

The A.M. Todd Rare Book Room at Kalamazoo College presents

# Kalamazoo College the Philosopher's Stone

The Early Science of Alchemists,  
Astronomers, and Apothecaries



## Kalamazoo College and the Philosopher's Stone

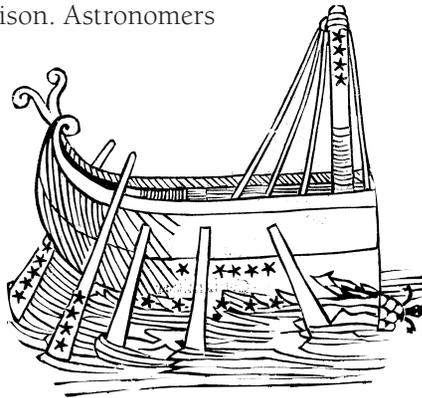
### The Early Science of Alchemists, Astronomers, and Apothecaries

A.M. Todd Rare Book Room Exhibit

Fall 2019; Curated by Mallory Heslinger

The legendary Philosopher's Stone promises wealth and eternal life. Many have tried and failed over the centuries to craft one. Alchemists throughout the world have sought its fabled ability to turn lesser base metals like lead into gold or to create the legendary elixir of life, which was said to cure ailments and provide a key to immortality.

Alchemists were joined by other early scientists and philosophers looking to cure diseases and study the natural world. Apothecaries used the knowledge of plants and early herbal books to craft potions and tinctures meant to heal, and sometimes instead to poison. Astronomers and navigators charted the stars and used the position of heavenly bodies to navigate their way around the world or to predict their fortunes in life. While many of these early theories were often later dismissed, the scientific thought behind many of our modern ideas was already evolving.

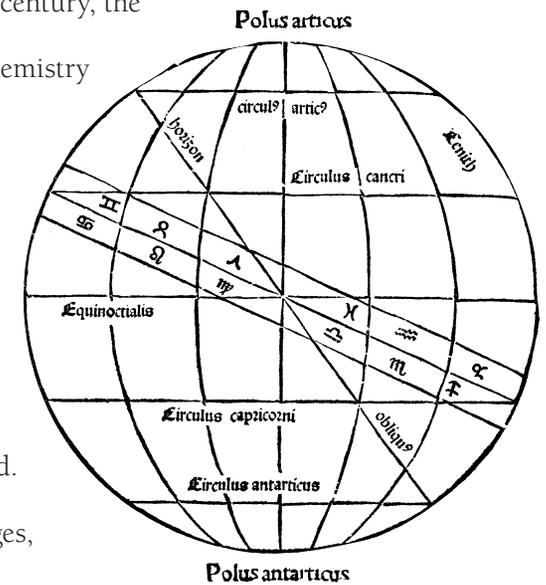


Navis

Before the eighteenth century, the studies of alchemy and chemistry were often intertwined.

Ancient Egyptian and Greek philosophers had attempted alchemy for centuries, their theories traveling around the world.

During the Middle Ages, scholars in the Middle East would repeat these older experiments, developing a scientific method to test their hypotheses. This would eventually evolve into the modern approach for chemistry. And it was the practice of alchemy that led to the discovery of previously unknown elements, such as phosphorus, which was discovered in 1669 during an attempt by chemist Robert Boyle to create the Philosopher's Stone through distillation.



Orion



Apothecaries and herbalists may not have understood or accurately portrayed every plant in early herbal books, but their work was groundbreaking in better understanding and cataloging the medicinal or toxic properties of plants, and how to use them. *Parkinson's Herbal*, written in 1640, praises the medicinal properties of onion for easing the belly, and acting as an expectorant for coughing, among other things. Besides additional illustrations of the plants, the herbal lists many varieties, their Latin classification, the plant's name in other languages, where it is found, and its many virtues.



Thousands of species of plants are recorded and studied in this manner. Various cultures have known the medicinal gifts of certain plants for thousands of years, plants that we often still use today. Willow has acted for

thousands of years as a precursor to aspirin, and many have used mint to soothe stomach pain or indigestion.

Meanwhile books of astronomy displayed detailed drawings of constellations, often depicting the legendary figures the constellations were said to represent, such as Gemini or Orion. While some early works explored the supposed influence of the sun, moon, and planets on the fate of mankind, also known as astrology, many early astronomers were also perfecting the scientific method. They included charts positioning the sun and planets within our solar system as they began cataloging stars and other celestial bodies throughout the galaxy.

These dusty old tomes contain old theories, and early attempts to explain the mysteries of the universe. They sometimes portray seemingly



magical attempts to find everlasting life or miraculous cures. But the study of distillation and base metals, the charting of stars, the study of plants and the natural world led to breakthroughs in physics, chemistry, biology, and medicine. The books displayed here illuminate this evolving scientific method and the beginnings of our modern scientific fields.



### Image Information

- Front cover, pages 1-2: Woodcuts of constellations from *Poeticon Astronomicum*, published in 1485.
- Page 3: Woodcuts of mint from *Theatre Botanicum*, published in 1640.
- Pages 4-5: Woodcuts from *The Theatre of Terrestrial Astronomy*, one of the works published in 1893 as part of *The Alchemical Writings of Edward Kelly* and translated from the Hamburg edition of 1676.

### Rare Books on Display

- Alsop, B., and Favveet, T. *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*. London: B. Alsop and T. Favveet, 1634.
- Du Pinet, Antoine. *Historia plantarvm. : Earum imagines, nomenclaturae, qualitates, & natale solum...* Secunda editio. Lvgdvni: Apud viduam Gabrielis Coterij, 1567.
- Glauber, Johann Rudolph, and Basilius Valentinus. *A Compendium of Alchemical Processes : Extracted from the Writings of Glauber, Basil Valentine, and Other Adepts*. London: James Elliott and Co., 1894.
- Hyginus. *Poeticon Astronomicum*. Venice: Erhard Ratdolt, 1485.
- Jābir ibn Hayyān. *Alchemiae Gebri Arabis philosophi solertissimi, Libri : cum reliquis, ut uersa pagella indicabit*. Bern: Ioān Petreius Nurembergen, 1545.
- Kelly, Edward, and Waite, Arthur Edward. *The alchemical writings of Edward Kelly* London: J. Elliot and Co., 1893.
- Manilius, Marcus., and Buonincontro, Lorenzo. *[Astronomicum]* Rome: [publisher not identified], 1484.
- Newton, John, Leybourn, R., Leybourn, W., Hurlock, G., and Boydel, Robert. *Institutio Mathematica, or, a Mathematical Institution...* London: R. & W. Leybourn, 1654.
- Parkinson, John. *Theatrum Botanicum : the Theater of Plants, or An Herball of Large Extent...* London: Tho. Cotes, 1640.
- Pomet, Pierre. *A Compleat History of Druggs* Third edition. London: Printed for J. and J. Bonwicke, R. Wilkin [etc.], 1737.
- Salmon, William. *Seplasmvm. : The Compleat English Physician: Or, The Druggist's Shop Opened*. London: Black Spread Eagle, 1693.
- Sędziwój, Michał, Paracelsus, and French, John. *A New Light of Alchymy : Taken Out of the Fountain of Nature and Manual Experience. To Which Is Added a Treatise of Sulphur*. London: A. Clark, 1674.
- Sędziwój, Michał. *A True Light of Alchymy. : Containing, I. A Correct Edition of the Marrow of Alchymy...* London: I. Dawkes, 1709.

## **About the A.M. Todd Rare Book Room**

The A.M. Todd Rare Book Room houses a distinctive collection of rare and unusual books and manuscripts acquired by the college through the benevolence of alumni and friends. Taken together, the materials demonstrate the nature of intellectual inquiry over the past five hundred years and thereby reinforce the strength of the general library collection.

## **History of the Collection**

The Rare Book collection at Kalamazoo College began in the 1920's with gifts from the library of Albert May Todd, a prominent Kalamazoo citizen and an internationally known book collector. In 1957, the A. M. Todd Book Room was established with the generous support of Todd's children and grandchildren. Over the years, the collection gradually expanded through generous contributions of many donors, but it was not until the 1970's that it attained its present scope and stature. Major bequests from A.M. Todd's daughter, Ethel Todd Woodhams, and from Elizabeth Dewing Todd, the widow of Todd's son Paul, brought together a major portion of the library originally collected by Mr. Todd. Today, the collection continues to be enhanced through the generosity of book lovers and friends of the library.

## **Support**

The Rare Book Room is supported by the A.M. Todd Rare Book Room Fund, a growing endowment created by friends of the college. The library welcomes contributions to this fund, which provides for the preservation, exhibition, and development of the collection.

## **Rare Book Room Staff**

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