

My Research

Light research I do in the history of alchemy and the beginnings of chemistry. [Here](#) is my timeline of alchemy, with extensive notes from my blog.

A note: I am not an academic scholar, and haven't been since I got my PhD. Academic scholarship seemed a burdensome way to take the fun out of curiosity, with grant writing, formalized research agreements, drafts, submissions, changes, just to say what I learned and concluded. And I don't trust the consequence of that process. Being curious and following my nose has been great fun for me.

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Beginnings of Alchemy

What I'm finding regarding the origins of alchemy. This is my [Timeline of alchemy](#) ([alternate presentation](#)), a page that links to my many blog posts on the various alchemists and those who influenced alchemy, with extensive quotations from English translations.

I'm slowly working on an equivalent set on the early history of chemistry.

How did alchemy emerge as an almost full-blown alchemy?

The first writers of alchemy seems to have a full blown version of alchemy in mind. This was around 300 A.D. with the [Stockholm Papyrus and the Leyden X papyri](#). Both of these seem to be written by the same author, and are "recipes" of alchemical transformations. They even admit when the transformation isn't real, but in appearance only. They are clearly based on some early philosophical ideas of transformation from [Plato](#) and [Aristotle](#) where the transformational steps determine the resulting material, and the starting material is non-consequential.

These are advanced ideas of how matter behaves. So how is it the first authors are using these ideas? Are we simply missing an entire multi-hundred years writings on the topic? I doubt it. These ideas, had they existed, would have ended up in one or many of the Alexandrian libraries of Hellenized Egypt, and would have been dumped by the Islamists from libraries like [Oxyrynchus](#). And there is nothing in those dumps we didn't already have.

We do have references to earlier writings, particularly those of Maria the Jewess, but that's one author, which could be missed in history.

How alchemy comes about remains a mystery. To me anyway. This chapter is my ideas on the ideas on the origins of alchemy.

Beginnings of Chemistry

What I'm finding regarding the origins of chemistry.

The 100-year mystery from Boyle to Lavoisier

In his 1660 book on experimental science, Robert Boyle made some things clear about how science is to be done: only trust an experiment, never philosophy, never try to make more of your experimental evidence than it directly says, and present your evidence as humbly and honestly as possible to give your reader the feeling they are witnessing the experiment themselves.

And then for 118 years, it was entirely ignored. Lavoisier will apply Boyle's principles in 1778.

Why so long? In 1620 Francis Bacon began speaking of the experimental way. His writing were said to be influential, but since he could give no example of those methods in use, I don't think they were in the end we minimally influential. The greater puzzle is found in Boyle. He uses the method, describes why, and generates a new law of nature, Boyle's law relating the pressure and volume of a gas sample.

So what was happening in that 118 years of relative experimental stagnation that the experimental way never caught on?

And why did Lavoisier's demonstration of the experimental way become so influential? Just 20 years later we have Dalton's Atomic Laws, after which science moves full bore.