LIGHT IN DARKNESS

The Mystical Philosophy of

JACOB BÖHME

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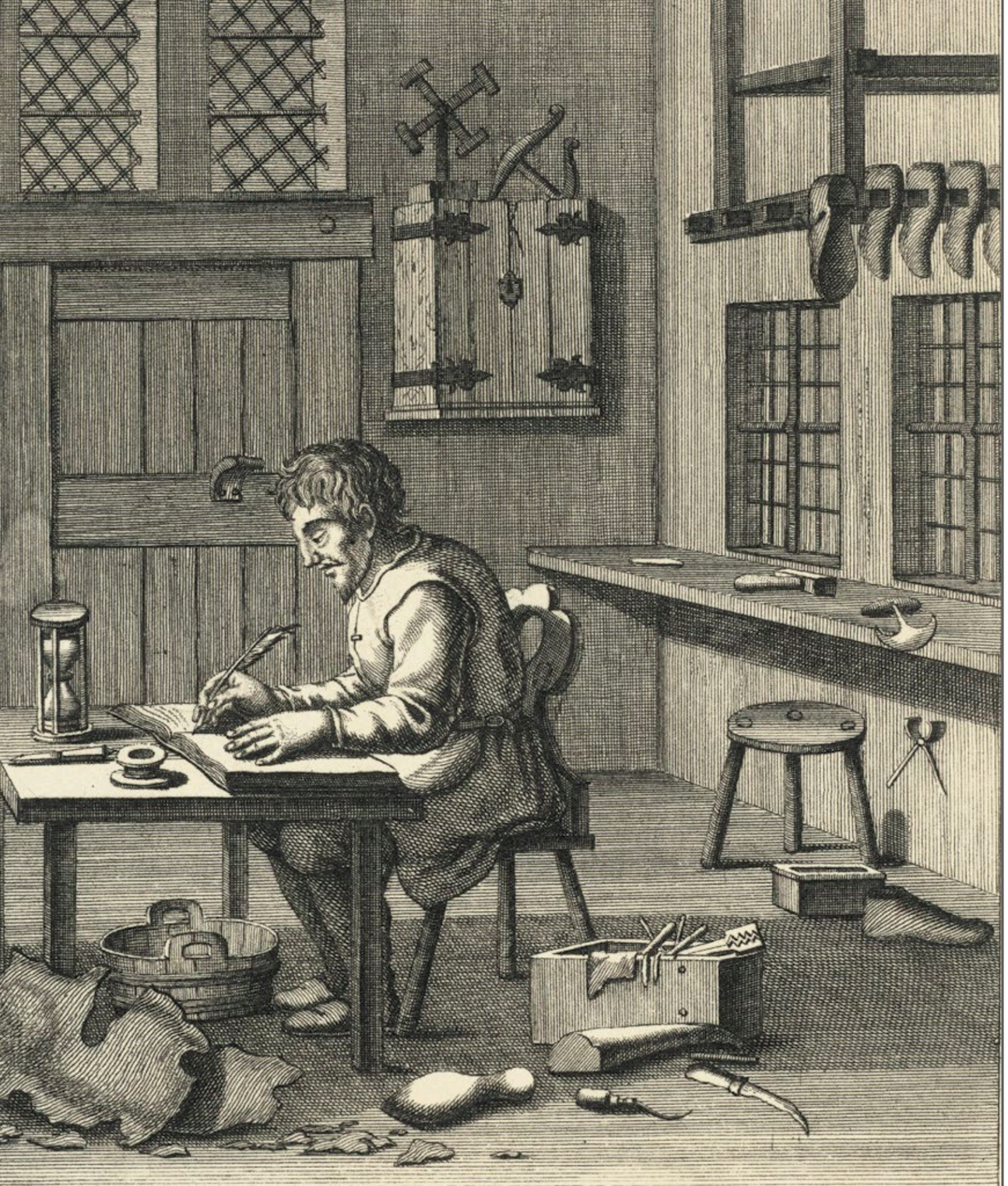

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

The Mystical Philosophy of

JACOB BÖHME

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CLAUDIA BRINK · LUCINDA MARTIN · CECILIA MURATORI

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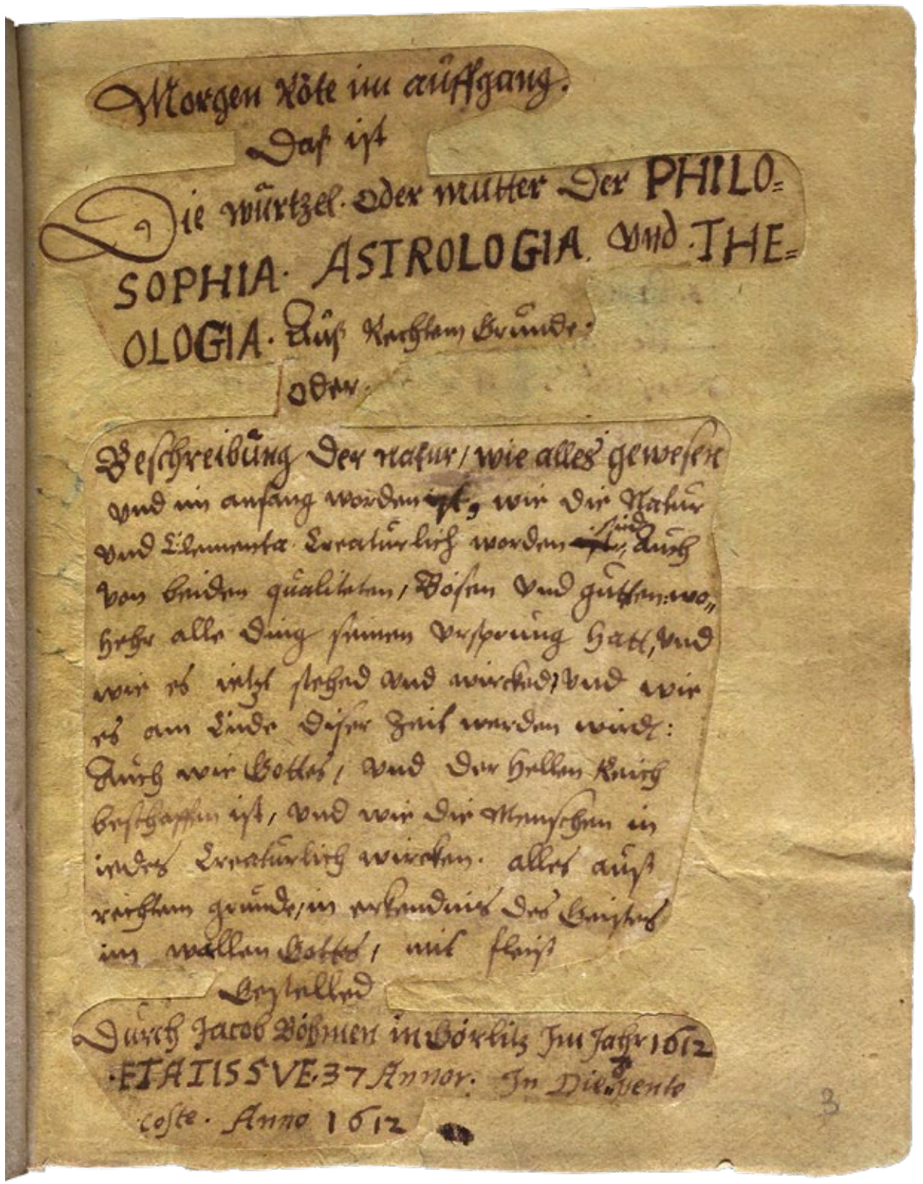

Morgen Röte im aufgang.
Das ist
Die würtzel oder mutter der PHILO=
SOPHIA. ASTROLOGIA. und THE=
OLOGIA. Aus Rechtem Grunde.
oder.
Beschreibung der natur / wie alles gewesen
und im anfang worden ist, wie die Natur
und Elementa Creatürlich worden sind, auch
von beiden qualitaten / Bösen und gutten: wo,
herr alle Ding seinen Ursprung hatt, und
wie es itzt stehet und wirket: und wie
es am Ende dieser Zeit werden wird:
Durch wie Gottes / und der heilen Schrift
Erfahren ist / und wie die Menschen in
jeder Creatürlich wirken. allen auf
rechtem grunde / zu verstehen der Einfalt
im wahren Gotte / mit fleiss
Beschrieben
Durch Jacob Böhmen in Görlitz im Jahr 1612
ETATIS SVE 37 Anno. In Dienstag
coste. Anno 1612

Cecilia Muratori

THE COBBLER WHO DID NOT STICK TO HIS TRADE

THE LIFE OF THE PHILOSOPHER JACOB BÖHME

On July 26, 1613, the mayor of the city of Görlitz, Bartolomäus Scultetus, penned a note in which he reported that "Jacob Boehme, a cobbler" had been brought to the city hall to be questioned regarding his enthusiastic beliefs.[1] The city magistrates had become aware of a potentially dangerous book, circulating in manuscript form, and had confiscated the original copy written by the author, the shoemaker Jacob Böhme. Two days later, on Sunday, the Chief Pastor of Görlitz, Gregor Richter, gave a fiery sermon in the church of Peter and Paul, accusing Böhme of spreading fanatical ideas. The book in question was titled *Morgenröte im Aufgang* (literally *The Morning Redness Rising*, known as *Aurora* already among his contemporaries), and it had been written the previous year, 1612, within the space of only a few months. At the time it was confiscated, it was still incomplete, and Böhme never returned to finish it (Fig. 1).

Jacob Böhme was 38 at the time. He had arrived in the city of Görlitz (now in Saxony) from his birthplace, the nearby village of Alt-Seidenberg, in 1592. A few years later, in 1599, he bought a cobbler's stand on the marketplace in Görlitz, acquired the citizenship of the city, and married the daughter of a butcher, Katharina Kuntzschmann, with whom he would have four sons. In Görlitz he had thus become "Jacob Böhme the cobbler," as Scultetus' note also identifies him: Jacob Böhme was a common name in Görlitz, and therefore the indication of the profession was needed to distinguish between several namesakes. But in the case of Jacob Böhme, the label of "fanatical cobbler" came to signify much more than the profession he practiced for some years. For his opponents, like Richter, the fact that he was a cobbler was the proof that he was unskilled to deal with higher, theological matters, such as those that

1
Title page in: Jacob Böhme, *Morgenröte im Aufgang* (*Morning Redness Rising*) – *Aurora* 1612, Autograph manuscript, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 62 Noviss. 4°, fol. 3r


Der Weg zu Christo.
In zweyen Büchlein.
Das erste
Von wahrer Busse / wie sich der Mensch im Willen vnd Gemütte in sich selber erwecken müsse / vnd was seine ernste betrachtung vnd fürsatz sein solle.
Nebenst angehengten gar ernsten Gebeten.
Das ander
Von wahrer Gelassenheit / wie der Mensch in Göttlichem vertrawen wandeln solle.
Gestellet
Durch einen Liebhaber Gottes / vnd der recht gründlichen warheit.
Im Jahr des HErrn Christi
M. DC. XXII.

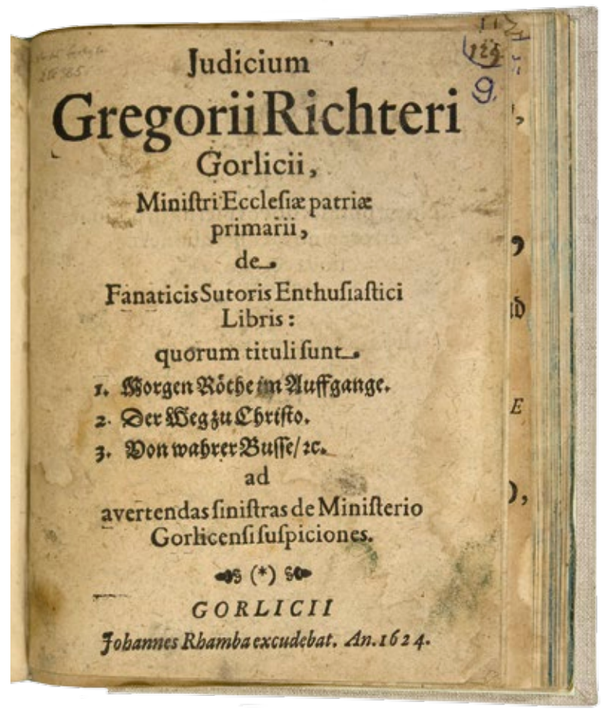
2
Title page in: Jacob Böhme, *Der Weg zu Christo* (*The Way to Christ*), 1622 [that is, 1624], Koninklijke Bibliotheek, National Library of the Netherlands, PH 2337

his occasional use of words in Latin demonstrates that he was not familiar with the language. But at the same time, he emphasized his simplicity, often to the point of exaggeration, in order to draw a parallel between his condition as a writer and that of certain biblical figures, such as the prophets of the Old Testament. Indeed, the genesis of his first book, *Aurora*, is described by Böhme as the result of a divine inspiration or intuition that he had had twelve years previously, that is to say around 1600. In a letter, Böhme recollects the years that passed before he decided to write down the content of the intuition as an unstoppable process of growth, as if the fruit of the experience had to mature before it could be picked and offered to readers. He also compares the intuition to the opening of a gate that unlocked to him more secrets and knowledge "in a quarter of an hour" than would have been the case if he studied "at distinguished schools" (*Epistles* 12.7).

The question of the anticipated readership of Böhme's work is crucial. The confiscation of *Aurora* was triggered by the fact that the book circulated in manuscript copies, drawing the attention of the authorities. Yet, in his later correspondence, Böhme remarked that he intended the book only as a "Memorial," or memorandum, of his experience. The fact that in *Aurora* he addresses his reader as "you" does nevertheless suggest that private and public use of the work were not mutually exclusive. That the manuscript remained incomplete, Böhme maintained in the correspondence, was ultimately the Devil's fault. Indeed, the central topic of the book *Aurora* is the battle between the opposing forces of evil and good, darkness and light, the Devil and God, which Böhme portrays at work in nature, as well as at a cosmic level. Böhme's own struggle with the city authorities is later drawn into this narration, as Böhme sees himself as attempting to communicate

he addressed in his books. By writing on such subjects, Böhme had trespassed the proverbial limits of one's sphere of competence, expressed by the traditional saying that a cobbler should not go beyond dealing with shoes: "ne sutor ultra crepidam!" (see p. 20, Fig. 5).[2]

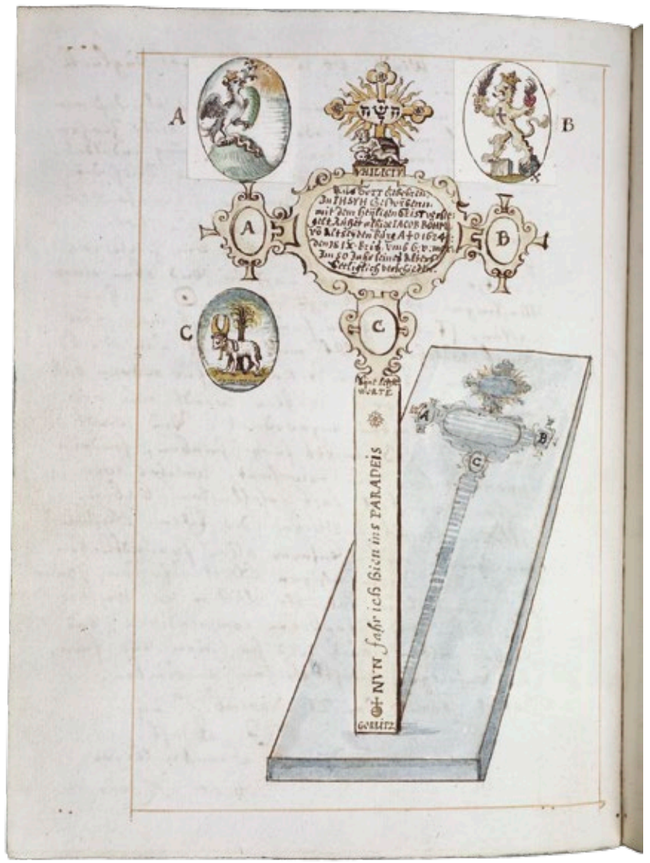
Böhme himself was conscious of the peculiarity of his position. He often stressed that he did not belong to the world of the learned, and especially of university theologians and philosophers. His education had likely consisted only in the basic formation he had received at the village school of Alt-Seidenberg. He wrote all his books in German, and


Judicium
Gregorii Richteri
Gorlicii,
Ministri Ecclesiæ patriæ primarii,
de
Fanaticis Sutoris Enthusiastici Libris:
quorum tituli sunt.
1. Morgen Röthe im Auffgange.
2. Der Weg zu Christo.
3. Von wahrer Busse / &c.
ad
avertendas sinistras de Ministerio Gorlicensi suspiciones.
(*)
GORLICII
Johannes Rhamba excudebat. An. 1624.

3
Title page in: Gregor Richter, *Judicium Gregorii Richteri Gorlicii*, Bautzen 1624, Oberlausitzische Bibliothek der Wissenschaften, LV 75. 35,9

the intuition he experienced against the dark forces that want to silence him.

The city authorities, though, did not intervene harshly against him. The confiscation of the manuscript and the warning not to write again were the only significant measures taken. For six years, Böhme appears to have obeyed the interdiction. When the Thirty Years' War broke out in 1618, he began writing his second book, *A Description of the Three Principles of Divine Essence* (*Beschreibung der drei Principien Göttliches Wesens*). Böhme views war as yet another sign of the Devil at work in the world, and thus it is plausible that he resumed his writing endeavors prompted by the need to communicate his message in times of darkness. It is in any case evident that from 1618 onwards he was particularly concerned to spread his philosophy through an intense phase of writing. Between 1618 and the year of his death, 1624, Böhme wrote indefatigably, producing in total around 30 works. Yet, he insisted that the entire content of his philosophy was already in the first book, *Morgenröte* or *Aurora*, and that all subsequent ones were mere attempts at expanding and clarifying the same core knowledge. Despite this, the books range greatly in terms of literary form as well as in terms of focus: they include a lengthy work devoted to the



4
Böhme's Grave Cross, in: *Vergaderinge van Eenige ongemeene Schriften van* [...] *Böhme*, Drawing in coloured ink by Michael Le Blon, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Cod. Guelf. 67 Noviss. 4°, fol. 78v

history of creation in the Book of Genesis (*Mysterium magnum*, 1623), a set of replies to questions posed by followers (*Forty Questions of the Soul* [*Vierzig Fragen von der Seelen*], 1620), a work dealing with the question of the election of grace, which had been at the centre of a crucial doctrinal controversy within Protestantism (*On the Election of Grace* [*Von der Gnaden-wahl*], 1623), as well as shorter polemical writings, for instance against Gregor Richter (*Apology or Defence Speech Against Gregor Richter* [*Apologia. Oder Schutzrede gegen Gregor Richter*], 1624).

In the years that passed before Böhme took up writing again, he must have been exposed to a variety of ideas that were circulating in Görlitz, in particular regarding natural philosophy. Both *On the Three Principles* (*Beschreibung der drei Principien Göttliches Wesens*, 1619) and the later *De signatura rerum* (*On the Signature of Things*, 1622) feature terminology derived from the alchemical tradition, and indeed Görlitz was an important centre of alchemical, astrological and astronomical inquiry. Görlitz was certainly no provincial backwater: the city had had a prestigious *Gymnasium* to prepare pupils for university study since 1565, where Scultetus, subsequently mayor, had also taught. Scultetus was in contact with figures such as Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler, and also edited a work on pestilence ascribed to the alchemist and doctor Theophrastus Bombastus Paracelsus (see p. 66, Fig. 4). In Görlitz, contemporaries debated natural science in all its forms, including branches that nowadays are relegated to magic rather than science, such as alchemy, and Böhme clearly profited from this environment. Most notably, the fact that Böhme integrated the heliocentric view of the universe in his philosophy is a clear sign of the impact that this context had on him.

Only one book, containing two short texts and titled *The Way to Christ* (*Der Weg zu Christo*, 1624),

was published during Böhme's life-time (Fig. 2). All others circulated in manuscript form through a network of dedicated followers. After 1618, the task of spreading his philosophy quickly absorbed Böhme's energies: he sold his cobbler's stall and dedicatet himself for a while to trading in other kinds of goods. Amongst the journeys he undertook for this new activity, he went to Prague in 1619, and was present when the Elector Friedrich V of the Palatine made his grand entrance into the city. Böhme reports on this in his correspondence – another important indication of the fact that he was not the secluded "mystic" he has sometimes been portrayed to be. On the contrary, he was deeply aware of political events and of their impact, and his writings are never abstract meditations, but aimed at showing that the knowledge of the world and of the divine cannot be separated.

In the year of his death, 1624, Böhme was hosted at court in Dresden. There, he stayed with the director of the court laboratory, Benedikt Hinckelmann. The exact reason for Böhme's visit to Dresden is not known. In a letter, Böhme writes that his booklet *The Way to Christ* had been appreciated at court, to the point that it was seen as "a divine gift," and was read daily (*Epistles* 61.1). Yet, the publication of the booklet had been controversial, at least in Böhme's hometown. Gregor Richter had launched a renewed attack against the "fanatical cobbler," and authorities had again called Böhme to the city hall of Görlitz to justify himself. Böhme had ultimately been acquitted, but only because he was able to argue that although he had authored the book, he had not arranged its publication, for which the nobleman Hans Sigmund von Schweinichen had been entirely responsible. Having travelled back to Görlitz after his visit to Dresden, Böhme fell ill and died in the night of 16 November. Böhme's fierce opponent, Gregor Richter, had died only a few months earlier, in August 1624, having published in Görlitz a violent pamphlet against Böhme (Fig. 3). Richter's condemnation of Böhme in speech and writing apparently ignited resentment against Böhme in his hometown, since the cross that his friends had erected to mark this grave was soon vandalized (Fig. 4). Today, Böhme's tomb in the Nikolai churchyard is marked by a large stone featuring one of the most famous depictions of his philosophical system – the "Philosophical Sphere" – which captures in a single drawing Böhme's main idea of the struggle of light and darkness (see p. 76, Fig. 6).

Notes

1 Quoted in: Jecht 1924: 36. See further on Böhme's biography: Fechner 1857: 313–446; Peuckert 1924; Jecht 1924; Weeks 1991; Penman 2014: 57–76; Muratori 2017 (online: www.springer.com/de/book/9783319141688). **2** Muratori 2017. On the characterization of Böhme as 'mystical cobbler' see Muratori 2016, especially Part 1.

YOU WON'T FIND ANY BOOK IN WHICH YOU COULD BETTER DISCOVER AND INVESTIGATE THE DIVINE WISDOM THAN WHEN YOU WALK ON A GREEN AND BLOOMING MEADOW.

THREE PRINCIPLES 8.12

Cecilia Muratori

NATURE

The observation of nature is the starting point of Böhme's philosophy. The frontispiece of his first book, *Aurora* (1612), states that the object of the text is the "description of nature, how everything was and came to be in the beginning, how nature and the elements became creaturely" (see p. 33).[7] Through the investigation of nature, Böhme seeks to understand the origin of the entire world, and even to envision how "it will be at the end of this time."[8] Nature is thus the most immediate source of knowledge for Böhme. He has recourse to the metaphor, used throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, that nature is like a book that the human being needs to learn how to read. In fact, what can be learnt from nature cannot be found in any traditional book. In his second work, *On the Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1619), he warns the reader as follows: "you won't find any book in which you could better discover and investigate the Divine wisdom than when you walk on a green and blooming meadow, there you will see, smell and taste the marvellous power of God, even if this is just a similitude" (*Three Principles* 8.12).[9]

1
Title page in: Valentin Weigel, *Studium Universale*, Frankfurt / Leipzig 1698, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

2
Dionysius Andreas Freher and Jeremias Daniel Leuchter, Untitled (Adam in the Garden of Eden), in: *Drei Tafeln* (*Three Tables*), First Table, 1717, Pop-up image, watercolour and ink on paper, British Library, Add Ms 5788, The British Library Board

3
The Alchemical Stages, in: Stephan Michelspacher, *Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur in Alchymia* (*Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature in Alchemy)*, Augsburg 1615, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

Böhme very frequently uses examples taken from nature in order to explain to his readers the relationship between the visible world and the divine power that created it. The entire preface to *Aurora* is dedicated to one such similitude: Böhme compares the sciences of "philosophy, astrology and theology [...] to a delightful tree that grows in a beautiful garden of delights," whereby the "the garden of the tree means the world, the field nature, the trunk of the tree the stars, the branches the elements, the fruits that grow on the tree stand for the human beings, the sap of the tree means the luminous divinity" (*Aurora,* Preface 1 and 8)[10] (Fig. 1). The presence of God in nature is thus as diffused and vital as the sap that flows inside the tree, making it alive. Böhme's God has never left his creation after having formed the world, but still inhabits it. God is in nature, and Böhme even calls nature "the body of God" ("Leib Gottes"). Yet, even if God is in nature, one should not conclude that inside God there are natural things like water, earth or air (*Three Principles* 1.5).

As the tree-metaphor develops, it becomes clear that Böhme views nature as a battlefield in which different forces fight each other, and God is therefore himself involved in nature's dynamism. For Böhme, all processes of natural change, such as growth and decay, are the result of a plurality of powers constantly opposing each other. This opposition generates friction, from which movement, and thus life derives. At the beginning of *Aurora*, Böhme mentions only two such powers, called "qualities": a good and an evil one, and from their contrast everything is said to derive. Together, these two qualities are the fountain from which all things that exist flow (*Aurora* 2.2): they stimulate all movements in nature, and therefore in nature they must always exist in combination and never individually, otherwise life itself would not be possible. All creatures, from plants, to animals and humans, and even including minerals, host in themselves these two opposing powers. "There is nothing in nature in which good and evil are not present," Böhme sums up (*Aurora* 2.5).[11]

But a quality for Böhme is not simply a property or feature of a thing. Instead he gives an original definition, calling a quality "the mobility, springing or urging of a thing" (*Aurora* 1.3).[12] The word quality is an exemplary case of Böhme's use of what he calls the language of nature, *Natursprache*. In the language of nature every word expresses perfectly its meaning, just as was the case with Adam's use of language in the Garden of Eden, when he named the animals according to their real essences (Gen 2:19-20) (Fig. 2). Böhme claims to have access to the language of

4
Broadsheet with Portrait of Paracelsus, Matthias Quad von Kinckelbach, Nuremberg 1606 (1st edition 1588), Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

5
Alchemical Furnace, Nuremberg or Augsburg, c. 1575, Engraved, cast iron, fire clay, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. no. 40919

The precise number and names of these qualities changes throughout Böhme's work: he talks of qualities, wills (*Willen*), characteristics (*Eigenschaften*), *Species*, and spirits (*Geister*). In *Aurora*, Böhme describes a cycle of qualities, each at the same time generating and opposing the next one in the chain of constant life movement, from bitter ("bittere Qualität"), to sweet ("die süße Qualität"), to sour ("die sauere Qualität"), to stringent and salted ("die herbe oder gesalzene Qualität"). He also includes in this cycle some of the substances traditionally identified as "elements," explaining for instance how air and water are generated thanks to the interplay of heat and cold (Fig. 3). Böhme suggests that the presence of the elements in all natural bodies can be best understood by looking at a burning candle: "in the candle everything is mixed, and no one characteristic is revealed separately from the others, until it is lit: then one sees fire, oil, light, air, and water from the air. All four elements, which had previously been hid in one united foundation, become revealed in it" (*Clavis* 62).[13]

Notably, Böhme also uses several terms that resonate with the vocabulary of the alchemical tradition, especially through the legacy of the doctor and alchemist Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus (1493–1541). This is particularly evident in *On the Three Principles*, whose title is reminiscent of Paracelsus' famous three substances, salt, sulphur and mercury (Fig. 4). For Paracelsus, alchemy was an important foundation to the practice of medicine, because he believed that every natural body was made up of these three substances, and that the doctor must be trained to recognize their presence and balance in everything. In *Paragranum*, Paracelsus compares the alchemist to a winemaker, or a baker: this indicates the fact that for Paracelsus alchemy is a practical discipline that involves skilful manipulation

nature through his mother tongue, German: the assonances between the words – he believes – guide us to understand the deep relationships between the concepts. Unlike any of the human languages spoken after Babel, the language of nature thus allows Böhme to grasp the original, true conception that lies beneath a word. The true meaning of quality, for Böhme, is signalled by the sound of the word, because a *Qualität* (also spelled *Quallität*) performs the actions of *quellen*/*quallen* (springing), and, most importantly, the origin of its mobility is an internal friction, indicated by the presence of the word *Qual* (torment) within *Qual-ität*.

JUST AS A MOTHER BEARS A CHILD, SO TOO WILL THE NEW HUMAN BEING BE BORN IN AND OUT OF GOD ... A CHILD OF HEAVEN AND PARADISE.

EPISTLES 20.4-5

Lucinda Martin

REBIRTH

A central concept in Christianity is the idea that believers can be cleansed of sin and "reborn." Traditionally, the sacrament of baptism has symbolized rebirth, but Böhme emphasizes that inner change is more important than outer ceremonies (Fig. 1). He sees religious renewal as a process so profound that it mirrors the birth of a child: "Just as a mother bears a child, so too will the new human being be born in and out of God [...], a child of heaven and paradise" (*Epistles* 20.4f.).[84] Böhme describes his own faith struggle as a "birth" and as "storming." He compares it to the night that his namesake, the biblical patriarch Jacob, spent wrestling with an angel of God, as recounted in the Book of Genesis. The two fought until "the breaking of the day" at which point the angel granted Jacob his blessing and then "the sun rose upon him" (Gen 32:24-31). Inspired by this Scripture, Böhme called his first book "Morning Dawn Ascending" or "Aurora," to point to the moment when his own faith battle was won and God gave him the blessing of rebirth (Fig. 2). He also likens the path to rebirth with the biblical Jacob's dream of a ladder into heaven, with angels ascending and descending. "Jacob's Ladder" has traditionally been interpreted as a bridge between heaven and earth and some have associated it with the Church or with Christ Himself. For Böhme, the

1
Unknown artist, German, 17th century, Baptism of Christ, Pen and brown ink, brown wash, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. no. C 1967-438

2
Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert after Maarten van Heemskerck, Jacob Wrestling the Angel, from the Series "The Story of Jacob," 1549, Etching, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. no. A 35384

ladder represents the long and arduous ascent into heaven that believers must undertake to achieve rebirth (Fig. 3).

Böhme underscores that his faith struggle was difficult, but the moment of illumination or the "breakthrough of the spirit" ("Durchbruch des Geistes") came suddenly. Böhme compares it to a stroke of lightning and calls it the "flash of life" ("plitz des lebens") (*Aurora* 8. 216, 3–6). He recalls how, from one second to the next, the deepest mysteries of the cosmos were revealed to him: "Then I saw and recognized the Being of all Being, the ground and the abyss: […] the birth of the Holy Trinity, the originating and the first state of this world and all creatures through Divine Wisdom […] I saw and recognized the whole Being in evil and in good, how each originated in the other" (*Epistles* 12.8).[85] In this context, Böhme cites Scripture about spiritual rebirth: "I tell

3
Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert after Maarten van Heemskerck, Jacob's Ladder, from the Series "The Story of Jacob," 1549, Etching, Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. no. A 35400

you, unless someone has been reborn, he will not be able to see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Traditionally, this verse has been taken to mean that only the righteous can enter heaven, but Böhme reads it to also mean that only the reborn can comprehend God's Creation – the nature and workings of the cosmos. This is how Böhme understands the statement of the biblical patriarch Jacob when he says, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32:31).

Böhme maintains that the key to winning the faith struggle is the will. One must truly want to be free of one's "own images," that is, the selfish ego. In freely choosing to trust in God's will and give up worldly desires, human beings mirror the original movement of the divine Will out of the dark realm of "Nothingness," the abyss that preceded the emergence of God. Böhme views it as a parallel act of will, when people let go of materialistic and profane things so that God can enter their hearts. Only then is rebirth possible.

One of the most basic tenets of Christianity is that humans were created in the image of God. Yet Böhme also grounds humanity's divine form in philosophy. In his view, everything that exists in the macrocosm must also be present in the microcosm. Humans contain the "essence of all Being" within themselves, a share of all substances and principles in the cosmos: "What is then the body of a human being? […] It is the visible world, an image and essence of all that the world is; and the visible world is a revelation of the inner spiritual world […]" (*Way to Christ*, I.44).[86]

Such anthropological theories have long fascinated Böhme's readers, above all in the generations after his death. The idea of a religious *renovatio* or "new birth" is anchored in the Bible and has a long history in Christianity, but Böhme combined these traditions with speculation from the realm of natural philosophy to transform older understandings. In Böhme's thought, God encompasses all substances and aspects of the cosmos, including the male and female principles. To help explain this philosophical perspective, Böhme revives the belief held by some within the Early Church that the Godhead contains a female person, alongside God the Father, Christ and the Holy Ghost. This tradition harks back to Scripture about the "Wisdom of God," in which the

4
Pieter de Jode after
Jean Cousin the Younger,
The Last Judgement,
after 1585, Etching,
Kupferstich-Kabinett,
Staatliche Kunstsamm-
lungen Dresden,
Inv. no. A 79147

voice of "Wisdom" – *Sophia* in Greek – speaks with the authority of the Divine. Since Böhme believes that God contains both male and female elements and since the first human was created "in the image of God," Böhme concludes that the first human being must also have been both male and female. In Böhme's view, the first human – Adam before the Fall into sin – was androgynous.

The unity of the first human – the *Urmensch* – within himself and with God and the cosmos was lost with the Fall into sin. According to Böhme, Adam turned inward, instead of focusing on God and fell asleep. In doing so, the first human lost the "light body" and angelic powers that God had intended. In Böhme's view, the Fall into sin is a fall into matter. Adam's "heavenly body" became mortal, susceptible to disease and the forces of nature. With the heavenly body, the first human had the ability to reproduce without the assistance of another, but as a mortal being, this ability was lost. As a pure spiritual being, the original human had the "Divine Sophia" – the female aspect of God – within, but after the Fall the human being was alone. God thus made for him a material companion, Eve, to replace the female spiritual companion who had "fled" – Sophia.

In contrast to traditional interpretations of the story of Creation, which blame Eve for the ruination of paradise, Böhme claims that it was Adam's turn away from God, his sleep, that caused the Fall: "Now we know that Adam was a chaste virgin before his Eve, before his sleep, and afterward he was a man, like an animal, monstrous, and it still causes us shame before God that we have animal organs for reproduction" (*Forty Questions of the Soul*, Question 33.5).[87] With the advent of sin, man and woman became two irreconcilable halves: "And Eve was herself but half of a virgin, because Adam was the other half according to the two tinctures" (*Forty Questions of the Soul*, Question 36.4). Böhme claims that it is the goal of all human love to regain the unity that was lost in the Fall, but, in mortal life, humans are doomed to remain separated from one another and from God.

According to Böhme, those who are reborn can get back their "perfect," that is, their complete, androgynous bodies, in heaven. In making such assertions, he is thinking of biblical passages that speak of a "new creature": "Therefore if any man be in Christ: he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17). Many of Böhme's readers referred to this as the "bringing back" (*Wiederbringung*), and they meant not just an original, innocent state of humanity, but also the return of the earth itself to a state of paradise. In the Early Modern period, people in general expected the "end of days" to begin soon. According to the biblical Book of Revelations, a time of great suffering would be followed by the Return of Christ, the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on earth, the resurrection of the dead, and the Last Judgement (Rev 20:1-7) (Fig. 4). The wars, plagues, natural disasters and other crises of the period led contemporaries to believe that these biblical events had already begun. Many placed their hope in biblical passages such as Isaiah 65:17-25: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth […] The wolf and the lamb shall feed together […] They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD" (Fig. 5). Böhme and others – including the reformer Martin Luther before him – referred to this dawning new time as the "Morning Dawn." In doing so, they were thinking about the fight in the Book of Genesis between the patriarch Jacob and an angel, which ended at sunrise. But they also thought of New Testament verses that point to a coming end time: "[…] take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark

Lucinda Martin · Cecilia Muratori · Leigh T. I. Penman with Mike Zuber

THE DIFFUSION OF BÖHME'S THOUGHT

Böhme lived in turbulent times – war, religious strife and economic crises marked the period, but it was also an exciting age of new scientific breakthroughs and increasing contact with other lands and peoples. Böhme addressed all of these issues in a way that readers have found compelling from his own time right up to the present day. To highlight some of the most important encounters with Böhme, this section presents a series of short texts designed to provide an impression of the breadth of Böhme's reception over the centuries.[1] This selection, which is organised chronologically, could easily be expanded, especially since research on Böhme is ongoing.

Although Böhme is often thought of as a prophet or genius, writing alone in his study, in fact, he was part of a network of people with similar interests. His home town of Görlitz, today on the border between Germany and Poland, was a crossroads, where intellectuals gathered to discuss the natural science of the time and the ideas of a range of religious reformers from all confessions – not only the mainstream confessions of Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, but also religious minorities. Furthermore, the area surrounding Görlitz was, then as today, a melting pot of different confessions and peoples – Germans, Poles, Slavs, Moravians, and more, and this is reflected in the place names. Towns often carry both German and Polish names, or sometimes the names are in German and Sorbian, a Slavic dialect common in Lusatia and Silesia, the regions where Böhme spent most of his life. Böhme's web of contacts consisted of diverse people from across this area, including physicians, alchemists, devotional writers, and noble patrons who sent him money, books and gifts. In this period, writings were often distributed as manuscripts instead of as published books, and in Böhme's networks, scribes made handwritten copies of his texts, which they traded with one another. Ironically, the wider public first became aware of Böhme through the polemical writings of his opponents.

Throughout the seventeenth century, friends and foes alike kept Böhme's ideas in circulation and spread them far beyond his corner of Germany. In 1685 the critic Erasmus Francisci complained that Jacob Böhme's writings "for some time now have been coming out of Holland like toads crawling from a bog."[2] As a place of religious tolerance, the Netherlands played a special role in the transmission of Böhme's writings. Religious nonconformists who had been exiled from Germany sought refuge in the Netherlands and especially in Amsterdam, which soon developed into a center for the publication of Böhme's works. These were then sold in Germany through underground networks and in England in translation. Soon English adherents of Böhme's thought were writing their own tracts, which they in turn translated into German and Dutch and sold on the continent. A triangle of exchange and influence developed between Amsterdam, London and German centers such as Frankfurt and Magdeburg. Böhme's ideas saturated German Pietism but also appealed to French and Scandinavian reformers. Through religious refugees influenced by Böhme, his thought reached the North American colonies and made a contribution to discussions about civil rights.

In the eighteenth century, Böhme continued to influence religious and ethical debates, but from that time to the present, it has increasingly been philosophers, artists and literary authors who have been inspired by his ideas. Böhme's claims about the role of the Divine in human imagination have struck a chord with poets and painters. It was especially his ideas regarding the dynamics of good and evil in God and in nature that appealed to philosophers, and his innovative, metaphorically rich language has engaged philosophers and poets alike. His mythical imagery has been a source for psychologists but also for writers of fiction, and his writings on the human being "made in God's image" and endowed with a conscience have kept Böhme alive in debates about human freedom and responsibility, making him more relevant than ever.

Notes

1 The list of Böhme's contacts is based largely on the research of Leigh T.I. Penman. The texts have been written by Lucinda Martin (LM), Cecilia Muratori (CM), Leigh Penman (LP) and Mike Zuber (MZ).
2 Francisci 1685: 755.

GÖRLITZ/ZGORZELEC

(town in Lusatia, today on the eastern German-Polish border)

Böhme had both friends and foes in Görlitz, and this included the city's clergy. His family was close to that of his pastor, Martin Moller. Böhme was likely influenced by Moller's emphasis on Christian meditation and by his idea that laity should lead informal worship services in the home. When Moller died in 1606, Gregor Richter became pastor of the Sts. Peter and Paul Church that Böhme attended. In contrast to Moller, who wanted laity to be able to take on greater roles in religious matters, Richter believed that only an ordained theologian had the authority to make public statements on religion. When Richter learned of Böhme's *Aurora*, which was circulating in handwritten form, he attacked Böhme from the pulpit, and in 1613 Richter initiated an investigation that ended with *Aurora* being confiscated and Böhme being forbidden from writing. In 1624, the year of Böhme's death, both Richter and Böhme penned polemical texts giving their side of the story. [LM]

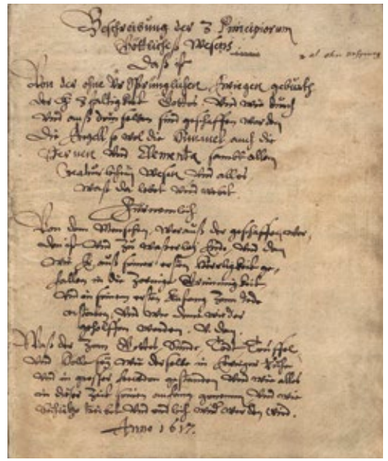
1
Unknown artist,
Portrait of Chief Pastor
Martin Moller, Oil on wood,
c. 1605, Ev. Innenstadt-
gemeinde Görlitz

LEOPOLDSHAIN/ŁAGÓW

(town in the region of Silesia, today in Poland)

Karl Ender von Sercha (1579–1624), one of Böhme's most devoted early supporters, readers, correspondents, and interlocutors, lived in Leopoldshain. Ender's family reputedly were supporters of the spiritualist doctrines of Caspar Schwenckfeld von Ossig (1489/90–1561). According to tradition, Ender copied and publicly distributed manuscript copies of Böhme's first work, *Aurora* (1612), which won many adherents to Böhme's theosophical ideas. Throughout the 1610s and 1620s Ender provided food, money, and other support to Böhme, in order to forward and encourage his theosophical activity. [LP]

2
Tobias Stimmer,
Caspar Schwenckfeld,
from: Nikolaus Reusner,
Icones sive virorum
literis illustrium […],
Woodcut, 1590, Kupferstich-
Kabinett, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, A 135157



3
Jacob Böhme,
Drey Principien
(*Three Principles*), Title page
of Christian Bernhard's
handwritten copy,
Biblioteka Uniwersytecka
we Wrocławiu,
AKC. 1975/255

SAGAN/ŻAGAŃ

(town in Silesia, today in Poland)

Sagan was home to one of Böhme's chief copyists, the toll collector Christian Bernhard (d. 1649), who made contact with Böhme through Balthasar Walther in late 1619. Another supporter in Sagan was Abraham Bernhard (1583–1654), brother of Christian, who was rector of the local Latin School, and who had first encountered Böhme's works while teaching at the *Gymnasium Schönaichianum* in Beuthen an der Oder. In 1627 Böhme's son Tobias, an apprentice shoemaker, dwelled in Sagan after having served in the Danish army fighting in Silesia. It was here that he converted to Catholicism at the behest of the local Jesuits. [LP]

SPROTTAU/SZPROTAWA

(town in Silesia, today in Poland)

Böhme had several readers and supporters in Sprottau. The jurist Gottfried Gloger von Schwanbach copied and collected Böhme's manuscripts, as well as those of Valentin Weigel, the Rosicrucians, Paracelsus, and others, including the lay prophet Christoph Kotter (1585–1647). From 1616 onwards, Kotter experienced a series of angelic visions that were disseminated in print and manuscript. Kotter attended Böhme on his deathbed in November 1624, and along with the Görlitz physician Tobias Kober (d. 1625) helped to reconcile Böhme with the Lutheran faith before his death. A further contact in Sprottau was the physician Adam Brux (1572–1639), who studied medicine in Basel before serving as personal physician to the Dukes of Anhalt. After Böhme's death, Brux continued to seek patronage and support from other members of Böhme's networks. [LP]

4
Portrait of Christoph
Kotter, 1665, Copperplate
engraving and etching,
Herzog August Bibliothek
Wolfenbüttel,
Inv. no. I 7300.1

STRIEGAU/SZTREZGOM

(town in Silesia, today in Poland)

Striegau was the home of Jonas Daniel Koschwitz (c. 1580–1632), a physician who studied medicine at the University of Wittenberg under Daniel Sennert. Koschwitz first met Böhme in 1621, and like many others in the region, he was interested in Böhme's ideas about predestination: Böhme rejected the idea that God has already determined all of the details of our lives. After 1621 Böhme and Koschwitz corresponded regularly, and Böhme designed a sevenfold method of spiritual rebirth that Koschwitz tried to realize. Koschwitz was the brother-in-law of one of Böhme's major opponents, Balthasar Tielckau von Hochkirch (also known as Balthasar Tilcken) in the village of Nider-Girßdorf/Miłochów. [LP]

5
Portrait of Abraham von Franckenberg, 1725, Etching, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Inv. No. I 4409

LIEGNITZ/LEGNICA

(town in Silesia, today in Poland)

Liegnitz was a major centre of Böhme readership and reception. Scribal copies of his works were prepared in Liegnitz by the apothecary Johann Leonard Knobloch (1585–1625), and read by several more residents of the city, including the physician Friedrich Krause, and the imperial toll collector Paul Kaym (c. 1572–1635), who in 1620 contacted Böhme for his opinions concerning the Last Judgment. In 1624 Böhme claimed to enjoy the support of Duke Georg Rudolf von Liegnitz (1595–1653) and several of his privy counselors. Yet Böhme also had opponents in the city. Abraham Friese (also Frisius, 1570–1627), head pastor at the church of Sts. Peter and Paul, complained to church officials that Böhme's *Weg zu Christo* (*Way to Christ*, Görlitz 1624) was heterodox. This complaint prompted Böhme's troubles in Görlitz. [LP]

SCHWEINHAUS/ŚWINY

(town in Silesia, today in Poland)

Residence of Johann Sigismund von Schweinichen (1591–1664), one of Böhme's foremost supporters and correspondents. Von Schweinichen came into contact with Böhme in 1621 after reading his *Aurora*. Tradition holds that Schweinichen was the publisher of Böhme's *Weg zu Christo* (*Way to Christ*, Goerlitz 1624). At Schweinhaus, Böhme met a number of other Silesians interested in his theosophical teachings. The most significant of these was the mystic Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652), who became aware of Böhme's writings in January 1623. Franckenberg possessed several autograph manuscripts of Böhme's works, including *Mysterium magnum* (1623). Later he composed an influential biography of Böhme and was instrumental in the transmission of Böhme's writings. [LP]

6
Frans Luyckx, Electoral Prince Johann Georg I of Saxony, 1652, Oil on canvas, Rüstkammer, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. Nr. H 0200

DRESDEN

(capital of the German state of Saxony)

Böhme made contact with several persons at the Saxon royal court in early 1624, following the printing of *Weg zu Christo* (*Way to Christ*). In May and June he spent around eight weeks in the city. His contacts included the court alchemist Benedict Hinckelmann (1588–1659) and other high officials interested in Böhme's thought. Böhme also spent several days at Pillnitz, residence of Joachim von Loß (1576–1633), Electoral-Saxon Privy Counselor and a supporter of Böhme's doctrines. Although Böhme hoped to secure an audience with Elector Johann Georg I (1585–1656), this never happened. Some historians believe that Böhme was exonerated of charges of heresy after facing a formal church tribunal in Dresden in 1624. The available evidence on this point is inconclusive, although it is known that some Dresden clergy supported him. [LM]

TROPPAU/OPAVA

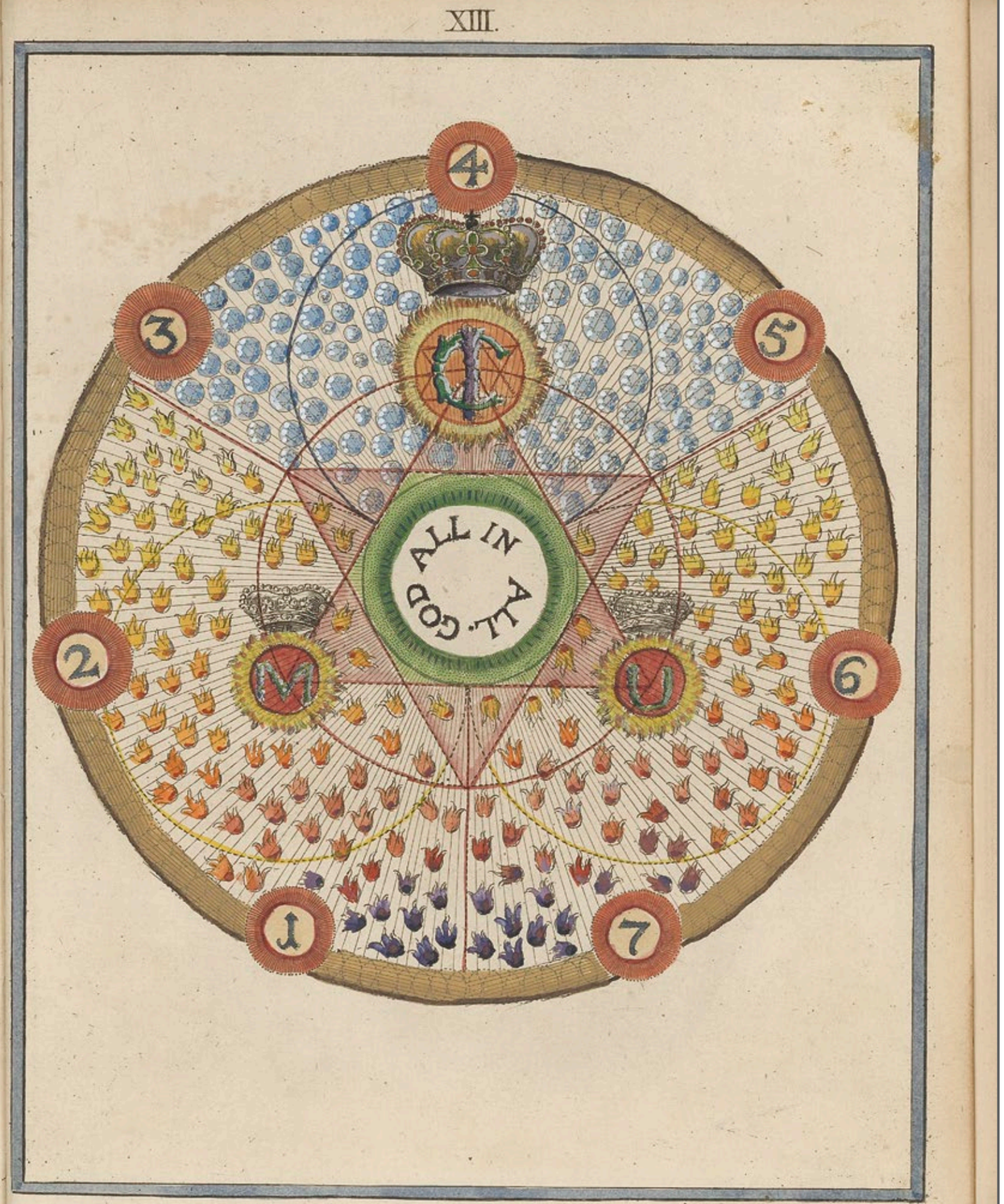
(town in the Moravian-Silesian region, today Czech Republic)

While Böhme's works had been circulating in Troppau since at least late 1621, in the spring of 1622 Böhme made personal contact with the physician Matthias Giller von Lilienfeld (d. 1655) while the latter was visiting Breslau/Wrocław. Giller carried letters from several other readers of Böhme's works in Troppau, including the cloth maker Balthasar Nitsche (fl. 1616–1641), and Hans Butowsky (d. 1645). Thereafter Böhme corresponded regularly with these figures, who in turn distributed his writings further. Several of them, such as Nitsche and Butowsky, would continue to participate in spiritualist correspondence networks well after Böhme's death, ensuring the continuing circulation of his works in manuscript into the 1640s among figures like Abraham von Franckenberg. [LP]

LEIPZIG

(town in the German state of Saxony)

The annual book fairs in Leipzig, particularly the November *Michaelismarkt*, were often used by Böhme and his supporters as places to distribute and exchange dissident publications in both print and manuscript. Leipzig was also the home of the physician Arnold Kerner (c. 1585–c. 1627), who from 1620 acted as a copyist and distributor of Böhme's *Aurora* and other works. Kerner also corresponded with the radical chiliast Paul Nagel in Torgau and in 1624, Kerner forwarded books and writings of Böhme to Balthasar Walther in Lübeck. [LP/LM]



Cecilia Muratori

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF BÖHME'S PHILOSOPHY

DIONYSIUS ANDREAS FREHER AND THE LAW EDITION OF BÖHME'S WORKS

Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649–1728) was the designer of the intricate images that were printed in the first edition of Böhme's collected works in English, published between 1764 and 1781 in memory of the theologian William Law (the so-called Law edition), under the editorial guidance of George Ward and Thomas Langcake. These images, and especially the series of "pop-ups" known as *The Three Tables*, were added to this edition without acknowledgement of the authorship. Indeed, they have sometimes been incorrectly attributed to Law himself. Some texts by Freher, printed anonymously in this edition, were also thought to be Law's own writings. The images contributed greatly to the success of this edition. The poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), who owned a copy of it, was fascinated by the pictures. The journalist and diarist Henry Crabb Robinson (1775–1867) wrote that William Blake (1757–1827), too, had admired them.[1] It is easy to see why the bold design and striking colouring of the *Tables* would have made an impression on Blake, whose own reception of Böhme may have been very extensive, not least owing to Freher's innovative, visual representations (Fig. 1).[2]

Freher's original achievement as a Böhme interpreter thus enjoyed a mixed fate. The images he designed won renown, while their author remained mostly unknown. The main reason is that Freher did not seek to publish his works during his lifetime, but they circulated exclusively in manuscript form. Freher was a native of Nuremberg and arrived in London around the end of the seventeenth century.

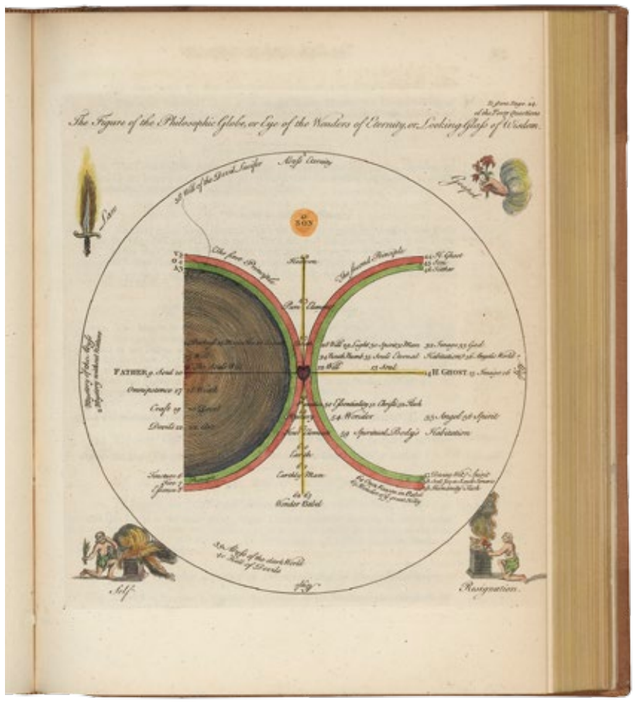
1
Dionysius Andreas Freher, "God All in All," in: *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, so-called Law Edition (Eds. George Ward and Thomas Langcake), London 1764–1781, Copperplate engraving, handcoloured, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

2
Dionysius Andreas Freher and Jeremias Daniel Leuchter, Untitled (Sophia), in: *Drei Tafeln* (*Three Tables*), Third Table, 1717, Pop-up image, watercolour and ink on paper, British Library, Add Ms 5788, The British Library Board

3
Dionysius Andreas Freher, Untitled (Sophia), in: *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, so-called Law Edition (Eds. George Ward and Thomas Langcake), London 1764–1781, Pop-up image, copperplate engraving, handcoloured, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

It is possible that he was drawn to England by the liveliness of the Böhme-reception there, and especially by the work of Jane Leade (1623–1704). In London, he was in contact with the Philadelphian Society, as well as with other German émigrés. His main goal was to explain the relevance of Böhme's philosophy to a new English readership.

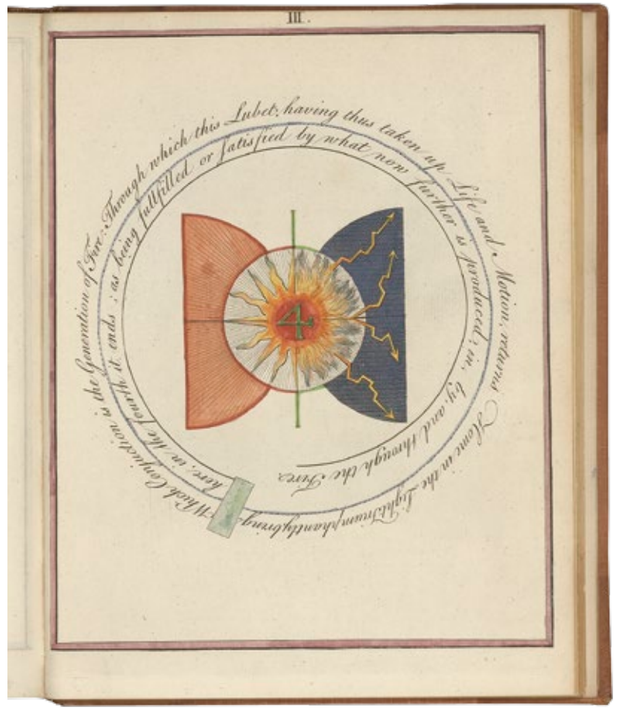
The main innovation of Freher is that he sought to combine visual work and text to explain Böhme's philosophy. He believed that images could have a particularly important function in unravelling the complexity of Böhme's thought, especially to readers who would have to rely on translations of the original German writings. All of Böhme's works had been translated into English by the 1660s, but Freher pointed out that sometimes the translators misunderstood Böhme's meaning, and thus misled their readers. Furthermore, he recognized that Böhme's language was often complex even in the original: therefore he considered it essential for readers to gain a good grasp of his whole philosophy in order to be able to understand (and translate) individual concepts. For instance, with regard to the key concept of God, Freher wrote that the word has a confusing



4
"The Philosophical Globe," from: *Forty Questions of the Soul*, in: *The works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic theosopher*, so-called Law Edition (Eds. George Ward and Thomas Langcake), London 1764–1781, Copperplate engraving, handcoloured, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

variety of meanings, both in Böhme's works and in the Bible: "we must of all Necessity speak of God distinctly, and take the word God, according to several different Considerations of him, because that single word is in the Scripture, and so also in my Friend Jacob's writings justly, not allways, and not everywhere taken in the self same Sense."[3] Given these premises, Freher saw his task as that of offering a comprehensive interpretation of Böhme, or "my friend Jacob," as he often calls him: this included very broad treatises, such as *Serial Elucidations on the Principles of Philosophy and Theology of Boehmius*, as well as a large number of drawings, including several pop-ups, which he designed but that were executed mainly by his collaborator, Jeremias Daniel Leuchter (Figs. 2 and 3).

Freher wrote several thousands of pages on Böhme, and on the religious controversies of the early eighteenth century. He provided very detailed philosophical explanations for his visualization of Böhme's thought. For instance, he adapted Böhme's scheme of the philosophical sphere in order to show the productive interaction of light and darkness, which in his version are connected by the spark of



5
Dionysius Andreas Freher, Untitled (The Generation of Fire), in: *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, so-called Law Edition (Eds. George Ward and Thomas Langcake), London 1764–1781, Copperplate engraving, handcoloured, Embassy of the Free Mind, Collection Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

fire in the middle (Figs. 4 and 5). Explaining the drawing, Freher wrote: that "these two eternal Principles [i. e. of Light and Darkness] I have several times, after my worthy Friend Jacob, represented in a figure of two semi-Circles, standing backwards to, and touching each other but in one point; and out of this point I made Rays of Light proceeding to the right hand, and flashes of Lightnings to the left. Now this one point denotes in those figures the Spirit of God, who is on the left hand a fiery Spirit of Wrath, and on the right a meek Spirit of flaming Love".[4] Freher's drawing thus seeks to underline the duality of fire, which is both the source of light (the "rays of light") and a dangerous force (the "lightnings"); yet they are interconnected, representing the internal dynamics of Böhme's God.

The technique of the pop-up layers that Freher used for some of the images he devised and most notably in the *Three Tables*, was an original way of making Böhme's ideas come alive by showing not just a set of thoughts, but their developments. In the *Three Tables* (copies of which are extant in both English and German), by opening the layers the reader can follow step-by-step Böhme's account of

Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen
Dresden

Jacob Böhme (1575–1624)
is one of the most important German thinkers. His writings have influenced literature, philosophy, religion and art beyond national borders from his time up to the present. One hundred years after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation – on the eve of the Thirty Years' War – Böhme wanted to give voice to the need for a deep spiritual and philosophical renewal. In a series of exhibitions – in Dresden, Coventry, Amsterdam, and Wrocław – the Dresden State Art Collections recall this unconventional thinker, whose ideas about the relationship between science and belief, humanity and nature, woman and man are today more current than ever.

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