

# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

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*Frater Hauck was a presenter at the "Hidden in Plain Sight" esoteric conference held at Rosicrucian Park. His paper based on that presentation entitled "Materia Prima: The Nature of the First Matter in the Esoteric and Scientific Traditions" can be found in Volume 8 of the Rose+Croix Journal - [http://rosecroixjournal.org/issues/2011/articles/vol8\\_72\\_88\\_hauck.pdf](http://rosecroixjournal.org/issues/2011/articles/vol8_72_88_hauck.pdf).*



The Philosopher's Stone was the key to success in alchemy and had many uses. Not only could it instantly transmute any metal into gold, but it was the alkahest or universal solvent, which dissolved every substance immersed in it and immediately extracted its Quintessence or active essence. The Stone was also used in the preparation of the Grand Elixir and *aurum potabile* ("drinkable gold"), remedies that would regenerate the human body. In addition, it was used to restore a plant or animal from its ashes in a process called palingenesis ("retrieval of the soul"). Because the Philosopher's Stone carried the purified life force, it could also be used to create artificial living beings called *homunculi*.

The idea of the Philosopher's Stone originated with Alexandrian and Arabian alchemists and soon captured the imagination of people around the world. By the Middle Ages, the Philosopher's Stone was not only the key to transforming base metals into gold but also held the secret to eternal life and spiritual perfection as well. Since the Stone would turn a corruptible

base metal into incorruptible gold, it could similarly transform humans from mortal (corruptible) beings into immortal (incorruptible) beings.

However, it is important to remember that the Stone was not just a philosophical possibility or symbol to alchemists. Both Eastern and Western alchemists believed it was a tangible physical object they could create in their laboratories. The idea probably originated with the observation that some precious metals could be obtained from the ores of base metals. For instance, silver is often obtained from galena, the ore of lead. Also, the preparation of metal alloys and chemicals that imparted the characteristics of gold to other metals suggested there might be a single agent that would perfect any metal.

Another inspiration for the concept of the Philosopher's Stone came from the theory of the Four Elements and the possibility of changing one element into another by manipulating their qualities. For instance, Water (with the qualities of moist and cold) could be turned into Air (steam) by changing its qualities into

moist and hot through boiling. Or Water could be turned into Earth (solid ice) by transforming its qualities into cold and dry by freezing.

The Fifth Element and most elevated form of matter was a subtle substance known as the Quintessence. The source of the other elements, the Quintessence was latent in all things and thought to be the substance of heavenly bodies. Paracelsus described it as the “star” in objects, an inner image that gave things their primary shapes and characteristics.

The spiritual significance of the Philosopher’s Stone probably originated in the Egyptian belief in the perfection of the soul and the creation of an immortal golden body. The mystical doctrine of the regeneration of the human soul is part of most religions, and the Philosopher’s Stone became the physical manifestation of our fundamental desire for perfection. The parallel is most obvious in Christianity, where Christ is the physical embodiment of God who offers us salvation and eternal life. In fact, in the liturgy of the Middle Ages, Christ was sometimes referred to as the *Lapis* or Stone.

Many religious scholars believe the Philosopher’s Stone is synonymous with the symbol of the stone found in many spiritual traditions, such as the Old Testament stone that Jacob rests his head upon, the New Testament rock Christ lays as the foundation of the temple, the Holy Grail or cup of Christ, the Yesodic foundation stone of the Kabbalah, and the Cubic Stone of Freemasonry. In some ways, the Philosopher’s Stone also resembles the forbidden fruit of Genesis and symbolizes knowledge that human beings are not meant to possess

The power of the Philosopher’s Stone to transform anything lies in its fundamental ability to connect through all levels of Above and Below, spirit and matter, light and darkness. The Stone exists in the for-

mative realm between energy and matter, suspended in the twilight between what exists and what does not exist. “Receive this Stone which is not a stone,” said the Alexandrian alchemist Zosimos, “a precious thing that has no value, a thing of many shapes that has no shape, this unknown which is known by all.”

In Latin, the Philosopher’s Stone was called the *Lapis Philosophorum* (Stone of the Philosophers) but to the Greeks it was known as the *Chrysopoeia* (the Heart of Gold). It was also referred to as the *Magisterium* (the Magistry), *Spiritus Mundi* (Spirit of the World), as well as “Azoth,” “Alkahest,” “Etherium,” “Universal Medicine,” and “Grand Elixir.”

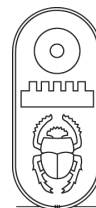
The eighth century Arabian alchemist Jabir did much to popularize the notion of the Philosopher’s Stone among alchemists. He reasoned that the transmutation of one metal into another could be accomplished by the rearrangement of its basic qualities, and the transformation would be expedited by a magical touchstone made from a hidden etheric substance that is distributed throughout the universe.

The Arabs referred to this agent as *Al-Iksir* (“from the ashes”), because it could be isolated through fire and concentrated in the ashes of substances. *Al-Iksir* is the origin of our word “elixir,” the alchemical medicine believed to prolong life indefinitely and also change metals into gold.

## What the Philosopher’s Stone Looked Like

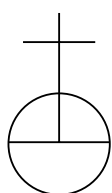
Much has been written about the Philosopher’s Stone, and there are scores of recipes for its preparation. One example is the seventeenth-century *Mutus Liber* (or Silent Book), which is a symbolic instruction manual of fifteen illustrations showing how to concoct the Stone.

Surprisingly, we know quite a bit about what the Philosopher’s Stone looked like. It was dark red in color and resembled





a common irregular stone or glass crystal. The material of which the Stone was made was the same red powder of projection so prized by the alchemists. The blood-red color of the Stone was its chief physical characteristic and showed up in many alchemical drawings as the Rosy Cross, the Red King, and the Red Dragon. All these represent the Philosopher's Stone.



The oldest cipher for the Philosopher's Stone is also the sign for cinnabar. It originated in the Middle Ages and depicts the cross of the elements raised to their highest level. Cinnabar is a naturally occurring mineral that unites sulfur and mercury (mercury sulfide HgS). It often appears as a red stone (above left) or in a beautiful trigonal red crystal that forms on white crystalline dolomite (above right). If you heat the stone in an open fire, drops of pure mercury metal sometimes ooze out from the cracks. The name "cinnabar" probably originated with the Greek philosopher Theophrastus, who was born around 370 BCE.



Another cipher for the Philosopher's Stone looks like the Sign of Solomon. It probably originated in the late Middle Ages and depicts the union of the elements Fire (the upward-pointing triangle) and Water (the downward-pointing triangle). This is the Sacred Marriage in alchemy, the merging of Fire and Water, Below and Above,



Masculine and Feminine, the archetypal King and Queen.



A third cipher for the Philosopher's Stone first appeared in the early Renaissance. It depicts the Squaring of the Circle, which is a formula for the creation of the Stone. The recipe for it was first revealed in the Rosicrucian text *Rosarium* (1550):

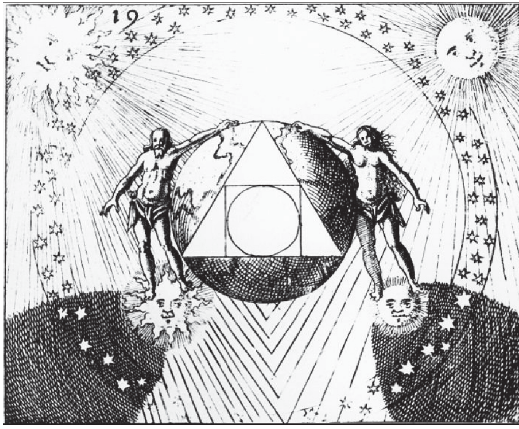
Make a circle out of a man and woman. Derive from it a square, and from the square a triangle. Make a circle and you will have the Philosopher's Stone.

This symbol is actually another depiction of the Sacred Marriage in alchemy.



The square is a symbol of masculine consciousness and signifies earth and the Four Elements. It is the four-square mindset of logic and the aggressive energy of spirit. The circle is a symbol of feminine consciousness, the unitary impulse to contain and nurture. It is the all-inclusive mindset of intuition, empathy, and the





passive energy of soul. The triangle is the cipher for Fire, which is the agent of transformation in alchemy. In this drawing, the triangle integrates the masculine and feminine energies into a third thing, which the alchemists sometimes referred to as the “Child of the Philosophers.” This is the Quintessence of consciousness that unites the functions of thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition in a new embodiment of body, mind, and soul now fused together in the fire. Finally, human consciousness achieves a divine union with the One Mind of the universe, signified by the greater circle encompassing all.

The Philosopher’s Stone exhibited the peculiar property of having a variable weight. Sometimes it was as heavy as a piece of gold and other times light as a feather. Its primary ingredient was an equally mysterious element known as “carmot.” Carmot may have been a mythological substance, since no mention of it exists outside alchemy, and it does not appear in any list of modern chemical compounds.

However, there is a tradition among French alchemists that the word “carmot” is a secret anagram for “marcot.” Specifically, the process is called “marcottage,” a method of plant propagation in which black soil is tied around a branch stripped of a ring of bark. The new branch that grows is called the marcot.

Interestingly, black dirt has been associated with the First Matter since

ancient Egypt. In fact, the word “alchemy” is derived from the Arabic *Al-khemi*, which means “from the black dirt of the Nile delta.” This all seems to imply that the Stone grows from the First Matter that has been raised to a higher level in the Work.

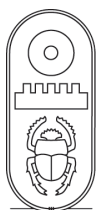
Many reports of the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone exist among Arabian and European alchemists. One of the most credible is from the revered alchemist Albertus Magnus. He reported he had successfully created gold by “transmutation” in the later years of his life. When Magnus died in 1280, the miraculous object was passed on to his student Thomas Aquinas, who is also said to have made many successful transmutations using it.

Another credible report of the creation of the Philosopher’s Stone comes from the sixteenth-century Swiss alchemist Paracelsus. He discovered what he called the “Alkahest,” a single substance from which all the elements (Fire, Water, Air, Earth) were derived. This substance was the chief ingredient he used to create his Philosopher’s Stone. He demonstrated its power by creating a *homunculus* he showed to some of his colleagues.

### Preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone

According to alchemical literature, there are two ways to create the Philosopher’s Stone: the “Wet Way” and the “Dry Way.” The Wet Way (or Humid Way) uses natural processes and is more gradual and safer than the Dry Way, which relies on intense heat and powerful chemicals to achieve the Stone in a shorter time.

Even in spiritual alchemy, there is a Wet Way in which natural inspiration builds gradually in the initiate to reach the fervor necessary for personal transformation. And there is a spiritual Dry Way in which the initiate attempts to ascend on a direct path to divine knowledge. The Wet Way works with the “slow, steady fires of nature,”



while the Dry Way works with the “raging fires of our lower nature.”

The rapid spiritual ascent of the Dry Way is very dangerous for unprepared initiates and can result in a loss of personal identity or even madness. Tantric alchemists of India follow the direct path by trying to release and control sexual energies, while the Dry path of shamanic alchemy consists of the use of powerful plant allies and psychoactive drugs. There is no doubt that some medieval alchemists made use of such preparations. The alchemists were the first chemists and were very much aware of the psychological and spiritual effects of the plants and compounds with which they worked.

In the laboratory, the Dry Way begins with roasting and heating in an intense fire that may only last a few hours. The Wet Way begins with slow digestion and putrefaction of the matter that can go on for many months. In both methods, this is known as the Black Phase in which the matter blackened as it was reduced to its basic essences.

The Black Phase gives way to the White Phase in which a purification of the matter takes place and the essences are separated away from any contamination. In the Dry Way, this appears as a white crust formed by dried matter carried by gases bursting in bubbles on the surface of the material. Sometimes the crust puffs up and releases a cloud of white vapor into the flask, which is called the White Eagle. In the Wet Way, a white layer of digesting bacteria forms on top of the putrefied material, which is called the White Swan.

During the ensuing Red Phase, the energies released in the previous operations are captured in a solution or powder. In the Dry Way, this is indicated by the appearance of a red coloring on the surface of the molten material or in the ashes, which is caused by high temperature oxidation-

reduction reactions. This was symbolized by the Phoenix rising from the fire.

In the Wet Way, the final phase is sometimes signaled by the appearance of a reddish swirl of oil or pink globules on the surface of the matter. This was symbolized by the Pelican, which sometimes can be observed regurgitating a meal of freshly killed fish for its young. The mother’s white breast plumage is often stained with red blood during the feeding process.

## **The Cipher of the Stone**

The most powerful cipher in all of alchemy is a rather odd-looking glyph that looks like a little stick man. It is a symbol of the Philosopher’s Stone, and it is said to incorporate some of the powers of the Stone whenever it is drawn. In other words, the cipher is said to carry its own spirit or intelligence, which is evoked every time it is written down or constructed. The name of the cipher is the “Hieroglyphic Monad,” and it was created by British Rosicrucian Dr. John Dee.

Dee was a true Renaissance man who achieved world renown as a mathematician, mapmaker, cryptographer, alchemist, magician, philosopher, and astrologer. His library was one of the largest in England with over 4,000 rare texts and manuscripts, and his alchemical laboratory rivaled any in the world at the time.

He entered Cambridge College at the age of 15 and began a five-year regimen of sleeping only four hours a day, so he could devote more time to studying Hermetic philosophy and alchemy. “I was so vehemently bent to study,” said Dee of his time at Cambridge, “that for those years I did inviolably keep this order: only to sleep four hours every night; to allow to meet, eat, and drink two hours every day; and of the other eighteen hours all were spent in my studies and learning.”

Dee grew into an imposing figure with a very commanding presence. Biographer John Aubrey described his physical appearance in his manuscript *Brief Lives* (1693): “He had a very fair, clear, rosey complexion and a long beard as white as milk. He was tall and slender, a very handsome man. He wore a gown like an artist’s frock, with hanging sleeves, and a slit. A mighty good man was he.”

Dee was a close confidant of Queen Elizabeth, who issued him a license to practice alchemy and make gold. As a favor to the Queen, it is said, he “controlled the Elements” and cast a spell on the Spanish Armada by causing bad weather to thwart the invasion of England. He became the model for “Prospero” in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and is also said to have been the inspiration for Goethe’s *Faust*.

With an intense purity of intention and motive, Dee embarked on a systematic plan to discover the Philosopher’s Stone. He viewed it as much a philosophy as a physical object. For Dee, the Stone was “the force behind the evolution of life and the universal binding power which unites minds and souls in a human oneness.” While most alchemists of his time sought the Stone for its ability to transmute base metals into gold, Dee wanted to possess it to transmute his soul into a more perfect state.

Before long, Dee realized that all the powers and characteristics of the Philosopher’s Stone could be represented in one magical symbol. After seven years of intense study and meditation on alchemical

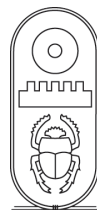
symbols, Dee’s efforts crystallized in a clear vision of the Stone. In just thirteen days in January 1564, he completed a step-by-step mathematical proof called the *Monas Hieroglyphica* (The Hieroglyphic Monad).

In his proof, Dee used the ancient ciphers of alchemy as geometric figures and applied Euclidean geometry to reveal their deeper meanings and relationships. Dee said his proof would “revolutionize astronomy, alchemy, mathematics, linguistics, mechanics, music, optics, magic, and adeptship.” He even urged astronomers to stop peering through their telescopes trying to understand the heavens and instead spend their time meditating on his Monad.

Dee believed he had proved the existence of the universal Monad, which according to Pythagoras, was the first thing that came into existence in the universe. It can be described as the One Thing, or the spiritual atom or egg that gave birth to the whole cosmos. To the Gnostic philosophers, the Monad was

the single higher spiritual being (the One Mind) that created all the lesser gods and elemental powers. In Jungian terms, the Monad is the first archetype that contains all the other archetypes. Today, we might look at it as a mega computer that contains all the software of the universe.

In describing the power of Dee’s cipher, Hermetic researcher Tobias Churton wrote in *The Gnostics*: “If one can imagine a great ocean of First Matter, then we are seeing the beginning of the universe. If a hand were to, as it were, drop the cipher of the Hieroglyphic Monad into that ocean of



infinite potentials, the First Matter would immediately start forming itself into the universe we imagine we know today.”

When the alchemists depicted the Monad, they often added the Latin caption *In Hoc Signo Vincas* (“In this sign you will conquer”). All the coded ciphers of the alchemists were thought to be pieces of the Hieroglyphic Monad and, as we shall see in the next section, this is geometrically quite true.

The frontispiece of the Hieroglyphic Monad is a succinct explanation of the cipher itself. It was considered so important in Elizabethan times that it became known around the world as the “Greater Seal of London.”

At the center of the frontispiece (shown above) is the Monad cipher within an inverted egg filled with embryonic fluid. This is known as the Hermetic Egg and the fluid is representative of the First Matter. The yolk is depicted as a circle and point at the center of the figure. The circle with a center point is the cipher for gold and the Sun.

The lunar crescent symbol of the Moon intersects the upper part of the yellow yolk of the Sun. Thus the Sun and Moon are united in gold at this level, which represents perfection or the end of the Great Work. Within the frame surrounding the Monad can be found the Four Elements and the Three Essentials of Sulfur (the Sun on the left pillar), Salt (the Moon on the right pillar), and Mercury (within the center symbol).

At the bottom of the Monad are two rounded lunar crescents or waves representing the Water Element. They come together to form the ram horns of the sign of Aries, which signifies Fire. Aries is the first sign of the zodiac and is associated with the burst of life force in the Spring, at which time the Great Work begins. “To begin the Work of this Monad,” wrote Dee, “the aid of Fire is required.”

The bottom and the top of the cipher are connected by a cross known as the Cross of the Elements. It is here that the workings of manifested reality play out. In this section of the Monad, all the glyphs of the seven planets and their associated metals (Saturn/Lead, Jupiter/Tin, Mars/Iron, Venus/Copper, Mercury/Quicksilver, Moon/Silver, and the Sun/gold) intersect. By tracing the connecting lines and arcs in different ways, one can locate all the symbols of these five planets and thereby reveal the invisible forces behind Nature.

The merged planetary ciphers are arranged left to right and top to bottom around the Cross of the Elements. According to Dee, by placing the planetary ciphers in their proper relationship, the astronomical symbols are imbued with immortal life,” allowing their coded meaning to be expressed “most eloquently in any tongue and to any nation.” In this arrangement, the Sun is the only symbol that is always the same, and in that sense, incorruptible like gold. No matter which way the Monad is turned – upside down, left to right, right to left, or its mirror image – the cipher of the Sun and gold is always exactly the same.

The heart of the Monad and the one cipher that encompasses all the others is Mercury. In alchemy, Mercury stands for the principle of transformation itself. As can be verified in the geometry of the Monad, Mercury is part of all the metals and elements of alchemy and melds them together as one. Dee embedded the spirit of Mercury at the heart of his master symbol and believed he had successfully captured the essences of the archetypal elements and metals.

Dee stated that his Monad carried the secret of transformation of anything that existed in the universe, but he never spoke of its precise workings publicly. He felt the Monad was much too powerful to share with the uninitiated. His only



public summary of the basic operation of the Monad was this cryptic phrase: “The Sun and the Moon of this Monad desire that the Elements in which the tenth proportion will flower, shall be separated, and this is done by the application of Fire.”

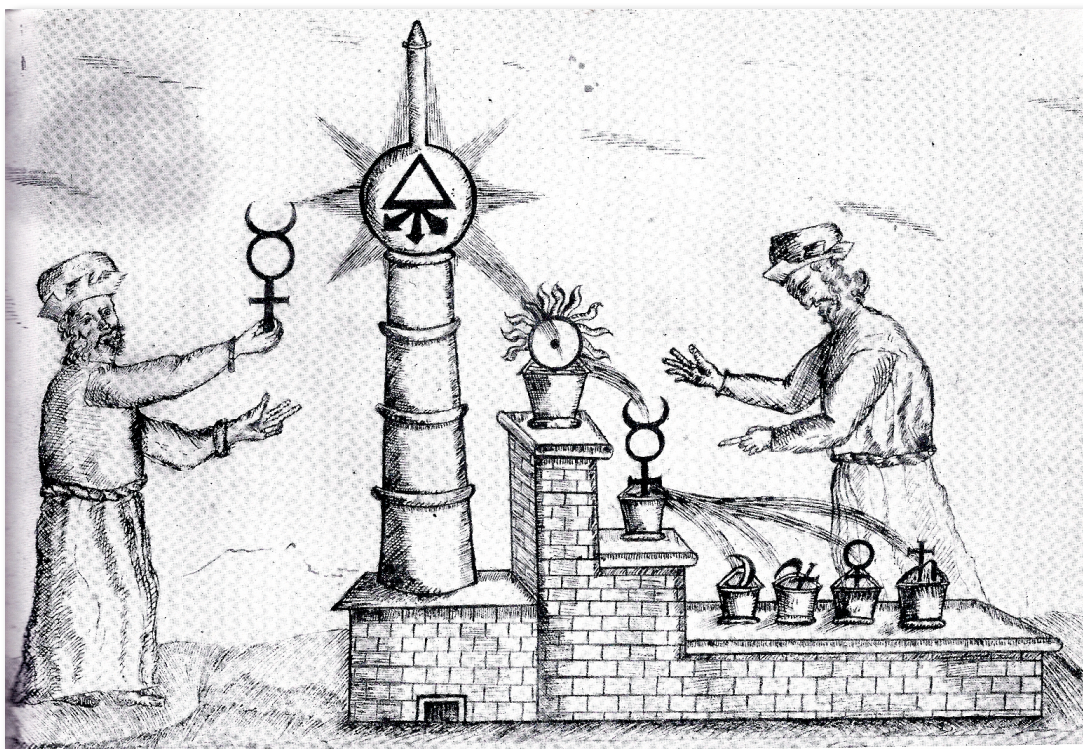
But Dee privately told other alchemists that his symbol described not only the exact interrelationship of the planetary energies but also showed the way to the transmutation of the metals, as well as the spiritual transformation of the alchemist. His symbol, he told them, was the true Philosopher’s Stone.

Dee even wrote a private unpublished book explaining in detail the workings of his Monad for his fellow alchemists. In the

inventory list of his massive library was a description of that book. However, Dee’s secret book on the Monad was destroyed when a mob of Anglican fundamentalists broke into his home and burned his entire library.

According to Dee, his commentaries on the Monad were not necessary to grasp its power. “He who devotes himself sincerely to these mysteries,” he said, “will see clearly that nothing is able to exist without the virtue of our hieroglyphic Monad.” But he also gave a strong warning to anyone who would attempt to master his proof:

“Whoever does not understand should either learn or be silent.”



*This article is taken from The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Alchemy (Penguin 2008) by Dennis William Hauck (www.DWHauck.com). A copy of Dee’s Hieroglyphic Monad can be downloaded from [www.AlchemyStudy.com/public/Monad-Dee.pdf](http://www.AlchemyStudy.com/public/Monad-Dee.pdf).*

