arts

MDPI

Article

The Salamander in the Furnace of the Loggia of Psyche at Villa Farnesina: Alchemy and the Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Rome (With an Analysis of Jacopo del Sellaio's Abegg-Stiftung Florentine Psyche Marriage *Cassone* Panel, as an Adaptation of Botticelli's *Primavera*)

Robert Paul Huber, Jr.

Faculty Art History, School of Arts, Temple University Rome, 00187 Rome, Italy; rhub@temple.edu

Abstract

This article examines the unexplained image of a reptilian creature in the fire of a spandrel of Raphael's Loggia of Psyche in Villa Farnesina, Rome, from the point of view of alchemy. The essay identifies the probable alchemical literary source upon which the image was based and explains its reason in the overall symbolism of the artwork. Moreover, evidence is brought to bear regarding the Cupid and Psyche myth from Apuleius' *Golden Ass* in the Renaissance as being understood as an allegory of the *Magnum Opus* of alchemy. Alchemy and related astrology, furthermore, are here considered in relation to Hermetism within the context of the period's notion of the *prisca theologia* and its learned *magia*. Medici household interest in the Psyche myth, as demonstrated by illustrations of Apuleius' fable on three sets of Florentine marriage *cassoni*, are used as evidence to explicate this. The essay also provides plausible reasons why the patron Agostino Chigi, papal banker from Siena, likely harbored interest in alchemy and the consequent effect on the symbolism in the Loggia of Psyche it implies. The methodology employed is essentially humanistic, in that I consider medieval and Renaissance literary sources regarding the Psyche myth, but also Hermetic philosophy, astrology and alchemy to rationally explain the symbolism of the Psyche tale illustrated in the Loggia of Psyche according to the Hermetic ideals of alchemy.

Keywords: Villa Farnesina; Agostino Chigi; Raphael; alchemy; astrology; Hermetism; Neoplatonism; humanism; allegory; mythology; Marsilio Ficino

Check for updates

Academic Editor: Pietro C. Marani

Received: 18 September 2025
Revised: 10 January 2026
Accepted: 4 February 2026
Published: 14 February 2026

Correction Statement: This article has been republished with a minor change. The change does not affect the scientific content of the article and further details are available within the backmatter of the website version of this article.

Copyright: © 2026 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

1. Introduction

The aim and objectives of this article are primarily iconographical, which takes access to alchemy and astrology in the Renaissance to explain the salamander in the furnace of the Loggia of Psyche (*Loggia di Psiche*). An important figure in the discussion is Hermes Trismegistus, who the Renaissance believed was a real person or divinity from the times of Moses (Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, xiv–xvi; Fowden 1993, pp. 2–25; Gentile and Gilly 1999). The reason for this is because I posit the famous 1488 image of the legendary Egyptian mage on Siena's Duomo floor inspired interests in Agostino Chigi, a Siena native and patron of the *Loggia di Psyche*, for alchemy and astrology, since "Mercurius Trismegistus" was considered the founding patriarch of these arts. Such interests I argue account for the proposed alchemical reading of the frescoed Psyche tale at Villa Farnesina. I am well aware of the debates in modern scholarship that have problematized "Hermetic

philosophy" and the controversy over the "Yates thesis," to which I do not subscribe, implicitly or otherwise.[1]

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the name whose authorship was ascribed to the *Hermetica*, Hermes Trismegistus, was in the Renaissance fundamentally associated with alchemy, astrology and all the magical arts. A series of Renaissance images of Hermes Trismegistus cited below, which portray him as an alchemist and astrologer, confirm that interest in him was chiefly connected to his identity as the primordial magus in these arts. Part of the phenomenon regarding Trismegistus thus extends to the important role alchemy and astrology, as aspects of learned magic, permeated mainstream Renaissance culture; even if it did not depend so much on a single philosophical framework, but rather a general background of Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Jewish and Arabic doctrines (Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 732).

The very fact, however, that Hermes Trismegistus appears on Siena's cathedral floor, sensational in itself for his pagan identity, evidences the cultural, philosophical and religious fame of his persona and doctrine at the time. Furthermore, this figure of Hermes Trismegistus betrays a humanist source confident in the contemporary belief that "Mercurius" had been a genuine prophet of Christ who had foretold the onset of the Christian religion. Yet the Siena Hermes Trismegistus also emphasizes the fabled Egyptian's role as a magus. The term "Hermetic tradition" here is primarily confined to this and the other Renaissance images of Egyptian "Mercurius" discussed in the essay; and does not view alchemy and astrology as mere facets of Hermetic philosophy. My article has no pretentions of making a contribution to the historiography of alchemy, rather it seeks through that history to add to our knowledge about the iconography of Renaissance painting. Let us, then, continue to the main body of the essay.

2. The *Loggia di Psiche* at Villa Farnesina and Its Strange Reptilian Creature in the Fire

In a spandrel above the arcade facing the garden of the *Loggia di Psiche* at Villa Farnesina in Rome, is a beguiling scene full of terror and wonderment. Emerging from the infernal region at the right angle of this spandrel is a hideous reptilian creature consumed by fire, but not scorched by its flames, which arises from the combustion (Figures 1 and 2). No scholar has analyzed this bizarre figure and its fiery domain or, to my knowledge, even mentioned its bewildering presence in the complex iconography of the hall (Shearman 1961, pp. 59–95; Marek 1984, pp. 257–90; Marek 1986, pp. 189–208; Rohlmann 2002, pp. 71–92; Cavicchioli 1995–1998; 1999, pp. 79–95; 2002, pp. 155–71; Varoli-Piazza 2002, pp. 57–69; Varoli-Piazza 2005, pp. 7–36; Frommel 2003a, 2003b; Rijser 2012, pp. 419–24; Huber, 2019, ch. 4; J. G. Turner 2022, ch. 4). Why is it there and what possibly could it mean? The final purpose of this study is to clarify the iconography of the image by identifying the literary source upon which it was apparently based, while indicating an alternative symbolic reading of the loggia.

The *Loggia di Psiche* at Villa Farnesina along the Tiber, frescoed by Raphael (1483–1520) and *bottega* for the fabulously wealthy papal banker from Siena, Agostino Chigi (1466–1520), completed by 1519, is among the best-known examples of High Renaissance art in Rome[2] (Figure 3). Baldassarre Peruzzi (1481–1536), architect and painter of Siena, designed and built the villa for Chigi in 1506–1510. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is contained in the second-century Roman novel originally entitled *Metamorphoses* (IV, 28—VI, 24), but later known as the *Golden Ass* (*Asinus Aureus*), by the North African writer and philosopher Apuleius (Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis).[3] Apuleius' fable is told on the lips of a drunken old hag to console the lovely maiden Charite, prisoner of a gang of bandits, as an anodyne tale to take her mind off losing her betrothed (Zimmerman 2004).



Figure 1. Raphael's assistants, Salamander in the furnace spandrel, *Loggia di Psiche*, completed by 1519, fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome.

The myth relates how Psyche, because of her extraordinary beauty, unleashes the terrible jealousy of Venus. The goddess in turn unknowingly provokes the love affair between her son Cupid and mortal Psyche. Having besmirched the name of Eros, but having successfully carried out the lethal tasks of Venus, Psyche reaches Olympus, becomes immortal and marries Cupid (Apuleius 1996, *Met*. 6.23–24; Rijser 2012, pp. 421–22). The story anticipates the trials of the novel's hero Lucius, who is turned into an ass, but in the end redeemed. Delivered back to his manhood through divine intervention, Lucius is initiated into the sacred guilds of Egyptian Isis to become a quasi-saint. Psyche's ordeal thus symbolically mirrors that of Lucius. In Greek Psyche means the soul, spirit and vital breath, symbolized by the delicate wings of the butterfly and thus the story of Cupid and Psyche is also the story of the human soul that must, like Lucius, overcome terrible trials in life to be made worthy of reaching the divine sphere.

Apuleius was a Platonist whose myth in the *Golden Ass* had a central place in Neoplatonism (Hartt 1950). In the Renaissance Apuleius' affiliation with Platonism is recognized in the first printed edition (*editio princeps*) of his works, both philosophical and literary, including *Metamorphoses*, which was financed by Bishop Andrea Giovanni Bussi (1417–1475) and published at Rome in 1469 by the printmakers Sweynheym and Pannartz (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 38). The preface to Bussi's *editio princeps*, although dedicated to Pope Paul II, lets us know that the writings of the great Greek émigré, Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), were the impetus behind the project: namely, the publication of a corpus of works unknown to the Platonic writers, beginning with "The Platonist Lucius Apuleius, in whom a distinguished

copiousness and gracefulness of speech is joined to the highest erudition" (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 38).[4] Perhaps, therefore, the *Loggia di Psiche* emphasized Neoplatonic matters that related the themes of love and marriage union in the Cupid and Psyche tale to Chigi's wedding at the villa in 1519 to his young Venetian bride of humble birth, Francesca Ordeaschi, for which the porch was painted. The nuptial theme of the loggia almost certainly intended to be a picturesque backdrop for Agostino's and Francesca's matrimony gala. So considering that its vault illustration of redeemed Psyche's celestial wedding to divine Cupid, after her terrible trials took a favorable turn, is full of decent Neoplatonic resonance, this may in part be the case.



Figure 2. Raphael and assistants, Salamander in the furnace spandrel, detail, completed by 1519, fresco, Loggia of Cupid and Psyche.

Modern scholarship, however, has looked beyond Neoplatonic relevance to draw a parallel between the Cupid and Psyche tale and the ordeal of bringing lowly Francesca, who was likewise severely tested, into Chigi's high social sphere. In this way the artwork allowed the betrothed to see their vicissitudes aptly enacted (Rijser 2012, p. 420). Contemporary studies, moreover, have connected the loggia's iconography to a narrative based on the concept of humor, wit, gaiety and entertainment that the Renaissance suburban villa presupposes, aimed at *voluptas* (Zimmerman 2004, p. 552; Rijser 2012, p. 420). The recent analysis of Villa Farnesina by James Grantham Turner concords with this line of thinking (J. G. Turner 2022). For Turner the villa (and its loggia) celebrates aesthetic, social and erotic pleasure (J. G. Turner 2022, p. 37). The frescoed edifice according to the author was

the "seedbed" of an early sixteenth-century erotic revolution; a locus "where artists like Raphael and Giulio Romano conversed with writers like Pietro Bembo and Pietro Aretino, a 'Palace of Venus' displaying an influential visual encyclopedia of erotic myth in a highly prestigious context. . ." (J. G. Turner 2017, pp. 110–31; 2022, p. 37). My analysis, by contrast, considers the fresco program and its iconography beyond Neoplatonic matters and sensual gratification at a deeper level of symbolic meaning from the point of view of alchemy, for reasons to be elucidated below.



Figure 3. Raphael and assistants, *Loggia di Psiche*, completed by 1519, fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome.

Let us, then, embark upon an excursus that will provide the essential set of clues for the direction this inquiry will take, before finally returning to the spandrel image in question. In the process, beyond explaining principles of alchemy, I need to consider the following things (at times simultaneously): 1. how the mythological imagery of Villa Farnesina was meant to be understood at the time it was made and the allegorical readings of the Psyche tale in the Renaissance; 2. the relationship between astrology and alchemy in the Renaissance and Hermetic philosophy; and a reading or the Psyche myth then as symbolizing aspects of Egyptian occult themes and thus possibly alchemy, for reasons to be explained; 3. the plausible reasons why alchemy may have concerned Agostino Chigi; 4. the adaptation of Botticelli's *Primavera* on Jacopo del Sellaio's illustration of the Psyche myth on a Florentine marriage *cassone* panel (now in the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, Switzerland) concerning alchemy and astrology. Having investigated these matters, I shall provide an explanation for the reptilian creature in the fire of the spandrel, by indicating the probable alchemical literary source upon which it was based, and other aspects of the iconography of the loggia in relation to alchemy (and astrology).

3. Myths and Their "Hidden Sense" at Villa Farnesina, Plus the Psyche Tale and Allegory

In the first instance, it is useful to consider what a humanist working within the inner circle of Agostino Chigi in the early sixteenth-century, Blosio Palladio (d. 1550), had to say about some mythological scenes of the villa in a eulogistic Latin poem called

Suburbanum Augustini Chisii ("The Suburban Villa of Agostino Chigi") of 1512. Referring to Sebastiano del Piombo's frescoed lunettes containing episodes from Ovid's likewise entitled *Metamorphoses* in the adjacent *Loggia di* Galatea, now a closed hall, the viewer is invited to grasp the unrevealed meaning: "But, having admired the work, now I desire that you marvel at that which lies hidden under it, and the story which is weighted with a hidden sense" (Quinlan-McGrath 1990, p. 119; Barbieri 2015a, pp. 184–213)[5] (Figure 4, beneath the spandrels and hexagons). We are thus presented with a concept of layered iconographical meaning, in which the viewer starts to comprehend the artwork at the narrative surface and then penetrates into the deeper realms of more arcane profundities (or rather is challenged to do so). Blosio essentially echoes what the bishop of Orléans and poet Theodulph (ca. 760–821) had long before said about the myths contained in Ovid's poem, namely that while much is frivolous there are very many truths hidden under false covering.[6]



Figure 4. Baldassarre Peruzzi, Horoscopic Vault of Agostino Chigi, *Loggia di Galatea*, c. 1511, fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome.

Costanza Barbieri has excellently termed this phenomenon of viewing the mythological imagery as being encoded with layered meaning at Villa Farnesina, *meta-mythologies* ("meta-mitologie"). Barbieri likens meta-mythologies to a theater within a theater of metamorphosis, in which the image first acts as the stage scene itself, to be admired for its beauty and narrative content, to then assume a symbolic function (Barbieri 2023, X). Doubtless the idea of a "hidden sense" in the myths from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Sebastiano's lunettes should be extended to all the mythological scenes of Villa Farnesina, such as the strange reptilian creature in the fire of the *Loggia di Psyche*, which I will show relates its depicted Psyche tale to alchemy.

As the art of transmutation into gold, producing the elixir of longevity and the Philosopher's Stone, alchemy at the metaphysical level accords well with the transformations of Psyche in Apuleius' fable of *Metamorphoses/Golden Ass*. For like the dissolutions and coagulations of the matter of the Stone in the alembic of alchemy, the story of Psyche is essentially one of corporeal death of imperfect matter, which passes from one nature to another; when

the soul, being raised up high and united to its higher genius (in marriage to Cupid), obtains perfection (like Psyche's apotheosis). A good starting point for understanding these alchemical processes is the notion of the "chemical wedding," a central image of the *opus alchymicum*, by which, through a repeated cycle of dissolutions and coagulations (*solve et coagula*), the old metallic form is killed and reduced to the primary matter (*prima materia*) of creation (Abraham 1998, pp. 35–39). And then, by way of a conjunction (*coniunctio*) of opposites, depicted in alchemical imagery as a coupling man and woman, it is reborn into a higher state of being. Through this "marriage" of opposites (*coniunctio oppositorum*), which is the "chemical wedding," the aim of the opus of rendering gold and its metaphysical correspondent, the Philosopher's Stone, was obtained. Psyche's trials, death, resurrection and ascent to Olympus, where she, like the "chemical wedding," marries divine Amor (Cupid) and becomes a goddess, as an allegory squares very well with the processes of alchemy in the production of the Philosopher's Stone. The notion will be explained further below. So we have to consider the fable allegorically, as indeed it was in the Renaissance.

The first monumental illustration of the Cupid and Psyche myth in Renaissance Italy, which was made at the ducal court of Ferrara, is instructive in this regard. Unfortunately, the artwork has not survived, but literary evidence of it remains, which confirms the spiritual and allegorical readings of Apuleius' fable. The lost cycle of ca. 1490 was commissioned by Duke Ercole I d'Este (1431–1505), to his court artist Ercole de' Roberti for the residence of Belriguardo.[7] Werner Gundersheimer in 1968 discovered a manuscript at the Vatican Apostolic Library (*Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*) of Sabadino degli Arenti's *De trumphis religionis* ("On the Triumph of Religion") of 1497 for Ercole I, which begins with a discussion of the magnificent lost Belriguardo frescoes (Gundersheimer 1972). Sabadino degli Arienti provides us with a kind of clinical chart of the former artwork. He commences his description of the cycle by noting that: "On the walls one sees with singular morality, beneath poetic veils adorned in delightful painting, Psyche. . ." (Gundersheimer 1972, pp. 62–65).[8] Hence, the moral message is contained under the poetic veils of allegory, for which the viewer must try to grasp the "hidden sense" concealed beneath the outward appearance of the tale.

This lost depiction of Apuleius's fable in the *Golden Ass* also emerges in the dedicatory letter of the so-called *Tabula Cebetis*, which Niccolò Maria d'Este, Ercole's cousin, had Gianjacopo Bortoloto da Parma translate into the *volgare* in 1498 so that the duke could read it.[9] The text, at the time attributed to a disciple of Socrates, the Greek philosopher Cebes, is an *ékphrasis* of an ancient painting in which a human life is represented in elaborate allegorical terms and was supposedly set up in a temple by a wise man for the instruction of the young (Hope and McGrath 2006, p. 179). The work's purpose was moral and didactic, thus in keeping with Ercole's Belriguardo Psyche cycle, for which Niccolò wrote that *Tabula Cebetis* would appeal to the duke's most intimate pleasures and so recommends it to him. In the letter Niccolò writes the duke derived great pleasure from contemplating the Cupid and Psyche fresco, because the fable was thought to contain a "secret mystery" (*secreto mysterio*): ". . .having [the duke] now taken such delight in painting. . .And already having had the tale of Psyche depicted, which in the veiled sense means the soul and who, in the distress that lies behind useless action, needed to find another way out of her predicament; represents with subtle and secret mystery the human life" (Kristeller 1987, p. 265).[10] It seems fairly clear from the text that the "secret mystery" thought Neoplatonically contained in the fable was that Psyche, the human soul, must seek a higher power to be liberated from her trials, a human life, which leads to salvation and upward ascent. As we have seen, however, such an allegory also conforms to the theory and practice of alchemy in the transmutation of metals and the production of the Philosopher's Stone, which thus

presents us with a complimentary way of understanding the fable's *secreto mysterio*. I shall put forth the cogent reasons why below.

In the *Capitoli del giuoco dei tarocchi*, ("Excerpts on the Tarot Game") Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441–1494) likewise treats Psyche's trials and celestial journey in elaborate allegorical terms: "Psyche had patience in her trials/And so was rescued in her desperation/And in the end was made a Goddess, which is an example to us all" (Boiardo 1944, pp. 752–53).[11] A late fifteenth-century commentary on Boiardo's "tarot" deck by the medic Pier Antonio Viti of Urbino (1470–1500), furthermore, underscores this allegorical (and Neoplatonic) significance for the Psyche tale: "This is our soul, which, rising above the ugliness of our world with greatest fatigue, takes wings conceded by grace from Jupiter [and] leaning on divine help arrives all the way to Heaven; where, for merit of her labors, taking up the happy life, becomes a Goddess" (Boiardo 1944, p. 711; 1993, pp. 29–62).[12]

The notion of the soul "rising above the ugliness of the world" to "leaning on divine help" obtain the celestial sphere is, moreover, a perfect metaphor for alchemy in the production of the Philosopher's Stone. This relates allegorically extremely well to scenes of the *Loggia di Psiche*, in particular those of the reptilian spandrel mentioned above and its two adjoining pendentives: one showing Cupid and Jupiter sealing their sacred covenant with a kiss, which grants Psyche entrance to Olympus/heaven (left), the other depicting Psyche's flight to Olympus borne aloft by Hermes (right) (Figures 5 and 6). At the metaphysical level, as explained by Abraham, alchemy aims to separate the metallic soul from the metallic body, to free it from the age-old attachment to the body, as a kind of "death" to the world in which the turmoil of nature is left behind (Abraham 1998, pp. 38–39). This is like redeemed Psyche's transcendent rebirth, after death, following her terrestrial and netherworld ordeals, a miracle seemingly consented to her in the loggia's Cupid and Jupiter pendentive ("on wings conceded by grace from Jupiter"). Then the soul takes flight to be united with the spirit above and is illuminated by it, just as Psyche ascends to Olympus in the arms of Hermes, thus "leaning on divine help," as illustrated in the loggia's Psyche and Hermes pendentive; to finally marry Cupid as a luminous immortal (referred to on two fictive tapestries of the vault above concluding the narrative sequence of the fresco program).

Aptly summing up the work of the alchemist regarding the separation of the metallic soul from the metallic body is a passage of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* ("On Obtaining Life from the Heavens"), by the great Florentine Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). This esoteric pharmacological treatise, published in 1489 and dedicated to Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492), is a commentary on a work of the Neo-Platonist Plotinus. It describes the role astrology and philosophy (here read alchemy) play in medicine. In the following passage such work is articulated clearly along alchemical and astrological lines: "In the meantime you ask: 'If the elements and living things generate something similar to themselves through their spirit, why then don't gems and metals generate, which are half way between the elements and living things?' Well, clearly because the spirit in them is withheld in something denser. When this spirit is separated in the right way [so alchemy] and, once separated, is conserved, it acquires the power of a seed that generates something similar to itself, so long as it is employed to a similar material. The diligent natural philosophers [so alchemists], when they separate this type of spirit from gold by sublimation over fire [so alchemy], they employ it to some metals and obtain gold. The spirit correctly extracted form gold, or from something else, and conserved, is called Elixir by the Arabic astrologers [who are thus likewise alchemists]" (Ficino 1561, *Opera Omnia*, 565, *De vita* 3.3, 15–24).[13]



Figure 5. Raphael and assistants, Cupid and Jupiter pendentive, *Loggia di Psiche*.

The text vividly conveys the workings of the Renaissance magus, while forging a bond between the science of the stars, Neoplatonic thought and alchemical practice. It thus forces us to consider Neoplatonic thought in relation to alchemy and astrology, which indicates one avenue by which the Cupid and Psyche myth in Apuleius could have been read by some as an alchemical allegory, with the possible symbolic consequences for the *Loggia di Psyche* it entails. As head of the Florentine academy, Ficino was a leading luminary of the Renaissance, perhaps its most influential humanist. So his writings reflect serious trends in the thought world at the time, which we should expect to be thematically and symbolically reflected in Italian Renaissance art. This was most certainly the case, for example, in Botticelli's allegorical paintings with mythological themes like *Primavera* (see below) for the Medici household, which was educated at Ficino's feet. Yet this thought

world of Ficinian matrix reached far and wide through the network of Marsilio's disciples at the Florentine academy and their associates, permeating the Italian courts and is, I believe, symbolically reflected in the mythological imagery of Villa Farnesina and the *Loggia di Psiche* for Agostino Chigi. For Chigi, a man of his times, harbored shared cultural interests with the Medici, who like them pertained to the merchant-banker class, was a patron of the arts and humanistic scholarship, fraternized with leading artists, scholars and literati, some of whom had been connected to the Medici household and Ficino's academy, so this makes perfect sense (Dante 1980; Gilbert 1980).



Figure 6. Raphael and assistants, Mercury and Psyche pendentive, completed by 1519, *Loggia di Psiche*.

Alchemy was the art of liberating parts of the cosmos from temporal existence (astrology thus directly pertained to it) for achieving perfection; through a circular work (*rotatio*) of the four elements (*opus circulatorium*) that acts upon the primary matter (*prima materia*) with the aim of transmutation, in a continuous distillation process of dissolving and coagulation ("solve et coagula") to achieve the perfected Stone, a cosmos in miniature.[14] Transferred to the material plane this means the transmutation of metals (*chymistria*), but for man is the elixir of longevity (*physica*), while for the human soul redemption and finally immortality (*spiritualis*). The story of Psyche, being effectively one of the soul's dissolution and reconstitution, which then gets raised up high to perfection in her marriage to Cupid on Olympus, allegorically conforms very well with all of these notions of alchemy (chemical, physical and spiritual).

4. Alchemy and Astrology

Something else to consider, with this in mind, is that the Ovidian based scenes by Sebastiano del Piombo mentioned above are illustrated right beneath Baldassarre Peruzzi's depicted horoscope of Agostino Chigi on the vault of the hall (Figure 3). To do this the artist "mytholgizes" the celestial bodies to map out on the vault hexagons and spandrels the patron's natal chart, showing the planets as the gods they are named after (Venus, Mars, Mercury and so forth), accompanied by the constellations of the zodiac (Capricorn, Sagittarius, Scorpio, etc.) and extra-zodiacal constellations depicted by myths related to them (Saxl 1934; Lippincott 1990; Quinlan-McGrath 1984, pp. 91–105; Barbieri 2023, pp. 29–55).[15] Such "mythologizing" of the celestial bodies finds its origins in the Homeric poems, which was codified in the fifth-century BCE and culminated in the catalogues of Eudoxos of Knidos, the poems of Aratos and in the works of the astronomer Eratosthenes of Cyrene (Seznec [1953] 1995, p. 38). Each constellation is thus connected with a mythological episode, thereby creating a fusion between astronomy and mythology, of which the works of the first-century poet, mythographer and astronomer Hyginus are a leading example (who became a principal source for the Middle Ages and Renaissance) (Seznec [1953] 1995, p. 38).[16]

This is significant because it shows how myths were understood in relation to astrological discipline, and not simply taken at narrative face value (a phenomenon that likewise regards myths and alchemical discipline, as we shall see below). Secondly, Peruzzi's depicted horoscope leads to a further important consideration, certainly for the man Chigi's personal interests, but also regarding the potential symbolic intentions behind the banker's artistic patronage, in particular the *Loggia di Psiche*: namely astrology and alchemy were inextricably connected disciplines in the Renaissance. Ficino's quote above already makes this abundantly clear. Hence, if Chigi harbored faith in astrology, as Peruzzi's depicted horoscope of the banker irrefutably attests, he likely would have been interested in alchemy. The possibility that the *Loggia di Psiche* was encoded with alchemical symbolism, as I believe the image in the title of this work demonstrates, would signify a sensational thematic harmony of these halls' artistic programs as planned according to the nexus of astrology and alchemy.

Alchemy was considered "terrestrial astrology" or "inferior astronomy." The compiler of alchemical texts Ludovico Lazzarelli (1444–1500) confirms this, stating that astrology and alchemy were considered inseparable arts in a work about his own training in the occult arts: "...in this book called *Vade Mecum* ["Go with Me"]," he wrote, "we will first of all speak briefly of alchemy, which is a natural magic and is called terrestrial Astrology by Aristotle" (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 2005, p. 377). An anonymous letter about alchemy composed at Venice in 1475 shares this point of view, being dedicated to those "who are interested from a theoretical, not practical, point of view in that celebrated aspect of the sublime and glorious philosophy that is hidden from the foolish, but revealed to prudent men; namely, *inferior astronomy*, which is the transmutation of the elements" (Pereira 2001, p. 17).[17] Lastly, the Elizabethan age Englishman, John Dee (1527–1608), in his *Monas Hieroglyphica* stated that alchemy is "the *insignia* of *astronomia inferior*" (Josten 1964, p. 86). The *astra*, furthermore, regarded alchemy. In alchemical writings the seven planets were frequently used to indicate the corresponding metals they stood for, so Jupiter for tin, Mars for iron, the Moon for silver, the Sun for gold and so forth; while the alchemists stressed the importance attributed to the influences of the stars in acting upon the elements during the process of transmutation (Pereira 2001, p. 36).[18] The correspondence between above and below was thus a fundamental doctrine of alchemy, which arises from Hermetic philosophy, something that I must now consider further (Pereira 2000a).

5. Alchemy and Hermetic Philosophy

Bussi's *editio princeps* of Apuleius' works is relevant here. For it also included the Hermetic text *Asclepius*, a dialogue between the legendary ancient Egyptian magus Hermes Trismegistus ("Thrice-great Hermes"), the supposed author of the work, and the Greek medicine god about the nature of the soul, Nilotic religion and theurgy.[19] The reason for this is that Apuleius was thought to have been the work's Latin translator from the original Greek (Gentile and Gilly 1999, p. 19).[20] The inclusion of the Hermetic *Asclepius* may provide us with a further clue regarding a reading of the Psyche tale and its "secret mystery" in the Renaissance in relation to alchemy. For it stands to reason that Apuleius was not only deemed an accomplished Platonist by his erudite readership, but by virtue of having been considered the Latin translator of *Asclepius* de facto well-versed in Hermetic philosophy and its doctrines. As we have seen in the introduction to this work, the figure of Hermes Trismegistus was intimately associated with alchemy and astrology, even if these disciplines were not mere facets of Hermetic philosophy (Pereira 2000a, 2000b). Nevertheless, the connection between Apuleius and Hermes Trismegistus through *Asclepius*, may explain the appearance of alchemical and astrological symbolism that I find present in the iconography of the Renaissance illustrations of the Psyche myth in *Metamorphoses* discussed in this work.

In the legendary history of alchemy, which took upon the name *Magnum Opus* ("Great Work"), Hermes Trismegistus, the Greek equivalent of Egyptian Thot, was considered the discipline's founder and patron (many works on alchemy were ascribed to him)—as well as on astrology and all the magical sciences (Pereira 2000a, p. 132). The reason is well known. Seventh through eleventh century Arabic translations of a variety of late Hellenistic *Hermetica* on astrology, alchemy and talismanic magic, begot Latin versions that invaded Europe done largely at the hands of Spanish friars. (Szulakowska 2017, p. 12; Ockenström 2013, p. 40). The short tractates likely reinforced the notion of the primordial origin of Hermes Trismegistus, which, in tandem with the Latin *Asclepius*, informed the late medieval understanding of Hermetic wisdom that Ficino inherited (Ockenström 2013, p. 40). Consequently, the alchemical phenomenon in Latin culture by the mid-Quattrocento was of very widespread nature. (Crisciani 2002, p. 25, n. 1).

Although obviously there was no unified "Hermetic philosophy," the notion of "technical" (magical, alchemical and astrological) versus "philosophical" (theosophic and spiritual teachings) *Hermetica* is modern, categories created by Garth Fowden in 1993, following the foundational studies of the Greek Hermetic literature in antiquity by André-Jean Festugières (Festugière [1922] 2002). Florian Ebeling made a lapidary synopsis of the primary Hermetic texts, concluding that by the Renaissance there were two distinct sub-traditions of Hermetism, one philosophical-theological and the other alchemical (Ebeling 2007). However, like Fowden's categorizations, the Renaissance made no such distinction.

In the Renaissance the Hermes ascribed to the "philosophical" *Corpus Hermeticum* was considered the same author of the "technical" *Tabula Samragdina* ("Emerald Tablet") of alchemy. Such texts, consequently, were viewed as part of a unified tradition that pertained to a common, divinely revealed ancient Wisdom. Hence, the Renaissance itself conflated them, but this does not mean that I wish to do so. Moreover, period readers appeared to have viewed something of the philosophical in the technical and vice versa. Suggesting this are Ficino's previously mentioned *De vita coelitus comparanda* about attracting down beneficial astral forces, and Ludovico Lazzarelli's dialogue, *Crater Hermetis* ("Hermes' Jar"), composed probably between 1492 and 1494, about how the Hermetic magus can cause the palingenesis of human souls. Both works evidence great knowledge of Hermetic sources, both philosophical and technical (as well as Neoplatonic, Kabbalistic and Biblical ones) (Kaske and Clark 1998; Hanegraaff 2018, p. 8; Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 681).

Due to the translations of Arabic technical *Hermetica* and to the passages in *Asclepius* (Asclepius 2007, pp. 23–24, 37–38) about so called "god-making" regarding animating statues, "Mercurius" was often associated with alchemical and astrological magic and demonology. Ficino, moreover, considers Hermes Trismegistus as the founder of all science and human wisdom (Ficino 2001, *Th. Pl*. 6.1.7, 12.1.4). Renaissance alchemists, therefore, referred to themselves as *filii Hermetis*, the "children of Hermes" (Pereira 2000a, pp. 26–28). So it goes that Hermes knew the secrets of metallic transmutation and the process for making the Philosopher's Stone; and that this ancestor of alchemy had obtained his knowledge of the *Magnum Opus* from the *Book of Genesis* of "Moses," since Genesis was considered the greatest page of alchemy of all (Patai 1994, p. 158). Renaissance alchemists, consequently, thought the Egyptians, or at least a privileged class among them, had complete insight into the structure of the Universe and Creation; thus granting them access to the secret of the Philosopher's Stone, with which transmutation of metals could be brought about (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 22).

To Hermes was ascribed authorship of the Ur-text of alchemy called *Emerald Tablet*, a brief work that professes the unity between the elemental forces of earth and heaven (*vim inferiorum et superiorum*), and explains the root of all phenomena diffused throughout the macrocosm and microcosm in the One origin (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 58; Pereira 2000b). The opening precept of *Emerald Tablet* summarizes the notion: "True it is, without falsehood, certain and most-true. That which is below is like that which is above. And that which is above, is like that which is below…"[21] *Emerald Tablet* thus alludes to the possibility of the passage of matter from above to below and vice versa, while establishing the profound spirit of Renaissance Hermetism, namely that the alchemist could transform matter in a Hermetic quest to obtain a higher consciousness of God and the divine work that unifies cosmos and world (Garin 1954, pp. 150–91). Ficino's already-cited *De vita coelitus comparanda* tells us something about the notion: "The doctor, the natural philosopher, that knows the objects of nature and the stars [so alchemy and astrology], who we quite rightly usually call a Magus. . .inserts at the right time [astrological moment, that is] celestial powers into terrestrial ones [thus astrology/alchemy] . . .The Magus subjugates the things of nature to the things of the heavens, indeed everywhere the forces of inferior things to the superior ones [as inferred by *Emerald Tablet*] . . .The same Hermes [Trismegistus], who Plotinus follows, affirms [all of this] (Ficino 1561, vol. 2, p. 600 *De vita*, 3.26, 54–59).[22]

The fundamental doctrine consequently arises of a parallel between Macrocosm and Microcosm and belief in the power of stars and astral spirits (and daímones), in the zodiac and decans, which govern the descent of both the human soul and cosmic life (to be harnessed by the astrologer/alchemist in his work of purifying matter with the aim of transmutation). Through an influence of Platonic World Soul (*anima mundi*) vis-à-vis the Spirit of the World (*spiritus mundi*), the spirits of matter can be perfected, so goes the doctrine, but likewise the human soul is purified during the *opus alchymicum*. Ficino sums up the notion when discussing the Arabic astrologers: "That the cosmos is animated just like anything else, or rather much more so, is not only demonstrated by the arguments of the Platonists, but also by the testimony of the Arabic astrologers. The very same work of the Arabic astrologers demonstrates that by applying our spirit to the spirit of the Universe through physical science [alchemists were often referred to as "physici" in the Renaissance literature] and our well-disposed soul, celestial gifts enter our soul and body. Such comes about on the one hand through our spirit that is a mediator, strengthened by World Spirit and, on the other hand, by the light of the stars that act favorably upon our spirit, which by its very nature is similar to the stellar light rays and capable of adapting itself to celestial things" (Ficino 1561, *Opera Omnia*, 564, *De Vita* 3.2, 87–95).[23] The attracting of benevolent planetary influences is essential to Ficino's concept of *magia*, which he believed

was practiced by the ancient mages that was inherited by and further transmitted through the Arabic astrologers.

The exceptional fortune the Hermetic doctrines enjoyed in late Quattrocento Italy and beyond was largely thanks to Ficino's Latin translation in 1463 of the Greek Hermetic corpus, a series of texts ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, for Cosimo il Vecchio de' Medici (Cosimo the Elder "Pater Patriae," 1389–1464) ruler of Florence. Ficino's Latin *Corpus Hermeticum* was published at Treviso in 1471 (Hanegraaff et al. 2006, pp. 533–34; Scott 1924, p. 20; Gentile and Gilly 1999, p. 19). The title Ficino gave his translation of Books I–XIV was *Poimandres* (or *Pimander*), after the name of the "Mind of the Supreme Power" with whom Hermes has a hypnagogic encounter who reveals to him the sacred mysteries (Faivre 2006, pp. 533–34).[24] Moreover, Ficino believed Hermes' creed was established roughly in the times of Moses and thus foundational to Plato's philosophy (in reality the Hermetic texts postdate Plato). Plato, the Florentine humanist rather asserted, inherited the sacred *disciplina* of Hermes contained in the Egyptian magus' writ, while enhancing and illuminated it in his own writings (Ficino 2001, *Theologia Platonica*, 17.2). This is why a Hermetic reading of the *Loggia di Psyche* concerning alchemy would not clash with a Neoplatonic one in the Renaissance, but is complementary to it.

A series of late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento images of Hermes Trismegistus show him as the primordial alchemist and astrologer. He is represented as an alchemist and mage in the *Florentine Picture Chronicle* attributed to Maso Finiguerra and Baccio Baldini of circa 1470–1475 (for the FPC see Godwin 2002, pp. 51–59; Colvin 1898) (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Maso Finiguerra and Baccio Baldini, Hermes Trismegistus "Mercurius Re Degitto" *Florentine Picture Chronicle*, circa 1470–1475, © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

Hermes is styled King of Egypt ("Mercurius Re Degitto") and holds a diminutive, nude alchemical homunculus, symbol of the alchemical child, the Philosopher's Stone and at times a deeply sacred conception (Abraham 1998, pp. 102–3) (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Hermes Trismegistus, Ms. Ashburnham 1166, f.1v, created in the Veneto region in the 1470s. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Permission granted by the MiC.

With this magical, daemonic being of alchemy, Hermes is about to make a statue of Hercules, identifiable by his club, come alive. The image is in a section of the "Florentine Picture Chronicle" devoted to the theme of magic, along with Zoroaster and Ostanes, as well as many characters of Greco-Roman mythology and the Old Testament, who appear in light of their possession of secret knowledge. The theme of magic is here an important semantic line, showing a legendary alchemical figure interacting with a creation of his own. The presence of the homunculus in the scene thus underscores Trismegistus' identity as a magus and was likely intended to represent his mystical or alchemical wisdom.

Trismegistus also appears several times as an alchemist/astrologer in an important anonymous alchemical miscellanea within which is the *Secreta secretorum philosophorum* (Ms. Ashburnam 1470, f. 1v, 6r, 17r, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana). The images were probably made by the Venetian painter, Lazzaro Bastiani in the late 1470s, which implies a Veneto origin for this *miscellanea alchimica*. The figure of Hermes on f. 1v styles the magus, "Father of the Philosophers" ("Pater hermes Philosophorum") (Gnaccolini 2012, pp. 28–29). Philosophy here means astrology and alchemy, as is evident by the Egyptian mage gesturing with one hand above to a star and the other below to the natural world, a clear reference to the opening of *Emerald Tablet*. We see him again on an early sixteenth-century astrolabe container frame now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, identified as "Trismegistus," seated in the role of primordial astrologer pointing to the heavens. A Latin text written around the edge of the round frame has the Hermetic axiom from *Asclepius*: *Deus est sphaera intelligibilis, cuius centrum est ubique et circumferentia nusquam* ("God is an intelligible sphere, the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere"). The encircling phrase also alludes to the ontology of the One ("all is the One") in alchemy from *Emerald Tablet*: "And as all things were by contemplation of one, so all things arose from this one thing by a single act of adaptation."

Importantly "Mercurius" also appears as a mage on the intarsia floor of the cathedral of Chigi's native Siena, by Giovanni di Stefano in 1488 (Figure 9). Hermes is shown as a venerable bearded sage with a wizard's cap, identified as *Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus Contemporaneus Moysi* ("Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus Contemporary of Moses"). The large image is to be prominently seen right inside the cathedral entrance. Chigi, who doubtless admired the figure on multiple occasions, I posit likely became interested in the Hermetic doctrines, at least partly, as a result of this image. His faith in astrology I believe

attests to this, but which fundamentally also involves alchemy. On either side of the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, moreover, running up the side isles of the cathedral floor are those famous prophetesses of classical antiquity, the Sibyls (Caciorgna 2022) (Figures 10 and 11). In *Divinae institutiones* (304–314) the Church father Lactantius believed Hermes Trismegistus, along with the Sibyls, had been a genuine theologian and pagan prophet of Christ (Lactantius 1964). Hence, Ficino, following Lactantius, stressed the prophetic character of the "theological" writings of Trismegistus: "He foresaw the destruction of the ancient religion, the rising of the new faith, the coming of Christ, the day of judgment to come, the resurrection of men, the renewal of time, the glory of the blessed, the punishment of sinners (Ficino 1561, *Opera Omnia*, p. 1836).[25]



Figure 9. Giovanni di Stefano, Hermes Trismegistus (*Contempraneus Moysi*), 1488, black, white and red marble, intarsia floor of the Cathedral of Siena.

The pairing of Hermes Trismegistus with the ancient seers thus associates the Hermetic tradition with sibylline prophesy. Constantine of Pisa, a thirteenth-century student of medicine, provides an interesting alchemical reason why this may be so in his *The Book of the Secrets of Alchemy*. Making a series of epistemological parallels, Constantine argues that alchemy is related to medicine, because both depend on *physica;* to astrology, because nobody can penetrate alchemy if they do not infallibly know the motions of the stars; and finally to prophesy, because alchemy is "very profound and most obscure. . .like the science of the prophets, thus alchemy resides in the sphere of philosophical discourse" (Constantine of Pisa 1990, p. 73; Pereira 2001, p. 133). Alchemy, astrology and prophesy are, therefore, concomitant facets of ancient Wisdom traditions, to which the Hermetic doctrines were believed foundational.

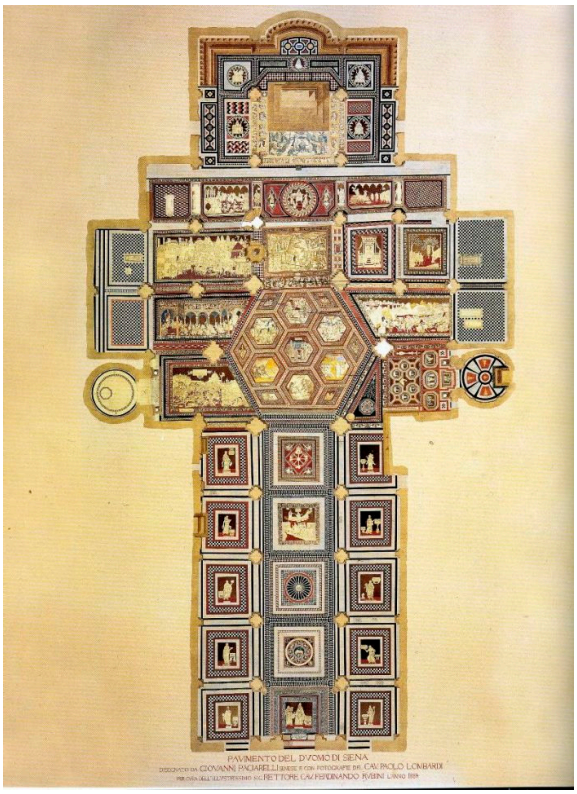


Figure 10. Pavement of the Duomo of Siena, Giovanni Paciarelli, 1884, with Hermes Trismegistus (bottom center, 1488) and the Sibyls (running up the side isles, 1482–83), by Giovanni di Stefano, black, white and red marble.



Figure 11. Giovanni di Stefano, Cumaean Sibyl, 1488, black, white and red marble, intarsia floor of the Cathedral of Siena.

Given this connection between alchemy, astrology and prophesy, which further relates Hermes Trismegistus to the Sibyls on the Siena Duomo's floor, it seems little coincidental that Chigi had Raphael in 1514 paint four stunningly beautiful sibyls on the wall of his

family chapel at Santa Maria della Pace in Rome (Hirst 1961, pp. 161–85) (Figure 12). Since it evidences, along with Chigi's depicted horoscope at Villa Farnesina, the banker's interest in themes dear to Hermetic philosophy and most pertinent to alchemy. One of the sibyls portrayed by Raphael was indeed styled the *Sybilla Chimica* ("Alchemical Sibyl"), alias Virgil's Cumaean ("Emeria") Sibyl, in Filippo Barberi's 1481 published scientific *Opusculum*, the *Discordantiae sanctorum doctorum Hieronymi et Augustini* on the discordance between the Church doctors, saints Jerome and Augustine, dedicated to Cardinal Oliviero Carafa (Smoller 2010, pp. 76–89). Filippino Lippi portrayed her among the four sibyls on the vault of the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Rome in 1488–1493. In other words, she is an alchemist who knows the secrets of transmutation and the Philosopher's Stone (Figure 13). I think this may be important for why Carafa, who led a failed crusade against the Ottoman Empire in 1472 at the behest of Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–1484), and Chigi took such a keen interest in the ancient seers. It has to do with the perceived usefulness at the time of alchemy, to which the "Sibylla Chimica" was directly related, in defeating the Turks that shall be explained further below.



Figure 12. Raphael, *Sibyls and Angels*, 1514, Chigi Chapel, Santa Maria della Pace, Rome. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura—Soprintendenza Speciale Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Roma.

The Siena Hermes previously mentioned is handing an open book to a turbaned figure accompanied by a monk that says, *Suscipite o licteras et leges Egyptii* ("Take up letters and laws, O Egyptians"), which may refer to the ascribed role Cicero (Cicero 1881, *De natura deorum*, 3.56), who Lactantius and Ficino quoted, gave to Hermes Trismegistus as inventor of writing and legislation. However, it may also allude, given the presence of the Sibyls, to becoming learned in philosophical letters and the laws of nature, which was fundamental for achieving success in the Hermetic arts like alchemy, astrology and prophesy. For this

reason, the doctrinal side of Hermetic alchemy was not exclusively bent on laboratory practice, but the "reading of secrets" (Crisciani 2016, pp. 73–74).



Figure 13. *Sibylla Chimica* (Alchemical Sibyl"), alias Virgil's Cumaean ("Emeria") Sibyl, as she is styled in Filippo Barberi's 1481 published scientific *Opuscula*, the *Discordantiae sanctorum doctorum Hieronymi et Augustini* dedicated to Cardinal Oliviero Carafa.

6. The Psyche Tale and Alchemy

Interesting in regard to Hermetic philosophy and the "reading of secrets," is that in the Renaissance, as we have seen, the Psyche myth was thought to contain a "secret mystery." The Bolognese humanist Giovanni Battista Pio (ca. 1460–1543), furthermore, thought the Psyche tale of Apuleius' novel allegorized the secrets of Egyptian occult themes, which during the period were synonymous with the Hermetic mysteries. Such mysteries were related to alchemy, astrology and prophesy, suggesting a Renaissance reading of the Psyche myth from Apuleius according to these arts. Pio taught rhetoric at the *Studium Urbis* (today *la Sapienza*) of Rome in the times of Chigi and Raphael in 1512–1514 (Conti 2015). Writing about the *Golden Ass* in *Annotamenta* of 1505 (G II), Pio states that in Psyche's katabasis (descent to the underworld) we find symbolic elements of Egyptian rite, which would have been reinforced by the Egyptian cult fringe of the famous, so-called, Isis-book (Book XI) at the end of the novel (Apuleius 1989).[26] Apuleius' Psyche tale thus offered the perfect venue to explore these esoteric doctrines visually.

Psyche's katabasis or descent into Hades resulted in death, cast as she was upon her return into a terminal slumber, from which only through Cupid's intervention she awoke. However, now redeemed and purified through her constancy and piety, she is resurrected into a higher being and raised to Olympus. Psyche's descent and return from the underworld, resurrection and ascent, therefore, harmonizes well allegorically with alchemy in the production of the Philosopher's Stone. The initial phase of the *opus alchymicum*, as

Abraham explains, is the black stage or *nigredo*, in which the body of the impure metal, like Psyche, is killed, then putrefied (*putrefactio*) and dissolved (*solve*) into the original substance of creation (*prima materia*), the matter of the Stone, so that, like Psyche's rebirth into a higher state, it may be renovated (*coagula*) and born in new form to then rise up and be united with the higher spirit (Abraham 1998, p. 135). The fifteenth-century Augustinian canon and English alchemist George Ripley, who legend has come to Rome as the court alchemist of Pope Innocent VIII Cibo (r. 1484–1492), wrote: "And Putrefaccyon. . .ys of Bodeys the sleying. . .The kylling Bodys into corrupcyon forth ledying/ And after unto Regenratyon them ablying" (Abraham 1998, p. 161).

The "secret mystery" that was thought contained in Apuleius' Psyche tale, occulted beneath the poetic veils of allegory and couched within a soul salvation metaphor, could thus further have been considered to relate intelligibly to Hermetic alchemy within the context of the Egyptian cult matters that Giovanni Battista Pio perceived were symbolized in the heroine's katabasis. This led to her death, rebirth and ascent to Olympus where she entered into marriage union with Cupid. Allegorically this relates very well to the processes in the alchemical vessel, as the art of transmutation, in the production of the Philosopher's Stone. The iconography of the Renaissance illustrations of the Psyche myth discussed below, including the strange reptilian creature in the fire of the *Loggia di Psiche* spandrel, appears to bear this out.

7. Myths and Alchemy

It was not unusual to regard the myths as allegorizing the processes of alchemy in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, just as it was not out of the ordinary to "mythologize" the celestial bodies in astrology. The whole of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, was considered to concern alchemy in the *Margarita Pretiosa Novella* ("The New Pearl of Great Price") of ca. 1330 by the alchemist and medic at Ferrara, Petrus Bonus (*Petrus Bonus Lombardus*) (Crisciani 1973, pp. 165–81).[27] In this work Bonus assures us that the poets Homer, Virgil and Ovid were masters in the Royal Art, whose works, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that was thought to contain "hidden gold" (*aurum in Ovidio occultam*), concealed the secrets of alchemy. Their poetry, consequently, if read in the wisest sense, supposedly allegorized the secrets of the divine work of *chrysopoeia* ("gold making"), the elixir and producing the Philosopher's Stone. Bonus thus thought the myths of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* treated the secrets of alchemy in an esoteric manner (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 37). From Cicero's *De natura deorum* ("On the Nature of the Gods"), moreover, Renaissance humanists were taught that the impious myths of the pagan gods enshrined physical properties by allegorizing the science of the elements of nature, which had relevance for alchemy.[28]

Similarly, Giovanni Francesco II Pico della Mirandola (ca. 1469–1533), nephew of Pico, in *Opus aureum de auro* said that he, as Thomas Willard explains: ". . .compared the Latin and Greek authors and consulted a text by the Byzantine scholar Michael Psellus in order to see what was hidden 'under the veils of fables and the clouds of enigmas.' He concluded that 'Jason sailed to Colchos on the quest of the Argonauts to seize, not the golden sheepskin of Phrygia, but a parchment of ram's membrane on which the process of making gold was described'" (Willard 2000, p. 156). Moreover, Ficino (or someone writing in his name) was ascribed during the period to a work about alchemy that likewise espoused this view; called *De Aurei Velleris Mysterio* on the mystery of the Golden Fleece, which declares Cosimo il Vecchio as the dedicatee (Forshaw 2011, p. 249).[29] More than just adding some brio to the *vexata quaestio* as to whether or not Ficino was an alchemist, although some in the Renaissance indeed thought he was, this point is crucial.[30] Since it shows again how from the High Middle Ages the alchemists read pagan mythology

allegorically in relation to alchemy, for which it is not far-fetched that this was also the case with the Psyche tale for the reasons indicated above.

8. Chigi and Alchemy for the Extirpation of the Turk (ad Extirpandum Turcam)

It is not difficult to imagine how a banker such as Agostino Chigi could have taken a keen interest in the art of gold making for minting coins, while he would have at least been cognizant of the metallurgical science, to which alchemy was a natural consort (Figure 14). Chigi was also a mining entrepreneur and chemical merchant with the papal Tolfa alum contract, awarded to him in 1500 by Pope Alexander VI Borgia (r. 1492–1503) (Gilbert 1980; Rowland 2001, pp. 78–82; Barbieri 2023, p. 2).[31] Alum was the chemical sulfate compound, a double salt, used in glass-making, in tanning leather and creating and fixing dyes to cloth in the fabrics industry; the production of tinctures and the concoctions of the dyes themselves being incorporated into the alchemical domain and its practitioners (Patai 1994, p. 4; Barbieri 2023, p. 2).



Figure 14. Medal with Portrait of Agostino Chigi (verso and recto), early-XVI century, bronze, © Gabinetto Fotografico Gallerie degli Uffizi, inventory 6644, Florence.

Hence, alum was the salt of the alchemists' par excellence, which, along with sulfur and mercury (salt, sulfur and mercury being the alchemical triad) is a primary agent of dissolution and coagulation of bodies in alchemical processes. One of the well-known alchemical texts during the period was Rhazes's (al-Razi, 865–925), or pseudo-Rhazes's, *De aluminibus et salibus* ("On Alums and Salts") (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 31).[32] Inspired by the Persian philosopher's treatise, the Franciscan friar Elia da Cortona (Elias Bonusbaro, 1182–1253) wrote *Lumen Luminum Ad Fredericum Imperatorem* ("Light of Lights") for Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250), which discusses alums and salts in connection with the principal theories of transmutation and the production of the Philosopher's Stone (Califano 2016, pp. 55–56).[33] Chigi's lucrative alum business enterprise thus had a natural affinity with the alchemical art. Until the sixteenth-century alum was primarily imported from Anatolia, which up to 1453 was part of an agonizing Byzantium. However, that year Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks and now Christian Europe was faced with a serious dilemma: continue to purchase alum from the infidels and so finance the Islamic campaign against itself, or buy elsewhere and financially weaken them?[34]

This predicament is important for Chigi's obtaining the papal alum lease to be weaponized against the nemesis of Christendom, since it has to do with yet another possible reason the pope's banker could have been drawn towards the *Magnum Opus*. It involves the eschatological and apocalyptic currents of Renaissance alchemy, as discussed by Urszula Szulakowska, that sees the Philosopher's Stone as the means to strengthen Christendom's defense against the Mohammedan Turk (Szulakowska 2017, pp. 6–7, 38–55). The catastrophe of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 generated apocalyptic fears in the Christian West. A series of alchemical tracts were consequently written since 1419 (*Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* or "Book of the Holy Trinity" by Frater Ulmannus, probably a certain German Franciscan spiritual Poverello or Jachomite) and into the Cinquecento that, directly or indirectly, engage the crisis for the defense of Christendom against the Turks (Szulakowska 2017, p. 6). Such was the case of a work called *Processus sub forma missae*, or the "Alchemical Mass."

This bizarre enactment of the solemn liturgy according to alchemical processes, was transcribed by the astrologer of King Wadislas of Hungary and Bohemia, "Melichor Cibinensis" of Transylvania, sometime in the 1490s (Szulakowska 2017, pp. 42–43; Kiss et al. 2006, pp. 143–59). The miraculous Stone of the Wise and the elixir, it was argued, would serve to strengthen the forces of Europe. The Turkish nemesis is mentioned from the outset, while the reader is informed that "Christ, Holy One, [is the] blessed Stone of the art of "scientia" (alchemy). . .which for the safety of the world inspired the light of knowledge for the extirpation of the Turk (*ad extirpandum Turcam*). Lord, have mercy" (Kiss et al. 2006, p. 159).[35] Hence, the Philosopher's Stone in the religious sense is Christ (providing alchemy with a certain legitimizing sacrality among Christian practitioners who were often Catholic monks). The closing of the "Alchemical Mass" reads: "We have received this help [of the art of alchemy] for our salvation and well-being and giving thanks to Thy majesty, we ask that it may profit us for the safety of our body and soul and the extirpation of the Turks by our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go the mass is ended. Alleluia" (Kiss et al. 2006, p. 159).[36]

Now Chigi enjoyed intimate relations with popes Julius II della Rovere (r. 1503–1513), whose wars he financed, and Leo X de' Medici (r. 1513–1521), whose pleasure activities he underwrote (Cugnoni 1878; Rowland 1998, pp. 72–83). Each of these popes saw an alchemical work dedicated to himself. One exhorted Julius II to use alchemy in the defense of Christendom for the vindication of the papacy against the Ottoman Turks. Entitled *De Quercu Iulii pontificis, sive De lapide philosophico* ("On the Oak of Pope Julius, or, The Philosopher's Stone"), this alchemical tract was penned by the previously mentioned Lazzarelli's master, the Italian mystic Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio, at the Burgundian capital of Lyon in 1506. The intention of this panegyric, with its pronounced apocalyptic elements, is to convince Julius II to engage the Ottoman Empire with the alchemical "trismegistical" Phoenix (of Hermes Trismegistus), emblem of the resurrected Christ, at once the quintessential elixir and the mystical Philosopher's Stone of occult wisdom (Hanegraaff 2007, pp. 101–12; Szulakowska 2017, p. 38; Crisciani 2016, pp. 64–79).[37] Armed with the purified stone the pope would become invincible, allowing him to vanquish and subjugate the forces of the Turks, Mohammedans and all pagan nations through the power of occult wisdom, the Holy Ghost and the staff of justice (Szulakowska 2017, p. 38).

It is, consequently, very interesting that the alum contract the Camera Apostolica provided Chigi, giving him rights on its commercialization, was defined "Appalatum Alluminum Sanctae Cruciate;" signifying that the proceeds would officially be invested in a never materialized holy crusade against the Turks. Along with filling the papal coffers, therefore, Chigi pocketed the profits (Barbieri 2023, p. 2). Nevertheless, alum was stipulated to play a direct role in Christendom's apocalyptic campaign against the Ottoman Empire, which, as we have just seen, brought alchemy into the picture to which the chemical salt

was intimately connected. As a business agent of Julius II Chigi was, consequently, sent on a diplomatic mission to Venice in 1511, to convince the republic to stop buying alum from the Ottomans and purchase the mineral salt from the papal mines at Tolfa (Gilbert 1980, pp. 92–93). The Senese banker was thus a key agent in Christendom's campaign, however unsuccessful, against the Ottoman Sultanate on behalf of the pope, for whom he executed a decisive role in international affairs. Perhaps the author of *De Quercu* was encouraged in his enterprise by the fact that Chigi had settled upon Lyon, where Giovanni's work was composed, as a strategic place to sell Tolfa alum, understanding as he would have its value in alchemy, the pursuit of the Philosophers' Stone and the latter's perceived usefulness *ad extirpandum Turcam*.[38]

Chigi's and Cardinal Carafa's previously discussed predilection for sibylline prophesy, may thus have been bound to the sibyls' relation to alchemy (as directly testified to by the "Sybilla Chimica" of Barbari's text dedicated to Carafa of Figure 11) and the Noble Art's perceived usefulness in defeating the Turks. This is especially persuasive because Sixtus IV ordered Cardinal Carafa to lead a crusade against the Turks, while Julius II, Sixtus's nephew, for whom Michelangelo painted monumental sibyls on his uncle's chapel ceiling, sent Chigi to put pressure on Venice to stop buying alum from the Ottoman Sultanate. So the recovery of ancient sibylline Wisdom, in its relation to alchemy, seems to have been viewed as useful to Christendom's apocalyptic campaign against the Turkish nemesis, suggesting one reason for the popularity of the Sibyls in Renaissance Rome. The *De Quercu* on using the "trismegistical" Phoenix to defeat the Turks being dedicated to Julius II, very much connects to such conceptualizations.

The other work is an alchemical poem by Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli (or Augurello) entitled *Chrysopoeia Ad Leonem Decimum Pontifex Maximus* ("Gold-Making dedicated to Pope Leo X") about transmutation into gold, published at Venice in 1515 (Fùrnari 2023, pp. 207–34; Soranzo 2012, pp. 87–109; 2019; Califano 2016, p. 87; Martels 1993, pp. 121–30; 1994, pp. 979–88). Augurelli's poem presents Leo X de' Medici as an alchemist, who is given the alchemical-political task to claim possession of the *elixir* or *lapis occultus* (the Philosopher's Stone) of universal regeneration, in order to transform the troubled times portrayed as rife with war, devastation and schisms, into an *aurea aetas* ("golden age") of world peace and prosperity (Soranzo 2012). The Italian painter, architect and art historian, Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), moreover, asserted that Leo X (like Chigi a scion of a banking family) was a great student of natural philosophy, in particular alchemy (A. R. Turner 1992, p. 66). Vasari's claim that Leo X had a passion for alchemy, which seems to have gripped the entire Medici household, appears to be confirmed by the fact that the pope permitted the Venetian priest Giovanni Agostino Panteo (Johannes Augustinus Pantheus) in 1517 to publish in papal territory his *Ars Transmutationi Metallicae* and, in 1519, the *Commentarium Transmutationis Metallicae* (Califano 2016, pp. 75, 216). Leo X, moreover, lobbied for a new crusade against the Turks, sending legates to the European monarchs for this purpose (Fletcher 2020, p. 203). As the celebrant of Agostino Chigi's wedding to Francesca Ordeaschi, for which the loggia again was almost certainly painted, Pope Leo X would thus have been well-positioned to grasp the hidden alchemical symbolism I maintain is present in the artwork.

9. The Psyche Myth, the Prisca Theologia and Its Learned Magic

Before turning back to the *Loggia di Psiche*, however, I must address the Renaissance notion of the *prisca theologia* and its learned *magia* embraced and disseminated by Ficino and others in his circle, like Pico della Mirandola. The reason for this is because I posit they are also fundamental to understanding how Renaissance illustrations of the Psyche myth were meant to be perceived allegorically in relation to alchemy and astrology. The important

illustrations of the Psyche myth on late Quattrocento Florentine Marriage *cassoni* panels made for the Medici household I believe bear this out. Hence, the *prisca theologia*, to which Hermes Trismegistus was fundamentally bound (see below), with particular reference to *magia*, is I think of great cultural importance to this discussion on artistic representations of the Psyche myth in Renaissance Italy. Regarding *magia*, Patricia Aakhus argues that, in fact, without considering magical thought and operations much Renaissance art and literature cannot be fully understood (Aakhus 2008, p. 186).

Aakhus, for example, explains how images from the magical text *Picatrix*, an eleventh-century Arabic compendium of astral magic and a source for Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*, appear on an extraordinary collection of Hellenistic gems owned by Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–1492), now in the Museo Nazionale of Naples (Aakhus 2008, p. 186). Magical operations Aakhus further notes, appear as tropes in Lorenzo the Magnificent's poetry and autobiographical writing. Furthermore, she postulates that works not explicitly about magic by Lorenzo de' Medici, Poliziano and Botticelli, Michelangelo, Walter Raleigh, and Cellini, were colored by magical texts and thought (Aakhus 2008, p. 186). Alchemy, astrology and magical thought, consequently, may be the actual ways to deeply understand the arcane symbolism in Renaissance imagery of the Psyche myth. This was a learned magic enshrined in the Renaissance notion of the *prisca theologia* or "ancient theology" and Wisdom (Walker 1972; Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, pp. 134, 148; Hanegraaff et al. 2006, pp. 1125–29).

The concept of *prisca theologia* postulated that at the core of all ancient religions there lies a common metaphysical truth, which was only fully revealed in Christ. The philosophy and mythology of the pagans was, consequently, believed to have been providentially laced through divine inspiration with some of Revelation under the poetic veils of allegory. The *prisca theologia* endeavored to bring into harmony all that was considered valuable in pre- and non-Christian thought with the doctrines of the Church (Wilkinson 2007, p. 30). Adherents of the *prisca theologia*, moreover, thought a divinely revealed *disciplina* was contained therein; that is, the sacred *magia* of the ancient magi, involving astral Wisdom and natural philosophy (read astrology and alchemy), which presaged Christianity and proved its mysteries. That Ficino placed Zoroaster as first of the Magi, seeing as he did the Chaldean Oracles ascribed to him (that we know today rather pertain to Neoplatonic theurgy) as the font of *magia*, it made sense to view *prisca theologia* and magic as the same. (Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 1126).

Ficino thus believed the ancient mages Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus (an Orphic teacher of Pythagoras), Pythagoras and Plato were the bearers of this holy magic; who formed a sapiential chain or genealogy of wisdom, explicitly called *prisca theologia*. (Ficino 2001, *Theologia Platonica*, 17.2; Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 1127)[39]. Hence, Ficino allows us to understand how the *prisca theologia* came to be viewed as sympathetic to a revival of magic and occult philosophy in Renaissance culture (Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 1126). Ficino's work would then reacquaint the broader European audience with the ancient *magia* and philosophical gnosis (Ockenström 2013, p. 40). All of this is I suggest highly important for illustrations of the Psyche myth on a series of late fifteenth-century Medicean Florentine marriage *cassoni* panels. For these artworks appear to demonstrate in an esoteric way that the Psyche myth was regarded as having allegorized occult aspects of the *prisca theologia*, with specific reference to *magia* related to alchemy and astrology. Such magic involved obtaining the beneficial astral influences in preparation for the soul's ascent, with metaphorical applications to the alchemical *opus* of chemical, medicinal and spiritual transformation. These artworks, moreover, I posit form the conceptual basis, regarding magic in the disciplines of alchemy and astrology, upon which the depicted myth of Psyche

by Raphael and *bottega* at Villa Farnesina for Agostino Chigi must similarly be understood. Let us, then, turn towards the Psyche illustrations on the Florentine marriage *cassoni* panels.

10. Illustrations of the Psyche Myth on Late Quattrocento Florentine Marriage Cassoni, Prisca Theologia and Learned Magic

These earliest pictorial representations of the Psyche myth are found on three sets of marriage *cassoni* panels, all painted in Florence during the late Quattrocento (Vertova 1979, pp. 104–21; Nutzmann 1997, pp. 223–35; Cavicchioli 2002, pp. 30–50; Miziołek 2000, pp. 133–54; 2001–2002, pp. 128–32; 2019, pp. 73–90). The first set of these eminently refined tempera painted domestic objects used for storage date to ca. 1470 and consist of two *cassone* fronts whose artist is identified with the so-called Master of the Argonauts, now in the Bode Museum, Berlin (Vertova 1979, p. 111; Miziołek 2019, p. 75). The pair was produced for the Medici, presumably as a wedding gift for the occasion of the marriage between Lorenzo de' Medici and Clarice Orsini, for which a 1468 date, the year of the event, has been proposed (Vertova 1979, p. 111; Nutzmann 1997). The other two sets, also made for the Medici household, date from ca. 1490 and were painted by Jacopo del Sellaio, who according to Vasari had studied under Filippo Lippi along with the younger Botticelli (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 47; Vasari [1879] 1906). The first Sellaio pair are *spalliere* or back-boards, now split between the Fitzwilliam Collection, Cambridge and a private collection (formerly in the Diamond Collection, New York) (Miziołek 2019, p. 78). The second set are *cassone* frontals, one now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the other in the Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, Switzerland (Miziołek 2019, p. 78). The Sellaio panels exhibit the artist's supreme phase under Botticelli's inspiration. In fact, there is an oneiric and fanciful Botticellian style to them.

Medici interest in Apuleius' Psyche myth is confirmed by a family inventory that indicates both Cosimo il Vecchio and his son, Piero di Cosimo (1416–1469), owned copies of *Metamorphoses/Golden Ass*. Cosimo had requested Apuleius' works from Pope Nicholas V (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 47). The Medici household being the fulcrum of Florentine culture and intellectual life under Cosimo and his grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent, indicates these Psyche *cassoni* panels, with stylistically refined and intellectually profound narrative settings, were meant to provide both allegorical symbolism and hermeneutical entertainment implicit in the myth itself. (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 48). A long history of allegorical interpretations of the Psyche myth attests to this.

According to Martianus Capella's then popular *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ("On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury," c. 410–420 CE), 1, 7, for example, Psyche was the daughter of Endelechia (Aristotelian "ripeness of time") and Apollo ("Endelechiae ac Solis filiam")—unlike in Apuleius where she is one among three daughters of a Greek royal couple. After many adventures and suffering she triumphs as the embodiment of the Soul, gaining immortality (Capella 1977, pp. 6–8). Later in the fifth-century the Christian Fulgentius, in part of the third book of *Mythologiae* (*Fabula deae Psicae et Cupidinus*), compared Psyche's suffering, because of her disobedience to Cupid, to the fall of Adam and Eve (Jones et al. 1971, pp. 88–90). These erudite mediators led Boccaccio (1313–1375) to insert the Psyche myth into his scholarly compendium, *Genealogia deorum gentilium* ("Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles"), which resurrected and summarized the allegorizing zeal of the myth's fifth-century interpretations. For example, from Martianus Capella Boccaccio identifies Psyche's parents as Endelechia and Sol (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 32). Cosimo il Vecchio and Piero di Cosimo each also owned a copy of Boccaccio's *Genealogiae* (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 47).

The point is that the illustrated Psyche *cassoni* panels must be understood against this background of allegorizing the myth. It is worth considering, furthermore, what André Chastel thought about three related Sellaio *spalliere* Florentine marriage *cassoni* panels of ca.

1485 depicting the myth of Orpheus, also products of the Medici sphere with similar esoteric intentions. Chastel wrote these Sellaio *spallieri* may have been visual expressions of the ideas of the Florentine Neoplatonists (Chastel 1959, p. 273). Prompted by the intuition Jerzy Miziołek, aware that for Ficino and Pico della Mirandola Orpheus was among the creators of the *prisca theologia*; argued that the iconographical programs beautifully allegorized the "ancient theology" (Miziołek 2009, pp. 43–47) Apparently this was the result of an allegorical transformation regarding pagan myths at Medicean Florence under first Cosimo and then Lorenzo the Magnificent, where humanist ideas about the *prisca theolgia* of the ancient magi and classical authors found their most congenial development ground. I posit the Psyche *cassoni* panels similarly express ideas of the Florentine academy related to the *prisca theologia*, with particular reference to learned magic, because they are products of the same intellectual, artistic and cultural milieu.

Naturally, due to the limitations of space, it is not possible to go over all of these *cassoni* panels, so I shall limit the discussion to the Abegg-Stiftung one (Figure 15). The three sets of these panels, however, display a similar esoteric way in which the myth is treated, with narrative affinity rendered in surreal settings having common metaphysical implications. In Apuleius' narrative Cupid abandons Psyche when she disobediently gazed upon him, whereupon she goes into hiding in the temples of Ceres and Juno. However, Mercury is sent by Jupiter to deliver the world a message to find her. Found, Psyche is brought before Venus, flogged, then ordered by the jealous goddess to complete four terrible tasks. The last ordeal, like Orpheus, entailed a descent into Hades, but to retrieve some of Proserpina's beauty. In the end with Cupid's assistance, who still loved her, Psyche prevails and is redeemed; whereupon Jupiter consents to their sacred marriage union. Among certain curious and highly indicative alterations, with the four trials only implied, but not shown clearly due to a lack of space; this is the plot we see synthetically painted on the Abegg-Stiftung panel.



Figure 15. Jacopo del Sellaio, Psyche *cassone* frontal panel, ca. 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 14.123.63. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg, 2026 (photo: Christoph von Viràg).

On the left side we find Cupid atop a tall cypress tree scolding Psyche for her disobedience, about to abandon her. In the background Psyche seeks hiding places at two tempietto-like temples, respectively those of Ceres and Juno. Beneath these edifices in the middle ground are the episodes of Psyche attempting to drown herself in a river and her subsequent encounter with Pan. At the center above, Mercury flies with his golden horn to announce the delivery of his message by which secretive Psyche shall be found. Below in the middle foreground we see Psyche's capture and flogging before Venus.

Here the hermeneutical entertainment is further heightened, because, as Jerzy Miziołek (Miziołek 2001–2002, pp. 128–32; 2019, pp. 73–89) and independently Huber Jr. (Huber 2019, p. 280) noticed, we observe a curious adaptation of Botticelli's famous *Primavera*, with a further element that recalls the artist's *Birth of Venus*. Both paintings were Medici household commissions (Levi d'Ancona 1992, pp. 7–15).[40] Obviously this adaptation has nothing to do with Apuleius' narrative, so it must be key to understanding the artwork's hermeneutical significance.

In the central section of the Sellaio panel Psyche kneels before Venus, hands folded in prayer, as she seeks divine assistance in her moment of duress. Behind Psyche Venus' servants are about to flog her, which is the only part of this scene described in *Metamorphoses*. To Venus' left stand the three Graces, clearly inspired by those in *Primavera*, while at the goddess' right appear Flora, Zepherus and Cloris. Hence, the affinity with Botticelli's *Primavera* is straightforward (Miziołek 2019, p. 80). Doubtless these extra-narrative additions from *Primavera* were meant to underscore the notion that the Psyche myth contains a "secret mystery," the meaning of which shall be expounded upon below. Needless to say, it is not possible to give a detailed account of *Primavera* in this essay. For analogy purposes with the Abegg-Stifting panel, however, some preliminary observations can be made.[41]

11. Botticelli's Primavera and the Soul's "Second Birth"

In a remarkable recent study, Alison M. Roberts, prompted by the Renaissance scholar of Ficino and his magic, Angela Voss, masterfully describes how *Primavera*, painted sometime between 1477–1482, should be understood as a complex allegory of alchemy (Roberts 2022, pp. 267–304) (Figure 16). Roberts' thesis, which draws upon alchemical texts (Arabic and Latin) and diverse authors from Ovid, Plutarch, Apuleius, Dante, Angelo Poliziano, Aurelio Augurello and, of course, Marsilio Ficino, is very compelling. I try to summarize some of the main points in what follows. The crux of the argument is that *Primavera's* arrangement of nine figures corresponds to the 9-h day of alchemy, which the alchemists associated with both nature's seasonal cycle and the sun's diurnal rhythm (Roberts 2022, p. 290).

The alchemical 9-h "work of the day" sees the metallic soul rise in the vas or alembic, initiated by a fertilizing "coupling" with a "fleeing female," which in *Primavera* would be represented by Zephyrus' rape of Chloris that "fertilizes" Flora or, as Kline (2011, pp. 665–88) thinks, the two seasonal Horae of winter and spring for the female figures. The alchemical *opus* culminates in the "White" crowning and a "second birth," embodied by the central goddess. This occurs when the sun reaches the midheaven zenith during the ninth hour of the day. Simultaneously the sun enters the fiery zodiac constellation of Leo, when the alchemical *opus* arrives at the last "reddening" (*rubedo*) phase in the production of the Philosopher's Stone (Roberts 2022, p. 290). The moment of the painting would thus be the "ninth hour" of circularity, as a "second birth" of a heavenly soul under the auspices of the central goddess, mostly identified as Venus, indicating love and fecundity, but alternatively Persephone (Kline 2011, pp. 665–88) or Egyptian Isis (Gillies 2010, pp. 32–43).

In Roberts' interpretation, the circling movements of the painting's three Graces are also required for this "second birth." (Roberts 2022, p. 292). Charles Dempsey thought *Primavera* a portrayal of love arising from the Neoplatonic philosophy of the Florentine humanists (Dempsey 1992). Indeed, much celestial Love is required in this transformative alchemy of the "second birth," as blindfolded Cupid taking aim with his fiery dart at one of the pregnant Graces makes clear enough. Mercury, too, is necessary for heaven's regenerative light to enter the alembic and soul, by dispelling winter's grey, cold clouds (Roberts 2022, p. 292). The alchemists knew fire is also needed to bring forth the purified Stone, but a controlled warmth, not a destructive blaze burning too fiercely. The early fifteenth-century alchemical treatise *Aurora Consurgens* instructs it should be maintained

at the "fourth degree," to not send everything up in smoke (Roberts 2022, p. 292). The flickering flames on Mercury's red chlamys and blindfolded Cupid's enflamed arrowhead, Roberts argues, let us know in Botticelli's *Primavera* that a carefully regulated solar fire is called for, heated with precision, which makes everything joyfully ripen and not burn destructively out of control (Roberts 2022, p. 292). Everything must become solar in this regenerative springtime moment of the ninth-hour, "second birth" of the heavenly soul.



Figure 16. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, ca. 1477–1482, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Roberts considers iconographically relevant here the Arabic alchemical treatise entitled *Epistle of the Secret*, which arrived in Italy in Latin form by the 1470s, (Roberts 2022, p. 271). In it Hermes teaches Theosebia to seek her elusive, indefinable red companion, Mercury (mercurial cinnabar), to succeed in her quest to obtain the purified Stone. If she does this, Hermes assures, Thesebia will earn heaven's wisdom: "The clouds will be dispelled, the heavenly region will become clear, and you will forever attain the fruit of the Wise" (Roberts 2022, p. 271). Mercury dispelling the clouds with his raised caduceus, illuminating the fruitful grove in *Primavera*, conforms well to this passage of *Epistle of the Secret*. It is no ordinary messenger god, however, which Botticelli paints in *Primavera*. For this Mercury, with scimitar slung at his side, is the one who charmed the all-seeing Argus to sleep with a lullaby played on his panpipes or syrinx and then decapitated him (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.28 and 748–9) (Roberts 2022, p. 289; Freedman 2011, pp. 220–21). The slaying of Argus Panoptes restored the nymph Io to her human form, who jealous Juno had changed into a wandering heifer. Fearing Jupiter, the nymph's lover, would intervene, Juno sent her hundred-eyed faithful servant Argus to keep watch over the Io-heifer. In fact, the lord of Olympus did intercede by sending the cleverest of gods, Mercury, to Io's rescue.

Now the Roman statesman Cicero wrote (Cicero 1881, *De natura deorum*, 3.56) that this Mercury, for there were many versions of the god, after slaying Argus flew to Egypt. There the Egyptians worshiped him as the Thrice-great one. Hence, this Mercurius became known among the ancient Greeks as Hermes Trismegistus. Luba Freedman thus perceptively got the message, but which escaped Roberts, that the Mercury in *Primavera* makes a secretive nod to the father and patron of alchemy, Hermes Trismegistus (Freedman 2011, p. 221). The "hidden" presence of Hermes Trismegistus provides a tantalizing clue that suggests Botticelli has indeed presented us with an enchanting allegory of Hermetic alchemy in *Primavera*. The action of Botticelli's Mercury, furthermore, relates to what Ficino wrote in his *Argumentum* prefacing the *Corpus Hermeticum* about Mercurius Trismegistus; namely that he banishes "the mists of the fantasies" obscuring the flow of the divine mind into the human soul (Roberts 2022, p. 271). We detect a whiff of the *prisca theologia* and its transformative *magia* in the air of the artwork's Hesperides-like grove.

Primavera was already interpreted in relation to alchemy by Barbara Gallati (Gallati 1983, pp. 99–121) and to both astrology and alchemy by D'Ancona (1983) and Gillies (2010). Interesting in this regard is Gillies argument that in reading the artwork from right to left, we observe the thematic color triad of alchemy, morphing from black (*nigredo*), to white (*albedo*), culminating with the final red (*rubedo*) phase; when the Blessed stone takes on its brilliant vermilion color, embodied by the far left side, red-robed figure of Mercury as the alchemical Red King (Gillies 2010, pp. 32–43).

The central figure, who Roberts identifies as Venus, wears a sun and moon pendant around her neck, which Mauro Zanchi believes is a Hermetic image of the alchemically significant circular snake devouring its own tail, the Ouroboros (Roberts 2022, p. 270; Zanchi 2011, p. 33). Now the alchemists, as we have seen, were much concerned with the union of opposites; in particular Sun (sulfur) and Moon (mercury), male and female (Roob [1997] 2018, pp. 36–37, 116). So in a decidedly alchemical turn of phrase, Ficino wrote "the Moon by virtue of the Sun is the lady of generation" (Roberts 2022, p. 289; Voss 2006, p. 197). The sun and moon pendant worn by our "lady of generation," may thus relate to alchemy. Moreover, the solar-like gem encased in the crescent moon is a ruby, whose color is interestingly that of the Philosopher's Stone. According to Roberts, the pendant image marks the central goddess of *Primavera* as "generative," in connection with the "generative Venus" of the already-mentioned early fifteenth-century version of the alchemical treatise, *Aurora Consurgens* (Roberts 2022, p. 290). Another literary source to consider in this regard is a work by the sixth-century Greco-Egyptian alchemist, Olympiodorus, contained in the Byzantine treatise owned by Cardinal Bessarion, *Marcianus Graecus* 299, now in the Macian Library, Venice. It discusses the alchemical "copper union" that Roberts finds central to *Primavera's* meaning (Roberts 2022, p. 271). Here an elusive "woman of vapor" is identified with "the Cyprian" (Venus/Aphrodite), who presides over the copper bearing regions (Roberts 2022, p. 287). She is also "the Egyptian with the tresses of Gold," like those of the dress worn by our fair goddess at the center of *Primavera*.

Roberts makes a further connection regarding alchemy's soul-creating "second birth" and the alchemically inspired *Masnavi* (ca. 1258–1273), by the Persian Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. The birthing, *Masnava* teaches, brings the gestating fetus to maturity in the retort, a power "turning rocks to gems, the ruby red [like that of the central goddess' sun and moon pendant], and nourishing gold;" so too it creates a reborn, mature human being, capable of turning mind-soul to celestial inspiration (Roberts 2022, p. 292). It is a "second birth," therefore, that has much in common with the *magia* Ficino describes in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, in which, as quoted above, he says the magus turning towards the cosmos "subjugates the things of nature to the things of the heavens." It is a *magia* that also brings to mind Lazzarelli's application of Hermetic philosophy towards realizing the palingenesis

of souls, as described in *Via Christi et Crater Hermetis* (composed between 1486–1494). The mysterious doctrine, Lazzarelli's proclaims, allows a man under sublime inspiration, who possess the fullness of Wisdom rendering him so similar to God, to replicate creation; not only by regenerating his own soul, but those of his listeners (Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn 2005, pp. 57–96). This alchemical "second birth" of the soul, moves the initiate, who is baptized in Hermes' jug, towards a state of rapture; who then becomes accessible to the true mystery, before finally grasping the revelation. The process of obtaining heaven's light that gives a "second birth" to the human soul, therefore, needs the philosophy (*prisca theologia*) of Mercurius Trismegistus; just as, Roberts notes, "Mercury dispels *Primavera's* clouds that might obscure its shining on eternal fruitful life" (Roberts 2022, p. 292).

12. The Relevance of Primavera for the Abegg-Stiftung Psyche Panel

The "second birth" of the soul is what the Psyche myth in the Renaissance is really allegorically all about and this is why, I posit, Sellaio found Botticelli's *Primavera* suitable imagery for adaptation on the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel. It is important, therefore, to know something about the origin and "first birth" of the soul, because it will be useful to understand how the "second birth" is allegorically rendered in Sellaio's artwork. The soul's "first birth" is told in *Kore Kosmou* ("Maiden of the Universe"), interestingly a Hermetic dialogue that has evident traces of alchemy (Pereira 2001, p. 32). This work is found in the so-called *Stobaei Anthologium* (compiled ca. 500 C.E. by Johannes Stobaeus of Macedonia), contained in a manuscript set of the library of Photius, the ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople, which was owned by Cardinal Bessarion, who presumably read it, and is now in the Marcian Library of Venice (*Marcianus Graecus* 450 and 451) (Taylor 2020, pp. 403–26; Faivre in Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 540).

Kore Kosmou is a dialogue between Isis and her son Horus, in which the Egyptian lunar goddess tells her son what she learned from Hermes Trismegistus about the creation and fall of human souls. God created human souls in a cauldron from his own divine essence with Hermes' help. Having added the necessary quantity of celestial water to the dry primary matter prepared by God, Hermes explains how the heavenly souls transgressed the divine order to remain fixed in their cosmic houses (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xxiii, p. 24, Italian trans.; Bull 2018, pp. 101–21). As punishment for such insubordination the Supreme Being cast the souls below through the celestial spheres into human bodies, a first birth (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xxiii, p. 30, Italian trans.; Bull 2018, pp. 101–21). The *Corpus Hermeticum* (3.3) says the human soul is forged and tempered "through the course of the cycling gods," i.e., the seven planets (Van der Broek in Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 561). During the soul's passage through the celestial spheres into birth, however, each planet leaves a negative imprint: Venus, lust; Mercury, greed; Mars, rage; Jupiter, vanity and so forth (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 38). Consequently, in life one must liberate oneself from the negative planetary accretions and cosmic influences, the soul's sickness, to be made worthy of reaching the divine sphere, like Psyche did, after death. (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 38). This was to be done through obtaining perfect moral qualities and the gift of gnosis regarding the heavenly planets and signs, as specified in *Asclepius*, 22, to allow the soul during its cosmic ascent to pass the tests of the seven spheres and return to God (Van der Broek in Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 563; Roob [1997] 2018, p. 38).

Kore Kosmou is thus a kind of Hermetic Genesis; however, one which then sees Isis inform Horus of how she and Osiris were sent by God to the world to teach the retched race of humans the ways of civilization, laws and sacred religious rites to be liberated from vile and bestial behavior for their own salvation (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xxiii, pp. 64–66, Italian trans.; Bull 2018, pp. 101–21). The euhemerized Osiris and Isis, who were instructed by Hermes about the ascending order to God, thus ingeniously prepared the prophets so

that, whenever they raised their hands to the heavenly bodies, "philosophy and magic nourish the soul" (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xiii, pp. 68–69, Italian trans.; Bull 2018, p. 401). From this Hermetic doctrine, which teaches how the Creator ordered that the things below be tempered to the things above, the sacred rites (of *magia* and *philosophia*), vertically connected to the mysteries of the heavens, came into being (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xiii, p. 68, Italian trans.) In this way the gap between humans and the cosmos was bridged, so as to act favorably upon the soul's good reception by the planets during its ascent *ad astra* back to its true heavenly home (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xiii, pp. 68–69, Italian trans.; Bull 2018, pp. 101–21). It is interesting that magic, like philosophy, is viewed as a remedy of the soul, for this is just what I posit the allegory of *Primavera* and its adaptation in the Psyche myth of Sellaio's marriage *cassone* panel were meant to convey.

It is the magic Ficino embraced in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (Roberts 2022, p. 290), which he defended in his *Apologia* of it as "pleasing to the Gospels." "From this workshop," Ficino wrote, "the Magi, before anyone else, adored the new-born Christ. . .thus that wise man, that priest, for the sake of human welfare *tempers the lower parts of the world to the upper parts*. . ." (Ficino 1561, *Opera Omnia*, 603, 18–21). Arising from the *prisca theologia*, then, this magic puts "celestial powers into terrestrial ones" in the work of the soul's "second birth," be it in the alchemical vessel or the person. *De vita coelitus comparanda* was dedicated to Ficino's pupil and patron, Lorenzo the Magnificent, which implies that Lorenzo and the Medici household were fascinated by the topic and doubtless wished to learn this magic—or what was the point of Ficino writing it? Such *magia*, furthermore, "for the sake of human welfare," beyond healing the soul, was thought capable of forging a better world.

In a letter to the Venetian ambassador to Florence, Bernardo Bembo, written sometime between September 1477 and April 1478, Ficino states that there is "now a need for this transforming alchemy which turns iron into gold, so that the worst ages, which come as iron because of suffering, may be transformed at least for us into gold through the exercise of patience" (Roberts 2022, p. 273; Forshaw 2011, p. 253). Ficino is referring to alchemy's power to transform base iron into noble gold. Such power, however, is cast upon the age-old cyclical notion of history and the passage of time from an age of iron (the metal of Mars), to one of gold (the metal of Apollo, the Sun). Ficino says "this transforming alchemy" would be brought about through cathartic patience, but apparently much ground had already been gained. In a letter to Paul of Middleburg (1445–1533) of 1492 Ficino wrote: "So if we are to call any age golden, it must certainly be our age which has produced such a profusion of golden intellects. Evidence of this is provided by the inventions of this age. For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts that were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre, and all this in Florence" (Ficino 1561, p. 944).

Interestingly, such patience recalls the myth of Psyche as interpreted by Boiardo in the previously cited *Capitoli del giuoco dei tarocchi*, ("Excerpts on the Tarot Game"), a deckgame which plausibly concerns alchemy: "Psyche had patience in her trials/And so was rescued in her desperation/And in the end was made a Goddess, which is an example to us all" (Boiardo 1944, pp. 752–53). Psyche's metamorphosis from human to goddess, therefore, I posit offered the Medici household (and later Chigi at Villa Farnesina) a means to see aptly enacted the ends joined to new beginnings through the circular movement of "this transforming alchemy." The extent to which new golden age genesis occupied minds at the time is demonstrated by Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio's prophecy of the renewal of time before the End. (Vasoli 1981, p. 58). According to the *Epistola Enoch* of Ludovico Lazzarelli on Palm Sunday in 1484 Giovanni gave a sensational performance. He galloped through the streets of Rome on a white horse announcing, based on the great astrological conjunction, the advent of a new golden age under the sign of Hermes Trismegistus (Foà

2001, pp. 784–86; Kristeller 1956, p. 256). Dressed as a surrogate Christ with a crown of thorns and tao cross, the histrionic knight called himself the Lord's chosen servant Poimandres, the divine nous of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Hanegraaff et al. 2006, p. 680).

Implicit in Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio's faith in Trismegistus, as Cesare Vasoli explained, are concepts of a "renovatio" of religion that would bring about a great "mutation" in human history and a new golden age (Vasoli 1981, p. 58). The period's golden age genesis and eschatological expectations are also expressed in Ficino's erstwhile disciple Egidio da Viterbo's 1507 *libellus* on the golden age, *De aurea aetate* (O'Malley 1969). They are likewise implied in the alchemical tracts against the Turks mentioned above, in which alchemy, with its "Trismegestical phoenix," would favorably act upon the fulfillment of Providence and regenerate the world. The spirit of "this transforming alchemy" Roberts finds to have been encapsulated in Botticelli's *Primavera*, I posit is further connected to the period's millennialism, bound to a notion of the clockwork alteration of History and the genesis of a new age of gold—propitiously announced by astral signs. According to Vasoli the Hermetic, Orphic and Kabbalistic themes upon which Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio relied, resulted in a more intimate, secret and "spiritual" religiosity, which frequently took access to the symbols and language of the *prisca theologia* (Vasoli 1981, p. 58).

Plausibly, therefore, *Primavera* and the Florentine Psyche tale marriage *cassoni* panels (like the Orpheus ones) were intended as graphic illustrations, for private contemplation, of this occult spirituality and magical religiosity of the *prisca theologia* that concerned both the human soul's salvation and the genesis of a new golden age. They are alchemies of paint, which, on the one hand, wonderfully capture "this transforming alchemy" of golden age genesis to which Ficino referred and, on the other, the luminous soul's "second birth" in a harmonious heavenly union with the divine. Let us, then, consider the Abegg-Stiftung Psyche panel as an allegorical expression, like *Primavera*, of "this transforming alchemy" of birthing a "heavenly soul." Two highly significant elements, beyond the adaptation of *Primavera*, convey this very well: the encounter between Psyche and Pan and the curious image, not mentioned in *Metamorphoses* at all, of Venus Urania from Botticelli's "Birth of Venus."

13. The Abegg-Stiftung Cassone Panel

Following his discovery of the adaptation of *Primavera* on Sellaio's Abegg-Stiftung Psyche *cassone* panel, Jerzy Miziołek concluded it may have been to show how the "catharsis" Psyche undergoes in being flogged by Venus' servants, in the presence of Venus, the Graces, Flora/Hora, Chlora, Zepherus (the wind that brought Psyche to Cupid's palace) and Mercury, creates, as with Botticelli's painting, an "enigmatic bridge" between this world and heaven (Miziołek 2019, p. 85). Miziołek also believes it may have been to show the newly married couple how to obtain immortality (Miziołek 2019, p. 85). I would suggest, however, that this "enigmatic bridge" between earthly reality and heaven in Sellaio's painting further involves the left side presence of Pan and right side appearance of an alluring Venus Urania, as well as the "cosmological" party of the Cupid and Psyche wedding beside her. The same theme of the *prisca theologia*, furthermore, that Miziołek convincingly argued was expressed in the Florentine Orpheus marriage *cassoni* panels, I submit is also found on the Abegg-Stiftung Psyche one (and the related Florentine marriage *cassoni* panels in general).

The insertion of the encounter between Psyche and Pan is preceded by the former attempting to drown herself in a river after having lost Cupid. These episodes are all too brief and casual in Apuleius, yet they form a main part of the plot in both Sellaio *cassoni* frontals (just as they do in the Master of the Argonauts one) and take on a fundamental role in Psyche's spiritual journey. The reason for this seems to lie within the philosophical-religious climate led by Ficino and his colleagues at the Florentine academy informed by

the *prisca theologia*. In this context, a "secret tradition" about Pan that equated the wood deity and god of shepherds with Christ, appears to have been borrowed to express the "mystery" of the deity in Sellaio's illustration, as one who initiates Psyche into the *sacra arcana* of the soul's "second birth." (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Pan and Psyche, detail of Psyche *cassone* frontal panel, ca. 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 14.123.63. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg, 2026 (photo: Christoph von Viràg).

14. Pan as Christ

That Pan for some in the Renaissance stood for Christ, the *Bonus Pastor* ("Good Shepherd"), was explained over a century ago by the classicist Wilfred H. Schoff (Schoff 1912, pp. 512–32). The story goes that Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339 CE) in Book V of his *Praeparatio Evangelica* ("Preparation of the Gospel") observed that the account of Pan's death during Tiberius' reign in Plutarch's (40-ca. 125 CE) dialogue, *De Defectu Oraculaorum* ("On the Obsolescence of Oracles"), coincided with the time of Christ's dying on the cross (Schoff 1912, p. 525). Extricated from its context the tale served in the late Middle Ages as grounds for belief that by Christ's birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection, all ("pan") the pagan gods of the ancient world came to pass and a new order of Christianity was instituted (Schoff 1912, p. 525). Later Christian authors from Fulgentius to Boccaccio took note of Eusebius' observation about the matching deaths of Pan and Christ, which fostered grave speculation in the Middle Ages over the nature of "Pan," whether evil or good. The idea, consequently, among some that goatish Pan represented the devil, because the horned and tailed deity supplied some of the distinctive features of Satan, was balanced by the equally suggestive context that Pan was to be assimilated with Christ. Abbott Anselme, as the French archaeologist Salomon Reinach observed, Schoff reports, in 1715 summarized their conclusions: "whether the god Pan was, as some have thought, Jesus Christ himself, as if the divine Savior had needed to borrow the name of one of his enemies, or whether the devil was forced himself to confess his total defeat by the Cross" (Schoff 1912, p. 526).

In this way Pan, at least since Boccaccio (*Eclogues*, 10), was sometimes a figure for Christ. In his tenth eclogue under the Dantean title, *The Dark Valley* ("Vallis opaca"), Boccaccio scripts an *allegoria mitologica* of the incumbent threat of an infernal region (Hell), as divine punishment for the sins of the world, with the hope that Pan (Christ) will bring about the restoration of the bucolic idleness of the *locus amoenis* (Paradise) (Lumus 2013, pp. 164–65). The infernal eclogue ends with the shepherd Dorilus' prayer to Pan: "Divinity long honored by the forests/Oh Pan, I pray, be present, let the day/come to me: from the flock a fatter lamb/you may be sure will gladly be struck down/upon the

altars which I raise to you/and I'll prolong your sacred games with song." (Lumus 2013, pp. 164–65). Boccaccio's eclogue was a Christianized, medieval Platonic allegory for the created world, involving the threat of its fall through moral decay and material corruption, to the promise of ultimate redemption through cosmic love and restored spiritual values (Lumus 2013, p. 165). This cosmic and regenerative Platonic interpretation of Pan/Christ, I posit may in part indicate the god's symbolic meaning on the Sellaio's Abegg-Stiftung Psyche *cassone* panel.

Boccaccio's medieval explanation, furthermore, was adapted by Rabelais (1483 or 1494–1553), in which Plutarch's unaltered tale about Tiberius is told from the mouth of the absurd Pantagruel (ca. 1532) (Schoff 1912, p. 527). Here Pantagruel relates: "For my part, I understand of that great Savior of the faithful, who was shamefully put to death at Jerusalem, by the envy and wickedness of the doctors, priests and monks of the Mosaic law and methinks, my interpretation is not improper for he may be said in the Greek tongue to be Pan since he is our all. For all that we are, all that we have, all that we hope, is him, by him, from him, and in him. He is the good Pan, the great shepherd, who, as the loving shepherd Corydon affirms, hath not only a tender love and affection for his sheep, but also their shepherds. At his death, complaints, sighs, fears, and lamentations were spread through the whole fabric of the universe, whether heavens, land, sea, or hell. The time also concurs with this interpretation of mine for this most good, most mighty Pan, our only Saviour, died near Jerusalem, during the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (*Pantagruel* 4.28, quoted in Schoff 1912, p. 527). Playing on cheap pun on the Greek word of the god Pan, the "all," the laughing shepherd-god is identified with the crucified Savior.

On behalf of Pan as Christ, the third book of the novel *Pantagruel* interestingly says that the soul in heaven contemplates an infinite sphere of which the center is in every part of the universe, but its circumference is nowhere adding "c'est Dieu selon la doctrine de Hermes Trismegistus" (Schoff 1912, p. 527). In fact, Pantagruel is paraphrasing the famous already-mentioned dictum of Hermes Trismegistus (in *Asclepius*): "God is an intelligible sphere, the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere." Rabelais, therefore, in *Pantagruel* makes a connection between the Pan/Christ figure and Hermetic philosophy. The meaning of Pan on the Sellaio Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel, with his *verga aurea* (golden magic wand) and antennae, I suggest arises from this relation.

Psyche's encounter with the god of the flocks would thus stand for the soul's experience with Christ, who, however, in Sellaio's hermeneutics reveals to her the Hermetic theology of "this transforming alchemy" that leads to the soul's "second birth" and cosmic ascent. Moreover, Pan, the "All," in his association with the Hermetic definition of God as the "infinite intellectual sphere," which the humanists referred to as the "circle of Trismegistus," plausibly allowed for Sellaio's image of the wood deity to be understood as coinciding with the circularity of the alchemical *opus* and, hence, alchemy itself. In fact, during the Renaissance Pan was associated with the Noble Art.

15. Pan the Alchemist

In the Hermetic "marriage" alchemy of Quattrocento Italy, the rustic god Pan Silvanus, part man, part goat, appears playing his panpipes (or syrinx) in the already-mentioned Ms. Ashburnham 1166 (*Miscellanea d'Alchimia*), f. 18r contained in the Laurentian Library, Florence (Roberts 2022, p. 271) (Figure 18). It is the same manuscript with the image of Hermes Trismegistus as "Father of the Philosopher's" mentioned above. Pan is here clearly brought into the domain of Hermetic alchemy, which its anonymous author certainly knew. The instrument of Pan in the image has completely metamorphosed into the alchemical retort, in which cosmic life has entered (inferred by the great star) so that the purifying *opus* can be performed. As Robert's so eloquently puts it: "Wind is air, air is life, and life

is soul, and here Pan's airy music is ensuring the elements circulate harmoniously within the alchemical vessel, no longer in conflict, but rather flowing into one another in a unified whole (infra). For it is this "circling" that makes the hidden beauty manifest, transforms the earthly into the heavenly, and reveals the Philosopher's Stone, now being brought to perfection through Pan's alchemical art" (Roberts 2022, p. 273).



Figure 18. Pan as alchemist in Ms. Ashburnham 1166, f.18r, created in the Veneto region in the 1470s. Florence. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Permission granted by the MiC.

In Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, Socrates compares Pan, as the "son of Hermes," to the logos or "word" (Roberts 2022, p. 288). A parallel with Christ as the logos made flesh (John 1:14) also comes to mind here. Pan's "speech" makes "all things (pan) known," Socrates says, always causing "them too circulate and move about" (Roberts 2022, p. 288). Socrates also refers to Pan's "double-sided" form, calling him the "tragic goat" whose "smooth" true upper parts dwell with the gods, but whose false, lower parts are "rough and goat-like" (*Cratylus* 408a–d; Roberts 2022, p. 289). Hermes Trismegistus in the opening chapter of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was initiated into the sacred mysteries of the soul by the being Poimandres, or "Man-Shepherd," an expression of the universal mind, who, like Pan, "makes all things known" (Bull 2018, p. 122) Ficino's disciple Ludovico Lazzarelli interestingly equated this "Man-Shepheard" with Jesus Christ in *Via Christi et Crater Hermetis*, just as Pan was assimilated with the Savior (Soranzo 2012, p. 90). Moreover, as Socrates says Pan was considered a double being, both heavenly and earthly; so the wooly pastoral god further conforms to the alchemical notion of the unity of all ("pan"), above and below, in the One as expressed in the opening lines of *Emerald Tablet*.

Interestingly we find the three Greek words "One, is the All" (Ἕν τὸ π(ᾶ)ν), surrounded by the Ouroboros image on the folio illustrating Cleopatra's "gold-making" in the previously citied Greek alchemical manuscript *Marcianus Graecus* 299. Hence, Pan (the "All") may have also been viewed in association with the Ouroboros, the paradoxical serpent devouring its own tail that transmutes itself, signifying eternity and the circularity of the *opus alchymicum* (Abraham 1998, p. 181). This consists of a repeated process of

evaporating and distilling matter in the retort, which is turned into a musical instrument in the Ms. Ashburnham 1166, f.18r image of Pan, purifying, cleansing and whitening it.

Ficino, as the great translator of both Plato and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, from Socrates' descriptions of Pan I do not think would have failed to make these connections. The god's duel form, as a union of opposites, cosmic and world, is akin to the synthesis sought in Hermetic "marriage" alchemy, which is further de facto expressed allegorically in the Psyche tale through her ascent and union with Cupid. In this sense, Pan on Sellaio's Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel seems to embody the very essence of *magia* in the *prisca theologia* that tempers "the lower parts of the word to the upper parts." And indeed Pan here wields a *virga aurea*, a golden magical wand. Psyche, therefore, instructed by double-bodied Pan, who makes all things known so that "philosophy and magic nourish the soul," will find the means to be granted access to the divine realm that saves her.

Pan, furthermore, played an important role in Medici family symbolism. The cosmic and pastoral reading of Pan, for example, had particular resonance with the leading Florentine household in reference to the play of words in Italian between *Cosmo* ("Cosmos" = Pan or All) and *Cosimo*, the name of the *pater familias*, Cosimo il Vecchio (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 55). Pan was thus a god much honored by Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent, who owned a now lost painting of Pan by Luca Signorelli of ca. 1490 and wrote poetry in the pastoral deity's honor (Brummer 2015, p. 30). In his *Altercazione* (5.1), Lorenzo begins with a hymn to Pan *che impera a quell che si corrompe e genera* ("who is master of whatever perishes and is born") (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 55). This, too, seems connected to the meaning of Sellaio's Pan on the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel; namely as the "Good Shepherd" who tends to Psyche's "perishment" and "new life"—like the alchemical death and rebirth of the metallic soul in the retort.

16. Venus Urania and the Marriage of Cupid and Psyche

Another image in this Sellaio *cassone* panel that suggests a meaning tied to the *prisca theologia* and the *magia* of "this transforming alchemy," is the curious figure of Venus Urania (as identified by Miziołek 2019, p. 85) (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Venus Urania, detail of Psyche *cassone* frontal panel, ca. 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 14.123.63. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg, 2026 (photo: Christoph von Viràg).

Alias *Venus pudica*, the Sellaio's goddess is unmistakably a reflection of Botticelli's deity with flowing golden locks in the *Birth of Venus* painting now in the Uffizi Gallery. The naked goddess appears mystically beyond Chloris' outstretched arm. The presence of

Venus Urania is most plausibly explained in light of an astrological/cosmological principle, because "Urania" indicates the celestial sphere. This would point to a spiritual meaning of Venus on the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel in connection with the heavens and the soul's ascent. The epithet Aphrodite Urania, signifying "heavenly or spiritual," who descended from the sky-god Uranus, in fact, distinguished her from the earthly Aphrodite Pandemos. "Urania" is also the name of the Greek muse of astrology and geometry, who often was identified with Venus Urania, thereby creating of the figure a cosmic allegory.

Venus Urania may thus relate to the role astrology plays in the alchemical *opus* of birthing a heavenly soul, in this case that of cosmic bound Psyche. In the Abegg-Stiftung panel the goddess is seen next to the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, the episode with which each of the Florentine Psyche marriage *cassoni* imagery ends. This suggests she is related to the nuptial moment and seems to be the numinous power that assisted Psyche's cosmic ascent into mystical union with Cupid. In the Master of the Argonaut's panel the wedding indeed takes place in a dark, star-spangled cosmological setting with astrological embodiments (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 53). The Sellaio panels rather show the episode in a kind of "Garden of the Philosophers," a metaphysical paradise, which in the Abegg-Stiftung example is set upon a florid meadow ideal for birthing a heavenly soul that was clearly inspired by the flowery lawn of *Primavera* (Miziołek 2019, pp. 81–82). Here, as in the other Sellaio and Master of the Argonauts panels, the marriage party consists of embodiments of the seven planets represented by the gods after which they are named (Miziołek 2019, pp. 81–82; Huber 2019, pp. 160–77) (Figure 20).

Hence, we find Luna (Diana) *Cornuta*, with her arrow and crescent horns, as Vincenzo Cartari explains;[42] Mercury with his caduceus; Saturn with his sickle and grain of wheat; Jupiter, the celebrant, with his papal tiara, solemnly uniting the joyous couples' right hands (the ancient Roman ritual nuptial bond, *iunctio dextra*); Apollo (Sol) with his golden arrow; Mars in armor and, finally, fair Venus. Venus is dressed in a white gown with red himation, exactly as she appears in the flogging of Psyche episode and, importantly, in the way the central goddess of *Primavera* is clothed. Of course, this makes a strong case that the central goddess of *Primavera* is indeed Venus.

The Neoplatonic-Gnostic-Hermetic tradition thought a human being needs to shape a life, and thus the world, according to virtue, in order to save the organism from its cosmic illness. One must live, therefore, in such a way—by finding the gold of spiritual love—as to lead back to the divine spark from whence the soul originated (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 19). Applied to alchemy this meant passing through the successive stages of the metals from lead to gold; given each metal represents a period of maturity or, conversely, degeneration of the *prima materia* in the bowls of the earth (metals were believed to be conceived and develop, like a gestating fetus, in the earth). Passing through Saturn, the farthest ring, representing the basest of metals, lead, symbolizes the body's death and the putrefaction of matter; an indispensable precondition for any form of transmutation (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 19). The successive stages of this progressive ennobling chemical/spiritual ripening are Jupiter-tin, Mars-iron, Venus-copper, Mercury-mercury, Luna-silver and Sol-gold. The chemical/philosophical discipline's aim, therefore, was to return the metallic soul in the cucurbit to its "heavenly origin" during its post-mortem ascent in the production of the Philosopher's Stone.



Figure 20. Marriage of Cupid and Psyche, detail of Psyche *cassone* frontal panel, ca. 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, inv. no. 14.123.63 © Abegg-Stiftung, CH-3132 Riggisberg, 2026 (photo: Christoph von Viràg).

Put on the spiritual plane of the human soul this meant passing the tests of the seven planets on the way up back to God. To pass through the seven gates of the demonic planetary spheres, one must learn the "secret of the Cosmos;" and thus a knowledge of magical-astral discipline which Venus Urania here seems to embody (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 38). In the Abegg-Stiftun *cassone* panel the celebrant Jupiter's papal tiara (like on Sellaio's private collection one) makes of him a kind of hierophantic magus who consummates the marriage sacrament. Previously above winged Cupid kneels before Jupiter, who with crown and scepter, like God the Father, sanctions their solemn covenant (an episode also rendered in the *Loggia di Psiche*) by which Psyche shall obtain immortality. This is the second birth of a "heavenly soul," at once the *secreto mysterio* of the Psyche tale. After all, as Robert's relates, according to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111) in his *Alchemy of Happiness*, the aim of alchemy is to help human beings "rise from the rank of beasts to that of angels" (Roberts 2022, p. 289). The previously cited manuscript Ashburnham 1166, in reference to alchemy, on foglio 15v interestingly says: "opus philosophorum nihil aliud est quam facere ascendere de Terra celum" ("the work of the philosophers is none other than to ascend from earth to heaven")—as Psyche does.

Standing as a witness to the left of the marriage union, furthermore, is Apollo (or Orpheus?)[43] with his *lira da braccio* (Miziołek 2019, p. 81). Ficino in *Theologica Platonica* XIII,

1.5.13–28 stresses music's ability to cure the soul's sickness by Apollonian incantations, that is, by philosophical reasons: "…Valetudinem vero animae curare Apollineis incantationibus quibusdam, id est philosophicis rationibus." Apollo's presence thus seems to indicate how the charms of music, like "magical baits" (Ficino quoting the late fourth-early fifth century Neoplatonic philosopher Synesius of Cyrene in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, 3, 1), inspire the "philosophical reasons" that helped heal Psyche's soul. In Pythagorean music harmony theory, the seven notes were mathematically set upon the vibrations of the seven planetary spheres. Hence, the enrapture caused by music allows the soul to "tune in" to the "music of the universe" and receive its beneficial planetary forces in preparation for its cosmic ascent. The seventh and eighth century Byzantine alchemist Stephanos of Alexandria considered alchemy and music as being two accessory fields, each expressing cosmic harmony in their own way. So the music accompanying the alchemical process serves to harmonize the soul with the music of the spheres, which seems to be the meaning of Apollo here (De Jong [1969] 2014, pp. 28–29).

On this type of magical and cathartic music, Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) in one of the Orphic *Conclusiones*, which discussed the ancient bard's hymns as bearing spiritual truths connected to natural magic related to theology and cosmology, admonishes: "He who cannot attract Pan approaches Proteus in vain" (Wind 1958, p. 191). Hence, to obtain Protean wisdom (universal knowledge and prophesy), one must approach Pan as Psyche did. Psyche's encounter with Pan, along with the guidance of Venus Urania, got to the bottom of the secret of the Cosmos—which seems to be the significance of the Cupid and Psyche wedding. All is resolved in the union of female and male principles, here allegorized in the marriage of Psyche to Cupid, so that what is hidden takes shape, "et occultam manifestatur," as the well-known medieval alchemical treatise, *Turba Philosophorum* 1, 58, says, in the *Opus Magnum* of the alchemists (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 313). I posit, therefore, that the gist of Apollo as a witness to the Cupid and Psyche marriage of Sellaio's painting reflects these philosophical and alchemical principles of music.

17. The Primavera Group

We are left with the central figures adapted from *Primavera*: namely the Graces, Venus, Flora (or the spring Hora) distributing flowers and Zepherus abducting Chloris (or the winter Hora). I would suggest these figures rehearse the soul's "second birth," as Roberts suggests they do in the blossoming springtime garden of Botticelli's masterpiece; while similarly performing "this transforming alchemy" of clockwork new golden age genesis that Ficino so ardently desired. Sellaio's adaptation of Botticelli's *Primavera*, therefore, may provide a tantalizing clue that the Psyche myth in Apuleius was indeed read as an alchemical and astrological allegory of the soul's "second birth" into heavenly union with Cupid; like the reborn metallic spirit rising in the retort to be united with its higher genius.

The Three Graces, however, require some further consideration. As mentioned above, these goddesses were certainly required for the circularity of the alchemical *opus* to succeed. In Apuleius, however, the Graces only appear at the Cupid and Psyche nuptial banquet, whereas here, as in the *Loggia di Psiche* of Villa Farnesina, they feature more prominently. The reason for this may be bound to Ficino's astrological concept of the Three Graces in *De vita coelitus comparanda*. However, I shall reserve further discussion on that for the image of the goddesses in the *Loggia di Psiche*. Suffice it to say for now, the history of the allegory of the Graces has been known since Seneca. In his *De Beneficiis* ("On Benefits") 1.3, the Roman philosopher reports that these nymphs stand for the giving of benefits. The Latin, *gratia*, denotes a "gratuitous" bestowing of "charm, grace, pleasure." Since antiquity we find the Three Graces visually represented as intertwined in circuitous dance, at times in flowing, diaphanous robes as in Botticelli's *Primavera*.

As the daughters of Jupiter and Eurynome, they are younger and rather fairer than the Hours and, as such, are assigned as companions to Venus (like we find them in *Primavera* and the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel). In *Primavera*, *moreover,* as Edgar Wind suggested, Mercury, like a Platonic hierophant, with his magic wand of the divine *mystagogue*, a bridge between earth and heaven and a revealer of secret or "Hermetic" knowledge, is the leader of the Graces (Wind 1958, pp. 122–24). Sellaio's Mercury in the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel seems to perform this same leadership role. The messenger god hovers directly above the Three Graces brandishing his golden trumpet—the instrument he also bears in a pendentive of the *Loggia di Psiche*—to sound the delivery of his message by which hiding Psyche shall be found. Now Psyche is brought before Venus and flogged, while the Graces, guided by Mercury, stand beside the fallen heroine seemingly as secret "gift-givers," providing her with the necessary celestial benefits (see below) through which she shall gain heaven.

Ficino states that Mercury "calls the mind back to heavenly things through the power of reason," which seems to neatly apply to Psyche, who through immoderate curiosity lost Cupid, on the Abegg-Stiftung *cassone* panel (Wind 1958, p. 124). For Wind the Graces are bound by a knot they are loath to loosen, one that connects divine Love to true Beauty and right Passion for it; that is, God, who is desirously sought by following Mercury, the guide of souls (psychopompus) (Wind 1958, p. 124). It is this transcendent love, seemingly alluded to by blindfolded Cupid's fiery dart in *Primavera*, which Psyche must be infused with to overcome Venus' terrible ordeals to gain immortality and celestial union with Cupid. The Sellaio Abegg-Stiftung panel, with its adaptation Botticelli's *Primavera*, along with the other Florentine marriage *cassoni* examples, as well as the lost Belriguardo fresco cycle; demonstrate the special place in the history of Renaissance visual hermeneutics that the Psyche myth enjoyed. Moreover, they establish a tradition of illustrating the Psyche tale and its "secret mystery," which must be considered when approaching the peculiar iconography of the *Loggia di Psiche* at Villa Farnesina for Agostino Chigi. Such artworks relate a humanistic conceptual framework, which we should expect to have similarly informed the deeper symbolic intentions of Raphael and *bottega's* later monumental example in papal Rome. Let us, then, return to the *Loggia di Psiche.*

18. The Salamander in the Furnace

In the absence of any documents proving the links between alchemy and the *Loggia di Psyche*, it is the iconography of the artwork itself, like on the Florentine marriage *cassoni* panels, that tells us something about the connection. In the spandrel with the reptilian creature emerging from the fires mentioned at the outset of this work, for example, we also find an Erote stealing off with Vulcan's tools, a blacksmith's iron hammer and tongs—in the loggia's sixteen spandrels we see *amorini*, the children of Eros, in flight, each bearing the trophies of the Olympian Gods (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 74)[44] (Figures 1 and 2). I believe the blazing lizard, combined with the Erote dashing off with Vulcan's tools, allow us to correctly identify the literary source for this particular scene. The text in question is the *Tractatulus de Alchimia Avicennae*: *de tinctora metallorum* ("Treatise on Alchemy: on the tincture of metals") attributed to the Arabic scholar Avicenna (980–1037) or, more probably, pseudo-Avicenna, which describes the Philosopher's Stone as a salamander (our reptilian creature) living within the fire of the alchemical furnace: "The philosophers have called this stone our Salamander, because, like a salamander, it is fed exclusively by fire and lives in it, that is to say is perfected by it and so is our stone" (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 216)[45] (Figure 2).

Helen de Jong provided an excellent appraisal of this passage's significance, elaborating upon its full alchemical significance: "The Salamander is the Mercury substance in its final stage, in its state of perfection and indestructability; the 'executioner Vulcan' has

no hold of it any more, that means it cannot be destroyed by fire; this is the characteristic of the Philosopher's Stone" (De Jong [1969] 2014, pp. 216–17). De Jong's reference to the "executioner Vulcan," the symbolic *artifex* of alchemy (Abraham 1998, pp. 212–13), I believe explains the Erote of the spandrel dashing off with the blacksmith's tools of the god of the forge. For at this stage of the *opus alchymicum* Vulcan's instruments are useless, since the salamander, a symbol of transmutation in the act of becoming the Philosopher's Stone, is impervious to fire. Evidently the god of the forge's success in the *opus* ironically lost him control over its process when the salamander appears in the fire: it can no longer be managed, like a nuclear chain reaction once fission ignites. Avicenna's text was published for the first time in a compendium of alchemical sources in 1550, but its manuscript translation from the original Arabic into Latin, which was cited by the French Dominican friar and mystic, Vincent de Beauvais (1190 ca–1264), must have occurred before 1250 and evidently circulated thereafter amongst alchemy adepts (Anawati 1971, pp. 327–39). Avicenna also wrote another treatise regarding alchemy and medicine called, *Healing of the Soul* (which was essentially the outcome of Psyche's trials). It was reissued in Latin in 1485 and again in 1508 and 1546 (Patai 1994, p. 96).

Petrarch in the poem *Canzoni* 207 uses the salamander to represent "infinite, burning desire," which does fit well with Psyche's quest for redemption and union with Cupid.

Moreover, there was an age-old tradition of salamander lore in medieval bestiaries that permeated Romance love poetry. However, the allusion to Vulcan strongly suggests alchemy, for the god of the forge in alchemical symbolism represents the alchemist par excellence. Hence, the loggia's spandrel imagery makes it rather more likely that the salamander in the fire here is bound to Noble Art, instead of merely to Romance love poetry. Since the salamander bears a strong symbolic value related to fire and transformation, however, it could simply be united to Vulcan and have an allegorical-moral meaning about fortitude and purification, which suggests the moment when the soul is forged, tempered and prepared for its amorous and celestial transfiguration, as suggested by the adjacent pendentives. Even so, this is a metallurgical metaphor that allegorically relates very well, as we have seen, to alchemy and the forging of the Philosopher's Stone. The reference to Vulcan in the spandrel, therefore, makes it arduous to remove the *Loggia di Psyche* image of the salamander in the fire from the domain of alchemy. The passage of the *Tractatulus de Alchimia* appears to confirm this.

At the same time, the strange reptilian creature in the fire resembles the alchemical crocodile, whose amphibious nature aptly stands for the dual nature of Mercurius (see below), both as a liquid metal, quicksilver, and the transforming *arcanum* of the alchemists, which allows the purified stone to release its "secret fire" or "sun." (Abraham 1998, p. 48). The closing law of the Hermetic *Emerald Tablet* thus says: "That which I had to say about the operation of the Sun is completed." This is the unleashing of the secret fire hidden within the alchemists' raw material, galvanized by the application of the external material fire, which leads to transmutation into gold (Abraham 1998, pp. 48, 76). The allusion to Vulcan by the Erote brandishing the iron hammer and tongs, may thus relate the imagery further to alchemy by alluding to the employment of fire in the *opus*. This means both physical fire in the furnace and the secret fire of mercurial water, a magical transformative substance, that both the salamander in the fire and crocodile likewise incarnates.

The crocodile, however, does not live in fire, but only the salamander, as *Kore Kosmou*, which again brings us into the domain of alchemy, conveys: "There are certain animals that prefer fire, like salamanders *that reach the point of nesting in fire*" (*Kore Kosmou* 1989, xxiv, p. 17, Italian trans.). We are, therefore, dealing with the salamander in the loggia spandrel. The similarity with the crocodile, however, I posit was to make the creature seem more powerful, as befitting of it symbolizing the emergent Philosopher's Stone (like in

Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* mentioned below). A similar stylized, monstrous way of rendering the salamander in fire is found on the heraldic emblems beneath the statues of Charlemagne and Saint Louis IX, King of France, by Pierre Lestache in 1589 on the façade of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. As the salamander was said to be resistant to fire, Francis I chose it as his personal emblem.

Perhaps the discretion with which the salamander appears may seem to diminish its importance in the complex iconography of the loggia. By contrast, I believe this was precisely the point; that is, to not make easily accessible to the profane the alchemical symbolism in the artwork. The notion is consistent with the already-mentioned Blosio Palladio saying Sebastiano del Piombo's mythological scenes in the adjacent *Loggia di Galatea* contain a "hidden sense" that must be intellectually discovered. It is as if Chigi, Raphael and whichever scholar was behind the humanistic program, were to have hidden things in plain view.

19. Mercury and the Fornicating "Zucca"

Another example of "hiding things in plain view" in the *Loggia di Psiche* that I consider relates to alchemy, is the famous fornicating squash ("zucca") and fig on the festoon atop the south Mercury pendentive above the entrance to Chigi's *tablinium* (which makes its position obviously eminently meaningful to the patron) (Figures 21 and 22). Mercury here, sent by Jupiter, bears a message that will result in Psyche's capture, haranguing by Venus and ensuing terrible trials. Morel has interpreted the image of the fornicating "zucca" Mercury's raised hand evidences, somewhat secretly, as a recollection of Priapus, protector of gardens and female fertility; hence, a symbol of Chigi's lush estate, the *viridarium* (Morel 1985, 1990). Vasari remarked upon the graceful realism of this intriguing caprice, as something tantalizing and delightful (Vasari [1879] 1906, VI, 558). The risqué picture at face value was certainly meant to be humorous and stimulate mirth and pleasure. Yet gesticulating Mercury indicating this obscenity gives just cause to, as Blosio Palladio again would have us do, decipher the "hidden sense." For Mercury (Greek Hermes) plays a strong role in alchemy, who symbolized the universal agent of transmutation (Abraham 1998, p. 124). Mercury in the Noble Art covers common mercury, *argentum vivum*/quicksilver, from which all metals take their origin, and philosophical mercury, the solvent of philosophers, a composition of sulfur and argent vive (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 9). The alchemists most emphatically distinguished between them. The latter was the alchemists' magical *arcanum*, a transformative substance without which the *opus* cannot be performed (Abraham 1998, p. 124).

The messenger god likewise indicates the waters of destruction, in which the soul perishes, but also the Water of Life. The meaning of Mercury, therefore, approaches that of the *fons vitae* in the late medieval and Renaissance alchemical canon as in *Liber Octo Capitulorum* ascribed to Albertus Magnus (d. 1280): "The mercury is cold and moist, out of mercury God created minerals; it penetrates into and purifies all bodies, it is active like leaven, and red elixir, it is the eternal water, the water of life, the maiden's milk, the source, the alum, and he who drinks from it shall not die. In its living form, mercury performs certain works; after its death it performs its greatest works. It is the serpent charming itself, fertilizing itself, giving birth in one day, killing all metals with its poison. Mercury evaporates by fire, but wise men make it fireproof, feeding it with its own earth and then it brings about transmutations. Only mercury conquers fire and is not conquered by it, but in a friendly way it joyfully finds rest in the fire," hence, in the form of the mercurial salamander (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 111).



Figure 21. Raphael's assistants, Mercury pendentive (indicating the fornicating "zucca" in the festoon, upper right), fresco, *Loggia di Psiche*, completed by 1519.

Medieval alchemical works attributed to Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–ca. 1292), Arnaldus de Villa Nova (1240–1312) and Ramon Llull (or Lullus, 1232–1316), consequently, designate Mercury as semen or sperm (Moureau 2013, pp. 280 and 287ff). Lullism, in particular, was the natural accompaniment of the Hermetic-Kabbalistic philosophy that underlies Renaissance Neoplatonism (at least that is what Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and others thought). Accepted by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Ficino, Lullian emphasis on the elements with alchemy (and pseudo-Lullian alchemy) and Mercury with sperm, became explicit in the "universal art" of Renaissance magi; notably Cornelius Agrippa and Giordano Bruno, who were both Lullists (Yates 1982, p. 7). The most popular version rested, however, upon the theory of the two principles, sulfur and mercury, that arose from the Greek Alexandrian Hermetic tradition canonized later by the medieval alchemical author Latin Gerber, which were often seen as being active or volatile (Califano 2016, pp. 72–73).

The alchemists called them the "seeds" of metal. Using Aristotle's embryology as a model, they assumed that sulfur embodied by Mercury (personified by the mercurial lion, dragon or serpent, imagery by the way found in the loggia spandrels) had an active force similar to male seed or sperm, and a feminine role, called "menstruum" or "female seed," by which the alchemists dissolve metals into the *prima materia* to ripen matter into gold (Abraham 1998, p. 124). Since the final objective of the *opus* was the "marriage" of opposites in the "chemical wedding," the alchemists were ultimately concerned with the union of substances through a reconciliation of conflicting elements (particularly fire with water). Medieval and Renaissance alchemy, therefore, favored sexual analogies and explicit hylozoism under the influence of Stoic biocosmology, the *logoi spermatikoi* referred to by Plotinus, brought into the Middle Ages from Augustine's theory of "seminal reasons," or *rationes seminales*, both mentioned by Ficino in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (Hirai 2005 pp. 245–64; Califano 2016, pp. 72–73).



Figure 22. Giovanni da Udine, "Priapus-zucca" detail, *Loggia di Psiche*, fresco, completed by 1519.

Suddenly gesturing Mercury in the south pendentive drawing attention to the fornicating "zucca" (Priapus), in what might otherwise be described as vegetal pornography (akin to Arentino's *Sonetti lussuriosi* and its depicted derivative "I Modi" by Giulio Romano), takes on an alchemical significance. Since, upon closer inspection, we notice that the "zucca" is indeed ejaculating into the fig (Figure 22). In the Hermetic tradition Mercury was thus the outcome of "sexual chemistry," like our fornicating squash and fig indicated by the messenger god, and bound to the alchemical phase of *coniunctio* (the union of opposites in the "chemical wedding") in the forging of the Philosophers' Stone. This implies a deeper symbolism for the gesticulating Mercury in the pendentive as the *Mercurius alchemista* or *Mercurius philosophorum* that dissolves the metallic matter; the fruit and vegetable garland with its formicating "zucca" that frames the episodes of the entire loggia a kind of *hortus alchemicus*, as described later by the Neapolitan occult philosopher, Giambattista Della

Porta (1536–1616) (Califano 2016, pp. 90–91). The prominence given this figure in the loggia and its position over Chigi's office entrance certainly suggests Mercury, as god of merchants, was the banker's symbolic supernatural patron. Yet the showcasing of Mercury here indicating the fornicating "zucca" also plausibly intimates the god's paramount role in alchemy.

The god Mercury, who possesses a sublime, ineffable type of intelligence, was indeed the very god of alchemy (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 110). In this guise Hermes/Mercury reminds us that the path to the alchemical *coniunctio* in this "sexual chemistry" is through acquired Hermetic wisdom. Mercury is the metallic soul of the sacred sperm, which must receive fire in order to rise. And in alchemical philosophy the lead soul imprisoned within our body/personality can, through virtue and constancy (like in Psyche's example), be transformed into magnificent spiritual gold. This would be done by the transmutation of the "sacred sperm," which in the spiritual sense does not mean one of the seven metals of alchemy (*argentum vivum*/quicksilver), but the Mercury of occult wisdom. So Mercury is a mystery; it is the beginning, the middle and the end of the work.[46] The first Mercury was seen as the metal in a liquid state, the second was to be seen as the philosophical Mercury of spiritual initiation (an apt metaphor for Psyche's trials), which plausibly the Mercury gesticulating to the fornicating "zucca" of the spandrel signifies in the "hidden sense." Lastly in alchemy Mercury, as we have seen, is the metal that makes *coniunctio* possible (just as Psyche in the last spandrel is accompanied by Mercury to Olympus to marry Cupid); that is the union between opposite material states, male and female, a sublimation that leads to transmutation from lead to gold.

Hence, for those familiar with the lovers' tale, we are reminded by the fornicating "zucca" of the joyful resolution to Psyche's plight in eventually reaching Olympus and marriage to Cupid, which by definition is a *coniunctio oppositorum*. In this metaphor the god indicating the fornicating "zucca" alchemically in the Hermetic sense signifies the metallic soul's spiritual fecundation, embodied by Psyche, by the mercurial water or sperm, as she embarks upon trials (alluded to in the subsequent two pendentives) that lead to her salvation. Chigi and Raphael (and whichever humanist scholar/s in the banker's sphere behind the project) are using entertainment and humor to illuminate, and it is extremely witty. Now Peruzzi's depicted horoscope of Agostino on the vault of the *Loggia di Galatea* portrays Mercury, appropriately god of merchants, in the role of Chigi's "dominus geniturae;" that is, the dominant planet at birth which is said to leave an indelible imprint on one's life according to astrological belief (Quinlan-McGrath 1984, p. 102ff). Chigi, as a magnet of *hermaia*, therefore, in part explains the placement of the Mercury pendentive above the entrance to his office. Yet in indicating the fornicating "zucca," Mercury's fundamental role in alchemy is feasibly alluded to in the *Loggia di Psiche*, a connection which I do not think Chigi would have failed to appreciate.

In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Psyche died executing her last labor, but by Cupid's grace the soul of Soul was released from the bondage of slavery to Venus and the material confinement of its bodily prison (like the death of the base metal and the liberated metallic soul of alchemy); to ascend to Olympus in the arms of Mercurius/Hermes in the last pendentive (Figure 4). The special attention given the psychopompus deity raising Psyche through the heavens to reach Olympus, I posit was meant to metaphorically ape the Hermetic "soul ascent" of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Chapter twenty-five of *Poimanders* describes the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres and its gradual liberation from the vicious planetary concretions acquired during its decent into the material body (Culianu 1983, p. 49). Raphael's strategically placed salamander in the fire of the preceding spandrel reinforces the Hermetic tone of this imagery in the late narrative stage of the cycle. It suggests Psyche's spiritual transformation that granted her access to the immortal realm

in Hermes's embrace is a well-played allegory of alchemy. All prepares the perceptive viewer for the last stage in the fabrication of the Philosopher's Stone; when the liberated metallic soul with its mercurial substance ascends to be united with its higher spirit and obtains a perfected state (just as Psyche, accompanied by Mercury, reaches Olympus, marries Cupid and becomes a goddess).

There is a peacock flying at the top of the Mercury and Psyche pendentive, a bird associated with immortality. In alchemy, however, this bird is connected to the washing and purification of the blackened body of the Stone, succeeding the deathly black stage or *nigredo*, by the mercurial water during the process of ablution (Abraham 1998, p. 141). In this phase, the iridescent rainbow colors of the peacock's tail (*coda pavonis*) appear (Abraham 1998, p. 140). The *nigredo* phase is succeeded by the pure whitening or *albedo* stage, in which the now purified matter (like reborn Psyche after her labors) is ready for re-animation by the illuminated soul in the chemical wedding (akin to Psyche's rebirth and subsequent marriage to Cupid on Olympus). The peacock in this pendentive is white, with gold highlighting some of its plumes, so it may suggest we have entered the *albedo* phase, when the mercurial water has washed and purified the blackened Stone in preparation for the last act of the *opus alchymicum*. That act is again the chemical wedding, which is plausibly rehearsed symbolically in the loggia by the climactic narrative scenes on the vault's two fictive tapestries above: *Council of the Gods*, in which Jupiter (God) consents to the marriage of Cupid and Psyche (where we indeed see a peacock again, next to Juno, but now with its glorious iridescent tail fully fanned), and the concluding *Nuptial Banquet of Cupid and Psyche* episode (Figures 23 and 24).



Figure 23. Raphael's assistants, Council of the Gods, completed by 1519, fresco, *Loggia di Psyche*.



Figure 24. Raphael's assistants, Nuptial Banquet of Cupid and Psyche, completed by 1519, Loggia of Cupid and Psyche.

20. The Alchemical Triad

An element in these scenes that draws us into the domain of alchemy is the remarkable side-by-side arrangement of Jupiter, Neptune (with trident) and Pluto (with pitchfork) in the Council of the Gods (Figure 25). The divine trio is again seated at the banquet table made of lead and gold next to each other, same order, in the concluding nuptial galla episode: the sky god accompanied by Juno (and served by Ganymede), the sea god by Amphitrite and the underworld god by Proserpina. Hercules with club is also present, while standing Vulcan has prepared the sumptuous repast, both gods symbolically relating to alchemy (Pereira 2001, p. 234; De Jong [1969] 2014).[47] For in alchemy these gods (in this order) stand for the alchemical triad, the *tria prima*, which represents the fundamental principles of the *opus alchymicum*: Jove (air and sulfur connected to soul); Neptune (water and mercury connected to the spirit); Pluto (earth and salt connected to the body) (Abraham 1998, p. 176). We see this very configuration again in the opening spandrels of the narrative cycle with *amorini* holding the trophies of the gods: 1. an Erote bearing Jupiter's lightning bolts accompanied by the god's sacred eagle (Figure 26); 2. an Erote holding Neptune's trident (Figure 26 right spandrel and left spandrel of Figure 27); 3 an Erote bearing Pluto's pitchfork accompanied by another controlling the monstrous guard dog of Hades, terrifying Cerubrus. (Figure 28). Is this mere coincidence? I think not and rather what we have are cogent reminders of the first three principles of alchemy, befittingly at the beginning and end of the pictorial cycle.



Figure 25. Detail of the Council of the Gods with Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto.

https://doi.org/10.3390/arts15020041

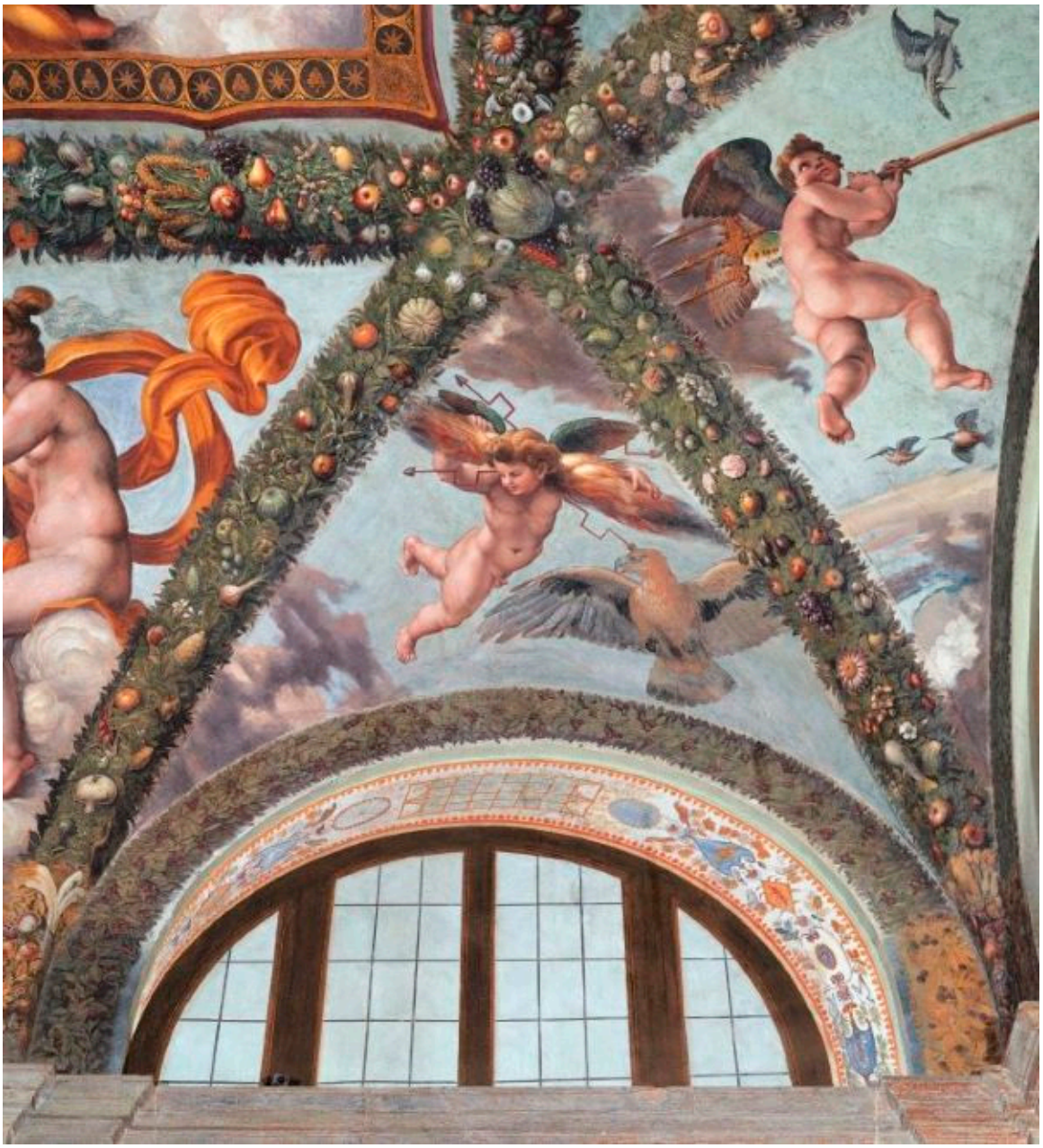


Figure 26. Raphael's assistents, Spandrel with Erote bearing Jupiter's lightning bolts (center) and Erote bearing Neptune's trident (right).

These images of the alchemical triad remarkably anticipate the theory of the Swiss iatrochemist and physician, Theophastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493–1541), known as Paracelsus, according to whom metals are composed of a three-fold matter: sulfur (the soul); mercury (the spirit); and salt (the body) (Abraham 1998, p. 176). As Abrahams relates: "In the *prima tria* theory, sulphur is the cause of the structure, substance and combustibility, and is the principle of growth. Mercury provides the vaporous and liquid quality, penetrating and enlivening things, while salt keeps matter together by giving it fixity and firmness, and is found in ashes" (Abraham 1998, pp. 176–77). The *Loggia di Psiche* alchemical triads also predate by approximately eighty years Caravaggio's version of the *tria prima* for the *camerino* or "distilleria" of the casino of Cardinal Francesco del Monte's Roman villa (now Villa Ludovisi), underscoring the enduring presence of alchemy at Renaissance Rome.



Figure 27. Raphael's assistants, Three Graces pendentive with Erote bearing Neptune's trident (left) and pendentive with erote holding Pluto's pitchfork (right).



Figure 28. Raphael's assistants, Pendentive with Erote bearing Pluto's pitchfork and another controlling Cerubris.

21. The Three Graces Pendentive and Astrology

Another curious aspect of the fresco program is the second pendentive of the Three Graces, who from *Primavera* were also rendered on Sellaio's Abegg-Stifting *cassone* panel. (shown in Figure 27) Here we see Cupid nimbly giving the Three Graces, also known as the Charites, their charge to prepare Psyche's banquet (who had been delivered to Cupid by Zephyus, god of the gentle springtime wind); a delectable repast ("un bel convito"), to be served by the Nymphs on gold plate accompanied by the chorus of the Muses. Apuleius does not provide the literary source, for he imagined that Psyche was simply greeted be some beautiful, though unseen maidens, who accompanied the girl to her room in Cupid's palace. It was rather Niccolò Correggio's derivative *Fabula Psiches et Cupidinis* of 1491 that provided the reference to the Graces (Cavicchioli 2002, pp. 74–75). The mythological personages are artfully aloof, although aroused by Amor's command the Graces, floating on clouds, seem eager take up their task. The prominence afforded this scene in the loggia, given that it comes not from Apuleius, suggests, as in Sellaio's *cassone* panel, a deeper symbolic intention and same symbolic function. Peruzzi's astrological vault in the adjacent hall (considering astrology's relation to alchemy), I posit hints at a meaning of the Three Graces that approaches the astrological significance given them by Ficino in *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

Ficino puts the triad goddesses in an astrological context in in this work, when advising the magus to "capture" the beneficial powers of those heavenly spheres that he calls the "Three Graces:" namely, Sol (Apollo), Venus and Jupiter. Consequently, when discussing medicinal compounds, Ficino wants there to be an admixture of things generously infused with the salubrious and joyful influences of Venus, Sol and Jupiter; precisely the Three Graces. Ficino writes: "The astrologers hope to obtain favors from these Three Graces, through the planets of their same nature and so they use them to this end" (Ficino 1561, *Opera Omnia*, 566, *De vita* lib. III, 5).[48] Ficino even remarks that the benefits of the Three Graces Jupiter, Sol and Venus arrive by the mediation of Mercury and Luna, which relates well to the transformative effect that Mercury (Sol) and sulfur (Luna) were said to perform in alchemy. Ficino's astrological meaning for the "Three Graces" makes sense, when we consider Boiardo's and Viti's allegorical reading of the Psyche tale previously discussed in reference to the former's "tarot deck." Miziołek has shown that the Three Graces in Boairdo's "tarot deck" metaphorically relate to the Hermetic soul ascent (Miziołek 2000, 136). The Three Graces thus rehearse a Hermetic ideal regarding Psyche's perfection in preparation for her celestial journey. The gifts she receives from the Three Graces are, as I believe likewise in Sellaio's Abegg-Sitfitung *cassone* panel, decisive to her sacred preparation for ascending through the cosmos into mystical union with the higher spirit, Cupid, to obtain perfection. Allegorically this coincides well with alchemy and its metaphysical *opus* of birthing a heavenly soul in the alchemical vessel in producing the Philosopher's Stone.

22. Conclusions

The Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo (1437–1502), who doubtless Chigi had met in Rome at the court of Pope Alexander VI Borgia (r. 1492–1503), in his undated vernacular treatise on alchemy entitled, *Opera in alchymia, chiamata arte minore o vera pietra* ("A Work on alchemy, called minor art or true stone"), compares the alchemical processes to human death, decomposition and separation of the bodily parts in the earth, to a breaking down of the metallic elements and their re-composition into a resurrected perfection.[49] This is essentially the allegorical trajectory of what Psyche endured in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* to become a goddess. Annius wrote:

> "...as Albertus Magnus says..., along with all the ancient *physici*, one cannot transmute metals if they are not dissolved in their *prima materia*. And so we have

> declared in our Great Work that from this primary matter all metals are given birth, as well as quicksilver and sulfur. . .in the veins of the earth. . .That's because, as the philosopher says, in physics each thing composed of more parts can be dissolved and returned to its parts; just as we are composed of four elements, when we die our body becomes divided and remains under the earth, the water and humidity go away, the air returns to its place and likewise the fire. Given that, therefore, metal is composed of sulfuric and mercurial water, we can make it return into its primary matter. This water is its true mercury and natural sulfur, which is called the *materia prima* of metals. Now given that grain is dry, it cannot generate other grain if it does not first die in the earth. So it is with metal, which cannot generate another metal if first it does not die through calcination and becomes cold and saturated through dissolution [in mercury and sulfur—linked to the dissolving of the metallic material, which leads to its re-composition into a higher synthesis— embodied in the alchemical motto *solve et coagula*]" (Annius of Viterbo n.d., *Opera in alchymia*, 152–53).[50]

Psyche has by dint of her complete love for Celestial Love (personified by Cupid), which led her even to descend into the impenetrable darkness of the netherworld, like Orpheus, like Christ's harrowing of hell; been granted passage through the stellar spheres to reach the empyrean of the Cosmos. George Ripley put the quest for the Philosopher's Stone in similar terms: "So you have to go through the light of darkness," as Psyche did, "if you want to enter the light of Paradise in Purity" as Psyche did (De Jong [1969] 2014, pp. 86–87). Psyche's "passion, death and resurrection" then, like Christ's, is here in the loggia made analogous to the whole process from which the Philosopher's Stone shall arise.[51] As mentioned above, such access to eternity seems to have been conceded Psyche in the pendentive showing Cupid and Jupiter sealing their sacred covenant with a kiss, providing an apt *raison d'etre* for the episode (Figure 4). The salamander in the furnace motif from Avicenna's *Treatise on Alchemy* is similarly suited to this allegorical purpose, which creates a fusion between alchemy and mythology. In alchemy the salamander is a symbol of the *prima materia*. In the alchemical process it plays the role of helping the substance under transformation to give up its secret fire, which will help the Philosopher's Stone claim its final power. As a symbol of transmutation in the process of becoming the Philosopher's Stone, therefore, the salamander arising from the flames aptly anticipates Psyche's ascent to Olympus in the arms of Mercury and marriage to Cupid, which plausibly enacts the chemical wedding.

From 1487 onward, at just twenty-one years old, Chigi claimed for himself the title *Mercator senensis Romanam curiam sequens* ("Sienese merchant following the Roman Curia"). He surrounded himself with erudite humanists and literati within the banker's social sphere like the previously mentioned Blosio Palladio (Rowland 1998, p. 72). Another such erudite was Chigi's own Maecenas and chamberlain, Cornelio Benigno of Viterbo, who may have been the scholar behind the mythological fresco program at Villa Farnesina (Gigante 1966; Rowland 1998, pp. 100–1, 188, 220–21). Benigno certainly would have been acquainted with the writings of fellow Viterbese intellectuals like Annius of Viterbo and his great friend, the Augustinan prelate, Egidio da Viterbo (1469–1532). The writings of Annius and Egidio are riddled with Neo-Platonic and Hermetic resonances, on varied subjects including alchemy and astrology.[52] There thus may be a connection between the "hidden sense" of the mythological imagery at Villa Farnesina, as indicated by Blosio Palladio, in the domains of alchemy and astrology through the interaction among such humanists and literati.

On a closing note, we have the interesting case of the alchemical emblem book called *Atalanta Fugiens* (published 1617), by the German alchemist and medic of Rudolph II Haps-

burg of Prague, Michael Maier (1556–1622) (De Jong [1969] 2014). Maier's greatest work on alchemy is accompanied by fifty beautiful incisions by Matthäus Merian (1593–1650). Emblem XXIX illustrates the salamander in the fire as a symbol for the perfected Stone with the motto: *Ut Salamandra vivit igne Sic lapis* ("Just as the Salamander lives in the fire, so too the stone") (De Jong [1969] 2014, p. 414 for the image) (Figure 29). Doubtless the star-spangled stripe on the salamander's back indicates the cosmic life that has united with the perfected metallic soul in forging the blessed Stone. Maier was not the inventor of this tradition, as De Jong has shown, but drew upon medieval and Renaissance texts to elucidate his theories (De Jong [1969] 2014). Well then, a century earlier, Raphael for Chigi already depicted this reptilian creature in the alchemical furnace on the spandrel of the *Loggia di Psiche* at Villa Farnesina here discussed.



Figure 29. Matthäus Merian, Emblem XXIX, Salamander in Fire, engraving, in *Atalanta Fugiens* by Michael Maier, published in 1617.

The purpose of this essay was to provide alchemical starting points for a more comprehensive analysis of the *Loggia di Psiche*. The presence of the salamander in the fire fulfills such an alchemical starting point, while justifying a reassessment of the entire loggia's imagery in symbolic relation to alchemy. The salamander in the fire thus indicates a path for further study of the iconography in the *Loggia di Psiche*, and Chigi's art patronage in general, to see if other texts might provide clues that lead to additional revelations related to alchemy.

Supplementum: Cupid

In the very first spandrel, which precedes those of the Erotes flying off with the trophies of the three gods of the alchemical triad, we find an allusion to Cupid (Eros), because the *amorino* is dashing away with the child love god's bow and quiver about to prick his hand on a love-inducing, golden tipped arrow. (Figure 30) The image reminds us of Cupid's unintentional jabbing himself in Apuleius with one of his darts, which caused him to fall in love with Psyche rather than punishing her as Venus commanded. It is appropriately placed at the beginning of the depicted narrative, right before the first pendentive in which Venus gestures towards an unseen Psyche while giving Cupid his charge. The Erote in the act of being about to prick his finger with one of Cupid's arrows is further an apropos commencement to the fresco cycle, because it reminds us the roles Eros/Cupid play in both Neoplatonic philosophy and the Hermetic alchemical tradition.



Figure 30. Raphael's assistants, Erote with Cupid's Bow and Quiver.

In the fable Cupid is the means by which Psyche is reborn and saved. Hence, during the Renaissance the figure of the love god was frequently interpreted in a Platonic sense: in the *Symposium* (202c), for example, Socrates defines Eros as a daemon, one of those angelic beings that act as an intermediary between the realm of God and that of humanity. During the ensuing centuries, then, the passage of Plato concerning Eros encouraged scholars to elaborate a theory of demonology, which Apuleius had expounded and systematized in the brief work called *De deo Socratis*: "There exist some intermediary divine powers that dwell between the highest aether and the vile baseness of Earth, which communicate our desires and our merits to the gods. They were given the name "daemons" by the Greeks

and they are the go-betweens for men and the inhabitants of the heavens, in relating the prayers from down below to receive the gifts from up above. . .” (Apuleius 2017, *De deo Socratis*, VI, 133).[53]

Here we find the same interconnection between above and below and vice versa. Ficino drew upon this in his commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* (“On Love”), *Commentarium in Convivium Platonis de Amore, Anno 1469* (subsequently published in the Italian vernacular as, *El Libro Dell’ Amore*), which describes Amor in a Christian light as an intermediary being between God and humans, the force that pushes the soul towards the absolute and God (Ficino 1987, *El Libro Dell’ Amore* 4.1,2). In this Neoplatonic theory of love, as in part disseminated by the above-mentioned sources, Love is considered the maximum spiritual force that unifies God to the world and the world to God, which has the capacity to elevate and ennoble the human soul to the universal Creator. This is also aptly allegorized in the Cupid and Psyche tale. Ficino thus exalted Love in *De Amore* 1.4 for stirring the mind/soul toward the contemplation of the Godhead and a desire for true beauty, which is God.

Raphael’s image in the pendentive of winged Cupid sealing his sacred covenant with Jupiter by a kiss, which permitted Psyche to be raised to the heavens and become a goddess, now takes on a deeper significance related to a sacred mystery (Figure 5). This is Neoplatonically bound to the ability of Eros *qua* Ficino to again elevate and ennoble the soul to God. In this pendentive, however, Raphael depicts Cupid with Hermetic singularity, endowing him as he does with the characteristic locks drawn up vertically above the forehead like a flame or pinecone of the Ptolemaic Hellenistic Alexandrian deity of silence and sacred mysteries, a fusion between Cupid and Hermes, Harpocrates. Cupid thus rendered conveys well his role as an intermediary daemon, who prepares us for the “Hermetic soul ascent” of the subsequent Mercurius/Hermes and Psyche pendentive (Figure 6).

Moreover, this Hermetic Cupid here may have an alchemical significance for the attentive viewer, as suggested by his rainbow wings with eyes (as in the Council of the Gods of Figure 17) that remind us of the colors of the peacock’s tail between the black and white stages of alchemy during the process known as ablution. During this phase, as Abraham describes, when “the cleansing showers of mercurial water descend from the top of the alembic to purify the blackened body below, a rainbow appears to show that the testing time of the *nigredo* is past and the perfect white stage, the *albedo*, is in sight. When the *albedo* or white stone is reached the multi-colours of the rainbow are integrated into a single white colour, a sign that a state of pure stillness and receptivity of the soul has been obtained” (Abraham 1998, p. 163).

There is allegorically a clear affinity with these alchemical processes and Raphael’s rainbow-winged Cupid of this pendentive that heralds the salamander in the fire (emergent Philosopher’s Stone) of the adjoining spandrel and the subsequent Mercury and Psyche pendentive (who, “like the cleansing showers of mercurial water,” descended from above to raise Psyche up high), with its hovering white peacock no less (like the *albedo* stone). Furthermore, Psyche’s relationship with Cupid in the *fabula* of *Metamorphoses/Golden Ass*, as evidenced in these loggia episodes, be it chemically or spiritually, relates metaphorically very well to the notion of the alchemical union of opposites or “animosity” between Aristotelian hot and cold, moist and dry, which can only be bridged or converted into “love” (Cupid) through an intermediary that would be Mercury (like Mercury elevating Psyche to Olympus). Now we arrive at the soul’s perfection (visually anticipated by the salamander in the furnace spandrel) and union with its higher genius in the chemical wedding (like the marriage of Cupid and Psyche).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Data for this article was accumulated at the following library archives: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, Rome; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma; American Academy of Rome; Casa Buonarroti Biblioteca, Florence; Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Problematical from the beginning in 1964, Frances Yates identified the Hermetic texts of *Asclepius* and the *Corpus Hermeticum* as central sources for the magical and astrological thought of Marsilio Ficino, thus bringing the occult sciences into modern academic discussion (Yates 1964). However, Yates espoused the exaggerated idea that the recovery of an abandoned, though highly significant, wisdom tradition, with the 1471 publication of the Latin *Corpus Hermeticum*, greatly impacted the scientific revolution. She ambitiously argued that strong reverberations of sixteenth-century Hermetic philosophy (through the likes of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Giordano Bruno) gave rise to experimental methodologies that, according to her, forged the path for an emergent modern science (Hanegraaff 2012). Notable studies of the 1980s by Brian Copenhaver, however, rejected Yate's thesis (Copenhaver 1984, 1986, 1988). The scholar denied, for example, that Hermetic philosophy significantly impacted upon Ficino's occult interests in magic or that he was a "Hermetic philosopher" at all. Copenhaver rather argued that other sources like the scholastic philosophers and late antique Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, Porphyrius, Iamblicus and Proclus were determinant in the formation of the Renaissance magus (Copenhaver 1984, pp. 523–54; 1986, pp. 351–69; 1988, pp. 79–110). Scholars of Western Esotericism and historians of alchemy have since generally agreed with him.

2 A letter written to Michelangelo by Leonardo Sellaio dated 1 January 1519, confirms that in the last days of 1518, the scaffolding was removed and the vault revealed (Golzio 1936, p. 65).

3 The later title *Golden Ass* was coined by St. Augustine, first found in *De civ. Dei* 18.18 (Winkler 1985). Winkler (1985, pp. 292–321) believes in the Apuleian authenticity of the title *Asinus Aureus*, the original from of which was double: *Asinus aureus*, περὶ μεταμορφώσεων (*The Golden Ass, Concerning Metamorphoses*).

4 "Lucium Apuleium Platonicum, in quo uno summae eruditioni praecipua linguae copia et gratia coniuncta est." While formally addressed to Paul II, it is clear that Bussi had someone else in mind: "Bessarion of the Holy Roman Church." Bussi's preface to the first edition of Apuleius' works begins with, "Cardinal Bishop of Sabina and Patriarch of Constantinople, resoundingly acclaimed throughout the lands by the venerated name of Nicea." (Feld 1985, p. 23).

5 For the Iconography of Sebastiano del Piombo's lunettes (Rijser 2012, pp. 349–55; Barbieri 2015b, pp. 125–52; 2023, pp. 55–85).

6 *Theodulfi Carmina*, verses 19–20: "…Quanquam sint frivola multa, Plurima sub falso tegmine vera latent…" (Seznec [1953] 1995, p. 91).

7 Ercole de' Roberti was court painter from 1486, providing the Belriguardo cycle with its *terminus post quem*. (Gundersheimer 1972, pp. 10–12).

8 "In le periete si vede con moralità singular, sotto poetica velamento hystoriata con felicissima pictura, Psyche…" (Gundersheimer 1972, c. 49v)

9 The translation commissioned to Gianjacopo Bartoloto da Parma has been located in the Biblioteca Marciana (ms. Marc. Lat. Xiv, 123–4662-) (Kristeller 1965, p. 265). The Latin translation of the *Tabula Cebetis* was published at Bologna in 1497 and edited by Filippo Beroaldo (Schleier 1973).

10 "…havendo [il duca] al presente delectatione de la depinctura…Et havendo gia facto depingere la Psyche, che sotto velamento significa l'anima, e la perturbatione che drieto il vanno restava trovare qualche altra inventione, che depingendola con suttile, e secreto mysterio representasse l'humana vita."

11 "Pazienza Psiche ebbe ne i casi soi/E però fu soccorsa ne li affani/E facta Dea nel fin, ch' è exempio ad noi."

12 "Questa è l'anima nostra, che cum grandissime fatiche da le brutture del mondo levandose, piglia l'ale, da Jove per grazia concesseli, pogiando col divino adiuto insino al Cielo, dove, per merito de le sue fatighe, la felice vita prendendo, diventa Dea." On Viti (Renier 1894, pp. 229–59; Dummett 1973, pp. 1–11).

13 The translation is based on Kaske and Clark in Ficino (1998, pp. 256–57), with modifications for precision: "Sed quaeres interea, 'si elementa atque animantes generant aliquid sibi simile suo quodam spiritu, cur lapides et metalla non generant, quae inter elementa et animantes media sunt?' Quia videlicet spiritus in eis crassori materia cohibetur. Qui si quando rite secernatur secretusque conservetur, tanquam seminaria virtus poterit sibi simile generare, si modo materiae cuidam adhibeatur generis eiusdem. Qualem spiritum physici diligentes sublimatione quadam ad ignem ex auro secernentes, cuiuis metallorum adhibebunt aurumque efficient. Talem utque spiritum ex auro vel ex alio rite tractum atque servatum, elixir Arabes astrologi nominant."

14 Aristotle (*Meterologia*) provided the basis of the theory of the *prima materia* and the concept of a conversion of the elements through rotation (*rotatio*) (Roob [1997] 2018, p. 30 there is also an English edition of this book); (Abraham 1998, pp. 137–39 on

"opus circulatorium" and 186–187 on "solve et coagula"). See also (Pereira 2001, chp. 5 entitled *Cosmologia alchemiche*, pp. 79–93; De Jong [1969] 2014, pp. 51–53).

15 See also (Lippincott 1990, pp. 185–96).

16 Hygenius, but also Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, were the literary sources for the mythologized representations of the extra-zodiacal constellations (Lippincott 1990, pp. 185–96).

17 Translated from Latin into Italian by Pereira, which I put into English. The anonymous letter of 1475 is entitled, *Conversatio philosophorum*, Venice, Biblioteca Nationale Marciana, ms. Lat. VI. 215 (3599) f. 155r.

18 The seventh-century Byzantine alchemist Stephanos first explained how the demiurge placed each planet and its sphere with a corresponding metal. Regarding the importance of astral influences in the *opus*, the planet Mercury plays a fundamental role, which was associated with the four elements of earth, air, water and fire themselves (Pereira 2001, p. 36).

19 As we see in Vat. Lat. 2193 of the Vatican Library, fol. 4r–9r Apuleius. *Opere spurie e dubbie*: *Asclepius*.

20 For Apuleius, so says the fourth century Bishop of Carthage Quadvultdeus, was the Latin translator of the Greek hermetic text *Asclepius*. Ficino restated this: *Ille Asclepius. . .illum Apuleius Platonicus Latinum fecit*" ("The *Asclepius*. . .the Platonist Apuleius put in Latin").

21 *Tabula Smeragdina* in *Theatrum Chemicum* 1622, I. 362: "*Verum est sine mendacio, certum, et verissimum. Quod est inferius, est sicut id quod est superius. Et quod est superius, est sicut id quod est inferius. . .*" (*Theatrum Chemicum: PraecipuosSelectorum Auctorum Tractatus De Chimiae Et Lapis Philsophoci Antiquitate* 1622).

22 "Idem quoque philosophus naturalium rerum astrorumque peritus, quem proprie Magum appellare solemus, certis quibusdam illecebris coelestia terrenis opportunequidem nec aliter inserens. . .Subicit Magus terrena coelestibus, immo inferiora passim superioribus. . .His ferme exemplis ipse Plotinus utitur, ubi Mercuriam imitatus ait. . ."

23 "Quem sicut et quoduis animal multoque efficacius animatum esse, non solum Platonicae rationes, sed etiam astrologorum Arabum testimonia comprobant. Ubi etiam probant es applicatione quadam spiriyus nostri ad spiriyum mundi per artem physicam affectumque facta, traiici ad animam corpusque nostrum bona coelestia. Hincquidem per spiritum nostrum in nobis medium et tunc a mundi spiritu roboratum, inde vero per radios stellarum feliciter agentes in spiritum nostrum, et radiis natura similem et tunc se ipsum coelestibus coaptantem."

24 The fourteenth-century manuscript upon which Marsilio Ficino based his Latin translation of the Hermetic corpus, published at Triviso in 1471, is now called MS A and owned by the Biblioteca Laurenziana (*Laurentinus Plut*. 71, 33).

25 Ficino: "Hic ruinam praevidit priscae religionis, hic ortum novae fidei, hic adventum Christ, hic futurum iudicium, resurrectionem hominum, renovationem saeculi, beatorum gloriam, supplicia peccatorum."

26 *Annotamenta Ioannis Baptiste Pii Bononiensis*, 1505., GII: "Idem autor libro quinto multa ex ritu aegyptorum explicaturus: qua ad tartara translata sunt."

27 E. A. Waite (Bonus [1894] 1974) provides an English translation of Bonus's work.

28 Cicero, *De nat. deo*., II, 24: "Physica ratio non inelegans inclusa est in impias fabulas."

29 The chymist and physician Pierre Borel (1620–1689) in his *Bibliotheca Chimica* (Paris, 1654), 94 mentions a *De Aurei Velleris Mysterio*, supposedly penned by Marsilio Ficino (Borel 1654).

30 That Ficino had acquired the reputation of an alchemist is demonstrated by Philipp Ulstad's *Coelum Philosophorum, seu de Secretis Naturae Liber* (Paris, 1526), which refers to *De vita coelitus comperanda* (one of the earliest alchemical writers to do so), asserting that Marsilio provides the proper method for obtaining potable gold by making the quintessence of gold pass into ordinary water rather than into *aqua fortis* (nitric acid). He also refers to *De vita longa*, 10, as well as chapter 10 in *De vita sana*, on "How to Avoid Black Bile," where Ficino recommends infusing gold and silver drinks and soup and eating out of a gold vessel, so that the food is impregnated with the beneficial qualities of these superior metals. Philippus Ulstadius, *Coelum Philosophorum, seu de Secretis Naturae Liber* (Paris, 1526), sig. XL recto, Ficino *De vita coelitus comparanda*, 1.10, 30–33 (Ulstadius 1526).

31 Chigi's famous venture in acquiring the lucrative Tolfa alum contract was defined by the Camera Apostolica as *Appalatum Alluminum Sanctae Cruciatae*, which eventually gained him a virtual monopoly on the procuring and selling of this important chemical agent used for fixing dies to cloth in the fabric industry.

32 Rhazes was the Latinate version of Al-Razi, who, from the ninth century and beginning of the tenth, was a great figure of Arabic alchemy and medicine, considered a famous physician in Islam and Christendom during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

33 Elia da Cortona was chosen by Saint Francis of Assisi during Pentecost in 1221 as his administrative successor and general vicar of the order, then became a papal ambassador to Emperor Frederick II (Frate Elia 2021).

34 For a history of the alum market from the Renaissance to the industrial age (Delumneau 1990; Franceschi et al. 2007).

35 "Christe. Hagie lapis benedictae artis, qui pro mundi salute inspirasti luman scientiae ad extirpandum Turcam. Eleyson. Kyrie."

36 (Kiss et al. 2006, p. 159), versus 170–177: "Sumpsimus hunc in nostrae salutis ac valetudinis auxilium et agentes gratis tuae maiestati rogamus ut proficiat nobis ad salutem corporis et animae sitque. Turcam extripatio per D. [Dominum] N. [Nostrum] J. [Jesum] C. [Christum] (Kiss et al. 2006). Amen, etc. Ite missa est. Alleluia."

37 The manuscript is Harley MS 4081 of the British Library, London.

[38] For Chigi and selling Tolfa alum at the strategic market of Lyon (Rowland 2001, pp. 76–82; Barbieri 2023, p. 58).

[39] "In rebus his quae ad theologiam pertinent, sex olim summi theologi consenserunt, quorum primus fuisse traditur Zoroastre, Magorum caput, secundus Mercurius Trismegistus, princes Sacerdotum Aegyptiorum. Mercurio successit Orpheus. Orphei sacris initiatus fuit Aglaophemus. Aglaophemo successit in theologia Pythagoras, Pythagoras Plato, qui universam eorum sapientiam suis letteris comprehendit, auxit, illustravit. Quoniam vero ii omnes sacra divinorum mysteria, ne prophanis communia fierent, poeticus umbraculis obtegebant, factum est ut successors eorum alii aliter theologiam interpretarentur" ("In these matters, pertaining to theology, six theologians, once supreme, were in mutual accord. The first was said to have been Zoroaster, the chief of the Magi, and the second was Mercurius Trismegistus, the prince of the Egyptian priests. Succeeding him was Orpheus and then Aglaophamus was initiated into the [mysteries] of Orpheus. In theology Pythagoras came after Aglaophamus; and after Pythagoras came Plato who embraced the universal wisdom of all of them and enhanced and illuminated it in his writings. Now given that they all concealed the sacred mysteries of divine things in poetic veils, so as not to make them get mixed up in profane matters, it just so happened that various of their successors had poorly interpreted that theology otherwise."

[40] According to a Medici inventory of 1488/9 *Primavera* once hung, along with Botticelli's *Minerva and the Centaur*, in the inner chamber of the house of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici on the Via Larga of Florence (Shearman 1975, pp. 12–27). Today both paintings are in the Uffizi Gallery.

[41] On *Primavera* there is the seminal work of Dempsey (1992). See also Reale (2001).

[42] Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagini delli Dei de gl' Antichi* ("Images of the Gods of the Ancients") published in 1556, which, however, resulted from a compilation of source material that stretched back to Boccaccio, describes lunar Diana as horned: "...al simulacro di quella, che era di vaga ninfa, come ho detto, mettevano due piccolo cornette in capo" (...on the statues of that [goddess], who, as I said, was a charming nymph, they placed two little horns on the head." This was so, Cartari explains, because Diana's temple on the Aventine Hill in ancient Rome had ox horns affixed to it: "...perchè questo animale si confa assai a Diana, mentre che per lei intendiamo la Luna..." ("...since this animal is rather adapt to Diana, for whom we mean the Moon...") (Cartari 2004, pp. 57–58).

[43] Be it Apollo or Orpheus, the magical musical interpretation of the figure does not change.

[44] These winged divine children have always been interpreted as a reference to that famous Virgilian poetic theme of *Omnia amor vincit* ("love conquers all"). The source for these scenes, however, was not Apuleius, but Niccolò da Correggio's derivative work entitled *Fabula Psiches et Cupidinis* ("Psyche and Cupid Fable"), dedicated to Isabella d'Este, which testifies to an erudite humanist's involvement in the narrative program. The charming work describes what Cupid had taken from the other gods he defeated, which were kept in the *pregion de inamorati dei* ("prison of the gods in love"); hence, Amor shows the poet Jupiter's lightning, Mars' shield, Mercury's caduceus and so forth (Cavicchioli 2002, p. 74). It is interesting that Renaissance alchemists always stressed the need to be guided by divine Love in the alchemical opus.

[45] Latin text in *Artis auriferae* 1572, I, 454, quoted and trans. by De Jong: "Philosophi hunc lapidem nostrum vocaverunt Salamandram, quia sicut Salamandra solo igne nutritur et vivit, id est, perficitur, ita et noster lapis."

[46] This is how Mercury is described in *Tractus Vere Aureus de Lapidis Physici Secreto* or *Golden Treatise* in cap. 7 (*Theat. Chem*. 1659, IV, 608): "Ex quo colligitur, hunc eundum Mercurium esse principium, medium at finem operis."

[47] The frontispiece of Michael Maier's alchemy emblem book, *Atalanta Fugiens* (published in 1618) (Maier 1618), shows Hercules in his labor of fetching apples from the Hesperides Garden. In this work the court Medic of Rudolf II of Prague goes on to explain how the pagan myths from Ovid's Metamorphoses secretly explain the whole work of alchemy. According to Maier God encoded nature with *arcana*, chemical secrets, which the myths allegorize and that the alchemists, noble spirits educated in the liberal arts capable of grasping higher realities, not charlatans and false chemistry deceivers, must discover through researching things divine (Pereira 2001, p. 234). The work is later, but Maier was not the inventor of a tradition, who relied upon late medieval and Renaissance alchemical theories to compose his work as De Jong ([1969] 2014) has admirably shown.

[48] "Et haec ipsa Venus est amicissima Iovi, sicut et Soli Iuppiter, quasi Gratiae tres inter se concordes atque coniunctae. Ab his quidem tribus coeli Gratiis et a stellis eiusdem generis astrologi gratias et sèerant et diligenter exquirunt..."

[49] The undated work is found at Florence, Casa Buonarroti, Archivio Buonarroti, 125 Misc., 137; 141–206 and has the following title: *Opera del R.do Padre Maestro Giovanni Nano da Viterbo de l'ordine di S. Domenico in Alchymia, chiamata arte minore o vero pietra* (Kristeller 1965, p. 508; Mattiangeli 1981, pp. 271–72; Fubini 2012).

[50] "...come dice Alberto Magno...e ancora tutti i physici antiqui non si possono trasmutare i melalli se non si disolvono nella sua prima materia et noy abbiamo detto nella maggior opera nostra la materia prima donde sono procreati tutti li mettali...nelle vene della terra...et perche secondo il philosopho nella phisica ogni cosa composta di piu cose li puoy dissolvere et ritornare nelle sue parte come noi siamo composti di quatro elementi quando moriamo il corpo nostro si dividesse et rimanesse terra di sotto l'acqua ne va et humidita, l'aere ritorna nel luogo suo et cosi il fuoco. Essendo adunque il metallo composto di acqua sulphurea et mercuriale noy lo possiamo fare ritornare nella sua prima materia et questa acqua è il suo vero mercurio et solfo naturale la quale si chiama materia prima dei metalli et come il grano da poy che è secco non puo generare altro grano se prima non si mortifica

sotto la terra et poy infradicia dall'acqua et al.lora produce il suo frutto, così il metallo non puo generare altro metallo se prima non si mortifica per calcinatione et infrigida et inpregnia per dissoluzione. . ."

[51] For Christian alchemists making the passion, death and resurrection analogous to the processes of making the philosopher's stone (Szulakowska 2017, ch. 1).

[52] For example, Egidio wrote a dialogue that apes the *Corpus Hermeticum*, entitled *Praesul divum nuntium vidit atque arcana divinorum sicititatur* [sic]. . . ("A Bishop sees the divine messenger and solicits knowledge about the secrets of divine matters") (Monfasani 1991, p. 313). Annius, as we have seen wrote a treatise on alchemy, while he also wrote about and practiced astrology. One such text was penned in 1471 called, *De imperio Turchorum secundum astronomos* ("On the Turkish Empire According to the Astronomers"), another was *De futuris Christianorum triumphis in Turcos et Sarracenos* omnes ("On the Future of Triumphant Christendom over All Turks and Saracens") (Mattiangeli 1981, p. 270, n. 52).

[53] "Ceterum sunt quedam diviniae mediae postestates interim summum aethera et infimas terras in isto intersitae aeris spatio, per quas et desideria nostra et merita ad deos commeant: hos Graeci nomine δαίμονας (daemonas) nuncupant, inter homines coelicolasque vectores, hinc presume inde donorum, qui ultro citro portant. . .".

References

Aakhus, Patricia. 2008. Astral Magic in the Renaissance: Gems, Poetry, and Patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici. In *Magic Ritual and Witchcraft*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, vol. 3, n. 2, pp. 185–206.

Abraham, Lyndy. 1998. *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anawati, Georges Chehata. 1971. Avicenne et l'alchimie. In *Oriente e Occidente nel Medioevo: Filosofia e Scienze. Convegno Internazionale 9–15 aprile 1969 Roma, Atti dei Convegni*. Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Fondazione Alessandro Volta 13. Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, pp. 327–39.

Annius of Viterbo. n.d. *Opera del Reverndo padre maestro Giovanni Nano da Viterbo dell'ordine dominicano in Alchymia chiamata arte minore o vero in pietra*. Florence: Firenze, Casa Buonarroti, Archivio Laurenziana, ms 125. pp. 141–206.

Apuleius. 1989. *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass), Volume II: Books 7–11*. Edited and Translated by J. Arthur Hansen. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Apuleius. 1996. *Metamorphoses (The Golden Ass), Volume I: Books 1–6*. Edited and Translated by J. Arthur Hansen. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Apuleius. 2017. *Apologia, Florida, De Deo Socrates*. Edited and Translated by Christopher P. Jones. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Asclepius: The Perfect Discourse of Hermes Trismegistus. 2007. Salaman, Clement, ed. and trans. London: Bloomsbury.

Barbieri, Costanza. 2015a. Gli affreschi di Sebastiano del Piombo nella Loggia della Galatea (Vasari e la "natura difforme" di Sebastiano). In *Studiolo, 12, Dossier Italie Revée Italie Fantasmée*. Roma: Accademia di Francia a Roma—Villa Medici, pp. 184–213.

Barbieri, Costanza. 2015b. Tam foelix pictor vate, ut picture Poeta. *Artibus et Hitoriae* 72: 125–52.

Barbieri, Costanza. 2023. *Gli Astri Benigni di Agostono Chigi: Peruzzi, Sebastiano e Raffaello nella Loggia della Galatea*. Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider.

Boiardo, di Matteo Maria. 1944. Tarocchi. In *Tutte le Opere*. Edited by A. Zottoli. Milan: Mondatori, Milan: Ricardo Ricardini Editore, vol. 2.

Boiardo, di Matteo Maria. 1993. *Tarocchi*. Roma: A cura di S. Foà. Salerno Editrice.

Bonus, Petrus. 1974. *The New Pearl of Great Price*. Translated by E. A. Waite. Manhattan: Arno Press. First published 1894.

Borel, Pierre. 1654. *Bibliotheca Chimica*. Paris: Car. du Mesnil et Thom. Jolly.

Brummer, Hans Henrik. 2015. Santo Pan. In *Allusion and Reflections: Greek and Roman Mythology in Renaissance Europe*. Edited by E. Wäghäll Nivre, A. Carlstedt, A. Cullhed, C. Franzén, P. Gillgren, K. Lundström and E. Sellberg. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 27–44.

Bull, Christian H. 2018. *The Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus: The Egyptian Priestly Figure as a Teacher of Hellenized Wisdom. Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*. Leiden: Brill.

Caciorgna, Marilena. 2022. *Siena: The Pavement of the Cathedral*. Livorno: Sillabe.

Califano, Salvatore. 2016. *Storia Dell'alchimia: Misticismo ed Esoterismo All'origine della Chemica Moderna*. Il Edizione Rivista e Ampliata. Florence: Firenze University Press.

Capella, Martianus. 1977. *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, vol. 2: The Marriage of Philosophy and Mercury*. Translated by William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, and E. L. Burge. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cartari, Vincenzo. 2004. *Imagini delli Dei de gl'Antichi*. Milan: Luni Editrice.

Cavicchioli, Sonia. 1995–1998. La Favola di Amore e Psyche fra Quattro e Cinquecento. Iconografia e Tradizione Testuale. Ph.D. thesis, Dipartimento delle arti visivi, Università di Bologna, Bologna, Italy.

Cavicchioli, Sonia. 1999. Il ciclo di Psyche alla Farnesina e le prime traduzioni e proposte di lettura degli affreschi. In *Fontes: Rivista di Filologia, Iconografia e Storia della Tradizione Classica*. Anno II, Numero 3–4. Turin: Agorà Edizione, pp. 79–95.

Cavicchioli, Sonia. 2002. *Le Metamorfosi di Psiche: L'iconografia della Favola di Apuleio*. Venice: Saggi Marsilio.
Chastel, André. 1959. *Art et Humanisme a Florence au Temps de Laurent le Magnifique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (PUF).
Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1881. *De natura deorum libri tres*. Commentary by G. E. Schoemann. Edited by Austin Stickney. Boston: Ginn & Heath.
Colvin, Sydney, ed. 1898. *A Florentine Picture-Chronicle; Being a Series of Ninety-Nine Drawings Representing Scenes and Personages of Ancient History, Sacred and Profane by Maso Finiguerra*. London: B. Quaritch, pp. 1426–64.
Constantine of Pisa. 1990. *The Book of the Secrets of Alchemy*. Introduction, Critical Edition. Translation and Commentary by B. Obrist. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
Conti, Daniele. 2015. Pio, Giovanni Battista. In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. vol. 84, Available online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-battista-pio_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ (accessed on 30 November 2018).
Copenhaver, Brian P. 1984. Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De vita* of Marsilio Ficino. *Renaissance Quarterly* 37: 523–54. [CrossRef]
Copenhaver, Brian P. 1986. Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: 'Ennead' 4.3–5 in Ficino's 'De vita coelitus comparanda'. In *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*. Edited by Gian Carlo Garfagnini. Florence: Olschki, pp. 351–69.
Copenhaver, Brian P. 1988. Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance. In *Hermeticism and the Renaissance. Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*. Edited by Ingrid Merkel and A. G. Debus. London: Folger Shakespeare Library—Associated University Presses, pp. 79–110.
Copenhaver, Brian P., and Charles B. Schmitt. 1992. *Renaissance Philosophy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Crisciani, Chiara. 1973. The conception of Alchemy as Expressed in the 'Pretiosa Margarita Novella' of Petros Bonus of Ferrara. *Ambix* 20: 165–81. [CrossRef]
Crisciani, Chiara. 2002. *Il papa e l'alchemia: Felice V, Gugliemo Fabri e l'elixir*. Rome: Viella.
Crisciani, Chiara. 2016. Alchemia, magia e patronage: Giovanni 'Mercurio da Correggio. In *Società Natura Storia: Studi in Onore di Lorenzo Calabi*. Edited by Andrea Civello. Pisa: Edizione ETS, pp. 63–79.
Cugnoni, Giuseppe. 1878. *Agostino Chigi Il Magnifico*. Rome: Forzahi Soc. Romana di Storia Patria.
Culianu, Ioan Petru. 1983. *Psychanodia I*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
D'Ancona, Mirelia Levi. 1983. *Botticelli's Primavera: A Botanical Interpretation Including Astrology, Alchemy and the Medic*. Florence: Olschki Editore.
Dante. 1980. Chigi, Agostino, Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani. pp. 735–43. Available online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/agostino-chigi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ (accessed on 21 April 2018).
De Jong, Helena Maria Elisabeth. 2014. *Atalanta Fugiens: Sources of the Alchemical Emblems*. Leiden: Brill. First published 1969.
Delumneau, J. 1990. *L'allume di Roma: XV–XIX Secolo*. Roma: Edizione CO.A.C.
Dempsey, Charles. 1992. *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Dummett, M. 1973. Notes on a 15th-century Pack of Cards from Italy. *The Journal of Playing-Card Society* 1: 3.
Ebeling, Florian. 2007. *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Faivre, Antoine. 2006. Hermetic Literature IV: Renaissance—Present. In *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach. Leiden and Boston: Brill, vol. 1.
Feld, M. D. 1985. *The First Roman Printers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Festugière, Jean. 2002. *La Philosophie de l'amour de Marsile Ficin et son Influence sur la Littérature Française au XVIe Siècle*. Paris: Vrin. First published 1922.
Ficino, Marsilio. 1561. *Omnia Opera*. 2 vols. Basel: Henricpetri.
Ficino, Marsilio. 1987. *El libro dell'amore*. Edited by S. Niccoli. Olschki: Florence.
Ficino, Marsilio. 1998. *Three Books on Life*. A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies.
Ficino, Marsilio. 2001. *Platonic Theology*. Edited by James Hankins. Translated by Michael J. B. Allen. 6 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Fletcher, Catherine. 2020. *The Beauty and the Terror: An Alternative History of the Italian Renaissance*. Kindle Edition. Dublin: Vintage, Random House Ireland.
Foà, Simona. 2001. Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio. In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, pp. 784–86.
Forshaw, Peter J. 2011. Ficino and the Chemical Art. In *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*. Edited by S. Clucas, P. J. Forshaw and V. Rees. Leiden: Brill.
Fowden, Garth. 1993. *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Franceschi, F., R. A. Goldthwaite, and R. C. Mueller, eds. 2007. *Il Rinascimento Italiano e l'Europa. Comercio e Cultura Mercantile*. Angelo Colla Editore: Vicenza.

Frate Elia. 2021. *Lumen Luminum Ad Fredericum Imperatorem*. Edited by Paolo Galiano. Rome: Simmetria.

Freedman, Luba. 2011. Mercury à la David in Italian Renaissance Art. *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 3: 135–57.

Frommel, Christoph Luitpold. 2003a. *La Villa Farnesina a Roma. Mirabilia Italia*. Edited by Salvatore Settis. 2 vols. Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini.

Frommel, Christoph Luitpold. 2003b. Loggia di Amore e Psiche. In *La Villa Farnesina a Roma. A cura di Christoph Luitpold Frommel*. Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore.

Fubini, Riccardo. 2012. *Giovanni Nanni.* 2012. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. vol. 77. Available online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-nanni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (accessed on 23 May 2018).

Fùrnari, Gianluca. 2023. L'alchimista rinascimentale tra «natura» e *ars*: Sul terzo libro della *Chrysopoeia* di Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli. In *IPR. Italian Poetry Review*. Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, vol. Xviii, pp. 207–34.

Gallati, Barbara. 1983. An Alchemical Interpretation of the Marriage between Mercury and Venus. In *Botticelli's Primavera: A Botanical Interpretation including Astrology, Alchemy and the Medici*. Edited by M. Levi D'Ancona. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, pp. 99–121.

Garin, Eugenio. 1954. *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi e ricerche*. Bari: Laterza.

Gentile, S., and Carlos Gilly, eds. 1999. *Marsilio Ficino and the Return of Hermes Trismegistus*. Florence: Biblioteca medicea laurenziana Bi bliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Centro Di.

Gigante, Marcello. 1966. "Cornelio Benigno" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. vol. 8. Available online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cornelio-benigno_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ (accessed on 8 May 2018).

Gilbert, Felix. 1980. *The Pope, His Banker, and Venice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gillies, Jean. 2010. *Botticelli's Primavera: The Young Lorenzo's Transformation*. Bloomington: iUniverse.

Gnaccolini, Laura Paola, ed. 2012. *Il Segreto dei Segreti: I Tarocchi di Sola Busca e la Cultura Ermetico-Alchemica tra Marche e Veneto alla fine del Quattorcento*. Milano, Pinoteca di Brera 13 novembre 2012–17 febbraio 2013. Milan: Skira.

Godwin, Joscelyn. 2002. *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Golzio, L. V. 1936. *Raffaello nei Documenti*. Spoleto: S. a. arti grafiche Panetto & Petrelli, Città del Vaticano.

Gundersheimer, Werner L. 1972. *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I D'Este: The De Triumphis Religionis of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti*. Geneva: Librairie Droz.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2007. Pseudo-Lullian Alchemy and the Mercurial Phoenix: Giovanni da Correggio's De Quercu Iulii Pontificis, sive de ladipe philosophica. In *Chymists and Chymistry: Stdies in the History of Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry*. Edited by Lawrence M. Principe. New York: Watson Publishing International LLC, pp. 101–12.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2012. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2018. Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism. In *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*. Edited by Sgarbi. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG. [CrossRef]

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., and Ruud M. Bouthoorn. 2005. *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447–1500): The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 281).

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach, eds. 2006. *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Leiden: Brill, vol. 1.

Hartt, Frederick. 1950. Gonzaga symbols in the Palazzo Del Te. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13: 151–88. [CrossRef]

Hirai, Hiro. 2005. *Le Concept de Semence dans les Théories de la Matière à la Renaissance: De Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi*. Turhout: Brepols.

Hirst, Michael. 1961. The Chigi Chapel in S. Maria della Pace. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 24: 161–85. [CrossRef]

Hope, Charles, and Elizabeth McGrath. 2006. Artists and humanists. In *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*. Edited by Jill Kraye. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huber, Robert P., Jr. 2019. Raphael's Loggia of Cupid and Psyche in the Villa Farnesina: An Analysis of the Hermetic Ideals Related to Alchemy. Ph. D. Thesis, KU Leuven Faculty of Arts, Leuven, Belgium.

Jones, Wilbur Devereux, Fabius Planciades Fulgentius, and Arvel B. Erickson. 1971. *Fulgentius the Mythographer*. Translated by Leslie George Whitbread Athens. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Josten, C. H. 1964. A translation of John Dees' Monas hieroglyphica (Antwerp, 1564), with an Introduction and Annotations. *Ambix: The Journal of the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry* 12: 84–221. [CrossRef]

Kaske, and John R. Clark. 1998. *Three Books on the Life* [*De Vita Libri Tres*] *by Ficino, Marsilio. Medieval & Renaissnce Texts & Studies*. In conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America. Tempe: The Renaissance Society of America.

Kiss, Farkas Gabor, Benedek Lang, and Cosmin Popa-Garjanu. 2006. The Alchemical Mass of Nicolaus Melchior Cibinensis: Text, Identity and Speculations. *Ambix* 53: 143–59. [CrossRef]

Kline, Jonathan. 2011. Botticelli's Return of Persephone: On the Source and Subject of the *Primavera*. *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 42: 665–88. [CrossRef]

Kore Kosmou. 1989. *I Trattati Ermetici, Ermete Trismegisto: Kore Kosmou, Scritti Teologico-Filisofici*. Edited by Tiziana Villani and Carlo Tondelli. Milan: Mimesis, vol. II.

Kristeller, P. O. 1956. Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli: Contributo alla Diffusione delle idee Ermetiche nel Rinascimento. In *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.

Kristeller, P. O. 1965. *Iter Italicum*, vol. II. Leiden: Brill.

Kristeller, P. O. 1987. *Iter Italicum*. Leiden: Brill, vol. I.

Lactantius. 1964. *The Divine Institutes: Books I–VII*. Translated by Mary Francis McDonald. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Levi d'Ancona, Mirella. 1992. *Due Quadri del Botticelli Eseguiti per Nascita in casa Medici*. Florence: Olschki.

Lippincott, Kristen. 1990. Two Astrological Ceilings reconsidered: The Sala di Galatea in Villa Farnesina and the Sala del Mappamondo at Caprarola. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* LIII: 185–96. [CrossRef]

Lumus, David. 2013. The Changing Landscape of the Self (*Bucolicum carmen*). In *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*. Edited by Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg and Janet Levarie Smarr. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 144–72.

Maier, Michael. 1618. *Atalanta Fugiens*. Oppenheimii: Ex typographia Hieronymi Galleri: Sumptibus Joh. Theodori de Bry.

Marek, Michaela J. 1984. Raffaels Loggia di Psyche in der Farnesina. Uberlegungen zu Rikonstruktion un Deutung. *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 26: 257–90. [CrossRef]

Marek, Michaela J. 1986. La 'Loggia di Psiche' nella Farnesina: Per la Ricostruzione ed il Significato. In *Raffaello a Roma*. Roma: atti del Convegno (Roma 1983), pp. 209–16.

Martels, Z. van. 1993. The Chrysopoeia of Ioannes Aurelius Augurellus and the importance of alchemy around 1500. *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 13: 121–30.

Martels, Z. van. 1994. The Allegorical Meaning of Chrysopoeia of Ioannes Aurelius Augurellus. In *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Hafniensis. Proceedings of the Eight International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Copenhagen 12 August to 17 August 1991*. Edited by Rhoda Schnur. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, pp. 979–88.

Mattiangeli, Paola. 1981. Annio da Viterbo ispiratore di cicli pittorici. In *Annio da Viterbo*. Documenti e richerche. Edited by Massimo Pallottino. Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, pp. 255–342.

Miziołek, Jerzy. 2000. Alcune Osservazioni sulla Storia di Amore e Psiche nella Pittura Italiana del Tre e Quattrocento. *Fontes* 5–6: 133–53.

Miziołek, Jerzy. 2001–2002. Botticelli's masterpieces reflected: Jacopo del Sellaio's domestic panels with the fable of Cupid and Psyche. *Center* 22: 128–32.

Miziołek, Jerzy. 2009. Orpheus and Euridice: Three Spalliere Panels by Jacopo del Sellaio. In *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 12, pp. 117–48.

Miziołek, Jerzy. 2019. Jacopo del Sellaio's adaptation of the *Primavera*. In *Botticelli Past and Present*. London: UCL Press, pp. 73–90.

Monfasani, John. 1991. Hermes Trismegistus, Rome and the Myth of Europa: An Unknown Text of Giles of Viterbo. *Viator* XXII: 311–14. [CrossRef]

Morel, P. 1985. Priape à la Renaissance. Les Guirlandes de Giovanni da Udine à la Farnesine. *Revue de l'art* LXIX: 13–28. [CrossRef]

Morel, P. 1990. Mitologia e natura nella pittura di Giovanni da Udine: Priapo alla Farnesina. In *Raffaello e l'Europa*. Roma: Ist. Poligrafico dello Stato, pp. 191–207.

Moureau, Sébastien. 2013. *Elixir Atque Fermentum*. New Investigations About the Link Between Pseudo-Avicenna's Alchemical *De Anima* and Roger Bacon: Alchemical and Medical Doctrines. *Traditio* 68: 277–325. [CrossRef]

Ms. Ashburnam 1166 ca. 1470. *Miscellanea di Alchimia*. Florence: Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.

Nutzmann, H. 1997. Verschlusselt in Details: Hochzeitsbilder fur Lorenzo de' Medici. *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kultutbesitz* XXXIV: 223–35.

Ockenström, Lauri. 2013. Hermetic Roots of Marsilio Ficino's Anthropocentric Thought. *J@RGONIA—ELEKTRONINEN JULKAISU* 11: 37–56. Available online: https://journal.fi/jargonia/article/view/162036 (accessed on 3 December 2025).

O'Malley, John W. 1969. Fulfillment of the Golden Age under Julius II: Text of a Discourse of Giles of Viterbo, 1507. *Traditio* XXV: 296–332. [CrossRef]

Patai, Raphael. 1994. *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pereira, Michela. 2000a. Alchemy and Hermeticism. An Introduction to this Issue. In *Early Science and Medicine. A Journal for the Study of Science, Technology and Medicine in the Pre-Modern Period*. Leiden: Brill, vol. 5, pp. 115–20.

Pereira, Michela. 2000b. Heavens and Earth from the Tabula Smaragdina to the Alchemical Fifth Essence. *Early Science and Medicine. A Journal for the Study of Science, Technology and Medicine in the Pre-Modern Period* 5: 131–44. [CrossRef]

Pereira, Michela. 2001. *Arcana Sapienza: L'alchemia dalle Origini a Jung*. Roma: Carocci editore.

Quinlan-McGrath, Mary. 1984. The Astrological Vault of the Villa Farnesina: Agostino Chigi's Rising Sign. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes* 47: 91–105. [CrossRef]

Quinlan-McGrath, Mary. 1990. Blosius Palladius, Suburbanum Augustini Chisii. Introduction, Latin text and English Translation. *Humanistica Lovaniensia. Journal of Neo-Latin Studies Leuven* 39: 93–156.

Reale, Giovanni. 2001. *Botticelli. La Primavera o le Nozze di Filologia e Mercurio?: Rilettura di carattere filosofico ed ermeneutico del capolavoro di Botticelli con la prima presentazione analitica dei personaggi e de particolari simbolici*. Rimini: Idea Libri.

Renier, R. 1894. Tarocchi di Matteo Maria Boiardo. In *Studi su M. M. Boiardo*. Modena: Zanichelli, pp. 229–59.

Rijser, David. 2012. *Raphael's Poetics: Art and Poetry in High Renaissance Rome*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Roberts, Alison M. 2022. Feminine Alchemy, Egyptian Hermes, and Botticelli's Primavera: The Quest for the Golden Fruit. *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei* XIV: 267–304.

Rohlmann, Michael. 2002. Von allen Seiten gleich nackt: Raffaels Kompositionskunst in der Loggia di Psiche der Villa Farnesina. *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 63: 71–92.

Roob, Alexander. 2018. *Il Museo Ermetico, Alchemia & Mistica*. Cologne: Taschen. First published 1997.

Rowland, Ingrid D. 1998. *The Culture of the High Reniassance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth Century Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rowland, Ingrid D. 2001. *The Correspondence of Agostino Chigi (1466–1529)*. Rowland, Ingrid D. [Publ.]. Vatican City: BAV.

Saxl, Fritz. 1934. *La Fede astrologica di agostino Chigi*. Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia.

Schleier, R. 1973. *Tabula Cebetis: Oder "Spiegel des Menschlichen Lebens, darin Tugent und untugent abgemalet ist"*. Studien zur Rezeption einer antiken Bildbeschreibung im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag.

Schoff, Wilfred H. 1912. *Tamuz, Pan and Christ. The Open Court*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, pp. 512–32.

Scott, Walter. 1924. *Hermetica*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. I.

Seznec, Jean. 1995. *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. First published 1953.

Shearman, John. 1961. Die Loggia der Psyche in der Villa Farnesina und die Probleme der letzen Phase von Raffaels graphischen Stil. *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wein* 24: 59–95.

Shearman, John. 1975. The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici. *Burlington Magazine* 117: 12–27.

Smoller, Laura Ackerman. 2010. Teste Albumasare cum Sibylla: Astrology and the Sibyls in medieval Europe. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 41: 76–89. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Soranzo, Matteo. 2012. *Poesia e Trasformazione Spirituale nel Primo Rinascimento: Lodovico lazzarelli, Giovanni A. Augurelli e Battista Mantovano, Letteratura Italiana e Religione: Atti del Convegno di Studi*. Toronto: Italian Studies, University of Toronto, pp. 87–109.

Soranzo, Matteo. 2019. *Giovanni Aurelio Augurello (1441–1524) and Renaissance Alchemy: A Critical Edition of "Chrysopoeia" and Other Alchemical Poems, with an Introduction, English Translation and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill.

Szulakowska, Urszula. 2017. *The Alchemical Virgin Mary in the Religious and Political Context of the Renaissance*. Cambridge: Scholars Publishing.

Taylor, Andrew W. 2020. Diplomatic Transcription: The Transmission of Photius, Cyril and Theodoret in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Italy. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 27: 403–26. [CrossRef]

Theatrum Chemicum: PraecipuosSelectorum Auctorum Tractatus De Chimiae Et Lapis Philsophoci Antiquitate. 1622. Zeitzerni. Strasbourg: Laarus Zetzner.

Turner, A. R. 1992. *Inventing Leonardo*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Turner, James Grantham. 2017. *Eros Visible: Art, Sexuality and Antiquity in Renaissance Italy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Turner, James Grantham. 2022. *The Villa Farnesina: Palace of Venus in Renaissance Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ulstadius, Philippus. 1526. *Coelum Philosophorum, seu de Secretis Naturae Liber*. Paris.

Varoli-Piazza, Rosalia. 2002. Un esempio di 'concinnitas'. In *Raffaello: La Loggia di Amore e Psiche alla Farnesina*. Edited by Rosalia Varoli-Piazza. Roma and Milano: Silvana Editoriale, pp. 57–69.

Varoli-Piazza, Rosalia. 2005. *Raffaello nella Loggia di Amore e Psiche alla Farnesina: Il Restauro di un Dipinto Murale come Momento di Studio ed. Approfondimento Interdisciplinare. Accademia Raffaello 1*. Roma: Atti e Studi, pp. 7–36.

Vasari, Giorgio. 1906. *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori Scultori ed Architettori*. Edited by Gaetano Milanesi. Florence: Giunti, vol. IV. First published 1879.

Vasoli, Cesare. 1981. Il Mito Dell'Età Dell'Oro. In *Giorgione e l'Umanesimo Veneziano*. Edited by Rodolfo Pallucchini. Florence: Olschki, vol. I.

Vertova, Luisa. 1979. Cupid and Psyche in Renaissance Painting Before Raphael. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XLII: 104–21. [CrossRef]

Voss, Angela, ed. 2006. *Marsilio Ficino*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

Walker, D. P. 1972. *The Ancient Theology*. London: Duckworth.

Wilkinson, Robert J. 2007. *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation: The First Printing of the Syriac New Testament*. Edited by Robert J. Bast. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Willard, Thomas. 2000. The Metamorphoses of Metals: Ovid and the Alchemists. In *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 151–63.

Wind, Edgar. 1958. *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance (Revised and Enlarged Edition): An Exploration of Philosophical and Mystical Sources of Iconography in Renaissance Art*. New York: The Norton Library. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.

Winkler, J. J. 1985. *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, pp. 292–32.

Yates, Frances A. 1964. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. London: Routledge.

Yates, Frances A. 1982. *Lull and Bruno: Collected Essays, Volume 1*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Zanchi, Mauro. 2011. *Filippino Lippi e L'Umanesimo Fiorentino*. Art Dossier. Milan: Giunti.

Zimmerman, Maaike, ed. 2004. Apuleius Madaurensis. In *Metamorphoses*. Book IV 2–35, V and VI 1–24. The tale of Cupid and Psyche. Text, Introduction and Commentary, Gronigen Commentaries on Apuleius. Gronigen: Egbert Forsten.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.