

BASIC CONCEPTS TO BE RECKONED IN A PROPER HISTORY OF ALCHEMY

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ABSTRACT: *Use of simple synthetic drug called Chin – Yeh, Gold – plus – plant juice or red colloidal gold. Gold made body everlasting and the herbal principle, as soul, increased life-span. Dialectally it was called Kim – Iya. Arabicized as Al – Kimiya it finally appeared as Alchemy. Chin – Yeh as drug was only brick – red when mercury, and sulphur – with traces of gold were sublimated there resulted Chin – Tan, Gold – plus – cinnabar. It was blood – red and with redness as soul it became the ideal drug of longevity.*

It is admitted that an engineer can say all he wants in a blue print and on this basis a whole building can be constructed. Likewise we want to offer a sketch, with basic concepts, capable of contributing a proper history of alchemy. At the same time we shall critically consider some facts assumed to be real but which can only go to present a picture of “ghost – alchemy” or which is dead but in name. We may now begin by asking what is alchemy. Above all how an art came to acquire this designation. It is usually define as the art of synthesizing gold taking some metals and minerals as the starting material. But no one ever succeeded in doing so and accordingly there never was such an art; it then means that there was no beginning and as such there can be no knowledge of it. Hence R. J. Forbes (1), a master – historian of ancient science and technology, had to begin in his communication, on “the origin of alchemy” writing that, “the evolution of chemistry (is) still shrouded in mystery, (and) is a problem that should intrigue every student of the history of science”. According to some alchemy arose in China, as opposed to the popular view that it was born at Alexandria. Now with regard to Chinese alchemy Sivin

(2 : 36) confesses that, “of the origins of Chinese alchemy we know nothing”. It clearly implies that what never existed had no beginning and consequently there can be no knowledge of it. But alchemy did exist as some kind of craft for Sivin observes, nevertheless, that “it is clear at the same time that the earliest treatise as an apocryphal tradition of interpretation of the Book of changes, A. D. 142, is the fruit of long growth”. Granting that man tried to make gold, this would be an expression of the human urge for prosperity. But man was also the subject of an earlier and more powerful urge that for longevity. Man is mortal but no one wants to die, hence he tried to prolong life and such attempts finally gave rise to a cult of longevity.

Let us follows such a cult as it arose and developed in China. Here at any rate we are dealing with no “ghost – alchemy” with mere claims of making gold but with a real cult using oral drugs, herbal and mineral. In an earlier communication 1 (3) have quoted Gutzalff (4) who speaks of Chinese leaving no plant which they did not try as medicine, and likewise Velch (5), according to whom, inorganic substances were also given an

extensive trial. Such a voracious appetite for drugs of longevity succeeded in establishing perhaps the best cult of longevity which claimed to produce the first synthetic drug man ever made and after which the art itself finally came to be called alchemy. The early man believed, Life = Body + Blood and Blood = Soul and Redness = Soul – concentrate. Blood became a magical substance, charged with creative energy which could do anything and even become anything. Wounds were dressed with red-ochre, because they resulted in loss of blood and this in turn meant loss in soul – content which could be replaced by the redness of red – ochre, since redness was soul – concentrate. Later red – ochre became a panacea, drug of longevity and an agency of resurrection. Finally it was recognized as a sacred substance and the first image of a deity was fashioned out of it. This was called A – Dam, when in Arabic, Bam – Blood – Soul. Such an image according to its make – up was redness – incorporate which means constituted entirely of soul and of no base material. A fact which is easily established is that the caveman all over the world, including China, buried the dead swayed with red – ochre. This enables us to infer that red – ochre had been duly recognized as the drug of longevity.

At the same time man realized that body, as the vehicle of life – essence, had to be strong enough to maintain it. A body weak and decrepit is destined to part with its soul. Then body had to be looked after on its own account. The Chinese candidate of longevity accordingly tried jade. It was pulverized and taken with milk or water. Pieces of jade were also placed in the mouth of the dead to expedite resurrection. What justified such uses is clear enough, it is the theory that like makes like. The redness of red – ochre as soul increased the stock of

soul in man, while the hardness of jade improved the physical nature of its consume. Red – ochre increased life and jade strengthened the body. Mean while vegetable products were also found to be red and they were consumed to prolong life. These became so popular that a tradition arose attributing the use of herbal medicines to a benevolent source as Emperor Shen Nung. He is depicted wearing a tunic of leaves obviously of medicinal plants and also chewing the stalk of such a plant. It means that such a figure resulted on personifying herbalism. At the same time it was established that of indigenous products nothing excels peach for it is blood – red at the core. It became the ideal “drug of longevity” so much so that the Chinese god of longevity, Shou – Sing, emerges from it. We may now accept that herbalism was well established as supporting a cult of longevity with Emperor Shen – nug as its founder and Shou – Sing as the God. But as antecedent to such a cult the Chinese had tried every plant and mineral finally selecting Peach as the drug of longevity. That this was due to its redness is confirmed by the parallel case of Ephedra, as Soma, among the Aryans. Ephedra bears bright red berries. It started as an energizer – cum – euphoriant, later it became a panacea and next a drink of immortality. Then as an agency of resurrection and finally god Soma, it became the Aryan counterpart of Chinese Shou – Sing and of Adam. The red – god among the pagan Semites. Even the red – seeded pomegranate in Mesopotamia and ancient Iran held a similar position and the Egyptians interred it with their dead. All this confirms that redness meant life – essence and substances incorporating redness became drugs of longevity – cum – resurrection. Incidentally it may be said in advance that alchemy, as a cult of longevity, fully recognized redness as qualifying its first preparation as also the ideal drug it

could design. We have learnt that at a certain stage in China, jade became the best donor of physical strength and peach that of extending the life – span. Later came the discovery of gold as the one substance on earth that is fire proof and as such the ideal to preserve the human body. I (3) have analyzed the inscribed characters Yu (jade) and Chin, superior to red – earth or red – ochre, the earliest drug of longevity and Chin or gold as super – jade. Thus red – ochre, jade and gold all the three can easily form a series, each as drug prolonging life.

Whereas gold being fire proof could easily be approved for preserving the body the best donor of perennial life had to be blood – red, the ideal qualifying a soul. Search in this direction resulted in the discovery of minimum, red – oxide of lead. When its order was purified by fire there resulted lead. It was found that on heating lead becomes red while overheating minimum it melts into pure lead. Accordingly it was believed, Lead = Minimum = Soul. Thus lead was looked upon as soul in metallic form and used as drug of longevity. Sivin (2:187) gives a formula for making “lead – elixir”. Lead also became the “first principle” recognized as Prime Matter by the theoretical alchemist. Moreover even in India today there is a pill of longevity made of an amalgam of lead and mercury. We can now realize how important lead must have been to the first discoverers of red minimum.

Later came the discovery of cinnabar. This is blood – red, excelling all substances in its colouration. It at once became the drug of longevity and was even interred with the dead to expedite resurrection. When cinnabar was discovered technique had not developed enough so that when subjected to purification by fire, it completely volatilized leaving nothing behind. Hence its ore was pulverized and lavigated and thereby refined

to be taken orally. However it was now suggested that gold should be so tinted that it becomes cinnabar in appearance. When gold and cinnabar in appearance. When gold and cinnabar were heated together only gold was left cinnabar having evaporated completely. Then the only choice left was to combine gold and a herbal principle which would yield red – gold as the resultant preparation. What the Chinese pharmacist actually took need not be discussed for it would be hypothetical. But how the same was actually prepared in India I have been able to watch. For some three years I was private secretary of Maharaja Sir Kishen Pershad of Hyderabad. Being an old gentleman an Ayurvedic physician suggested his taking an gold – preparation to improve his system. This is how it was made. Gold was granulated with a file and placed in a mortar of hard granite. To it was added a decoction of Har, *Terminalia chebula* and rubbed with a pestle of granite. The procedure continued for a couple of months when the resultant became a brick – red powder. Its technique could not be simpler and it was very time – consuming. Anyone can see now that it easily represents the earliest procedure of its preparation. Gold has been taken because it is ever – lasting in form. The choice of Har, *Terminalia Chebula*, for its juice to be incorporated in the final preparation, needs an explanation. Gold can be had on mere buying but the herbal principle which was to go with it was the secret which the alchemist would maintain. In the Indian procedure above Har was selected because it is a drug of longevity in its own right. It would be a proper herbal counterpart of gold when each is independently capable of prolonging life. In an earlier communication I (6) have reproduced a Tibetan painting in which the Buddha of Medicine is holding “Har” as the emblem of immortality. Even Alberuni (7) mentions, Har, being recognized as

prolonging life and records its having been considered worthy of a royal present to be sent from one King to another. Then the Indian preparation, which was herbo – golden according to its make-up, incorporated a well recognized *herbal principle of longevity*. To be precise it was gold – plus – Har when Har itself was a drug of longevity. Then any simple which can donate “a principle of longevity” can go along with gold is a dead metal, in fact a fossil. And if the herbal principle can tint it red, it means red – gold became live – gold fully capable of transferring its own soul to its acceptor. Now the herbo – golden complex, the Har plus gold preparation, became a brick – red powder and would be accepted as live – gold functioning as drug – of – longevity. Something almost identical was synthesized in China. The Chinese called gold. Chin, and for the herbal principle they used the word “T”, or “Yeh”, literally meaning fresh plant juice. The herbo – golden product accordingly was designated Chin - I, which, in a Southern dialect was pronounced Kim – Iya. It entered Arabic as Kimi – ya, which, with the prefix Al, being the definite article in Arabic, as Al – Kimiya, finally became the word, Alchemy. All this has been explained by me (8) before. Chin – I was a drug of longevity but as Kimiya in Arabic was a drug first and the art of conferring longevity next. This is how alchemy was born. Kimiya of Arabic is a parallel cast to Rasayana in Indian medicine. This gain is the drug of rejuvenation first and only next the art conferring the same.

Now critical consideration suggested that the herbo – metallic preparation, Chin – Yeh, was only brick – red, whereas the ideal drug of longevity should be blood – red. Such a substance, as simple, was cinnabar. At a later stage when they had better command over sublimation, they found

cinnabar to be a compound of sulphur and mercury. Each of these, like cinnabar, had been independently recognized as drug of longevity and their use in India survives to this day. This is because if cinnabar, is = ‘Sulphur + Mercury’, really Cinnabar = Soul and Sulphur = Spirit or Ruh in Arabic or Shan in Chinese, while Mercury is “the soul” or Nafs in Arabic or Kuei in Chinese. Sulphur and Mercury, as sub souls, are fully capable of increasing the stock of soul in the human system. To prepare Chin – I or Chin – Yeh, gold and a drug of longevity of vegetable origin were taken. Now gold had to be retained for it was the one substance fire – proof but cinnabar was to replace the herbal principle, for cinnabar is the one substance nearest to blood in its colouration, and cinnabar is “soul”. The product designed would be gold – plus cinnabar or in Chinese Chin – Tan. Chin = gold and Tan = cinnabar, when Chin – Tan. Chin = gold and Tan = cinnabar, when Chin – Tan = Cinnabar – gold. It is still made in India and in the following manner. Sulphur and mercury are taken to which a little gold is added and all the three subjected to sublimation. The sublimate becomes vermilion or synthetic cinnabar with traces of gold. When it is micronized it appears as blood – red powder, the idea in colour that was expected.

It is thus gold + Cinnabar, or in Chinese, Chin – Tan, Chin = gold and Tan = Cinnabar. Chin – Tan in Indian medicine would be Makara – Dhawaja. This is best paraphrased as Cupid’s Hallmark for it is supposed to confer the vigour of Youth which means it can cure all defects in the human system reconditioning it at its best. It is panacea for all incurable ailments. We can now realize how with the preparation of Chin – Tan, incorporating gold to make the body – ever lasting and cinnabar to make life perennial, nothing can be imagined as

better. With Chin – Yeh alchemy started as craft and with Chin – Tan it reached its zenith. Then if Shen – Nung and Shou – Sing represent herbalism contributing to the cult of longevity, Chin – Yeh and Chin – Tan, represent the final stage to which such a cult can aspire. Alchemy proper started by making red – gold or red colloidal – gold while “ghost – alchemy” or alchemy without any life, continued claiming that it can make bullion – gold. Alchemy thus became the art of preparing calcined metals as drugs and colloidal – gold was the first synthetic drug man ever made.

Summary

Human urge to live long suggested using simples as drugs of longevity. The first such drug man used was red – ochre. It was believed that Red ochre as *mineral* strengthened the body and its *redness* increase the soul – content of the human system. Later jade and gold were specifically used to make the body everlasting. Drugs of vegetable origin were considered best to increase life – span. Herbalism was personified as Emperor Shen – Nung, idealized as its founder, and the best drug of longevity was assumed to be peach so much so that Shou – Sing, the god of longevity, emerged from it. To improve upon simples or single drugs as strengthening the body and prolonging life a preparation was planned as a herbo – golden complex. In India gold was taken as making the body everlasting and Har, *Terminalia chebula* independently recognized as a drug of longevity, and together produced red colloidal gold. The corresponding drug in China was called Chin – Yeh, Chin = god and Yeh = Plant – Juice. Dialectally it was pronounced Kim – Iya, which entered Arabic as Al – Kimiya and finally appeared as Alchemy. Al – Kimiya in Arabic is primarily a drug of longevity, and next the

art of preparing synthetic drugs. Alchemy started by making the first synthetic drug known to history. But Chin – Yeh was a brick – red powder while the ideal drug of longevity had to be blood – red.

Earlier they had used red minerals as drug. Minimum is red oxide of lead. Purifying by fire it resulted in lead. Lead heated gently gave minimum and this heated to its meeting point gave lead. It was then accepted that lead was potentially red. Accordingly it was believed, Minimum = Lead = Soul. Lead at once entered the list of drugs of longevity. Later cinnabar was discovered and was accepted as the one substance red as blood. Much later, when the technique of sublimation was perfected, cinnabar proved to be constituted of sulphur and mercury when cinnabar became soul and sulphur and mercury sub – souls. Each of these three substances became drug of longevity. In this light sulphur, mercury and a little gold were taken and sublimated. The resultant became synthetic cinnabar or vermilion with traces of gold. In India this preparation is called Makara Dhawaja signifying Cupid’s Hallmark, rejuvenating the aged and conferring longevity, a regular panacea. Its Chinese name would be Chin – Tan or cinnabar – gold; Chin = gold and Tan = cinnabar. Here, gold made the body everlasting and cinnabar, as soul – incorporate, made life perennial. Being blood – red it was the ideal drug of longevity. Thus alchemy took its birth with the synthesis of Chin – Yeh, and reached its zenith with the preparation of Chin – Tan, the former as brick – red, the latter blood – red, showing the importance of redness and its significance as life promoter. These synthetic drugs came after a long use of simples as drugs of longevity. Alchemy then started as making red – gold while it degenerated as “ghost alchemy” claiming to make bullion – gold. Finally it may be

stated that not to know Shen – Nung and Shou – Sing, is not to know the antecedents of alchemy and not to know Chin – Yeh, is

not to know its birth and not to know Chin – Tan is not to know its ideal achievement.

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