
Heut / Heut / Heut /
Iſt deß Königs Hochzeit/
Biſtu hierzu gebohren/
Von Gott zu Frewd erkohren/
Magſt auff den Berge gehen /
Darauff drey Tempel ſtehen/
Daſelbſt die Geſchicht beſehen.
Halt Wacht /
Dich ſelbſt betracht/
Wirſt dich nit fleiſſig baden /
Die Hochzeit kan dir ſchaden.
Schad hat wer hie verzeücht/
Hüet ſich wer iſt zu Leicht/
Vnden an ſtynd : Sponſus & Sponſa.

Verse from *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, Johann Valentin Andreae, 1616.

4.

The Deepest of the Rosicrucians

Michael Maier (1569–1622)

JOSCELYN GODWIN

Emblema XLII, *"Let Nature be thy guide."*
Michael Maier, *Atalanta fugiens,* 1618.

FRANCES YATES WROTE, "I am entirely unable to understand all this," as she contemplated Maier's famous emblem of the alchemist about to cleave a giant egg with a sword,[1] "nor how it would be possible to work out a mathematical problem in terms of this kind of alchemy. But I believe that implications of this kind are present in the Maier emblems, and that Maier may have been the deepest of the 'Rosicrucians'."[2] As Dame Frances plainly hinted, Maier deserved a book-length study; but no one has yet accepted the challenge. The one and only monograph remains the Rev. Craven's classic *Count Michael Maier*,[3] 86 years old and still indispensable for anyone without a complete set of Maier's works on their shelves.

While we await the scholar willing to dedicate several years to studying and explaining this fascinating figure, the Munich professors Karin Figala and Ulrich Neumann are filling out the blanks in Maier's biography.[4] They have established, for instance, that Maier was born in Kiel, on the

1. This is Emblem 8 of *Atalanta fugiens* (Oppenheim: De Bry, 1617).
2. Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 83.
3. The Rev. J. B. Craven, D.D., *Count Michael Maier. Doctor of Philosophy and of Medicine. Alchemist, Rosicrucian, Mystic. 1568–1622.* Kirkwall: William Peace & Son, 1910. Facsimile ed., London: Dawson's of Pall Mall, 1968.
4. Karin Figala and Ulrich Neumann, "Ein früher Brief Michael Maiers (1568–1622) an Heinrich Rantzau (1526–1598). Einführung, lateinischer Originaltext und deutsche Übersetzung." In *Mathemata* (Festschrift für Helmuth Gericke), ed. Folkerts and Lindgren. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985, pp. 327–357. Figala and Neumann, "Michael Maier (1569–1622): New Bio-Bibliographical Material." In *Alchemy Revisited. Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen*, ed. von Martels. Leiden: Brill, 1990, pp. 34–50. Figala and Neumann, "À propos de Michel Maier: quelques découvertes bio-bibliographiques." In *Actes du Colloque international "Alchimie—art, histoire et mythes.* Paris, 14–16 March 1991.

Baltic Sea, in the summer of 1569. His father, Peter Maier (variously spelled) was an embroiderer in gold and pearls who worked for the nobility of Holstein, then under Danish rule. Peter Maier died before 1587, when Michael was sent at the expense of a maternal relative to study philosophy and the Liberal arts at the University of Rostock.[5] Between 1589 and 1591 he made one or more journeys to Padua, where he was honored with the title of Poet Laureate. In 1592 he obtained the Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Frankfurt an der Oder. His academic training was completed with the degree of Doctor of Medicine, granted him by the University of Basel in 1596.

Now in his late twenties, Maier returned to the Baltic to practice as a physician in Holstein and East Prussia, bearing the three "titles from the Schools" to which he proudly alludes in the caption of his sole surviving portrait: Ph.D., M.D., and poet laureate.[6] His earliest publications date from this period of medical study and practice. With the exception of his dissertation, they are addresses to his friends, printed in small editions for private distribution:

"Semper usitatum fuisse, Illustris et magne vir" (Rostock, 1590)
Letter to Heinrich Rantzau, dated from the University of Rostock, 18 June 1590[7]

"De epilepsia" (Basel, 1596)
M.D. dissertation, University of Basel, 1596. No copy known.[8]

Eidyllion gratulatorium (Basel: Konrad Waldkirch, 1596)
Ded. Johannes Sagittarius, who had graduated M.D. in the same class as Maier.[9]

5. Figala & Neumann, "Ein früher Brief," p. 329
6. The portrait was included as a frontispiece in Maier's *Symbola aureae mensae* and in *Atalanta Fugiens*.
7. Figala & Neumann, "Ein früher Brief," pp. 338–349, giving Latin text and German translation. The fact of the letter's printing, in an edition of 100 copies, is mentioned at the end of the text. Only a Ms. copy is known: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 9737, tom. II (-m), f. 27r–30v.
8. Figala & Neumann, "Ein früher Brief," p. 352, n. 23.
9. Figala & Neumann, "Ein früher Brief," p. 335, states that only a Ms. copy is known: Munich, Staatsbibliothek, Codex latinus 17,923.

Verba nupta in nuptias M. Mart. Braschii, Prof. Rostoch., & Doroth. Badeniae Rost. 1597 (Rostock, 1597)
Ded. Martin Brasche, on his marriage with Dorothea Badenia. No copy known.[10]

Shortly after Maier's return to his homeland, he witnessed a remarkable cure effected through alchemy, which reoriented him entirely. With the systematic habit that he retained throughout his life, he began by making a glossary of alchemical terms. Then he studied the theoretical aspect, sifting the good authors from the bad, and made a first-hand study of natural phenomena, especially those of mining regions. Finally he proceeded to the practice, setting up a laboratory in Kiel with his brother-in-law (that is, his sister's husband; Maier never married). His alchemical work lasted from 1602 until 1607 or 1608, at the end of which time Maier "had obtained, by God's grace, the Universal Medicine, of a bright lemon color."[11] He was unable to proceed further owing to technical difficulties. Besides, his avocation had made him an object of hostile curiosity to the provincial burghers of Kiel, and the long experiments had exhausted his funds.

Under such conditions, where else would a three-quarters successful alchemist turn, if not to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II? Around the middle of 1608, Maier went to Prague and presented himself, armed with his Universal Medicine, at the Hradcany Palace. It took him about a year to penetrate the circles of courtly obstruction surrounding the reclusive Emperor. Perhaps the door was opened by the publication of his first alchemical book:

De Medicina regia et vere heroica, Coelidonia (Prague, 1609)[12]

On 19 September 1609 he entered the Emperor's service, and ten days later was raised to the nobility. The caption of Maier's portrait lists, along with his academic honors, the three titles that Rudolf gave him: Personal

10. Figala & Neumann, "Ein früher Brief," pp. 335, 352, n. 24.
11. Ulrich Neumann, "Michael Maier (1569–1622), Arzt, Alchemist, Schriftsteller und Rosenkreuzer: Erste Erträge eines bio-bibliographischen Forschungsprojektes." In *Mitteilungen. Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker. Fachgruppe Geschichte der Chemie* 8 (1993), pp. 6–16. Here: p. 9, quoting from Maier's letter to Fürst August von Anhalt-Plötzkau, 5 August 1610, discovered by Dr. Carlos Gilly in the town archive of Oranienbaum, Russia.
12. Neumann, "Michael Maier," p. 7, mentions a unicum in the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

Physician, Count Palatine, and Knight Exemptus. This ennoblement of a person who had contributed to cultural life was not unusual in Rudolf's court. Others so honored included the diplomat and humanist Johann Mathias Wacker von Wackenfels, the poet and bibliophile Jirí Bartholdus Pontanus, the painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo, and the alchemists Johann Müller von Müllenfels and Sir Edward Kelley.[13]

Maier's golden years in Prague were few. He had arrived at the melancholy twilight of Rudolf's reign, which ended with the Emperor's forced abdication in favor of his brother Matthias in April 1611 and his death, a virtual prisoner in his own palace, on 20 January 1612. Maier, along with many other courtiers and artists, was obliged to seek another patron. According to Professor Neumann,[14] he turned to three alchemically-inclined rulers: August von Anhalt-Plötzkau, Moritz von Hessen-Kassel, and Ernst III von Holstein-Schauenburg. But instead of settling in any of their domains, Maier went next to England, arriving before Christmas 1611 and remaining there until 1616.

Maier addressed himself immediately to King James I and VI. His visiting-card, now in the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh (GD 242/212), took a most unusual form. It was a Christmas greeting to the King, made of a folded parchment 33 by 24 inches, on which a central Rose-Cross emblem made out of words in gold and red is flanked by four Latin poems. Two of these poems address James, while the others are put into the mouths of four archangels and two shepherds attendant on Christ's Nativity. The parchment includes a musical canon in six parts representing the songs of the angels and shepherds.[15] All in all, it is a most curious object, displaying the verbal ingenuity and the multimedia approach that marked Maier's creative style. It is also the earliest known appearance of the Rose-Cross symbol in England.

Although the Rosicrucian manifestos, the *Fama* and the *Confessio*, were not published until 1614 and 1615 respectively, the *Fama* at least was circulating in manuscript by 1611. In his study of the early Rosicrucian documents, Dr. Carlos Gilly quotes a letter of December 1611 from

13. See R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World. A Study in Intellectual History 1576–1612* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973): Wacker, p. 155; Pontanus, p. 159; Arcimboldo, p. 166; Müller, p. 209; Kelley, p. 226.
14. Neumann, "Michael Maier," p. 10.
15. See Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, ed. Godwin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1989), pp. 207–208, for a description of the manuscript and a transcription of the music.

August von Anhalt to Carl Widemann in which Anhalt records receiving a transcript of the *Fama* from Adam Haslmeyer as a New Year's gift.[16] As mentioned above, Maier had written to August von Anhalt on 10 August 1610, describing his alchemical work,[17] and, according to Professor Neumann, he sought employment with this ruler after Rudolf's deposition. August von Anhalt was the brother of the Calvinist prince Christian von Anhalt, of whom Frances Yates says: "Anhalt was, of course, the moving spirit behind the 'activist' tradition in German Protestantism, the tradition which had been looking for leaders throughout the early part of the century and which by now (by the time the Rosicrucian manifestos were actually printed) had fixed on Frederick V, Elector Palatine, as the leader destined to head the movement and to lead it to victory."[18] Yates's surmise that the Rosicrucian movement was intimately linked with the political plans of the German Protestant rulers is only strengthened by this earlier appearance of the Rose-Cross symbol, adorning a greeting from a German envoy to King James.

These political plans reached a crucial stage in the following year, 1612. On 16 October, Frederick landed in England as suitor of King James's daughter Elizabeth. At that moment, Maier was preparing another Christmas greeting, this time addressed to the 18-year-old Henry, Prince of Wales. This oversized parchment is now in the British Library (Royal Mss. 14.B.xvi). It is made entirely from words, both poetic and prose, arranged in various geometrical shapes so as to form acrostics. The text is full of classical allusions that are turned to praise of the Prince, whose personal gifts had made him so popular and raised such hopes for his future as King of England. Alas, they came to nothing: Prince Henry died of typhoid fever on 6 November 1612, and never received his Christmas cards. But this tragic death did not prevent the official announcement at Christmas of Elector Frederick and Princess Elizabeth's engagement, followed in February 1613 by Frederick's investment as a Knight of the Garter and by the wedding.[19] The couple departed for their home in Heidelberg Castle in April 1613.

16. *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica. Die Rosenkreuzer im Spiegel der zwischen 1510 und 1660 enstandenen Handschriften und Drücke*. Exhibition catalogue, ed. Carlos Gilly. Amsterdam: In de Pelikan, 1995, p. 40.
17. Neumann, "Michael Maier," p. 7.
18. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 53.
19. See the chapter "A Royal Wedding" in Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 1–14.

Maier's presence in England during the preceding year was almost certainly the fulfilment of a diplomatic mission, preparing the ground for this dynastic marriage. His status as a Count Palatine and a familiar of the eirenic Rudolf (from whom James had earlier received presents[20]) would have made him an acceptable envoy, while his contacts in 1611 with three German Protestant rulers suggests who he was now working for: the coalition that was forming in the face of an aggressively Catholic Habsburg monarchy, and which hoped to enroll King James as an ally of their cause.

Did Maier know Robert Fludd, as is often surmised? There is no reason to believe the tale, often repeated by modern Rosicrucians, that Maier initiated Fludd into the Brotherhood;[21] even less, the assertion of Clymer that Maier was its "First Supreme Grand Master."[22] All the same, it is impossible to imagine that Maier and Fludd never met each other. One man whom Maier definitely knew in London was James's personal physician, Sir William Paddy. To Paddy he dedicated his first alchemical book, *Arcana arcanissima* (1614). Paddy was a close friend of Robert Fludd, receiving the dedication of Fludd's *Medicina Catholica* (1629). The first book of Fludd's "History of the Macrocosm and Microcosm," *Utriusque cosmi... historia* (1617), was dedicated to the King, at a time when James was still friendly to the Hermetic philosophy and to his son-in-law Frederick. The conclusion has already been drawn by Frances Yates:[23] that while in London, Maier frequented the circle of Hermetic physicians close to the Court, just as in Prague he had formed part of a similar circle around Rudolf. And he brought to this English circle, three years before the *Fama* was published, the news of the rising movement in Protestant Germany, whose spiritual wing went under the sign of the Rose-Cross.

Maier stayed in England for nearly five years. He must have devoted much of his time to research and writing, for within two years of his return to Germany in mid-1616, he was able to publish eleven books:

20. Evans, *Rudolf II*, p. 81n., mentions a gift of a celestial globe and a clock in 1609.
21. Already in 1924, A. E. Waite, in *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (reprint ed., New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, n.d.), p. 324, poured cold water on "modern gratuitous inventions which represent Michael Maier carrying the Rosy Cross in his pocket to England and initiating Robert Fludd...."
22. R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Book of Rosicruciae* (Quakertown, Pa.: Philosophical Publishing Co., 1946), vol. I, p. 177.
23. *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 84.

De circulo physico quadrato [On the physical circle squared] (Oppenheim: Jennis, 1616)
Ded. Moritz von Hessen. Preface dated from Frankfurt, August 1616
Lusus serius [Serious game] (Oppenheim: Jennis, 1616)
Ded. Francis Anthony, Jacobus Mosanus, Christian Rumphius. Preface dated from Frankfurt, September 1616
Examen fucorum pseudo-chymicorum [Examination of the pseudo-chemical drones] (Frankfurt: de Bry, 1617)
Ded. Joachim Hirschberger, M.D. Preface dated from Frankfurt, September 1616
Jocus severus [Severe joke] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1617)
Ded. to German lovers of chemistry, especially the Brethren of the Rose-Cross
Silentium post clamores [Silence after clamor] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1617)
Issued anonymously
Symbola aureae mensae [Symbols of the golden table] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1617)
Ded. Ernst III, Fürst von Holstein-Schauenburg. Preface dated from Frankfurt, December 1616
Atalanta fugiens [Atalanta fleeing] (Oppenheim: de Bry, 1617)
Ded. Christoph Reinhart of Mühlhausen. Preface dated from Frankfurt, August 1617
Tripus aureus [Golden tripod] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1618)
Ded. Johannes Hartmann Beyer. Preface dated from Frankfurt, January 1618
Themis aurea [Golden Themis] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1618)
No dedication
Viatorium, hoc est, De Montibus Planetarum Septem seu Metallorum [Guidebook, i.e., of the mountains of the seven planets or metals] (Oppenheim: de Bry, 1618)
Ded. Christian von Anhalt. Preface dated from Frankfurt, September 1618
Verum inventum, hoc est, Munera Germaniae [True invention, i.e., the gifts of Germany] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1619)
Ded. the Town Councillors of Frankfurt. Preface dated September 1618

Only after this date did Maier's production slow down to about one book a year. To complete this shortlist of his publications, here are his remaining works:

Tractatus de volucri arborea [Treatise on the tree-bird] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1619)
Ded. Johannes Hardtmuth

Septimana philosophia [Philosophic week] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1620)
Ded. Christian Wilhelm, Archbishop of Magdeburg. Preface dated from Magdeburg, January 1620

Civitas corporis humani [City of the human body] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1621)
Ded. to medical men and to sufferers from gout. Preface dated from Magdeburg, August 1620

Cantilenae intellectuales de phoenice redivivo [Intellectual songs of the revived phoenix] (Rome, 1622; Rostock, 1623)
Ded. Herzog Friedrich III von Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf. Preface dated from Rostock, August 1622

Ulysses, hoc est, Sapientia seu Intelligentia [Ulysses, i.e., wisdom and intelligence] (Frankfurt: Jennis, 1624)
Published posthumously

The Prefaces show that Maier lived for two years in Frankfurt am Main, perhaps supported by the publishers of his numerous books. He dedicated these either to fellow-scholars or to Hermetically-inclined Protestant rulers. In 1618 he was rewarded by Moritz of Hessen, to whom earlier in the year he had presented copies of all his books, with the official title of "Medicus und Chymicus von Hauß aus," that is, Original Physician and [Al]chemist.[24]

A word should be said here about Maier's social and economic position. Born the son of a prosperous craftsman, he had been made a Count Palatine and Knight Exemptus. But Emperor Rudolf had not thought of

24. Neumann, "Michael Maier," p. 11.

adding a grant of land that would provide Maier with an income commensurate with such titles: he left him in the uncomfortable condition of an unlanded nobleman. Maier was henceforth barred from modest employment such as tutoring or the general practice of medicine. Yet having no property or inherited wealth, he had to work for somebody. His only hope was for attachment to some greater nobleman's household, or for diplomatic status such as he presumably enjoyed in England.

It is interesting to compare Maier's social situation with that of Robert Fludd. Robert's father, Sir Thomas Fludd, had been knighted for military services to the Crown, and acquired the manor of Bearsted in Kent. Robert, as a younger son, did not inherit the manor but was expected to fend for himself by joining the army or one of the learned professions: Law, Medicine, and the Church. He worked for several years as a tutor to European noblemen's sons, then settled in London as a physician with a flourishing and profitable practice. Count Michael Maier, in contrast, was forced into a kind of upper-class beggary.

There is no evidence of why Maier left Moritz's household after only two years, except the obvious political circumstances. The death of the Emperor Matthias, the rebellion of the Bohemian estates, the invitation of Elector Frederick of the Palatinate to the throne of Bohemia, the battle of the White Mountain outside Prague with its catastrophic consequences for the Protestant league: all these weighed heavily on Moritz and threatened his little realm. Already extremely pressed for military funds, he had neither time nor money for the esoteric diversions that he had pursued for many years. Nor did Maier have any prospect of a quiet life with war on the doorstep.

No wonder that Maier moved north. In 1620 we find him in Magdeburg, where he had a potential patron in the Markgraf Christian Wilhelm von Brandenburg. Two years later, in 1622, he was petitioning Herzog Friedrich III von Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorf, Prince of Norway, apparently with a view to returning to his Baltic homeland. But his plans never matured, for Maier died in Magdeburg in the late summer of that year. His last book, the forty-page essay *Ulysses*, sounded a valedictory note, imbued with the Christian Stoicism that Maier had perforce to cultivate in his last years. It treats of "how to recover from the shipwreck of bodily goods and fortune" through the virtues of Ulysses, that is, the intellect.

Maier's travels had almost come full circle, taking him as far south as Padua, as far west as London, and all around the states of Germany. While modest by our standards, they had succeeded in giving him a global consciousness, rare for his time. He was aware of the New World, he had a sense of the earth's other continents, and he conceived of Europe, for all its family quarrels, as an entity. Perhaps this was easier in the days when one could travel all around Europe, confident that anyone worth talking to could speak the same language: Latin.

In the *Symbola aureae mensae*, Maier gives expression to this global view in a long disquisition on the four continents. Seen as if from outside the earth, they take on the shape of a cross: the cross of the four cardinal directions and the four elements. Europe, he says, corresponds to earth, the Americas to water, Asia to air, and Africa to fire.[25] He justifies these attributions with a wealth of geographical knowledge. In this way he was able to grasp the external world, classify its parts, and make sense of what we would accept as random or natural dispositions of land and sea. Much of Maier's work was on these lines: organizing human experience so that it made sense within his private world, which was in turn organized according to traditional cosmology, arithmology, and Hermetic concepts.

The *Septimana philosophica* illustrates Europe as a female figure, a conceit that Maier explains in that semi-scientific, semi-emblematic way that is so typical of the period.[26] He is discussing the shape that people see on the face of the moon. Some see a hare, some a man, others a woman. What is this shape? It is the reflection of the woman-like shape of the continent of Europe, says Maier. This is caused by the sunlight striking the earth's surface and sending the image back to the moon. People in India, in consequence, must see different lunar markings: they see a reflection of India. Maier's conclusion was entirely logical, because the astronomical doctrine of 1620 held, following Aristotle, that the surface of the moon was perfectly smooth and polished, acting as a mirror. This was before Galileo had pointed out that the telescope shows the lunar surface to have mountains and valleys, just like the earth. However, Maier goes on to say that Europe *is* a woman, and that Germany is her belly. Speaking of the Brethren of the Rose-Cross and their *Fama* and *Confessio*,

25. *Symbolae aureae mensae*, p. 572.
26. *Septimana philosophica*, pp. 30–31.

recently published in Germany, he says that Germany is pregnant with great things for the future.[27] Through this numinous image, astronomy has merged into sacred geography.

Maier was strongly conscious of being German, and proud of it. His journey to England only intensified his patriotism. Again in the *Symbola aureae mensae*, in the chapter on English alchemy, he offers some impressions of England and the English.[28] He celebrates in a poem the generous hospitality he enjoyed there, but adds that he was much offended by the English actors because in their public plays they "introduced Germans as drunk and babbling, mixing in a few Teutonic words, showing the women almost as beasts, the Emperor as a petty prince..." (p. 483). Maier in turn criticizes the English as barbaric pronouncers of Latin, and even of their own language: "In this depraved state of literacy, there are many thousands of words pronounced by other nations that they cannot write as they are pronounced. The word *Church* they pronounce *Tziertz*...." (p. 495).

Nothing reinforced Maier's German patriotism so much as the Rosicrucian movement, which he was inordinately proud to see arising from his own soil. The movement appears as the crown of Germany's many gifts to humankind in his patriotic work, *Verum inventum*. Maier also devoted two books solely to the defence of the Rosicrucians. The first, *Silentium post clamores*, is his sole book in German, evidently written with a more popular audience in mind; it is a defence of the Brethren for being so silent and unresponsive after giving out the *Fama* and the *Confessio* to the world. The second, *Themis aurea*, is one of the two books of Maier's that was translated into English in the seventeenth century.[29] It is again a defence of the Brethren, adducing arguments in favor of the rules given in their manifestos: keeping anonymity, healing the sick gratis, and so on. Like all of Maier's works, these are full of fascinating asides and digressions, to which a book-length study could scarcely do justice.

27. "For Europe is with child and will bring forth a strong child...." *Confessio*, English ed. (London: Giles Calvert, 1652), p. 17. Facsimile ed., *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R: C:* (Margate: Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, 1923).
28. *Symbola aureae mensae*, pp.482–496.
29. *Themis aurea. The Laws of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross.* London: N. Brooke, 1656. Facsimile ed., Preface by Manly Palmer Hall, Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1976. The other English translation is *Lutus serius: or, Serious Passe-time.* London: Humphrey Moseley & Thomas Heath, 1654.

The Rosicrucian event, like the map of Europe, had somehow to be incorporated into Maier's private cosmos. A ready receptacle was there in his belief in the mystery schools, which he reiterates many times in his various works. The formidable edifice of the *Symbola aureae mensae* is built around the concept of twelve mystery schools, appearing in chronological order in twelve different nations. The earliest was the school of Hermes Trismegistus in ancient Egypt, followed by their inheritors the Hebrews. Then came the schools of Greece and Rome, the Arabians, and the various European nations. Other books of Maier's give differing lists of the schools, but the principle is constant. I do not believe that he ever uses the term "philosophia [or theologia] perennis," but he obviously conceived of a "perennial philosophy," a traditional wisdom handed down from the ancient days and manifesting alike in pagan nations and in those belonging to the three Abrahamic religions. The last in line of these mystery schools was the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, appearing in the center of Europe and addressing the modern age.[30] Maier felt proud that such wise men existed in his own country. Although he never claimed to belong to them, he left his readers in no doubt of his sympathy with Rosicrucian principles and aspirations.

Frances Yates makes it plain that by a "Rosicrucian" she means not a card-carrying member of the Brotherhood—there were none—but someone who shared the ideals set forth in the manifestos. The *Fama*, the *Confessio*, and the *Chemical Wedding*, which put into circulation the name and myth of Christian Rosenkreutz, were in this view only part of what Yates called the "Rosicrucian Enlightenment," a movement of intellectual and spiritual history that unfolded between John Dee's arrival in Germany in 1583 and the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620.[31] If one accepts these definitions, with their stern implied judgment on later "Rosicrucian" orders, Michael Maier was certainly a Rosicrucian. The teasing question is, did he know that the *Fama* and *Confessio* were written by Johann Valentin Andreae and his circle for private circulation in manuscript; that these manifestos then "escaped" into print against the will of their authors, causing the latter embarrassment and even danger, which Andreae later dissembled by calling the whole

30. See especially *Symbola aureae mensae*, pp. 288–289.

31. See, e.g., Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 220–222, 231.

affair a "ludibrium," a prank?[32] If Maier did know this, then his lifelong praise, defence, and citation of the Rosicrucians must have been undertaken in order to turn the prank to deadly earnest, because he so passionately agreed with the sentiments expressed therein. If Maier did not know, which I think more probable, he elected to join an enterprise whose reality he did not doubt for a moment. As he says in *Themis aurea*, he accepted that the Brethren did not and would not make themselves known, because this was the best way to achieve their ideals in an imperfect world. People such as Maier and Fludd were living proof of the wisdom of their strategy, for here were minds of exceptional caliber devoting themselves to the Rosicrucian cause without even needing personal contact or initiation.

Maier's contribution to the Rosicrucian movement took several different forms. First, he practiced the decreed profession of healing. We can get an idea of the kind of physician he was from his book on the gout, *Civitas corporis humani*, and from the *Themis aurea*. In both books he rails against the common run of doctors, having no good word for the Galenists—followers of the official medical system, based on balancing the four humors—and the practitioners of pedantic, book-based medicine. He admits that Galenic medicine has its good points, but says that one cannot remain tied to ancient texts. The chief alternative medicine in Maier's time was Paracelsian, which relied on chemical remedies, including ones made from metals. Maier also acknowledges that chemical treatment may be useful in certain circumstances, but is not a cure-all. A third system was the traditional folk-medicine of herbs or "simples." Maier approves of this, too, saying that sometimes the herbal remedy is all that is needed. He adds that the same herbs may alter their character according to the solar and planetary influences on them (*Themis aurea*, English ed., p. 49). One glaring omission remains: the Universal Medicine that Maier claimed to have made during his period of alchemical work in Kiel. One would have thought that this made all other remedies redundant.

Maier was a practical man with a serious interest in technology, not content simply to read Aristotle and Pliny but willing to get his hands dirty.

32. This summary of the facts is based on the research of Dr. Carlos Gilly and the publications of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam. See *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica* (see above, n. 16) and Dr. Gilly's book *Adam Haslmayr. Der erste Verkünder der Manifeste der Rosenkreuzer* (Amsterdam: In de Pelikan, 1994).

He was particularly interesred in mining and metallurgy, and wrote with authority on these subjects. During his Kiel period, he made a special journey to Hungary to obtain some unnamed substance that could be found nowhere else. In *Symbola aureae mensae* he describes the different ways in which gold grows in other minerals, how it is found in the mines of Hungary and Bohemia, and the methods used to separate gold and other metals from their ores.[33] There is nothing alchemical about that. In the *Viatorium*, a treatise on the seven planets and the corresponding metals, he takes the metals one by one and describes their roles in making gold, in compounding the "tincture" (the Universal Medicine), and in general medicine. Alchemy apart, he writes of normal chemical and metallurgical processes with easy familiarity.

The science and technology of Maier's day, compared to our own, were not yet closed to the world of anomalies and wonders that now constitute the category of "rejected knowledge." Besides being a scientist by our definition, Maier was also a kind of Fortean. That is, he shared some of the interests that are associated today with the research and writings of Charles Fort. His most Fortean book is the *Tractatus de volucri arborea*, whose title refers to the barnacle goose. Maier's years in Britain seem to have included a trip to Scotland, for he testifies to having seen as well as heard of this creature there. It is a large barnacle that hangs onto rotting timber from a stem and somewhat resembles an embryo bird. After developing under water, it was believed to turn into a goose and emerge from the sea. Maier took this old wives' tale seriously enough to write a whole book about it. His motive was complex. The barnacle goose was not just a freak of nature, but an example of spontaneous generation, in which there was little reason to disbelieve before the use of the microscope. Spontaneous generation involves a virgin birth, or a birth not preceded by sexual intercourse; hence it is symbolic of the birth of Christ. In the solemn spirit of the Medieval bestiaries, with their moralized animal stories, Maier presents the barnacle goose to his readers as an emblem of the Savior.

The *Tractatus de volucri arborea* is filled out with other anomalies. It has passages about the incubi and succubi, and other denizens of that liminal world between the physical and the psychic domains (or, in the

33. *Symbola aureae mensae*, pp. 523–529.

terminology of occultism, between the physical and the astral planes). This compendium of natural wonders and freaks includes the creatures that live in caverns, which Maier's miner friends had seen and heard, and the Green Children who once emerged from a cave in England and lived for a time in the surface world.

Some would classify alchemy as a Fortean topic, especially if attention is paid to the few unimpeachable witnesses of transmutation. Maier did not call himself an alchemist: he was a *chymicus*. In the Preface of his first book on the subject, *Arcana arcanissima*, he says "I speak of Chymia, not Alchimia which is the mother of deceptions, adulterating metals, not really transmuting them."[34] The short but densely-packed book *Examen fucorum pseudo-chymicorum* describes the frauds of the alchemists, the "drones" (*fuci*) of the title, who resemble worker-bees but do nothing useful. These pseudo-chemists, who glory in the name of alchemists, are the familiar "puffers" of anti-alchemical polemic. Maier lists fifty-six ways in which they fool the public, promising to make gold with no expense or trouble at all. What, he asks, could be more unlikely than that? (pp. 10–13) Among those against whom he warns the reader are Cornelius Agrippa, "who says somewhere that he could extract the subtle spirit from gold. What sort of man he was appears from his letters" (p. 41); and Edward Kelly, whose tincture was nothing but a colored extract from gold. Although the Emperor was assured that Kelly had transmuted hundreds of pounds with it, it profited him nothing. (p. 42)

Maier's Chymia had nothing to do with making gold. Transmuting base metals into gold, he says, is not even useful to humanity, because putting too much gold into circulation would wreck the economy, encouraging luxury and eventually bringing down society, which does not benefit by excessive riches. For this reason the ancient Egyptians preserved the secrets of chemistry with the strictest laws. If the Egyptian hierophants had let their secrets abroad, their country would have been swamped with immigrants hoping to get rich (p. 29). Maier does not want to say dogmatically that silver and gold cannot be made, or extracted from other metals, but he is highly skeptical about the examples of transmutation that he has been shown, such as the nails, half iron and half gold, made in the laboratory of the Grand Duke of Florence. He comments suspiciously on the

34. *Arcana arcanissima*, I, A1^r

disparity of weights, the gold parts weighing twice as much as they would have weighed when they were iron (p. 30).

Having learned of all the frauds of the alchemists or pseudo-chemists, one is entitled to ask what exactly Maier's Chymia was, to which, after all, he dedicated the bulk of his writings. It was practical and involved work in the laboratory, though without needing elaborate equipment. A common furnace and fire will do, Maier says, so long as the degree of heat is observable; "one vessel, one furnace, one matter are sufficient" (p. 28). He puts it plainly in his first great work, *Arcana arcanissima*: Chymia has as its goal not the goldmaking of the alchemists but the preparation of the Universal or "Golden" Medicine that is a gift from God.[35] Maier's most direct ancestor in this regard is the canon of Erfurt, Basil Valentine, whose *Twelve Keys* he translated from German into Latin and published in his *Tripus aurea*. One finds in Basil the same intense piety, the familiarity with practical chemistry, the playful introduction of pagan deities, and the ultimate goal of healing, rather than of making gold.[36] To achieve the Universal Medicine was for Maier, as for Basil, the highest goal of a physician, and the most Christian thing one could do.

In the *Symbola aureae mensae* Maier offers a prayer to Christ the Savior that sums up his attitude:

> I, from the deep submission of my mind, in prayers, that ever I may offer with tongue and heart, beseech thee, who by ordinary means hast instituted and given a useful Medicine to the human race, whereas thou hast removed and cured even incurable diseases by thy Divine virtue acting in this world, and hast raised the Medical faculty by its name above all other arts and sciences as if it were blessed, pray and beseech that thou mayest never deny me the presence of thy grace, by which I may seek the said Medicine, in whose cause I have suffered and persisted, wandering and investigating through so much labor, work, expense, and danger, as thou knowest; that I may obtain

35. *Arcana arcanissima*, f. A2'–A3.

36. On Basil's chemistry, see John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry. An Outline of Alchemy, Its Literature and Relationships* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1936), pp. 183–211. On his spirituality, see A. E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Alchemy. Its Development and Records* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), pp. 163–176.

> what I seek, and what I have obtained, use for the glory of thy name and for the relief of the poor. (pp. 589–590)

Beside his knowledge of chemistry and technology, Maier was trained in the liberal arts, and urged every aspiring chemist to obtain like training. In *Examen fucorum pseudo-chymicorum* he lists the arts that are beneficial, giving a slightly different list from the canonical Trivium of Grammar, Dialectic or Logic, and Rhetoric, and the Quadrivium of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music or Harmony, and Astronomy: he omits Music and adds Physics and Medicine.[37] He himself was an expert Latin grammarian, and could wield a syllogism as well as the next man. *Symbola aureae mensae* is his tour-de-force in this regard: it contains thirty-six arguments against chemistry, srated in the scholastic language derived from Aristotle, together with thirty-six refutations put into the mouths of the twelve historical alchemists attending the "golden table." Maier disliked Scholasticism because it was Catholic, no doubt, and also because it was Aristotelian. Like other Renaissance Hermeticists, he was a staunch defender of Plato against Aristotle: "What shall we think of that monster Aristotle, who (as it is reported) was so spiteful to his Master Plato, that he caused many of his works to be burnt that he might shine brighter?"[38]

Maier's favorite use of language was in writing Latin poetry, which he did with gusto and ingenuity. He had, as we recall, received the poet's laurel crown while still in his twenties. Few of his works are without one or more poems, and his swan-song, *Cantilenae intellectuales de phoenice redivivo*, is entirely in verse. In conformity with his encyclopedic approach, of which I will say more, Maier's Latin poetry is a compendium of styles, meters, and verse forms. Far from adhering to the Humanist principle of only imitating the best classical poets, Maier happily uses the rhyming Latin verse that arose in the Middle Ages. The *Cantilenae*, for instance, are in rhyming Anacreontic verse, a bastard of classical and Medieval techniques.

Maier and his friends, who often contributed verses to the frontmatter of his books, enjoyed swapping clever Latin poems. They probably also played erudite word-games, for Maier loved Latin anagrams and acrostics,

37. *Examen fucorum pseudo-chymicorum*, pp. 14–16.

38. *Themis aurea*, English ed., p. 75.

as we can see from his Christmas greetings to the English court. Did he also know Greek? *Arcana arcanissima* contains Greek anagrams of the name "Michael Maier":

ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΜΑΙΗΡΟΣ	— *Michael Maier*
ΗΛΙΟΣ ΧΑΡΜΑ ΗΜΙ	— *The sun is my delight*
ΜΗ ΑΜΑ ΗΡΙ ΧΙΛΟΣ	— *Not as early as the grass* [?]
ΜΗ ΗΜΑΙ ΧΛΙΑΡΟΣ	— *I am not lukewarm*

But the occurrence of Greek in his books is so rare that I doubt that he knew the language at all well. If he had, his natural bent for wordplay and the display of erudition could not have resisted the opportunities offered.

Maier the littérateur was also blessed with a sense of humor, even though it may not coincide with our own. Two of his books with similar titles, *Lusus serius* and *Jocus severus*, are fables about birds and other creatures. *Jocus* presents Chymia personified as the Owl, the bird of Minerva and of nocturnal wisdom. She is attacked by other birds, the Parrot, the Nightingale, the Crow, and all, each claiming to be the best. The Phoenix acts as judge, as they come one by one and try to persuade the assembled company that they are superior. The Owl however prevails and receives the highest accolade. *Lusus* is similar in presenting a number of creatures that try to outdo Mercury in their claims to be useful to humanity. The creatures are the Calf, Sheep, Goose, Oyster, Silkworm, and Flax. The Goose, for example, says that without me, you'd sleep very cold and hard in your beds; you couldn't write without my quills, and besides, you eat me for Christmas dinner. Flax says: I'm just as important, because besides providing edible seeds and oil, I clothe you. If you didn't have linen underwear to change, you would have to be forever taking baths, like the ancient Romans. Then when you wear out your clothes, you turn me into paper, without which goose-quills are useless. But Mercury points out that he is the source from which all the metals come, and then lists the manifold uses of gold, silver, copper, tin, iron, and lead. Naturally he wins the contest to determine the greatest helper of humankind.

Maier's versatility as a writer enabled him to produce sharp polemic, especially when moved by three particular abuses: the pretensions of alchemists and pseudo-chemists (in *Examen fucorum*); the greed and stultification of the medical profession (in *Themis aurea*, where they are contrasted with the Rosicrucians, who heal gratis); and the wealth of the

Catholic Church (in *Symbola aureae mensae*, where he gives statistics of its holdings in France and Italy). Aside from his poetry and music (see below), he was more scholarly than creative, being immensely learned in the two fields of alchemical literature and classical mythology. He had at his fingertips the entire available corpus of ancient, Arab, and Medieval alchemical texts. Although from the twentieth century viewpoint Maier's own time may appear to have been the golden age of alchemy, he paid little attention to modern writers. He admired his fellow German Paracelsus, and quoted Heinrich Khunrath and Oswald Croll. But his whole bent was historical, in conformity with the idea of a tradition of mystery schools. *Arcana arcanissima* sets the style for his other domain of learning: the mythology of the Greeks and Romans, and of the Egyptians and other ancient peoples insofar as the Greeks and Romans were able to transmit it. This, too, Maier knew in minute detail. *Arcana arcanissima* is an interpretation of some of the principal myths and mythic cycles of antiquity: Isis and Osiris, the Voyage of the Argonauts, the Genealogy of the Gods and Goddesses, the Labors of Hercules, and the Trojan War. Maier believed that every one of them was invented to conceal the secrets of Chymia. This is a leitmotiv of his entire creative work, on which he insists to a degree that one might criticize as reductionist. He seems to have had little feeling for myth in itself; he treats the personalities of Hercules, Jason, and so on, merely as vehicles for a hidden agenda. He takes myth after myth, shows or hints at its chemical interpretation—and there is an end to the matter. Hercules' conquest of the Nemean Lion, for example, is the process of reducing the Green Lion so that it bleeds red.[39] Whether that leaves one any the wiser or not, it effectively disposes of the incident. Anything golden, like apples or a fleece, symbolizes the Universal Medicine. Any cases of marriage, rape, or copulation are the conjunction of the solar and lunar elements of the alchemical work. That takes care of much of classical mythology!

Obviously Maier found inspiration in myths and spent much time brooding over them. He loved them, but not for themselves—not for the vision of a guiltless, sensuous, and pagan world that so charmed Renaissance artists and their patrons. Maier loved myths solely because they spoke to him of Chymia. By reading Chymia between their lines and into their symbols, he must have felt that he was making contact with the great

39. *Arcana arcanissima*, p. 219.

alchemical tradition, which had concealed its secret knowledge in these enigmatic stories. It had begun in Egypt, under the patronage of Hermes Trismegistus; now it was flourishing once more in Germany. Maier was keenly conscious of being one of its principal bearers, with all the consequent privilege and responsibility before God.

The only one of the seven Liberal Arts that Maier does not prescribe as a preparation for Chymia is Music, but this was not out of ignorance. On the contraty: Maier was, as far as we know, the most musically gifted alchemist who ever lived. His musical masterpiece *Atalanta fugiens* is admittedly popular on account of its fifty illustrations; but its fifty fugues are no less remarkable, if less accessible to the bibliophile. Thar Maier knew music is no surprise: it was part of a Renaissance gentleman's education to be able to hold a part in a madrigal or to play the lute. That he could compose music is not extraordinary: so could his fellow Hermetists Simon Studion, Robert Fludd, and Moritz von Hessen. What is phenomenal is the kind of music he undertook to compose in *Atalanta fugiens*: fifty fugues in two canonical parts over a cantus firmus, which is one of the most challenging exercises in counterpoint.[40] Although he sometimes breaks the rules of his day—and it has to be said that he does so out of incompetence, not out of a Beethovenian urge to express himself—his patience and persistence in cartying out the project to its conclusion are awe-inspiring. Possibly Maier intended a musical setting for his late work, the *Cantilenae intellectuales de phoenice redivivo*, but was forced to leave them as "intellectual songs," songs without music but still assigned to three imaginary voices.

Whether Maier had any graphic gift we do not know; but a keen visual sense led him to have nearly all of his works illustrated with emblematic engravings. This is what has made them so collectable. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola's book of alchemical emblems, *The Golden Game*,[41]

40. In John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry* (London: G. Bell, 1936), pp. 281–289, there is an Appendix, "The Music in 'Atalanta fugiens'," by F. H. Sawyer, Lecturer in Music in the University of St. Andrews. Sawyer offers an amusing "fugue" of his own composition, but it is not on a cantus firmus, hence free from the most constricting element in Maier's chosen form. Out of curiosity, when transcribing *Atalanta fugiens* for the Phanes Press edition I composed one fugue at the interval of a sixth on Maier's cantus firmus. With a professional training in music theory and composition, it was still difficult, and the prospect of writing 49 more was absolutely daunting.

41. Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *The Golden Game. Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1988.

devotes about a third of its volume to illustrations from Maier's works. Very often Maier will begin a chapter with an emblem, then explain and elaborate on it in prose or verse. The emblem then serves as a memory-image for the chapter, which can be stored and recalled in a way not possible (for most people) with words alone. Several of his works are organized in a rhythmical way, with alternating emblems and commentaries. The *Viatorium* has emblems of the seven planets; *Septimana philosophica*, of the seven days; *Symbola aureae mensae*, of the twelve nations; *Atalanta fugiens* fifty emblems to go with the fifty fugues, epigrams, and commentaries. Altogether there are about a hundred emblems in his works. He surely had a large part in designing them before they were entrusted to Matthias Merian and other professional engravers.

All of Maier's works give a sense of orderliness, which in its extreme forms organizes the whole book into a grid-like pattern. The Phoenix songs (*Cantilenae intellectuales de phoenice redivivo*) are a simple example: nine songs, each song containing three poems of identical length. *Atalanta fugiens* is a more complex pattern. It is based on approaching each topic in four distinct ways: visually, poetically, musically, and through erudition. Each topic takes up four pages, or two openings of the book. The first opening presents a visual element in the engraving, a poetic one in the six-line Latin epigram with its German translation, and a musical one in the setting of the epigram for three voices. The second opening contains two pages of commentary on the emblem. This pattern is repeated without variation fifty times.

The most elaborate grid occurs in *Symbola aureae mensae*, where there are twelve repetitions of the pattern, each consisting of the following elements: an imaginary portrait of an alchemist with a saying attributed to him or her, and some emblematic representation of the saying in the background; a history of alchemy in his or her nation; sayings from the alchemists of that national school; objections to alchemy; answers to those objections. But the twelvefold repetition of the pattern is not all. Just as in the comedies of Maier's time there would be interludes between the acts that were not part of the drama, *Symbola aureae mensae* contains digressions that distract one from the otherwise too predictable rhythm and the high seriousness of the writing. The German chapter contains a miniature pattern within the larger one: nine poems in different Latin meters about the nine Muses, addressed to the Rosicrucians. This exemplifies Maier's love of completeness—all nine Muses are there—and his love of writing

verse. The chapter on French alchemy has a digression that lists the annual tributes paid to the Gallican Church, including cows, sheep, pigs, and one million eggs. The chapter on Italy has a similar statistical exposé of the enormous revenues of the Pope. The chapter on English alchemy, as mentioned above, digresses to tell of Maier's experiences in England.

Maier must have begun work on his books by dividing the subject into an arithmologically significant number of sub-themes, such as 7, 9, 12, 50. The result is crystalline in its regularity and in the way it permits reflection on the subject from a number of different facets. He must then have worked systematically to fill out the appointed scheme. The process closely resembles the composition of music in the fixed forms that were evidently found so satisfying in Maier's time: variations on a melody; ground basses (including chaconne and passacaglia); measured dances such as the Pavane and Galliard with varied repeats. Given this habit of work, it is less amazing that he would write fifty fugues of identical length.

His mind itself must have been unusually orderly. The grid-like organization of his works suggests that he was familiar with the Art of Memory, in which a regular geometric or architectural pattern, stored in the imagination, is filled with diverse images, which facilitate the retrieval of memorized material. The images may be complex and are habitually bizarre: they serve as emblems from which a whole cluster of associated ideas can be drawn out. In the same way, the emblems of Maier's books encapsulate the sense of the whole.

All of the above adds up to one of the most universal minds of the time. His work embraces the whole cosmic hierarchy, from the heavenly bodies (in the *Viatorium*) to the bowels of the earth and its elements. In the dimension of time, he surveys the whole of civilization, but viewed as sacred history. It is the secret tradition of the mystery schools, interwoven with the Christian revelation, that endows chronology with value in his eyes. "Survey," however, gives a false sense of superficiality, whereas everywhere Maier looks it is into the depths that are accessible to him, thanks to Chymia. Everywhere he penetrates to inner meanings and their secret transmission. As if this were not enough, Maier seems to have been a man of unimpeachable morality, a paragon of courtly virtue and of total dedication to his philanthropic mission.

Maier's Chymia was not just a symbolic system of Christian mysticism, nor was it just a Jungian quest for the integration of the psyche. It entailed

dirty work: practical, laboratory alchemy, in the course of which very remarkable things occurred. There is no point in trying to write about it if one lacks such experience. This lack prevents virtually all scholars, including myself, from ever comprehending the most important thing in Maier's life. That which is deepest in him is inaccessible to us, and will always remain so.

Yet Maier cannot have expected all his readers to set up laboratories and devote themselves to the quest for the Universal Medicine. What he offers to the uninitiated reader is already rich and deep enough to justify Frances Yates's sobriquet in the spirit of normal, non-occult discourse. He reveals a world of curious imagery that haunts the imagination; a world that, despite appearances, is measured, numbered, and ordered, as if imprinted by the intelligence of the Creator; a world where the classical gods and goddesses are still alive, informing the metals and other substances and opening them to strange adventures; a world of freaks and wonders, frauds, crimes, sicknesses, and their remedy, which is still loved by God; a world of hope, as the never-extinguished torch of the wise burns again in the hands of the Brethren of the Rose-Cross.

Emblema XXVI, *"The Fruit of Human Wisdom is the Tree of Life"*
Michael Maier, *Atalanta fugiens*, 1618.