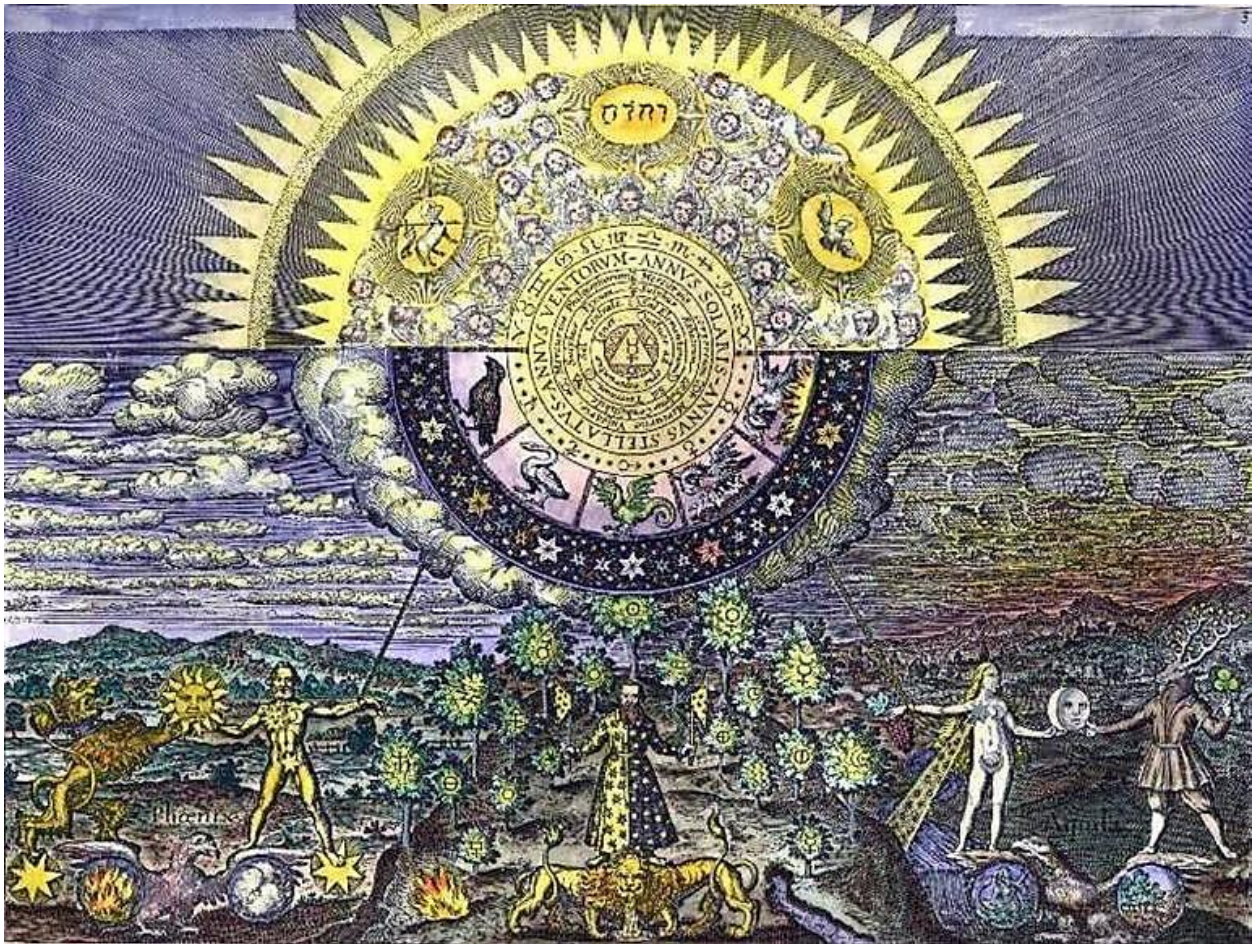


# The Emerald Tablet Engraving

By [Dennis William Hauck](#)



The best way to grasp the overall “Pattern” referred to in rubric six of the Emerald Tablet is to envision all the precepts of the Tablet in one drawing or image. That was exactly what artist Matthieu Merian had in mind when he began a very special engraving for inclusion in Daniel Mylius’ *Opus Medico-Chymicum*, which was published in 1618. Merian titled his work *Tabula Smaragdina* (Latin, “Emerald Tablet”), and his goal was to incorporate all the truths contained in the tablet in one awe-inspiring vision.

This beautiful work (see above) shows in dramatic detail the birth of the Philosopher’s Stone as it leaves heaven and enters earth. The picture immediately became one of

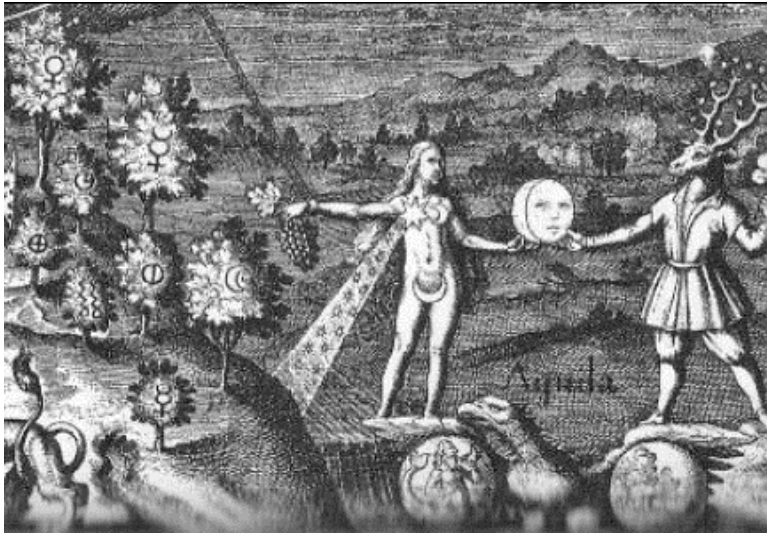
dozens of symbolic mandalas which alchemists used for meditation, and many medieval alchemists sat staring at this drawing for hours trying to absorb its power. Because of the importance of this particular work, we are going to examine it in some detail, so that those interested in using it for meditation will have a basic understanding of the many levels of meaning it contains.

The first thing that strikes one about the picture is its obvious division into the Above and the Below, and the sharp line between the two indicates that these are very different realms. Above, the larger Sun of the One Mind, whose rays encompass the whole universe, rises behind the Sun of Heaven or what Hermes called “Mind the Maker.” This intermediate Sun is dominated by twenty-nine cherubs or archetypal forces. In numerology, the number twenty-nine is equivalent to the number two, thus signifying the embryonic division of the One Mind to create Mind the Maker, which carries on the primary creation through the “crystallized thoughts of God”  $\frac{3}{4}$  the archetypes. The three solar presences floating amongst the angels represent the three heavenly elements expressed as the Holy Trinity: Sulfur (the Tetragrammaton of Jehovah the Father at the center), Mercury (the Son, the sacrificial Lamb of God), and Salt (the Dove or Holy Ghost hidden in matter). In the generic terms of the Emerald Tablet, this trinity is made up of the One Mind, the Process of Transformation, and the primal One Thing.

The Below is divided into the daytime (solar) left side of the drawing and the nighttime (lunar) right side. At the very bottom of the page, one can find the purified Four Elements sealed inside glass balls carried by two different birds. On the left, Fire and Air are under the outstretched wings of the Phoenix, a bird of myth and imagination that rose from the ashes of fire to be reborn, giving it dominion over the spheres of Fire and Air. On the right, Water and Earth are held in the wings of a real bird, the *Aquilla* (“Eagle”), who has dominion over the spheres of Water and Earth. Thus, the rising elements of Fire and Air represent spiritual or psychological processes, whereas the sinking elements of Water and Earth are physical or bodily processes.

The left or solar side of the engraving represents the process of Calcination. At the bottom left corner is a lion standing upright like a man. Known to alchemists as the Red Lion, he symbolizes the fiery, masculine energy of the Work. Behind him, it is daylight, and trees and a village can be seen. The lion is wearing a collar of stars and represents the cosmic forces emanating from the constellation of Leo, that figured so prominently in Egyptian religion and is the inspiration for the Sphinx, which symbolizes the astrological Age of Leo. Leo’s right foot rests on top of a seven-rayed sun, while his other foot is supported by the wing of the Phoenix. Leo is presenting a naked man with a thirteen-rayed Sun, symbol of the Hermetic Mysteries, said to be revealed to mankind over 10,000 years ago. The man is Sol, who represents the masculine component of nature and personality. Sol’s genitals are covered by a small

sun, as is his right breast, though his other breast is covered by the crecent moon which is the seed of the feminine in all men. His right foot is on the wing of the Phoenix and his left foot rests on a seven-rayed Sun identical to the one on which Leo stands. These seven rays are the seven steps of enlightenment that make up the Emerald Formula. Sol is chained by his left hand to the Clouds of Unknowing, which keep us from experiencing the splendor Above.



The right or lunar side of the engraving represents the process of Dissolution. In the bottom right corner can be seen a stag standing upright like a man. Known to alchemists as the “Fugitive Stag,” he is a symbol of the volatile, feminine, watery energy of the Work. He has a twelve-pointed rack of antlers, and each antler has a star over it, representing the influences of the zodiac. In

mythology, this is Acteon, the mythical hunter who was turned into a stag for admiring the nude Artemis while she was bathing in a pond. Artemis was the Greek goddess of nature and fertility who later was worshipped by the Romans as Diana. In both incarnations, the goddess stood for the deep creative and curative powers of the subconscious mind and nature.

The left foot of Diana’s stag is planted firmly on the earth, while his right foot rests on the wing of the Eagle. In his left hand is a three-leaf clover, representing the three heavenly forces expressed in nature, and in his other hand is the Moon, which he is passing on to a naked woman. Known as Luna, the naked woman is the feminine component of one’s personality. Her genitals are covered by a crescent moon, as is her left breast, but her right breast is a small seven-rayed sun—the active yet intuitive force within women—from which streams a shower of stars (the Milky Way) that is immediately grounded and absorbed directly into the earth. Luna straddles over the Hermetic River with one foot in the water and the other on the right wing of the Eagle. Behind her is a night scene in which the outlines of trees, valleys, and mountains can be discerned. In her left hand she holds a bunch of grapes, a symbol of sacrifice, and her right hand is chained to the Clouds of Unknowing.



In the center of the Below, a hermaphroditic alchemist holds up two starry hatchets, which represent the higher faculty of discernment and the powers of Separation. The alchemist has cut the Chains of Unknowing that tied Sol and Luna to their duality and balanced the powerful forces of their sexual attraction. He has seen through the Clouds of Unknowing, gained his freedom from instinct, and realizes the powerful influences of the archetypal powers. The empowered alchemist is symbolic of a successful Conjunction of the opposing forces to his left and right. Half of his frock is black with white stars and the other half is white with black stars. In other words, each side of his personality contains the seed of its opposite, so he has neither denied nor destroyed the compelling powers of the opposites, only integrated them into his own being.

The alchemist is located on the side of a mountain and stands on two lions who have a single head. The lion on the left is the Red Lion and the one on the right is the Green Lion. As shown by the Fire and Water emerging from the mountain behind their tails, these two lions represent Sulfur and Mercury, the alchemist's spirit and soul, which unite to produce the Ferment, the precursor of the Stone, symbolized by the thick substance flowing from the common mouth of the beasts. Thus, the alchemist himself represents the union of Fire and Water. This melding of rational with irrational, reason and feeling, male and female, is a necessary part of any act of creation.

Directly behind the alchemist are three rows of plants that stand for the seven operations of alchemy done three times to perfection. The first two rows contain six bushes that culminate in the Tree of Gold at the summit of the mountain. Each bush is marked with alchemical signs for metallic compounds. Behind these bushes is a semicircle of tress, each marked with a symbol for one of the pure metals. At the top of the mountain, the Clouds of Unknowing part and the powers Above touch the top of the tree with the sign for gold. This is the act of Fermentation, the penetration of the purified essence by forces from Above.

A line drawn from the Ferment Below (flowing from the common mouth of the two lions) to the name of God Above divides the engraving in half and bisects the alchemist through the middle of his being. That line, which is the Cosmic Axis or vertical axis of reality, connects him through the Tree of Gold and central Stone

directly to God. It travels through all three realms, starting in the Physical Realm, transecting the psychological processes of the Realm of Soul, and reaching the highest point in the Realm of Spirit.



The first area encountered as the alchemist travels along this vertical axis is a Ring of Stars in which seven larger stars predominate. This stellar ring presents the seven alchemical operations as cosmic principles available to sentient species everywhere. It is followed by a semicircle of five scenes that lead to the Quintessence. This register of alchemical accomplishments is known as the Ring of Planets, and each scene depicts the bird of spirit associated with one of the five planetary bodies. From left to right: the Black Crow of Calcination

(Saturn), the White Goose of Dissolution (Jupiter), the Rooster of Conjunction (Earth), the Pelican of Distillation (Venus), and finally, the Phoenix of Coagulation (Sun).

Above the Ring of Stars and the Ring of Planets, and partaking of all realms, is a central sphere made up of seven concentric layers. These layers symbolize each of the Seven Steps of Transformation that must be achieved or peeled away to reach the Stone, which is the innermost sphere where a triangle is inscribed. Within the first sphere are the twelve signs of the zodiac. These are personal and karmic archetypes of the personality that are burned away by the intensified fires of existence in the operation the alchemists named Calcination.

The second sphere is inscribed with three Latin phrases meaning “Year of the Winds,” “Year of the Sun,” and “Year of the Stars.” These are the transpersonal archetypes resolved and released during the long process of Dissolution. The third concentric sphere within the layered ball at the center of this engraving describes the three kinds of Mercury (Common Mercury, Bodily Mercury, and Philosophical Mercury). These are the essences of soul released in the previous two operations and saved during the filtering process of Separation. The fourth sphere names the three kinds of Sulfur (Combustible Sulfur, Fixed Sulfur, and Volatile or Ethereal Sulfur). These forces are the driving spiritual passions of the Conjunction, in which the opposing parts of our personalities, the Mercury and Sulfur of our being, are united in the common goal of transformation.

The fifth inner sphere refers to the Quintessence, the newly formed matter or Salt unveiled during Fermentation. Inscribed in this sphere are the three types of Salt (Elementary Salt, Salt of the Earth, and the Central Salt). The next and sixth sphere contains a message written in Latin which warns: “You must find the four grades of

Fire of the Work.” As we have seen, these four grades refer to the various states of consciousness that must be purified and united during Distillation, so they do not contaminate the Work in its final stage.

The seventh and innermost sphere contains a central upward-pointing triangle of Fire, which represents the sublimated state of distilled consciousness that is congealed Above. Within that triangle is drawn the symbol for the exalted Mercury, the Monad or One Thing perfected, which is the Stone. In the middle of the symbol is a single dot, the center of the entire engraving and around which both heaven and earth revolve. It is the convergence point in our minds and personalities where all things come together as one. To the left of the large triangle is a smaller downward-pointing triangle representing Water or Mercury; to the right is a small upward-pointing triangle representing Fire or Sulfur. Below the central triangle is the Star of David, which symbolizes Salt, the union of Fire and Water, the permanent coming together of the Above and the Below.

This wonderful engraving is a summary of how the Mercury of our souls is exposed and purified in the Work. United with the Sulfur of our spirits, it undergoes Coagulation to form the Salt of the Philosophers, the immortal, permanently enlightened, and wholly incarnated state of consciousness known as the Stone. Like the concentric target that it forms at the very center of this engraving, this is our perfected being and ultimate home.