

M. MOLEIRO → THE ART OF PERFECTION

SPLENDOR SOLIS

*“Unique and unrepeatable first editions, strictly limited to 987
numbered and authenticated copies”*



S P L E N D S O R L I S

LIBRARY
HSLIRB

- Shelf mark: British Library, Harley 3469.
- Date: 1582.
- Size: 230 x 330 mm.
- Provenance: Germany.
- 100 pages, 22 full-page miniatures.
- Bound in dark crimson leather with gilt border.
- Full-colour commentary volume.
- «First, unique and unrepeatabe edition strictly limited to 987 copies».

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The *Splendor Solis* codex dated 1582 and housed in the British Library, London, is the most beautiful treatise on alchemy ever made. The imagination and lyricism of its truly marvellous illustrations are awe-inspiring even to those not familiar with this subject. This sumptuously illustrated treatise is attributed to Salomon Trismosin, possibly a pen name of Ulrich Poysel, the master of the legendary Paracelsus. The secrets of kabbalah, astrology and alchemic symbolism are revealed on 22 folios bearing full-page illustrations with a wealth of colour and almost Baroque profusion of detail.

This manuscript features 22 large paintings surrounded by floral or animal motifs belonging to the North-European style of Renaissance miniature. Like the context and the contents of book itself, all the illustrations are impenetrable and difficult to understand. Particularly noteworthy are the now famous Glaskolben or glass flasks depicted in a lavish painting in the centre, surrounded by typical town and country scenes of late medieval Germany beneath a celestial image of a pagan god that seems to endow the image as a whole with unity and meaning.

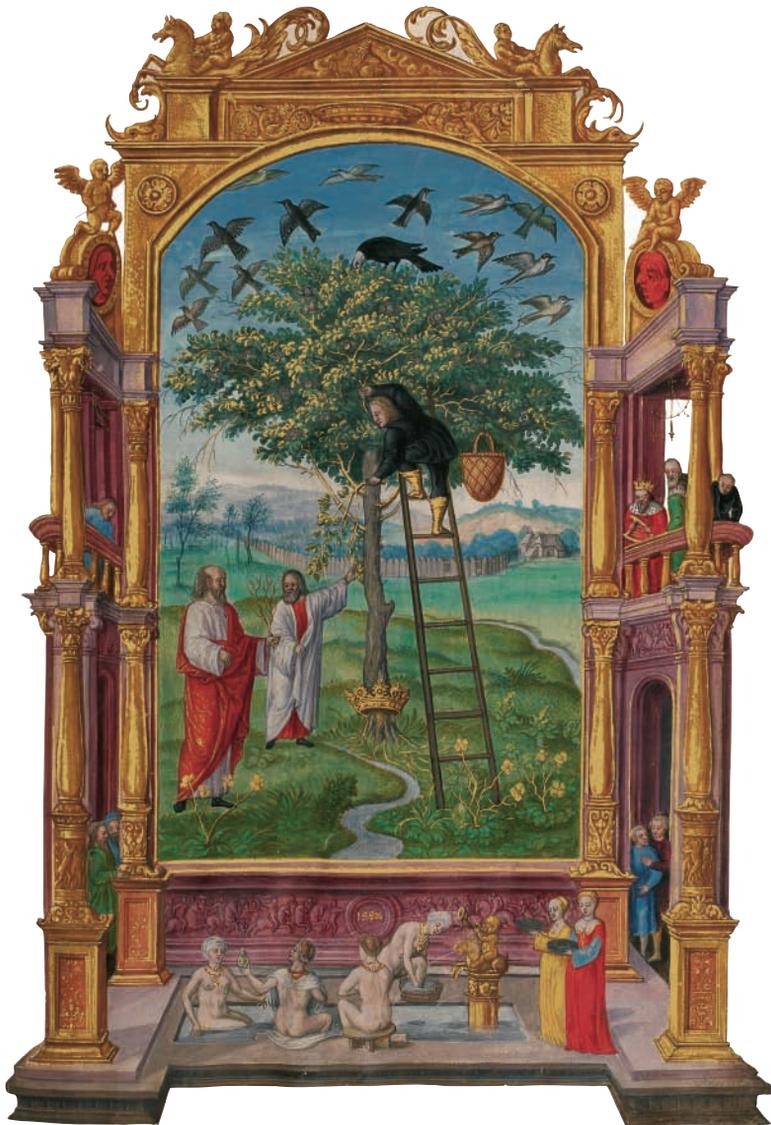
The motifs in each glass flask—allegorical and poetically suggestive images characterised by boundless imagination—represent the splendour of Trismosin's mystical knowledge, gleaned, he says, from «kabbalistic and magical books». Indeed, in a covert and yet precise manner this cryptic and strangely poetic treatise conveys the secrets of the elements in nature, along with their combinations, blends, powers and influences.



The codex has 100 pages written in German in a dainty, German Gothic script. The text is embellished with enormous, lavishly decorated initials that are, in themselves, a delight to behold.

The tale of the codex itself is equally interesting. John Evelyn, the court painter of Charles II of England, saw what is known today as «Harley 3469» in the library at Whitehall Palace on September 2nd 1680. He described it as containing «the proceses for the Great Elixir of philosophers» and that it was embellished with paintings of great beauty. It was subsequently acquired by the German theologian Johann Cyprianus, thanks to whose heirs it entered the private library of that patron of artists, the powerful, aristocratic and eminently bibliophile Harley family. The British Library bought it in 1753 for the now derisory sum of 10,000 pounds. It is now considered to be one of its most valuable treasures. Not for nothing is the *Splendor Solis* the most beautiful and splendid treatise on alchemy ever made.





f.15r

The philosophical tree. Aeneas is given a branch symbolising successful rejuvenation by his son, Silvius.

"Plant this tree in the lapis (...), so that the birds in the sky inhabit it and reproduce on its branches; for wisdom rises from there." (Theatrum Chemicum)

Aeneas, majestically garbed in red, receives a branch from the tree of life from his son Silvius, a branch that will protect him on his way through the putrefaction and purifying flames of hell. Everything suggests he will come through unscathed, for Trismosin has revealed that the crow's head has turned white.



f. 19v

The hermaphrodite rebis with the philosophical egg

The rebis depicted here in the three main colours of the Opus is the “dual body of the art, i.e. the sun and the moon (...), the male and female that beget four children”. These are the four elements the androgen holds in his right hand. In the centre is a mirror that represents the Opus or raw material, in which, it is said, the entire world can be seen.

The egg in the other hand means that from the four elements – the shell, white, membrane and yolk – the quintessence is born: the chick, which represents the lapis.



f.21v

The Saturnal night. A wise man wishing to regain his youth by controlled boiling

"Ovid tells the tale of a wise old man who wanted to be young again. This meant cutting him into pieces and boiling them thoroughly but not too much. The limbs would then come together again and recover their youthful vigour." (S. Trismosin)

The dove is the spirit (the distillate) that rejoins what remains of the body after rotting. "When Saturn is baptised with his own waters, the black raven takes flight." (B. Gutwasser, 1728)



f.26r

The sun reigns in the sign of Leo

The Sun reigns in the sign of Leo which is to be fed with matter.

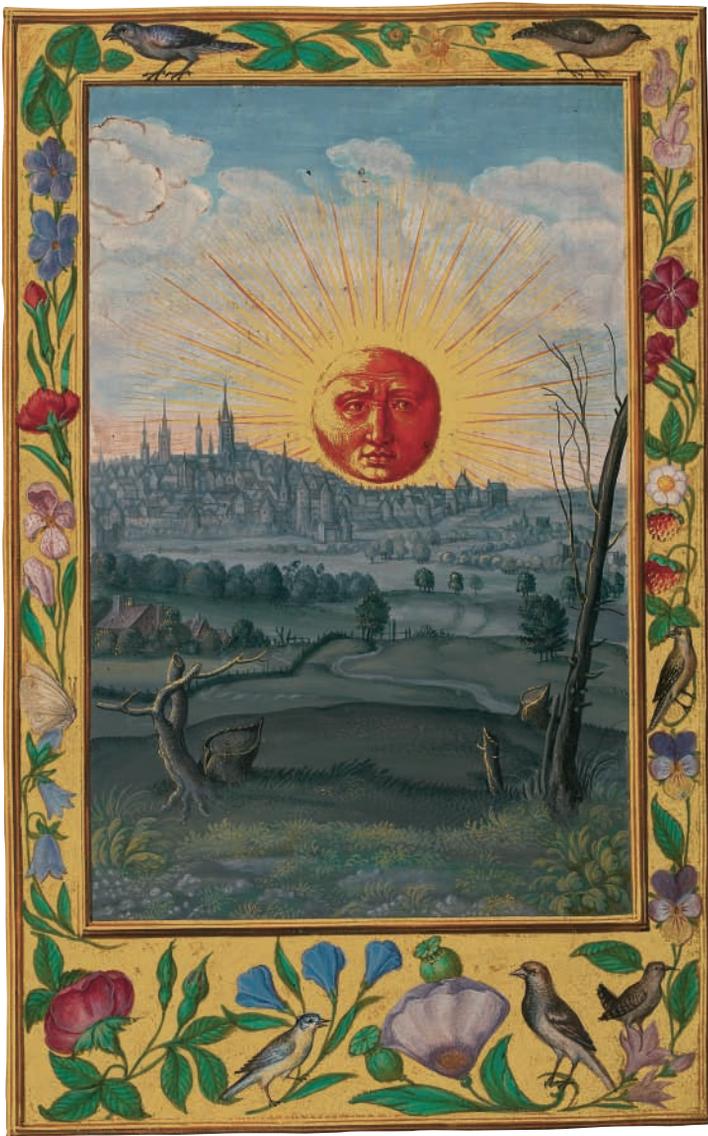
The monster's green wings confirm Hartlaub's theory that this refers to iron sulphate, an extremely caustic product known as copperas or vitriol or green lion. The sun is in the opus phase known as digestion.



f.28r

Venus and the pleasures of the senses. The imminent transition of wetness to dryness

The appearance of Venus in the firmament announces the pleasures of the senses; a marvellous interplay of colours that Basilius Valentius calls a peacock's tail. Like the rainbow, the peacock's tail heralds in, according to this author, "the imminent transition from wetness to dryness." (Philosophischer Hauptschlüssel [Key philosophical interpretation], Leipzig, 1718).



f.33v

Lapis, the winged, red lion

The inner sun as a symbol of lapis, the winged, red lion that “wrenches man from this vale of tears, i.e. from the tribulations of poverty and disease, raising him up amongst praise and honour far from the fetid Egyptian waters that are the everyday fare of mortal man (...)” (Nicolas Flamel, *Chymische Werke*, ed. Hamburg, 1681).



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