

Sanguis Agni

By Nigel Jackson

'If the house of God then is consequently the mystical church, the spouse of Christ with him is her soul, of which Solomon makes so large testimony in his song, who called herself the rose of the field and the lily of the valley, after the pattern whereof the Alchemists have shaped their red and white Elixir. This stone therefore of Jacob does well agree with the Celestial Jerusalem which is as it were the body, house or city of the spiritual Lamb, which serves to govern and illuminate it...'

Robert Fludd, 'Truth's Golden Harrow', 1623

Sanguis Agni: this design depicts the 'Glorified Body' (*Corpus Gloriosum*) of the Risen Christ as the type of the Stone of the Wise, the Elixir or Red Tincture which is the goal of the Great Work in Alchemy. The term *Sanguis Agni* ('Blood of the Lamb') is a traditional signifier of this Red-Purple Tincture, identifying it with the sacramental Mystery of the Precious Blood/Wine, relating also to the symbolic complex of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, *Agnus Dei*, the hermetic quest for the Golden Fleece and the Divine Fire in an esoteric homonymy which links with the Ram as the symbolic beast of the Vedic divinity Agni, the eternal shining flame of the Atmanic Self (and as Titus Burckhardt has commented in Hindu Yoga the Bija-Mantra of Fire is RAM)—the Resurrected Christ appears in a glory of golden flame, the Christic Gold, haloed and enrobed in red, bearing a cruciform banner with the Chi-Rho Christogram visible above. The mystery of universal regeneration is alluded to in the oft-repeated asseveration of the schools of Christian hermetism in the Middle Ages: '*The Stone is the Christ*'.

Christ rises in triumph above the sphere containing hieroglyphic emblems of the realm of death, mortality and putrefaction, the Nigredo stage of the Great Work symbolized by the death's-head and crossed bones, *Caput Mortuum*, the Raven and the saturnian sickle—the work of 'blackening' is a descent into hades, the alchemical phase of dissolution being a mortification, a 'death to the world' which is traditionally held to last for 40 days like Christ's forty days in the wilderness or the traditional 40-day *khalwa* in *Tasawwuf*.

Flanking the hermetic vessel within which the Philosopher's Stone, Christic Gold or Red Tincture, the Elixir which Robert Fludd lauds as 'the true temple of wisdom...the crystal palace of fiery Cupid or divine wisdom...the enchanted castle of light and perfection into which we must find an entrance if we would walk in the pathways of light' has been revealed in glory, we behold, on one side the hermetic tree of the moon bearing argent lunar fruit and the White Queen, robed in silvery-white and blue, crowned with silver, bearing a silver scepter surmounted by the fleur-de-lys and in her hand the white rose—*Rosa Alba*: she personifies the principle of the Philosophical Mercury, of *Leukosis* or 'Whitening'. The Mercury of the Wise corresponds to the receptive Soul. Beside her foot a shield bears the heraldic emblem of the White Eagle and a flowering Lily grows beside a flowing spring of living waters. The White Queen stands upon a sphere wherein we see the Swan—as Maurice Aniane terms it 'the Hyperborean symbol of the swan, which has come down to us both in alchemy and Tantrism...we find this swan gliding over the silver sea of the pacified Anima Mundi, at the zenith of the "work of whitening"'.¹ René Guénon in 'The Great Triad' refers to Mercury as the passive 'principle of humidity' which functions in 'the role of a centripetal and compressive force' and informs us that Mercury, identified with the "animic" realm of the psyche, represents the subtle 'ambience' with its dual currents.

On the other side of the design we discern the hermetic tree of the sun bearing golden solar fruit growing over the figure of the Red King, robed in crimson and purple, who bears a golden scepter surmounted by the sign of Philosophical Sulphur, whose principle he personifies, crowned with gold and holding a red rose—*Rosa Rubeus*: the Sulphur of

¹ Maurice Aniane, 'Notes Sur l'Alchimie "Yoga" Cosmologique de la Chrétienté Medievale', Marseilles-Paris 1953

the Sages symbolizes the Spirit, the 'work of reddening' (*Xantosis*) and the purple hue which signifies 'transmutation of venom' (*Iosis*) into the Elixir of Immortality. A leafing rose-bush bearing red-petalled blossoms grows beside tongues of flame and above we see the heraldic shield bearing the emblem of the Red Lion. The Red King is shown standing upon a sphere within which the Phoenix is beheld, rising in renewal from the fire. René Guénon in 'The Great Triad' describes how 'Sulphur, whose active nature assimilates it to an igneous principle, is essentially a principle of inner activity considered as radiating outward from the very centre of the being' and thus identifies this 'centrifugal and expansive action of Sulphur' with the celestial Divine Will or 'Will of Heaven'.

The hermetic wedding or *nuptiae chymicae* of Mercury and Sulphur, Moon and the Sun, is implied in this symbolism, the reunion in perfection of Soul with Spirit in their primordial unity. René Guénon, equating Sulphur with the Taoist concept of *Yang* and Mercury with *Yin*, states in ch. 12 of 'The Great Triad' that '...Sulphur is comparable to the luminous ray and Mercury to its plane of reflection...' (with Salt reifying their point of interaction as the bodily form). In the interior path of the mystics, transposed onto the level of intra-kardial prayer and invocation, this alchemical union is the conjunction of the active spiritual life of the Name with the passive or receptive soul, the coincidence of the Name and the Heart. Titus Burckhardt states that '...Sulphur is the will, which unites itself with the content of the word pronounced in the prayer, and acts in a formative manner upon the Quicksilver of the receptive soul...Sulphur is the penetrating spiritual light contained in the sacred words, like the fire in flint, and whose appearance effects the real transmutation of the soul.'² As M. Aniane asserts: '...for the awakening of the Gold, the appropriate spiritual methods can intervene: "Who dreams?" it is asked; and the Stone itself proclaims the Divine Name.'³ In 'The Sophic Hydrolith or Water Stone of the Wise' it is written: '...so Christ, that blessed heavenly Stone, extends the quickening influence of His purple Tincture to us, purifying us, and conforming us to the likeness of His perfect and heavenly Body.'

² c.f. Titus Burckhardt, 'The Alchemy of Prayer' in 'Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul', Louisville 2007, ch. 12

³ Aniane, *ibid.*

The figures and symbols flanking each side of the hermetic vessel also respectively symbolize the 'Humid Way' and the 'Dry Way' undertaken to attain to the spiritual term of the Great Work. The stopper of the philosophical vessel is shaped as the medieval symbol of the Tincture of the Sages, the orb-sphere surmounted by the cross (as shown in the *Novum Lumen Chemicum* of Michael Sendivogius) and the heavenly crown contained within a glory of straight and undulating rays, symbolic of intelligence and love, contemplation and action, the sacerdotal and the regal aspects of the Christ as Priest and King. The attainment of the Stone in the alchemical opus is the 'Operation of Sol' and the six luminaries represent the other heavenly bodies of the planets as also the six days of creation culminating in the Holy Sabbath. By analogy the movement through six spatial directions and the return to the center is synonymous with the opening of the Sun-Door through which descends the supra-cosmic 'Seventh Ray', the projection of the 'Divine Ray' of the Solar Comprehensor centrally trans-piercing and uniting the hierarchic states of the being. Bearing always in mind the principial priority of Gnosis/Contemplation over Faith/Action in the Primordial Tradition, M. Aniane defines certain specific limits to the scope of the Royal Art as pertaining originally to the domain proper to the 'lesser mysteries' when he says that '... the aim of Alchemy, whose role must remain cosmological, is not union with transcendence, but the establishment of a contact with it through the "angelic ray" which unites the supraformal with the world of forms.'⁴ Thus the revelation of the Stone is the attainment of the station wherein there is realised the 'spiritualization of the body' and 'fixation of the volatile' in accord with the hermetic axiom 'Solve et Coagula' (concerning which, in regard to the 'power of the keys' Guénon asserts that broadly speaking 'solution/volatilization' is the function linked with Sacerdotium and 'fixation/coagulation' the function most characteristic of Regnum). René Guénon says: "Transcendent Man", that is, he who has realised in himself "Universal Man" (*al-insan al-kamil*), is himself referred to in the language of Islamic Hermeticism as the "red sulphur" (*al-kabrit al-abmar*), which is also represented symbolically by the Phoenix: between him and "true man" or "primordial man" (*al-insan al-qadim*) the difference is the same as that between the work of "red-dening" and the work of "whitening", which correspond to the respective

⁴ Aniane, *ibid.*

perfections of the “greater mysteries” and the “lesser mysteries”.⁵ As with the Yin-Yang symbol of oriental metaphysics each aspect of the White and the Red, sacerdotal and regal, can effectively be seen to be contained in the other, allowing for specific initiatory transpositions in the context of Hermetism. ‘We cannot deny but that Christ the author of salvation (whose image and pattern this our mystery is) did rise both body and soul and so of two united together in perfection made one unity, transmuted darkness into light, mortality into immortality...which is Christ risen again, composed of a divine spirit and a divine body, of which the true philosophers Elixir is said to be the type or pattern... being the pattern of Christ risen again, it must needs have the power to multiply infinitely, according to that saying of Christ: When I am exalted I will draw all bodies unto me.’⁶

⁵ René Guénon, ‘The Great Triad’ Hillsdale NY 2004, ch. 12 ‘Sulphur, Mercury, Salt’ note 3.

⁶ Robert Fludd, ‘Truth’s Golden Harrow’ 1623—‘The Fourth Furrow’.