

THE HERMETIC MUSEUM, 1625

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From *The Secret Rosicrucian Tradition*
(San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, 2004).

The Hermetic principle of “as above, so below” is illustrated in this emblem first published in 1625 in the collection, [The Hermetic Museum](#) in Frankfurt. Frater Peter Bindon, considers the mystical meanings of this image.



“Cosmic Harmony,” thought Pythagoras, “is more than simple relationships between musical notes.” Well, he might have made such a statement when he discovered that musical harmonic relationships reflect simple numerical proportions. Then again, his discovery may have occurred the other

way about, he may have discovered that numerical proportions could be applied to musical notes. If this sounds something like a “chicken and egg” story, you are right.

We have considered in another place the adage “as above so below, as below so above,” reputed to be first recorded on the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus. The illustration is an alchemical example of this adage. It first appeared as one of only two illustrations in the first edition of *The Hermetic Museum*, published in Frankfurt in 1625. Although not presented in our illustration, the original illustration was accompanied by a text in Latin which can be translated as follows:



Engraving from *Musaeum Hermeticum*, Frankfurt, 1625. Color version © 2011 by Adam McLean.

The things that are in the realms above are also in the realms beneath; what heaven shows is oft found on Earth. Fire and flowing water are contrary to one another; happy thou, if thou canst unite them: let it suffice thee to know this.

Above and Below

To emphasize the statement that the upper world is reflected in the lower and vice versa, the illustrator has chosen to duplicate the pale crescent containing the Sun, Moon, and five stars as a dark crescent beneath bearing the same images. But what about Pythagoras you ask? His contribution to this engraving comes through the Kabbalists, who added many of his numerical concepts to those inherited from their mystical Jewish ancestors. From the Kabbalists, who maintained their studies in Spain, France, and Portugal until the late fourteen hundreds when they were expelled from these areas, Rosicrucians inherited the Tree of Life which shows diagrammatically the human relationship to the Divine.

One of Pythagoras's contributions was to attribute gender to numbers, the male odd numbers being active and generative, the even female numbers being passive and receptive. He also provided descriptions of the typical attributes of these numbers, based primarily on his observations concerning the relative place of each number in the harmonic system of the universe. Rosicrucian teachings discuss these concepts at certain stages on the student's path, but for our present discussion it is sufficient to see how the engraver used some of these ideas in our illustration.

Pythagorean Numbers

The central figure holds the Seal of Solomon which stands for the one, the Philosopher's Stone and ultimate goal that mystics seek to attain. The Seal is produced by the union of the two, male and female, indicated by the alchemical triangles for

water and fire, when joined emblematic of alchemical perfection and plenty. The engraving also shows one Apollo who plays his lyre in the symbolic underworld. He plays to the six Muses themselves symbolic of the six alchemical metals and their celestial counterparts. Together they look towards the well from which the rope and bucket are strangely absent.

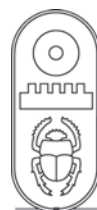
The biblical Jesus asked the women of Samaria to give him water from the well, the draught of knowledge and indeed of life. This well reminds us that we too can access the hidden or arcane knowledge of the earth that is symbolically hidden in the well. Water has always been a precious commodity as we can testify. We can conclude from the absence of the means to draw the water, that we must devise the method of accessing the sacred principles from within the depths of this well using our own initiative.

The three figures seated beneath the trees emphasize that we are dealing with the Law of the Triangle in this instance, three being the geometrical number that gives us the first solid figure—one being a point and two defining a line, but three providing a triangle. The presence of three in our illustration is underlined by the three sides of the triangles and the multiple triangles that can be found in the Seal of Solomon and the three cherubs providing the symbol for air in the top right-hand corner.

The Elements of Creation

The other three corners of the illustration are filled with more quaint drawings representing the other three elements of Creation: the salamander representing fire, ship and whale indicating water, and the castle solidly grounded on Earth. The four elements are united in the perfected work of the philosopher and the mystic, represented in the one we have previously noted.

Five stars separate the Sun and the Moon, active male and passive female. Lest





Greek Orthodox shrine of the Well at Samaria, 1934–1939.
G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, Library of
Congress / Wikimedia Commons.

readers think that passiveness is in some way a lesser role for the feminine principle, let me emphasize that the nurturing role of absolute creativity has always been held as supremely important in the development of the mystical life. Such development cannot come to fruition in an atmosphere of hectic action. Creativity and all the other qualities cherished in the mystical life demand a certain amount of passive reflection and quiet before they manifest. The participation of the feminine is absolutely indispensable in mysticism as it is in all of human activity. The five is emblematic of humanity as a whole. There are five projections from the trunk of the human body (head and four limbs)

that emphasize this numerical similarity, our hands and feet are constant reminders of our relationship to the number five and especially five is the number of the human senses.

A. E. Waite, that prolific author of the nineteenth century esoteric revival, comments in his preface to a translation of *The Hermetic Museum* that it had appeared after many had been disillusioned by the difficulties of alchemy and were just being “awakened to the conviction that if alchemy was true at all, it was not to be learned from books, or, at least, from any books that had hitherto been written on the subject.” The mystical and allegorical character of alchemical symbolism had been brought to the fore.

