



# The Ripley Scroll Revealed

By Theophrastus von Oberstockstall

Edition: One (text) with Illustrations.

© 2012

This work is dedicated to the members of  
The Order of Artisans and Kindred Spirits,  
who have inspired this work for the presentation at  
the Abbey Medieval Festival, 2012, Queensland, Australia.

Thank you to the support of  
The Restorers of Alchemical Manuscripts Society,  
for the scholarship to research this topic and  
print the Ripley Scrolls that were part of the lecture presentation at the festival.

Please support:

<http://www.ramsdigital.com>

<http://order-of-artisans.com.au>

## Preface

I have kept this document simple and concise. I apologise for the lack of citations, though assure the reader that the references contain all of the material that will support the statements made in this text and all of the manuscripts that I perused to compile this pamphlet. This text was designed as an accompaniment to the lecture presentation and a keepsake to enjoy the topic after the talk. Much which is briefly mentioned in this text is for further investigation. I have endeavoured to ‘name-drop’ as much as possible and connect as many thoughts together as to warrant a territorial summary that surrounds the fascinating topic, The Ripley Scroll. I hope that this will encourage you to find out more.

I hope that a profound understanding of Nature’s wisdom, that the medieval alchemists strived to comprehend, is not novelty from the past but truths that pervade time. So too in part be the value of the small pearls that may be lying in the ashes of a reverberating furnace if we only choose to seek a truth that may belittle our understanding of time, space and ego.

What wisdom is there in pursuing the Philosopher’s Stone that can transmute lead into gold? Have we actually discarded the very same greed that drives our society to bulldoze more tracks of land to transform housing estates into future retirement funds? Is the Elixir of Life now translated into the aspiration to cure cancer or the next disease that is shortening our lives past fertile ages?

George Ripley was a pious man. He felt sorrow for the luxuries of court, the *‘pissing of wealth against the wall’*, and injustices of mankind that swept the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. He had travelled widely throughout Europe and noted the same diseases and desires that tortured the human soul. He ended his life in a vow of silence, yet his writings have spoken to many. Since before the creation of the Ripley Scrolls, artisans have strived to find the secrets of Nature and believed that these secrets can be understood and held humbly by man. Yet, as George Ripley understood in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, greed is a design fault in an unconscious but awake mankind. So, he threaded his discovery with allegory, symbolism and considerable warning. Be warned reader, Nature has a fragile balance that remains in dynamic action.

Theophrastus von Oberstockstall,

2012.

## **What is the Ripley Scroll (Scrowle)?**

The Ripley Scroll is amongst the earliest alchemical works that incorporate allegorical imagery (colours lions, dragons, toads, half man-half bird creatures) with verse text (rhyme royal stanzaic form), whilst appropriating existing symbols to disguise the teachings to all but the initiated. Its sequence of instructions purported to indicate the process necessary for the acquisition of the Philosopher's Stone, an entity that cures both man and metals. However, the Ripley Scroll has a warning, as found added to the Mellon 41 scroll: the bottom figure speaks, via a phylactery (parchment banner): *"Woe is me, a miserable man who has completely lost my time and trouble."*

### **The Scroll Overview.**

A continuous scroll containing a series of images and texts with a top wooden roller and a lower wooden bar housed in a wooden box (occasionally fabric covered). Each group of images leads into the next as the scroll is generally considered to be divided into sections (generally four) and purposefully displayed in sections sequentially via unrolling. Most of the 23 surviving scrolls are in poor condition with parchment decay mainly at the upper end, fading water sensitive colours and oxidizing pigments. As a result of their fragile state most are on restricted access. Considerable decay has been reported with a Wellcome MS 692 scroll. Two scrolls were recently found: one 20-foot, incomplete, 18<sup>th</sup> Century copy of a Ripley scroll was uncovered at the Science Museum, London in March, 2012, now on permanent display and the other found in a Parisian archive in 2010!

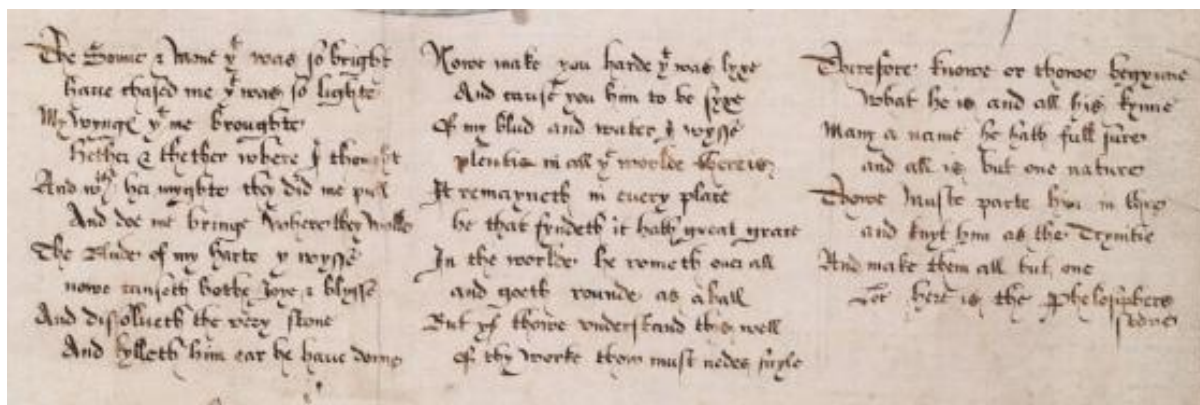
### **The Ripley Scroll is a composite scroll.**

The scroll's material is not considered to be produced as a single roll, rather the images were produced in separate sheets and combined, especially in the case of the vellum examples combining seven large sheets. The Mellon 41 scroll is thirteen and a half folio sheets of differing lengths glued together to a total length of 5.4m. Most scrolls are the product of a composite process. Bodleian roll 1 is produced entirely of vellum whilst the other Bodleian scrolls are a combination of paper on paper with a vellum top (roll 40), paper on linen with a vellum top (roll 52) and paper on linen. In the case of some paper scrolls, dating has been conducted on the paper and weave to confirm later dates of reproductions. The British Library Sloane 2524A was created on vellum and bound to linen, whilst the Sloane 2523B was recreated on a recycled vellum map of (present day) East Germany and Poland by Londoner Moses Pitt (d. 1696)! The diversity of reproduction dating indicated that the scroll enjoyed a successful interest for a considerable time.

## The Ripley Scroll is a composite poem!

The scroll's text is composed with Latin, abbreviated Latin and Middle English phrases and scientific verse. The Bodleian Library, Ashmole roll 52 scroll has no verse only Latin phrases and other scrolls are clearly incomplete versions or poorly executed. Robert M. Schuler published a comprehensive book on the topic of scientific verse, *English magical & scientific poems to 1700*. Schuler indicates that verse was a popular tool in composition, indicative of the fifty-three remaining examples of alchemical poems. The verse can also be considered as a memory techniques using rhyme, rather than thought solely a comparison to modern poetry.

Across the scrolls are many variants in the Ripley text, considerable rewording and spelling changes by the copyist and reordering of the verse couplets. Minor detail changes are also identified in the drawings. In the cases of Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) pp.375-379 the text appears in reversed order without any obvious reason. Some incomplete scrolls have no verse.



*Section of poem from Final Panel of MS Mellon 41 Scroll. [Yale University, USA]*

Copyright and citation was not necessarily a consideration for medieval authors. If an existing passage of prose eloquently explained a point or an existing text could be easily recognised by the expected audience, authorship recognition did not necessarily take place. The text within the scroll contains fragments of Richard Carpenter (another English alchemist, who has a text contained in MS Harley 2407 "On Preparing the Philosopher's Stone," 91r–93v.) and elements of *Visio Mystica* by Arnaldus de Villa Nova (c. 1235 – 1311), translated into English.

Richard Carpenter is attributed to the scroll text:

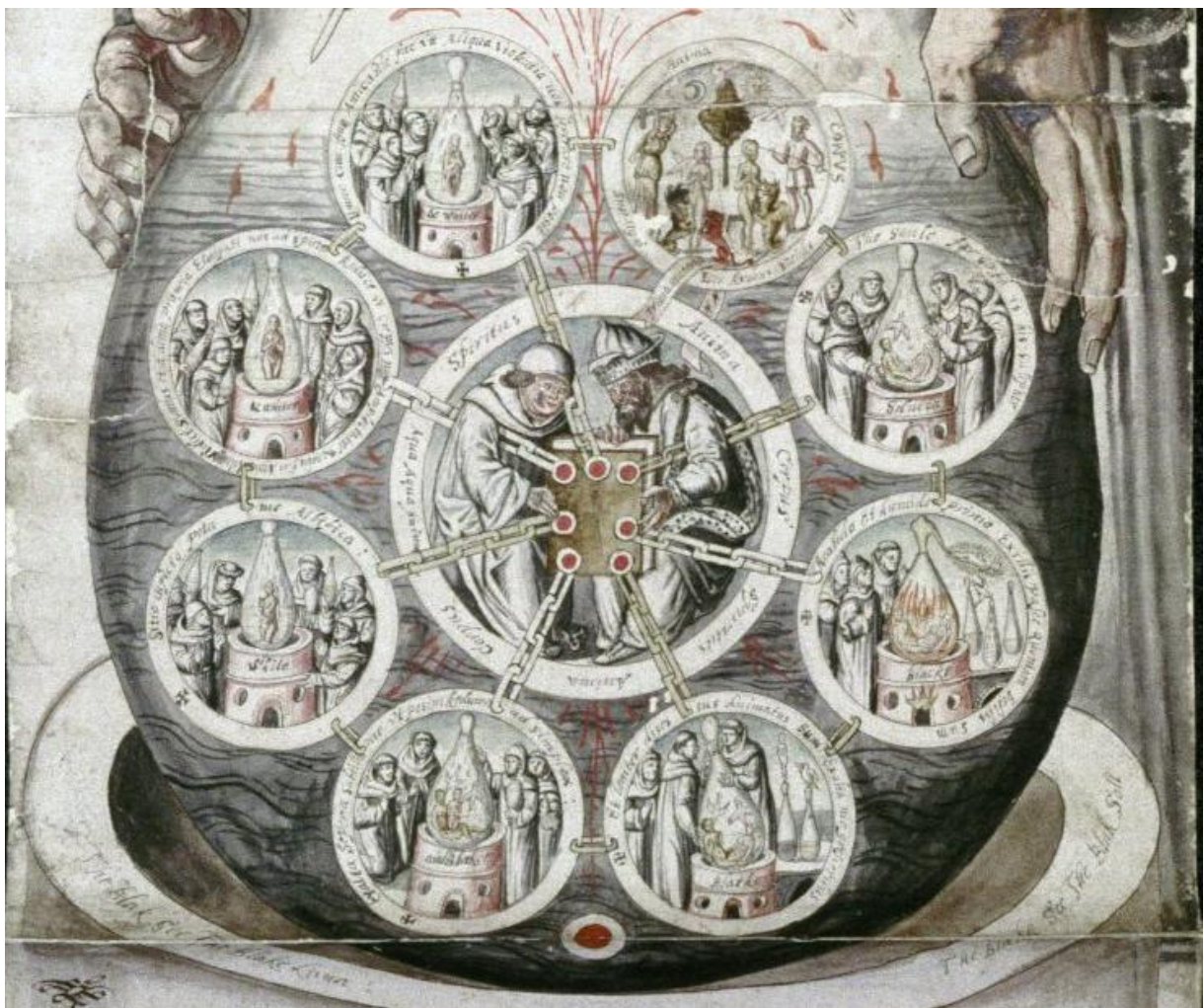
*Of the Sunne take the light  
The red Gum that is so bright  
And the Moone doe allsoe  
The white gum there keepe to...*

*But in the Matrix wher the bee put  
Looke never the vessel bee unshut  
Till they have ingendred a Stone  
In all the world is not such a one.*

*Visio mystica* is a tract on the philosopher's stone, originally written in Latin, using as allegory an old philosopher's secrets represented as a magic book. In the *Index of English Prose*, Handlist XI – Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge the *Visio Mystica* fragments are attributed as:

*“I saw a holde man in a clerenes schynnyng and rysyng and in his hand a clere boke with bytyll synngys isehyd and ihyftyng up myn yyyne sav a booke with postys of tvne and with levys of sol coueryed and in ye hede of thyse postes a rovnde ryng of sol with lvne coueryed set and ye syrcumferens of ye ryng... fforwthy men labure and god thorow hys grase dose all thyngys blessyd be god yat gevys conyng to wyse and secrete men deo gracias”.*

The scroll shares similar images to British Library MS Harley 2407, a collection of miscellaneous treatises on alchemy from the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The collection contains the poem, *The Gracious Science and Blessed Secret*, attributed to Ripley which is associated with images using roundels similar to the details within the Pelican of the Ripley Scroll's first section.



*Roundrels details in Ashmole Roll 40. [Bodleian Library, UK]*

### **Alchemical scrolls are rare.**

There are 23 Ripley Scrolls (See back listing), some recently located. In London, the British Library has seven (some of which are only fragments, and one is a 16<sup>th</sup> century adaption by the Rosicrucians possibly in Hesse, Germany, MS 5025(3) ); the Wellcome Library has two (one in very poor condition, both have unique floral borders) purchased at auction at Sotheby's in 1911 (692) and 1934 (693); the Bodleian Library in Oxford has five; and the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge whilst only having a single scroll has probably the most famous one.

The Fitzwilliam scroll is the largest scroll at 6.725m x 57cm and is attributed by Thomas Brown (1658) to have been in the legendary Elizabethan John Dee's (1527 – 1608) private library which also included the MS Harley 2407 and a manuscript copy in Dee's hand of Ripley's "*Compound of Alchemy*". During Dee's ownership of the scroll he commissioned three copies to be made during his European exploits at Lubeck, Germany, 1588. One of these copies is the smallest version (possibly thought of as a quick guide to the larger scroll) of the scroll measuring 1.26m x 14cm and is now in the British Library MS5025(2). Whilst the Fitzwilliam scroll was later housed in the Cambridge University, Isaac Newton (1642 – 1727) hand copied a portion of the first illustration - roundels contained in the Pelican. Newton titled his copied fragment, '*Liber septum sigillorum*' (The Book with Seven Seals). This copy recently sold as Lot 509 at the New York Sotheby sale of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2004 to an unknown buyer for \$467,200. It had previously been purchased by Emmanuel Fabius at auction in 1936 at Sotheby's for ten pounds ten shillings. The scrolls are expensive. A late copy considered to be made in early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which has circulated through private ownership sold in December, 2000 in an auction at Sotheby's for 206,000 pounds (\$300,000US).

Four scrolls are in the United States of America, all of which were bought at auction. One each in the Mellon Collection (Yale University, purchased at Christies auction for six guineas from H. P. Kraus, inc. (bookseller), New York in 1904); Princeton University; Huntington Library (UC Berkeley, San Marino); and the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities (Santa Monica).

The Huntington Ripley Scroll (HM 30313), on heavy weight handmade wove parchment measuring 3.25m x 39cm, was first drawn in iron gall Ink and coloured with water colour and wash (some scrolls are uncoloured and crudely drawn). It belonged to Canterbury Archbishop Sancroft (1617-93) who added his name to it. Later owned by C.W. Dyson Perrins (1864-1958), it was acquired by the Huntington library from Sotheby's Auction on the 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1958, (Lot 42). It is reportedly similar to the British Library (5025). The British Library scroll has

been dated to approximately 1580s. The Huntington, Edinburgh and Yule scrolls are now available as high resolution scans on the internet.

The iron gall ink used for the scrolls was made from a combination of iron salts, ferrous sulphate (FeSO<sub>4</sub>), gallotannic acids extracted from oak marble galls fermentation and gum arabic. Iron gall ink was a standard writing ink in Europe between 12<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In older manuscripts the mild imbalanced acid of an inferior ink has deteriorated the parchment.



*Prince Henry VIII's pray roll (15<sup>th</sup> Century).* [British Library, UK]

Whilst alchemical scrolls are rare, scrolls were not rare in general during the Middle Ages period. Pray scrolls, obituary rolls, patent rolls and charter rolls were common. King Edward IV had large alchemical scrolls decorate the walls of Westminster Abbey for his coronation in 1461, indeed some of the Ripley Scrolls appear to have been designed to be hung. The scrolls length would have made them otherwise unwieldy. The Ripley Scroll is not uniquely long, the French “*Chronicle of the World*” (1461) scroll is 17 metres long. Though Pray rolls are now considered rare, Prince Henry VIII’s (whose accession to the throne took place on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1509) pray roll is one of the few remaining examples due to the mass destruction of pray rolls during the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. By comparison, the large number of remaining Ripley scrolls may indicate a protection

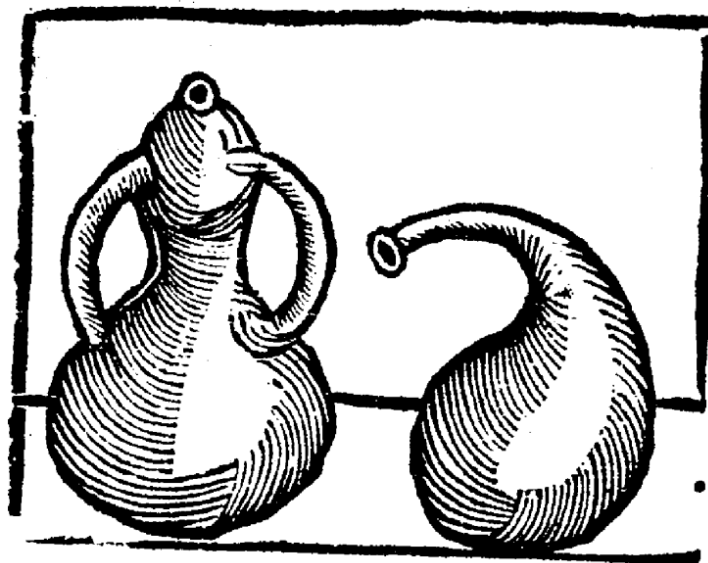
of these scrolls, exclusion to the religious manuscript fires of the Reformation, or a later reproduction to spread its knowledge.

### **The Ripley Scroll is old.**

All existing scrolls are copies. The earliest scroll (Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Bodley roll 1 on vellum, part of top missing, 5.36m) is dated from the middle to late 15<sup>th</sup> Century (1450-1500). It contains omissions and obvious blank spaces indicating it may be the result of a reproduction process. If it was first produced for the coronation of King Edward IV, as is considered by Jonathan Hughes, to be a work of propaganda for Edward IV rule, then it can be dated to 1461. However, R.H. Robbins suggests that the scrolls were used as a “hocus-pocus advertisement” in Apothecary shops. George Birch’s will from early 1630’s certainly indicates that the apothecary profession could afford such luxuries, however physical limitations make Robbins claims questionable. Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), who owned a number of the scrolls, in *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) attributes “*verses belonging to Emblematicall scroll... to be invented by George Ripley*” as well as other Ripley text. David Beuther reproduced sections of the scroll in his 1718 (Hamburg) *Universal und Particularia* in German, yet no scrolls are reported to be held in Germany. William Salmon’s “*Medicina Practica*” (1692) includes both text and discussion. Later printed reproductions differ from existing scroll text which may indicate that other scrolls are available or that editorial manipulations are present.

In historical context, the scrolls were created after the English Parliament act in 1404 declaring the making of gold and silver to be a felony. In 1455, King Henry VI (ruling 1422-61, 1470-71), granted permission to several “*knights, citizens of London, chemists, and monks*” to find the philosopher’s stone, or elixir, “*to the great benefit*”, stated the patent, “*of the realm, and the enabling of the King to pay all the debts of the Crown in real gold and silver.*” The monks and ecclesiastics were supposed to be most likely to discover the secret process, since “*they were such good artists in transubstantiating bread and wine.*” It is indicated that Henry Sharp, Doctor of Laws, (who had been of assistance to King Henry VI’s foundation of his new college of St. Mary of Eton; the patent rolls dated 1448, 25<sup>th</sup> January record a ‘*pardon to Master Henry Sharpe, doctor of laws, for good service in the company of Master William Gray... concerning the estate of Eton College.*’ Sharpe was later dean of St. Stephen’s, Westminster) with three other persons, were to pursue the study of alchemy for the remuneration of their royal master. In Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Add. C.125 is a patent roll, march 9 1456/7 (35 Henry VI): *a commission to Thomas Hernei an Austin friar, Robert Glaselay a Cambridge Domincian, William Atchyf the Queen’s physician, Henry Sharpe mast of St Lawrence Poutenay College in London, and six others, to*

*examine into and record on the philosopher's stone.*" Again in 1456, a commission was issued to alchemists, to search the ancient writings, such as Roger Bacon (1214-94), to find an alchemical cure for King Henry VI's sickness (mental breakdown). John Kirkby, physician at St. Bartholomew's in Smithfield and Henry VI, is attributed to being a Court alchemist. In this context, the pursuit of alchemy should not be considered an hermetic pursuit of isolated pseudo-scientists. With the considerations of gold making, it is interesting that the Ripley scroll directly mentions the stone and elixir yet avoids the mention of gold production.



*A pelican (on left) depicted in Hieronymus Brunschwig's The Virtuous Book of Distillation.*

### **The Ripley Scroll displays sophisticated glassware.**

The first image in the scroll is a man holding a large glassware vessel called a Pelican (frequently misidentified as a retort, vase or egg) within which are eight circles (roundels) containing monks looking at human figures within bottles. The Pelican adorns the title page of John French's *Art of Distillation* (1651) and in his text describes it to be used to separate and rejoin the true spirit. A Pelican appears in the glassware illustrated in Hieronymus Brunschwig's *The Vertuose Boke of Distyllacyon* (1500), Dr. Konrad Gesner's *The Practise of the new & old phisicke* (1576, 1599 London) and *The Complete Chemist* (1677) by Christopher Glaser. In the *Lexicon of Alchemy* by Martin Rulandus the Elder (1612), a Pelican is described as "a circulating vessel, in the shape of a pelican pecking its own breast with its beak, and thus feeding its young. It has a full body, which narrows towards the neck, and the neck bends round and the mouth goes back into the body. This vessel has a channel at the bottom, by which the liquor is poured in, and then the entrance is hermetically sealed." It was the circulation of spirits that was considered by the medieval alchemist to be an acceleration of the natural

processes that would contribute to the production of the philosopher's stone. A Pelican also appears in the laboratory equipment depicted in the portrait page of Johann Daniel Mylius' *Opus medico-chymicum*, 1618 and a Pelican is being held by the figure identified as 'Kunst (Art)' who also holds a book open to the words '*Ultimat Imateria*' in Steffan Michelspacher's *Cabala*, 1616.

Within the roundels contained in the Pelican are images of a great alembic for distillation, cucurbits for holding distillate, and brick reverberation furnaces. One unchained roundel importantly illustrates the arrangement of the *Prima Materia*. The cucurbits identified in the scroll appear to be sourced from an established manufacturer able to produce blown glass of reproducible standard. Cucurbits are held by numerous people about the bath that by their distinctive head-wear resemble the portraits on the title page of Michael Maier's *Symbola aureae mansae*, 1617. By comparison, urinary glassware was a large medieval market requiring supply of a standard glass bottle similar to that seen in the scroll images.



*Giovanni de Stefano's portrait of Hermes in the Siena Cathedral floor mosaic, central Italy*

The identity of the person holding the Pelican has been referred to as Aristotle, an alchemist, George Ripley himself, but is generally considered to be Hermes, patron of alchemy. His importance as a divine figure is central to the expected quality aspired to by the practicing alchemist. The portrait of Hermes of the time is supported by its reproduction in Giovanni de Stefano's mosaic on the floor of the Siena Cathedral, central Italy which was completed in 1488 and was being constructed whilst George Ripley was staying in Rome.

### Reappropriated imagery misdirects the unaware.

Throughout the imagery of the scroll are frequent reappropriation of existing symbolism that would have been recognisable to a medieval audience. Great caution is required in analysis as frequently the symbols are employed to denote processes other than what was generally signified.



*Raymond and the Melusina woodcut*

The Melusine, a creature from medieval legend, is utilised in the second section as one of the naked figures in the fountain. In the tale of *Raymond and the Melusina*, a cursed maiden is discovered in a forest by Raymond, the Duke of Aquitaine (c. 921-950), who begs her to marry him. The Maiden consents, on condition that he never interrupts her Saturday baths. When Raymond inevitably does disturb her, to discover she is a serpent tailed siren from the waist down, she transforms herself into a dragon and furiously departs. The tale can be interpreted as a misogynous sexual transformation or the contradictory duality of feminine nature that triggers calamity. Interestingly, the Melusine scene and other alchemical symbols are seen on the family tree scroll for Edward IV (MS Lewis E201) from 1461, referring to a biblical scene of Adam and Eve. Melusine has frequent exhibition in alchemical

imagery, such as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century *Turba Philosophorum* or 15<sup>th</sup> Century *Aurora consurgens*, were it plays a benevolent emblem of enlightenment, the universal spirit that unities body and soul as depicted in the scroll. The transformation of Melusine in alchemy may be a deliberate reappropriation to intentionally abduct known symbols and redefine them for another at time contradictory meaning. Within the scroll itself are transformed symbols.

George Ripley habitually employed the toad as a symbolic product such as in his *Vision* which shares similar allegorical imagery. Ripley is attributed to the first Middle English Alchemical poet to employ beast-fables such as toads, dragons, and birds as allegory. Within the scroll the toad appears twice, at the top of the Pelican in the first section and in the Dragons mouth at the bottom of the second section. Both appearances may be referring to a similar state in a different aspect of processes. The toad may represent both a stage of the process and an ingredient.

A Bird of Hermes is witnessed in the third section of the scroll, which popularly is considered to represent a Philosophical Mercury. The consumed wings symbolise a stabilising act; as wings and feathers indicate volatility and the lack of wings as fixity. However the grounding of a volatile dragon by St. George is symbolised by him ‘fixing’ it to the earth with his lance. The Bird imagery refers to an existing popular medieval poem of Lydgate’s *Churl and Bird*, identifies with Roger Bacon’s *Radix Mundi* and associates the triumph of Kings to alchemical glory.

The Basilisk seen in the scroll is also featured upon Ripley’s Tomb (two basilisks appear poised on an orb, facing a sun and moon), a representation of it is presented in Ashmole’s *Theatrum*, in stonework at the Bringlington Prior, and in the Harley 2407 collection. Frequently throughout the scroll are balances of pairs and the trinity of “Corpus, Anima and Spiritus” or Body, Soul and Spirit respectively.

### **Who is George Ripley?**

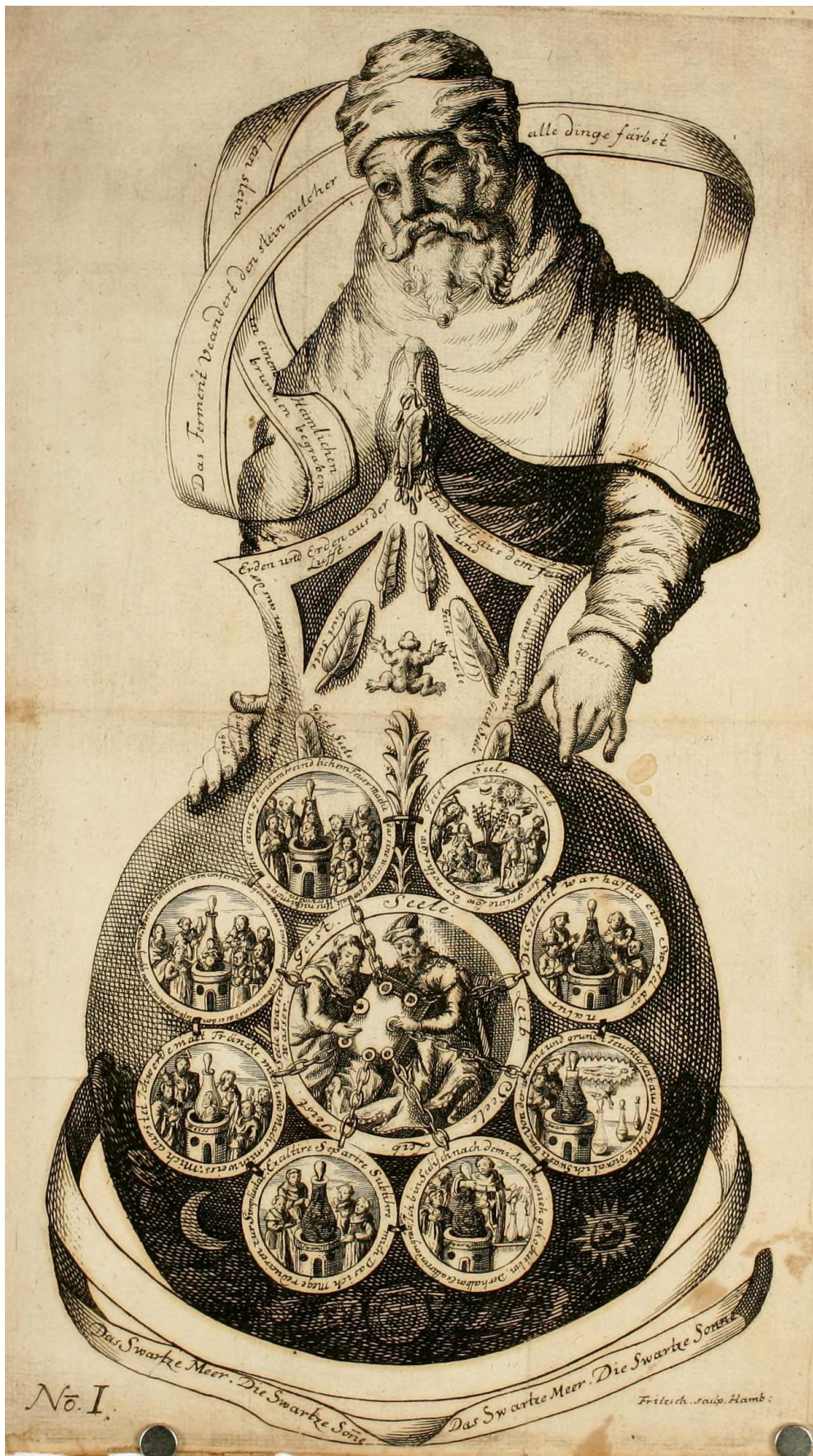
Author of *Compound (Compende) of Alchemy* (1471) dedicated to King Edward IV, a text that lead the alchemical text printing explosion starting in 1591. Ripley was born circa. 1415 and died 1490 during the reign of Edward V. He has 25 works attributed to his name though most still exist in manuscript. Other titles include ‘*The Mistery of Alchymists*’ (predominately a discussion between father and son), ‘*Medulla Alchymiae*’ (*The Marrow of Alchemy* – which he sent out of Italy anno 1476 to the Arch-Bishop of York, George Nevell), ‘*The Vision*’, and ‘*A Shorte Worke*’. All of the listed texts are in scientific verse.

Ripley also is accredited to being the first publisher and populariser of works by the renowned 13<sup>th</sup> century alchemist, Raymond Lull (Lully ca. 1232 – 1315) and was heavily influenced by pseudo-Lull alchemy. He promoted Catalonian alchemy, via his manuscript *Cantilena*, which had been introduced by John Kirkby, and Sericon Alchemy in England with his *Bosome-Book*.

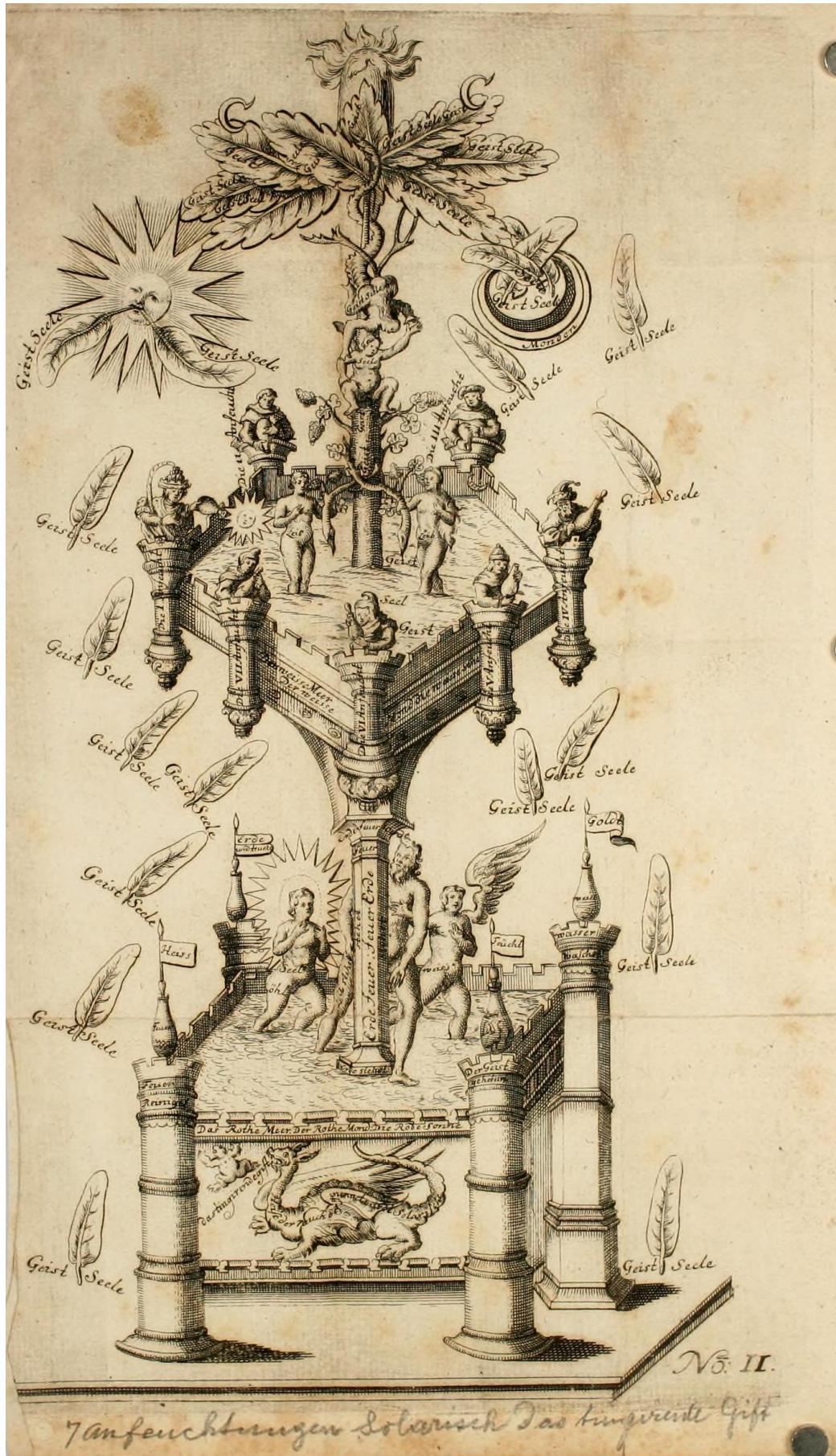
George Ripley supposedly taught alchemy to Thomas Norton (c.1433-1513, born in Bristol) at the age of 28 (c. 1461). They are both reported to be in the company of exiled King Edward IV in Burgundy in 1470, so their relationship was long. The *History of the Worthies of England, Vol. 3*, mentions that Norton “*in forty days he learnt the perfection of chemistry*”. Norton later became a famous 15<sup>th</sup> century alchemist notable as author of *Ordinall of Alchimy* (1477), a 3000 line alchemical poem with exceedingly irregular heroic couplets and attributed as advice to King Edward IV. Samuel Norton (b.1548 – d.1621, author of *The Key of Alchimy, 1577*), Thomas Norton’s great-grandson, discovered in his estate the *Bosome Book*, reported to have been in Ripley’s hand-written Latin. He laboriously translated it whilst at St. John’s College, Cambridge finally publishing it in 1573.



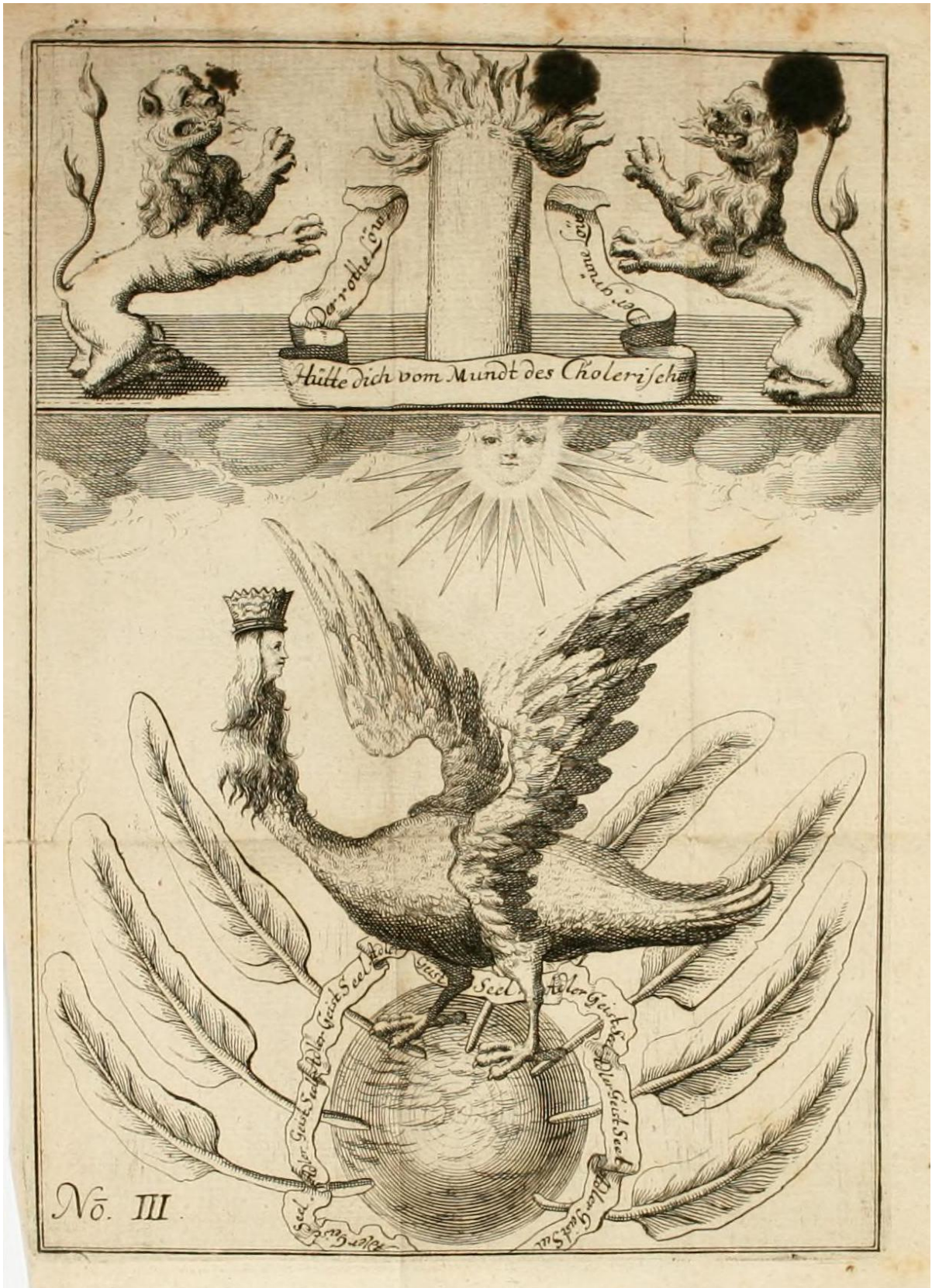
*Detail from Thomas Norton’s Ordinall of Alchimy Manuscript. [University of Glasgow]*



Panel one from David Beuther's *Universal and Particulars*. (1718).



Panel two from David Beuther's *Universal and Particulars*. (1718).



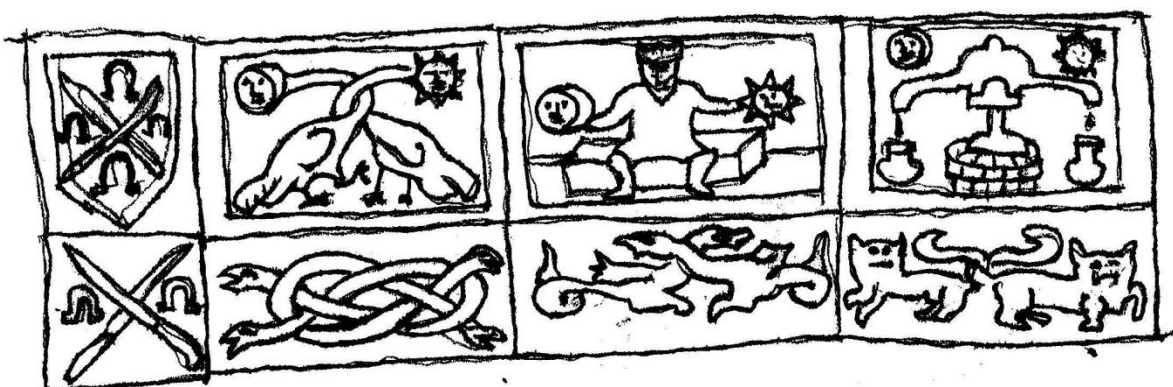
Panel three from David Beuther's *Universal and Particulars*. (1718).



Panel four from David Beuther's *Universal and Particulars*. (1718).

George Ripley was an Augustine Monk from Yorkshire, Canon of Bridlington, Yorkshire, listed in Burton's *Monasticon Eboracense*. The Prior was established about the year 1114 and dissolved in 1538. Only the Prior Church and Bayle Gate remain today. [The Priory was also home to Saint John of Bridlington (1319-1379) who was canonized 1401]. Ripley travelled throughout Europe. After Louvain, lived in Rome for approximately twenty years with Papal support. He was domestic prelate of the palace and Master of Ceremonies in 1477 for Pope Innocent 8<sup>th</sup> (1432 – 1492, Pope – 1482, notorious for the papal bull of the 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1484 which was the basis for *Malleus Maleficarum*). As Ripley was absent from England until 1478 he missed the War of the Roses. The imprisonment of the alchemist, Thomas Dalton, in 1467 by an alchemy obsessed King Edward IV, in a forceful attempt to secure the secret of transmutation, may have fuelled Ripley's resolve to remain outside of England. Ripley's later dedication of a manuscript to George Neville, the archbishop of York and opposer of King Edward IV, complicates the report that an exiled Edward IV, Thomas Norton and Ripley spent time together in Burgundy in 1469/70. In 1483, Ripley is associated with the marriage of Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of York. Ripley rededicated his *Compound of Alchemy* to Henry VII). Lavish donations to the Knights of the Order of St. John on Rhodes to aid their campaign against the Turks may have enabled Ripley to gain the title of Sir and Knight. At the end of his career Ripley joined the English Carmelites at the monastery of St. Butolph, founded in Boston, Lincolnshire as an Anchorite in 1488. For most of his religious life, Ripley enjoyed an exemption from devotional services and ceremonies to devote his entire time to scientific pursuits.

George Ripley's Tomb, pictured in the British Library manuscript, *MS. Cotton Vitellius E.X. fol. 235v*, displayed symbolism reproduced in the scrolls. The connection of horseshoes, both on the tomb and the lower figure on the scroll, aim to identify the figure of the pilgrim with Ripley himself.



*Panels from George Ripley's Tomb depicted in MS [British Library, UK]*

## Other mysterious medieval texts.

The *Voynich manuscript* is a work which dates to the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, possibly from Northern Italy. It is named after the book dealer Wilfrid Voynich, who purchased it in 1912. The manuscript resembles an herbal manuscript of the time period, seeming to document illustrations and information of plants and their possible uses for medical use. However, most of the plants do not match known species, whilst the manuscript's text is in an unknown and unreadable language.

The *Aurora consurgens* is an outstanding series of illustrations in a parchment manuscript of alchemical Latin treatise. The earliest dating of the 10 known copies is 1420-30, St. Gall. The thirty-eight images are produced in iron gall ink and watercolour depicting allegorical associations of alchemical components.

Corresponding Author: [Theophrastus.von.oberstockstall@gmail.com](mailto:Theophrastus.von.oberstockstall@gmail.com)

Text © 2012.

Permission for non-profit reproduction is given, if entire document remains complete and clearly attributed to the original author and benefactors.

Images manipulated from publically available sources.



Printer's Mark from Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652).

## Further Reading – Research References

Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, (1652). Contains an extensive collection of George Ripley's verse and a scroll text.

David Beuther's *Universal and Particulars*. (1718). Contains a rendition of the core images of the Ripley Scroll and text in German.

William Salmon's *Medicina Practica*, (1692).

Hughes, Jonathan, *Edward IV and the Alchemists*, History Today, Aug. 2002; 52, 8; pg. 10. Jonathan Hughes looks at the significance, in alchemical terms, of his reign, and what the King himself made of alchemical prophecy. Proposes coronation decorative scrolls.

Fredell, Joel, *Alchemical Lydgate*, Studies in Philology, Fall 2010, Vol.107, No.4, pp.429 – 464. A comprehensive study of Lydgate's *Churl and Bird* in alchemical context to other Hermes Birds and the mystical stone, jagounce. Description of Ripley's verse style and writings.

Schuler, Robert M., ed., *Alchemical Poetry, 1575–1700. From Previously Unpublished Manuscripts* (New York: Rouland, 1995), Book.

Schuler, Robert M., *English Magical and Scientific Poems to 1700: An Annotated Bibliography*, Garland Publishing, 1979.

McCallum, R.I., *The Ripley Scroll of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, Vesalius (1996), II, 1, pp.39-49. A discussion of the Edinburgh Scroll, with an appendix table detailing the scrolls known to the author. Some modern catalogue renumbering may confuse the list.

Moncrieff, W. & Small, J. *Account of an Alchemical Roll on Parchment presented by the Earl of Cromarty in 1707 to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* (1876), Proceeding of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Vol XI, Session 1875-76, Edinburgh, pp. 561-75.

Rampling, Jennifer M, *Establishing the Canon: George Ripley and his Alchemical Sources*, Ambix (Nov. 2008) Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 189-208.

Rampling, Jennifer M, *The Catalogue of the Ripley Corpus: Alchemical Writings Attributed to George Ripley (d. ca. 1490)*, Ambix (July 2010) Vol. 57, No. 2, pp.125-201.

Szulakowska, U, *The Pseudo-Lullian Origins of George Ripley's Maps and Routes as Developed by Michael Maier*, in Cosmos. The Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society, 9. (1993). pp.107-126

Morrison, Eliot & McClanan, Anne. *Alchemy, Magic & Science: An analysis of the Ripley Scroll, Mellon MS 41*, Portland State University. Unpublished. Abstract available online. Full article unpublished and available from author: [eliotm@pdx.edu](mailto:eliotm@pdx.edu). An undergraduate student paper with university assessment structure, well researched and annotated.

McLean, Adam, *Adam McLean's Study Course on the Ripley Scroll*. Available from author. <http://www.alchemywebsite.com>

*A Sixteenth-Century Scroll of Alchemical Emblems*, Princeton University Library Chronicle 19 (1958): PP. 201–2, includes plates iv and v.

Jung, Carl, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 1944. Second edition, 1993. The book that brought an awareness of the imagery of the Ripley Scroll to a modern reading audience.

Robbins, R.H. *Alchemical texts in Middle English Verse*, *Ambix* (1966) 13: pp.62-73.

Timmerman, Anke, : The circulation and reception of a middle English Alchemical poem: The Verses upon the Elixir and the Associated Corpus of Alchemica” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2006).

Corbett, M.K. *Ashmole and the Pursuit of Alchemy: The Illustrations to the Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, 1652*, *The Antiquaries Journal*, (1983) 63, pp. 326 – 36.

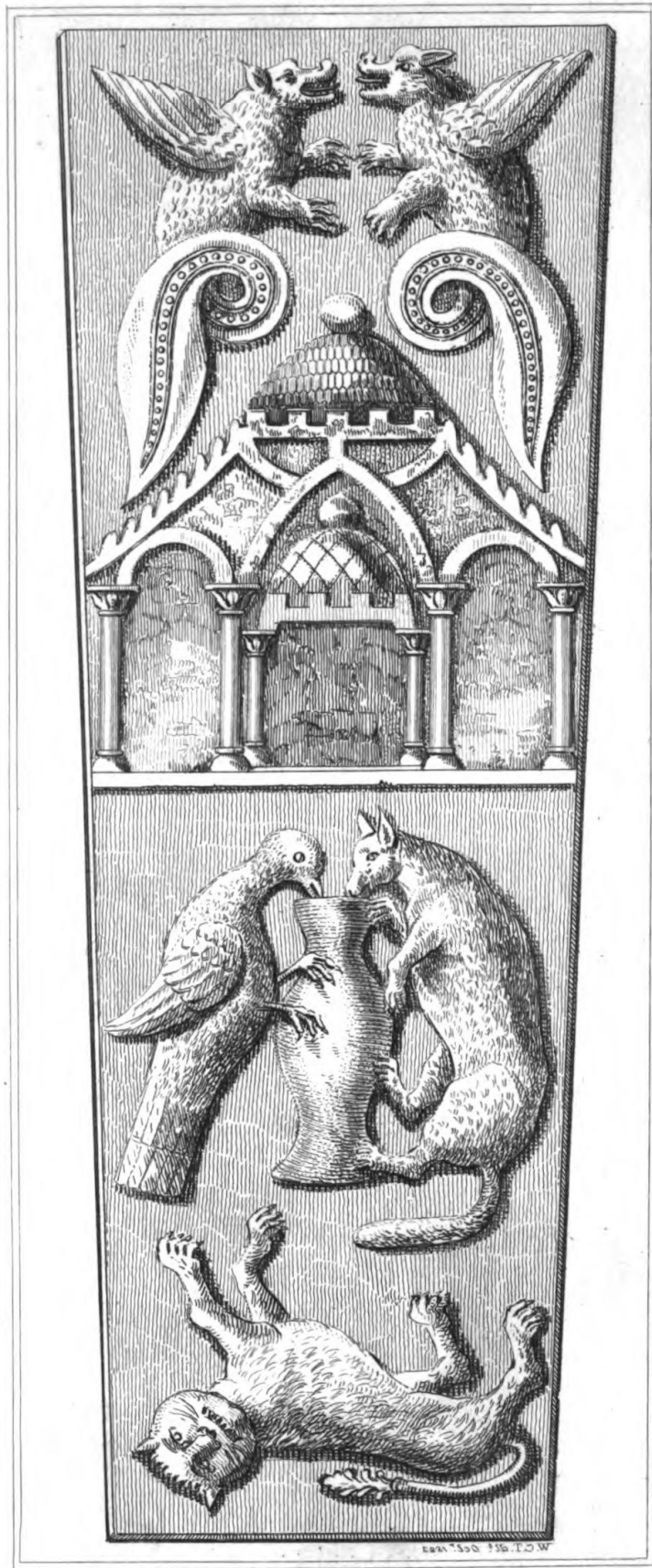
Vickers, Brian, *Occult Scientific Mentalities*, 1986, Cambridge University Press, UK.

Linden, ed., *George Ripley's Compound of Alchemy*.

Linden, SJ, *The Ripley Scrolls and The Compound of Alchemy* article within, “Emblems and Alchemy” *Glasgow Emblems Studies*, 1998, Glasgow.

Prickett, Marmaduke, *History of the Priory of Bridlington, in the East Riding of the county of York*, 1836, Printed for Stevenson, T. Cambridge. Page 28 give a small biography of Ripley, pages 90-93 contain literary listing, and Appendix contains image of ‘sculptured Stone, Bridlington Church’ of two basilisks

Eirenaeus Philalethes, (1679), *Ripley Reviv'd: or, an exposition upon Sir George Ripley's Hermetico-Poetical Works*. Containing the plainest and most excellent Discoveries of the most hidden Secrets of the Ancient Philosophers, that were ever yet Published. (London).



*Sculptured Stone at Bridlington Church of two basilisks.*

## See also..

British Library Harley 2407, miscellaneous treatises on alchemy from the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Images available at

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP??Size=mid&IID=19932>

Zurich, Zentralbibliothek, ms. Rh. 172, fol 27v. “*Aurora consurgens*” (ca. 1420-30).

Wien, Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms. 2372, fol. 46vb-47ra, (Late 14<sup>th</sup> Century), “The Secrets of My Lady Alchemy”.

Constantine of Pisa, “The Book of the Secrets of Alchemy” (1361), Glasgow University Library, ms. Ferg. 104, fol. 45v.

Standard Latin authors: Avicenna, pseudo-Geber, pseudo-Lull, and Albertus Magnus

Middle English Writers: Bernard of Treves, Thomas Norton, and Carpenter.

Biringuccio, Vannocio, *De la Pirotechnia of Vanoccio Biringuccio* 1540, translated by Cyril S. Smith & Martha T. Gnuchi, 1942.

Truman Schwartz, A. & Kauffman, George B., *Experiments in Alchemy. Part 1: Ancient arts*, Journal of Chemical Education, (March, 1976) Vol. 53, No. 3, pp. 136 – 138.

Truman Schwartz, A. & Kauffman, George B., *Experiments in Alchemy. Part II: Medieval discoveries and transmutations*, Journal of Chemical Education, (April, 1976) Vol. 53, No. 4, pp. 235 – 239.

[http://herve.delboy.perso.sfr.fr/ripley\\_scrowle.html](http://herve.delboy.perso.sfr.fr/ripley_scrowle.html) . (2010) Large article in French.

[www.rcpe.ac.uk/library/read/collection/ripley/ripley.php](http://www.rcpe.ac.uk/library/read/collection/ripley/ripley.php) . (2012) by Pro. R.I.McCallum

<http://bibliodyssey.blogspot.com.au/2009/01/ripley-scroll.html?m=1> (2009).

<http://wellcomelibrary.blogspot.com.au/2011/12/conservation-in-action-ripley-scrolls.html?m=1> (2011). Details information of conservation of Wellcome scrolls.

<http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/hehweb/HM30313.html> (1989).

AMBIX - Journal for the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry.

<http://www.ambix.org>

The Alchemy Guild. <http://www.alchemyguild.org>

Paracelsus College - <http://homepages.ihug.com.au/~panopus/>



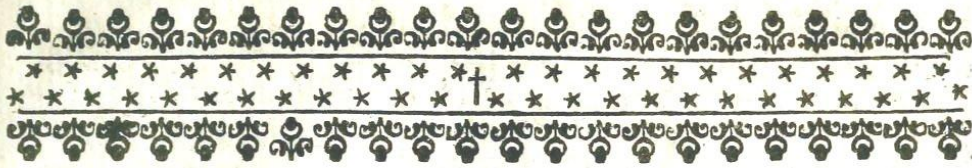
THE  
**V I S I O N O F**  
*Sr: GEORGE RIPLEY:*  
 CHANON OF BRIDLINGTON.



Hen busie at my booke I was upon a certeine night,  
 This Vision here exprest appear'd unto my dim-  
 (med sight,  
 A *Toade* full rudde I saw did drinke the juce of  
 grapes so fast,  
 Till over charged with the broth, his bowells all to brast;  
 And after that from poysoned bulke he cast his venome fell,  
 For greif and paine whereof his Members all began to swell,  
 With drops of poysoned sweate approaching thus his secret Den,  
 His cave with blasts of fumous ayre he all be-whyted then;  
 And from the which in space a golden humour did ensue, (hew:  
 Whose falling drops from high did staine the soile with ruddy  
 And when this Corps the force of vitall breath began to lacke,  
 This dying *Toade* became forthwith like Coale for colour blacke:  
 Thus drowned in his proper veynes of poysoned flood,  
 For tearme of eightic dayes and fowre he rotting stood:  
 By tryall then this venome to expell I did desire,  
 For which I did committ his carkase to a gentle fire:  
 Which done, a wonder to the sight, but more to be rehear't,  
 The *Toade* with Colours rare through every side was pear't,  
 And VWhite appeared when all the sundry hewes were past,  
 Which after being tinted Rudde, for evermore did last.  
 Then of the venome handled thus a medicine I did make;  
 VWhich venome kills and saveth such as venome chance to take.  
 Glory be to him the graunter of such secret wayes,  
 Dominion, and Honour, both with Worship, and with Prayse.

A M E N.

VERSES



VERSES  
**B E L O N G I N G**  
 TO  
*A N E M B L E M A T I C A L L*  
**S C R O V V L E :**

*Supposed to be invented by* GEO: RIPLEY.



Shall you tell with plaine declaracion,  
 Where, how, and what is my generacion:  
*Omogeni* is my Father,  
 And *Magnesia* is my Mother:  
 And *AZot* truly is my Sister,  
 And *Kibrick* forsooth is my Brother:  
 The *Serpent* of *Arabia* is my name,  
 The which is leader of all this game:  
 That sometyme was both wood and wild,  
 And now I am both meeke and mild,  
 The *Sun* and the *Moone* with their might,  
 Have chastised me that was so light:  
 My Wings that me brought,  
 Hither and thither where I thought  
 Now with their might they downe me pull,  
 And bring me where they woll,  
 The blood of myne heart I wiss,  
 Now causeth both Joy and blisse:

And

And dissolveth the very *Stone*,  
 And knitteth him ere he have done ;  
 Now maketh hard that was lix,  
 And causeth him to be fix.  
 Of my blood and water I wis,  
 Plenty in all the World there is.  
 It runneth in every place ;  
 Who it findeth he hath grace :  
 In the World it runneth over all,  
 And goeth round as a ball :  
 But thou understand well this,  
 Of the worke thou shalt miss.  
 Therefore know ere thou begin,  
 What he is and all his kin,  
 Many a Name he hath full sure,  
 And all is but one Nature :  
 Thou must part him in three,  
 And then knit him as the Trinity :  
 And make them all but one,  
 Loe here is the *Philosophers Stone*.

**T**He *Bird of Hermes* is my name,  
 Eating my wings to make me tame.

**I**N the *Sea* withouten lesse,  
 Standeth the *Bird of Hermes* :  
 Eating his Wings variable,  
 And thereby maketh himselfe more stable ;  
 When all his Fethers be agon,  
 He standeth still there as a stone,  
 Here is now both White and Red,  
 And also the Stone to quicken the dead,

All



Therefore I counsell ere thou begin :  
 Know him well what it be,  
 And that is thick make it thin ;  
 For then it shall full well like the.  
 Now understand well what I meane,  
 And take good heed thereunto,  
 The worke shall else litle be seene :  
 And tourne thee unto mikle woe,  
 As I have said in this our Lore,  
 Many a Name I wiff it have,  
 Some behinde, and some before ;  
 As *Philosophers* of yore him gave.

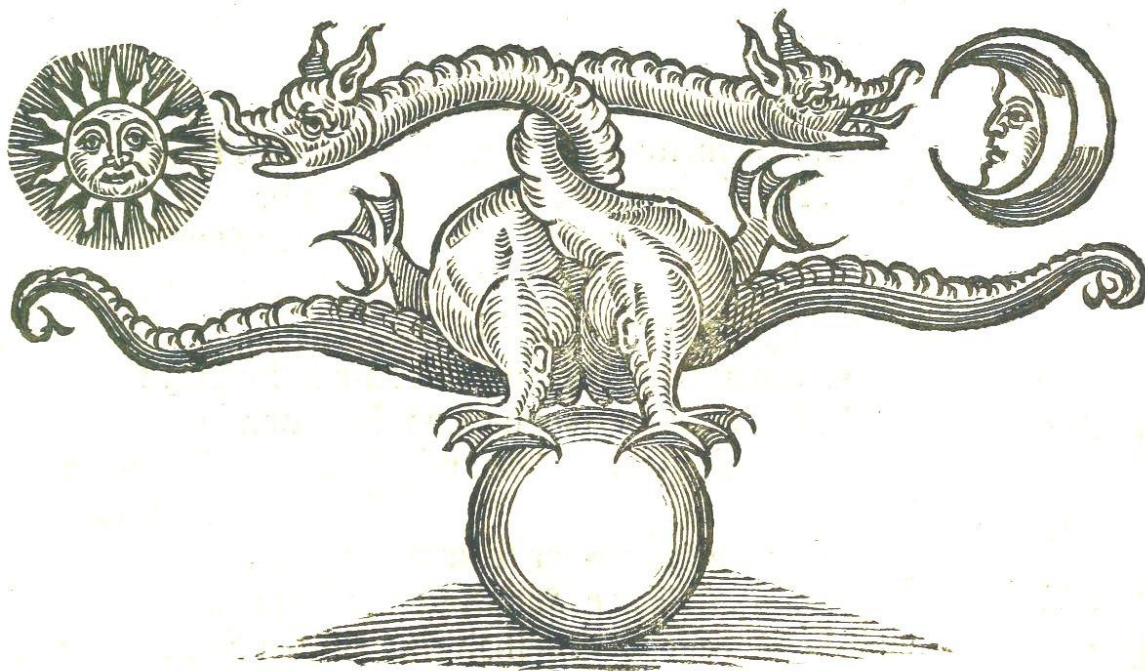
**O**N the *Ground* there is a *Hill*,  
 Also a *Serpent* within a *Well* :  
 His *Tayle* is long with *Wings* wide,  
 All ready to fly on every side,  
 Repaire the *Well* round about,  
 That the *Serpent* pas not out ;  
 For if that he be there agone,  
 Thou loofest the vertue of the *Stone*,  
 What is the *Ground* thou mayst know heere,  
 And also the *Well* that is so cleere :  
 And eke the *Serpent* with his *Tayle*  
 Or else the worke shall litle availe,  
 The *Well* must brenne in *Water* cleare,  
 Take good heede for this thy *Fyre*,  
 The *Fire* with *Water* brent shal be,  
 And *Water* with *Fire* wash shall he ;  
 Then *Earth* on *Fire* shalbe put,  
 And *Water* with *Air* shalbe knit,  
 Thus ye shall go to *Putrefaccion*,  
 And bring the *Serpent* to *reduction*.

First

to Ripley's Scrowle.

379

First he shalbe Black as any Crow,  
And downe in his Den shall lye full lowe:  
I swel'd as a Toade that lyeth on ground,  
Burst with bladders fitting so round,  
They shall to brast and lye full plaine,  
And thus with craft the *Serpent* is slaine:  
He shall shew Collours there many a one,  
And tourne as White as wilbe the bone,  
With the Water that he was in,  
Wash him cleane from his sin:  
And let him drinke a litle and a lite,  
And that shall make him faire and white,  
The which Whitnes is ever abiding,  
Lo here is the very full finishing:  
Of the *White Stone* and the *Red*,  
Loe here is the true deed.



Page images from Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652).

---

**MEDIEVAL TITLES SOLD BY  
THE RESTORERS OF ALCHEMICAL  
MANUSCRIPTS SOCIETY**

**www.ramsdigital.com**

**Kalid Persica (? - 702)**

"The Book of the Secrets of Alchimie", "Secreta Alchemiae" &  
"Liber Trium Verborum"

**Artephius (c.1130-1150)**

"The Secret Book"

**Albertus Magnus (1193 – 1280)**

"The Compound of Compounds"

**Roger Bacon (1220 – 1292)**

"SPECULUM ALCHYMIÆ: The True Mirror of Alchemy",  
"Of the medicine or tincture of antimony", "An excellent discourse of the  
admirable force and efficacie of Art and Nature"

"Tract on the Tincture and Oil of Antimony", & "Radix Mundi".

**Arnald of Villanova (1240-1311)**

"The Epistle of Arnoldus de Villa Nova to the King of Naples"

**Raymond Lully (1232-1315)**

"Testament" & "Clavicula"

**Nicolas Flamel (1330 - 1418)**

"Summary of Philosophy"

**George Ripley (1415 – 1490)**

"The Compound of Alchemy", "Liber Secretisimus",  
"Lully's Theory of the Philosophers Fire Explained by G. Ripley."  
"Medula Alchymie", "The Breviary of Alchemy", "The Bosome Book", &  
"A treatise of Mercury and the Philosophers Stone".

## List of known Ripley Scrolls

- British Library Add 5025/1 – paper, 1.52m, Type II.  
British Library Add 5025/2 – 1588, paper, smallest, 1.26m.  
British Library Add 5025/3 – Rosicrucian Influence, Type II.  
British Library Add 5025/4  
British Library Add 32621  
British Library Sloane 2424 A - , Type II.  
British Library Sloane 2423 B – recycled vellum map.
- Wellcome MS 692 – paper on linen, floral border  
Wellcome MS 693 – paper on linen, floral border
- Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh - paper on linen, 5.61m
- Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodley Roll 1. oldest? Mid-15<sup>th</sup> Century vellum  
Bodleian Library, Ashmole Rolls 40, no. 1772 - 16<sup>th</sup> (17<sup>th</sup>?) Century  
Bodleian Library, Ashmole Rolls 52, no.1523  
Bodleian Library, Ashmole Rolls 53, 16<sup>th</sup> Century. paper/linen, Type II.  
Bodleian Library, Ashmole Rolls 54, no.1771. 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Type II.
- Private collection: Sotheby Sale, 17<sup>th</sup> century copy.
- Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, USA
- Princeton University, USA, MS 93 – vellum, 5.54m
- Mellon Collection, Yale, USA, MS Mellon 41. c.1570, paper/linen, 5.94m.
- Huntington Library, UC Berkeley, HM 30313. 16<sup>th</sup> Century Parchment, 3.3m.
- Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, MS 276. largest, 6.725m, paper on linen.
- Parisian Archive. found 2010
- Science Museum, London – 18<sup>th</sup> Century, found 2012.