

Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll

Lesson 1 : Introduction - Placing the scroll in context

The *Ripley Scroll* is one of the most remarkable artefacts of alchemical symbolism. Apart from anything else it must be the largest of all symbolic alchemical drawings - the version in Cambridge is 6.71 metres long by 57 centimetres across (22 ft by 22 inches). The scroll has not yet been thoroughly studied by scholars, though a few articles are now appearing about this remarkable document. The scroll was virtually unknown till Carl Jung used sections of some scrolls as illustrations to his *Psychology and Alchemy*, 1944. A number of more recent works have mentioned the scroll or tried in some way to understand its symbolism. I have added some references as an appendix to this lesson.

I have found that we can only truly read an alchemical work when we place it into its correct historical context, otherwise we merely interpret and project the preconceptions and concerns of a later age onto the work itself, and thus view it through a distorting lens. We must always try to see how the scroll was conceived within the cultural milieu of the original author. So first we should look at what little history is attached to the scrolls.

At the moment there are 21 surviving manuscript copies of the *Ripley Scroll*. Actually that is not quite right as we must immediately recognise that there are two distinct versions of *Ripley Scroll*, Type I with 16 examples and Type II with 5 examples. In this study course we will focus almost entirely on the Type I scroll. The Type I scrolls are all very similar using the same images and text with a number of variations and additions in some cases. The Type II are a more varied group and though some incorporate elements from the Type I scrolls, they will, even on a superficial examination, be seen as differing in structure. I will include a note on the Type II scrolls in a later lesson, but for now we will only be concerned with the Type I. So when I refer to the scroll in these lessons I specifically mean the Type I group. See appendix for a listing of the manuscripts.

The scrolls were produced over a period of around a hundred years, some being copied almost exactly from earlier versions and others being a radical redrawing of the images. Thus the British library Ms. Add. 5025 (2) and MS. Add. 5025 (4) are about one half to one third the size of the other copies. Some of the scrolls are on parchment others on paper. Some are well coloured, others have badly faded, and some are uncoloured. Some are well drawn by a reasonably competent artist or copyist, others are more crudely executed.

Dating is a problem, as it often is with alchemical manuscripts, and it is best to be

conservative with assigning dates as manuscripts may appear older than they actually are. It seems likely that the earliest ones were produced in the early decades of the 16th century, with the later copies being made towards the end of the 16th into the beginning of the 17th century. There is a problem with dating the copy considered to be the earliest, Bodley Roll 1 in Oxford. The Bodleian catalogue description assigns this on the grounds of the style of the written characters to the middle of the 15th century. It is rather uncertain if this date can be sustained, and it may be that we have to come to accept that this, like the other early versions, is consistent with being made in the opening decades of the 1500's. We cannot view Bodley Roll 1 as the original version, because it has a key section of text missing.

Of the sonn take thy lyht
The rede gome yt ys so bryht
And of ye mone do all so
The wyht gome there boye to
The felissovyr sulfer wyss
This I caled wt outtyn strife
Kybryt and akybr I callid also
Mand other nayd many moo
Of them draw howt a tyntor

And

The copyist making this scroll left a space for the rest of the text and a placemaker with the word "And" but neglected later to add the text. So there will have been an earlier copy, either the original or a copy of the original from which he was working. This original copy has not survived.

The next earliest copy would appear to be the Cambridge manuscript Fitzwilliam 276. This has been made on paper rather than the parchment of Bodley Roll 1 and the paper can be dated through the watermark.

So without going into too much detail on the dating we can immediately see that we should take a conservative view and place the copying of the scroll to the early decades of the 16th century. As George Ripley died in 1490 none of the existing copies would have been made by him. Indeed, we may even have to raise the question, of whether the scroll was actually conceived by George Ripley, or ascribed to him at a later date. The earliest versions do not mention Ripley's name, though some later copies do.

Let us try and place the scroll into a time line of other key works of alchemical symbolism.

- c. 1410 *Buch der heiligen Dreifaltigkeit*
- c. 1420 *Aurora consurgens*
- c. 1450 *Pretiossissimun Donum Dei* [many scores of manuscripts from the 15th to the 18th century]
- c. 1520 *The Ripley Scroll***
- 1532-5 *Splendor Solis*
- 1546 Printed woodcuts of *Petrus Bonus* series [there may be earlier manuscripts]
- 1550 Printed version of the *Rosarium philosophorum*
- 1570-80 Earliest versions of the *Crowning of Nature*

Was the Ripley scroll a visible influence on the early alchemical tradition? It seems not. I don't know of any work of the late 15th or 16th centuries which mentions the scroll. Unlike the *Donum Dei* which appeared in so many copies and was printed in numerous versions, or the 'Book of the Holy Trinity' which was made widely available through being printed in Reusner's *Pandora* of 1582, or the *Splendor solis* which was also printed with woodcut images at the close of the 16th century, the *Ripley Scroll* images were not printed till much later in 1718, in David Beuther's *Universal und Particularia*. So the only way people could be influenced by the scroll was if they actually were able to see a copy. All the copies of the scroll seem to have remained in Britain, though key personalities in the late 16th century such as John Dee and Simon Forman had access to copies and must therefore have passed this information on to others. However, there seems no evidence that the Scroll had any impact upon early continental alchemy. The text was printed in 1652 in Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, at the time when there was a revival of interest in Ripley, perhaps sparked off by Ashmole and also the publication in Latin of Ripley's works at Kassel in 1649.

Although we should perhaps not see the Scroll as a major influence on later alchemical imagery and writings, nevertheless it remains one of the most intricate and well conceived examples of early alchemical symbolism. Many of the key symbolic elements in alchemy are found depicted there, and the whole work is obviously conceived as a kind of alchemical sequence in which the alchemical work is illustrated through a series of tableau. We can immediately recognise four separate panels which seem to be demarcated one from the other, as though they are stages or different views of the ongoing alchemical process. A fifth panel does not seem to bear such obvious alchemical symbols, and we will look at the possible significance of this later.

- First panel The alchemist places a pelican flask onto his furnace.
- Second panel Two basins one heptangular, the other quadrangular are set around a central pillar.
- Third panel The bird of Hermes eats its wings
- Fourth panel The dragon bites at the moon
- Fifth panel A man in medieval clothes holds a strange staff. In some manuscripts a king also appears.

Ripley was well known in the alchemical tradition from the late 16th century onward through his idea of the twelve gates of alchemy. This was published in English in 1591 with many Latin editions following on, and it was included in the important compendium the *Theatrum Chemicum*, 1602. The idea of the twelve gates of alchemical processes which lead into the alchemical castle, seemed to catch the interest of many alchemists and Ripley was often quoted by 17th century alchemical authors. This idea of the twelve gates does not seem to find any embodiment in the symbolism of the Scroll, there being no obvious twelvefold structure. Instead the Scroll seems to use only the sevenfold, the fourfold, the triple and the dual in its symbolism. You can read the text of the Twelve Gates on the alchemy web site at <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/ripgates.html>

Apart from the panels of imagery the Scroll also bears a number of verses. There are five main verses one for each panel, except the third panel which has two verses upon it. Some versions of the Scroll have additional verses at the end. The verses seem directly linked with the imagery, often commenting on and extending the imagery. The verses are quite consistent through the various versions though the English spelling differs so much between the different manuscripts, and often words have become altered through copying errors. We will examine the text of these verses in a later lesson.

I include with this lesson the **Ripley.exe** file, which contains my own coloured version of the Ripley scroll. This is primarily based on the Bodley Rolls 1, the Cambridge, and the Yale versions. The colouring to a great extent follows what can be seen on the manuscripts, but I have had to improvise and adjust things in some areas. I am not presenting this as a corrected scroll, but merely as an integration of some of the early versions. As an exercise for this first lesson you should thoroughly examine the scroll, and familiarise yourself with all its symbolism. Another interesting practical exercise is to make a listing of all the symbols depicted on each panel or tableau, with any duals, triplicities, or quaternaries of symbols, in the manner we explored in my foundation course on alchemical symbolism. There is no background or decorative elements here. Every image depicted is an active symbol. The next lesson will deal with the symbolism on each of the four sections, so try to familiarise yourself with the details of the scroll.

Appendix

Type I Scrolls

Bodley Roll 1	Early 16th cent.
Cambridge	first half 16th cent.
Huntington	second 16th cent.
Yale	c. 1570
Princeton	end 16th cent.
Ashmole Roll 52	end 16th cent.
B.L. Add. 32621	end 16th cent.
Edinburgh	16th cent.
B.L. Add 5025/2	16th cent.
B.L. Add 5025/4	16th cent.
B.L. Sloane 2523 B	16th cent.
Getty	16th cent.
Ashmole Roll 40	c. 1600
Wellcome 692	begin 17th cent.
Wellcome 693	begin 17th cent.
Sotheby sale	1624

Type II Scrolls

B.L. Add 5025-1	16th cent.
B.L. Add 5025-3	16th cent.
B.L. Sloane 2424A	16th cent.
Ashmole Rolls 53	17th cent.
Ashmole Rolls 54	17th cent.

Some books and articles which treat of the Ripley Scroll.

Jung, C.G. *Psychology and Alchemy*.

Burland, Cottie. *The arts of the alchemists*, 1967.

Dobbs, Betty Jo Teeter. Alchemical Death and Resurrection [Has coloured illustration of the Huntington scroll.]

McCallum, R.I. 'The Ripley Scroll of the Royal college of Physicians of Edinburgh' in the journal *Vesalius*, II, 1, 39-49, 1996.

Linden, Stanton J. 'Reading the Ripley Scrolls: Iconographic Patterns in Renaissance Alchemy' in the conference proceedings *European iconography East and West*, 1993.

Linden, Stanton J. 'The Ripley Scrolls and the Compound of Alchymy' in *Glasgow Emblem Studies Volume 3 Emblems and alchemy*, 1998.

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Lesson 2 : Identifying the components of the Scroll

On glancing at the Scroll one immediately forms the impression that it is structured with four main panels, each with an entirely different symbolic statement.

The work in the pelican flask
The two basins set around a central pillar
The bird of Hermes eating its wings
The dragon biting at the moon

There is a final figure in medieval dress which we will look at later.

To appreciate the Ripley Scroll as a whole we will have to explore the inner symbolic workings of each panel and also try and see just how these relate to one another. There is no immediately obvious symbolic thread linking the four panels, so they may seem to stand alone and independent of each other, however, an initial clue to their interlinking can be found in some short pieces of text on each panel.

First panel (The work in the pelican flask)

The black Sea. The black Luna. The black Sol.
Here is the last of the white stone, and the beginning of the red stone.

Second panel (The two basins)

(top heptangular basin) The white Sea. The white Luna. The white Sol
(bottom rectangular basin) The red Sea. The red Luna. The red Sol.

Third panel (The bird of Hermes eating its wings)

Here is the last of the Red, and the beginning to put away the Dead. The Elixir Vitae.

Fourth panel (The dragon biting at the moon)

The red Sea. The red Sol. The red Elixir vitae.
Red Stone. White Stone. Elixir vitae.

The first two panels seem to be describing a process that takes place through three

coloured 'seas', in the traditional alchemical order of Black - White - Red.

The last two panels introduce the idea of the Elixir vitae. Wings, also, seem especially important in the last two panels.

One common feature to the panels is that something is seen descending in the space of the emblem.

In the first two panels feathers are seen descending.

In the last two panels it is drops of liquid that descend.

In the first panel these feathers are coloured white, and are seen in the space between the cool top of the pelican flask down towards the dark liquid. Red drops are also seen descending down the inner surface of the flask, and they seem to rise up in a fountain that comes from the lower dark liquid and shoots through the toad. In the second panel, there are two different sets of feathers. Those on the left are golden and descend from the Sun, while those on the right are grey and descend from the Moon. Liquid does still descend in the second panel, but it is only suggested symbolically by the figures around the heptangular basin, who pour the contents of their flasks into the vessel.

In the third panel, it is golden yellow drops that descend from the Sun above, while in the fourth panel we see red drops of blood falling from the wounded dragon and gathering in the strange winged orb form.

The first two panels appear to be linked by their symbols reflecting something recognisably close to a physical alchemical process, the work in the flask and the baths of the second panel. Indeed, we could come to see this as a single emblem, as most of the scrolls show the upper branches of the tree in the second panel poking into the fiery furnace of the top panel. We may need to read these two panels together almost as a continuous emblem of an alchemical process.

In a similar way the last two panels are symbolically linked. Each have a winged creature standing on a circular form and set under either the Sun or Moon.

In the middle of the Scroll we have a short section, probably best seen as part of the second panel, in which a red and a green lion stand opposite each other around the open mouth of a furnace. This furnace bears the text "the mouth of choleric beware" and this echoes the furnace mouth of the first panel. It may be best to see these two lions in connection with the symbols placed on the lower front of the rectangular vessel, the green dragon and the toad with its tingeing venom, as the text below them "here is the fume which is the mouth of choleric" echoes that found with the two lions. Here we have a quaternary of symbols

Toad
with red tingeing venom

Green dragon

Red Lion

Green Lion

You will see here how I am following the approach I have demonstrated in my other study courses on alchemical symbolism, of trying to read this complex emblematic work from inside its own symbols, rather than trying to force external interpretations upon it. We have found that most alchemical emblems have their own internal logic. Once one grasps this, it then becomes possible to read the symbolic message of the emblems that constitute it. This has been the main theme of my study courses on alchemical symbolism.

So far we have analysed the links between the different 'panels' and are beginning to integrate the different symbolic parts of the Scroll into a few emblems that present the sequence of ideas that the author of the Scroll seems to have intended us to see.

We have so far ignored the man in medieval clothing at the bottom of the Scroll, because when we look at this final figure we are confronted with an image which does not immediately strike us as alchemical in itself.



What can this strange figure represent ? He carries a staff with a horses hoof on one end and with a quiver containing a quill pen and a roll of parchment on the other. At his belt, what might easily be mistaken for a purse, is actually an inkpot. He is, therefore, a scribe or secretary, by his dress more an itinerant notary or penman than a religious clerk, but at any rate the sort of person who might have made a copy of the Scroll. At the beginning or top of the Scroll stands another figure, the alchemist who places the flask onto the furnace. There would seem to be some intention of contrasting these two figures at the beginning and end of the scroll. Both seem to stand outside the symbolic emblematic action.

Some of the scrolls have the figure of a king set opposite the scribe. For example that in the manuscript in Edinburgh.



The following manuscripts depict this king : Edinburgh, Huntington, B.L. Add. 32621, and B.L. Add. 5025-4. These four manuscripts also include a section of text not found in the other manuscripts. Here is the text in my version which modernises the spelling :

In the Name of the Trinity
 Harke here and you shall see
 The author that formed this work
 Both first and last, bright and dark
 Some of them I shall you tell
 Both in rhyme and in verse
 Mallapides, Plato and Peion
 And the Book of Turba philosophorum

Both Aristotle Geber and Hermes
 Also Lully, Morien, and Rhazes
 Bonelles, Raymondus and Albert
 Arnold and Percy the Monk so black
 Aros and Rasces and also Dessrima
 The sister of Moses, Mary prophetess
 Bacon also the great Clarke
 Formed I know all this work
 All these account now in one
 That here is now the philosophers' stone
 Otherwise it may not be
 Understand this I counsel thee
 And pray thou God of his Grace
 That you may have time and space
 To have the truth of this parable
 Thank thou God that is so stable
 For many a man desires this
 Both Pope, Emperor and king
 Priest and Clarke and also friar
 And not so much but the very begger
 Now Jesus if it be thy will
 Keep us from the pains of Hell
 And as thou made days seven
 Bring us to the bliss of Heaven
 All manner of good men in their degree
 Amen amen for charity

Here the writer of these verses gives a list of the authors of the Scroll, choosing from among the major early writers on alchemy - Turba philosophorum, Geber, Hermes, Lully, Arnold, Bacon, Mary prophetess, Percy the Black monk, and so on. He says that many men desire the secret of the work of alchemy, both those of the status of kings and those more lowly clerks. A clerk in those days was a man in a religious order, a cleric, or clergyman. As the scholarship of the Middle Ages was practically limited to the clergy, and these performed all the writing, notarial, and secretarial work of the time, the name 'clerke' came to be equivalent to 'scholar', and specially applied to a notary, secretary, recorder, accountant, or penman. So here we see depicted examples of these two classes. Some commentators on the Ripley Scroll even go so far as to identify the clerk figure as Ripley himself. This and other similar interpretations requires one to impose a meaning onto a symbol such as this from outside the Scroll. If we stick to my more conservative view and interpret the image from inside the Scroll, in this case through the text, we should see the figures at the end of the Scroll as those who seek the secret of alchemy, and this is dualistically coupled with the alchemist at the top of the Scroll who obviously has the secret. The text in a banner around his head can be roughly translated : "Here is the hidden stone buried in the secret fountain. It transforms into the ferment or stone, which tinges everything".

Another way of looking at the final figure is a more satirical one. The scroll in the Yale collection has a little phylactery or banner of parchment beside the final figure stating

Ve mihi miser qua olium operam perdidit

Woe is me, a miserable man who has completely lost my time and trouble.

This is not found in other scrolls, so we should just view this as a later humorous addition, perhaps added by a copyist who may not have been very impressed by alchemy.

The Huntington Library copy has another satirical Latin phrase at the end of the scroll.

si queras in merdis secreta philosophorum expensum perdis opera tempus que laborem
If you seek the secrets of the philosophers in dung, you will waste your expenditure of time and labour on this work.

The British library manuscript Add. 5025-4, uniquely has a piece of text as the tailpiece.

Thus with all I am content

To shew this comely Ornament.

Of these types and Figures your eyes doth beholde
Mervellous matter the hidden sence doth unfolde
But how and in what manner the same is effected
In a written booke it is plainly directed
Of the very ancient and most strange operation
By Calcination and Sublimation
Elevation and perfect Fixation
To be good in Tincture and in Malliation
In poys [weight] good, and in test the true probation
And many things els this worke doth unfold
Which at this time is too long to be told

What shall I say that Man then maketh Gold
Nay God forbid, we will not be soe bold
For when a Man doth all his whole intent
What is he but a simple Instrument
By whom God works and Nature brings to pass
The very same, by Art that compast wast
Where Nature left, there Art doth but begin
That perfectness that Nature could not winne
Few words I meane at this time for to make
This have I done for all true Students sakes.

These verses perhaps delightfully sum up the Scroll. The author suggests that in the figures and symbols of this work, the hidden sense is revealed, compressed into these emblematic images. It shows the secrets of the alchemical operations, of calcination, sublimation, elevation and fixation, and we see these clearly enough in the vertical polarities, the things ascending and descending throughout the images on the Scroll we have now identified. The last verse makes the point that although it might be said that alchemy works against God's order in making gold, in reality the alchemist is but a simple instrument by whom God and Nature bring their work to completion. This sentiment reflects the inner struggle of a churchman involved in alchemy, and comes to an excellent solution to this problem.

Please work through the ideas I am presenting here by following them up on the imagery of the Scroll. See if you can find other ways in which the structure of the Scroll reveals itself through the association and interlinking of the individual symbols that make up each of the emblem.

As an exercise, you could try and uncover other symbolic links between the different components of the Scroll. Pay particular attention to vertical polarities. Set these out in tables as I have done above as this will help you to see the structure. At this point in our investigation we should not be trying to read or interpret the Scroll, merely to discover the structure. The more in depth analysis of the symbolism and the text, which we shall pursue in the next lessons, will be necessary before we can attempt a reading of the Scroll.

We started with seeing the Scroll as having four panels, but on looking deeper more structure has emerged.

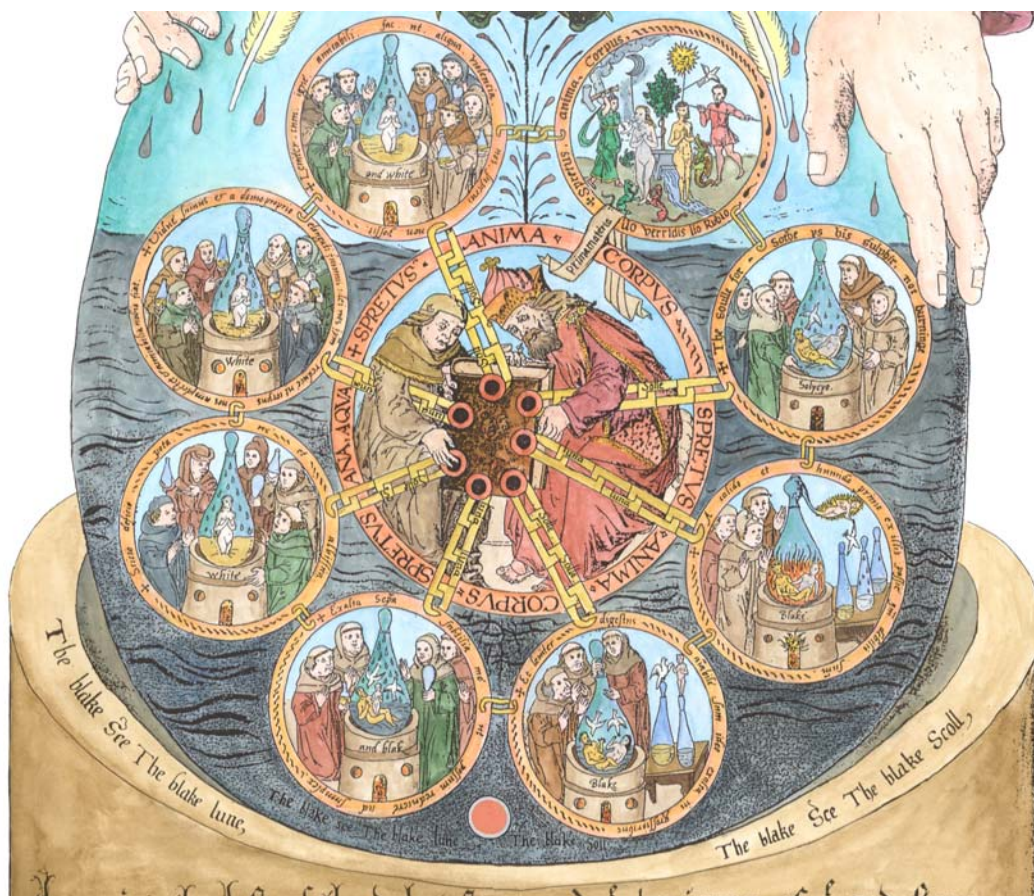
The work in the pelican flask and two basins set around a central pillar, seem to form a continuous emblematic narrative. There is then a linking section of the Dragon-toad and red and green lions. Finally the two panels with the winged figures, which seem to mirror one another.

Once we grasp the overall structure of the Ripley Scroll, it will be possible to read its emblems in a coherent way. There will be no need to import ideas from outside the Scroll, as all the clues are found within its frame.

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Lesson 3 : The sequence within the sequence

The main focus of this lesson will be the sequence within the sequence. In the first main panel in the scroll, we see an alchemist heating a large flask upon a furnace. Within this large flask are eight circular areas or roundels. Seven of these roundels are connected by a chain to a book with seven seals. This is a kind of allusion to the Apocalyptic book of seven seals, and the chains may even carry some association with the idea of the Homeric golden chain that links the spiritual with the earthly, or it may just be used with the sense of linking each process in a roundel with the opening of one of the seven seals.



We have here a sequence of eight roundels. Notice how, the roundel on the top right is different from the others, in that it is not connected to the book of seven seals by a chain. Instead there is a little scroll of parchment saying "prima materia". The other seven form a sequence of stages from the prima materia towards the conclusion of the work. The imagery inside this first roundel differs substantially from that of the other seven, which are based around processes occurring in a flask. Let us just look at this first roundel in more detail.



The text around the circumference states "Spirit, Soul and Body. The green lion and the red lion." We see a naked female and a male figure upon which rays come down from the Moon and Sun above. They stand in front of a basin or well from which a stream of water emerges. A tree grows up from the fountain or well, and a serpent winds itself around the tree trunk. On the left a woman approaches the naked female and is about to kill her with an axe, while on the right a man approaches the naked male figure and is trying to kill him with a spear. A black toad attacks the naked female while a dragon attacks the male. Two birds are seen, one beside the naked female figure the other flying high above the naked male. All the key symbols in the *Ripley Scroll* are seen here. This little roundel can be seen as the key to the whole scroll.

The prime matter is produced by working upon the substance pouring out of the earth using various opposing forces, the red and the green lion, the toad and the dragon, the sun and the moon.

Let us now see how this primal matter is alchemically processed through the remaining seven roundels.



The first roundel in the sequence, like the seven others, shows a flask set upon a furnace. Inside this flask we see the naked male and female figures from the first roundel showing the prima materia. A bird rises up like a soul emerging from these dying figures. They lie upon and earth or ground. In the neck of the flask is an inverted small flask showing that the substance from the prima materia roundel has been poured in. Drops of liquid run down the inside of the flask. Outside this are five monks tending the work. This stage is labelled "Solution".

The text states: The soule forsooth is this sulphur not burning.



Now the temperature has risen, the fire in the furnace is much more intense, and the male and female figures are being consumed by flames within the flask. The flask has an alembic or still head fitted and three essences are being distilled off into three flasks or phials. These essences are shown as the little human figure in a nimbus of light and the bird. These may be the body, soul and spirit extracted from the prima materia. Three monks look on. This is the first of three stages labelled "Black".

The text states: *A calido et humido primo ex illis passie quam debilis sum.* I have at first suffered so much from the hot and humid that I am weak



In this third stage, the second black phase, a monk is seen pouring one of the small flasks of essence extracted in the earlier stage, into the large flask. The intensity of the furnace now seems to have been reduced. Inside this the remains of the male and female figure lie in ashes, while a bird rises up in the flask and another descends upon the material at the bottom of the flask. Here we are reminded of the imagery of the *Crowning of Nature*. Two flasks of essence are left as yet unused, one with the bird, the other with the human figure. These perhaps are the spirit and the soul respectively, with the body already having been poured into the main flask.

The text states: *Et leniter digestus amabile sum ideo exalta in grossioribus*. And I am mildly and pleasantly digested therefore exalted among more gross things.



In the fourth stage, another flask of essence seems to have been poured into the main flask. One monk holds an inverted flask to show us it is empty while another holds a flask containing some essence. Adding the one inverted in the large flask, three small flasks are now being shown here. Two other monks look on, making four in all. This is the third of the black stages.

Inside the main flask the bird ascends and descends, and drops of liquid descend as before. But the human figures are now changed. Previously the male and female figures lay on the bottom of the flask as if dead. Now we see the female aspect seeming to come to life, rising up and becoming reborn in a new form.

The text states: *Exalta sepe e subtilia me ut possim reducere ad simplex*. Elevate and separate me subtly so that I can lead back/reduce to the simple.



In this fifth stage, we may assume the final phial of essence has been poured into the main flask. This stage is now labelled "white". A first solution, then three phases of black, followed by three of white. Five monks now look on three holding flasks. Together with the one inverted in the large flask there are now four small flasks shown.

The text states: *Scicio deficio pota me a albifica*. I am weakened by being divided. Drink me and become white.



This sixth stage, the second white phase, shows the woman standing in the flask of transformation. Six monks now look on. Two operators and four holding flasks. Together with the one inverted in the large flask, five small flasks are now shown.

The text states: *Vidue sumus et a domo proprio elongati ideo nos ipsum reduce ut corpus nos amplectat et amabilia nobis fiat.* We are deprived and distant from our own home, therefore it having reduced us, so that the body embraces us and may become friendly to us.



In the final roundel, the third of the white phases, the woman stands in the flask as before. There is now a crowd of seven monks, six holding flasks and the other perhaps praying or operating the furnace. Together with the one inverted in the large flask there are now seven small flasks shown.

The text states: *Leniter cum igne amicabile fac ut aliqua violentia nos superare non possit.* Heat gently with an amicable fire so that it cannot overcome us by some violence.

So we can see an elaborate alchemical system being demonstrated in quite a subtle way, from the fourth to the seventh stages, through the increasing number of flasks and the number of monks needed to hold them. There are three flasks of essence at the third stage.

Stages

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Solution	First Black	Second Black	Third Black	First White	Second White	Third White
		Three Flasks	Three Flasks	Four Flasks	Five Flasks	Seven Flasks
			One Flask full	Two Flasks full	Four Flasks full	Four Flasks full
			One Flask inverted	One Flask inverted		Two Flasks inverted
Five Monks	Three Monks	Three Monks	Four Monks	Five Monks	Six Monks	Seven Monks
Sol	Luna	Sol	Luna	Sol	Luna	Sol

The fourth stage marks a turning point of this little sequence. This is the last of the black stages and from then on the white stages begin.

Another interesting fact is that each of the chains linking the seven roundels to the central book of seven seals has either "sol" or "luna " written upon it.

As an exercise try to find other aspects of symbols that change throughout these seven roundels.

We can see here how so much is hidden in the detail. One of the most important tools you will need to investigate any alchemical sequence is to be able to examine the detail and look for structure. There is so much structure embedded and hidden deeply within this seemingly opaque and obscure work. It may all seem quite straightforward when one has this explained and analysed as we have seen in this lesson, but it requires much thought and contemplation to be able to discover the patterns and structure in seemingly irrelevant detail. There is little extraneous decoration in the allegorical alchemical images

on the scroll. The images are spare and lean, not fattened out with decorative detail, so you should be aware that most symbols and images have been put there as essential elements of the process.

This sequence within the larger sequence of the scroll, appears to be based on a text, sometimes identified as the *Visio Mystica* of Arnold of Villanova (1235 - 1312) or even to Maria the Prophetess. These attributions, however, are no longer accepted and this appears to be an anonymous work originally written at the beginning of the 15th Century. At least 20 manuscripts of this work have survived. The Scroll in Yale has an English version of this text added below the furnace. No other scrolls include this. It is instructive to read this text and see how this relates to the imagery of the roundels. I have somewhat modernised the English to make it easier to read.

An expounding of the signification of the seven seals wherewith the book of philosophy is closed.

I saw an old man shining and rising in brightness having in his hand a book shut and sealed with seven seals. And beholding the book well I perceived the leaves of the book to be of gold; and the cover and clasps were silver, on the top, whereof was placed a speire ring of gold rolled with silver, and in the circumference of the ring was written this subscription: *Spirit: Soul: Body*. From which ring seven sealed chains also of gold as [they were] of silver preceding, did encompass the whole book, and by a respect often pursing the book, did all again return unto the ring.

This old man being demanded by me what this signified, answered saying, "The ring and golden skein coiled with silver is the Philosophers' stone, which in his profundity is gold and the male, and in his manifest silver and the female. And how much [] he is divided in his part is always the spirit, but the seven operations which doth encompass the whole magistry of the stone do after make it perfect."

And the old man being again commanded by me what the inscription of the ring did signify, he answered, "The writing is miraculous because it briefly comprehends all the secrets of Philosophy. By the Spirit is understood Mercury which subtly entering into the body disposes it into simplicity, and draws the Soul from it, and elevating it upwards into the air, bears it with him, and afterwards disposes the body and reduces it into the nature of the quintessence which is a certain simplicity, and pours the soul into the body again. The which the body embracing rejoices with it, because the soul when it enters into the body makes it perfect, as the quick perfects the dead, until it rise again and lives [sored], and this is the stone of Philosophy teaching thee to observe all things. The Soul is sulphur not burning because it congeals Mercury into the body of Luna or Sol, meeting it in the place of Nature and is drawn from the body. And the Soul is the mediating between the body and the Spirit which binds and conjoins with an [un...ex... erable] conjunction when as the spirit cannot be united with the body but by the soul, which is the gold and tincture of the philosophers; for know you that without it nothing can be made perfect nor accomplished. And know you also that our sulphur is not common sulphur which is fat and adustive [dry], destroying and corrupting all things. And I say unto thee, body signifies Sol and Luna without life, in which the soul did bear rule and remained, as it were a true form in his subject, which body after the separation of the soul is called a dead body until by introduction by the soul again it be made perfect. And then it is called the immortal body raised from death to life.

Upon the declaration of this [dis...pcone] contained in the king, beholding it better, I saw in the first part of the golden chain written with letters of silver this saying - *a calido et humido primo ex illis sic passus quia debilis sum.*

And hereupon the old man being demanded of me what this writing meant, answered, "This writing makes the first key and operation of the stone which is called putrefaction or digestion of the philosophers' stone which [...] in his due time in a hot and moist fire, for as our nourishment or meat cannot be converted into any other thing but by this digestion, so neither our stone can be converted into a simple unless, by the Spirit, the Soul be drawn from the body, by means of his digestion which is the key of philosophy. For a thing the more it approaches to simplicity the more perfect it is. And know you that unless it be putrefied you cannot attain to this secret."

And looking more vigilantly [...] the vision I saw in the second chain the which was in the beginning silver and in the end gold. And in the silver part thereof was written these words - *Et leviter digestus amabilis su Ideo exalta me agrosioribus.*

Then I requested the old man to expound to me the meaning [...] and said, "Understand that by the seal is understood the second operation of the stone, which is called Distillation. The first part of the silver chain signifies the first thing which is distilled which is the spirit or mercury vive having the life and the white tincture. But the second part which is of gold signifies that which [is ... distilled] secondly and thirdly, and that is tinted oil, the soul and red tincture, which is called the gold of Philosophers, and it is the second key of the secret of philosophy. And in the third seal in the third golden chain was written in [letters] of silver - *Tinctum a tincto* - which he said signifies the separation from air, showing that the air must be exalted in moisture, which is the third key of the work."

And I saw in the fourth seal placed in the fourth chain of silver, written in letters of gold *Exalta sepe e subtilia me ut possu redusi ad simplex*, which he said was the operation of the spirit having life, which is the fourth key of the work. And looking upon the fifth chain which was both of gold and silver, I saw written in the fifth seal in letters of silver this saying - *Siseto, deficio pota me a albifica.*

And the old man said, "this is a great secret which is the dead body calcined, which doth so imbibe and whiten the spirit that they may the sooner be reduced into the most simple nature of the quintessence which is the fifth key of the work."

Likewise beholding the sixth chain which was as well gold as silver, I saw in the sixth seal written with letters of gold this saying - *Vidue sumus et a domo propria elongata ideo nobis ipsum redito ut corporis nos amplectat e amicabile nobis fiat*, this take reduction of the water and oil upon the dead body, when as the soul cannot be nor consists without the body, and the contrary, which is the sixth key of the work. And in the seventh and last chain [as] well gold as silver was the most perfectible and last seal sealing [...] written in letters of gold and silver this saying *Leniter cum igne Amicabile fac ut aliquam violentia nos superare non possset.*

Then said the old man, "this is [...] nourishment and perfection which is to dissolve the fixed and to fixe the dissolved which is the [...] work. "

All these things being finished... I said to the old man, "If [...] you by the Lord of Heaven that of thy courtesy you now open this book unto me, and reveal and show unto me those things which are contained in it."

And the old man answering said, "Amen, I say unto thee that no man is certain to open this book nor to open the seven seals thereof, but a lamb, that is to say, the mild disciple of philosophers to whom God shall give power to effect and reveal this secret which I have told thee, therefore understand and do as you have seen and the book shall be opened unto thee. For men labour but God gives the increase unto all things. Then blessed be God that gives wisdom unto the wise. Amen."

The texts on the roundels differs a little in the different scrolls, and from that given in this *Visio* translation. I have used the version from the Cambridge manuscript for my translations added to the roundels descriptions.

As an exercise you should try and see just how the text of the *Visio mystica* provides the structure to the imagery of the roundels. There are a few other small details indicated in this text. Try and correlate these with the symbolism of the roundels.

The verses associated with the first panel echo the symbolism in the roundels. We should note, however, that these particular verses are not unique and quotes in part an early English alchemical poem *The Work of Richard Carpenter*. This is supposed to have been written in the middle of the 15th century, and probably before the *Ripley Scroll*. So the Scroll again (as it did with the *Visio Mystica*) reuses or quotes from earlier material.

Scroll - first panel

Of the Sun take the light
The red gum that is so bright
And of the Moon do also
The white gum there both two
The philosophers' Sulphur wise
This I call without strife
Kibrit and Kibrigh it is called also
And other names many more
Of them draw out a tincture
And make of them a marriage pure
Between the husband and the wife
Espoused with the water of life
But of this water thou must beware
Or else thy work will be full bare
He must be made of his own kind
Mark thou well now in thy mind
Acetum of the philosophers men call this
A water abiding so it is
The maiden's milk of the dew
That all our work do renew
The spirit of life it is called also
And other names many more
The which causes our generation
Between the man and the woman
So look that there no division
Be there in the conjunction
Of the Moon and of the Sun
After the marriage is begun
And all the while they be a wedding
Give to them their drinking
Acetum that is good and fine
Better to them than any wine
Now when this marriage is done
Philosophers call this a stone
The which hath a great nature
To bring a stone that is so pure
So he have kindly nourishing
Perfect heat and decoction
But in the matrix where they be put
Let never the vessel be unshut
Till they have engendered a stone
In all the world there is not such a one

Richard Carpenter - alchemical poem

Of Titan Magnesia take the clear light,
The red gum that is so bright,
Of philosophers the Sulfur wise,
I am called Gold without strife:
Of him draw out a Tincture,
And make a matrimony pure:
Between the husband and the wife,
Espoused with the Water of life:
And so that no division
Be there, in the conjunction
Of the Moon and of the Sun,
After the marriage is begun;
And that Mercury the planet,
In loes make him so to mete:
That either with other be joined even,
As a Stone engendered sent down from heaven;
Of him make water clear running,
As any crystal bright shining.
Drawn out of bodies fixed,
By Nature prively mixed
Within a vessel depured clean,
Of Philosophers bright and shiney;
Beware the fume escape you nought,
And also mark well in thy thought;
That of the Fire the quality,
Equal to Phoebus' beams be;
In the month of June and July,
Understand me be not dull;
For you shall see marvels great,
Colours spring out of the heat:
First Black and White, and so Red,
And after Citrine without dread:
And so within hours three,
That Stone shall through pierced be
With Air that shall upon him light,
The which is a wonderous sight:
When the spirit is refrained,
And with the body so constrained,
That him asunder may nothing part,
So Nature them doth there so coart,
In matrix when they both be knit,
Let never thy Vessel be unshut;
Till this ingendred have a stone,
That in this world is not such a one.

['coart' means pressed together.]

The verses on the Scroll seem to refer to this process in the roundels. It opens by asking the alchemist to take the Sun and the Moon, the red and the white gum, and draw out of this Philosophical Kibrit or Sulphur a tincture. This seems to be what is taking place in the third roundel. Then he must make a marriage in the flask between these two which should be espoused or completed by adding the water of life. The verses make it clear that this water is very important. It is the acetum of the philosophers, the maiden's milk of the dew, or the spirit of life. This appears to be the water drawn off in the stage pictured in the third roundel. If the alchemist adds the right water to his flask, then the male and female in the flask will be united together and married. As this is further nourished by the water it turns into a stone. Care must be taken by the alchemist never to let his vessel remain open, and that it has the correct heat and cooking. If he is diligent in all these things then he will have made the perfect stone.

For a final exercise you should try and find the links between the Ripley and the Carpenter verses. We will return to the Richard Carpenter poem again as other sections of text quote lines from it. Carpenter is supposed by Ashmole to have been the brother of John Carpenter the Bishop of Worcester between 1443 and 1476. These verses seem to date from the mid 15th century, and thus predate the Scroll.

Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll

Lesson 4 : The spiritualisation of the corporeal

Now we will turn our attention to the second panel - the two basins set around a central pillar.

The first thing we notice is that this complex panel seems primarily concerned with the interlinking of spirit, soul and body. Most symbolic elements on this emblematic panel bear the words "spirit" and "anima", often contracted to "spus" and "aia". We see this on the leaves of the canopy of the tree, on the feathers descending from Sun and Moon, in the waters of the lower basin, and elsewhere. The word "corpus" (body) only appears in three places, on the male and female bodies in the upper vessel and on the Atlas figure in the lower basin. Thus perhaps we should see that all the energies of the spiritual and soul become focussed through this alchemical process upon these three key symbols.

Let us see just how this is happening in the emblematic space. There are a number of symbolic components to investigate.

- The descent of the feathers from Sun and Moon
- The tree in the upper vessel
- The upper vessel
- The lower vessel
- The dragon and toad
- The heating of the furnace

Feathers seem to be a key symbol used in the Scroll. We see feathers in the large flask in the first panel, descending from Sun and Moon in the second, and making a final appearance in the third panel. Feathers, of course, are that which enables the flight of birds, and we note that birds appear in some of the flasks in the roundels in the first panel. Birds in alchemy were often used to emblematised a rising and descent of aspects of the alchemical work in the flask. Birds can fly up and down in the emblematic space, free from the constraints of the earthly. Thus they were useful symbols for the soul and the spirit, or of a volatilisation or sublimation of the substance in the flask. The feathers rise in the large flask of the first panel and drops of liquid descend. In the second panel things are portrayed differently. Here the symbolic process seems to indicate a descent from above down through the vessels, this being framed within the two streams of feathers emanating from the Sun and Moon, the gold and the silver feathers. In my version of the Scroll I have taken this colouring scheme from the Yale copy. We will see later how this

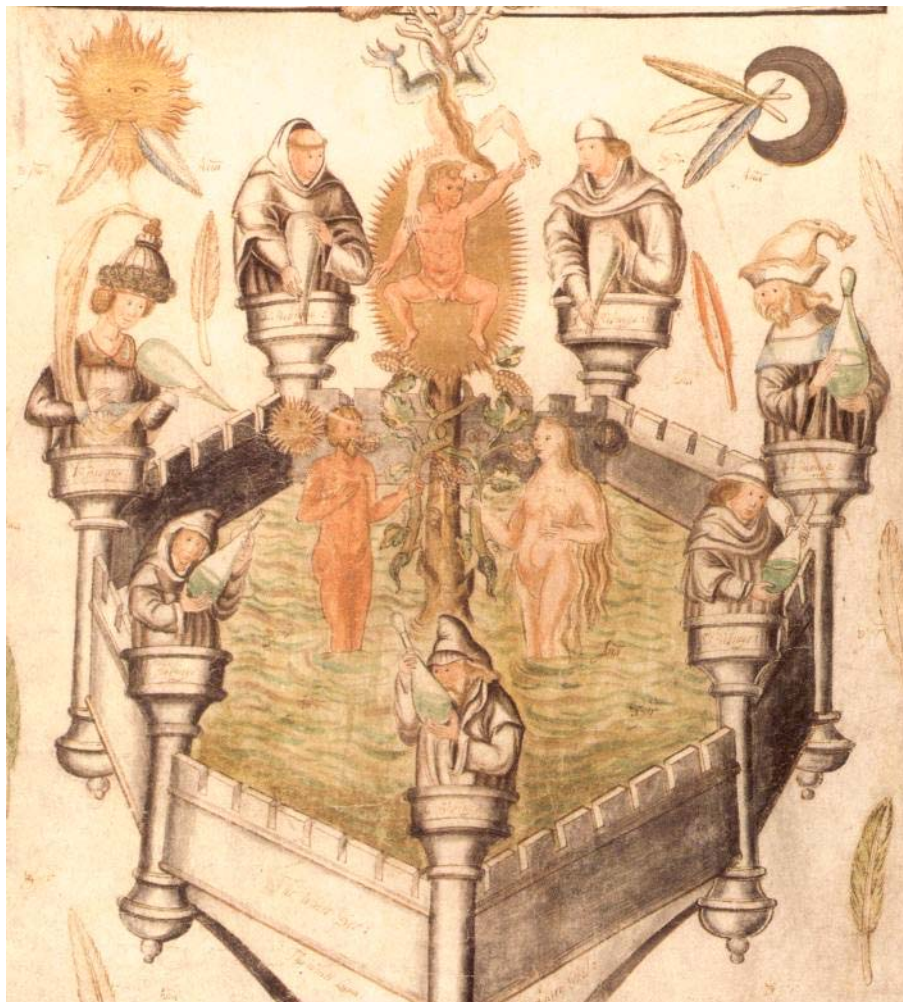
is not merely arbitrary but makes coherent sense within the Scroll.

Let us now turn to the tree growing out of the upper vessel. This has a number of symbols upon it which are familiar. From the branches above, a serpent woman or Lilith figure descends, gesturing towards and seeming to be in the act of seizing the small child labelled "anima". This child sits at the middle of the tree in a nimbus of light. From below two vines grow towards him, intertwining with one another. These vines are held by two figures, a man on the left, coloured yellow (or possibly golden), and a woman on the left, coloured greyish white (or possibly silver). They both have the word "corpus" on their bodies and a Sun and Moon stand besides their respective heads. They are both eating of the fruits of these vines. The imagery here may draw upon the miniatures in medieval religious manuscripts which the creator of this manuscript could have seen (certainly George Ripley would have been familiar with these). Here are two examples, one from a medieval manuscript and the other a woodcut from the *Biblia pauperum* (late 15th century).



If one looks at the wide variety of paintings of the temptation of Adam and Eve from the 14th through into the 16th century, we will note that the Scroll has subtly altered the symbolism depicted there and adjusted it to a new and more alchemical conception. Usually the serpent is seen as a slippery thing of the earth and is shown as crawling up the tree from the ground to tempt Eve. This complies with the underlying Judeo-Christian religious idea of evil arising from contact with the earthly. But in the Scroll the Serpent figure descends from above. The figure of the soul, the child in a nimbus of light seems to be reaching up with his left arm to the heavens and downwards to the earth with his right. This serpent even has "spirit" and "soul" written upon her thighs. This emblem appears to have turned the Temptation and Fall myth on its head. Now, in this alchemical conception, the spirit descends down from the heights of the tree animating the soul, and nourishes the earthly body with a spiritual food. The alchemist who created this imagery was daring to invert the creation myth and instead have us see that matter could be ennobled though contact with the spiritual instead of the more conventional idea that spirit (Adam and Eve) were debased through contact with matter.

The vessel itself is heptangular. One immediately thinks of planetary associations. Are the seven figures in the towers representations of each of the planets? This would be a nice neat alchemical resonance, but on closer examination this does not appear to be so. Two of the planets, Venus and the Moon, are definitely feminine and always depicted as women. But in most of the Ripley Scrolls it is difficult to see more than one woman. She always appears in the first tower (on the left). The figure on the right immediately opposite her in the fourth tower is also uniquely dressed. He appears to be a King wearing the same costume as the figure crouching over the book with seven seals at the centre of the first panel, thus it might not be wrong to see her as his Queen. The other figures in the towers seem to be dressed as monks, similar to the figures in the roundels of the first panel. We can see this, for example, in the early version in the Huntington Library.



Whether we can see them as king or queen these two figures are definitely dressed in a secular manner, while the others are cowled monks. If they were to be seen as reflecting the planets, then the woman figure would be the Moon and the king the Sun. This would

mean, following the conventional order of the planets, that the two figures in the towers on the back wall would be Mercury and Venus, and the three in the foreground, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn (reading right to left). We should expect Saturn to be shown as an old man, but this does not appear to be so in the known versions of the Scroll. So instead of pursuing a planetary association we should see this as an extension of what was taking place in the roundels. There we saw a number of monks pouring the contents of flasks into their main vessel which was being heated on the furnace. Three flasks were initially extracted from the prima materia and then later poured back onto the work. At the end of the process, four of the monks held flasks full of some essence. This seems to parallel what is depicted around the heptangular basin.

Each of the towers is labelled from the first to seventh "Imbibing" and the figures hold flasks containing some essences. Three have poured these into the basin, while four hold full flasks. It is not quite clear if they will in turn pour the essence into the basin, or whether they will keep this for another stage of the process. These may be the four flasks that are seen on the towers around the lower basin. The way in which these flasks are used is surely a key part of the process explored in the Scroll. As an exercise you should review the various possibilities. It may be that the Scroll is ambiguous on this matter and that no definite conclusion can be drawn as to how this works.

In some of the Scrolls fires are shown under each of the towers, but this is not true of all the manuscripts. The bath of transformation is labelled "The White Sea". We have already noticed that the water in the flask of the first panel was called "The Black Sea".

The lower basin is foursquare and associated more with the elements. These are shown in four flasks set in towers at the corners of the square vessel. Above each is a small label giving the main quality associated with the element, and each has short phrase on the masonry of the tower.

Fire	fiery and hot	Fire purges
Earth	earthy and dry	Earth stands
Water	watery and cold	Water washes
Air	airy and moist	The spirit enters

The central pillar is supported by an Atlas like figure who looks upward. He is labelled "Terra - Corpus - Stat" or "Earth and the body stands". The pillar he supports is also labelled "Earth stands or holds firm". This pillar supports the upper basin with its towers and the tree. Beside Atlas are two smaller figures who echo the Adam and Eve of the heptangular vessel. Here the male figure appears enveloped in a ring of cloud from which emanates a nimbus of fiery light. The female figure, labelled "water", is winged. This square vessel contains the "Red Sea".

On the front of the lower basin we note a dragon biting at a toad. From the toad issues a spray of venom, which is labelled as the tingeing venom. A text below states "Here is the fume which is called the mouth of choleric".

The verses written below the foursquare vessel may perhaps throw some light on what is being shown in this panel.

On the ground there is a hill,
Also a serpent within a well
His tail is long with wings wide
All ready to flee by every side
Repair the well fast about
That thy serpent prise not out,
For if that he be from there gone
You lose the virtue of the stone
The well must run in water clear
Take good heed for this the fire
The fire with water bright shall be burnt
And water with fire washed shall be
The earth on fire shall be put
And water with air shall be knit

Thus you shall go to purification
And bring the serpent to redemption
First he shall be black as a crow
And down in his den shall lie full low
Swelling as a toad that lies on the ground
Burst with bladders sitting so round
They shall to burst and lie full plain
And this with craft the serpent is slain,
He shall shine colors here many a one
And turn as white as whales bone,
With the water that he was in
Wash him clear from his sin,
And let him drink a little and a light
And that shall make him fair and white
The which whiteness be here abiding
Lo here is a very full finishing
Of the white stone and the red
Lo here is the very true deed.

The first section of this poem talks about the prima materia, the dragon or serpent. This must be placed in the well or alchemical vessel, set on a hill. The text teases us to identify these aspects of the work.

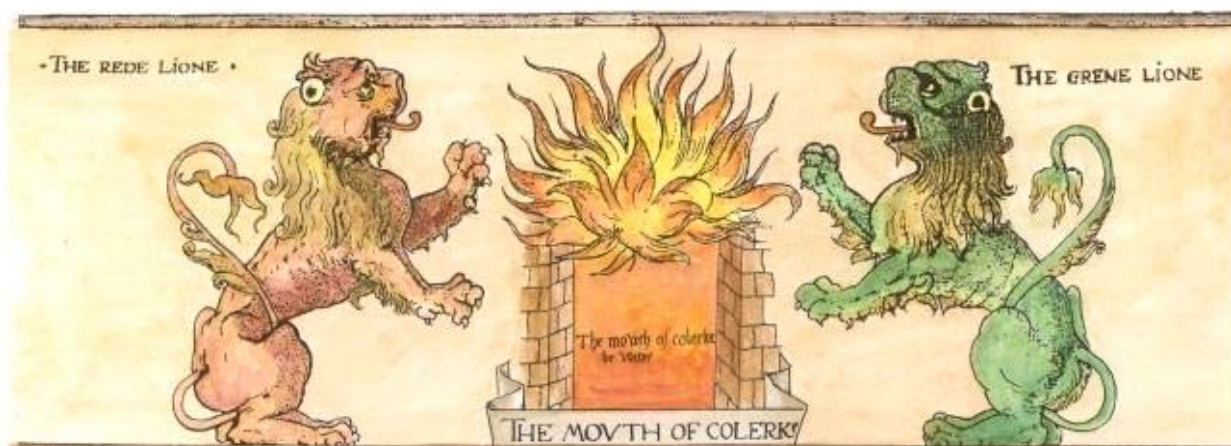
Where is the ground you must know here
And the well that is so clear
And what is the dragon with the tail
Or else the work shall little avail

The ground or hill may be the alchemical furnace, the well the alchemical flask, and the dragon the unknown prima materia. The alchemical work must be nourished by adding liquids, as we have seen depicted by the figures in the towers around the vessel or well. The work must then be taken through a cycle of the elements. The fire shall be

burnt with water, and the water washed with fire. Earth shall be put on fire, and water and air knit together. This echoes the phrases about the elements seen in the upper part of the flask in the first panel. "You must take water of the earth, and earth of the air, and air of the fire, and fire of the earth". When these paradoxical processes have been completed the work then proceeds to purification.

The second part of the verse gives the conventional cycle of colour changes in alchemy. First the putrefaction, the Nigredo, "First he shall be black as a crow". Next the Peacock's Tail "he shall shine colours here many a one". Then the washing to the Albedo "And that shall make him fair and white", with the implication of the Rubedo to follow.

Finally we should note that this whole process in these two vessels is being heated on a furnace attended by the two lions - the red and the green.

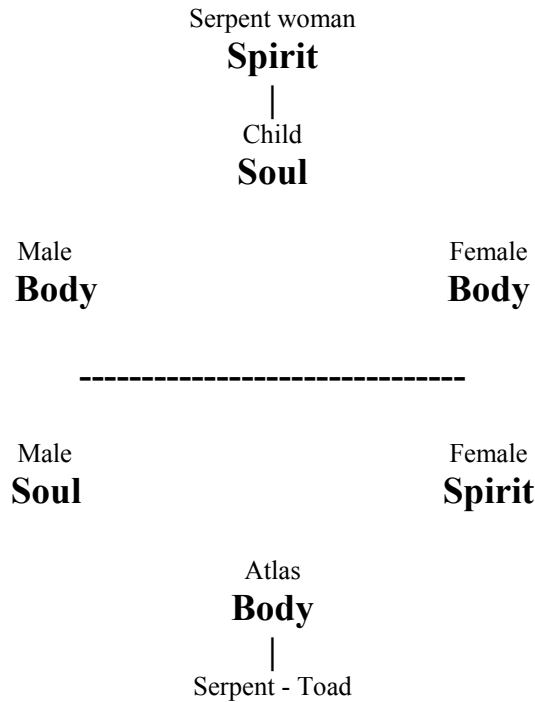


* * * *

We should now attempt to summarise the process outlined in this panel. The alchemical work here proceeds on two levels. On one level it involves a work with the elements in the foursquare vessel. The Atlas figure bears the label "Earth stands firm". He holds the axis or central column that supports the alchemical work. He is the opposite of the female serpent figure that descends from the heights and brings a spiritual influence into the sphere of the soul, the anima child clothed in light half-way up the trunk of the tree. This spiritual transformative force must descend all the way down into matter in order to create the spiritual power of the philosophers' stone. In the upper vessel the alchemical process enables this spiritual power to descend down into the anima or soul. This is the whitening - the phase of the white sea, the white Luna the white Sol. In the lower vessel it then enters the world of the four elements and becomes firmly rooted in the material. This is the reddening - the phase of the red sea, the red Luna, the red Sol.

We have seen before that the word "corpus" only appears on three figures. In the upper vessel the female serpent figure has "spirit" and "anima" marked on her, there is the child with the "anima" and the male and female figures each bear the word "corpus". They form with the soul child a triangular structure. This is echoed in the lower vessel

where the man is soul, the woman spirit and the Atlas figure is "corpus".



Here is perhaps a clue to the structure of this section of the symbolism. It is primarily concerned with the bringing of the spiritual into the material through an alchemical process which began in the black sea with the materia prima in the large flask and roundels, then proceeded to the white sea where the spirit incarnated itself in the soul realm, and this finally anchored itself in the material body in the Atlas figure, the "earth which holds firm", the stone that is so purified that it withstands the fire and transcends corruption, and indeed can tinge and transform, with its indwelling spirit, baser materials. The male and female figures seen in the first roundel are transformed in the series of flasks into a white woman. In the white sea of the upper vessel we again see a male and female figure. These appear to be transformed into the male figure in a nimbus of clouds and light and his winged female companion who stand in the red sea. It may be that the transformative element that sets the whole process depicted on the second panel into action, is the female serpent form descending from the heights of the tree. The first roundel also contains the symbolism of this process in a summarised form, for in this there appear the red and green lions, the tree, the fountain or basin, sun and moon, toad and serpent dragon, and the birds.



As an exercise try and extend this structure and see if other symbols in the panel resonate with this idea - The Sun and Moon, the two lions tending the fire.

Another point you can consider is the role of the toad. We see the toad at the top of the flask in the first panel, and again at the bottom of the square vessel. Ripley is well known for his use of the toad. Here is his famous *Vision*

When busy at my book I was upon a certain night,
This vision here expressed appeared to my dimmed sight:

A toad full ruddy I saw, did drink the juice of grapes so fast,
Till over-charged with the broth, his bowels all burst.
And after that, from his poisoned bulk he cast his deadly venom,
For grief and pain whereof his members all began to swell,
With drops of poisoned sweat approaching thus his secret den,
His cave with blasts of fumous air he all bewhited then.
And from which in time a golden humour did ensue,
Whose falling drops from high did stain the soil with ruddy hue.

And when his body the force of vital breath began to lack,
This dying toad became forthwith like coal in colour Black.
Thus drowned in his proper veins of poisoned flood,
For a term of eighty days and four he rotting stood

By trial then this venom to expel I did desire,
For which I did commit his carcass to a gentle fire.
Which done, a wonder to the sight, but more to be rehearsed,
The toad with colours rare through every side was pierced.

And white appeared when all the sundry hues were past.
Which after being tinted ruddy, for evermore did last.
Then of the venom handled thus a medicine I did make,
Which venom kills, and saves such as venom chance to take.

Glory be to him the granter of such secret ways,
Dominion, and Honour both, with Worship, and with Praise.
Amen.

As an exercise see how this vision relates to the imagery of the scroll.

Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll

Lesson 5 : Final Conjunction and Projection

We will now deal with the third and fourth panels. These have much simpler components than the first two panels, and are entirely tied together reflecting each other's imagery, so much so that they must really be considered together. The first shows a bird eating its wings, while the second presents us with the image of a dragon biting its own tail and the Moon's crescent.

The Bird of Hermes

In the sea without lees
Stands the bird of Hermes
Eating his wings variable
And making himself yet full stable
When all his feathers be from him gone
He stands still here as a stone

Here is now both white and red
And all so the stone to quicken the dead
All and some without fable
Both hard and soft and malleable,
Understand now well and right
And thank you God for this sight.

In the clear sea (lees are the sediment that can make beers or wines cloudy) we see the bird of Hermes eating its own wings. (You will remember there were three seas in the earlier two panels – the black sea, the white and the red sea.) The bird is here devouring the very thing that makes it fly. This indicates the alchemical process of fixing the volatile, or bringing that which is able to rise and fly into the spiritual, down into an earthly form. Thus we have here the incorporation or fixing of the spiritual into a material form. When the process is complete the bird of Hermes will stand in the form of a stone. It is now both white and red. We note the heading of this third panel :

Here is the last of the Red, and the beginning to put away the dead. The Elixir Vitae.

In the second panel we saw the two seas, the white and the red, in their respective vessels. The resulting white and red stones have now, through the continuing alchemical process become merged into this bird of Hermes. We note another link with the second panel. There, golden feathers descended from the Sun and silver ones from the Moon. Here, these feathers have become merged, the left sides being coloured golden and their right sides being silver. The Solar and the lunar, the red and the white, the golden and the silver are beginning to conjoin into one integrated matter. The bird itself is twofold, its body/breast being silver while its wings are golden. This is alchemically, a stage of conjunction, a uniting of opposites. It is happening underneath the Sun, from whom golden drops descend. The verses beside the Sun say :

Take the father that Phoebus so high
That sit so high in majesty
With his beams that shines so bright
In all places wherever that he be.

For he is father to all things
Maintainer of life to crop and root
And causes Nature for to spring,
With the wife beginning sothe,

For he is salve to every sore
To bring about this prosperous work
Take good heed unto this lore
I say to learned and to clerk

And Homogenie is his name
Which God made with his own hand
And Magnesia is his dame
You shall verily understand.

Now I shall here begin,
for to teach you a ready way
Or else little shall thou win
Take good heed what I say.

Divide thou Phoebus in many parts
With his beams that be so bright

And this with Nature him convert
The which is mirror of all light.

This Phoebus have full many a name
Which that is full hard to know
And but you take the very same,
The philosophers' stone ye shall not know

Therefore I counsel ere you begin
Know it well what it should be
And that which is thick make it thin
for then it shall full well like thee

Now understand what I mean
And take good heed thereto
Our work else shall little be seen
And turn you to much woe

As I have said this our lore
Many a name I wish he hath
Some behind and some before
As philosophers doth him give.

The alchemist is here encouraged to take the essence of the Sun. This is Homogenie, “born out of the same or uniform thing”, or made by the hand of the God. His wife is Magnesia. (Magnesia to the alchemists was a white stone that shone like silver, and not necessarily a compound of magnesium.) The alchemist must divide him into many parts, here pictured by the many golden drops that descend. These must be converted by contact with Nature, which is the mirror of light. Phoebus has many a name in alchemy, and it is hard to know which is the one that is necessary for the alchemical work. Unless you take the correct ‘Phoebus’ you will never be able to make the philosophers’ stone. One clue only is given, “that which is thick make it thin”, that is, follow the process of spiritualising the material, making the gross into a subtle form. The bird of Hermes stands on an earthly globe or sphere, in some manuscripts coloured an earthly brown. This is like a great egg, incorporating and uniting all the energies of the previous stages.

The text below sums up the message of this panel “The bird of Hermes is my name, eating my wings to make me tame”. The primal power of Phoebus, the spiritual energy of the sun, must be tamed, tied down, or reduced from a volatile flying form into a fixed earthly one.

The Serpent of Arabi

The fourth panel shows us a great dragon or serpent, standing on a winged globe, biting at its own tail. The serpent dragon is depicted in green in some manuscripts, and below it are similarly coloured wings. This can be seen as a transformation of the previously winged bird, but the wings here are bat or dragon-like and not feathered. It has now lost its wings to become the serpent, and the wings have become attached to the sphere or globe beneath its feet, like the feathers were to the globe or egg at the bottom of the third panel.

Here the serpent bites or tries to incorporate the crescent moon. Above it stands what could be a Sun, though this is not directly depicted here, as its energies were woven into the alchemical work in the third panel, and it is now time for the lunar forces to be absorbed into the work. Above we see three stones tied together – the Red stone (reddish golden), the White stone (silver) and the Elixir Vitae which is coloured brown. This is a similar brown to the globe at the feet of the Bird of Hermes. This constellation of the three stones must also incorporate the energies of the Sun, though perhaps not in a direct way. The rays which emerge from the three interlinked stones or spheres are similarly coloured and we see these colours again on the crescent moon. Thus we have a conjunction of Sun and Moon, through the medium of the three stones – red, white and elixir.

This serpent forms the ouroboros by biting and eating itself, and incorporating into its body the red and white stones and the elixir vitae. From a pore in its belly drops of blood emerge and drop down onto the globe which is in the form of an orb. The drops run down the orb and collect into a water or sea. Three streams descend into three spheres each bearing the colours, brown on the outside, silver in the middle and red in the centre.

The verses explain this to us :

I shall you tell with plain declaration
Who and what is my generation
Homogenie is my Father
And Magnesia is my Mother.

And Azot truly is my Sister
And Kibrick forsooth is my Brother
The Serpent of Arabia is my name
Which is the leader of all this game.

That sometime was both wood and wild
And now I am both meek and mild.

The Sun and the Moon with their might
Have chastised me that was so light
My wings that me brought
Hither and thither where I thought.

Now with their might they down me pull,
And bring me where they will
The blood of mine heart I wish
Now causeth both joy and bliss.

And dissolveth the very Stone
And knitteth him ere he have done.

Now maketh hard that was lix
And causeth him to be fixed

Of my blood and water I wish
Plenty in all the world there is.

It runneth in every place
Who it findeth he hath grace
In the world it runneth over all
And goes round as a ball.

But thou understand well this
Of the work thou shalt miss.

Therefore know ere thou begin
What he is and all his kin
Many a name he hath full sure
And all is but one nature.

Thou must part him in three
And then knit him as the Trinity
And make them all but one
Lo here is the Philosophers Stone.

This is the Serpent of Arabi, its father is Homogenie, its mother is Magnesia. Homogenie is the name of the solar power of Phoebus in the third panel, and his wife is the bright shining lunar Magnesia, so the serpent here is the child, born out of the alchemical work of the third panel. The Sun and Moon forces have brought the serpent down from flying in the spiritual sphere, removed its wings and anchored it in the material world. The blood of its heart flows out over the world, causing joy and bliss as it dissolves the very Stone, knitting or joining its components together. The serpent wishes its transformative blood and water could run out all over the world, so that everyone that finds it could obtain grace. The verse ends by indicating that the alchemist must part the alchemical work into three, then join them together like the Trinity. This is pictured by the triple streams of blood in the globe below the serpent. The alchemist can only make the philosophers' stone when he can unite these three streams together into one trinity. The three tied together in the star or Sun like form and in the lunar crescent above the serpent, are the spiritual forms of the stone, and this must be made material through the ouroboros serpent. These forces are precipitated from the spirit through this ouroboros serpent and woven into its blood which can then be manifested materially in the globe of the earth on which it stands.

Panels three and four completely mirror one another. They are symbolic statements of the alchemical process of conjunction seen from two different and mirrored perspectives. We cannot really understand one of these panels in isolation. It is only when we study and work with them together that we can grasp the alchemical ideas being presented here. In a similar way we can see panels one and two are also two parts of the same process. The first two panels are more about breaking things down, identifying the different components of the alchemical work, leading them through a process of transformation, involving colour changes in the three seas, and ultimately forming various pure 'stones'. What poured out of the toad in the flask at the beginning of the first panel and led to the

formation of the stones, is now finally digested and transformed in the blood of the dragon/serpent. Thus the last two panels take the products of the first stages further and integrate these into one single alchemical work, the conjunction which can then lead to the ultimate projection of the energies of the alchemical process onto the outer material world. As the verse at the end of the fourth panel states.

Of my blood and water I wish
Plenty in all the world there is.

It runneth in every place
Who it findeth he hath grace
In the world it runneth over all
And goes round as a ball.

But thou understand well this
Of the work thou shalt miss.

The Ripley scroll, though ornate, ideosyncratic and complex, is thus a magnificent summary and statement of the classical alchemical process.

Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll

Lesson 6 : The type II scrolls

There are five scrolls that differ so substantially from the coherent group of sixteen manuscripts that we can place them in a second group, the Type II Scrolls

B.L. Add 5025-1	16th cent.
B.L. Add 5025-3	16th cent.
B.L Sloane 2424A	16th cent.
Ashmole Rolls 53	17th cent.
Ashmole Rolls 54	17th cent.

Of these British Library MS. Add 5025-1 and Ashmole Roll 53 appear to be close copies, and British Library MS Sloane 2424A is substantially similar to these. Ashmole Roll 54 is a rather corrupted and poorly drawn version more closely following the Type I scrolls than others in this group. British Library MS. Add 5025-3 is entirely unique. It has only a few elements of the symbolism on the Type I scrolls, however, as it has become used as illustrations in a number of recent books on alchemy, following Jung's use of it in his *Psychology and Alchemy*, many people confuse this unique and idiosyncratic manuscript with the coherent type I scrolls.

Let us look firstly at the Type II scroll exemplified in British Library MS. Add 5025-1, Ashmole Roll 53 and British Library MS Sloane 2424A.

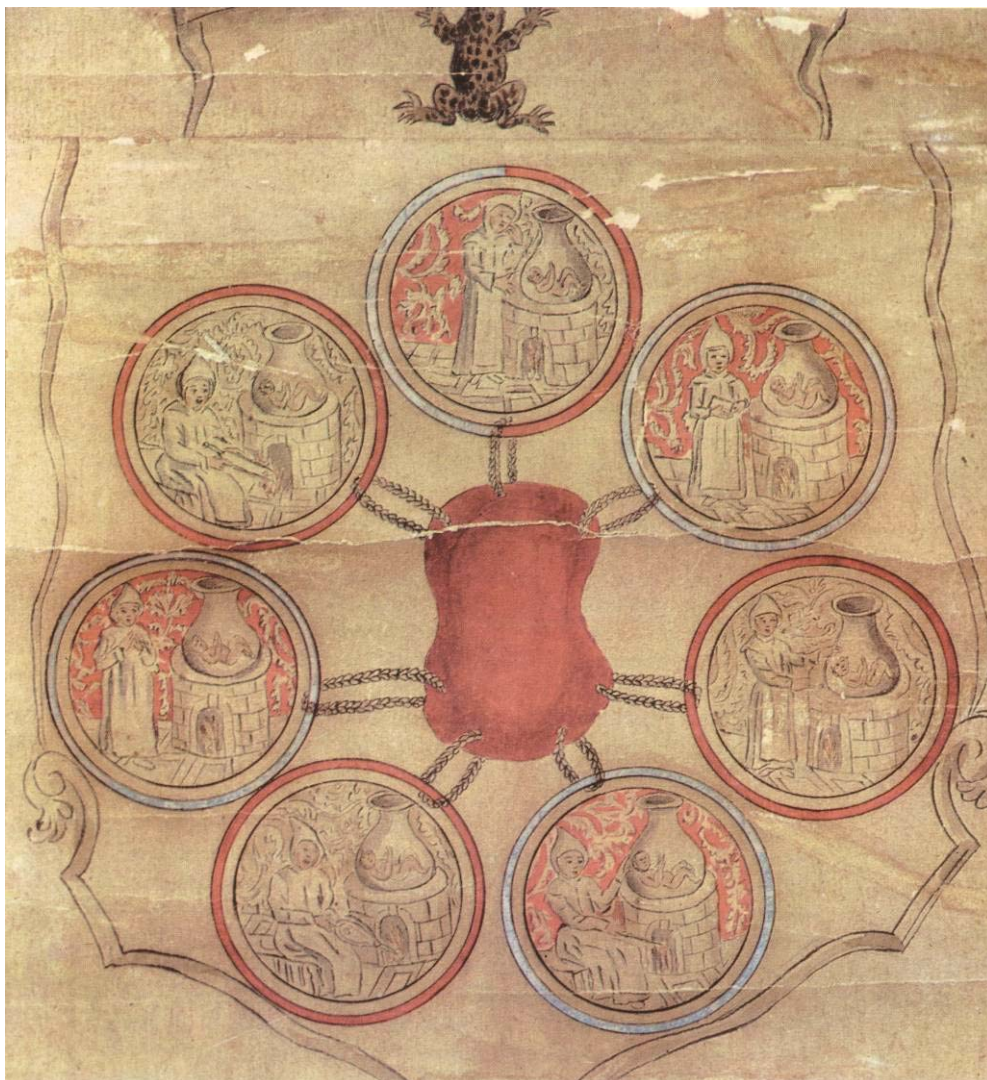
We should immediately notice a simplification of the complex imagery on the Type I scrolls, and also the absence of the text. Instead of the alchemist holding his flask at the top of the Type I scrolls, this group begins with two pictures of a monk lying on his bed. Angels appear to him and present objects. Firstly, a plate of bread (or possibly stones), and then a heart pierced by a knife on a plate. A banner states "Collirio iunge oculos tuos ut videas" – connect your eyes with these striking things, so that you can see and understand.

Then we have the text found at the head of the Type I scroll, "Est lapis occultus secreto fonte sepultus fermentu variat lapide qui conta colora". We then see the toad and a very restricted and simplified version of the roundels of the first panel of the Type I scrolls. Below this we have an abbreviated version of the basins, here in the form of a single hexagonal vessel, rather than the foursquare and the heptangular ones seen in the second panel. The serpent woman again descends but instead of crawling down the trunk of the tree in the upper seven-sided vessels now she entwines around the column and kisses the Atlas figure seen in the of the lower foursquare vessel of the second panel in the Type I scrolls. Here we have a radical simplification and conflation of the symbols.

I here show the Ashmole Rolls 53 on the left and the B.L. Add 5025-1 on the right

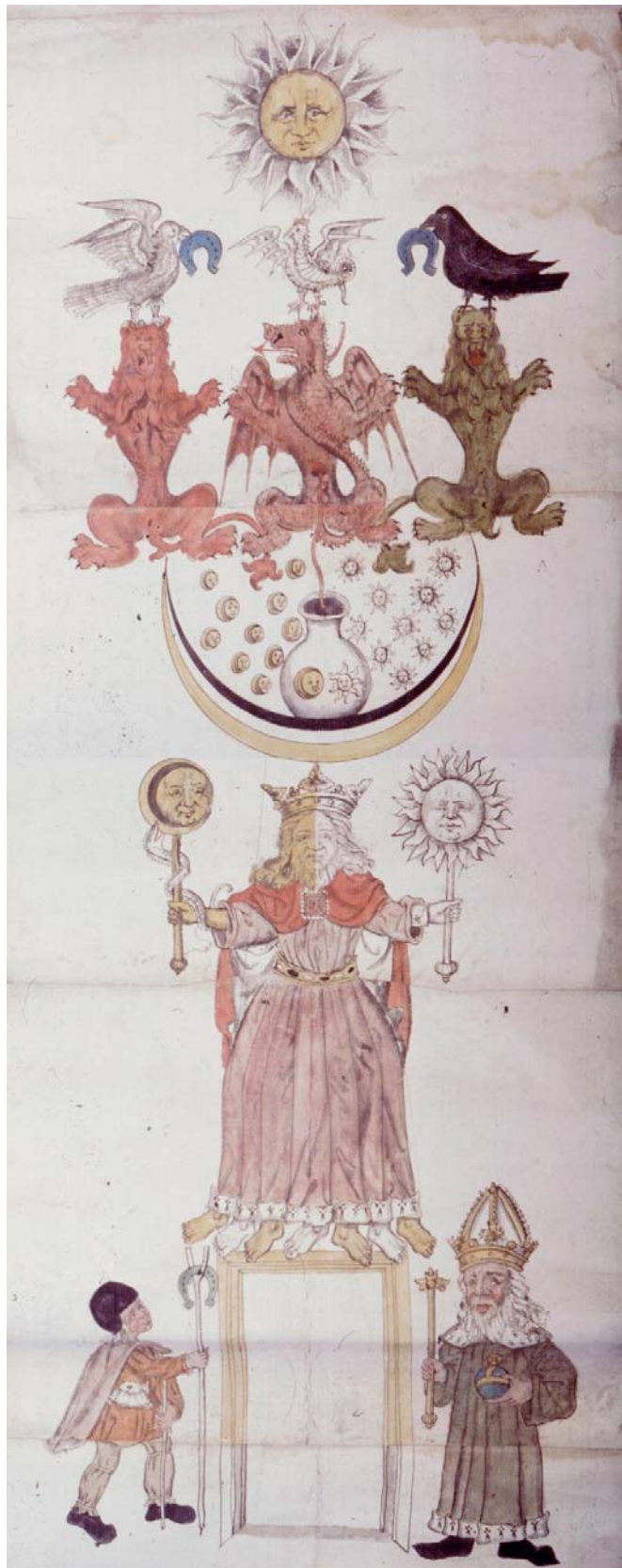


The roundels have been radically simplified. In B.L. Add 5025-1 we see that a single monk attends the furnace and a child or homunculus only appears in all seven flasks. There is no sense of transformation or the addition of substances to the flasks.



We see the symbolism of the third and fourth panels in a much simplified form further down the scroll. The dragon seen in the fourth panel of the Type I scrolls (which is depicted green on those which are coloured) is here a bright red colour.

At the end of the Type II scrolls there is a complex emblem not seen in the Type I scrolls. Here a red and a green lion flank a winged lion or perhaps a griffin. Birds on their heads hold horseshoes, a white eagle on the red lion and a black crow on the green lion, while on the head of the lion/griffin is a small winged dragon or cockatrice. Below in the belly of a crescent moon a flask is seen with the sun and moon within it. Standing beneath this is a strange, possibly hermaphroditic, figure. One side of its body is golden, the other silvery white. It is crowned and holds up the sun and moon on sceptres. It has seven feet, four golden and three silvery. These are likely to be the seven planetary metals three of which are solar having sun discs in their glyphs - Mars, Sun and Venus, three lunar with lunar crescents in their symbols- Jupiter, Moon and Saturn, and Mercury having both. Here is the image from Ashmole Rolls 53.



This strange double figure stands above a doorway. On the left we see an echo of the pilgrim/secretary/scholar at the end of the Type I scrolls. Here he appears more like a peasant holding a crutch with a horseshoe. On the right is a king holding his orb and sceptre. This king is seen on four of the Type I Ripley Scrolls (as is described in the second lesson of this course).

I think we can see that this subgroup of the Type II scrolls draws substantially upon the Type I scrolls. Many of the symbols from there are included but much of the detail has been removed and it is difficult to grasp the coherence of the imagery without referring to the Type I versions. Two extra emblematic sections are added – the monk encountering the angels, and the sun and moon-sided king. The verses, so important to understanding the import of the symbolism, are not included. We should perhaps see this group as a later reworking of the scroll. It is interesting to see how the symbolic material is handled differently, but this group of manuscripts does not seem to throw any new light onto the Scroll or help us substantially in reading its symbolic message. For that we should perhaps rely only on the Type I scrolls.

The remarkable Ms. Add 5025-3

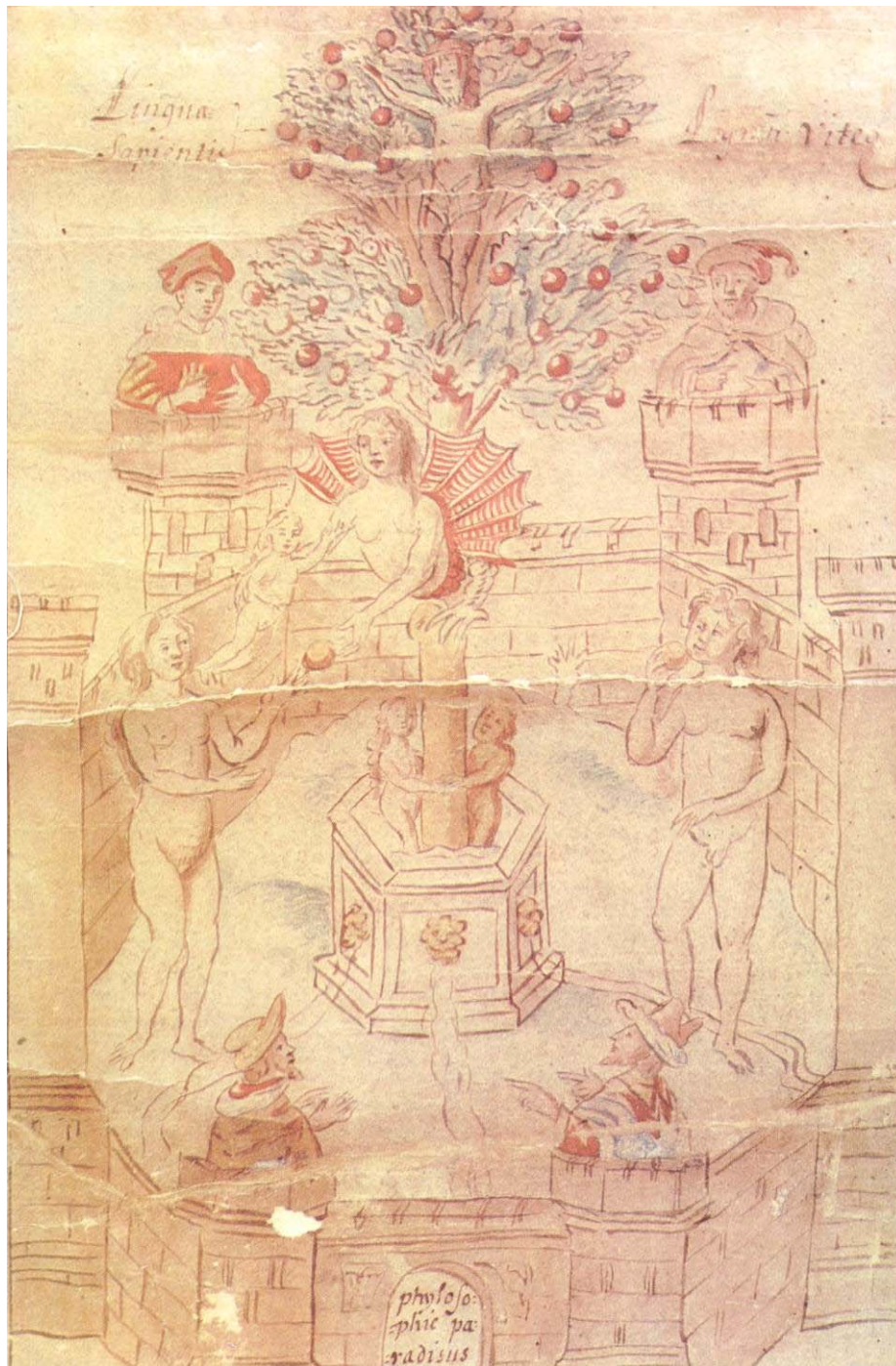
As we have seen this is a unique manuscript. Most of its symbolic material is only found there. Although it seems to bear some links to the other scrolls, its symbolism departs from the Type I and other Type II manuscripts and takes us off on a path of its own. This manuscript really needs a substantial commentary of its own, which would only touch tangentially on the Ripley Scroll. It is of a late date, the closing decades of the 16th century, and is found in the group of four manuscripts constituting MS. Add 5025 in the British Library. These are distinguished by being so much smaller than the other scrolls, about 1/3 the size. They appear to be made by the same hand, and are dated 1588. MS. Add 5025-2 has at the end “This long roll was drane for me in Cullers At Lubech in Germany Anno 1588.” This group includes two Type I scroll, MS. Add 5025-2 a representative of the type II, and this odd version MS. Add 5025-3.

Hopefully, some time in the future, I will be able to produce a commentary on this manuscript, but for now we can merely note the following. At the top of this scroll is our alchemist holding the pelican flask, however there are no roundels or any other indication of the sequence of operations. Next follows the conjoined sun and moon with the dragon underneath, which is based on the fourth panel of the Type I scrolls. There are feathers and drops of liquid to the sides. It seems as if the whole symbolic contents of the Type I scrolls have been compacted into merely the beginning and end. Below this is a rose. The text above this states

Take the fair roses white and red
And join them two in one bed
So between those roses milde
You shall bring forth a [...] child



Then we are shown a castellated space somewhat like the heptangular vessel of the second panel of the type I scrolls. Here it is not itself a basin of liquid but a walled garden “the paradise of the philosophers”. Here we see the tree of the second panel standing in a hexagonal basin of liquid. The bat winged female serpent figure stands on the trunk and hands out apples to the male and female figures. High up in the tree Christ is crucified. This presents us with a radical reworking of the earlier material into a more obviously Christian context.



The rest of this scroll presents us with symbolic material not found in any of the other scrolls

A triple furnace

A pelican flask supported by a lion and a dragon, with male and female figures inside

A furnace with a flask heated in a water bath

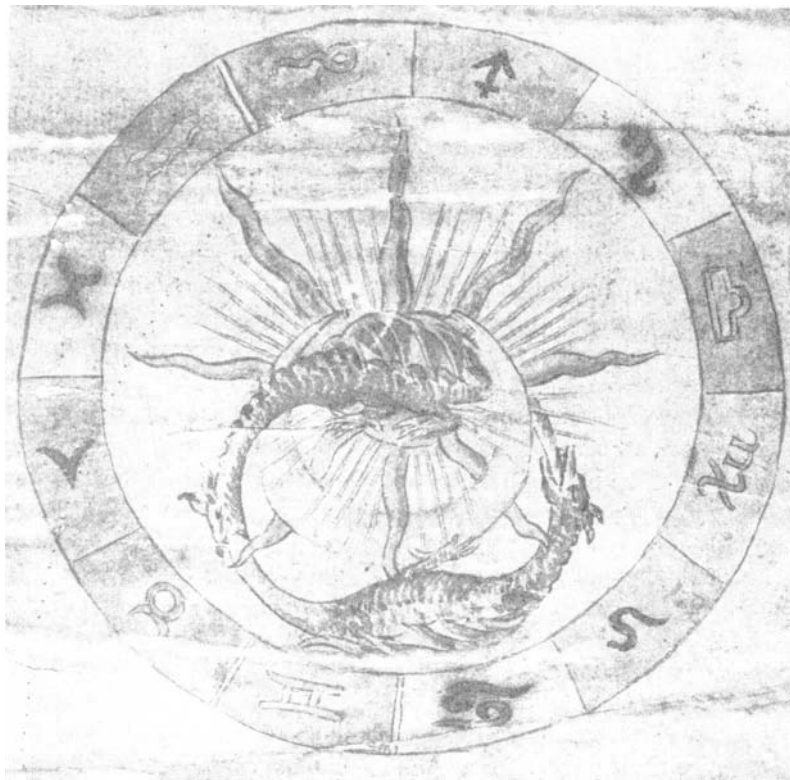
A circulatory apparatus with two flasks, the double pelican.

A circulatory apparatus with upper and lower flasks.

A double ouroboros within a zodiacal circle [This is often reproduced in books]

Finally a man lying on the ground [probably Adam] with a female emerging from his side [Even born from the rib.]

These symbols take us some distance away from the Type I scrolls so I will not discuss this in detail here. MS. Add 5025-3 is a remarkable manuscript and deserves a deeper study. Although obviously based on the Ripley Scroll it presents us with another journey through the alchemical process.



Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll

Lesson 7 : Ripley's signature

We have now looked at the *Ripley Scroll* in some detail and been able to identify all of its symbolic elements. We have seen how these are related together to form sub-sequences which reflect alchemical processes (such as the sequence of colour changes) found in other alchemical manuscripts and in allegorical alchemical texts and verses. Thus it has been possible to show that the *Scroll*, which seemed at the outset entirely unique and obscure, can be quite easily explored within the context of the tradition of alchemical symbolism and emblematic sequences. The work reveals itself once we come to see it in the context of alchemical imagery and not seek ad hoc explanations drawing on ideas which have no connection to the work itself. We must always remember that the author of this *Scroll* was deeply immersed in the alchemical tradition, he had undoubtedly read other allegorical works and pondered other alchemical manuscripts. He was familiar with the symbolic language of alchemy and thus his work can really only be understood within the context of alchemical symbolism. This is what has been attempted in this study course. I hope a firm foundation has been built upon which further insights can be constructed.

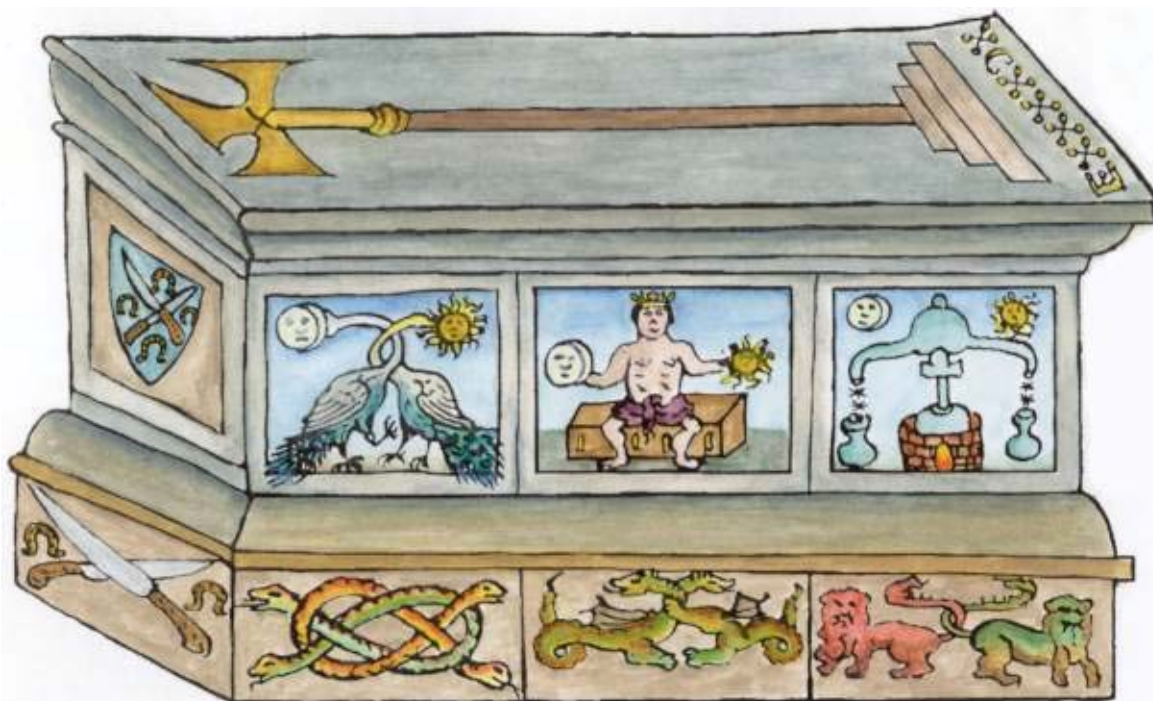
We have in these lessons shied away from positively identifying George Ripley, the Canon of Bridlington, as the actual author of the *Scroll*. In a sense it does not actually matter whether he was the author as it is the material that is presented in the *Scroll* that is important, however, since beginning this course I have been able to obtain access to a drawing made by Elias Ashmole in his annotated copy of his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. This copy, annotated by Ashmole himself, contains a few corrections, amendments and some new material he had discovered since his book had been published. Among these is a drawing of George Ripley's tomb. The original drawing which Ashmole copied from is now in the British Library in MS Cotton Vitellius E.X. fol 234v, but this has been damaged by fire and part of the image is now missing. Ashmole writes beneath his own drawing

The draught of George Ryplies Monument at Bridlington inYorkshire : taken from a draught in a MS in Bibliotheca Cotton [Vitellius] E.10 18 Nov: 1671 by E. A.

Here is my own redrawn and corrected copy of Ashmole's pen drawing. I have taken the liberty of colouring the images. The images on the front panels of the tomb are all familiar alchemical ones. They all show the working of the polarities of the Sun and Moon. Sun and moon-headed birds entwine their necks, the king holds solar and lunar discs, while in the rightmost panel we see an alembic fitted to a flask set in a furnace, distilling out two essences, one solar, the other lunar. In the lower three panels, we again see symbolic expressions of the alchemical idea of the union of polarities - the two intertwined double-headed snakes, two

dragons interweaving their necks and two lions. Of these symbols only the two lions are key symbolic components of the *Scroll*. The two dragons might be eating their own wings, which would echo the third panel of the *Scroll*, but the drawing of the tomb is not detailed enough to be entirely sure on these points. It is suggestive but not conclusive evidence of a link. The top of the tomb has the cross on the three steps - a conventional Christian image of the time. On the left is the date 1490, the year in which Ripley died.

The panel at the head of the tomb, drawn in reverse perspective in order to create a bit more room for the images, is a shield quartered by two crossed knives with horseshoes in each quarter. This image is repeated in the lower panel with the two crossed knives and two horseshoes. These symbols are not recognisably alchemical, so perhaps we should view these as having some personal connection to Ripley, rather than reflecting his alchemical interests. It may be best to view this as a heraldic image rather than an alchemical one. I have not been able to discover the coat of arms of the Ripley family during the 15th century. The present day Ripley family coat of arms is entirely different and there are no knives or horseshoes there (nor any alchemical resonances!).



The horseshoes are, however, significant in the context of the *Scroll*. You will remember, the figure of the clerk at the bottom of the *Scroll*. This figure carries a staff with a quiver of pens and a roll of parchment. A horseshoe was attached to the other end of his staff. The significance of this horseshoe now becomes clear. I cannot think of any alchemical manuscript or printed emblem which uses the horseshoe as a symbol. So we must presume this horseshoe to be a personal symbol of George Ripley, perhaps used in his coat of arms or as part of a personal seal.

It appears that Ripley's father came from Ripley in Derbyshire. This area was under the control of Darley Abbey, an Augustinian Priory founded by Robert Ferrers. The name Ferrers being derived from "farrier", that is, a smith who makes horseshoes, and the horseshoe appears on

the arms of the Priory. The horseshoe symbol is still used in the town of Ripley. Ripley's father built Ripley Castle about 80 miles north in Yorkshire. Later George Ripley became a Canon at the Augustinian Priory in Bridlington, also in Yorkshire. As Bridlington does not seem to have any association with the horseshoe symbol, we can presume this is connected rather with Ripley's origins, so it may be a symbol with which he felt a personal connection. Thus we might expect it to have appeared in his family's crest or on some personal seal.

So our initial conservative view that the *Scroll*, as it lacks any direct reference to Ripley, might not have actually been created by Ripley, should be revised in the light of this connection. In a sense the *Scroll* bears the signature of Ripley in the horseshoe. So I am pleased to announce as a conclusion to this course that we have over the past six months truly been exploring and studying the *Ripley Scroll*.

