‘Alchemy in the Amphitheatre’

Some consideration of the alchemical content of the engravings in Heinrich Khunrath’s Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom (1609)

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One of the features that makes Heinrich Khunrath’s Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom so remarkable is its sequence of ‘theosophical’ and ‘hieroglyphic’ figures, the most famous of which, the Oratory-Laboratory (Fig. 8.4), has appeared in innumerable articles and books on alchemy and the occult arts. Unfortunately, the complexity of these engravings has, on the whole, resulted in superficial readings of their message and consequent misrepresentations and distortions of Khunrath’s alchemical practice. On the one hand, Whiggish historians like John Read condemn him as a “Hermetic mystic of the deepest dye”¹ practising an alchemy which was “spiritual rather than material”, and exerted “no influence upon the progress of alchemy towards chemistry”.² On the other hand, although the occultist A.E. Waite acknowledges the fact that Khunrath was a practical alchemist and “an absolute believer in the literal transmutation of metals”,³ he prefers to promote him as a “hierophant of the psychic side of the opus”,⁴ misleadingly describing the Amphitheatre as “a text of purely spiritual and mystical alchemy”,⁵ a “book of Divine Alchemy”.⁶ This paper shall consider the alchemical content of the Amphitheatre’s engravings and show that far from deserving the somewhat marginalized status of ‘spiritual alchemist’, Khunrath should be recognised as someone whose alchemy
spans the whole spectrum, from investigation of the properties of matter and practical physical-chemistry to the use of alchemical language in the regenerative discourses of Christian spirituality.

Heinrich Khunrath, 'Doctor of Both Medicines and Faithful Lover of Theosophy', was born in Leipzig in 1560. Graduating with highest honours from Basel Medical School in 1588, he subsequently practised as a physician in Magdeburg, Hamburg, and Trebon, as well as spending time at the court of Rudolf II in Prague, numbering both Count Wilhelm von Rosenburg, John Dee's erstwhile patron, and Graf Albrecht VII von Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt among his clientele. He died in Dresden in 1605, leaving behind a collection of predominantly alchemical writings, including *On Primordial Chaos*,⁷ *Three highly useful Questions*,⁸ *On the Fire of the Mages and Philosophers*,⁹ *Universal Magnesia of the Philosophers*,¹⁰ and *Light in Darkness*.¹¹ His best known work, *The Universal Ter-tri-une Christian-Cabalist, Divinely-Magical, and Physico-Chemical Amphitheatre of the Only True Eternal Wisdom*¹² is a theosophical commentary on selected verses from the Solomonic texts of the Bible in which Khunrath seeks to propound his “way of correctly philosophising” by a “mystical Ladder of Seven orthodox Grades”¹³ and has been described as “one of the most important books in the whole literature of theosophical alchemy and the occult sciences”¹⁴.

Although emblem books like Horapollo’s *Hieroglyphica* (1505) and Alciatus’ *Emblemata* (1531) antedate the *Amphitheatre* in the use of illustrations, none had appeared containing such detailed and complex images, which have been numbered “among the most important and remarkable mystical drawings in the world,”¹⁵ depicting “remarkable illustrations of a kind of sophic Utopia, the whole symbolic landscape of the occultists.”¹⁶ Umberto Eco describes them as “complex verbal-visual constructions, where banderoles, subscript texts, [and] compositions in rebus merge with symbolic representations,”¹⁷ displaying “surreal landscapes, initiatory journeys […] a sort of Dantine ascent to a magical passage [resembling] Christian Rosencreutz’s tomb in the *Fama*”¹⁸ and Jacques van Lennep likens them to “visual mazes” and logographs,¹⁹ constituting what Urszula Szulakowska calls the “first Paracelsian illustrative cycle.”²⁰ They are, indeed, of particular interest in the history of alchemical imagery in that they pre-
date the famous alchemical emblem books of, for example, Michael Maier, Johann Daniel Mylius, and Daniel Stolcius, and are far more sophisticated than anything that had come before, such as Arnold of Villanova’s famous *Rosarium Philosophorum* series (1550) or the illustrations in Petrus Bonus’ *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* (1546). What is surprising, however, is the paucity of serious academic work on them. Other than Umberto Eco’s short work, *Lo Strano Caso della Hanau 1609* (1989), Ralf Töllner’s published thesis, discussing the alchemical content of certain of the engravings, *Der unendliche Kommentar* (1991) and Urszula Szulakowska’s chapters in *The Alchemy of Light* (2000), little detailed work exists.²¹

The *Amphitheatre* exists in two main versions: an extremely rare 1595 edition of which only four printed copies are known to survive, and a later enlarged 1609 edition that can be found in the rare book collections of most major European and American libraries.²² Along with their 25 pages of text, each surviving copy of the 1595 *Amphitheatre* contains four hand-coloured circular theosophical figures surrounded by further explicatory text. Although no place or publisher is given on the title page, Hamburg is the most likely place of publication as all four engravings bear the inscription:

> Heinrich Khunrath of Leipzig, lover of Theosophy and Doctor of Medicine, inventor, by the grace of God. Paullus von der Doort Antwerp engraved [this] in Hamburg, in the year 1595 since the birth of Christ, in the month of April (May, July, September).²³

The fourth and most famous image of the Adept in his Oratory-Laboratory also includes the words “H.F. Vriese painted [it].”²⁴

The engraver Paul, or Peter van der Doort (or Doost), was at that time Superintendent of the Dutch Poor in Hamburg and is otherwise known for a picture of the Holy Family, one of a sailing ship, and a view of the city of Hamburg with figures in costume.²⁵ The perspectival scheme of the fourth figure was drawn by the Netherlandish painter, draughtsman and writer on perspectival drawing and architecture, Hans Vredeman de Vries (1527-1606), author of the *Theatrum Vitae Humanae* (1577).²⁶ In 1595 he moved from Gdansk, where he had been designing fortifications...
as well as painting pictures for the Court of Artus, the Red Room of the Town Hall and several churches, to Hamburg, and it is most probably there where he met Khunrath, before moving on to decorate rooms in the imperial palace in Prague.²⁷

The Amphitheatre’s second, enlarged edition of 1609 adds a further five rectangular ‘hieroglyphic figures’ along with Khunrath’s portrait and an ornate symbol-rich title-page, all dating from 1602, and sometimes an owl engraving which also appears in two other of Khunrath’s publications,²⁸ with three of the five double-page rectangular engravings including Khunrath’s name as their ‘Inventor,’ ‘Constructor,’ and ‘Fashioner.’ Khunrath’s portrait also supplies the name of its engraver, Johann Diricks van Campen who engraved it in Magdeburg when Khunrath was aged 42. Although it cannot be taken as final proof, a comparison of the lettering of the unnamed engravings with that in the portrait suggests the probability that all these additional images where executed by the same artist.²⁹ In contrast to the 1595 edition, all these engravings are in black and white, as are the four circular engravings that now appear without their original surrounding Isagoge or ‘Introductory Commentaries,’ which are printed separately, to conform with the smaller and more standard folio format of the augmented edition.

A curious fact about the copies of the 1609 Amphitheatre is that they all have the engravings bound in different sequences. It is doubtful whether any real order was ever intended for the later rectangular engravings; in fact, an errata note in the colophon asks readers to ignore the printer’s mistaken instructions to insert images at the end of each of the book’s 7 Grades.³⁰ There is, however, as Eco points out, a clear sequence to the four circular engravings,³¹ as all the surviving copies of the 1595 edition, as well as the manuscript in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, have the same order,³² the sequence being easily seen to follow the Amphitheatre’s title-page description of itself as Christian-Cabalist, Divinely-Magical, and Physical-Chemical: Figure 1 is Christ at the centre of a cabalistic diagram of Hebrew names; Figure 2 shows Man the microcosm as Adam-Androgyne at the centre of hyperphysical or supernatural magical practices; and Figure 3 (Fig. 8.1) represents the macrocosm and Physico-Chemical practices.

Figure 4 (Fig. 8.2) is the Amphitheatre’s most famous engraving and a
visual representation of its “Triune Apocalyptic Key”,³³ the Three Books of God, Man and Nature, with Khunrath’s threefold injunction to Know God, Thyself, and Nature. Although the work’s most well-known commentary, the anonymous Judgement and Commentary of an experienced Cabalist and Philosopher concerning the 4 Figures of Doctor Heinrich Khunrath’s great Amphitheatre (1608),³⁴ generally attributed to the Pietist Johann Arndt,³⁵ is correct in describing this figure as being concerned with Theology,³⁶ it should be borne in mind that Khunrath’s idea of what constituted theology is broader than most. While the first three engravings are presented as flat, two-dimensional images, this fourth figure is striking in its depth
of perspective, the sense of extra dimension being particularly appropriate as it represents the synthesis of Khunrath’s Theosophy, which he defines as “Wonder-working Catholic Theology, in the ternary (that is Biblically, Macro and Microcosmically)”\(^\text{37}\)

Given its synoptic nature, a brief description of Figure 4 would be a useful point of departure for an introduction to Khunrath’s beliefs and practices. The left-hand side of the image, the Oratory, is the realm of God, connected with Christian-Cabala and the spiritual aim of divine union. This is represented by the presence on the Oratory table of the Amphitheatre’s first two circular figures. On the left is the Sigillum Emet
(Seal of Truth), Christ as חכמה אל (Wisdom of God) at the centre of concentric rings of divine and angelic Hebrew names. That on the right is the image of Adam-Androgyne, representing the Theosoper, the ten Grades of Cognition and the Ladder of Conjunction and Union by which he comprehends the universe and unites with God. The right-hand side of Figure 4 is the realm of Nature, and shows the Laboratory concerned with Physical-Chemistry, the transmutation of metals, the preparation of both chemical medicines and the Philosophers’ Stone. Finally, I would suggest that the central table signifies Man as he relates to these two realms via Magic, be that concrete physical magic or natural philosophy or more abstract hyperphysical magic relating to God and his angelic ministers. As well as being an allusion to the doctrine of sympathies and the harmony of the spheres, the presence of the four musical instruments on the table (the harp and Lira da Braccio on the left, spiritual; the lute and cittern on the right, secular) are also a reference to sacred music’s ability to dispel sadness and evil spirits, melancholy being a subject treated of by Khunrath in his most iatrochemical work, the Three highly useful Questions.³⁸

In his book Alchimia e Iconologia, Mino Gabriele divides the discussion of alchemical images into three sub-categories, dealing essentially with 1) allegorical images featuring animal and anthropomorphic figures, 2) a secret vocabulary composed of cryptographic and hieroglyphic ciphers, such as geometrical shapes, and 3) images of laboratory equipment.³⁹ This convenient division of categories shall serve as the basis for the following analysis of alchemy in the Amphitheatre.

On the subject of allegorical images, Khunrath shows a predilection for describing the alchemical process figuratively both in word and image. His most well-known alchemical work, On Primordial Chaos, is full of references to Green and Red Lions,⁴⁰ Salamanders,⁴¹ Basilisks,⁴² and Phoenixes,⁴³ while the Amphitheatre’s Circular Figure 3 contains some of the most impressive examples of alchemical symbolism found anywhere, in the image of the hermaphrodite Rebis and the equally composite Hermes’ Bird, along with references to Lion’s blood, White Eagle’s water, and Virgin’s milk. One of the rectangular engravings, that of the alchemical Citadel, also features members of the alchemical bestiary in the large dragon atop
the Philosophers’ Stone, a smaller dragon in the pool at its base, along with the well-known images of the serpents devouring each other’s tails, representing the volatile and fixed parts of the process, and the ouroboros, symbol of both eternity and the universe.⁴⁴

Turning to the second category, that of cryptographic and hieroglyphic ciphers, the most obvious example is the presence of the symbol John Dee describes in his Monas Hieroglyphica (1564), formed from a combination of the astrological and alchemical sign for Mercury and the zodiac sign for Aries, ☽ which can be interpreted alchemically as the Mercurial Water which does not wet the hands, otherwise known as Azoth, and the Fire necessary for the operation, in the well-known alchemical adage “Azoth and Fire are sufficient for the Art”.⁴⁵ Although Szulakowska’s claim that “the imagery and much of the text of the Amphitheatre […] is due to
Khunrath’s meeting with Dee in Bremen [in 1589]⁴⁶ is somewhat exaggerated, there can be little doubt of the esteem in which Khunrath held Dee’s enigmatic work. The Monas symbol is clearly visible in both Figure 3, where it forms the ‘o’ of the word Azoth on the raven’s breast, and in the Alchemical Citadel (Fig. 8.3) where it can be seen encircled by two serpents swallowing each other’s tails, above the triumphal archway into the centre of the city. What is surprising is that while both Szulakowska and Töllner note the presence too of alchemical glyphs in Circular Figures 3 and 4, and the rectangular engravings of the Calumniators (fig. 8.4) and the Citadel, neither of them comments on the novelty of the fact,⁴⁷ for while alchemical signs do appear in manuscripts, to the best of my knowledge this is the first instance of such symbols appearing in a printed engraving.⁴⁸ The Alchymia, for example, of Andreas Libavius who graduated from Basel the
same year as Khunrath, is considered by some to be the first text-book of chemistry and was published in the same year as the first edition of the *Amphitheatre* (1595). It contains many images of furnaces and alchemical equipment, but no examples of specifically chemical notation. Volume 1 of his *Rerum Chymicarum epistolica forma ad philosophos et medicos*, which came out the same year, does contain some glyphs, such as the *Hieroglyphia Mercurii philosophorum* H, but, as in this example, rather than being glyphs specifically dedicated to chemical substances they are merely the common dual-purpose astrological-alchemical symbols for the planets and related metals, already found, for instance, in Paracelsus’ *Coelum philosophorum*.49

Many of Khunrath’s alchemical glyphs, however, are of a quite different order. Figure 3 has those for the Paracelsian *tria prima* H (Mercury), I (Sulphur) and G (Salt), and H *Sapientum* (Sal ammoniac of the Wise). In Figure 4 we also find D (Precipitate of Spirit);50 I *sub* (Sublimate of Sulphur), *Sang[uis]* A (Lion’s Blood),51 O *Potabile* (Potable Gold), and F (Vinegar). It is only in the year following the publication of Khunrath’s circular engravings that we find Libavius including similar new glyphs in his *De Sceuastica artis* (1596).52 What is particularly interesting is that not only do more symbols appear in two of the *Amphitheatre*’s later rectangular engravings, but these additional symbols show a move towards depicting more readily identifiable ‘chemical’ rather than ambiguously ‘alchemical’ substances; thus in the twenty examples of alchemical malpractice written in the false entrances surrounding the *Alchemical Citadel*, we find Antimony J, Lead K, Vitriol G, and Vinegar F, and on the rocks at the centre of the *Calumniators* engraving we find in addition Cinnabar 33, Tartar E, and Saltpetre/Nitre B.

As for Gabriele’s third category of alchemical equipment, although there are images of the alchemist in his laboratory which predate Khunrath’s famous engraving, such as the miniature in Thomas Norton’s *Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477) or the cover of Hieronymous Braunschweig’s *Das Buch zu Distillieren* (1519), none has attained the popularity of the *Oratory-Laboratory*, which graces the pages of the majority of modern publications dealing with alchemy or the occult in the Early Modern period. Ralf Töllner devotes several pages to the alchemical apparatus appearing in the *Amphitheatre* image, identifying smelting equipment for the extrac-
tion of metal from ore found in Georgius Agricola’s *De re metallica* (1556) and glass vessels, ovens, and other instruments found in Braunschweig’s *Ars Destillandi* (1527) and Christoph Glaser’s *Novum Laboratorium Medic-Chymicum* (1677) including a *Balneum Mariae*, a sand-oven, retorts with hoods, *circulatoria* and a *pelikan*. More alchemical apparatus can be seen in Khunrath’s *Portrait*, where it appears again on the right side of the engraving, corresponding no doubt to the placing of the Laboratory to the right in Figure 4. Another image deserving mention is that appearing in Khunrath’s *Truthful Report concerning the Philosophical Athanor, its Use and Effectiveness*, illustrating his new design for an alchemical furnace or athanor, which is described in detail in the accompanying text. Not to be neglected either is the small image, appearing in the margin of *On the Fire of the Mages and Philosophers*, of a mirror, which Khunrath speaks of as a useful physico-magical instrument for setting a coal or lamp-fire alight by the heat of the sun, a fact of great significance for Szulakowska who discusses it at length in her *Alchemy of Light*, in the context of what she describes as Khunrath’s catoptrical theurgy in his spiritual and material alchemy.

Before concerning ourselves with the contentious subject of spiritual alchemy, let us first look slightly more closely at the *Amphitheatre’s Circular Figure 3* for references to Khunrath’s down-to-earth Physical-Chemistry of Nature, which he defines as:

> [T]he art of chemically dissolving, purifying and rightly reuniting Physical Things by Nature’s method; the Universal (Macro-Cosmically, the Philosophers’ Stone; Micro-Cosmically, the parts of the human body […] and all the particulars of the inferior globe.

With a mixture of Neoplatonic and Cabalistic terms and symbols Figure 3 and its accompanying *Isagoge* set forth an alchemical reading of the biblical account of creation in Genesis to promote knowledge of Primal Matter, where God is seen as an alchemist and the Firmament of Heaven as the “wonderful, perpetual, Universal Macrocosmic Laboratory of Wonderful God, with Nature presiding or Working.” As both alchemy and cabala are concerned with the knowledge of creation, their combination must
have held obvious attractions for Khunrath, particularly when works like the Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Formation), describing how the universe was generated from the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, suggested not just ways of understanding the process, but claimed to provide techniques for active creation. Consequently, Figure 3 is a curious combination of Hebrew terms with those drawn from medieval works of Chrysopoeia, or gold-making through metallic transmutation, by which Khunrath attempts to correlate the terminology of various conceptual systems to guide the reader in the direction of gaining knowledge of the preparation of alchemy’s Prima materia.

Thus, at the base of Figure 3 we see a globe containing the two Neoplatonic extremes of Form and Matter, where Khunrath equates \( \textit{morphe} \) or the ‘Essential Form’ of things with \( \textit{Ruach Elohim} \), the Spirit of the Lord that moved on the face of the waters, elsewhere calling it also the Anima Mundi, Soul of the World, and the Light of Nature. The raw, confused and unformed mass of virginal \( \textit{Chaos} \), is equated with the biblical \( \textit{Tohu} \) and \( \textit{Bohu} \), that which was formless and void. These two are mediated by \( \textit{Schamaim} \), Heaven, the Ethereal Spirit that permeates the whole machine of the world. This is the ‘burning spirit’, \( \textit{Esh va Maim} \) (Fire and Water), \( \textit{Aqua Communis} \) (Common Water), or \( \textit{Vinum Catholicon} \) (Universal Wine), drunk by all created things, the ‘aethereal latex’ which can be collected by chemists. Above this is another sphere representing both the ‘material’ worked on and the ‘practice’, within which we see the square of the four elements and the triangle of the three principles of Soul, Spirit, and Body, Sulphur, Mercury and Salt, the presence of all three identifying Khunrath as a ‘modern’ chemist, inspired by the then revolutionary iatro-chemical writings of Paracelsus.

Holding this second sphere is the two-headed Rebis, familiar from the Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit (1433) attributed to Ulmannus, Arnold of Villanova’s Rosarium Philosophorum and the later works of writers like Maier and Mylius. It is male on the left wearing a solar crown, female on the right with a lunar diadem, representing the Chymical Wedding symbolised as the union of Adam and Eve, Gabricius and Beya, Mercury and Saturn of the Philosophers, alchemical Gold and Silver. It also displays
the three Paracelsian principles, the right breast bearing the sign of Sulphur, the left the sign of Salt, while the sign for Mercury is placed on the navel, as befitting its own ‘versatile nature’.

Main stages of the alchemical process can also be seen in the quaternary of “Volatilise, Fix, Coagulate, Compound” and the ternary of “Separate, Dissolve, Cleanse.”

Above the Rebus is the ‘Hermetic Bird’, a symbol of the main colour changes of the alchemical process: the nigredo of the Raven’s head, albedo in the Swan’s Wings, and the multicoloured stage in the Peacock’s Tail. Here it bears the word Azoth, formed of the first and last letters of the three matrix languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, encapsulating the message of the whole diagram: the transformation of ‘Prima materia’ into ‘Ultima materia’. As mentioned above, we also find Dee’s Monas hieroglyph, itself a symbol of the totality of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ astronomy, i.e. knowledge of the stars and alchemy, understanding of divine order and the pattern of all change in the universe. Finally, above this is the Hebrew word דָּמוֹן (Urim), the Heavenly Fire and Light to be contemplated in the Philosophers’ Stone, surmounted by the Hebrew word אֱש (Esh), both the Solar Fire used by Khunrath to kindle the fire in his Athanor, and that fire which purifies and consumes the macrocosm on the day of judgement.

This synoptical representation of alchemical practice is complemented by elements in the later rectangular engravings. One such component is Khunrath’s condemnation of chemical malpractice. Although he is interested in transmutation he does not want to be classed as a mere ‘Gold-maker’, whom he critically depicts in the theriomorphic symbolism of the Calumniators engraving. There, alongside images satirising elements in the clergy, university and court, we find several condemning less high-minded fellow practitioners of alchemy, including a bovine figure with mortar, pestle and bellows, presumably one of the unkempt “Bad Chemists” whom Khunrath describes as “incompetents and botchers.” His ass-like neighbour, calling to mind Midas’ foolish lust for gold, most likely represents with its bellows the type of alchemist contemptuously known as ‘puffers’, the axe perhaps implying crude preparation of materials. The supine beetle at their feet, described as a “meddlesome gold-beetle” presumably represents the type of goldbeetle and black-magical treasure-seeker.
Khunrath condemns in his pseudonymous ‘Warning’ appended to On
Primordial Chaos.⁷⁷ In a similar vein, the duck-headed figure is perhaps a
pun on the German word to ‘discolour,’⁷⁸ given that it is called a ‘Washer’
and perhaps represents charlatans who coloured impure metals, claiming
them to be gold.⁷⁹ On the subject of fraudulent and mistaken practice, the
Citadel engraving describes specific examples such as the confidence trick
of making iron nails gold-bearing by having special nails made, half iron,
half gold, the latter half only revealed to the onlooker when dipped in a
solvent that removed a surface covering,⁸⁰ or the falsehood of passing off
the whitening of copper for silver, and the fixation of the same for silver,
and likewise its redness for Gold.⁸¹

Although on first sight it may seem as though the Citadel is purely
concerned with physical alchemy, the reader’s perspective changes, literally,
when he passes through the gate, guarded by Hermes with his caduceus
(whose ‘Emerald Tablet’ is the ur-text of the hermetic art), crosses the
bridge, approaches the inner wall marked with the joint injunction to ‘work
physico-chemically’ and ‘pray theosophically,’ passes beneath the archway
surmounted by the two serpents swallowing each other’s tails, and Dee’s
Monas symbol, moving as Töllner and Szulakowska have both noted from
the flat, map-like or aerial view of the outside of the Citadel engraving into
a three-dimensional perspective at the centre.⁸² Given that the exterior
of the Citadel shows twenty false entrances describing physico-chemical
malpractices and only one leading to the interior and the attainment of
the Philosophers’ Stone, the implication would appear to be that as with
the transition from the first three flat circular figures to the deep perspec-
tive of the fourth, ultimately Khunrath’s alchemy entails a coordination of
various levels of practice to attain the Stone.

In the centre, dominating the Citadel from atop the Philosophers’ Stone
is a dragon, from whose mouth issues the words “I am the way, truth,
and life,” calling to mind the comparison of Christ to the serpent nailed
to the cross by Moses, an image which was to appear later in Le Livre des
Hiéroglyphs de Nicolas Flamel (1612, Paris) and Abraham Eleazar’s Uraltes
chymisches Werk (1760, Leipzig).⁸³ Above this is a triangle, resembling that
in Figure 3, although this one bears not the word Urim, but the Hebrew
word Aben, meaning at the same time both literally ‘rock’ or ‘stone,’ and
Christian-Cabalistically the first two members of the Trinity: ‘Father’ (Ab) and ‘Son’ (Ben). In this one word Khunrath propounds what he considers to be an analogous relationship between the Philosophers’ Stone as the filius macrocosmi, son of the macrocosm, and Christ as the filius microcosmi or son of man.⁸⁴

In his book Magnesia, Khunrath explains that “the two great Wonder-Books [of Nature and Scripture]” respectively concern “the Apocalypse, that is, revelation of universally hidden Magnesia” and the “analogical Harmony of the Universal Magnesia of the Philosophers with IHSVH Christ.”⁸⁵ In this statement, Khunrath presents the ultimate implications of his synthesis of classical philosophy, alchemy and scripture. Asserting the idea of the correspondences existing between the Macro and Microcosm, he parallels the alchemical belief that the Philosophers’ Stone is the most perfect expression of the Greater World, having the power to heal, preserve and perfect all created bodies,⁸⁶ with the religious belief that Christ is the most perfect expression of incarnate man, having the power to heal not only bodies but to save souls.⁸⁷ Both the Stone and Christ are capable of preserving and perfecting man, by means of spirit, the one his body, the other his soul.⁸⁸

The Citadel is not the only rectangular engraving to encourage readings on more than one level. The Pyramid engraving includes both Latin and German versions of the hermetic ‘Emerald Tablet’, whose famous ‘as above, so below’ maxim also appears on the 1609 Amphitheatre’s title-page. The engraving also includes the beginning of the Pimander, which describes Hermes’ vision of the Spirit Pimander and his sudden understanding of the whole of the Cosmos, calling to mind other biblical and alchemical visions mentioned by Khunrath, such as those of Joseph and Geber.⁸⁹

This leads us finally to Khunrath’s alchemical description of man’s purification and illumination through hyperphysical magic and Christian-Cabala, as detailed in Figure 2, which appears as a microcosmic complement to the macrocosmic context of Figure 3. Many parallels can be found existing between the two figures, both of which display the quaternary of the four elements, the ternary of body, spirit, and soul, and the union of the binary in the androgyne or Rebis. Both figures too make use of exactly the same terminology found in Trithemius, Paracelsus and Dorn, of rejecting
the binary, so that the ternary by means of the quaternary may be reduced to the simplicity of the monad.⁹⁰

While the message of Figure 3 is ‘Know Nature’, here we find the Delphic exhortation to ‘Know Thyself’, as body, spirit, and soul. Man is portrayed as a composite being partaking of both the material and the divine, recalling the writings of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola; he is the link between the realms of matter and spirit. In Figure 2, we find the Ladder of Conjunction and Union, and the Ten Grades of Cognition whereby Man can move from knowledge of himself ultimately to union with God. The Grades of Cognition, for example, list the faculties of the human soul, from the senses concerned with the apprehension of matter to the *mens* or intellect that intuits the divine. Man is shown as the Cabalistic Adam-Androgyne, animated by God’s breath, *Ruach Elohim*, bounded by the square of the four elements, while above is the Archetype of God ready to transform the purified Theosopher with the Holy Spirit of *Ruach-Hokmah-El*.⁹¹

Although Khunrath never speaks of spiritual alchemy *per se* in any of his works, he does make use of alchemy as a metaphor for spiritual regeneration, most explicitly in the declaration that Man must be “f Freed from the superfluities of impurities, dissolved, separated, purified, conjoined […] sublimated (by the Divine skill of Divine fire), that is, exalted, to the grade surpassing perfection, and mentally fermented with God.”⁹² In Circular Figure 2 we find references to man being ground “with the fiery pestle of the Ten Commandments of Contrition”, the “fertile salt of conversion”, the “primaterial Water of burning tears”, and the “vivifying fire of Divine love, piously digested and wisely dissolved in fasting”, so that “Fiery-Minded Adam” may be sublimated by being born again. All this language is an immediate foreshadowing of writings that integrate religious and alchemical discourses like Johann Valentine Andreae’s *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*,⁹³ Thomas Vaughan’s *Anthroposophia Theomagica*,⁹⁴ and Pierre Fabre’s *Alchymista Christiana*,⁹⁵ together with the works of Jacob Böhme, where chemical substances and processes denote spiritual entities existent in man and the world.⁹⁶

Khunrath intimates that he sees both the preparation of the Stone and
the spiritual regeneration of man as parallel processes, implying that any success in the transmutation of base metals into gold is dependent upon a corresponding inward transmutation of the alchemical operator’s soul into spiritual gold, in line with Dorn’s “thou wilt never make from other things that one which thou seekest, except there first be made one thing of thyself.”⁹⁷ There is the sense of a unified experimental and experiential practice, an interweaving of physical and spiritual levels of practice when, in the Isagoge to Figure 3, he speaks of the adept experiencing an ‘internal movement’ within himself at the moment of the perfect preparation of Azoth, when he will weep for joy with the understanding that his forefather’s original sin has been divinely taken away and removed by the fire of Divine love, in the regeneration of the Body, Spirit and Soul.⁹⁸

In conclusion, then, we see that Khunrath’s alchemy has manifold sources and purposes. The preparation of the Stone was both evidence of his Christian faith and an aim at proof of the existence of supernatural and divine phenomena, of the possibility of miracles. As such, the investigation of nature becomes no less than a quest for the real presence of Christ existing in the physical universe.⁹⁹ For Khunrath, the practice of alchemy and natural philosophy could have moral and devotional value for the promotion of Christian belief, the illustration of truth and refutation of pagan or atheistical errors. Alchemy was in a way a mystical natural theology, a bridge between natural philosophy and theology, a way for man to either discover or rediscover the holy both in the world and himself. It is a complex combination of chrysopoeia and iatro-chemistry, philosophy and religion, magic and mysticism motivated by the desire for an understanding of the relationships between God, Nature, and Man, and aiming ultimately at nothing less than the transformation of the body, spirit and soul, both of the micro and the macrocosm, with the Amphitheatre’s engravings representing the quintessence of this experience.

Although he downplays the practical significance of Khunrath’s self-appellation of Physical-Chemist, Waite is undoubtedly correct in his estimation that Khunrath is one of the first to emphasise a spiritual dimension to alchemy, predating Böhme, Fludd and the Rosicrucians,¹⁰⁰ an opinion harmonising with Carlos Gilly’s observation that the wonderful illustrations not only in the alchemical emblems of Maier and Mylius, but also
Rosicrucian images from the works of Robert Fludd and Daniel Mögling to the *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer* in the eighteenth century would simply not have been possible without the inspiring hieroglyphic figures in Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom*.¹⁰¹
Notes

2 Ibid., p. 87.
6 Ibid., p. 257.
12 Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Æternae, Solivs Veræ: Christiana-Kabalisticum, Divino-Magicum, nec non Physico-Chymicum, Tertrivmvm, Catholicum*, Hanoviae: Guilielmus Antonius, 1609. As this work is divided into
two main parts with separate pagination, subsequent references will be to either
Amph. I. or Amph. II. to avoid confusion.
18 Ibid., p. 13: “Le tavole rettangolari rappresentano paesaggi surreali, itinerari iniziatici, e culminano nell’accesso alla Porta Amphitheatri, una sorta di ascesa dantesca verso un varco magico che […] ricorda a molti la tomba di Christian Rosencreutz così come viene descritta nella Fama rosacrociana.”
22 For the 1595 copies, see Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, University of Wisconsin-Madison, <http://www.library.wisc.edu:2784/libraries/SpecialCollections/khunrath/>; University of Darmstadt, Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek, Schloss 64283 Darmstadt; Öffentliche Bibliothek Universität Basel, Standort J G 10. Although I have not managed to see it, there appears to be a fourth copy in Rostock, UB Rostock (Signature: G VI-7, Location: 28-SON). As for manuscript versions, one particularly attractive copy exists in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, Ms.1765 and a less artistic, but nevertheless useful copy at Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, England, Alnwick Ms 571, available as British Library Microfilm 334.
24 "H.F. Vriese pinxit."
28 See Khunrath, Chaos (Magdeburg, 1597) and Magnesia (Magdeburg, 1599).
29 For further information and references, see Thieme (ed.), Allgemeines Lexicon, Vol. IX, 1913, pp. 326-7.
30 Eco, Lo Strano Caso, p. 20.
31 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
32 The Alnwick manuscript includes basic reproductions of the Circular figures in the sequence 4, 3, 1, 2. It does not include one of the 1602 engravings as Szulakowska claims in her Alchemy of Light, pp. 106-7.
33 Khunrath, Amph. I, p. 7: "Apocalyptica Clavis Triuna."
34 Anon., Judicium und Bericht eines Erfahrenen Cabalisten und Philosophen/ über die 4 Figuren deß grossen Amphitheatri D. Heinrici Khunradi, pub. Benedictus Figulus, as an appendix to Khunrath’s De Igne Magorum Philosophorumque secreto externo et visibili, pp. 107-123.


38 Figure 4: “musica sancta tristitiae spirituum[ue] malignorum fuga quia spiritus ἠλοθρεῖον lubenter psallit in cordi gaudio pio perfuso. *Questiones*, B2”*, *Cvii*-*Cviï*. See too *Amph.* II, p. 204 for the power of the Philosophers’ Stone to cure melancholy.


41 Ibid., p. 143 and p. 147.

42 Ibid., p. 218.

43 Ibid., p. 147 and p. 249.


45 Khunrath, *De Igne*, p. 2 and *Chaos*, p. 258 cite Morienus as the source.


49 Ibid., pp. 82-4.


51 John Read prefers ‘dragon’s blood’, identifying the shape as a serpentine symbol.


52 See Bettina Meitzner, *Die Gerätschaft der Chymischen Kunst: Der Traktat ’De Sceustica Artis’ des Andreas Libavius von 1606, Übersetzung, Kommentierung*
54 Töllner, Kommentar, pp. 206-9.
55 Heinrich Khunrath, Warhafftiger Bericht vom Philosophischen Athanore; Auch Brauch und Nutz desselbigen, Magdeburg, 1603.
56 See Khunrath, De Igne, p. 77 for the Speculum image. For Szulakowska’s ideas on catoptrics, see Alchemy of Light, ch. 7.
57 Khunrath, Amph. II, p. 147 (mispaginated as p. 145 [T2v]): “Physicochemia est ars, methodo Naturae Chemicè soluendi, depurandi & rite reuniendi Res Physicas; Vniuersale[m] (MacroCosmicè, Lapide[m] Phil[osophoru[m.] MicroCosmicè corporis humani partes: […] & particulares, globi inferioris, omnes.”
58 Ibid., p. 131: “Mirabile Dei Mirabilis Laboratorium Macro Cosmicon, Naturà presidente aut Laborante, perpetuum, Catholicon.”
60 Khunrath, Chaos, p. 41.
61 Genesis 1:2.
63 Khunrath, Magnesia, p. 121: “rebis oder doppelter Mercurius.”
66 Cf. the Amphitheatre’s table: “Three Things, which primordially constitute the World”: “[…] similar to the Planet Mercury in the firmament, which has a
varied and completely versatile Nature, [since] it is hot with hot things, and cold with cold things, for it follows the Nature of that with which it is conjoined."

67 "Solve, Fige, Coagula, Compona" on the Rebis’ body.

68 "Separa, Dissolve, Depura" in the sphere. See too the Citadel engraving: “Dis-solutio; Purificatio; Azoth Pondus; Solutio; Multiplicatio; Fermentatio; Proi-ectio”.

69 See Basil Valentine, Azoth: L’Occulta Opera Aurea dei Filosofi, Rome: Edizioni Mediterranea, 1988, p. 103: ‘I Filosofi mi hanno gratificato con il nome di azoth, con le lettere latine A e Z, le greche α e ω, le ebraiche א et ת, Aleph e Tau, che sommate insieme danno «AZOTH».”

70 Khunrath, Amph. II, p. 38.

71 See Khunrath, De Igne, p. 80 for Khunrath’s distinction between Urim and Esh.


73 Khunrath, Chaos, p. 263.


75 Ibid., p. 257: ‘Gemeinen Püffel’.

76 Ibid., “Ardelionische Gold-käfer”.


78 In German ‘duck’ = ‘Ente’ and to ‘discolour/bleach’ = ‘entfärben’.


80 “Auch derogestalt aus στον Nägeln χς deszu[m] machen. IMPOSTVRA.”
81 "albatio quo pro, ἔισσομε[ue] scilicet fixatio in ἡ. Item, rvbeum pro Sole, falsitas."

82 Töllner, Kommentar, p. 38; Szulakowska, Alchemy of Light, p. 125.

83 John 14:6: “Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me.” John 3:14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up.”

84 Jung, Alchemical Studies, p. 96.

85 Khunrath, Magnesia, p. 57: “Davon können zwey grosse Wunder Bücher/ das eine Apocalypsis/ das ist/ Offenbarung der Catholischen verborgen mag nesiae; das andere Harmonia analogica Magnesiae Philosophorum Catholicae cum IHSVH CHristo.”


87 Khunrath, Chaos, p. 170.

88 Khunrath, Amph. II, p. 163: “the Philosophers' Stone, truest Catholic Medicine of our restoration and preservation.”

89 Khunrath, Amph. II, p. 101 and p. 150 (mispaginated as p. 148 ['T3']).

90 See Khunrath, Chaos, p. 123 where the binary is related to chemical substances; see also Chaos, p. 20 and Amph. II, p. 4, p. 71, p. 216 and Figure 2. On Tritheimius, see his letter: “Ioannes Tritemivs Abbas Spanheymensis Domino Ioanni Vuestenburgh Comiti & viro desideriorum, de tribus naturalis magi[ae] principiis, sine quibus nihil in ipsa ad effectum producere potest”, in Ioannis Tritemii Abbatis Spanheymensis De Septem Secvndeis, id est, intelligentis, siue Spiritibus Orbes post Deum mouentibus, reconditissima scientiae & eruditionis Libellus, Cologne: Johann, Birckmann, 1567, particularly pp. 93-5.


92 Khunrath, Amph. II, p. 54: “impuritatum liberemini, soluamini, separemini, depuremini, coniungamini […] ad plusquam perfectionis gradum […] sublimemini, hoc est, exaltemini, & cum Deo ipso […] mentaliter fermentemini.”

93 Cf. van Lennep, Alchimic, p. 168


95 Petrus Joannus Faber, Alchymista Christianus, Toulouse: Petrus Bosc, 1632.
100 Waite, The Secret Tradition in Alchemy, p. 257.