Spiritual alchemy from the age of Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood, 1600–1900

Zuber, M.A.

Publication date
2017

Document Version
Other version

License
Other

Citation for published version (APA):
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Looking back at how this project moved from inchoate ideas on alchemy among German Pietists to what it ultimately became, I am struck by the enormous debts I owe to the many people who helped me along the way. In the process of writing these lines, I may even have forgotten some of them, for which I apologize in advance. And, of course, this is also the place to repeat the well-worn cliché: I take sole blame for any remaining imperfections.

Rosalie Basten deserves my heartfelt gratitude for making possible the fascinating microcosm that is the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam. I could not conceive of another institute that would have allowed me such complete freedom to transcend disciplinary boundaries and follow my manifold interests. My supervisors, Peter J. Forshaw and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, initially believed in my potential to do fruitful research on the topic of alchemy and religion. Throughout many chats over the years, Peter consistently encouraged me to follow my hunches, even if they were pulling me in odd or unexpected directions. In the final phase, Wouter became convinced by my argument before I myself quite knew what it was and pushed me to become a more exacting editor of my own writing. Students from all across the world contributed actively to a course that outlined an early version of what would eventually become the storyline of my thesis. I would particularly like to thank those who went on to become members of an alchemical reading group: José Vieira Leitão, David Sterkenburg and Kateryna Zorya. My colleague, researching the most obscure modern sources imaginable, J. Christian Greer, went through the ups and downs of PhD research with me. Thanks for all sorts of things also go to Nadine Faber and Leentje Molenaar. Special thanks are due to Yaniv Hagbi (Department of Hebrew Language and Literature) who taught me the rudiments of the Hebrew tongue with verve and gripping enthusiasm.

At conferences and events across the world, I had the privilege of meeting many dedicated scholars who generously shared their knowledge with me. Instead of mentioning them throughout the footnotes, I decided to thank them here, even as their impact is felt from the first page to the last. The first scholar who comes to mind is Leigh T. I. Penman (University of Queensland), who answered many arcane questions on Jacob Boehme, his network and correspondence at an amazing pace, volunteered much priceless information and shared crucial clues on further sources. Additionally, he read through, and commented on, a substantial portion of this thesis as it was nearing completion. Indeed, thanks to his efforts, as well as those of Lucinda Martin, Guido Naschert and Aren Roukema, I proudly consider my thesis informally
peer-reviewed. Jacqueline Borsje and Eric Jorink read different sections at various stages of progress. I am particularly indebted to Scott Brown, Carlos Gilly and Frank van Lamoen for various pointers that, ultimately, helped me to perceive the grand picture from the late sixteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth. Many others engaged with my ideas, responded to queries or helped me in other ways: Bo Andersson, Günther Bonheim, Hartmut Broszinski, Holly Brown, Marcel Elias, Ariel Hessayan, Tünde Beatrix Karnitscher, Lucinda Martin, Martin Mulsow, Tara Nummedal, Julian Paulus, Horst Pfefferl, Rafał Prinke, J. Jürgen Seidel, Joachim Telle, Andrew Weeks and Matthias Wenzel.

Numerous librarians and archivists across the world have equally taken the time to answer my questions on rare and unique sources or made the same accessible to me. Here I would merely like to mention some among them that have been helpful far beyond the call of duty. First and foremost, there is Monique Fasel (Universiteit van Amsterdam, Bijzondere Collecties): it was a great joy for me to discover, only weeks into my PhD programme, that there was somebody in my preferred research environment (overlooked by a Swiss Railways clock) who shared my strange native dialect. Over time, Monique became a close friend of the family and even proofread a great part of this thesis. Among her colleagues, I should like to thank Yvonne de Wit, Paul Dijstelberge, Adriaan Plak and Klaas van der Hoek for their help and advice. Equally in Amsterdam, Cis van Heertum and José Bouman (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica) guided my exploration of the manuscripts collected by Joost R. Ritman. I vividly remember my first meeting with the library’s founder, who said at the time that he had already been engaged in collecting books for me while I still was in my previous incarnation. I am unsure if this was what I was up to prior to my birth, but my gratitude for his tireless efforts continually increases. Among the treasures of the Ritman Library in Amsterdam and its state-owned portion in Den Haag, I found crucial material to support my arguments.

A three-month sojourn in Gotha, funded by a Herzog Ernst Scholarship (2015) of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, allowed me to do much of the research that fed into Part III. Cornelia Hopf, Franziska König, Christine Röhrig (Forschungsbibliothek Gotha) and Rosemarie Barthel (Staatsarchiv Gotha) were exceptionally helpful and actively engaged with my obscure pursuits. Elsewhere in Germany, I should mention Michael Ludscheidt (Bibliothek des Evangelischen Ministeriums Erfurt) and Ulrich Dühr (Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland Düsseldorf); in Switzerland, Barbara Tribelhorn (Stadtbibliothek Schaffhausen) and René Schurte (Zentralbibliothek Zürich). I would not have been able to write Part IV if it had not been for the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry: its New Scholars Award (2015)
made possible the digitization of the Mary Anne Atwood Papers, in which connection I also need to thank Christopher Geissler (Brown University, John Hay Library). Last but not least, the Society enabled me to travel to London frequently and to do research on the magnificent collections in the immediate vicinity of its London council meetings. Among British librarians, I am particularly grateful to Andrew Gilbert (University Library Glasgow), Jane Giscombe (Dr Williams’s Library London) and John Hodgson (John Rylands Library Manchester).

As I grew up, my parents, André and Luzia, taught me to value education and persevere in its pursuit. Indeed, I may have pursued it much further – both temporally and geographically speaking – than they had reckoned at the time. Through the years, they have always been supportive and, to a significant extent, outfitted me with the IT equipment on which I relied while writing this thesis. There was a time, quite close to the finish line, when a back-up mechanism originally suggested by my father saved the very footnote I had been working on as my laptop suddenly broke down. My brother Josh occasionally helped me with Greek – and German, since I started catching myself writing in a rather early-modern idiom.

The greatest debt of all I owe to Lana: you gave me the courage to embark on this adventure and were by my side from beginning to end, keeping me sane. This infans philosophicus may be an odd sibling for our Amsterdam-born little ones, Aidan and Na’ima, but it is dedicated to you.

Amsterdam, February 2017
Mike A. Zuber