

Unlike Elizabethan England, which remained relatively isolated from cultural developments in Catholic Europe, Jacobean Scotland welcomed contacts with scholars and scientists in France, Italy, and Spain—countries with long traditions of support for Scottish monarchs, especially in their struggles against England. Moreover, James's greater tolerance for Catholics meant that his northern court received news of research and publication carried out by Scottish Catholics abroad. When James moved to London, this international Scottish network began to exert a greater influence on Hermetic and Cabalistic affairs in England.

In 1603 the most famous of the travelling Scottish adepts was Alexander Seton, "the Cosmopolite," a kinsman of James's trusted chancellor, the architect and mathematician of the same name.¹⁴⁶ The alchemist Seton had developed his method by studying the "profound Ramon Lull," which suggests an interest in the pseudo-Lullian Hermetic literature as well as the Lullist Art of Memory in the Scotland of James VI.¹⁴⁷ While travelling on the Continent, Seton astounded audiences with his transmutations which reportedly turned lead into gold. As his assistant, he employed a fellow Scot, William Hamilton, whose red hair and beard provoked much notice, especially because of the European tradition that red hair and freckles were signs of Jewishness.¹⁴⁸ At the University of Helmstedt, Seton was hosted by another wandering Scot, Dr. Duncan Liddell, who served as dean of faculty and achieved distinction in mathematics and medicine. Liddell had earlier visited Tycho Brahe at Uraniborg and shared the Dane's Hermetic interests.¹⁴⁹

Seton's fame led to his imprisonment and torture by Christian II, Elector of Saxony, who was determined to acquire the secret of his alchemical powder. After the frightened Hamilton escaped and returned to Scotland, Seton was rescued by Michael Sendivogius, a

¹⁴⁶ E.J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (1957; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 223–38; John Read, *Humour and Humanism in Chemistry* (London: G. Bell, 1947), 38–65. Seton may have been an expatriate Scot, possibly a Catholic Marian exile. Professor Włodzimierz Hubicki argues that Seton was really an Italian "impostor-charlatan-illusionist" named Gorolamo vel Hieronymus Scotto of Parma (b. ca. 1540); see his article, "The Mystery of Alexander Seton, the Cosmopolite," *Proceedings of the XIV International Congress of the History of Science* (Tokyo-Kyoto, 1974), II, 397–400.

¹⁴⁷ Seton's heavy debt to Lull is revealed in the edition of his work by Michael Sendivogius, *A New Light on Alchemy*, trans. John French (London, 1650).

¹⁴⁸ See Fabre-Vassas, *Singular Beast*, 105–09.

¹⁴⁹ J. Dreyer, *Tycho Brahe*, 137.

Polish alchemist, who carried him off to Cracow.¹⁵⁰ As the weakened Seton approached death in early 1604, he gave Sendivogius the remains of his powder. The rescuer then married Seton's widow, who handed over her husband's alchemical manuscript, which Sendivogius published as *Novum Lumen Chymicum* (1604). Taking up his mentor's title of "Cosmopolite," Sendivogius soon gained a sensational reputation, which led the Emperor Rudolph II to invite him to his Hermetic court in Prague, where the alchemist was made a counsellor until his own imprisonment and subsequent disappearance from 1607 to 1625.

It is unknown whether Seton's assistant Hamilton continued to practice alchemy after his return to Scotland, but Liddell went on to achieve fame as a professor of mathematics after his return to Aberdeen in 1607. It seems likely that both men kept up their contacts in Germany, which may account for the visit of a German alchemist to Scotland at this time. In November 1607 John Napier journeyed from Merchiston to Edinburgh to consult with Dr. Daniel Müller, who believed that he was dying and wanted to pass on his secrets to his Scottish collaborator.¹⁵¹ Müller, who utilized the techniques of Seton and Sendivogius, was awaiting the return of his "credible friend" Lionel Struthers from Istria in Germany, where he hoped to obtain a supply of the crude mercury with which Müller claimed to achieve transmutations. He also showed Napier his little cipher table entitled "*Medulla philosophiae Hermeticae*." Citing from memory many sources (ranging from Ficino to Trevisano), Müller instructed Napier, who attempted the experiments without success. Finally, in March 1608, Müller reported that Struthers had arrived with the Istrian mercury, and Napier planned to proceed on their project.

Müller had connections with the court of Hesse-Darmstadt, which would soon witness stirrings of Rosicrucianism, and McLean suggests that he was sent to Scotland as an "ambassador" of the German

¹⁵⁰ W. Hubicki disputes the traditional Scottish version of the Seton-Sendivogius relationship; see his articles, "Michael Sendivogius," in C. Gillespie, *Dictionary*, and "The True Life of Michael Sendivogius," *Actes du XI Congrès international d'histoire des sciences*, IV (Warsaw, 1965), 98–103. However, for the purposes of this study, the traditional account—which was widely believed in the seventeenth century—is the more relevant one.

¹⁵¹ For Napier's account of their conversations, see J. Small, "Sketches of Later Scottish Alchemists," *Proceedings of Society of Scottish Antiquaries* (1876), 412–15.