

11. The *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* and One of the *Mutus liber*

Also in one of the *Mutus liber* (a ‘mute book’ without words), called here the *Mutus liber 1*, printed in Mangetus’ *Bibliotheca curiosa*, we find clear parallels to the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar*.⁷⁸ But here we again see pictures which, in contrast to those of the *Rosarium*, show an individual relationship of the adept and his soror mystica. In some there is a clearly defined lower register where we see the adept and his soror mystica on their knees in front of the oven, and then an upper level where we see what happens on the transpersonal level. The content of the upper, archetypal world needs, however, to be well contained in the hermetic vessel.

This is a clear parallel to two of the pictures of the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* that also divide the upper divine level and the lower human level, and points to the need for a containing vessel. But while the picture on folio 99a (see p. 34 and 85) of the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* shows the lower level clearly separated from the upper level, the picture on folio 128b (see p. 101) gives the two levels not clearly separated. Only the text speaks of the two levels, namely of the upper, big Theosebeia, and the lower small or human Theosebeia. The entire *Mutus liber 1* illustrates how the upper archetypal world and the lower human level must be clearly kept apart. The symbolic depiction of the opus alchemicum in the *Mutus liber 1* not only lacks a detailed explanation—contrary to the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar*—but it also excludes the animal level that is so frequently represented in the pictures of the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar*, where we see depicted the bull, the serpents, the dogs, the whale and the birds. These animals are sometimes even represented as if they belong to a separate, subhuman register.

The essential work since the time of Zosimos has been the distillation. The furnace for this work in figure 9 (folio 153a) has the same size as the great Theosebeia with the moon on her head and the great Zosimos with the sun on his head. It needs to be pointed out here that this is the only representation we have of a furnace in a text by Zosimos.⁷⁹ The striking similarity to the *Mutus liber* is seen in figure 10. The furnace was considered by the alchemists to be a microcosm, as can be seen from figure 11.

⁷⁸ La Rochelle, 1678, reprinted in *Bibliotheca Curiosa* of J. J. Mangetus, Genève 1702.

⁷⁹ There is a striking similarity of the distillation apparatus seen in fig. 9 to the one represented in Codex Parisianus gr. 2327, fol. 81v, see Mertens, Mem. auth. p. 255.



Figure 8: The 2nd picture of the *Mutus liber 1* showing the Sun-king and the Moon-queen in the hand of the great Mercurius, but well contained in the retort, a main achievement of alchemy which is to contain the archetypal world within and not to become possessed by it. In the lower part of the picture we see the adept and his soror mystica on their knees in front of the oven.



Figure 9: (fol. 153a) The huge alchemical oven with the small vessels on top is the same size as Zosimos and Theosebeia, showing that it is not the concrete outer oven that is depicted, but that the oven is a symbol. It points to the fact that the distillation process is the best possible image for continuous pondering, as he points out in the text in different places. The product of this distillation process is the red elixir, that is also shown condensed in the upper part of the head of Theosebeia. As Zosimos states in the text on fol. 220a, the stone is called the head, and the head conceals the thoughts as the red colour of the stone is concealed in the white. The elixir is distilled from the autonomous phantasies gravitating around the bodily urges, symbolized by the yellow colour, becoming in the end like a halo around Theosebeia's own head and a scarf around her shoulders.

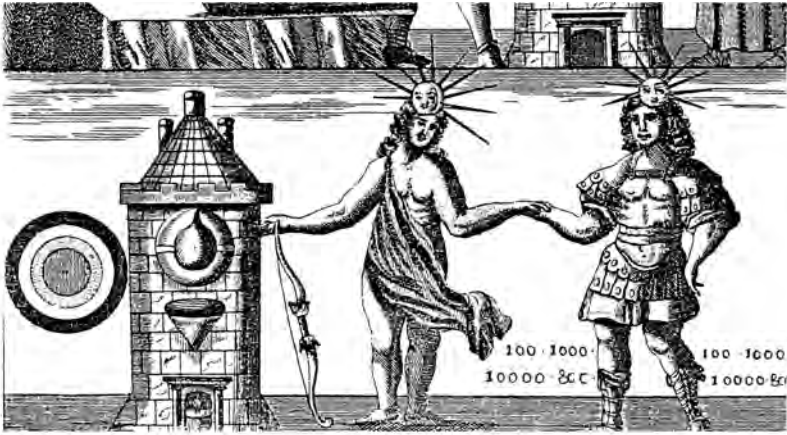


Figure 10: Another picture from the *Mutus liber I*, showing a woman with the moon on her head and a man with the sun on his head, symbolizing the divine aspects of the adept and his soror mystica. The oven, also here in this picture of the 17th century, is of the same size as the humanized archetypal figures. The similarity of this picture to Figure 9 on the opposite page is striking, leading to the hypothesis that the pictures of the *Muḥṣaf aṣ-ṣuwar* must have been known in some form to the author of this *Mutus liber I*. The numbers 100, 1,000, 10,000 etc. point to the multiplicatio of the elixir as a result of the successful union of the opposites.

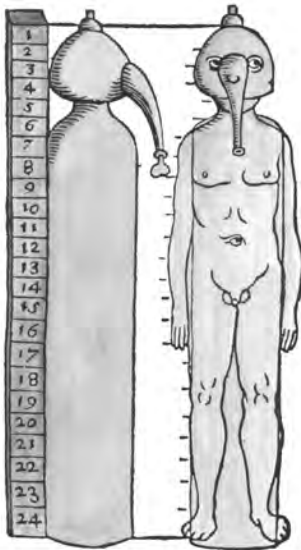


Figure 11: View of the alchemical oven with a distillation apparatus on top. The picture comes from a text written by Dorneus, a medical doctor and alchemist from the 16th century (*Aurora* 1577). The oven is of the same size as the human being beside it, pointing to the symbolic dimension of the alchemical oven. The elixir is distilled out of the human body, i.e. out of the mysterious urges and phantasies that emerge from the inner unconscious world of the individual. To distil them is a symbol for pondering over those images, as we can learn from alchemical writings. The result of this patient work is the wisdom of the earth or the body (see fn. 73, p. 59).

12. Summary

This introduction has given evidence for the following conclusions concerning the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar*:

a. The book must be considered to be a translation from a Greek original, above all because of a strong correspondence of ideas and language with extant Greek books of Zosimos. But the Arabic translation of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* which has come to us is best understood as a translation with a certain amount of adaptation. The prophecy concerning the Arabs here must be an interpolation into the original text. Our text must have been written by Zosimos himself, or Theosebeia, or quite possibly somebody of his following.

b. The *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* shares many characteristics with the *Kitāb al-mafātīḥ fī aṣ-ṣanʿa*. There is evidence that our dialogue was composed later than the *Kitāb al-mafātīḥ*, which is mentioned in the *Fihrist* of Ibn Nadīm. Both texts also have later offspring: the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* can be found to a large extent in the up till now singular *Kitāb al-ḥabīb*, while the widely-known *Kitāb Qirāṭis* turns out to be largely (from page 6, line 3) an epitome and copy of part of the *Kitāb al-mafātīḥ*.

c. The *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* is important for the question of the origin of the famous *Turba philosophorum*, as the *Turba* derives partly from the *Book of Pictures*. Even the framework of the meeting of philosophers may have its origin in this book.

d. Our text was known in some form to the Latin alchemical tradition, as can be seen from a translation of the «2nd Book of the Names» from the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* that can be found in the *Artis auriferae* of the 16th century. The pictures of the *Rosarium philosophorum* go back to Zosimos, whose pictures also seem to have influenced one of the *Mutus liber*.

Above and beyond these connections, the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* has to be considered a *key text* to open up the better understanding of the religious-symbolic branch of alchemy. This branch thrived among the Arab alchemists, who were influenced by a wide knowledge of translations from Greek works. Authors like Muḥammad ibn Umail, known in Latin alchemy as Senior, developed Zosimos' symbolism further.

This branch of symbolic alchemy has from now on to be seen as the description of a *psychological transformation* of the adept on his or her quest for immortality. This process is described in the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* with basic substances, mirroring the very elemental, collective character of this process. It is the great merit of C. G. Jung to have shown the way to a better understanding of this branch of alchemy. Further research that tries to understand this type of text should stop looking for concrete substances that might be covered up by the symbols mentioned by these authors.

The *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar*, the complete text of which survives in only one manuscript, reveals the important role played by Arabic alchemy in enabling the continuity of Western civilization. Arabic-Islamic culture was a bridge that reconnected Western culture to its cradle, the culture of Antiquity. By the uncovering of the historical facts presented here, the discoveries of C. G. Jung concerning the meaning of religious-symbolic alchemy are further reinforced.