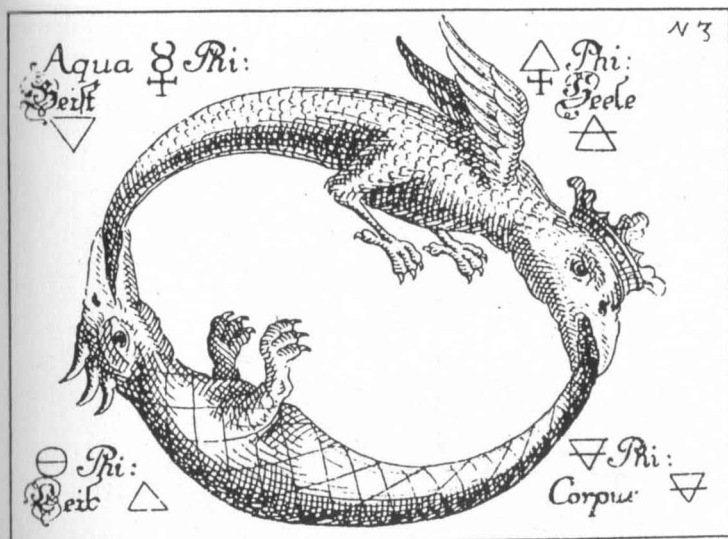
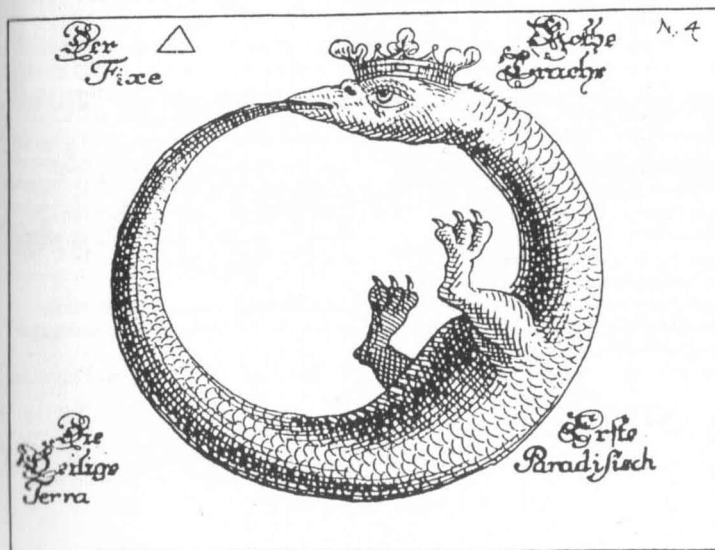




"The top snake (No. 3) is the cosmic spirit which brings everything to life, which also kills everything and takes all the figures of nature. To summarize: he is everything, and also nothing."

Through the art of separation one makes the One into Two, "which have the Third and Fourth within themselves. It is the most volatile and also the most fixed, it is a fire that consumes everything, and opens and closes everything (...). Cook this fire with fire until it stops, and you have the most fixed thing that penetrates all things, and one worm has eaten the other, and this figure (No. 4) comes out."



It is called *Ouroboros*. In Coptic *Ouro* means king, and in Hebrew *ob* means a snake.

A. Eleazar, *Donum Dei*, Erfurt, 1735

To the poor soul who wants to turn away from God, the Devil shows his own image as the cycle of nature, "in the form of a snake: the fire-wheel of essence". He speaks: "You too are such a fiery Mercury, as you introduce your desire into this art. But you must eat from a fruit in which each of the four elements reacts within itself to the other, with which it is in conflict."

When the soul has eaten of it, "Vulcan lights the fire-wheel of essence, and all the qualities of nature awakened in the soul, and guided it into its own pleasure and desire". (J. Böhme, *Gespräch einer erleuchteten und unerleuchteten Seele*)

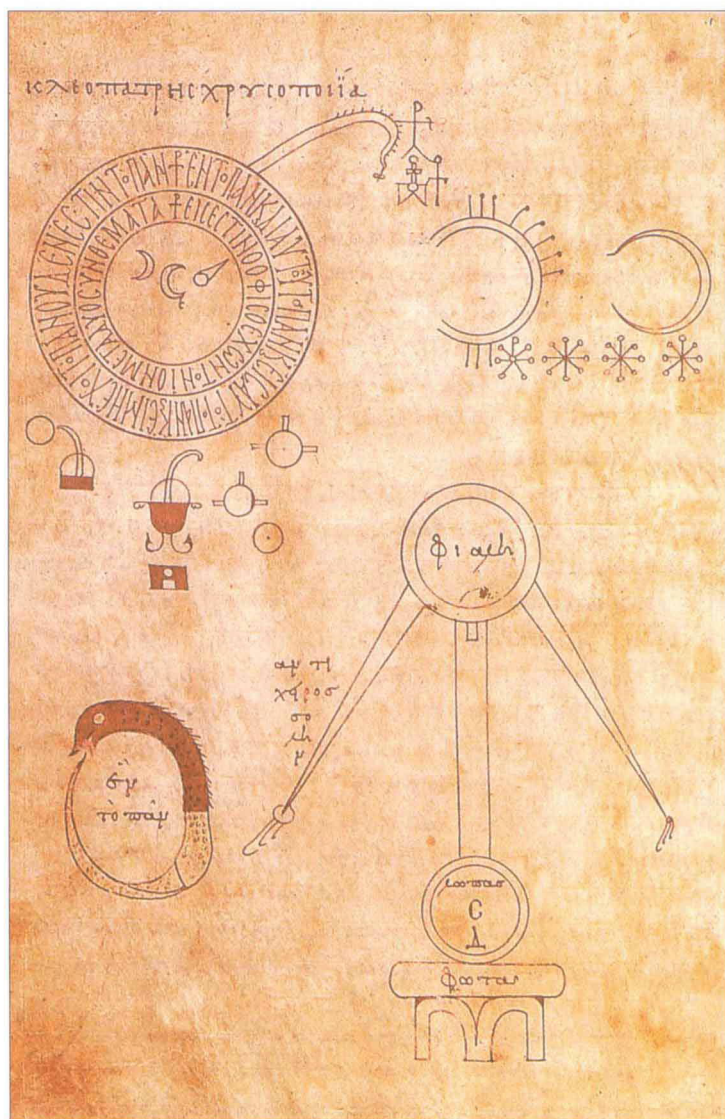
J. Böhme, *Theosophische Werke*,
Amsterdam, 1682



This sheet from an 11th-century Greek anthology illustrates a treatise about 'gold-making' (*Chrysopoia*) by an alchemist named Cleopatra in 4th-century Alexandria.

At this time, alchemists were persecuted by the state and the Church, since there was supposedly a biblical curse upon their work. The caption is said to have been whispered to mankind by the fallen angels. The inscriptions and symbols on the sheet indicate that at this time chemistry was a subsidiary part of magic.

The circles on the top left read: "One is all, of him is everything, for him is everything, in him is everything. The snake is the one; it has two symbols, good and evil".



Serpent

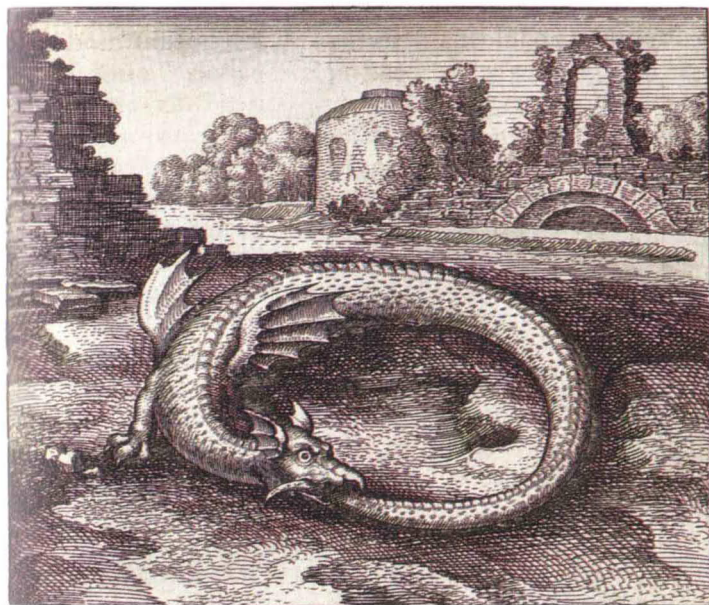
The magical inscriptions on the Abraxas gemstones were often surrounded by the Ouroboros. He is Eon, the entirety of time and space, and also Okeanos, the water-belt in the gnostic cosmology, which separates the upper sphere of the Pneuma from the lower, dark waters.

Heinrich Khunrath calls "our Mercury" Proteus, the eternally wandering watery, old man from Greek mythology, "who has the keys to the sea (...) and power over everything, the son of Oceanus (...) who reforms and returns in diverse forms". (*Vom hylealischen Chaos*, Frankfurt, 1708)

Whoever manages to grasp and preserve him will achieve great and wonderful things.

Johannes Macarius, Abraxas en Apistopistus, Antwerp, 1657





"Not without reason do the ancient philosophers compare quicksilver with a snake (...) because it pulls a tail behind it and its weight drags it hither and thither."

The ancients, Maier writes, saw the Ouroboros ring both as "the change and return of the year" and as the beginning of the Work in which the poisonous, moist dragon's tail is consumed. When the dragon has completely sloughed its skin, like the snake, the supreme medicine has risen from its poison.

In Goethe's hermetic *Märchen* (1795), the Ouroboros plays an important part: "(...)

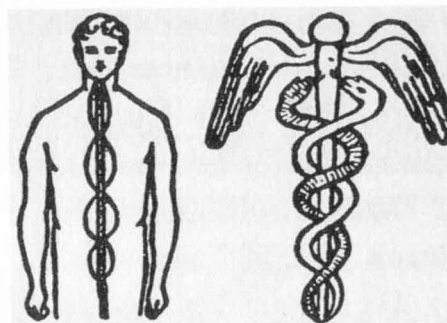
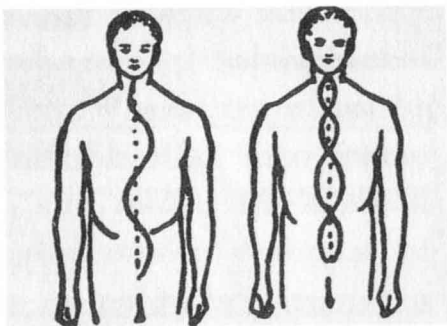
sweet Lily stood motionless, staring rigidly at the soulless corpse (...) In her mute despair she sought not help, for she knew of no help. The snake moved all the more assiduously against it (...) With its lithe body it drew a broad circle around the corpse and grasped the end of its tail with its teeth and lay there peacefully."

M. Maier, Atalanta fugiens, Oppenheim, 1618

Serpent

"In India the spine is called the staff of Brahma. Illustration 4 also shows the archetype of the Caduceus, whose two serpents symbolize the Kundalini or the serpent fire (...) while the wings signify the power of conscious flight through the higher worlds brought about by the unfolding of this fire."

(C.W. Leadbeater, *The Chakras*, 1927)



Ripley's "Serpent of Arabia" speaks: "Azoth is truly my sister, and Kibrick (Arabic kibrit, sulphur) is indeed my brother". Ripley advises: divide it in Three, make from it One and you have the lapis.

*Theatrum
chemicum
Britannicum,
London, 1652*

