

Victoria Cambranes
SHAC Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry
Travel Grant Report

Although many modern scholars have worked to bridge the gap between Science and Theology, and Alchemy reveals itself as a quintessential common ground for this endeavor, I believe that there is still much work to be done in combining methodologies from both Religious Studies and the History and Philosophy of Science to achieve this goal. I have chosen to approach this project through a study of a medieval alchemical tract entitled the *Aurora Consurgens*, or the *Rising Dawn*. This short text is a pedagogical work focused on the metaphysical requirements for achieving the ultimate objective of the alchemical endeavor, that of union with the divine and the creation of the Philosopher's Stone. While the *Aurora* can be interpreted on multiple levels to mean both spiritual deification and a physical harnessing of universal occult powers, I have demonstrated that these objectives are interrelated and in fact non-exclusionary.

Since modern studies on this text have been limited by Jungian scholarship, and in many respects driven off course by it, I have proceeded my analysis with three goals in mind; that of dating the text, explaining its philosophical background, and demonstrating its religious significance thereby elucidating its author's original intent. These goals are inherently interconnected because of the interdisciplinary nature of alchemical treatises, however I have used modern methodologies from Religious Studies and the History and Philosophy of Science in order to render them comprehensible to a modern audience. This required a contextualization of alchemical themes and ideas through an analysis of a late-thirteenth and early

fourteenth century scientific consciousness as well as the theological and philosophical milieu of this period. This has placed the text within its rightful period of production in the late thirteenth century, and explained the cryptic and multivalent themes within through the lens of mystical union as interpreted in the *Song of Songs*.

I presented this paper at the Eighteenth International Medieval Congress at Leeds this July, 2011 to further my research in the relationship between science and theology in the High Middle Ages. This project was an extension of my undergraduate interest in the subject of Alchemy, and my subsequent work in the History of Science at Columbia this past year. The IMC at Leeds allowed me to network with other scholars in the field and gave me greater perspective for the scope of my interests and how to proceed further with my research.

I hope to continue studying natural philosophical and theological principles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during my graduate work at the University of York this Fall, where I will be concentrating on Optics as a subject of both religious and scientific interest. I would like to thank the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry, SHAC, for their generous support of this project in the form of a travel grant and their ongoing support through a vast network of scholars and contacts in the subject.