

‘This engaging and wide-ranging book raises important questions about alchemy’s long history. Combining meticulous archival skill and big-picture vision, Zuber demonstrates that in early modern Europe some alchemists saw their art as a technology of the body closely intertwined with Christian mysticism. *Spiritual Alchemy* thus challenges our reigning view of alchemy as primarily an experimental precursor to laboratory chemistry and adds a fresh perspective to the growing scholarship on the relationship between European alchemy and Christianity.’

—Tara Nummedal, Professor of History and Italian Studies,
Brown University

‘With outstanding archival sleuthing, Zuber identifies a remarkable thread of “spiritual alchemy”—running from seventeenth-century Germans to nineteenth-century English occultists—within the wider fabric of alchemy. Zuber documents for the first time what a spiritual alchemy could actually mean for its practitioners, thus advancing our understanding of the diversity within early modern alchemy.’

—Lawrence M. Principe, Drew Professor of the Humanities,
Johns Hopkins University

‘This book is a wholly innovative study and the best explanation we have of spiritual alchemy as it grew away from physical experiments but kept the language of the chemical quest for the elixir of life and the philosophers’ stone. With unprecedented clarity and precision, Mike Zuber illuminates the inner architecture of spiritual alchemy, and how, following the writings of Jacob Boehme, it became an extremely attractive way of imagining and enacting “inward but real bodily transmutation” in the here and now, across no fewer than five centuries: Protestant mysticism with psychological dimensions dedicated to self-regeneration for the rising middle classes. Many neglected figures are summoned to populate a vital and colorful new history of a widely adopted view of life that stretched from Poland across northern Europe to the Dutch Republic and England, and beyond to the New World.’

—Nigel Smith, William and Annie S. Paton Foundation
Professor of Ancient and Modern Literature,
Princeton University

Most professional historians see the relationship between pre-modern and modern alchemy as one of discontinuity and contrast. Mike A. Zuber challenges this dominant understanding and explores aspects of alchemy that have been neglected by recent work in the history of science. The predominant focus on the scientific aspect of alchemy, such as laboratory experiment, practical techniques, and material ingredients, argues Zuber, marginalizes the things that render alchemy so fascinating: its rich and vivid imagery, reliance on the medium of manuscript, and complicated relationship with religion.

Spiritual Alchemy traces the early-modern antecedents of modern alchemy through generations of followers of Jacob Boehme, the cobbler and theosopher of Görlitz. As Boehme's disciples down the generations—including the Silesian nobleman Abraham von Franckenberg and the London-based German immigrant Dionysius Andreas Freher, among others—studied his writings, they drew on his spiritual alchemy, adapted it, and communicated it to their contemporaries. Spiritual alchemy combines traditional elements of

alchemical literature with Christian mysticism. Defying the boundaries between science and religion, this combination was ultimately transmitted from Görlitz to England. In 1850, it inspired a young woman, later known as Mary Anne Atwood, to write her *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, usually seen as the first modern interpretation of alchemy. Drawing extensively on manuscript and otherwise obscure sources, Zuber documents continuity between pre-modern and modern forms of alchemy while exploring this hybrid phenomenon.

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