



## The History of Science Society

---

Seven Salts of Hermes

Author(s): Lynn Thorndike

Source: *Isis*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (May, 1930), pp. 187-188

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/224385>

Accessed: 27/05/2010 18:29

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The University of Chicago Press and The History of Science Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Isis*.

## Seven Salts of Hermes

In medieval manuscripts is found a work of alchemy ascribed to HERMES bearing the title, *Secrets according to the Nature of Transmutation or Of Salts and Bodies* (1) The treatise dates back to the thirteenth century if a manuscript at Brussels is correctly placed in that century. (2) The author, whoever he may really be, opens by pointing out that there are seven planets, seven metals,

---

(1) Mrs. DOROTHEA WALEY SINGER, *Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Alchemical Manuscripts in Great Britain and Ireland dating from before the XVI Century*, Brussels, 1928, No. 37, pp. 43-44, lists two Mss. of the fourteenth and three of the fifteenth century. Of these I had briefly mentioned the two 14th century Mss. in my *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 1923, II, 218, note 3, but in the present connection I have chiefly examined All Souls 81, and can give a somewhat fuller description of it than is found in the catalogue just mentioned or in HENRY O. COXE's *Catalogus codicum Mss. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur*, 1852, II, 24. It seemed to me that our treatise covered only fols. 18v-20v, rather than 18v-52v, as suggested by COXE and Mrs. SINGER. The exact wording of the preceding Rubric or Titulus is, « Hic incipiunt secreta hermetis regis grecorum secundum transmutacionis naturam. » After the passage on salts which I shall reproduce, the author turns to the nature of the planets and finishes with the moon at the bottom of fol. 20v, where the text appears to break off. From fol. 21r on we have a different handwriting and style of page, more of the paper than before being covered with writing. In Corpus Christi 125, 14th century, fols. 39r-41v, the text continues considerably beyond the point where fol. 20v of All Souls 81 breaks off, but the writing is very abbreviated and fol. 40 torn and faded. In none of the other manuscripts listed by Mrs. SINGER does the text occupy more than a few folios or have the Explicit proposed for All Souls 81. Mrs. SINGER and COXE give as the closing words of our treatise in the All Souls Ms., « Explicit Ycocedron (Ycocedrom?) philosophie, » but I should incline to regard this as the end of another treatise. At any rate it does not occur either at fol. 52v or fol 17, as Mrs. SINGER and COXE might respectively seem to imply in their notices of the Ms., but at fol. 18r, immediately preceding our treatise which begins on the reverse of that leaf. Finally, COXE gives a reference to BANDINI, *Catalogus codicum Laurent. Latt.*, tom. II, col. 33, but this citation does not have any connection with our treatise and must be erroneous.

(2) Library of the Dukes of Burgundy 4275 : cited in my *History of Magic etc.*, II, 218, note 4.

and seven *magisteria*. It is with the last that we shall concern ourselves here. These «masteries» or mysteries are not, as one might guess, methods or processes of obtaining the philosopher's stone and transmuting metals into gold, but seven different kinds of salts. Their constitution is briefly stated and they are thereby distinguished from or related to one another. The passage therefore seems worth reproducing in print, as indicative of the state of chemical knowledge at that time.

(All Souls 81, fol. 19r)

«Sal armonicus qui fit de sanguine hominis et sale communis ut postea plenius declarabimus.

Sal gemma qui est coloris cristallini et fit ex sale alkali et sale communi et aqua maris vel salsa ut dicemus inferius.

Sal nitrum qui fit ex sale gemma et sale alkali.

Sal calcis qui fit ex sale nigro et sale alembroc et fit de 7 herbarum succis.

Sal communis qui fit de aqua maris sive salsa.

Sal alkali qui fit ex sale vitro bene trito et isto sale utuntur vitriarii quia per ipsum operantur in fusione vitri.

Sal alembroc qui fit ut diximus ex 7 herbarum succis.

Et hoc est quod dicitur magisterium omnium magisteriorum nam hoc mirabile facit scilicet de mercurio lunam (fol. 19v) et solem purissimum. De quibus omnibus tractabimus in suis locis cum opus fuerit.»

*Columbia University*

LYNN THORNDIKE.