

# REVIEWS

## Alchemical Works: Eirenaeus Philalethes Compiled

Edited by S. Merrow Broddle  
from Cinnabar  
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Boulder, Colorado 80306  
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reviewed by Mark Stavish, M.A.

Looking for a little late night alchemical reading? Well, then you've come to the right place. How about enough reading for, oh say, the next 40 nights? Better still. *Alchemical Works: Eirenaeus Philalethes Compiled* is not only a mouthful, it is also an alchemical month's worth of some heavy duty reading on the laboratory aspects of the Great Work by one of the 17th century's leading exponents of the Art.

As the introduction suggests, over 300 years after the first publications of Philalethes, the identity of this near mythological adept is still unknown. Philalethes is the latinization of the Greek phrase for "Lover of Truth," and if he is judged by what he was written, which according to his prefaces suggest kindness, modesty, and a philanthropic attitude — the reputed hallmarks of spiritual attainment, it is a fitting name. Legendary for having achieved the Philosopher's Stone at the age of 23, in 1645, his additional pseudonyms describe him as a Citizen of the Cosmos, or *Cosmopolita*, by which he is best known.

An associate of Boyle, Starkey, and other lesser and some well known alchemists and pseudo-alchemists, Philalethes's writings were the basis for Isaac Newton's experiments in alchemy, particularly his search for Philosophic Mercury in 1675. In addition, Philalethes is best known for putting forth the idea of *metallic seed* which was "diffused throughout the metal, and contained in all its smallest parts..." an idea similar to today's atomic theory.

Included in this volume are all of Philalethes' works

available in English, indexed, and complete with the original format being preserved. A partial look at the contents show: The Marrow of Alchemy, parts 1 and 2; Ripley Revived; An Exposition upon the First Six Gates of Sir George Ripley's Compound of Alchemie; Experiment for the Preparation of the Sophick Mercury; By Luna, and the Antimonial-Stellate-Regulus of Mars, for the Philosopher's Stone; A Breviary of Alchemy; and more for a total of 17 tracts being reproduced.

However, don't expect to be able to just pick up this book, head to your basement with a chemistry kit and make Star Regulus or Ignis-Aqua. Like all Philosophers of the Hermetic Arts and Sciences, this one too writes in what his modern equivalent, Fulcanelli, calls the "language of the birds". Like any language, symbolic language is clear to those who know its definitions, grammar, and syntax, but is meaningless to anyone who hasn't done the Work in order to understand. But don't fear, there is help.

While there may not yet be a Yellow Pages for Alchemists, some preliminary reading in the field will help clear away many of the obscurities presented in Philalethes' works. Several introductory books on the actual laboratory techniques of alchemy do exist along with suggestions for practical experiments in the field. *The Alchemist's Handbook* by Frater Alberus; Manfred Junius' *Practical Handbook of Plant Alchemy*; *In Pursuit of Gold, Alchemy Today in Theory and Practice* by Lapidus; and *Gold of a Thousand Mornings* by Armand Barbault are all more valuable in conjunction with *Alchemical Works: Eirenaeus Philalethes Compiled* for the aspiring practical alchemist than a dozen psychological analyses of the text.

So, if you are looking for an authentic alchemical text to guide you, complete with references and historical background to give it weight, then *Alchemical Works* is one of the best buys for the money. It is an expensive book, \$60, but is loaded with what is considered by the publisher to be the essential readings on the subject of alchemy by one who is said to have made The Stone, and completed the Great Work.

A note about the publisher by the way, in the true spirit of hermeticism he has included the following statement on the dust-jacket: "This work was commissioned by a scholar of The Art who lovingly guided the stringent accuracy of the detailed restoration and publication of the material contained within. Consistent with the Hermetic Tradition, he wishes to remain - Anonymous." Could it be? Nah...