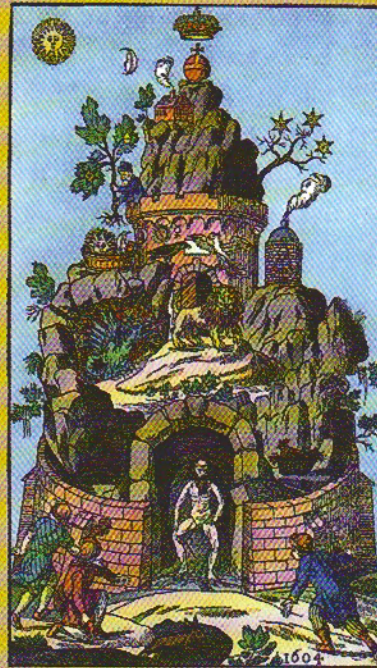


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THE NEW YORK OPEN CENTER

P R E S E N T S

A CONFERENCE
IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



PRAGUE

ALCHEMY

& THE HERMETIC TRADITION

in association with
Gnosis & Esotera Magazines
& *Universalis*, The Association of Czech Hermeticists



August 29–September 2, 1997

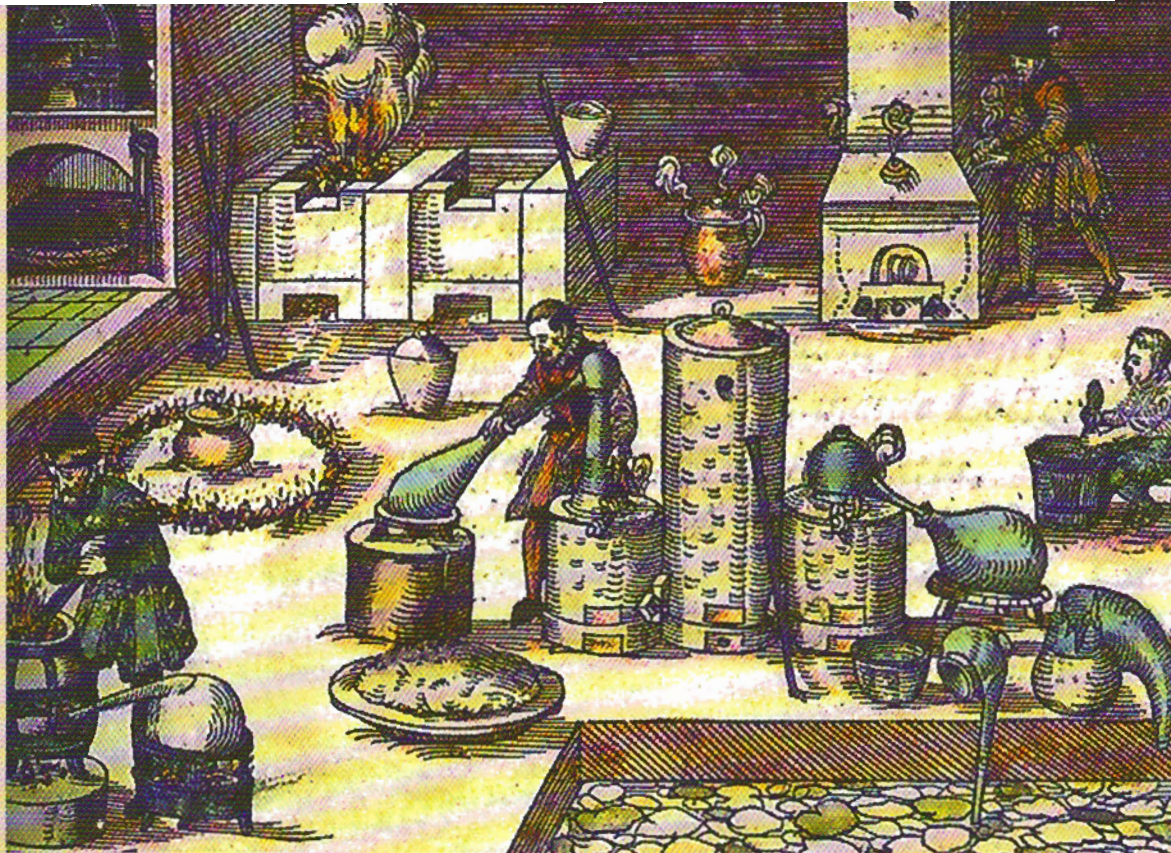


In the year 1600 Prague was the greatest center in Europe for the study of alchemy and hermetic philosophy. This year 1997 Prague, the beautiful capital of the ancient kingdom of Bohemia, is celebrating that magical Renaissance period with a summer-long festival of art, music and cultural events in its honor. The Open Center is presenting a parallel event to the festival, a conference on alchemy and the hermetic tradition, in which we will seek to enter with full, imaginative force into this half-forgotten but remarkable epoch. Continuing the work begun in 1995 with our unforgettable conference on *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, also held in the Czech Republic, we will explore this mysteriously powerful period when the Western Mystery Tradition was embraced and practiced in a manner that no succeeding time has rivaled.

The days and nights of this conference are a chance to bring that culture alive again after centuries of forgetting. At moments like this, atmosphere and imagination can combine to deepen insight into a lost world and its relevance to the present time. How did magic and science meet in this late Renaissance burst of forgotten brilliance?

How did those 16th-century alchemists experience the inner and outer worlds and the relationship between them? What subtle wisdom has been lost and awaits refinding? Join us for four days in Prague, the city of spires, the magical and deeply beautiful heart of Europe, as an outstanding range of scholars, writers and artists engage their creative attention on this important time and its continuing echoes today.





P L E N A R Y S E S S I O N S

Alchemy & the Pagan Imagination

J O S C E L Y N G O D W I N

The alchemy of the late Renaissance makes constant use of the gods and goddesses of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Both in its obscure texts and its well-known illustrations, such as the engravings of de Bry and Merian, it evokes a world more pagan than Christian. Like many artists of the Renaissance,

the alchemists found fresh inspiration in the myths and archetypal figures of paganism. They seem to have formed part of a broader current of pagan spirituality that avoided the religious controversies of the time.

Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Rudolf II & the Prague Hermetic Renaissance

R O B E R T P O W E L L

In the history of science the names of Tycho Brahe and Kepler stand out as pioneers of the modern heliocentric conception of the world. What is not generally realized is that they were both steeped in the hermetic tradition extending back to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus, who signified for Ancient Egypt what Moses did for the people of Israel. Hermes taught that the law of correspondences—"as

above, so below"—underlies all things. Summoned to Prague by Rudolf II, the two astronomers saw the emperor as a benefactor of their hermetic undertaking to discover the "divine laws" underlying the movement of the heavenly bodies. Their central role in the Prague Hermetic Renaissance of the 16th century needs to be recognized and honored.

John Dee & Renaissance Magic

N I C H O L A S G O O D R I C K - C L A R K E , D P H I L

The adviser of Queen Elizabeth I, John Dee (1527-1608) enjoyed wide renown as a philosopher, mathematician, geographer and navigator. Today he is usually remembered as the leading English scholar-magician of the Renaissance, deeply immersed in the study of occult arts and the influence of the supercelestial world. This talk looks at Dee's library as a storehouse of neo-Platonism, before tracing the

growth of his ideas on magic, alchemy and Christian Kabbalism. His practice of angel-magic and "spirit actions" with Edward Kelley are related to his search for ultimate knowledge of God's divine creation. Dee's continental mission in the 1580's, which brought him to Prague, was inspired by hopes for a new spiritual era and anticipated the rise of Rosicrucianism in Central Europe.

Alchemy in the Age of Rudolf

A D A M M C L E A N

During the last decades of the 16th century and the early 17th century alchemy underwent some profound developments, emerging into a mature spiritual philosophy that inspired

many writers and had a considerable impact on outer society. Adam McLean charts these developments by looking at the key writers, texts and manuscripts of this period.

Of Angels & Dragons: The Visionary Tradition in Alchemy

C H E R R Y G I L C H R I S T

Alchemy has always been inspired as much by vision as by physical experiment. Revelations from angelic figures, dreams of fiery dragons, and vivid visions of transmutation could sometimes open the door to the Mysteries of Creation after everything else had failed. Alchemists from at least as far back

as Graeco-Egyptian times sought their visions and cherished them, wrote them down and painted them to retain the power of the imagery. This talk looks at alchemical vision as a tradition in its own right and asks if it is still valid today and whether we can re-vision alchemy for our own times.

Rudolfine Prague: Sunset of the Renaissance

C H R I S T O P H E R B A M F O R D

What was the promise of the Renaissance? Where did it go? Where is it now? For almost two hundred years, before succumbing to the uncertainty and insecurity of the chaotic black night of the Thirty Years War, Europe struggled to give birth to a new human spiritual culture—a new shoot of an ancient stalk that sought to renew in the hearts of all humanity's most universal covenant with the gods. This talk will seek to discover what it was that was so prophetically

attempted and will examine the ways in which different spiritual currents and personalities cohered across national boundaries to create a single new vision.

It will also examine how the adversarial powers sought to derange and overturn it. Finally, we will consider the vision's last autumnal flowering in Rudolfine Prague—as with all such late blooms an outwardly somewhat sad, eccentric affair, but inwardly true and replete with seeds.

Royal Outsiders: Rudolf II & Ludwig II

C H R I S T O P H E R M C I N T O S H

Although separated by more than three centuries, Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor, and Ludwig II, King of Bavaria from 1864–1886, had much in common. Both were eccentrics and visionaries who created richly colorful worlds for themselves—Rudolf with his alchemical pursuits and his collection of curiosities, Ludwig with his castles and his

private theatrical performances. Both were suspected of madness and misunderstood by the world. Both were removed from the throne by force. Christopher McIntosh, author of an acclaimed biography of Ludwig II and of books on Rosicrucianism, will compare the lives and visions of these two royal outsiders.

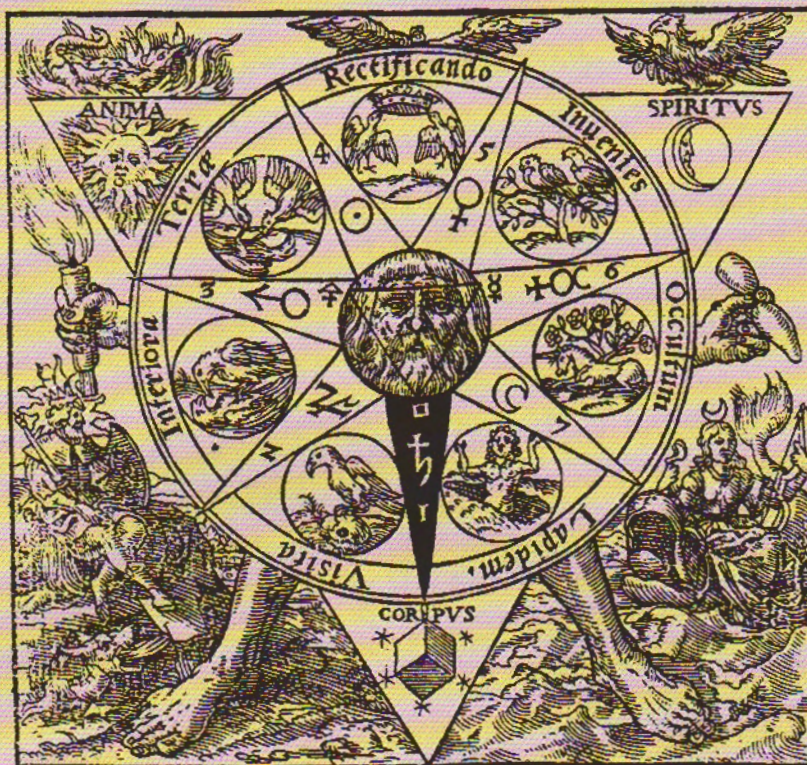
Cartesian Mysteries

Z D E N E K N E U B A U E R

A year before the tragic Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, a revelation was received in dreams by Rene Descartes which he communicated in his "Metaphysical Meditations." Utterly misunderstood, masked as an obsolete textbook treatise, the Meditations in the view of Zdenek Neubauer represent an initiation text of modern mysteries, a spiritual guide offering suggestions, clues and hints by which the

reader is led step by step to understand the mental essence of objective reality. In this work we recognize the ether of the ancients, the pure principle of light, mind and knowledge. Material, objective reality thus becomes—and has never ceased to be—the virtual reality of the hermetic world in disguise.





AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS

The Caduceus of Hermes

C H E R R Y G I L C H R I S T

In this workshop we will explore this central symbol of alchemy and look at the changing and elusive role of Hermes and Mercury in the alchemical tradition. He can be a guide and an initiator—but he is always ready to trick us too! The caduceus represents his cunning, sense of direction, and power

to release and unite energies in new forms—the key to transmutation. Since in essence the magic of alchemy lies in working with everyday materials, the emphasis will be on integrating these principles into our own lives and actions.

The Inner Theatre of Khunrath's Alchemy

A D A M M C L E A N

In 1598 Emperor Rudolf granted the privilege of printing an amazing work of spiritual alchemy—Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum*. Adam McLean will undertake an investigation

into the mystical symbolism of the emblems illustrating this Amphitheater of Eternal Wisdom, which had such an influence upon early 17th-century hermetic thought.

Prague's Hermetic Regent: Archduke Ferdinand

J O S C E L Y N G O D W I N

Ferdinand of the Tyrol (1529–95) is best remembered for his castle of Ambras near Innsbruck and its collection of art and curiosities, inherited by his nephew Rudolf II. Ferdinand spent the years 1547–66 as Regent of Bohemia, ruling with religious tolerance and aesthetic appreciation. His Star Castle

near Prague has remarkable stucco decorations on themes from Roman history and mythology. Ferdinand is one of a group of rulers whose universal interests and hermetic leanings are evident in the Mannerist art with which they surrounded themselves.

Cosmos & Sophia

R O B E R T P O W E L L

In this workshop we will seek a path to the Divine Sophia, the Soul of the World. In the cosmos she reveals herself in the movement of the planets through the signs of the zodiac: the dance of the cosmos. The session will include meditative movement expressing the nature of the planets and zodiacal

signs through gestures and forms of movement—mirroring, as it were, the heavens on earth and reflecting the hermetic tradition of star wisdom “as above, so below.” The workshop will be in English or German or both according to the needs of the participants.

The Spiritual Task of Central Europe in the New Millennium

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD

This workshop will discuss Europe historically and geographically in terms of the East, the West and the Middle, looking at each

separately and together in order to try to understand the new roles assigned to each in the coming global epoch.

The History & Survival of Esoteric Traditions in Bohemia & Moravia in the late 19th & early 20th Centuries

BLAHOŠLAV JÁNEŠ, PHD

With one of the Czech Republic's most knowledgeable speakers on the subject, we will review the appearance and survival of the esoteric traditions in this country from the first contacts with Viennese theosophists and the founding of the Theosophic Lodge by Gustav Meyrink, through the establishment of the Czech Mystical School soon after the

creation of independent Czechoslovakia, to the founding and recreation of Universalia, the Society of Czech Hermeticists. We will also examine the role of the Masonic and Martinist orders, the persecution of esotericism during the Second World War, and underground activities during the communist years.

Paracelsus & the Alchemy of Healing

NICHOLAS GOODRICK-CLARKE, DPHIL

Prague is an ideal place in which to explore the work of the alchemist and healer Paracelsus (1493–1541). We will explore the neo-Platonist macrocosm/microcosm model which profoundly influenced Paracelsus and led him to the point at which substance and spirit meet. For him the purpose of alchemy was far greater than transforming lead into gold: it

was the search for a perfect medicine. After examining the transmutation of substances into their quintessence, we will move deeper into the alchemical process to investigate the mysterious connection between alchemy and archetypal healing powers.

The Emperor & His Alchemist: Michael Sendivogius in Rudolfin Prague

RAFAL T. PRINKE

One of the key figures at Rudolf's court was Michael Sendivogius—alchemist, philosopher, diplomat, scientist and engineer—whose place in the history of alchemy (both from a scholarly and academic point of view) has until recently been unjustly neglected. The Emperor held Sendivogius in highest esteem after he performed a transmutation with his tincture. An inscribed marble slab was placed on the wall of

the room in the Hradcany Palace where it was performed, and Sendivogius was given both the title "baron" and landed estates in Bohemia. This workshop examines his extensive travels, his contacts with leading intellectuals and rulers in Europe, the admiration of his contemporaries (from Maier to Newton) for his work, and his scientific discoveries.

The following workshops will also be offered:

Bohemian Hermetic Culture & English Poetry

PAUL BEMBRIDGE, MPHIL

The Visual Code of Alchemical & Hermetic Symbolism in the Tarot

ELLEN GOLDBERG, MA

Alchemy in Islamic Times

PROF. HAMED A. EAD

University of Cairo

Details of these workshops will be available in Prague.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Lubos Antonin, PhD,

works at the National Museum in Prague, where he is responsible for three hundred castle libraries in the Czech lands. He studied philosophy at Charles University and was a member of the cultural underground in the '70's and '80's. He is currently Vice President of Universalia and an organizer of the Opus Magnum exhibition.

Christopher Bamford

is director of *Lindisfarne Anthroposophic Press* in Hudson, New York and the author of books on Celtic Christianity and Pythagoras. He is a long-time scholar and writer on the Western Mystery Tradition.

Robert Bly

is one of America's best-known poets. Winner of the National Book Award, he is a translator and the author most recently of *The Sibling Society*.

Cherry Gilchrist

is the author of *The Elements of Alchemy* and *Alchemy: The Great Work* and has studied Western inner traditions and mythology over a long period of time. Currently working on a new book, *The Quicksilver Way*, written as a visionary alchemical journey, she recently filmed a sequence on alchemy for a major new BBC series.

Joscelyn Godwin

was born in England and educated at Cambridge and Cornell Universities. He has taught at Colgate University since 1971. He has written, edited, and translated numerous books of music, esotericism, and intellectual history including *Robert Fludd*, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, and *Arktos, The Polar Myth*.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, DPhil,

is a writer and international lecturer with a special interest in the Western esoteric tradition. He is series editor of the *Essential Readings* (Harper Collins), with volumes on John Dee, Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and Robert Fludd. His own books include *Paracelsus* and *The Occult Roots of Nazism*.

Blahoslav Janes, LID,

is one of the founders of renewed Universalia in 1990. He has conducted extensive research on esoteric aspects of Czech culture, and explored aspects of alchemy in many cultures.

Christopher McIntosh, DPhil,

studied at the universities of Oxford and London and is the author of two books on Rosicrucianism: *The Rosy Cross Unveiled*, republished as *The Rosicrucians*, and *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, based on his Oxford dissertation.

Adam McLean

is a writer, researcher, editor and publisher working in the field of alchemy, symbolism and hermetic philosophy. He is currently organizing an internet web site devoted to alchemy.

Zdenek Neubauer

is a Christian Catholic by confession, a scientist by formation, and a thinker by profession. A member of the Center for Theoretical Study at Charles University, he is an advisor and speech writer for President Havel and a teacher of theoretical biology and epistemology.

Robert Powell

is a mathematician and astronomer, a performing artist, and a hermeticist. His books include *Divine Sophia*, *Holy Wisdom*, *The Most Holy Trinisophia*, and the *Hermetic Astrology Trilogy*, the last of which outlines a new star wisdom rooted in the hermetic tradition. Co-founder of the Sophia Foundation of North America, he is the translator of the classic *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*.

Rafal T. Prinke

lives in Poland and is the author of three books and many articles on esoteric subjects. His special interests include the Rosicrucian movement and its later developments, alchemical symbolism, divinatory arts and heraldry.

CONFERENCE DIRECTOR

Ralph White, New York Open Center





AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

Walking Tours of Prague

Dr. Lubos Antonin of the National Museum will conduct two optional walking tours of the city in the early afternoons

prior to the workshops. Please note that Walk 2 will be quite demanding physically. Strong walking shoes are a must.

Walk 1. Charles Square

Our walk will explore this fine historic square in the Emperor Charles IV's "New Jerusalem." One cannot walk far in one of Europe's largest squares without encountering evidence of Prague's rich alchemical and hermetic tradition. The whole square is noted for its connection with the

Hussite Uprising and with the activities of esoteric societies from the 14th-century onwards. An impressive Baroque Palace, the Faust House, is the site of several legendary tales and was connected with generations of alchemists.

Walk 2. Sacred Hills of Prague

Like Rome, Prague is built on seven hills, two of which, Vysehrad and Petrin, are the most interesting because of their connection to history and legend since pagan times. Vysehrad, associated with Queen Libuse, the legendary founder of Prague, was later the coronation site of the Czech

kings. Petrin, also known as the Hill of Zion, expresses an enigmatic aspect of the city's character. Offering the best views of Prague, it is the site of beautiful gardens with many mysterious hidden corners.

Opus Magnum Exhibit

The Gallery of the City of Prague and the National Museum Library, in collaboration with Universalia, the Society of Czech Hermeticists, will present an exhibition entitled Opus Magnum in the gothic House of the Stone Bell on the Old Town Square. In addition to displays of historic books and artifacts, the exhibit will present a multi-media alchemical initiation experience in

which participants proceed from the basement through the four floors of the building using spiral staircases to encounter a representation of Jacob's Ladder, Magic Lantern effects, and music and animation. Artists involved include the surrealist film-maker Jan Svankmajer and Martin Stejskal. We will be able to visit the exhibit and will be guided through it by its creators.

EVENING EVENTS

When the Divine Comes Close: Poetry of the Rosicrucians & Sufis

ROBERT BLY

American poet Robert Bly will present an evening of poetry from the European Renaissance and from the great Sufi

mystics of the Middle East. He will also read from his own work.

An Evening Cruise on the Vltava River

Sunday evening we will take a three-hour cruise down the Vltava River that flows through the center of Prague. Away from the bustle of the city we can deepen our social

connections, enjoy the beauty of nature, and see the magnificently illuminated Hradcany Palace and St. Vitus Cathedral from a unique perspective.

An Evening of Alchemical & Rosicrucian Music

Some of the Czech Republic's most accomplished musicians will perform alchemical music from the periods of Rudolfine

Bohemia and The Rosicrucian Enlightenment.