

10. The Muşhaf aş-şuwar and the Rosarium philosophorum

The *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* found its way into the Arabic world and inspired some introverted lovers of the soul, especially Ġābir ibn Ḥaiyān and Muḥammad ibn Umail.⁷³ Its pictures must have later on somehow found their way to Europe, where they became a source of inspiration to some Latin alchemists like the author of the illustrated book called *Rosarium philosophorum* (15th cent.), and later the creator of the *Mutus liber* (16th cent.).

Looking at the *Rosarium* pictures it is remarkable to see that the symbolism of sun and moon is also to be found in some of the pictures. But these luminaries are no longer connected to two specific, named human beings, as is seen so clearly in the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar*.⁷⁴ This shows that in the transition of Greek and Arabic alchemy to Latin alchemy the individual relationship faded into the background, and the adept and his soror mystica became just the archetypal sun-king and moon-queen, like figures in a fairy tale.

It needed the experience and the courage of C. G. Jung to look at the psychological *facts*, and thus rediscover the connection of the pictures of the *Rosarium* to psychology.⁷⁵ In his book called the *Psychology of Transference* Jung used this picture series as a guide to show how the process of individuation develops in a really deep analysis, and how the relationship between analyst and analysand gradually finds its right form if the two are able to separate (solve) the upper, divine dimension (sun and moon), and the lower, subhuman or instinctual level (the snakes and the dogs) from the human level, and then they are able, *deo concedente*, to coagulate the transpersonal pair of opposites within themselves, represented by the greater man and the greater woman, the animus and anima, as he called these archetypes.

The clinching argument for the continuity of culture in the Western World can be found in a treatise called *Rosinus ad Euthiciam*, as the dis-

⁷³ See Th. Abt, *The Great Vision of Mohammad Ibn Umail*, published as a supplement to *Psychological Perspectives*, Los Angeles 2003.

⁷⁴ See *Artis Auriferae*, Basle 1610, p. 158–208.

⁷⁵ See C. G. Jung, «Psychology of Transference» in *Coll. Works* Vol. 16.



Figure 7: King and queen standing on sun and moon from the «Rosarium cum figuris», as this late medieval alchemical florilegium was called by earlier historians of alchemy in order to distinguish it from other Rosarium texts without pictures (Vadiana Library, St. Gallen, Ms 394a).

torted names of Zosimos and Theosebeia were known by the time they came into Latin. In the first volume of the *Artis Auriferae* (first printed in Basle 1593), we find in the second chapter a dialogue that corresponds to the «2nd Book of the Names» of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar*. This translation preserved essential teachings of Zosimos to a surprising large extent.

In the introduction to this dialogue we even read that one has to look at the pictures (*speculare figuras*) at the beginning, in the same way as the reader of the different books of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* is supposed first to look at the pictures given at the beginning of each chapter. In Latin alchemy, however, the pictures seem to have migrated from the dialogue *Rosinus ad Euthiciam* to a separate treatise called *Rosarium philosophorum*, although the text that accompanies the *Rosarium* pictures is just a compilation of quotations—including from later alchemists—commenting on the different stages of the work represented in the pictures. These pictures of the *Rosarium* have the union of sun-king and moon-queen as their central topic, connecting this series clearly to the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar*.

After the remark about looking at the pictures, the text of *Rosinus ad Euthiciam* continues, showing clearly at times that it is a translation of the dialogue from the Arabic text which we are considering in this study:

Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar
(fol. 43a, 9–43b, 7):⁷⁶

2nd chapter of *Rosinus ad*
Euthiciam in the *Artis auriferae*:⁷⁷

«... to look at the figures of the names at the beginning, and to meditate on what he states, for he did not write anything except by

76 قالت: فأبيني عن قول شيماس بن طيفن الحكيم إنّ الشيء واحد الذي به يكون ما تطلبون. فإن لم يكن فيه مثل ما تطلب، فلست مصيباً شيئاً مما تطلب. قال: قد بين لك أنّ من دخل في الصنعة إنّما يطلب أن يصير الأشياء ذهباً. فأنت إن لم تجعلي الذهب في الذهب فلست على شيء. قالت: وما الذي ينتفع به أن يجعل الذهب في الذهب؟ قال: لأنه يخرج من القليل الكثير. قالت: لو عرف هذا أهل الدنيا لكثّر ذهبهم. قال: هو ذا قد أعلمتك به. قالت: فما في يدي من شيء. قال: جهالتك بتدبير أشباهه الذي يخلط به من أقرابه الموثلفة غير المختلفة. قالت: فأبيني عن ذكر الحكماء مزاج الهواء. قال: إنّما وضعوه قياساً للتركيب. قالت: وكيف وضعوه؟ قال: لأنه إن لم يكن بين الرطبين الطيفين ماسك مصلح بينهما هلكا وهريا من النار ولم يقويا على كثرة الطبخ. وإن لم يقويا على كثرة الطبخ لم يخرج منهما شيء ينتفع به، لحب الرطوبة اليبوسة وحب السخونة البرودة. وكذلك القمر والنجوم إنّما صار ضوءهن من ضوء الشمس، ولا سيما القمر خاصة أكثر ما يأخذ من ضوء الشمس، ولذلك كثر ضوءه بالليل. وكذلك كل شيء من الأشياء فمن الأصل يستفيد القوة والصيف.

77 Basle 1610, p. 165: «Speculare figuras initio nominum, & meditare quare hic posui nihil enim eorum posui, nisi ad eorum quibus eget coparatio. Ista est secunda expositionis nominum alienorum Rosini ad Euthicia, & est per quaestiones & responsiones...Et illa: "Patefac igitur

«She said: “Then tell me about what Šīmās ibn Ṭaifun the Sage says: ‘The thing by which what you are seeking comes into being is one. If it does not contain something like what you are looking for, you will attain nothing of what you seek.’”

He said: “He has explained to you that whoever enters the work is seeking to turn things to gold.

If you do not put gold into the gold

you will have nothing.” She said: “Then what is the benefit if you put the gold into the gold?” He said: “Because he gets the much from little.” She said: “If the people of the world knew this their gold would increase.”

He said: “That is what I told you.” She said: “So I have gained

way of analogy for some of them. This is following the explanation of the other names of Rosinus to Euthicia, and it is in questions and answers. She said: “Explain therefore what Syrnas the Philosopher said, that the thing in which everything that is to be operated exists is one, for if it is not there you will find nothing.”

He replied: “He has shown you here that whoever enters the art is only seeking to turn things into gold. If you do not put gold upon gold, that is the ferment that is prepared and put onto the stone of the philosophers, you will not gain that from which much comes from little.”

She said: “If many inhabitants of the world knew this, gold would be multiplied for them everywhere.”

He replied: “That is what I told you.” She said: “But it gave me

quod Syrnas Philosophus ait, quod res est una in qua sit totum quod operatur est: quod nisi insit, nihil inveniatis.” Respondet: “Iam tibi demonstravi, quod qui in hanc artem ingreditur, nihil adinquirat, quam res in aurum vertere, tu aurum nisi aurum in aurum ponas, id est fermentum praeparatum, & in lapidem Philosophorum positum, nihil habes ex eo quod a paulo multum exit.” Et illa: “Si mundi habitatores haec scirent, eorum auru utiq, multiplicaretur.” Respondet: “Ecce tibi notificavi.” Et illa: “Nihil mihi tum profuit.” Respondet: “Propter tuam ignorantiam & insipientiam, huius regem qualiter proxima immiscetur apta, non inconuenientia.” Et illa: “Cur aere Philosophus narrat complexione?” Respondet: “Hoc ad compositionis coparationem posuerunt.” Et illa: “Qualiter haec descripserunt?” Respondet: “Nisi duobus tetrissimis humidis continens fuerit aliquid quod ea placabilia faciat, pereunt, & ignem fugiunt, & coctionem sustinere nequeunt: & nisi decoctione sustinuerint, nihil ex eis utile procedit, eo quod siccitas humiditatem diligit, & calor frigus. Similiter Lunae & Stellarum splendor ex Solis est lumine, maxime vero, & proprie Lunae, quae magis ex Solis lumine sumit: quare nocte lume eius multiplicatum est. Similiter omnia ex radice sumunt vires.”»

nothing.” He said: “It is your ignorance of the operation of its relatives which are similar to it, and mixed with it, which conform with it, and are not different.” She said: “Then tell me about the mixing of the air which the sages mention.” He said: “They wrote it as an analogy for the composition.” She said: “How did they write that?” He said: “Because, if there is no holder and reconciler between the two subtle, moist ones, the two are destroyed, and flee from the fire, and they are not be strong enough to be cooked much. If they are not strong enough to be cooked much, nothing will emerge which could be beneficial. For moisture loves dryness, and heat loves cold. It is the same with the moon and the stars, their light comes from the light of the sun. Especially the moon takes much light from the sun. That is why its light is intense during the night. In the same way everything gains strength and dye from the origin.”»

nothing.” He replied: “That is because of your ignorance and failure to understand. Near and suitable things are mixed with this thing, not unsuitable.” She said: “Why does the philosopher speak of a composition in the air?” He replied: “They gave that as a comparison for the composition.” She said: “How did they describe this?” He replied: “If there is not something to contain the two very soft and moist ones, which makes them more pleasing, they perish, and flee from the fire, and they do not tolerate cooking. Unless they are put in the cooking, nothing useful will come from them.

For dryness loves humidity, and heat loves cold. In the same way the shining of the moon and stars comes from the sun, especially that of the moon, which takes a great light from the sun. That is why at night its light is made greater.

In the same way all things gain power from the root.”»

Also the end of the chapter corresponds to the end of the «2nd Book of the Names» of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar*.

In conclusion to this chapter, based on the fact that the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* must have been known, at least partially, in the Western world, it would be difficult to reject the hypothesis that Zosimos' *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* was the major source of inspiration for the *Rosarium philosophorum*. Now, having the pictures of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* together with the detailed teaching of Zosimos, we can get a congruent and probably quite complete idea of what he meant by the alchemical work and its effects on the adept.

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) of the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* shows the lower level clearly separated from the upper level, the picture on folio 128b 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 becomes clear from the text of the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* (see fol. 59a). 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 says in many places «the stone is called the brain» (see Berthelot, *passim*). The elixir is distilled from the autonomous phantasies gravitating around the bodily urges, becoming in the end like a halo around Theosebeia's own head and a scarf around her shoulders.

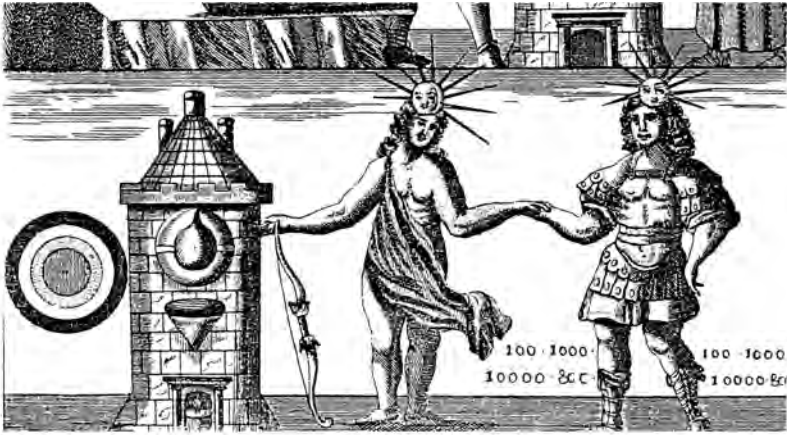


Figure 10: Another picture from the *Mutus liber I*, showing a woman with the moon on her head and a man with the sun on his head, symbolizing the divine aspects of the adept and his soror mystica. The oven, also here in this picture of the 17th century, is of the same size as the humanized archetypal figures. The similarity of this picture to Figure 9 on the opposite page is striking, leading to the hypothesis that the pictures of the *Muşhaf aş-şuwar* 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.

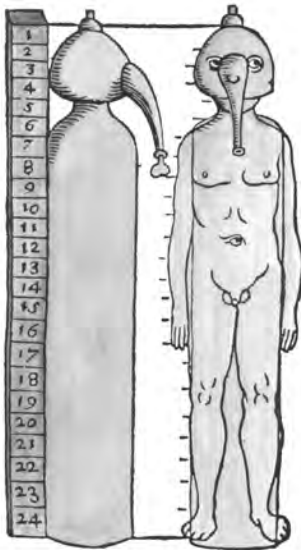


Figure 11: View of the alchemical oven with a distillation apparatus on top. The picture comes from a text written by Dorneus, a medical doctor and alchemist from the 16th century (*Aurora* 1577). The oven is of the same size as the human being beside it, pointing to the symbolic dimension of the alchemical 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 distill 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, 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.