

THE PORTRAIT OF A MEDIEVAL ALCHEMIST WITH SYMBOLS OF ELEMENTS IMITATING CREATION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper depicts the paraphernalia of an alchemist who believed in imitating creation and generating a soul thereby. The magic wands of creation are a compass and a triangular carpenter's square. They can produce the dual natured soul Ruh or Spirit symbolized as Cock and Nafs of "the soul" as snake: The real creative energy by nature is ultrasonic energy, characterizing the word of command of the creator. Ultrasonic energy can be produced by fiddle which is depicted also as such a producer. Thus all the elements necessary to imitate creation have been depicted here.*

The portrait is of the medieval Italian alchemist, Giovanni Capponi, fig. 1, taken from Schouten's who probably lived at the time of Dante when alchemy was believed to be the art that imitated creation. In fact Solomon Trismosin (8) who was the teacher of Paracelsus in alchemy maintained that "the secret of Arinestic science is "ovul-knowledge", and ovul is what is capable of creating anything. Dante himself realized alchemy to have been the art that imitates creation and accordingly placed the alchemist in his Inferno. The ancient thinkers divided creation into Heaven above and Earth below. From the emphasis on man earth become merely his residence whence arose the terms macrocosm and microcosm. The former included the entire universe while microcosm denoted man. This correspond with the two phases of creation, the first included the universe and the latter only man. Now any thing that has a form has life and carries a soul of its own. The soul of macrocosm was called cosmic soul; this idea came later when man had realized that he has a soul. The human soul projected became the cosmic soul. Now that there was human soul and comic soul he

basic elements of creation, above all, was the Divine word of command, the real creative energy.

We may further consider how man came to conceive soul at all. Observations easily revealed that breathing is the one continuous activity that characterizes a living man. On the contrary he dead never breathes. He then admitted that to breathe is to live and Breath==Soul. When man later on became a hunter he killed the game, as also his enemies and they all died from loss of blood. Hence he conceived Blood==Soul. Further observations pointed to the fact that freshly split blood gives out vapours and the rest, as liquid sinks into the earth. It was understood that blood-vapours are identical with breath, both being vapours. That breath is essentially vapour becomes obvious when in winter breath exhaled through the mouth or nostrils appears cloudy as typical vapour would. Accordingly he identified Breath==Blood - Vapours= Soul (really spirity or Ruh in Arabic).

Now blood-vapours were seen rising upwards and disappearing somewhere in

heaven. It was believed that nothing is lost and blood-vapours as soul became a bird. This I have discussed at length before (2). In as much as blood is red, the ordinary cock carrying a blood-red crest and otherwise having reddish plumage became the best

example of a soul-bird. We now turn to fig.1 and find on the top left the picture of a cock. This would be the symbol of spirit of Ruh; an arrow-mark outside on the margin has been added to further point the cock.



Fig. 1. Portrait of the Italian alchemist, G. Capponi, possibly a contemporary of Dante.

As stated before the main portion of spilt blood being liquid sinks underground. It was believed that if the volatile fraction becomes a bird the liquid fraction, which goes into the earth, becomes a snake. Snake then represented Nafs ion Arabic or “the Soul” in English. The division into two

fractions of soul also gave rise o bird-gods and snake-gods of several ancient religions with their other deities. We have found the cock depicted in fig. 1. On the right upper corner we have a serpent also indicated by an arrow mark so that the cock and serpent

represent Ruh and Nafs or Spirit and the Soul, together soul as whole.

These fractions of blood, as spirit (Ruh) and “the soul” (Nafs), further corresponded to Heaven and Earth. As Heaven there was *movement in the universe* and as earth *form specific* for each entity. Moreover there was the belief that Heaven is round while Earth is square. Then a round object in section appears as a circle, while any two sides of a square form a triangle. Hence the instrument to depict a circle would be a compass and to construct a square there would be a triangular instrument, the Carpenter’s square. Briefly Heaven=Circle=Compass and Earth=Square-Carpenter’s square. When Heaven and Earth unite as opposites they lead to some issue as creation. Compass as

the emblem of Heaven and the triangular carpenter’s square as that of Earth become the Magic wands of creation and can generate even a soul. This has been explained before (3). By resurrection we understand a body that has lost its soul and is now dead can come o life again if soul (Ruh) be introduced into it. The Chinese believed in he possibility of inducing resurrection by generating a soul using compass and the carpenter’s square for the purpose. Such a scene has been depicted on a Chinese grave and Cheng (4) has reproduced it being offered as fig. 2 here. It has to be added that the Chinese compass was of primitive type, resembling a cross. Admitting the significance of the compass and he triangular carpenter’s square we turn to fig. 1.



Fig.2. Cross-shaped Chinese compass and a triangular carpenter’s square, as the Magic Wands of Creation. They generate soul capable of resurrecting the dead.

On the left corner below there is the modern compass, marked “C”, further indicated by an arrow on the margin. This compass generates macrocosm, revealed by the fact that there is the celestial globe just below it. Once there is the compass here must be the triangular carpenter’s square when is indicated by an arrow or the margin below. That the triangular object is the carpenter’s square is confirmed by its being associated with the measuring rod which the

carpenter’s use and has scales marked on it but not discernible here. Thus in fig.1 we find the compass and the triangular carpenter’s square comparable with the Chinese pair of opposites seen in fig. 2. The cock-cum-serpent represent the creation of soul as whole, while the compass-cum-the carpenter’s square represent the Magic wands of creation that generated it. What further fails is the Creative Energy, the first entity which created everything else.

Once we speak of creation we imply the existence of a creator. The creator is assumed as having pronounced the word of command with which creation began. We are now to focus attention on the nature of this word of command. Of all forms of energy known to man the most subtle form of it is ultrasonic energy. It is powerful enough to kill even a bacterium. Then the Divine word can be interpreted as a form of ultrasonic energy. How then are we depict graphically what we believe to be ultrasonic energy. A Hindu thinker was faced with the same problem. He believed the Divine word was "OM" which pronounced had a humming sound and this represents ultrasonic energy. The humming sound can be compared with that of bees. Myer in his book on Oabbalah reproduced the Purusha and group of bees and I have offered it already in my article, on Galen and his three souls, published in this journal (5). Now the ideal case of humming sound in nature is that produced by a group of honey-bees. This permits depicting graphically humming sound as bees. This is how the Indian thinker actually expressed OM as sound. Briefly the Divine Word of command=Ultrasonic energy=om=Humming sound =Bees. Now I met a master-musician in Germany who told me that of all musical instruments which can produce various sounds the fiddle can claim universality. The fiddle then can produce a humming sound as well as bees do. Thus if the Indian cosmologist depicted creative energy by a number of bees the Italian alchemist found the fiddle can do the same, perhaps even better. Bees as producers of a humming sound, in lieu of creative ultrasonic energy, have been reproduced before. Fig. 1 here at the right corner has a fiddle which can easily replace the bees depicted before. Briefly stated the Divine word of command=Ultrasonic energy-

Creative Energy-Humming sound-Bees=Fiddle, I am convinced that this is the first time that the significance of the fiddle in fig. 1 has \at all been noticed, much less its significance explained.

We are now left with identifying the individual depicted in fig. 1 as an alchemist. A master-alchemist has been Paracelsus. Jacobi (6) has published his selected writings. On p.6 Paracelsus says "Know that philosophers are of two kinds, the philosopher of Heaven and the philosopher of the Earth. He who as knowledge of the *Lower sphere is a philosopher* (alchemist), he who has knowledge of the upper sphere is an astrologer and both share in the mystery of the four (cosmic) elements" He finally says (on p.59) that "I praise *alchemy because it reveals the mysteries of medicine*. Never must knowledge (theory) and preparation (practical) that is to say *medicine* and *alchemy* be separated from each other", Paracelsus introduced alchemycal preparations as curative drugs so that alchemy became the pharmaceutical chemistry of his times. He also depicts the astronomer with the right hand holding a *compass* and this is touching the celestial globe and the left hand touching a triangular object, like the carpenter's square. These two items are typical so that the individual, though labeled an astrologer, is as much an alchemist. This picture of Paracelsus of an astronomer really of an astronomer-cum-alchemist almost has ben reproduced and discussed before (7). With what has been said so far fig 1, would be the portrait primarily of an *alchemist*, specially as no one else would depict the fiddle where another cosmologist had expressed the same by a group of bees. Giovanni Capponi of Bologna as stated was "physician (Medico), philosopher (alchemist) and astrologer", when these would be he designations of the same savant.

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