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Tracing Alchemy

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (ALCHEMY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY) XI, pp. 535-38.

Thus we need only to read what Suidas says in his *Lexicon* with reference to the expedition of Jason, too well known to require telling here:

Δέρμας, Deras, the Golden Fleece which Jason and the Argonauts, after a voyage on the Black Sea in Colchis, took with the aid of Medea, daughter of Aiêtes, King of Aia. *Only instead of taking that which the poets pretended they took, it was a treatise written on a skin (δέρμασι) which explained how gold could be made by chemical means.* Contemporaries called this skin of a ram the Golden Fleece, most probably because of the great value attaching to the instructions on it.

This explanation is a little clearer and much more probable than the erudite vagaries of our modern mythologists, for we must remember that the Colchis of the Greeks is the modern Imeritia on the Black Sea; that the *Rion*, the big river which crosses the country, is the Phasis of the ancients, which even to this day carries traces of gold; and that the traditions of the indigenous races that live on the shores of the Black Sea, such as the Mingrelians, the Abhazians and the Imeritians are all full of this old legend of the golden fleece. Their ancestors, they say, have all been “makers of gold,” that is to say they possessed the secret of transmutation which today is called Alchemy.

In any case it is a fact that the Greeks, with the exception of the initiated, were ignorant of the hermetic sciences up to the time of the Neo-Platonists (towards the end of the fourth and fifth centuries), and knew nothing of the *real* alchemy of the ancient Egyptians, whose secrets were certainly not revealed to the public at large. In the third century of the Christian era we find the Emperor Diocletian publishing his famous edict, ordering a most careful search in Egypt for books treating of the fabrication of gold, which were to be burned at a public *auto-da-fé*. W. Godwin tells us that after this there did not remain one single work on Alchemy above ground, in the kingdom of the Pharaohs, and for the period of two centuries it was never spoken of. He might have added that there still remained *underground* a large number of such works, written on papyrus and buried with the mummies ten millenniums old. The whole secret lies in the ability to recognise such a treatise on Alchemy in what appears to be only a fairy tale, such as we have in that of the *golden fleece* or in the “romances” of the earlier Pharaohs. But it was not the secret wisdom hidden in the



allegories of the papyri which introduced Alchemy or the hermetic sciences to Europe. History tells us that Alchemy was cultivated in China more than sixteen centuries before our era, and that it had never been flourishing more than during the first centuries of Christianity. And it is towards the end of the fourth century, when the East opened its gates to the commerce of the Latin races that Alchemy once again penetrated into Europe. Byzantium and Alexandria, the two principal centers of this commerce, were suddenly inundated with works on transmutation, while it was known that Egypt no longer had any. Whence came then these treatises full of instructions on how to make gold and to prolong human life? It is certainly not from the sanctuaries of Egypt, as these Egyptian treatises did not exist any longer. We affirm that most of them were merely more or less correct interpretations of the allegorical stories of the green, blue and yellow Dragons, and the rose tigers, alchemical symbols of the Chinese.

All the treatises that are to be found now in the public libraries and the Museums of Europe are nothing but questionable hypotheses of certain mystics of various times, left halfway on the road of the great Initiation. All that is needed is to compare some of the so-called "hermetic" treatises with those which have been recently brought over from China, to recognise that Thoth-Hermes, or rather the science of that name, is quite innocent of all that. It follows from this that all that was known concerning Alchemy, from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, was imported into Europe from China and transformed later into Hermetic writings. Most of these writings have been fabricated by the Greeks and the Arabs, in the eighth and ninth centuries, re-fabricated in the Middle Ages, and remain incomprehensible in the nineteenth century. The Saracens, whose most famous school of Alchemy was at Bagdad, while bringing with them more ancient traditions, had lost their secret themselves. The great Geber merits rather the title of Father of modern Chemistry than of Hermetic Alchemy, although it is to him that is attributed the importation of Alchemical Science into Europe.



Jason carrying the Golden Fleece by Erasmus Quellinus, Madrid

