n’est pas en réalité provoquée par un obstacle matériel, la coque solide, mais par le fait que deux polarités énergétiques égales se repoussent.] Le spermatozoaire joue donc le rôle d’un feu « coagulant vital » comme le feu vulgaire coagule l’albumine féminine. C’est l’*action* d’un feu masculin en un milieu passif, froid, féminin. Il y a toujours encore, ici, des porteurs matériels de ces énergies, mais ils manifestent l’existence d’une énergie à l’aspect mâle actif, et d’un aspect féminin passif qui subit. Le feu ordinaire coagule brutalement le blanc d’œuf, mais le spermatozoaire le coagule doucement en le spécifiant en embryon de son espèce. Ceci est une image qui montre que la virtualité de la semence passe à l’effet défini à travers la coagulation d’une substance passive, semblable à l’action d’un liquide acide en un liquide alcalin formant un sel défini. Or le spermatozoaire, pas plus que l’albumine mâle, n’est acide, mais il joue

To salt as the mean term between the agent and patient of coagulation, he occasionally adds other revealing expressions, such as the following:

In geometry, in a triangle, the given line is Mercury, the Angles are Sulphur, and the resultant triangle is Salt.¹⁰³

Whereas here, Schwaller identifies Salt with a ‘datum’ or ‘given’ which is ‘fixed like seed’ (*une donnée concrète ou fixée comme semence*), elsewhere he identifies the active, *sulphuric* function with that of the seed (*semence*). What this means is that the neutral saline product, once formed, then acts in the sulphuric capacity of a seed and ferment, but also foundation:

It can only be a matter of an active Fire, that is, of a seminal “intensity”, like the “fire” of pepper, for example, or better: the “fire” of either an organic or a catalysing ferment. The character of all the ferments, i.e. the seeds, is to determine into Time and Space a form of nourishment—in principle without form; clearly, therefore, it plays a coagulating role. The coagulation of all “bloods” is precisely their fixation into the form of the species of the coagulating seed, the coagulation being, as in other cases, a transformation of an aquatic element into a terrestrial or solid element, without desiccation and without addition or diminution of the component parts.¹⁰⁴

animalement le même rôle; le feu ordinaire n’est ni mâle ni acide, il est pourtant le type de l’action mâle et acide. Ceci, et d’autres considérations, incitent le philosophe à parler d’une Activité positive, acide, coagulante, sans porteur matériel, et d’une Passivité, substance négative, alcaline, coagulable, également sans caractère matériel. De leur interaction résulte la première coagulation encore non spécifiée, l’*Unité ternaire*, aussi appelée le « Verbe créateur » parce que le Verbe, en tant que parole, ne signifie que le Nom, c’est-à-dire la définition de la spécificité des choses’ (trans. modified).

103 SCHWALLER, ‘Le monde de la trinité’, *Notes et propos inédits* I, 66: ‘En géométrie, dans un triangle, la ligne donnée est Mercure, les Angles sont Soufre, le triangle qui en résulte est Sel’.

104 SCHWALLER, ‘La semence’, *Notes et propos inédits* I, 44: ‘Il ne peut alors s’agir que d’un Feu actif, c’est-à-dire d’une « intensité » séminale, comme le « feu » du poivre, par exemple, ou bien le « feu » d’un ferment organique, ou bien d’une ferment catalyseur. Le caractère de tous les ferments, c’est-à-dire des semences, étant de déterminer en Temps et Espace une nourriture—en principe sans forme—, c’est donc nettement un rôle coagulant. La coagulation de tous le « sangs » étant précisément leur fixation en forme de l’espèce de la semence coagulante, la coagulation étant, par ailleurs, un changement d’un élément aquatique en élément terrestre ou solide, sans dessèchement, sans addition ou diminution de composants’.

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In the identification of both sulphur and salt as *semence*, one discerns a specific coherence of opposites that, in elemental terms, is described by the expression 'Fire of the Earth'. The salt is described in the passage quoted above as a seed (*semence*). This seed "becomes" seed again through the process of tree and fruit (growth, ferment, coagulation). It is at once a beginning and a finality (*prima* and *ultima materia*). The reality described is non-dual. Beginning and end partake of something that is not describable by an exclusively linear causality; and yet it is seen to "grow" or "develop" along a definite "line" or "path" of cause and effect; at the same time it partakes of a cyclic or self-returning character; and yet, for Schwaller, it is not the circle but the *spherical spiral* that provides the true image of its reality: a vision which encompasses a punctillar centre, a process of cyclic departure and return from this centre (oscillation), as well as linear "development", all of which are merely partial descriptors of a more encompassing, and yet more mysterious, reality-process. The fundamental coherence of this vision to the *Bewußtwerdungsphänomenologie* of Jean Gebser (1905–1973) consolidates the significance of Schwaller's perception for the ontology of the primordial unity which is at once duality and trinity. For Gebser, consciousness manifests through point-like (vital-magical), polar-cyclic (mythic-psychological) and rectilinear (mental-rational) ontologies, each being a visible crystallisation of the ever-present, invisible and originary ontology which unfolds itself not according to exclusively unitary, cyclic or linear modalities of time and space, but according to its own innate integrum.

Thus there is no contradiction in finding the presence of fiery sulphur in the desiccating dryness of the salt, for it is precisely in the one substance that the sulphuric seed (active function) and saline seed (fixed kernel) cohere. The fixed, concrete seed-form (itself a coagulation of mercury by sulphur) contains the active sulphuric functions (the coagulating rhythms) which it will impose upon the nutritive mercurial substance (unformed matter). 'One nature', as a Graeco-Egyptian alchemical formula puts it, 'acts upon itself'.

Salt and the Fire of the Earth

Among the various perspectives that have been surveyed on the nature and the principles inherent to salt, it is perhaps the Pythagorean statement—'salt is born from the purest sources, the sun and the sea'—that pertains most directly to the deeper meaning of Schwaller's hermetic phenomenology. Salt for Schwaller was placed in a septennial relationship comprising the *tria prima* and the four elements (Illustration 3). Elementally, salt was situated by Schwaller at the end of a progression beginning with fire and air and ending in water and earth. Fire and air form a triad with sulphur; air and water form a triad with mercury; water and earth form a triad with salt. But salt was also understood to join the end of this progression to a new beginning, to a new fire/sulphur, exactly as the octave recapitulates the primordial *tonos* in musical

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harmony. For Schwaller, it was precisely this ‘juncture of abstract and concrete’ (fire and earth) that was identified with the formation of the philosopher’s stone (or at least the *key* to the formation of the philosopher’s stone):

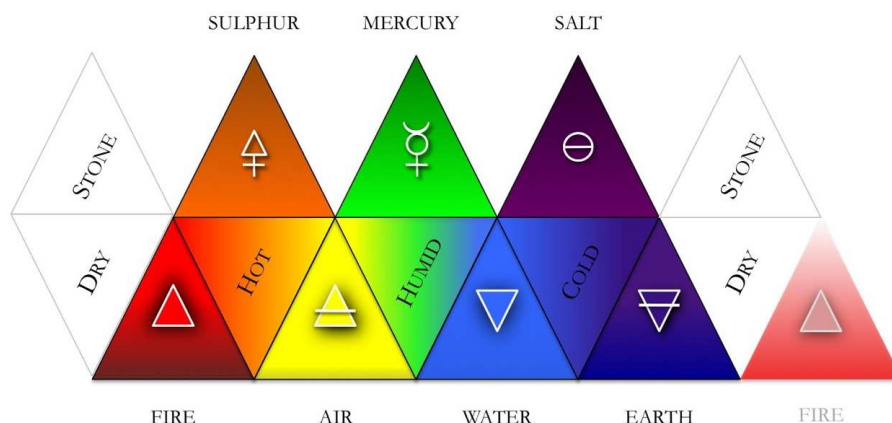


ILLUSTRATION 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRIA PRIMA AND TETRASTOICHEIA

Trinity (Sulphur-Mercury-Salt) begets quaternary (Fire-Air-Water-Earth). The juncture of Fire and Earth (abstract and concrete) is the means by which the end of the series is linked to its beginning. Diagram after Schwaller and VandenBroeck.

In this configuration (which prefigures the discussion of de Lubicz’s colour theory that will be undertaken in chapter five), one begins to see the hermetic “problem” of salt, i.e. its mystery. Salt partakes of something that stands between water and fire (Pythagoras’ ‘purest sources’) in a way that is intimately related to earth, to which it imparts its dryness. Here one finds an imbroglio that suggests at once an element and a principle. Its connection to fire is felt in the hermetic associations of the elements (the sulphuric triad, fire and air, is characterised by heat; the mercurial triad, air and water, is characterised by humidity or wetness, while the saline triad, water and earth, is characterised by *dryness*: thus the desiccating quality of salt can only come from fire). Visser’s remarks, once again, prove cogent and penetrating:

Salt, once isolated, is white and glittering. It is the opposite of wet. You win it by freeing it from water with the help of fire and the sun, and it dries out flesh. Eating salt causes thirst. Dryness, in the pre-Socratic cosmic system which still informs our imagery, is always connected with fire, heat, and light.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ VISSER, 76.

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Thus, inherent to salt is an equal participation in fire, sulphur and heat (+) and water, mercury, and wetness (–), such that it may be analogised with a chemical neutralisation reaction in which the positive and negative values become electrically equalised. This neutral condition is for Schwaller the very ground of being in which we are existentially and phenomenologically situated (‘everything in nature, being a formed Species, will be Salt’). Thus, to see existence—reality as we know it—as a neutralisation reaction between an active sulphuric function (*divinity, logos, eidos*) and passive mercurial substance (*prima materia*), to perceive the coagulating sulphur and the nourishing mercury through the “cinnabar” of all things, this is to “find” the philosopher’s stone. It is fundamentally, for Schwaller, a metaphysics of perception.

A Nondual Spiritual Alchemy

In sum, Schwaller’s alchemy is a non-dual spiritual alchemy. What is meant by this is that Lubiczian alchemy is not a dualistic spiritual alchemy that dismisses the physical or physiological aspects of the alchemical tradition as somehow inferior or irrelevant to the purely spiritual aspects of the alchemical purview. In other words, it is not an alchemy that can be subsumed under the dualistic spiritual interpretation of Atwood (which became largely normative in esoteric circles throughout the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries) or the psychological interpretation of Silberer and Jung, which views the material aspect of alchemy as merely a “screen” for the projection of the soul’s archetypal dramaturgy. Schwaller’s alchemy grows from the milieu of Parisian alchemists surrounding Fulcanelli, who were deeply immersed in the practical, laboratory aspects of the work, but who were ultimately seeking the verification not of material but spiritual processes. The Parisian alchemists of the *fin-de-siècle* and the early Twentieth century looked not to Atwood (et al.), but to the texts of Basil Valentine, Nicolas Flamel, and later, Cyliani, as exemplars of the alchemical tradition. For Schwaller, these seemingly bewildering texts not only masked a distinct laboratory process (a fact that has been increasingly recognised by scholars through specific studies of Early Modern alchemists such as Newton and Philalethes), but ran deeper still: behind the operative process and the physical manipulations, these texts preserved (and required) a method of perception based on struggle and breakthrough that mirrored the perceptual effort necessitated in the reading of the symbolic language of nature herself (hence the importance of the idea of the *liber naturae*, the ‘book of nature’ along with its *signatura*). It was precisely this effort to think according to a deeper symbolic imperative that gave Schwaller the *clavis hermeneutica* to the text of the Pharaonic temple. While scholars see the idea of a monolithic esoteric, hermetic or alchemical tradition as historically problematic, merely an identity construct, Schwaller saw the breakthrough to the perception of an actual ontological reality that eludes a purely quantitative epistemology as the true test of a hermetic adept. For Schwaller, the perception of this reality, at once abstract and concrete, the very

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bedrock of existence, at once material and spiritual, did not need a historical transmission because it was ever-present, therefore perennially available to human perception. To “discover” this ontological bedrock was equivalent to “finding” the stone, which was seen more as the process underpinning and embodied in materiality *per se*—the mineral kingdom being regarded as the first material manifestation of spirit—than as a peculiar piece of isolatable matter. For Schwaller it was this fundamental mode of reality-apperception, rather than rigid points of technical or doctrinal exegesis, that formed the true hidden current of continuity within the hermetic tradition, indelibly marking all “good” texts and adepts. But it also had a material application or proof, and this formed the *experimentum crucis* (and here it should be noted that the term *experimentum*, in Latin as in French, means both experiment and experience). Alchemy for Schwaller thus centred on a metaphysics of perception but also a material proof that this perception was germane to the very structure of matter and existence as we known it.

Spiritual Corporification

The thing that is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable. The thing that is sown is contemptible, but what is raised is glorious. The thing that is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful. When it is sown it embodies the soul (*psyche*), when it is raised it embodies the spirit (*pneuma*).

I Corinthians 15:42-44.

Having surveyed the ambivalent yet ultimately integrating symbolism of salt, we are now in a position to understand the hermetic application of this principle to the aims of hieratic alchemy: the transmutation of the physical corpus into an immortal resurrection body: an act of spiritual concretion in which the body is spiritualised and the spirit corporified. The deeper valences of alchemy thus unfold as both a material and a spiritual process and, as will be explored in the following chapter, become comprehensible as a form of theurgic apotheosis. As the words of the sixth century Syrian theurgist, Iamblichus, make clear, the decidedly *anagogic* nature of the divine energies (*theon ergon*) emerge as central to the metaphysics of perception:

[T]he presence of the Gods gives us health of body, virtue of soul and purity of mind. In short, it elevates everything in us to its proper principle. It annihilates what is cold and destructive in us, it increases our heat and causes it to become more powerful and dominant. It makes everything in the soul consonant with the *Nous* [mind, consciousness]; it causes a light to shine with intelligible harmony,

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and it reveals the incorporeal as corporeal to the eyes of the soul by means of the eyes of the body.¹⁰⁶

Alchemy and the Resurrection Body

The idea of the fixed alchemical salt finds its most significant forebears in the concept of the *corpus resurrectionis*.¹⁰⁷ In this respect, Schwaller is one of the few modern (Western) alchemists to possess what Corbin, in reference to Jaldakī, called a ‘very lucid consciousness of the spiritual finality and of the esoteric sense of the alchemical operation accomplished on sensible species’.¹⁰⁸ This spiritual finality, in the metaphysical purview of Islamic illuminationist theosophy, is no less than the creation of a resurrection body (*corpus resurrectionis*). In Schwaller’s alchemy one sees very clearly that all the intensifications made on material species occur through an inscription on the entity’s indestructible nucleus (alchemically, a mineral salt); because this nucleus is the foundation of the body, the more intensifications it experiences, the more its essential (primordial but also future) body will approach the perfect equilibrium of an indestructible (and paradoxically, incorporeal) physical vehicle until the point is reached where, ultimately, luminous consciousness itself becomes its own perfect body. Thus, the abstract and the concrete, the volatile and the fixed, are ultimately conjoined through a process of intensification registered permanently in the being’s incorruptible aspect—the salt in the bones or ashes (cf. the Hebrew *luz* or *os sacrum*).

What is the nature of this spiritual body? In a remark by Saint Gregory the Sinaite, the spiritual body is equated with the process of *theōsis* (deification) and thus becomes amenable to a theurgical interpretation:

The incorruptible body will be earthly, but without moisture and coarseness, having been unutterably changed from animate to spiritual, so that it will be both of the dust and heavenly. *Just as it was created in the beginning, so also will it arise, that it may be conformable to the image of the Son of Man by entire participation in deification.*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ IAMBlichus, *De Mysteriis*, 81, 13-82.2; trans. SHAW, 220.

¹⁰⁷ Cf., most notably, the resurrection theology of the Gospel of Paul, the Shaikhī school in Iranian Sufism, and the diamond body of Vajrayana Buddhism.

¹⁰⁸ Henry CORBIN, ‘Le « Livre des sept Statues » d’Apollonios de Tyane, commenté par Jaldakī’, *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. Pierre Lory (Paris: L’Herne, 1986), 67-8: « Ses nombreux ouvrages se signalent par sa conscience très lucide de la finalité spirituelle et du sens ésotérique de l’opération alchimique accomplie sur des espèces sensibles ».

¹⁰⁹ Saint GREGORY THE SINAITE, ‘Chapters on Commandments and Dogmas’, trans. Seraphim ROSE, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (= *Philokalia*, Russian, vol. 5; English, vol. 4).

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The matter of the spiritual body is clearly nondual ('both of dust and heavenly'). Robert Avens, in a preface to a discussion of Corbin and Swedenborg's contributions to the understanding of the spiritual body, helps situate the deeper meaning that pertains to the "matter" of the resurrection body:

It seems clear, then, that whatever Paul might have meant by the expression "spiritual body", he did not mean that the resurrected bodies were numerically identical with the earthly bodies—a view that was advocated by most writers for the Western or Latin church. The crucial question in all speculations of this kind has to do with Paul's treatment of "matter". We are naturally perplexed with the notion of a body that is composed of a material other than physical matter. Probably the best that can be said on this score is that Paul had chosen a middle course between, on the one hand, a crassly materialistic doctrine of physical resurrection (reanimation of a corpse) and, on the other hand, a dualistic doctrine of the liberation of the soul from the body.¹¹⁰

Thus, the resurrection body, like the alchemical salt, forms a paradoxical ligature between abstract and concrete, metaphysical and physical, spirit and body. While orthodox theologians such as Seraphim Rose draw on this and other passages to emphasise the Patristic doctrine that the body of Adam, the body that one will return to in resurrection, was (and is) different to one's current, corruptible body, the ultimate nature of the "matter" of the resurrection body must remain a mystery. In this respect, Gregory of Nyssa's remarks, from a treatise entitled 'On the Soul and Resurrection' may perhaps be taken as final:

The true explanation of all these questions is stored up in the treasure-houses of Wisdom, and will not come to the light until that moment when we shall be taught the mystery of Resurrection by the reality of it. [...] to embrace it in a definition, we will say that the Resurrection is "the reconstitution of our nature in its original form".¹¹¹

The original form he refers to is, of course, the Adamic, i.e. adamantine body, with obvious parallels to the Indo-Tibetan *vajra* (diamond) body. As Rose emphasises, the only thing that is certain is that the resurrection body will be different from its current, i.e. corruptible, form. As to whether it is "spirit" or "matter", or a nondual state that embraces yet supersedes both (per Corbin's *mundus imaginalis*, which spiritualises bodies and embodies spirit), it is perhaps best to remain apophatic.

110 Robert AVENS, 'Re-Visioning Resurrection: St. Paul and Swedenborg', *Journal of Religion and Health* 23, 4 (1984): 302-3.

111 GREGORY of NYSSA, 'On the Soul and Resurrection'; *Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers V: Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.* 464.

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As C. F. D. Moule notes, however, the somewhat ambiguous relationship between the mortal and incorruptible bodies may well inhere in the fact that transmutation between them was possible: for Moule, the Pauline resurrection theology was ‘perhaps wholly novel and derived directly from his experience of Christ—namely, that matter is to be used but transformed in the process of obedient surrender to the will of God’. ‘Matter is not illusory’, continues Moule; it is ‘not to be shunned and escaped from, nor yet exactly destined to be annihilated [...] Rather, matter is to be transformed into that which transcends it’.¹¹² These remarks approach the essence of the (nondual) alchemical *œuvre* in a way that confirms what one may call its theurgic and perhaps even tantric sense insofar as it recognises and embraces the *body* and *matter* as a *vehicles* or *foundations* for liberation. In short, macrocosmically and microcosmically, material substance is to be transformed into a spiritual vehicle and instrument.

¹¹² C. F. D. MOULE, ‘St. Paul and Dualism: The Pauline Conception of Resurrection’, *New Testament Studies* 12, (1966): 109; cf. also P. W. GOOCH, ‘On the Disembodied Resurrected Persons: A Study in the Logic of Christian Eschatology’, *Religious Studies* 17, 199–213.