

Megan Piorko

Material Evidence in Alchemical Texts and Arthur Dee's Career as Royal Physician

Alchemische Labore. Alchemical Laboratories, Sarah Lang (Hg.), unter Mitarbeit von Michael Fröstl & Patrick Fiska, Graz 2023, S. 133–153, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25364/97839033740418>

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Megan Piorko, megan.piorko@villanova.edu

Abstract

How does the history of alchemy benefit from a material culture approach to textual sources? The history of alchemy and the history of the book are uniquely interconnected. Practices of textual production, use, and reuse of alchemical texts show a specific alchemical culture of knowledge-creation and reading practices. This method of historical analysis will be applied to the courtly life of Arthur Dee, Physician to the Tsar. Bibliographical sources are a vital part of the narrative of Arthur Dee's patronage networks and career as Physician to the Tsar. The material evidence from the extant textual sources surrounding Dee's life provide the most complete narrative of his courtly alchemy and alchemical knowledge-production during his time in Moscow.

Keywords: alchemy, Arthur Dee, patronage, materiality, analytical bibliography

Zusammenfassung

Wie kann die Alchemiegeschichtsschreibung von einem *material culture* Zugang zu textuellen Quellen profitieren? Buchgeschichte und Alchemiegeschichte sind untrennbar miteinander verquickt. Praktiken der Textproduktion, -nutzung und -nachnutzung zeigen, dass es eine spezifisch alchemische Kultur der Wissensproduktion und Lesepraktiken gab. In diesem Beitrag wird ein auf die Materialität der Trägermedien bedachter Ansatz in der Analyse des höfischen Lebens Arthur Dees, Sohn John Dees und Leibarzt des Zars, angewendet. Hierbei zeigt sich, dass die Materialität der auf uns gekommenen Textquellen mit in Betracht gezogen werden muss, um das Narrativ seiner höfischen Alchemie und Wissensproduktion während Dees Moskauer Zeit möglichst vollständig zu beleuchten. Die Methode der analytischen Bibliographie lässt hierbei Erkenntnisse zu, die einer rein textuellen Untersuchung verschlossen geblieben wären.

Schlagwörter: Alchemie, Arthur Dee, adelige Förderung der Alchemie, Materialität, analytische Bibliographie

Introduction

This chapter will examine the benefits of analytical bibliography and a material culture approach as it can be applied to the history of alchemy through the lens of my talk at the 2020 Vienna conference, 'Alchemical Laboratories'. Analytical bibliography examines texts for their physical properties, rather than the literary contribution of what is written on the page. A material culture method treats texts as objects which tell a story through their production, use, and reuse. This type of analysis can be applied in conjunction with available archival sources as well as a visual and literary analysis of alchemical texts for a more complete understanding of alchemical history. The aim of this paper is to answer the question of, 'What can a material culture approach to bibliography contribute to the history of alchemy?'

I have addressed the inverse of this question, 'What can alchemical texts contribute to analytical bibliography?', in a 2019 article for the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*.¹ However, it is equally fruitful to examine how analytical bibliography and material culture as a method can tease out the often-observed history of alchemy. As objects, alchemical texts are rife with marginalia, hand-press anomalies, and material manipulation of the page, making them an excellent case-study for analytical bibliographical scholarship. The hermetic ideas communicated through alchemical texts are intentionally obfuscated with the use of coded language and symbols. Rather than simply reading alchemical texts for their literary contributions, a material culture approach provides another lens into alchemical knowledge-making and production that can illuminate how producers, authors, and readers utilized books as vessels of alchemical knowledge.

Alchemical texts are full of historical evidence beyond what is written on the page, and when a material culture approach is applied, the ways in which alchemical knowledge was shared can be most completely understood. Alchemical writing and imagery were frequently communicated through esoteric symbolism, with the intention that only predestined adepts could accurately decipher the true meaning within them. Hundreds of years later, historians are even further removed from the original meaning behind alchemical symbolism and language. However, with analytical bibliography, the ways in which their creators and users shared and interpreted alchemical knowledge can be understood through the composition, alterations, and physical interventions of these alchemical textual objects.

My paper from the Vienna panel 'Alchemy and Court' applies a material culture methodology to the texts and hand-press evidence that surrounds the life and legacy of Arthur Dee, physician to Tsar Mikhail I from 1621–1635. This type of analytical

1. Piorko 2019

bibliography supplements the limited extant archival information from the period of Dee's early life and career. Arthur Dee's texts and his career as a courtly alchemical physician can be viewed as a case-study to indicate broader early modern trends of alchemical patronage and authority. Dee published his hand-press text, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631), during his tenure with the Tsar as well as his original manuscript *Arca Arcanorum* (1634). The material evidence from the production of these texts adds context to his time in Russia, of which relatively little is known.

The analytical bibliographical evidence from these texts authored by Arthur Dee, as well as other material hand-press evidence from broadsheets, problematize the previously recorded events from Dee's life and career. This paper will contextualize what is known about Dee's time in Russia and his medical training with new material evidence from textual sources, allowing for a more nuanced reading of archival sources as well as drawing new conclusions about courtly alchemy and alchemical authority.

Review of Book History as an Alchemical Method

The study of history through books as human-made objects was pioneered in *L'apparition du livre* (1958), a text by Lucien Febvre and H.J. Martin as part of the *Annales* school of social history. This new approach to history was influenced by the older antiquarian tradition of bibliographical description. Using these two methods of textual analysis, Robert Darnton pioneered a new 'history of communication', which deals with actors and cultural history rather than texts themselves, and conversely, the study of books as cultural artifacts.² Based on the idea that books can be viewed as historical artifacts, David Pearson championed printed texts as objects with unique historical lives created by their use and reuse after production.³ Many historians have taken this method of material textual investigation and applied it to the history of ideas and knowledge-making, but few have explicitly merged it with the history of alchemy.

Most notably, William Sherman has published two monographs on the materiality of John Dee's library, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (1995) and *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (2008). In *The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, Sherman examines the collecting and copying practices of alchemist and polymath John Dee. Sherman argues that Dee's reading practices are "a textual manifestation of the alchemical belief in the interconnectedness of all matter."⁴ Alchemical textual practices of pseudonomia

2. Darnton 1982

3. Pearson 2008

4. Sherman 1995

and writing in hermetically sealed hieroglyphs are inherently confusing. This is especially true for readers and owners beyond the seventeenth century, who find themselves temporally and geographically removed from the original meaning, as reading is a practice which has gone through a cultural transformation over time. In order to read between the lines, Sherman calls for "reading without reading."⁵ In doing so, modern readers acknowledge their distance from a text, and thus their cultural displacement from historical actors, as means to investigate the text.

Stephen Clucas has also contributed a significant amount to the rich textual history of John Dee. In his 2017 article, "John Dee, Alchemy, and Print Culture," Clucas argues that while there has been excellent work done on non-material aspects of book history, such as locating, identifying, and analyzing alchemical manuscripts, printed books, and publishing houses, there has yet to be a systemic study of the relationship between alchemy and print culture.⁶ To this end, Clucas addresses the role of alchemical printers, publishers, and editors in creating and dispersing alchemical knowledge. He concludes that alchemical texts were a thriving part of manuscript culture at their inception, and that this alchemical tradition persisted alongside and intersected with alchemy's involvement in the hand-press print revolution.⁷ Additionally, he argues that there are aspects of print culture specific to alchemical book production, as hand-press printers of alchemical texts were known to be conscious of their role in preserving and canonizing alchemical knowledge.⁸

In her 2008 article, "Doctor's Order: An Early Modern Doctor's Alchemical Notebooks," Anke Timmermann makes the important distinction that alchemical medical notebooks should be understood as knowledge-making devices, rather than a text.⁹ To support this, she explains that notetaking was personalized and included technologies such as compiling, tracking, and sorting information. Both Jennifer Rampling and Lauren Kassell have done important work to identify and analyze the impact of the English alchemical textual legacy. In Kassell's 2011 article, "Secrets Revealed: Alchemical Books in Early Modern England," she shows the dearth in alchemical publishing in England during the English Civil War and the subsequent spike during the Restoration through an analysis of William Cooper's *A catalogue of chymicall books* (1688).¹⁰

Jennifer Rampling uses *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) to illustrate the ways in which both hand-press and manuscript media continued to be edited by readers

5. Sherman 2007

6. Clucas 2017

7. Clucas 2017

8. Clucas 2017

9. Timmermann 2008

10. Kassell 2011

and producers as they improved upon and altered the information on the page. She argues that in producing the alchemical compendium *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, Elias Ashmole codified a lineage of copied alchemical tracts resulting in what she terms “a kind of generational ‘nesting’ effect” in which new knowledge is created during each iteration of a tract.¹¹ Rampling was also part of the collaborative project, “Passing the Book: Cultures of Reading in the Winthrop Family, 1580–1730.” This project reconstructs the early Winthrop library and analyzes the ways in which reading practices were generationally learned and shared.¹² Anthony Grafton worked on this project, and has also significantly contributed to the literature on the history of the book with works that elucidate the important role of ‘periphery’ figures in hand-press production.¹³

While there is significant literature on both the materiality of the book and alchemical textual cultures of knowledge production, historians have yet to fully flesh out the relationship between these two historiographic arenas. By looking beyond the literary aspects of alchemical texts and embracing a material culture approach that focuses on texts as objects, the significance of print and manuscript media in alchemical knowledge-making can be fully understood. Additionally, any hand-press or scribbled artifact can be analyzed for its evidence of production, use, and reuse, not just texts. Information printed and scribed on the page is mediated by the object within which it is contained. Therefore, the material aspects of textual media should be considered in order to contextualize alchemical textual culture in its broader role in the history of alchemy and early modern knowledge-making.

Arthur Dee, Physician to the Tsar

The story of Arthur Dee’s courtly career illustrates the way in which a material culture analysis of sources can enrich our knowledge of alchemical courtly patronage. Little is known about Dee’s time in Russia, and no new scholarship has been done on his role as royal physician or his courtly patronage networks since articles that were published in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴ These articles provide a helpful survey of the archival evidence of his life in Russia, but do not deal with the material aspects of the extant texts about or authored by Dee. The materiality of the texts of Arthur Dee’s life corroborate, elucidate, and challenge the information available in the archives. The material evidence of alchemical texts is directly consequential to the narratives of alchemical knowledge production.

11. Rampling 2020

12. Calis, Clark, Flow, Grafton, McMahon, and Rampling 2018

13. Grafton 2020

14. Figurovski 1965; Appleby 1977

Early modern print and scribal culture were part and parcel of Arthur Dee's personal and professional life. For this reason, turning historical attention to the textual sources surrounding Dee is vital to attaining the most complete understanding of his alchemical career. A material culture approach can add historical evidence for many facets of Dee's life and should not be limited to the texts authored by Dee. Evidence of Dee's life and his understanding of medical alchemy, authority, and patronage can be found in the margins of manuscripts and gleaned from the material evidence of broadsheets.

Textual sources from early in Dee's life shed light on his formative experiences and affected the making of his alchemical worldview and career trajectory. Arthur Dee had the equal parts fortune and curse of being the firstborn son of renowned alchemist John Dee. It is no surprise that John Dee, who meticulously recorded his family's astrological cycles,¹⁵ drew Arthur's nativity the moment he was born on July 13, 1579. Next to Arthur's nativity, John Dee interpreted the diagram of his son's life as a dark premonition that Arthur would have good fortune with a prince but die a violent death abroad. Arthur bound his own horoscope in a notebook (Sloane MS 1902), along with other astrological and medical musings by his father and himself.

This prediction for his untimely death abroad in courtly service, by a man who Arthur fervently revered as a successful scryer, must have haunted him during his service to the Tsar. A material culture analysis of the medical notebook that Dee compiled, made up of his father's notes and added to by Arthur throughout his life, illustrates the importance of this horoscope to Arthur. The physical composition of this small medical manuscript necessitates that Arthur bound it and supplemented his father's notes, indicating that Arthur curated his father's notes based on those which he believed held valuable medical astrological knowledge. The material culture evidence from this manuscript gives context to Arthur's blatant dismay at growing old in a foreign court as well as his personal medical philosophy, which he applied in service to the Tsar.

Another incident that impacted Dee's early life and helped him to self-fashion his alchemical career as a courtly one, was his posting broadsheets that advertised medicaments around the city of London. These broadsheets were the impetus for a ten-year investigation into Dee's alchemical medical practice by the Royal College of Physicians. The College thought that these broadsheets "savoured of trickery," but they decided to wait to convene on the matter until Dee could present his 'medicaments' to the jury so that they could decide the medical properties for themselves.¹⁶ However, when they reconvened, rather than the previous charge concerning the

15. Harkness 1997

16. Annals of the Royal College of Physicians, I-II

broadsheets, the Royal College of Physicians focused their skepticism on his education, as to whether he was a learned doctor with proper training. They ultimately accused Dee and nine other ‘Doctors of Medicine’ of illicit practice. Two doctors from English universities and two from foreign ones were indicted, including Dee.¹⁷ In response, Dee returned to court February of 1614 to present The College with his “very beautifully written letters patent from the University of Basel and dated May 4 1609.”¹⁸

Dee’s medical degree did not absolve him of his crimes in the eyes of The College. It was not until May 6, 1615 when he declared that he was “the Queen’s physician” and that he had the right to practice medicine “by the royal prerogative,” that the Royal College of Physicians finally laid his investigation to rest.¹⁹ This experience shaped Dee’s perception of seventeenth-century alchemical authority. From this arduous trial, he learned to derive his professional clout from his royal association. While his medical degree from the University of Basel was of little consequence to the members of The College, it continued to be contested and misattributed during his lifetime. This mistake carried over into modern scholarship, and ultimately can be dispelled through material evidence.

The earliest references to Dee’s medical degree from Basel are limited to the description in the annals of the Royal College of Physicians. Additionally, there are multiple contemporary accounts placing Arthur Dee at Oxford, including his own son Rowland Dee.²⁰ A brief biography of Dee on the front flyleaves of Dee’s own manuscript copy of *Benjamin Lock his Picklock to Riply his Castle* (Wellcome MS 436) claims that “he was educated at the University of Oxford” (likely written by Sir Thomas Browne, a former owner and friend of Arthur Dee).²¹ Elias Ashmole, who translated and published Dee’s hand-press book *Fasciculus Chemicus* into English in 1650, also placed him at Oxford in a letter to Anthony Wood, writing that “Mr: Lightfoots Testimony is enough for you to place him [Arthur Dee] at Oxford.”²² This led to Dee being listed as an alumnus in the *Alumni Oxonienses* 1500–1714 since the list was compiled by Anthony Wood, although, according to him, no one could confirm his dates of attendance nor was he mentioned in any matriculation records.²³

However, there are three extant sources that confirm that Arthur Dee was at the University of Basel and completed a doctorate in medicine in 1609, which is corrobo-

17. Annals of the Royal College of Physicians, III

18. Annals of the Royal College of Physicians, III

19. Annals of the Royal College of Physicians, III

20. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*

21. Dee, “Wellcome MS 436”

22. Josten 1967

23. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*

rated by the date listed on his degree mentioned in the annals of the Royal College of Physicians. The first, an announcement of Arthur Dee's thesis from University of Basel 1609 is currently housed at Saxon State and University Library Dresden (1.B.3963,286.b.). The information on the degree matches the description in the Royal College of Physicians' annals and the decorative type ornaments can be found on other materials from the same print house, further authenticating the document (fig. 21). Another newly discovered document printed for the University of Basel in 1609, currently housed at the University's Library (KiAr H III 54:27), contains a Latin poem about graduating from medical school signed "Arthurus Dee Mortacensis Anglus Phil. & Med. Doct." Finally, he is mentioned in University of Basel's matriculation records as *Mediziner und Alchimist* and it lists him as studying medicine there in 1609.²⁴

Two important conclusions can be drawn by using material evidence to correctly place Dee at the University of Basel, rather than Oxford. First, Paracelsus taught medicine at the University of Basel in the sixteenth century,²⁵ and likely influenced the subsequent medical curricula at the University. Arthur Dee practiced Paracelsian medicine in the court of Tsar Mikhail. This educational connection further illustrates the influence of Paracelsian iatrochemistry in Dee's medical practice. Second, for hundreds of years he was thought to have attended Oxford without any evidence of a degree or matriculation records. That this rumor was perpetuated by figures such as Ashmole and Wood illustrate their Anglicizing agenda regarding the English alchemical legacy.

Arthur Dee's hand-press book and manuscript are some of the only sources available from his time in Russia, as the archival evidence is almost non-existent due to The Great Fire of London in 1666. The Russia Company (also known as the Muscovia Company) was formed in the sixteenth century and was a professional organization for Englishmen trading with Russia. The group lost all their records in the fire, so the earliest extant records date from March 1666, which is unhelpful in the context of Arthur Dee who died in 1651. However, a roll of freemen of the Mercers' Company, of which the Russia Company was incorporated, lists Arthur Dee as a member of the trade association by patrimony in 1605.²⁶ The lost archives from the Russia Company would certainly have contained information about Dee's time as Physician to the Tsar. Thus, it is especially imperative that Dee's texts be analyzed for the material evidence they provide in order to glean the most from the limited extant sources. Through analytical bibliography it is possible to get a fuller, and perhaps more personal, picture of Arthur Dee's courtly career.

24. Die Matrikel der Universität Basel, III.

25. Debus 1965

26. Appleby 1979

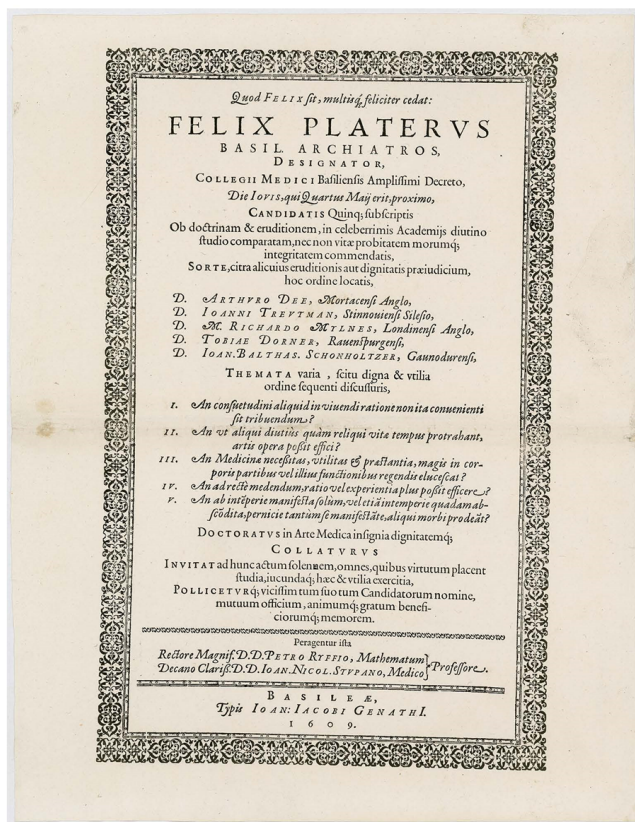


Figure 21.: Arthur Dee's Medical Degree. University of Basel, SLUB Dresden / 1.B.3963,286.b

In 1621 King James recommended Arthur Dee (who was 42 years old and relatively late into his professional life) to Tsar Mikhail of the Romanov empire to serve as his Physician in Ordinary. Less than three months after the courtly exchange, Arthur was received by the Tsar in Moscow.²⁷ Arthur Dee was known in Russia as Artemii Ivanovich Dii and led a financially comfortable life working for Tsar Mikhail. He was compensated in material goods as well as roubles, although he frequently pined for an intellectual community. Documentation of how little the Russian court physicians had to do on a daily basis accounts for 'plentiful inactivity', with the physicians spending most of their time in the 'study of books'.²⁸ Arthur describes his intellectual

27. Appleby 1977

28. Figurovski 1965

frustration in a dedication to the Rosicrucian Brotherhood present in a special issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631), where he laments the fact that Moscow lacked an alchemical network and complains that he does not have the necessary instruments to practice alchemy there.²⁹

Dee's main responsibility as Physician to the Tsar was the treatment of patients using Paracelsian medicine and iatrochemistry. As one of his first assignments, he travelled to Gorky to treat Mar'ya Ivanova Khlopova, the Tsar's bride who had apparently been poisoned.³⁰ Towards the end of his royal duties to the Tsar, Dee unsuccessfully treated his son-in-law Francis Glover, an English merchant. Dee's servant, John Duncombe, accused him of intentionally poisoning Glover during medical treatment, resulting in Glover's death on 26 May 1634.³¹ These medical incidents dealing with poison that bookend Dee's tenure in the Russian court can be better understood in the context of Paracelsian medicine.

Material evidence of Dee's medical philosophy can be found in the medical manuscript he shared with his father (Sloane MS 1902) and can be gleaned from his Paracelsian medical training at the University of Basel. On the front flyleaf of the medical notebook Arthur wrote the note, "Fasciculus remediey paracelsi" or 'a collection of Paracelsian remedies'.³² It was not uncommon for practitioners of iatrochemical medicine to treat patients with medicaments containing small amounts of poisonous chemicals. Paracelsian medicine relies on a chemical explanation for imbalances in the human body, purporting that chemical reactions should be treated with chemically prepared medicines and that poison was the most effective form of treatment, and thus dosage was crucial.³³

Dee produced two texts while living in Russia: his hand-press publication, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631) and his manuscript *Arca Arcanorum*, preface dated 1634. These texts are rife with material evidence of his alchemical achievements, relationship to the Russian court, and interest in the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. They also shed light on textual production in Europe during the seventeenth century and the role of royal authority in printing and scribal knowledge-making practices. The court, as an alchemical institution, simultaneously bestows legitimacy as well as shapes the alchemical identity for the courtly alchemist.³⁴ This is exemplified by Arthur Dee through the dedications, publication practices, and the knowledge-networks he creates during his time in the Russian court.

29. Dee 1631

30. Figurovski 1965

31. Appleby 1979

32. Dee and Dee, "MS Sloane 1902"

33. Debus 1965

34. Moran 1991

A significant amount of information on Arthur Dee's time in Russia can be gleaned from his 'Epistle to the Candid Reader', which is signed from his study in Moscow on March 1629, as well as the rest of the prefatory material from his hand-press book. It is clear that he composed his alchemical opus, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631), while working for the Tsar. It is estimated that he brought at least forty books on alchemy with him to Moscow, including his own transcriptions of his father's unpublished works.³⁵ While based on an impressive array of alchemical textual sources, *Fasciculus Chemicus* is a small book, which Dee refers to as a 'tiny bouquet' (or *fasciculus*) of alchemical knowledge handpicked for the reader.³⁶

Much confusion and misinformation has surrounded this small hand-press book, but through material evidence it can be proven that there is a single Latin edition, printed as two issues and one re-issue.³⁷ The re-issued copies are from a Stettin publisher in 1644, and being outside the scope of Dee's courtly alchemy, will not be addressed in this paper. The two issues of the Latin *Fasciculus Chemicus* that will be examined were both printed in Paris during Dee's tenure as Physician to the Tsar. One is directed at an audience of aspiring alchemical students and includes Paris publication information (fig. 22) and the other, of which only a few copies exist, is directed toward members of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood and lacks any publication information on the title page (fig. 23). A material analysis of the two variant title pages shows that they were printed at the same time using the same typesetting for the top-half of the page, and the bottom half was altered by the printer to create two issues of a single edition. Each issue elicits patronage using different strategies corresponding to their intended patron, neither of which is Dee's courtly patron of Mikhail I.

Arthur Dee dedicated the issue containing the Paris publication information to 'the students of chemistry'. The dedication ends with an invitation to patronize Dee through the purchase of his text. After this dedication is an 'epistle to the candid reader', which is signed, "from my study in Moscow, 629."³⁸ The misprint at the end of the signature is meant to read March 1629, and the corrected date appears in the special Rosicrucian issue. This material evidence provides a timeline for production, the Paris issue first and the corrected Rosicrucian issue second. The last portion of the prefatory material is a letter in support of the text and its author from Thomas Rhodes, who visited Dee in Russia and must have read some version of the text before it went to print. He introduces Dee as a worthy alchemist and the main physician to the Tsar, and it is in this order that Dee desired to be known; first as a successful

35. Figurovski 1965

36. Dee 1631

37. Piorko 2019

38. Dee 1631

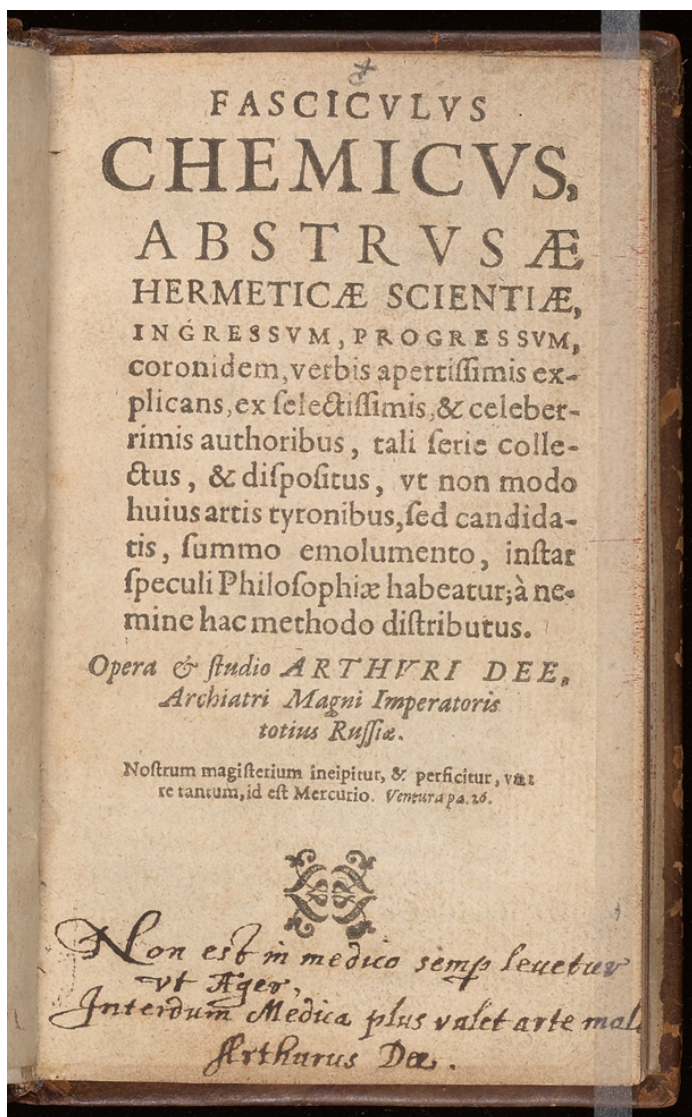


Figure 22.: Title page, Arthur Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631). Courtesy of the Houghton Library, sm. 24226.34.9*

alchemical adept, and always as a courtly physician second. Rhodes visited Dee in Moscow on June 30, 1625.³⁹ This indicates that Dee had been working on the manuscript for *Fasciculus Chemicus* for some time before it was published in 1631.

39. Appleby 1979

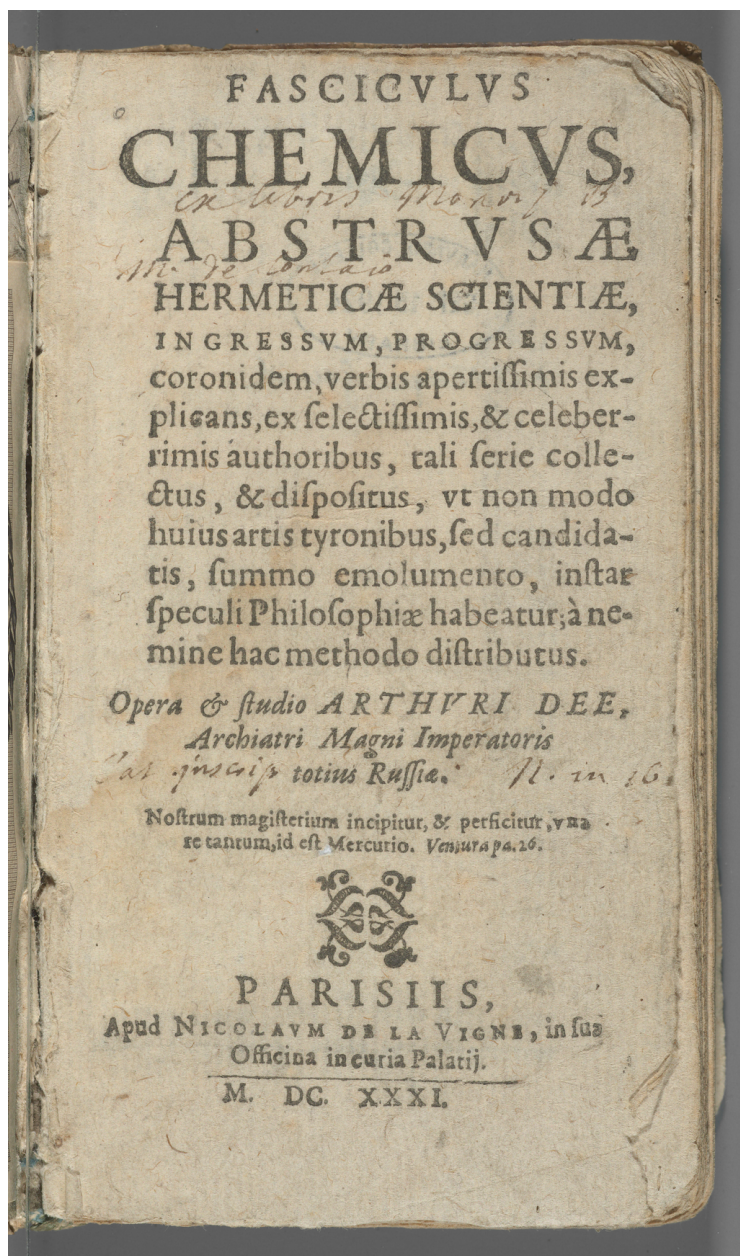


Figure 23.: Title page, Arthur Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631). General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Mellon Alchemical 91

The second issue produced for the 1631 edition was intended for a much more specific readership. There are a number of variations in the prefatory material from the Paris issue in the Rosicrucian issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus*, starting with the absences of any publication information on the title page. Additionally, the dedication to 'the students of chemistry' is replaced with a dedication to the *Fratribus Roseæ Crucis*. This special dedication includes multiple desperate requests for patronage directed to this secret society. By addressing the Brotherhood directly, Dee is pleading with them not to be invisible and acknowledging that he is aware of their existence. A copy of a Rosicrucian issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus* held by the Beinecke Library (Yna31 631d) includes a hand-written dedication from Arthur Dee to his friend John Winthrop Jr. Material evidence such as this allows historians to recreate alchemical networks across Europe and even spanning the Atlantic.

In addition to the previously mentioned material anomalies, three of the five extant copies of the Rosicrucian issue contain an extra-collation engraved title page (fig. 24). This engraving helps to elucidate the relationship between Arthur Dee's courtly patronage and his alchemy. With this engraving, Dee introduces himself to the reader as the chief physician to the great emperor of Russia, in Latin, a language which was not even printed in Russia during this time (this is one reason why he sought to publish his book in Paris). Below this is Arthur Dee's emblematic signature made up of a sun inside the moon inside of a six-pointed star to symbolize the union of opposites, in this case Luna and Sol. It is surrounded by the mantra "Trinity in Unity/Unity in Trinity" which is a reference to the three alchemical primes: Mercury, Salt, and Sulfur, of which all material substances were believed to be composed. Below Arthur Dee's personal Monas is a quote from Italian alchemist Lorenzo Ventura concerning Mercury. This shows that Arthur Dee was focused on promoting himself to an international alchemical community and used his title of court physician as part of this self-promotion and not as a means of performing his patronage, as Tsar Mikhail I is not even mentioned by name.

The production of the 1631 Latin *Fasciculus Chemicus* can be understood through analytical bibliography such as the order of the typesetting for the issues, the variant dedications, and the lack of publication information in the Rosicrucian issue. This material evidence adds to the archival evidence of Dee's time in the Russian court and his international knowledge-networks, including with the secret Rosicrucian brotherhood. *Fasciculus Chemicus* was printed in Paris just eight years after the Paris Placards Incident of 1623, in which broadsheets containing information about the secret Rosicrucian Brotherhood scandalized the city.⁴⁰ The printer of *Fasciculus Chemicus*, Nicolas de la Vigne, was known for printing illicit texts and selling pirated

40. Kahn 2001

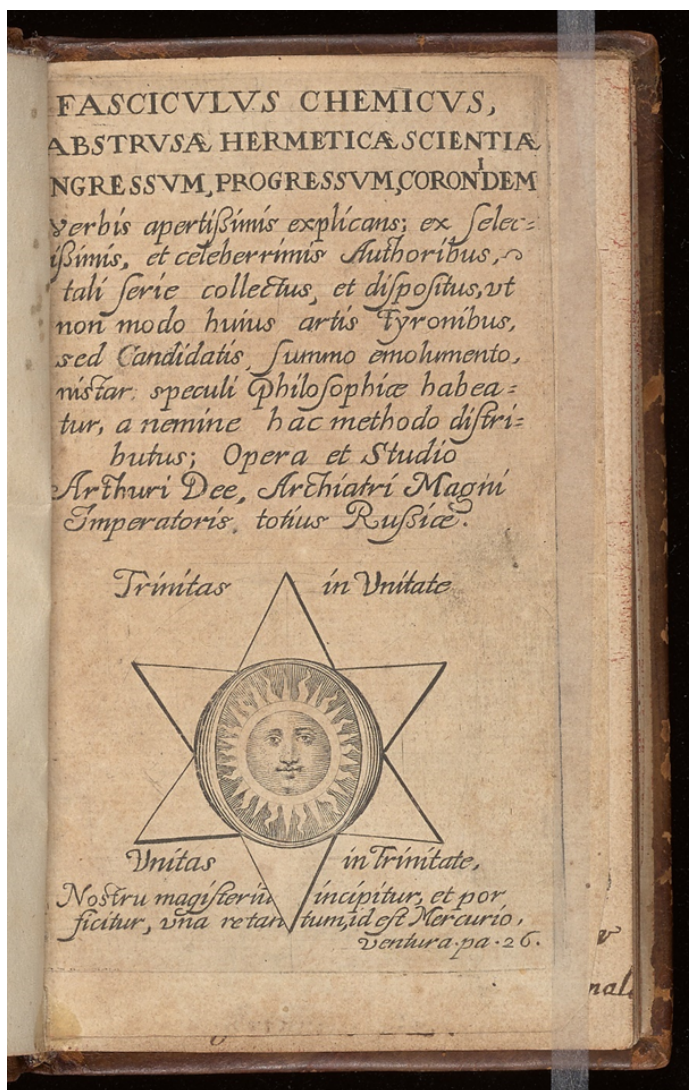


Figure 24.: Engraved title page, Arthur Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1631). General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Mellon Alchemical 91

editions of texts.⁴¹ It is likely for this reason that Dee sought him out to print the secret Rosicrucian issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus*. The very specific and intentional variations between the two issues of *Fasciculus Chemicus* printed by de la Vigne indicate that he

41. DeJean 2002

and Dee had a close relationship, much like that of Dee's father and his favored printer. Arthur Dee's manuscript, *Arca Arcanorum*, offers similar evidence of Dee's alchemical goals and professional pursuits, as well as purports that Dee successfully achieved the Philosophers' Stone during his time in the court of the Tsar. In the preface of the undated Rosicrucian issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus*, which material evidence has shown to have been printed in 1631, Dee laments that he has not obtained the tools he needs to practice his alchemy and thus has been unsuccessful in his endeavors.⁴² By contrast, in the preface of *Arca Arcanorum*, dated just three years later, he claims at long last to have solved the riddles of alchemical knowledge.⁴³ Thus, by juxtaposing these two prefaces, a timeline can be created in which Arthur Dee accomplished the Philosophers' Stone between the years of 1631 and 1634.

This narrative can be further fleshed out by adding the context of some archival evidence. In June of 1630 Dee petitioned to receive medical supplies from an English apothecary from the port of Archangel to his practice in Moscow. One year later, Dee had to remind the Tsar to send for medical supplies from overseas. It was not until two years later that Dee was finally given royal approval from the Tsar for transportation of the medical supplies he desperately needed from England.⁴⁴ It is very likely that this is the frustration that Dee is referring to in the preface of the Rosicrucian issue of *Fasciculus Chemicus*. Not only does Dee omit the name of his courtly patron in his hand-press book, he uses this text as a public platform to air his grievances about the lack of alchemical supplies available to him in the Tsar's court.

In 1633, Charles I wrote to Tsar Mikhail in petition for Dee's return home. Tsar Mikhail waited almost two years to reply, and finally, in July of 1635, he relieved Dee of his Russian royal duties after 14 years of service.⁴⁵ Upon returning to England, Arthur Dee donated this very special manuscript, that for him contained the secret of the Philosophers' stone, to the Bodleian Library. In the preface he dedicates his final life's work to "the most distinguished heads of Oxford and other men of letters in that famous academy."⁴⁶ However, this dedication is more than just a formality. By giving this very special manuscript to the Bodleian he is signaling the transference of his patronage from the Russian court to the English crown, something he had desperately wanted for years, and that he is entrusting his 'secret of secrets' to his homeland for safekeeping.

42. Dee 1631

43. Dee, "MS Sloane 1876"

44. Appleby 1979

45. Figurovski 1965

46. Dee "MS Sloane 1876"

Conclusion: What can a material culture approach to bibliography contribute to the history of alchemy?

Textual objects provide more historical evidence than can be gleaned from simply reading them. By ignoring the materiality of texts, historians miss important opportunities to understand the production, use, and reuse of texts for alchemical knowledge-making. The smallest detail from a textual object can provide radical insight into the historical context surrounding its creation. If material evidence is overlooked, valuable historical information can be wasted. In the context of alchemy, it can fill in gaps created by the intentional obfuscation of alchemical information by practitioners who simultaneously craved validation for their achievements yet felt the need to protect valuable trade secrets. Investigating the materiality of a text elucidates the often-contradictory alchemical duality of communicating secret knowledge.

In the case of Arthur Dee, his texts and the textual objects surrounding his life are rife with material evidence of his alchemical medical philosophy, knowledge-production, and courtly authority. This method of historical inquiry has altered the narrative of Dee's life and career and provides valuable insight into his alchemical knowledge-making practices. The material evidence from his medical degree and medical manuscript clarifies his Paracelsian iatrochemical medical practice, and subsequently the ways in which he constructed his identity as a royal physician. An analytical bibliographical analysis of his texts illuminates the nuances of his relationship with the Tsar, his printer, and the English crown from a more personal point of view than what is available through archival sources alone.

This style of historical investigation is particularly useful to alchemical texts because alchemy has so many extant textual sources. A significant amount of alchemical knowledge-making happened during the production and dissemination of scribal and hand-press texts. Alchemical texts are prevalent sources of historical information, and it is imperative that historians analyze them fully and not only for their literary content (which is often obscured to modern-day readers) but as objects that cycled through production, use, and reuse. Early modern alchemy employs a specific culture of copying and active reading which alters the textual objects to make them rife with unique material evidence of alchemical knowledge production. As is the case with Arthur Dee's early career and role as royal physician to the Tsar, material evidence can supplement archival sources, corroborate or problematize current historical narratives, and provide a unique lens into authority and alchemy in the court.

Megan Piorko is a historian of alchemy, the book, and material culture. She received her PhD from Georgia State University in 2020, and has held postdoctoral fellowships at the Huntington Library, the Atlantic Trust for the British Library, and the Science History Institute. She is currently the Distinctive Collections Librarian at Villanova University, where she also teaches courses in The Renaissance.

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