

ROSICRUCIAN SECRET SYMBOL

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Peter Bindon is a professional anthropologist and botanist. He has served on the Editorial Board of the Rose+Croix Journal (www.rosecroixjournal.org) for many years and is a frequent contributor to the Rosicrucian Digest. He recently retired as Grand Master of the English Grand Lodge for Australia, Asia, and New Zealand after many years of service in that position.

In this article, he explains some of the symbolism of this image from the Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians.



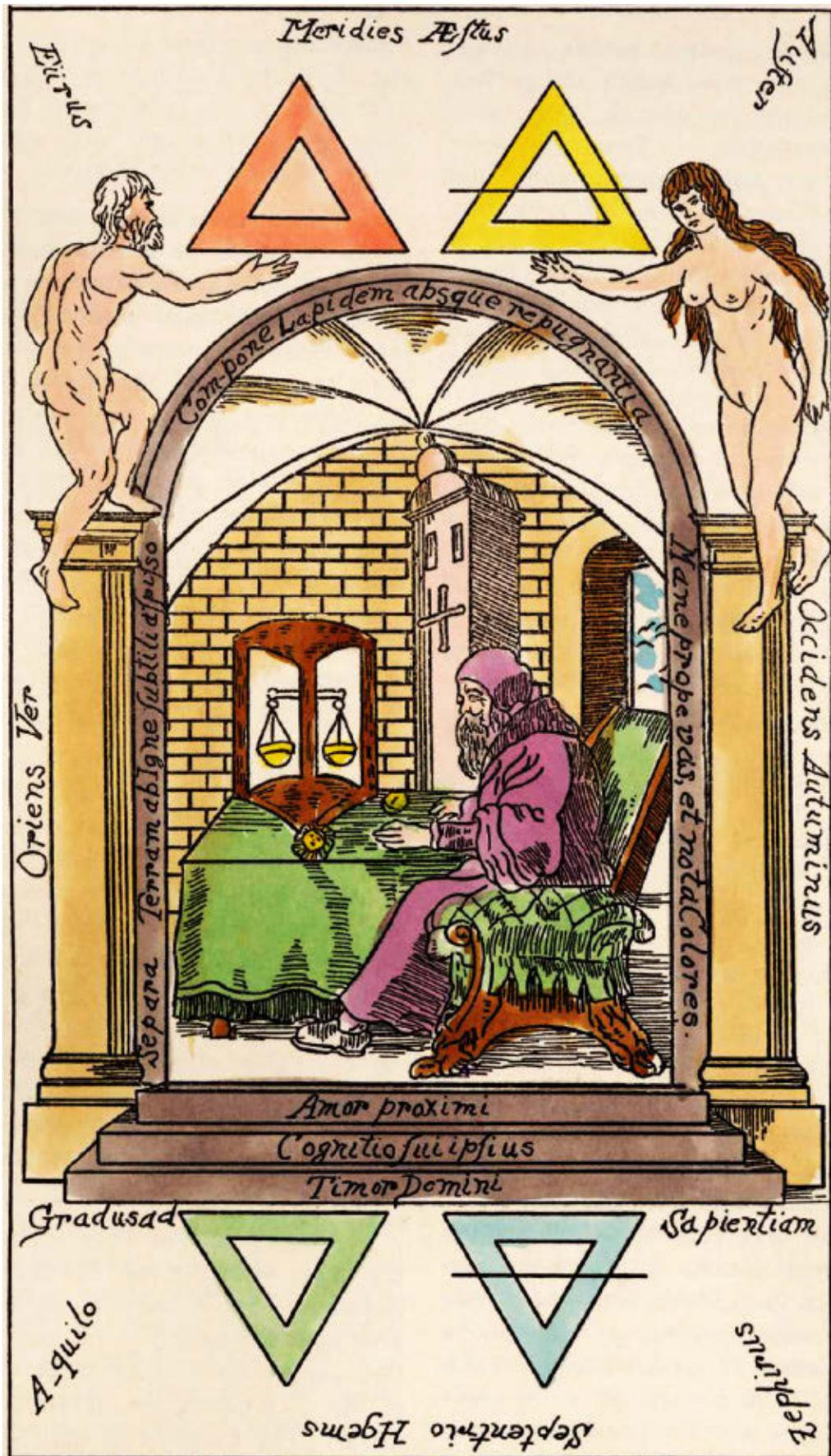
To the early Egyptians, two pillars together were symbolic of the portals of eternity or the gateway of life. They were also considered to stand at the entrance to heaven, but unlike the pillars of the alchemists, those of the Egyptians were related to the directions of the north and the south. As the Sun manifested its presence in the southern part of the sky, it is a fairly obvious use of symbolism to have that portion of the heavens representative of light. North, the opposite direction, thus becomes identified with darkness.

Although the alchemists also viewed the pillars as representing the portals or gates of an entrance to a higher state (perhaps influenced by Egyptian thought), their interpretation was inspired by a more direct relationship between each pillar and the movement of the Sun across the heavens. Living in higher altitudes of the northern hemisphere, European alchemists seem to have been influenced more by the daily progression of the Sun from east to west across the sky than by the general direction in which the solar disk was located. The rising and setting of the Sun in the east and west respectively led to the association of the coming of light with the east, the opposite direction west becoming identified with the loss of light. Thus, we often see a light colored pillar on

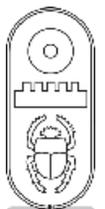
the side of a diagram representing the east and a dark colored pillar on the opposing western side.

In the Latin inscriptions in the corners and along the edges of the illustration, the four cardinal directions, north, south, east, and west are paired up with the seasons: winter, summer, spring, and autumn respectively. These form a boundary to the illustration suggesting to the viewer that the field of endeavor is bounded by the four seasons whose passage through the year is marked by the winds typical of those seasons (found in the corner inscriptions). By placing the field of endeavor within the annual cycle, the author is encouraging the student to study continuously and not just in one or another season. In other words, continuous progress requires continuous study. No one could challenge this wise counsel when the goal is self-improvement. This sentiment is emphasized by the inscription around the doorway. It encourages the student to work diligently at the task of combining the four elements, producing and refining the so-called "Philosopher's Stone," itself symbolic of the link that an individual can attain with the Cosmic.

To enter his place of study, our student has ascended the "steps of wisdom" leading to the portal flanked by



Ibidem 14. V. 6. A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not; but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth. Hand colored by H. Spencer Lewis.



the two pillars, noting that these three steps represent three of the conditions necessary for advancement. The first step for Rosicrucians is to develop and cultivate a respect for the God of your heart. The second step is to “Know yourself” or learn to be true to your self and not indulge in self-delusion. Thirdly, one should learn to love their neighbors or have compassion for the suffering of others. Rosicrucianism is not alone in encouraging the development of these characteristics. They are encouraged by many other organizations and religions, simply because anyone with those characteristics is considered a worthy citizen of their society. As it is difficult to live in the world today without belonging to one or another social group, the student with these traits is happily participating in their chosen society and is thus not distracted from the task of developing the other characteristics of a modern mystic.

Having ascended the stairs, our student has passed between the two pillars that support the arched roof of his sanctum. The symbology of the pillars is to mark his admission to a state of knowledge rather than forming the entrance to a physical place. The seated student or philosopher next ponders the balance that must be struck between the pairs of opposites if success is to be attained in the work that lies ahead. A chemical balance swinging in equilibrium in its cabinet on his table confirms this interpretation of his task. Lying before him on the table, we see a sun and moon, ancient symbol of the two human genders as well as potent symbols of the Godhead and Creation.

The triangles representing the four elements of fire, earth, air, and water surround the scene. The student will work with these primal elements in creating his or her “philosopher’s stone.” The upward pointing triangle is a symbol of the masculine and the element of fire; the triangle with its point aligned downwards

is symbolic of the feminine and the element water; the barred triangle pointing upwards is the symbol for air, and earth is represented by the barred triangle pointing down.

At the top of the pillars, we see a man and woman reaching towards each other. Could this be symbolic of a mutual quest towards assimilating certain characteristics each of the other? There are many ways to interpret the appearance of these two figures other than in their usual alchemical guise. We can see them as representative of the Great Work being undertaken by people of both genders. This is certainly the case in AMORC where participation in the studies and other elements of membership places no distinction on an individual’s gender. There is a further interpretation possible remembering that the student in the illustration is striving for balance in his studies and in his life. It is obvious that each individual enfolds aspects of life attributed to the opposite gender. For example, the warlike and aggressive attributes of the masculine nature often outweigh the caring and nurturing aspects of personality in men. Regardless of how this imbalance may have developed in past generations, it is desirable to bring the two into a more equitable balance for the sake of bettering one’s own spiritual advancement. This aspect of balance in one’s life has not been discussed widely until comparatively recently, but is now recognized as important in many ways. One could find numerous other examples within both genders to illustrate how this particular aspect of balance is necessary for unimpeded spiritual advancement.

