



# The Path of the Black Dragon

By Tomas Stacewicz

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In the Western or Hermetic external Alchemical traditions there mainly exists two major paths according to the subject matter, that of the Red and that of the Black Dragons. In Hermetic Alchemy the Dragon signifies the First Matter or *Prima Materia*, the crude material basis that is to be subjected to the Great Work, or *Opus Magnum*. There are also distinct “ways” or “paths” which are related to the process itself, or the *Modus Operandi* of the Great Work. They are basically three, the “wet” or “humid” way, the “dry” way, and lastly the “amalgams” or “mixed” way, the last one combining processes of both the dry and the wet ways.

In short the wet way uses glassware and a “secret fire”, as contrasted to the vulgar fire used in the dry way, and therefore it is seen as the more noble of them both. The amalgams way uses both the vulgar fire from the furnace (Athanor) and glassware. While the process of the wet way is more prolonged and take months rather than days to finish as with the dry way, using heat from chemical reactions which reaches temperatures way below 500°C, the dry way reaches very high temperatures approximating 1000°C.

While there are several matters used with the wet way, such as the Vitriol (Sulphate salts) and the Red Dragon, or Cinnabar (Mercury sulphide), there is a general agreement (however not uncontested) that the matter of the dry and amalgam ways concerns Antimony. Actually it is the *mineral* and not the metal of Antimony that is being used, i.e. Stibnite (Antimony sulphide). This mineral (see following image) has several names in Alchemy, such as the Black Dragon, the Scaly Dragon, the Grey Wolf, the Child (or Offspring) of Saturn, the First Born or Saturn, Daughter of Saturn, Son of Saturn, and Venomous Serpent. A beloved child has many names as we say in my native country of Sweden.





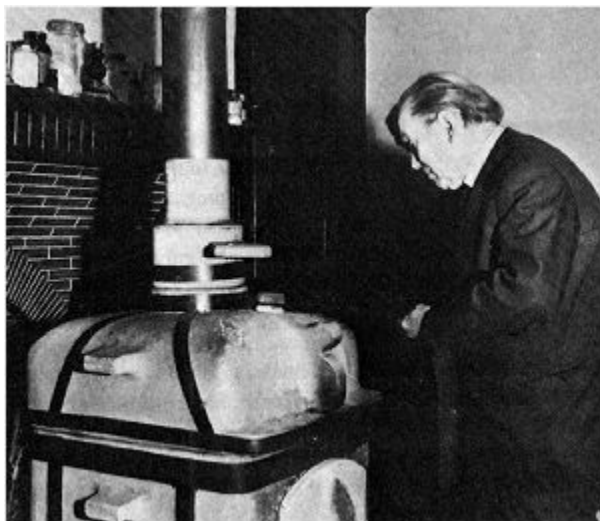
The Amalgams Way of Antimony was followed by Nicholas Flamel and Eirenaeus Philalethes, and Jean Dubuis, while the Wet Way of Vitriol was lead by Basil Valentinus and that of Cinnabar by Kamala Jnana and Roger Caro, while the Dry Way of Antimony was perpetuated by Basil Valentinus, Cyliani and Fulcanelli. This essay mainly concerns with the so-called “Dry Way of Antimony”, which has been popularised by the books of Eugène Canseliet (1899-1982), the beloved pupil of Fulcanelli (see following sketch of Fulcanelli by R. A. Schwaller dated 1930). Thus we will remain within the French Alchemical tradition and continue with its disclosure, an exposition that I started with my essay on The Path of the Red Dragon.



Today Fulcanelli is regarded as perhaps the greatest of the Masters of external Alchemy, revered by many modern students of the Hermetic Path. The name “Fulcanelli” is a pen name or a “magical motto”, which may be translated into “The Sacred Fire” (from the roman god Vulcan and the Canaanite god El). He only penned two books that have become modern classics, *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (“The Mystery of the Cathedrals”) from 1929, and *Les Demeures Philosophales* (“Dwellings of the Philosophers”) from 1930. A third book was planned but never came to be published, called *Finis Gloriam Mundi* (“End of the World’s Glory”), supposedly inspired by Fulcanelli’s favorite painting “Finis gloriae mundi” by Juàn de Valdès Léal (see following image).



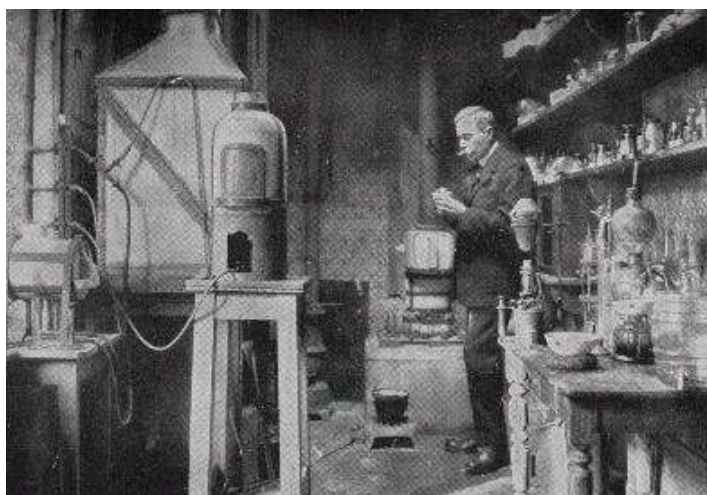
Some claim Canseliet wrote or compiled these works using the notes from his master. Perhaps Canseliet (see a following picture of him working in his laboratory) was somewhat involved in its editing as he wrote rather lengthy introductions to both, and later wrote several books on Alchemy using his own name, the most prominent being the *L'Alchimie expliquée sur ses textes classiques*. In this latter book, which never has been translated into English, Canseliet quite openly describes the Dry Way of Antimony, and modern adherents of this way use both it and Fulcanelli's *Les Demeures Philosophales* as their main source material.



It is said that already in his *Dwellings of the Philosophers* Fulcanelli were more generous than his predecessors in describing the Alchemical process, however scattered it may be through his work. But in the same vein as the old Masters of the Art, Fulcanelli also resorted to veiled symbolism in his descriptions. This has of course led to different interpretations about the nature of the process, and even about the very Matter of choice, i.e. the identity of the Black Dragon or *Daughter of Saturn* as Fulcanelli calls it. It's a fact that even Canseliet sometimes contradicts Fulcanelli, if we are to interpret Fulcanelli literately. And this polemic still continues today and a recent one on two Yahoo forums moderated by the Portuguese Alchemist Rubellus Petrinus actually inspired me to write this piece.



Fulcanelli himself believed that he was the pupil of Basilius Valentinus, the famous German alchemist supposedly born in 1394 (see previous woodcut). Canseliet claim Fulcanelli was born in 1839 and there are many other fantastic stories attached to his character, as for example Canseliet meeting his old master in 1953 for the first time after his disappearance, after the end of World War II, and in a much more younger appearance and vigour at that. He is of course reputed to have successfully transmuted lead into gold through Projection already in the 1920's.



However the identity of Fulcanelli is still shrouded in a veil of mystery, even if Canseliet left us some clues. Several names and identities have been proposed, all French, such as the painter Jean-Julien Champagne (1877-1932), the scientist Jules Violle (1841-1923), the renowned alchemist François Jollivet-Castelot (1876-1939), which figures on a famous picture taken from his laboratory (see previous image), and even Canseliet himself (although that last suggestion seems to be the least probable). However if the suggestions regarding Jollivet-Castelot are correct, this clearly ties him with Cyliani, through G F Tiffereau who reportedly knew Jollivet-Castelot. Most believe him to have been Champagne because of the similar physical appearance (see below portrait of Champagne from 1930 to the right and compare it to the drawing of Fulcanelli above).





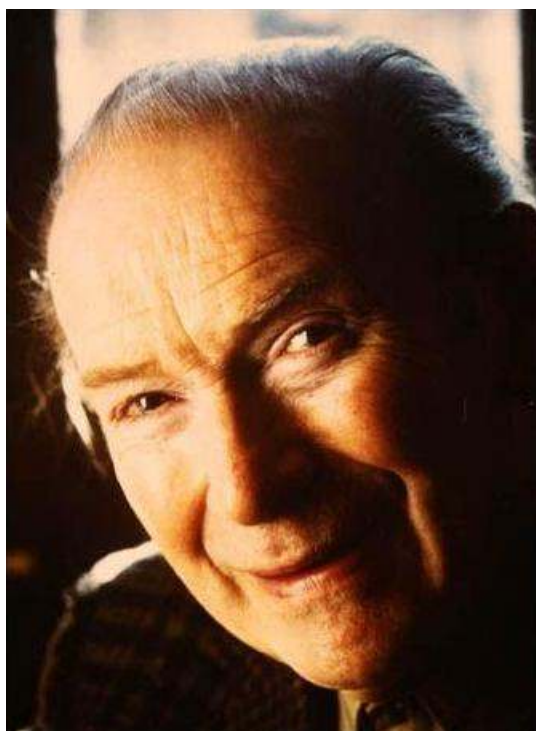
The name Fulcanelli is closely attached to an occult group called *Frères d'Héliopolis* (“Brotherhood of Heliopolis”), which included Canseliet, Champagne and Jules Boucher (1902-1955). Some maintain that Fulcanelli was the founder and head of this Brotherhood. Now this fellow Boucher is interesting besides the other three because of his merits which he later earned as a Martinist, as he later led the group called *l'Ordre Martiniste Rectifié* (O::M::R::), founded in 1948 claiming lineage to Robert Ambelain (1907-1997). The fact is that Boucher (see his *ex libris* in the following image) led an earlier group together with Ambelain, founded by them together in 1935 and called *Association pour la Rénovation de l'Occultisme Traditionnel* (L.A.R.O.T.). What we see here is a tightly knit collage of French Adepts which has been highly influential in the modern French occult movement, both before and after the Nazi occupation.



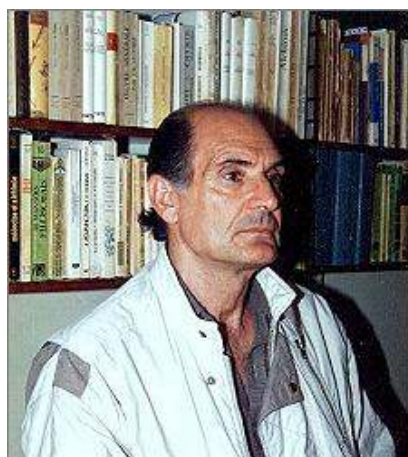
While on the subject of the highly influential French esotericist Robert Ambelain, it is well worth to mention in this context, that he was the head of the *Rose-Croix d'Orient* and its inner circle, *the l'Ordre des Chevaliers EASIA-EASIE* (“Eques A Sancti Iohannes Apostolica-Eques A Sancti Iohannes Evangelistae”). Now Ambelain taught a form of Inner Alchemy based upon certain Pythagorean principles, to produce the Philosopher’s Stone. He also claims that Fulcanelli himself taught a similar Inner Alchemical technique to his students, besides teaching the Dry Way of Antimony. Furthermore Ambelain claims that the Black Madonna, abounding in the Catholic world, was not only the patron of the Order but also the symbol of the *Prima Materia* of the Dry Path, i.e. of Antimony (see following image).



Canseliet (see following picture taken in 1982) left several students of his own and inspired others to perpetuate the Fulcanelli tradition of Alchemy, the most renowned today being Rubellus Petrinus and Patrick Rivière. Rubellus Petrinus claims that he was taught the Dry Way by the French Alchemical Master publicly known as “Solazaref”, which also used to call himself “Pierre d’Ouche”, who was a close friend of Canseliet and headed the group Filiation Solazaref. The real identity of Solazaref according to some is Daniel Winter. This Filiation seems to be defunct today because of infighting but Solazaref left us some French books to study the Dry Way of Antimony, such as *Introitus ad Philosporum Lapidem*.



Rubellus Petrinus (see following picture) is the *nom de plume* of the Portuguese alchemist Telémaco A. Pissarro (1951- ), who has written a book translated into English entitled *The Great Alchemical Work of Eirenaeus Philalethes, Nicholas Flamel and Basil Valentine* which basically is a testament of the author's understanding of these old Masters of the Royal Art. He runs a very informative web site on Alchemy and Spagery, which perhaps is the best source on the internet about these subjects. He runs several Yahoo-Group forums, the English the-Alchemist and the Portuguese-Spanish Os-alquimistas and El-alquimista, the latter one restricted for only laboratory practicing and experienced alchemists.



All these sites are extremely rich on source material when it comes to the practical application of the classical texts and the level of discussion is unparalleled. This fact has clearly placed Rubellus Petrinus on the absolute forefront in contemporary Alchemy of today. He is widely critically acclaimed for his work and contribution to the field of Alchemy and Spagery by most contemporaries amongst scholars and renown practicing alchemists. The fact is that I have this man to thank for most of the information regarding practical Alchemy that I have gathered and compiled into this essay.

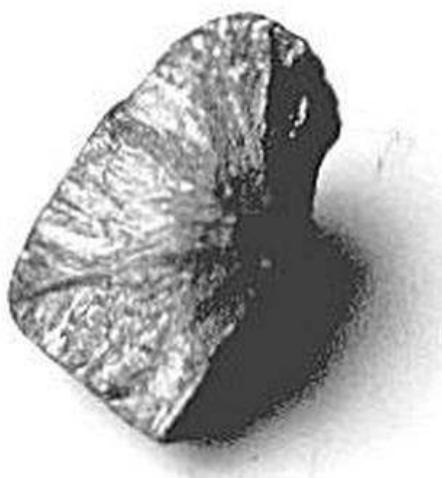
Patrick Rivière (see following picture), who claims to have been a personal student of Canseliet, runs an Alchemical group in France known as Spagy-Nature, which is devoted to both the spagyric tradition of Paracelsus and the Antimony Dry Way of Fulcanelli and Canseliet. This group is also linked to a neo-rosicrucian organization called CHR+CHM, claiming antiquity and lineage to the Rosicrucians of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Rivière is an acclaimed author on the history of Alchemy dealing with Paracelsian spagyric and the works of Fulcanelli, with French titles such as *Alchimie: Science et Mystique*, or *Alchimie et Archimie*, or *Pratique de l'Oeuvre Alchimique Végétale & Métallique*, etc. The only English translation to date is a book entitled *Fulcanelli: His true identity revealed*.





Patrick Rivière also runs a quite informative web site *Alchymie.net* for his group Spagy-Nature, where he exhibits some of his work, both as an author and as an alchemist. He has also starred in a documentary by Christian Sulleman entitled *L'Alchimie, Science et mysticisme* made for France 3. It runs for 52 minutes and is very well made film in my opinion, featuring several French spagyrist and the alchemist Rivière. The last 20 minutes is dedicated to the Dry Way of Antimony and documents the Alchemical process which I will describe below in its entire, performed by a member of the Spagy-Nature (presumably Rivière himself).

After this brief historical exposition, let us now turn our attention to the actual working process as described by Canseliet, the expounder of the mysteries of Fulcanelli, and the preparation of the Holy Mother (Black Madonna). Now I have already mentioned that this signifies the mineral ore, or Stibnite, from which Antimony is extracted. So in the preparation of the Black Dragon it must be subjected to a process of *Separatio* or *Solve*. This is done by adding three more matters, namely Mars and a “Double Salt” composed of Tartar and Nitre. The Nitre is an animal salt or saltpetre blended with dew (which naturally contains a nitrate; the Salt of Dew). The traditional Salt of Tartar is sometimes called “potash” or potassium and is a vegetable salt. Together our Nitre and Tartar constitutes our Salt, which is a Double Salt. This is used together with the purified Stibnite during the process of Separation. But before the Separation the Stibnite must be properly prepared to create the “Antimony of the Sages”, which is done through Assation and Purgation.



The initial preparation of the Stibnite is through a process that is described by Canseliet and Solazaref, and by the latter referred to as the “Philosophical Assation”. The reason behind this is that metals taken from the mine or bought in a shop are dead and have to be “reincubated”, i.e. brought back to life. Through this Philosophical Assation the Antimony of the Sages of Fulcanelli is produced (see previous image), according to the students of Canseliet. This process transforms the vulgar matter or Stibnite into a Philosophical Matter. Some however contest that this process is actually the true Philosophical Assation. There is also a polemic against and for the need of this Assation, as the detractors accuse Canseliet of inventing it to explain away the denial of Fulcanelli of the vulgar Antimony being the actual matter. I will return to the polemic in the last part of this essay, after my disclosure of the remaining parts of the Alchemical process of the Dry Way of Antimony.

Next comes a process called the Purgation or simply “Purge”, where the Stibnite is purified of its silica using a refractory clay crucible (see following image) put into a furnace and through a “distilation per descensum”. The greatest problem with the Purge or Purgation is that the alchemist needs to know exactly the suitable temperature for Stibnite ore purgation, so that the Sulphur isn’t burnt away. This of course requires lots of experience of metallurgy.



Now it is in place to say something about the furnace which is used in the Dry Way of Antimony, in the before mentioned Purgation and in the following processes. It is basically a modern melting furnace often built by the alchemist himself, from a large cylindrical aluminium cooking pot or from a dustbin. The two ears of the pan comes handy as the furnace has to be portable and placed outside, because of the poisonous fumes which is created during the process (remember one of the names for the Matter, i.e. “venomous serpent”). The inside is covered with a refractory insulator, such as concrete combined with fireclay, vermiculite or silica (sand), or a combination of more or all of these materials. Some simply use cement. In either case a hollow cylindrical space is left in the centre to hold the crucible. The opening is at the top of the cooking pot. A hole is drilled at the side made to fit the propane gas burner (see following image).



Some also build similar furnaces as the above example but instead of using propane gas they place charcoal at the bottom and mount an air-blower into the hole at the side so that the furnace is able to reach the desired temperatures (see following image). Even though there are many practical advantages of using a propane gas burner I personally find this last type of a charcoal burner as more appealing as it more resembles the ancient Athanors, but without resorting to bellows to keep the high temperature levels. There are lots of “do it yourself” web sites which amply describes the creation process of a melting furnace, of whatever kind desirable.



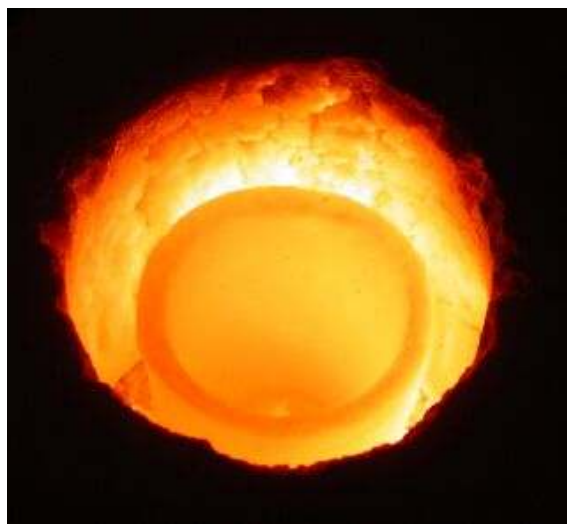
Furnaces of the first propane gas kind made by Spagy-Nature may be bought in France from Patrick Rivière’s site at *Alchymie.net*. Professionally made furnaces similar to these hand-made ones may be bought from several distributors and workshops all over the world (see following image of a professional furnace).





These furnaces are indispensable for this work on the dry and amalgams paths, as both start off with the same preparation and separation in creation of the so-called “Martial Regulus of Antimony”. We may now proceed with it, having prepared and purified the Stibnite ore through Assation and Purgation for it to become the Antimony of the Sages.

The Antimony, being finely grinded, is now placed inside a refractory clay crucible. Next the alchemist puts a quantity of finest and very old Mars, also grinded to a fine powder. The reason behind this is that Fulcanelli regards it as the male “fire” or “sulphur” that the Alchemist introduces into the female Antimony, which eventually will become the Mercury. Fulcanelli designates Sulphur as “Adam” and Mercury as “Eve”. Fulcanelli likens this with the image of the crucifixion of Christ, who was put onto the cross by three iron nails. Cyliani on the other hand gives us the metaphor of the knight killing the Black Dragon with a Spear, using a “substance” to unlock the door to the Temple holding the Dragon. Alchemists interpret this “substance” as the Double Salt. Hence the Double Salt, finely grinded, is also to be joined according to specific ratios of quantity, which are partly described in the works of the ancient Masters of the Art, such as Flamel and Philalethes.



The crucible is sealed with a lid and placed inside the furnace. A heat resistant cover, with a chimney hole, is placed onto the opening of the furnace with which to contain the heat. The temperature is now supposed to reach almost 1000°C during the process of Separation of the Martial Regulus from the Antimony (see above picture). Or to be more specific, the Regulus is separated from the Antimony with the assistance of Mars and the Double Salt. When all reaches the desired temperature and is melted the compound or alloy is then poured into a stainless steel mould with a conical shape (see below picture).



After cooling the waste material is gently removed from the solidified matter with a hammer. The result is the so called Martial Regulus of Antimony, also called the “Starry Regulus”, or using Fulcanelli's own words “Astral Stone”, “Celestial Water”, “Alkehest”, and “First Mercury”. These wastes left after the creation of the Regulus are in Alchemical parlance called the “Caput Mortum” and from this is the Sulphur extracted, which is called “First Adam” by Fulcanelli.

In the last part of the first stage of the Great Work the Martial Regulus or Mercury is to be put through a process of Mercurial Purification. This basically means that the Regulus or Mercury is put into the crucible anew, heated to the melting point when it is again poured into the conical mould to cool off, while Adam melts over the Starry Regulus to create a thin enamelled layer. When cooled it creates a scoria called “our Vitriol”. And this process of Purification is repeated two or three more times to reflect the three days between the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ. The three nails used in the crucifixion mentioned above echo this process of purification by Mars. Each time this is repeated the Regulus takes a more shining or starry appearance, likened to the Mercury. This is a reference to the glorious body of the Christ after his resurrection, but also to the star that guided the magi (alchemist) at the birth of Jesus. In this purified state the First Mercury has been transformed into the “Philosophical Mercury”. This matter now produced is also called the “mirror of art”, a term understandable by looking at the image of the purified Regulus shining like a mirror (see following image).



In each of these Purifications the thin enamelled layer or Vitriol created changes its colour and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> Purifications takes the form of a clear substance. Thus far the Alchemical work upon the Black Dragon or Stibnite is similar in the Dry Way of Fulcanelli and Canseliet, and in the Amalgams Way of Flamel and Philalethes alike. But as the latter now proceed with a wet or humid processes, the path of Fulcanelli, as taught by Canseliet, continues to proceed with the Dry Way using ovens and crucibles. Thus we now proceed with the second part of the Great Work or *Coagula*, which constitutes the Eagles or Sublimation of the Alchemical Sulphur and Mercury, together with the Green Lion (see next picture on following page). This process is sometimes also called the preparation of the “Rebis”. The end result of this is the so-called “Remora”. Remora, or “suckerfish”, is a fish that reputedly is very hard to catch and therefore serves as a good metaphor for the difficulty of this process and where most fail in the work. It was mentioned already by Michael Sendivogius.



According to Canseliet Adamic Red Earth is placed at the bottom of the crucible. Next is placed the Philosophical Mercury, also called Eve in Fucanellian parlance. When the desired temperature is reached the Red Earth will give away its Sulphur, which will rise and blend with the Philosophical Mercury above it, which in turn will start to melt and rise to the surface. These melted parts of the Philosophical Mercury is called the “ocean” in which the blackish fish Remora is suppose to swim. When the melted Mercury blends with the Green Lion it becomes golden and when cooled produce the Remora (see next image).



Thus the resultant of the Eagles process will be the fish Remora. Its blackish colour has also given it the name of “Black Crow” according to Fulcanelli. The third and last part of the Great Work concerns Coction or cooking of the Remora with the “Secret Fire”, or Golden Salt. This is the digestion process that supposedly all have failed since the days of Fulcanelli as it constitutes the most difficult phase of the work. This process is supposed to eventually result in the Philosopher’s Stone (see following image).





To take the Stone to the test a Transmutation or Projection is performed. One gram of the Philosopher's Stone is placed into the crucible together with some base metal, such as vulgar Mercury. Placed into the furnace and exposed to a high temperature the metal is supposed to transmute into Gold.

To complicate matters further there are some alchemists today who regard Fulcanelli as the last in line of Alchemical Masters, or even alchemists, and all authors after him as “puffers”, or to use Fulcanelli's own words working with “archemy” not Alchemy. Even Canseliet is regarded as a souffleur by some. Not only is the process described wrong by him, according to his detractors, but even his choice of *Prima Materia*. They state that the Matter is not Stibnite, even if it is supposed to be a mineral sulphide. The often-proposed alternative mineral is Galena (Lead sulphide), because of the fact that Fulcanelli refers to the First Matter as “G”, as in the Masonic letter contained in the Hexagram (see following image). The *Materia Prima* is also called Cohol or Khol, i.e. “coal”, a word often attached to Galena in ancient times.



Some state that Canseliet initially worked with Galena (see following image of mineral “G”) until 1945 (i.e. at the time of the disappearance of Fulcanelli) but failing in his work with lead rejected it to embrace Stibnite, after meeting the Spanish alchemist José Gifreda. Being more successful he started to understand that Fulcanelli must actually have meant Antimony, and by “rejecting” it actually embraced it in the old traditional confusing manner of the old masters of the Art as to hide their secrets.



Others contest Canseliet's description of the process also because of the fact that many masters of the Art repeatedly state that you cannot use a solvent or alkahest (i.e. Salt) from another kingdom (i.e. vegetable or animal) to dissolve a metal. This is a reference to the Double Salt, which is both vegetable and animal. But in defence of the use of Nitre and Tartar the highly revered Eirenaeus Philalethes used an alkahest that actually was taken from the animal kingdom.

Regarding my own opinions on the matter of the true identity of the *Prima Materia* I will keep that to myself. But in defence of Stibnite in contrast to Galena one has to contemplate the designation which Fulcanelli, as well as all elder masters, have given to the Matter, i.e. that of the "Offspring of Saturn". Besides the seven classical Planets (metals) the ancients recognized more metals which were seen as related to the main seven, such as the different Saturnian metals, of which Antimony is but one example (see following image of the crucified globe – the traditional symbol of Antimony). Galena on the other hand is the main Lead ore and thus from it is extracted Lead and Sulphur, i.e. it cannot be an "offspring" as it is Saturn *itself*.



But this is typical of Alchemical lore as each classical author attached his own meaning to the use of common Alchemical symbolism and often developed his own path to the Philosopher's Stone. Wouldn't it be best in a perfect Alchemical world if all authors used the same meanings attached to the common symbology, and that there were but one Path? Yes, but this unfortunately is not the case.

So in my essay I have made an exposition of one peculiar Path dealing with one of several First Matters (Antimony), preparing it according to one of several Ways (Dry), according to a peculiar Alchemical master (Canseliet). This is but one of several Ways or Paths, but a very popular one at that, practiced by quite a few alchemists of today. It is also a widely expounded Way, but restricted to French, Spanish and Italian literature and some web sites, in particular the one maintained by Rubellus Petrinus. This subject of the Dry Way of Antimony is also widely discussed on the several fora owned by Petrinus.

Thus my exposition is but a summary of information which may be gathered from published sources, even if it takes some time of investigation. Now, when I wrote the first version of this essay I wrote all I know about it in plain and fully disclosed manner. But adhering to the old principle of Silence I finally decided to heavily amend and abbreviate the text until it reached the format which you have been reading. However, the original and fully disclosed version, which describes this entire process of the Great Work in detail, I have preserved for the benefit of my fellow initiates.

Finally I must also state that the confusion that resides within Alchemy mainly concerns the external way, or analogical path, also referred to as the Lunar Mysteries. When we concern ourselves with the Internal Way of Hermetic Alchemy the confusion is dissipated. Hence the confusion arises in a general misinterpretation of Alchemy in the first place, who seeks outer similarities in internal processes as disclosed by the direct or Solar Mysteries.

However I personally do see a great significance and practical value of the Lunar Mysteries, as well as the Solar. Thus I consider practice of Outer or External Spagyric Alchemy as a prerequisite of the practice of Inner or Internal Hermetic Alchemy. And on the Tree of Life and the Rosicrucian Grade system I would correspond the work with the Black Dragon to the fiery Geburah of Mars and the Adeptus Major  $6^{\circ}=5^{\circ}$  Grade, as well as I would assign the work with the Red Dragon to the watery Chesed and the Adeptus Exemptus  $7^{\circ}=4^{\circ}$  Grade; the former because of the use of vulgar fire of the Athanor and intense processes, not to mention the creation of the *Martial* Regulus, and the latter because of the humid and tranquil quality of the work, and the use of the Secret Fire.

Fines.