



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Faculty of Humanities

Academic Year 2020-2021

Renaissance Esotericism I Medieval & Early Modern Alchemy



Renaissance Esotericism I: Medieval & Early Modern Alchemy 12 EC

Part of MA Western Esotericism

The module Renaissance Esotericism I: Medieval & Early Modern Alchemy' is part of the MA Spirituality and Religion. It can be followed along with the following seminars in 'Spirituality and Religion: Theories, Concepts and Methods (Prof. W.J. Hanegraaff and Dr M. Pasi), 'Introduction to Western Esotericism and Spirituality' (Prof. W.J. Hanegraaff) and 'Occult Trajectories' (Dr M. Pasi).

Alchemy is an important strand in the story of Western esotericism, with roots stretching back to late antiquity in Greco-Roman Alexandria. It first made an appearance in Europe in the twelfth century in the form of Latin translations from Arabic manuscripts, which in its turn had adopted, adapted and transmitted ideas from previous Greek authorities. This course focuses on the Renaissance and Early Modern periods which witnessed a growth of interest in the 'divine art of alchemy' due to the advent of printing and the eventual production, in the seventeenth century, of the elaborately illustrated alchemical emblem books that were to provide such a fascination for the psychologist Carl Jung in the twentieth century. During the course we shall consider significant primary texts and examine the arguments of influential voices in the current history of alchemy. We shall become acquainted with various kinds of alchemy, from the medieval interest in gold-making and the enthusiasm for chemical medicine in the sixteenth century to later, controversial notions of 'spiritual' alchemy. We shall investigate the way the alchemists communicated their secrets by way of image and text, the claims they made regarding transmutation, the Quintessence, Elixir, and the Philosophers' Stone, and the relation between alchemy and other esoteric strands such as astrology, cabala and magic. Students will be expected to participate actively in class, present and discuss articles from the reading list, and write an academic paper.

Objectives

By the time they complete this module students will have received a good overview of the major figures and central themes of Alchemy and related disciplines in the Early Modern Period as well as its reception in Modern Depth Psychology. From their critical examination of primary and secondary sources, students will have new knowledge of this subject area, an understanding of the fundamental characteristics of alchemy from antiquity to the present day, and insight into some its the social, religious and philosophical context. From their presentations and essays they will have the ability to identify, analyse and synthesise material from original historical texts and to evaluate modern scholarly interpretations, and then frame relevant questions for their presentations and essays in an independent and coherent way.

This course is taught entirely in English.

Course catalogue: 153421002Y

Semester 1

Block 1 and 2 (12 EC): Renaissance Esotericism I: Medieval & Early Modern Alchemy

Lecturer: Dr P.J. Forshaw

For most current information about this minor and its entry requirements, please contact our study adviser at:

T: 020 525 4484

E: studieadviseur-geschiedenis-fgw@uva.nl

For general information on the programme Western esotericism, please see: www.amsterdamhermetica.nl

Teaching Schedule

Wednesdays 09:00-12:00, Online, Blocks 1 & 2

9 Sept 2020

1. Introduction & The New Historiography of Alchemy

General introduction, discussion of the program's theme, goals and set-up of the course. Students decide who is going to be responsible for presenting each seminar. Instructions about how to get the reading materials. An introduction to current historiography.

- ☞ Lawrence M. Principe, 'Alchemy I: Introduction', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter Hanegraaff et al., Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 12-16.
- ☞ Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, 'Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy', in: William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 385-431.
- ☞ Brian Vickers, 'The "New Historiography" and the Limits of Alchemy', *Annals of Science*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 127-156.

16 Sept 2020

2: Alchemy in Antiquity

- ☞ 'Introduction', 'Hermes Trismegistus', & 'Zosimos of Panopolis', in: Stanton J. Linden (ed.), *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 1-23, 27-28, 50-53.
- ☞ Frank Sherwood Taylor, 'The Origins of Greek Alchemy', *Ambix*, Vol. 1 (May, 1937), pp. 30-47.
- ☞ Bernard D. Haage, 'Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th Century', in: *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter Hanegraaff et al., Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 16-26.
- ☞ 'The Name Alchemy', in: Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, London: Frederick Muller, 1970, pp. 68-89.

23 Sept 2020

3: Medieval Alchemy I: The Arabs

- ☞ Lee Stavenhagen (ed. & trans.), *A Testament of Alchemy, being the Revelations of Morienus, Ancient Adept and Hermit of Jerusalem to Khalid in Yazid ibn Mu'Awiyya, King of the Arabs, of the Divine Secrets of the Magisterium and Accomplishment of the Alchemical Art*, Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1974, pp. 3-29.
- ☞ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013, Chapter 2. Development: Arabic *al-Kimiya*, 27-50.
- ☞ William R. Newman, *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber: A Critical Edition, Translation and Study*, Leiden: Brill, 1991, Foreword, pp. i-ii, 159-167, Translation, pp. 633-640, 663-675, 783-785.
- ☞ 'Of the Investigation or Search of Perfection', in: *The Works of Geber, The Most Famous Arabian Prince and Philosopher* (1678), pp. 1-6.

30 Sept 2020

4: Medieval Alchemy II: The Christian West

- ☞ Chiara Crisciani, 'The Conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* of Petrus Bonus of Ferrara', *Ambix*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1973), pp. 165-181.
- ☞ Michela Pereira, 'Heavens on Earth. From the *Tabula Smaragdina* to the Alchemical Fifth Essence', *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Alchemy and Hermeticism (2000), pp. 131-144.
- ☞ Petrus Bonus, *Pretiosa Margarita Novella* (1546), in A. E. Waite (trans), *The New Pearl of Great Price*, London: James Elliott & Co., 1894, pp. 29-52, 84-92, 100-104, 109-128, 137-140, 146-151, 185-189, 225-233, 283-293.

7 Oct 2020

5. Renaissance Alchemy: Paracelsus and the Paracelsians

- ☞ Stephen Pumfrey, 'The Spagyric Art; Or, The Impossible Work of Separating Pure from Impure Paracelsianism: A Historiographical Analysis', in: Ole Peter Grell (ed.), *Paracelsus: The Man and his Reputation, his Ideas and their Transformation*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 21-51.
- ☞ Thomas Willard, 'Living the Long Life: Physical and Spiritual Health in Two Early Paracelsian Tracts', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Religion und Gesundheit*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011, pp. 347-80.
- ☞ 'The Third Foundation of Medicine', from Paracelsus, *Paragranum*, in: Andrew Weeks (ed. & trans), *Paracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim 1493-1541: Essential Theoretical Writings*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 211-

257.

- ☞ Paracelsus, *His Aurora, & Treasure of the Philosophers* (1659), pp. 1-4, 12-13, 45-59.

14 Oct 2020

6. Rosicrucians & Alchemy

- ☞ Roland Edighoffer, 'Hermeticism in Early Rosicrucianism,' in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Roelof van den Broek (eds), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 197-215.
- ☞ Joscelyn Godwin, 'The Deepest of the Rosicrucians: Michael Maier (1569-1622)', in Ralph White (ed.), *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1999, 99-123.
- ☞ Hereward Tilton, 'The Urim and Thummim and the Origins of the Gold- und Rosenkreuz', in Hans Thomas Hakl (ed.), *Octagon II: The Quest for Wholeness* (2016)
- ☞ Johann Valentin Andreae, *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, translated by Joscelyn Godwin: Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1991, pp. 15-22, 97-104.

21 Oct 2020

7. NO CLASS

28 Oct 2020

8. NO CLASS

4 Nov 2020

9. Early Modern Chymistry

- ☞ 'Motivations: Truth, Medicine, and Religion', in: Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and His Alchemical Quest*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 181-213.
- ☞ 'Revelation and Concealment: The Writings of Philalethes', in: William R. Newman, *Gehennical Fire: The Lives of George Starkey, an American Alchemist in the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994, pp. 115-135, 165 & Figures 3A-G.
- ☞ *An Exposition upon Sir George Ripley's Vision, Written by Aeyrenaeus Philalethes, Anglus, Cosmopolita* (1677), pp. 1-25, in: Eirenaeus Philalethes, *Ripley Reviv'd: or, an Exposition upon Sir George Ripley's Hermetico-Poetical Works* (1678).

11 Nov 2020

10. Hieroglyphic and Emblematic Alchemy

- ☞ Barbara Obrist, 'Visualization in Medieval Alchemy', *HYLE: International Journal for Philosophy of Chemistry*, Vol. 9, No.2 (2003), pp. 131-170.
- ☞ Nicholas Flamel, *His Exposition of the Hieroglyphicall Figures* (1624), edited by Laurinda Dixon, New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1994, pp. 6-35.
- ☞ H.M.E. de Jong, *Michael Maier's Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of an Alchemical Book of Emblems*, York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, Inc., 2002, extracts.
- ☞ Stanton J. Linden, 'The Ripley Scrolls and *The Compound of Alchymy*', in: Alison Adams and Stanton J. Linden (eds), *Emblems and Alchemy*, Glasgow: Glasgow Emblems Studies, Vol. 3, 1998, pp. 73-94.

18 Nov 2020

11. Alchemy & Cabala

- ☞ 'Kabbalah and Alchemy: A Reconsideration', Chapter 12 in: Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 152-169.
- ☞ 'Esh M'saref: A Kabbalistic-Alchemical Treatise', Chapter 26 in: Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 322-335.
- ☞ C.H. Josten, 'A Translation of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* (Antwerp, 1564), with an Introduction and Annotations', *Ambix*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & October, 1964), pp. 84-147, 155-185 [Please note: this is a parallel-text translation and you will only be reading every other page]
- ☞ Gershom Scholem, *Alchemy and Kabbalah*, Dallas: Spring Publications, 2006, extracts.

25 Nov 2020

12. Alchemy & Astrology

- ☞ William R. Newman & Anthony Grafton, 'Introduction: The Problematic Status of Astrology and Alchemy in Premodern Europe', in: William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (eds), *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 1-37.
- ☞ Constantine of Pisa, *The Book of the Secrets of Alchemy*, Introduction, Critical Edition, Translation and Commentary by Barbara Obrist, Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 236-247, 264-266.
- ☞ Thomas Norton, *The Ordinall of Alchimy*, in: Elias Ashmole (ed.), *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), pp. 59-61, 91-101 & Ashmole's 'Annotations and Discourses', pp. 443-447, 450-454.

2 Dec 2020

13. Spiritual Alchemy & Religion

- ☞ Italo Ronca, 'Religious Symbolism in Medieval Islamic and Christian Alchemy', in: Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds), *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, Leuven: Peeters, 1998, pp. 95-116.
- ☞ Daniel Merkur, 'The Study Of Spiritual Alchemy: Mysticism, Gold-Making, And Esoteric Hermeneutics', *Ambix* 37, Part 1 (March 1990), pp. 35-45.
- ☞ Robert M. Schuler, 'Some Spiritual Alchemies of Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April - June, 1980), pp. 293-318.
- ☞ Mary Anne Atwood, *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, London: Trelawney Saunders, 1850, 135-170; 455-473.

9 Dec 2020

14. Alchemy & Psychology

- ☞ Luther H. Martin, 'A History of the Psychological Interpretation of Alchemy,' *Ambix*, Vol. 22, Part. 1 (March, 1975), pp. 10-20.
- ☞ Thomas Willard, 'The Star in Man: C.G. Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz on the Alchemical Philosophy of Gerard Dorn', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Gutes Leben und guter Tod von der Spätantike bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 425-61.
- ☞ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Recorded and Edited by Aniela Jaffé; translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, Revised Edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, 201-213.
- ☞ C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967; reprint 1983, 'The Visions of Zosimos', pp. 59-108.
- ☞ C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967; reprint 1983, 'The Alchemical Mind', pp. 297-302.
- ☞ 'Origins of Alchemy: Extraverted and Introverted Traditions', in: Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemical Active Imagination*, Irving, Texas: Spring Publications, 1979, pp. 1-25.

Procedure

There are three requirements for successfully completing the course:

1. Presence and active participation

You are required to attend at least 80% of the seminar meetings, which means that a maximum of two meetings can be skipped. Failure to be present at more than two meetings results in a judgement of “insufficient”. Active participation means that you have read the materials for each week and take part in the discussions. You will be asked questions about the texts, so be prepared!

2. Oral presentations

One or several primary or secondary sources are studied during each seminar meeting. Dependent on the number of participants, you are required to take responsibility for *at least one* seminar presentation (instructions for seminar presentations, see below). If the number of participants is relatively small, you are required to accept more than one presentation. A grade is awarded for each presentation. In case of more than one presentation, the highest grade counts. **This grade counts for 40% of the final grade.**

Please note: not turning up when you are scheduled for a presentation is taken very seriously, for it means that you are letting down all your fellow students and are in effect sabotaging the entire meeting. Therefore in cases of “no-show”, 1.0 will be subtracted from the final grade. Exceptions can be made only if you can demonstrate that the absence was due to force majeure (serious illness, deaths in the family etc.), and if the absence was reported as early as possible (by means of email, via Canvas, or if necessary by telephone).

3. Written paper

You are required to write a paper (min. 10-max. 15 pages, 1.5 line spacing) on a subject of your choice, relevant to the theme of the course, and selected in consultation with the instructor. Take care! The paper will be evaluated on the basis of its contents, but the grade will be negatively influenced by failure to respect basic style requirements (i.e., rules for use of footnotes, literature references in footnotes, and presentation of the bibliography). A first version of the paper must be submitted as a Word document (attachment to p.j.forshaw@uva.nl), no later than **Friday 29 January 2021**). The paper will be returned with critical comments and suggestions by **Friday 26 February**. The final revised version must be submitted the following month (i.e., no later than **Friday 31 March**). If either the first or the final version of the paper is submitted too late, this results in a subtraction of 0.5 point for each week that it is late. **The grade awarded for the paper counts for 60% of the final grade.** Please note the following! “First version” does *not* mean merely a first sketch or draft: it should be a complete paper, written according to the instructions.

Instructions for Seminar Presentations

A good presentation takes between 20 and 30 minutes and contains the following elements:

- It provides some background information about the author. Please do not just copy his/her CV from the internet, but tell us in your own words who the author is and what s/he has been doing.
- The presentation makes clear what the text is about (or claims to be about) and why the author seems to have written it.
- It contains a short reminder of the structure and the contents of the text, presented in such a way that someone who has not read the text would be able to follow it. NB: The term “reminder” is used deliberately: your audience has already read the text, so please do not get into pointless summaries of what everybody already knows (“he says this, then he says that, in the next section he says that,” etc.).
- It contains two or three well-chosen quotations that clarify the author’s intentions and his/her argument.
- It contains an element of critical evaluation (for example: What to make of this text? How convincing do you find the author? Are there gaps or weaknesses in the argument? Can you find counterarguments against his/her claims? And so on). Don’t be afraid to also indicate your personal opinion: what did you think of the text, did you like it, or disliked it, and why? Please note “criticism” does not mean that you necessary have to criticize the text, although you’re welcome to; it means that you show that you have read it with a critical mind.
- Use of PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi is not mandatory, but very welcome. However: use it wisely. It is never a good idea to use long stretches of text if you do not then read through the quote, otherwise it will distract your audience’s attention from what you are saying. Use text elements sparingly: not with the intention of providing information, but rather, with the intention of helping your audience follow the thread of the information provided in your spoken presentation. Likewise, images are welcome, but should be functional, not just recreational.

While all students following the course are expected to have read the texts under discussion, a good presenter (and recipient of a high grade) has taken the trouble of looking further. For example if the required reading consists of only a few sections of a longer chapter, the presenter will have read the entire chapter so as to be able to put the sections in context. He or she will also have taken the trouble to visit the library (the physical one: not just the internet!) and have a look at additional literature relevant to the text and the themes that are central in it. On sites like JSTOR or Project Muse it is often possible to find reviews of books being discussed. Therefore you need to plan your presentation well in advance.

