

Alchemy and University

Conference at the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, November 20-22, 2019

The conference, organised jointly by Ute Frietsch, HAB Wolfenbüttel/Humboldt Universität Berlin, and Volkhard Wels, Freie Universität Berlin, will be funded by the German Research Foundation as part of the project “Epistemic Change: Stages of Early Modern Alchemy” (<http://www.hab.de/en/home/research/projects/epistemic-change-stages-of-early-modern-alchemy.html>)

For the historical examination and appraisal of alchemy, its relation to university has played a crucial role. General and persistent perception has seen alchemy as an occult practice divorced from European universities: In the Age of Enlightenment, this practice would definitely have been rejected by the emerging modern sciences and thus also excluded from the continued acceptance of the corpus of science, especially from modern chemistry.

The last decades, however, have seen groundbreaking and detailed research on social networks, terminology, procedures, instruments, pictures of alchemy as well as early chemistry by historians who have modified this simplistic view and described the rather gradual transformation of alchemy between the 16th and 18th centuries. Experts in this field today acknowledge that medical alchemy (chymiatría) was in some way established in European universities in the 17th century, despite deep-seated conflicts and disputes between the concept of humours and the concept of *tria principia* and between plant-based and mineral-based medication. Until now, though, the relationship between alchemy and universities remains to be researched in more detail, and the analysis of their relationship in the 16th and 18th centuries remains a desideratum.

This conference aims to deepen and to extend our knowledge of alchemy and universities in early modern times, especially our understanding of the protagonists (as for example: Wecker, Zwinger, Tancke, Libavius, Hartmann, Sennert, Rolfinck, Wedel, Stahl), the theories (e.g. *tria principia*, humoral pathology, phlogiston theory), preferred substances (e.g. sulfur, mercury, salt, antimony, laudanum), practices (e.g. academic *disputationes*, laboratory research, practical training of students), driving forces and controversies. With regards to the historical development, the major point of focus will certainly lie on the academic discipline of medicine. Nonetheless, contributions on alchemy in other academic *scientiae* and *artes* (as for example theology, natural philosophy, astronomy, history) are very welcome: How, for example, was an alchemically influenced theosophy discussed and practiced at early modern universities? And how broadly and freely could university professors, interested in alchemy, interpret the academic denomination of their chairs?

The conference will be held in English and German.