

## A COMPENDIUM OF OWL LORE

We shall first attempt in this paper to trace some of the symbolic meanings of the owl from the present day to antiquity. We are following this inverse process because we feel that basically the human mind has not changed in its tendency to associate symbols with nature or represent certain physical laws by definite objects. By finding some of the present-day meanings and associations for the symbolism of the owl, we may understand the available primary and secondary sources and attempt to postulate some means of continuity from the past to the present. After this has been accomplished, we may finally attempt to correlate the symbolism of the owl with alchemical work.

We find today that there are quotations, stories and definitions suggesting the symbolism of the owl. Among them, aside from bird definitions, we find:

- "Owl" as synonym for "fool." (1)
- "Owl's light" as synonym for "dimness" (2)
- Buho (owl), one that escapes social behavior. (3) trans. by auth.
- Hibou (owl), a taciturn man who shuns society. (4) " " "
- Scho (owl), smuggler, brave, to expose. (5) " " "
- Sova (owl), also: sich, felen, pugach, contraband at night. (6); A man who falls into a mood of depression or bitterness. (7) Trans. by auth.
- Eulen (owl), in the animal fable the owl is given as the smartest animal; in newer popular beliefs, it becomes, on the contrary, the messenger of bad luck (death message, especially the screech owl) and also witch-bird and specter-birds (8) trans. by auth.
- Civetta (owl), to the owl the Greeks attributed knowledge of the future. It was consecrated to Minerva as a symbol of prudence and vigilance. (9) trans. by auth.
- Lechuza (barnowl - uncult word), in Cuba, this refers among other things, to "coquette women". Also "Thief that takes at night." "(It) symbolizes prudence and knowledge, for which Antioch made engravings of this bird on his coins, on top of a lion signifying with this that force gives in or is defeated by prudence." "The 'lechuza' is an object of

object of a multitude of superstitions in Spain, the circumstance of finding it so often in churches has made the people believe that it arrives at night to sip the oil of the lamps; in other countries it has been conjectured that it sucks the blood of the children, and in almost all it is considered as a bird of bad luck. The old Greeks, to the contrary, considered them .... symbols of study and reflection. In Christian art later was attributed to the owl the symbolism of false wisdom, and was represented with a cross over the head of this bird. The triumph of the cross of the enemies of Christ" (10) <sup>Translated by author.</sup> <sup>over</sup>

"Owl, One who or that which is much abroad at night, on business or pleasure" (11)

"Owlism. A disposition to roam at night ... Stupidity" (12)

"Owl-light ... Glimmering or imperfect light" (13)

"Owl. A person owl-like in appearance, of solemnity, wisdom, or dullness, in habit of night activity or the like ... The Athenian tetradrochma, which had an owl for the reverse type ... a colloquial name (cult)" (14)

"Owl. Figurative name for a wise man. Sage-fool ... Screech-owl, cry-ululation" (15)

"Owl ..., but those who know the grotesque actions and ludicrous expression of this veritable buffoon of birds can never cease to wonder at its having been seriously selected as the symbol of learning, and can hardly divest themselves of a suspicion that the choice must have been made in the spirit of sarcasm" (16)

"Buhoneria [owlishness], Small portable store or store hanging from arms of owner, selling trinkets of low value" (17)

"The Superstitions concerning owls persist and belong to savages as well as to civilized peoples. The folklore of the uncivilized world is full of such notions. European peasants connect the birds with death-signs; the Andalusians say they are the 'Devil's birds and drink the oil from the lamps in saints shrines'; and the Malagasy consider them embodiments of the spirits of the wicked". (18)

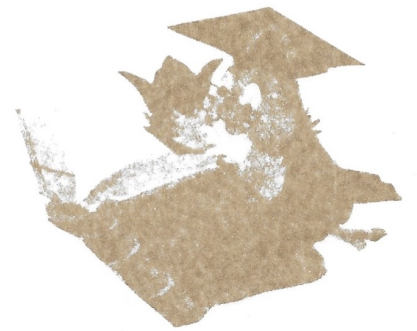
"Owl- ... Mascots made in its likeness give success in anything requiring study". (19)

"Owl, Wisdom, Meditation, Night ... [In] Japan: Filial ingratitude". (20)

In present day usage we find many commercial products depicted with owls, among them edibles and magazines. We also find institutions of learning using owls <sup>as</sup> ~~for~~ their symbols, for example, Temple University. In addition, we find protective groups, drug stores, clothing stores, photographic shops, candy stores, etc. portraying owls on their windows or having for name the word "owl" or a compound name in which the word "owl" is included. In musical compositions we find some whose titles include the word "owl". But although we should like to discuss these, the very highly controver-

sial significance of their titles and interpretation of the music place them beyond our scope. In the field of the motion picture we find owls in the title of some films. When it is feasible, their actions are photographed. In other cases, as in cartoons, they are also depicted. Walt Disney, in his production of "So Dear to My Heart", uses animated drawings to emphasize parts of the story; in this particular case, an owl plays a vital role and is depicted very favorably as the symbol of wisdom, experience, and understanding. (21) (See Figure 1.) In many mystery pictures, owls are photographed for very brief periods, usually frightening a protagonist or indicating eeriness.

It is here, in the above quotations and observations of present-day usage of the word "owl" that we find the beginning of an amazing parallelism which is a continuation of the same that we shall notice in this paper. Later on, the parallel lines show intermingling of its extreme antithetical poles, suggesting that "good" and "bad" interpretations of the symbolism of the owl really derive from the same facts.



Copyright Walt Disney Productions

OWL

sent from  
my class

Now follow some quotations, stories, and definitions suggesting symbolism of the owl in the immediate past, which, for this purpose approximates the years 1700 to 1900. This period begins to show some of the origins of owl-lore and its conflicting symbolism. Here we begin to see superficial differences. Their deeper meaning will become more apparent as we delve back through the years.

"Owl, owlet. A bird that flies in the night and catches mice." (22)

"Owler. One who carries contraband goods, perhaps from the necessity of carrying on an illicit trade by night.... 'By running goods these graceless owlers gain.' --Swigt. 'We understand by some owlers, old people die in France.' Tatler, No. 56" (23)

"Owl. To carry on a contraband or unlawful trade at night or in secrecy; skulk about with contraband goods, smuggle, especially to carry wool or sheep out of the country, at one time an offense at law. (Eng.)" (24)

"Owl....A dialectal form of wool." (25)

"Owler....One guilty of the offense of owling; a smuggler, especially of wool." (26)

"Owlish. Having an appearance of preternatural gravity and wisdom. Stupid; dull, fat-witted." (27)

"Owly....Seeing none better than an owl by day, purblind, blear-eyed." (28)

"Owler....A master of a ship, or other person who conveys wool, or ~~an~~ other prohibited goods in the night, to the sea-side, in order to ship them off, contrary to law." (29)

In the literature of this period we find authors like Lady Mary Wortley Montague, David Mallet, Gray, Graham, Goldsmith, Blair, Schiller, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, E.E. Higbe, Barry Cornwall, Washington Irving, Edward Lear, James T. Fields, Tennyson, and Hardy referring to the owl for a variety of reasons. Above all, many use the owl for the purpose of creating a mood of melancholy, loneliness, and seriness. Another group defends the owl with equal vigor, pointing out its attributes in comparison to other birds, and indicates its reasons for its preference. Still another group exists that incorporates owls or their noises, in their work with no apparent reason, although some of these authors lean heavily upon the owl

to produce a comical situation, abusing the torpid manner of the bird when not in its proper habitat.

The following quotations, taken from some of the above-mentioned authors' works, intermingled in their presentation here, may be used as examples of these tendencies:

"The sun was set; the night came on apace,  
The falling dews bewet around the place;  
The bat takes airy rounds on leathern wings,  
And the hoarse owl his woeful dirges sings." (30)

"The screech-owl, with ill-boding cry,  
Portends strange things, old women say;  
Stops every fool that passes by,  
And frights the school-boy from his play." (31)

"The wailing owl  
Screams solitary to the mournful moon." (32)

"From yonder ivy-mantled tower  
The gaping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower  
Molest her ancient, solitary reign." (33)

"Let the screeching Owl  
A sacred bird be held; protect her nest,  
Whether in neighboring crag, within the reach  
Of venturesome boy, it hang, or in the rent  
Of some old echoing tower, where her sad plaint  
The livelong night she moans, save when she skims,  
Prowling, along the ground, or through the barn  
Her nightly round performs: unwelcome guest!  
Whose meteor eyes shoot terror through the dark,  
And numb the tiny revellers with dread." (34)

"Goldsmith says that a single fowl is more serviceable than half a dozen cats in ridding a barn of its vermin." (35)

"Only the worm of conscience consorts with the owl. Sinners and evil spirits shun the light." (36)

"'Tis the middle of the night by the castle clock,  
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;  
Tu-whit!----Tu whoo!  
And hark again, the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew." (37)

"The wing is up....hark! how it howls! methinks  
Till now I never heard a sound so dreary:  
Doors creak, and windows clap, and night's foul bird,  
Hooked in the spire, screams loud.

Again the screech-owl shrieks----ungracious sound!" (38)

"Of all the horrid, hideous notes of woe,  
Sadder than owl songs or the midnight blast;  
Is that portentous phrase, 'I told you so.'" (39)

"The 'sad Aziola', which Shelley thought was 'some tedious woman', until he learned to love its melancholy tones." (40)

"St. Agnes' Eve----ah, bitter chill it was,  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold." (41)

"Hail to thee, owl! thou sentinel of night,  
That keepest pace with tongueless echo shouting whoo--  
And put'st the wanderer to startling fright,  
Travelling the dark woods through.  
Thou art a quaint old songster, horrid bird,  
Piping thy notes so cheerily on that dead tree,  
Then listening to know if echo yet is heard  
And will return thy minstrelsie.  
Tu-whooh!----sooth, that's a blast of noble sound!  
And dost thou hear it rolling through the evening air?  
And canst thou mark how woods and hills around  
Thy notes of warning bear?  
Tu-whooh!----again? sure thou'rt a queer old fowl  
To practice here thy song in solitary glee;  
Thou must be of thy feathery tribe a stoic owl,  
Thou carest little for society,  
I love thee since thou dost not boast thy song,  
Like birds of day, who only wish they may be heard--  
Thou never gabblest with unbridled tongue,  
Thou art a modest bird." (42)

"In the hollow tree, in the old gray tower,  
The spectral owl doth dwell;  
Dull, hated, despised, in the sunshine hour,  
But at dusk----he's abroad and well!  
Not a bird of the forest e'er mates with him----  
All mock him outright by day;  
But at night, when the woods grow still and dim,  
The boldest will shrink away!  
O, when the night falls, and roosts the fowl,  
Then, then, is the reign of the Morned Owl!" (43)

"The moan of the whip-poor-will from the hill-side; the  
boding cry of the tree-toad, that harbinger of storm; the dreary  
hooting of the screech-owl." (44)

"The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea  
In a beautiful pea-green boat,  
They took some honey, and plenty of money,  
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.  
The Owl looked up to the stars above,  
And sang to a small guitar,  
'O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,  
What a beautiful Pussy you are,  
You are!  
What a beautiful Pussy you are!'

"Pussy said to the Owl, 'You elegant fowl!  
 How charmingly sweet you sing!  
 O let us be married! too long we have tarried:  
 But what shall we do for a ring?'  
 They sailed away for a year and a day  
 To the land where the Bong-tree grows,  
 And there in a wood a Piggy<sup>wa</sup> stood,  
 With a ring at the end of his nose,  
 His nose,  
 With a ring at the end of his nose.

"'Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling  
 Your ring?' Said the Piggy, 'I will.'  
 So they took it away, and were married next day  
 By the Turkey who lives on the hill,  
 They dined on mince, and slices of quince,  
 Which they ate with a runcible spoon;  
 And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,  
 They danced by the light of the moon,  
 The moon,  
 They danced by the light of the moon." (45)

"'I'm an owl; you're another. Sir Critic, good day.'  
 And the barber kept on shaving." (46)

"When cats run home and light is come,  
 And the dew is cold upon the ground,  
 And the far-off stream is dumb,  
 And the whirring sail goes round,  
 And the whirring sail goes round;  
 Alone and warming his five wits,  
 The white owl in the belfry sits.

"When merry milkmaids click the latch,  
 And rarely smells the new-mown hay,  
 And the cock hath sung beneath the thatch  
 Twice or thrice his roundelay,  
 Twice or thrice his roundelay;  
 Alone and warming his five wits,  
 The white owl in the belfry sits." (47)

"In Mr. Hardy's novel Far From the Madding Crowd, Joseph Poorgrass, on losing his way in a wood at night, shouts, 'Man-a-lost!' and an owl cries, 'Who? who? who?' which Joseph imagines is some man answering him." (48)

"Hasselquist, writing in the middle of the eighteenth century, makes the same statement regarding the owls of Syria /the screech-owl was supposed to destroy children if they were not watched./" (49)

"Ellis, in his Modern Husbandman, writes, 'with us (in Hertfordshire) the owl is called Hobhouchin, and makes a great whooping noise or cry many times in the night, especially a fair one; for when the owl whoops loudest, and does this oftenest, it is by most deemed a sign of pleasant weather; according to the verse

"Nor the Owl, foretelling vain,  
 From the high roof observing Phoebus set,

will idly then nocturnal tales repeat.  
 She will not sing against rain." (50)

"A pretty legend is current in Normandy, to account for the owl's nocturnal habits: the Wren, in the successful effort of fetching fire from heaven for the use of man, lost all its plumage, and the other birds each presented it with a feather, save the surly Owl, and hence it is ashamed to show its face in the daytime.

"The Bat is often associated with the Owl in popular legends as highly objectionable, and even gruesome, and a Welsh tale gives a curious reason why those creatures 'love the darkness rather than the light.' The Dove and the Bat, on a journey together, came late at night to the dwelling of the Chief of the Owls, and sought and were granted shelter. After supper the Bat broke forth into a loud, laudatory strain on the wisdom of their entertainer, attributing to him qualities which it was well known he never possessed. When the Bat had ended his eulogy, the Dove, with modest dignity, simply thanked the Owl for his attentions and hospitality, on which both the Owl and the Bat attacked her furiously, and drove her out into the dark and stormy night. When morning dawned, the Dove flew to the King, who in great wrath passed an edict, enacting that thenceforth the Owl and the Bat should never presume to fly abroad until the sun was down, under pain of being attacked by all other birds.

"In Sicily the Owl that cries by night near the house of a sick man announces his approaching death; but among owls it is the Horned Owl (iacobu, chiovu, or chio) that is especially feared. The horned owl sings near the house of a sick man three days before his death; if there are no sick people in the house, it announces to one, at least, that he or she will be struck with squinancy of the tonsils. The peasants in Sicily, when in spring they hear the lamentation of the horned owl for the first time, go to their master to give notice of their intention of leaving his service.

"In Hungary the owl is called the 'bird of death'.... In the New World the Owl is also regarded as an uncanny bird. The natives of Yucatan believe that if it alights on, or even flies over, a house, it is a sure presage of death. The Apache Indians have a great dread of the Owl; 'On the Sierra Madre expedition, one of the commanders caught an owlet, which he fastened to the pommel of his saddle. When the ugly bird began its low-muttering ~~whirring~~ notes, the excitement among the Apache scouts was something wonderful to witness. Their head man approached General Crook, and remonstrated against the retention of this sure prognostic of defeat....

"The Luami, inhabitants of the mainland opposite Vancouver's Island, will never kill an owl, says Mr. Dorman. Among the Aztecs, Quiches, and Mayos, the Peruvians, Araucanians, and Algonkians, the owl was thought to have some relation to the dead. The Ojibways called the bridge they thought the spirits of the dead had to pass Owl Bridge. The Creek priests carried a stuffed owl with them as the badge of their profession. The Arickaras placed one in their council-lodge, and the culture-hero of the Monquins of California was represented, like Athene, as having one for his companion. The natives of the Antilles wore tunics with figures of these birds embroidered on them. Among the Zulus owls of pottery were very common objects of worship. Brinton says

the Indians are of opinion that there were numbers of inferior dieties, and that irrational animals were engaged in viewing their actions. The Eagle, for this purpose, with her keen eye, soared about in the day, and the Owl, with her nightly eye, was perched on the trees around their camp. Therefore, when they observed the Eagle or the Owl near, they immediately offered sacrifice, or burned tobacco.

"In Barbary, if the Owl appear from the northward the evil thus portended will not be confined to one person, but a plague will ensue, which will not be stayed until the bird of omen disappears.

"...In the folklore of many lands the ashes of the owl's penetrating eyes are good for clearing the sight; the feet, burned with the herb plumbago, render the bite of a serpent harmless; owls' eggs and the blood of their nestlings preserve the hair and make it curly. Owl broth is considered a cure for whooping cough /owl broth is also mentioned in the lore of ancient China ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ /....Hindus fasten an owl's claw round a child's neck to keep him from nervousness, and the smoke of owl's flesh they consider very efficacious in keeping off ghosts from children.

"In Madagascar the spirits of those who die and remain unburied are believed to be doomed to associate with, if not actually become, owls or bats....In Siam when an owl is seen to perch upon the roof of a house it signifies the death of at least one of the inmates.

"The Ainos have a singular legend to account for the tuft on the Owl's head: A rat having stolen the Owl's hoarded dainties, he went to the dwelling of that rodent, and threatened to kill him. But the rat humbly asked to be forgiven, and, as a peace-offering, gave the owl a gimlet, whereby he might obtain greater pleasure than he should have derived from the choice food of which he had been deprived. 'You must stick the gimlet point upwards in the ground, at the foot of that tree, then climb to the top of the tree and slide down the trunk,' said the crafty rat. The owl----who in this instance certainly did not justify the reputation of its kind for superior sagacity ----did all as the rat had instructed him, and sliding down impaled himself on the sharp-pointed gimlet. Full of rage, he went off to kill the rat, who, anticipating a visit of this nature, came along the road to meet him, and pacified him with a cap for his head----and this is how the Owl came to have the thick tuft of erect feathers which he wears to this day." (51)

"Buddhist beliefs--The owl is the mortal enemy of crows, and is wont to repair to their nests at night and kill their young; in like manner the religious mendicant is the foe of ignorance, and plucks it out of his mind and destroys it before it has become inveterate. Like the owl, too, he loves seclusion and the quiet favourable to calm reflection." (52)

"The Winnebago tribes of Indians thus describe, in their legendary lore, the sentinels of the four points of the compass in their respective place....Maho-koko-ko-ko, represented in the form of an owl, ruled in the north." (53)

"Emerson thinks that owls were worshipped as a class and not as individual protectors." (54)





represented dramatically as a mystery....imitated by actors  
of dancer....owls not mentioned by Vieir, proper name.....  
lives of persons bound up with those of....sex totem of  
women....called Women's 'sisters'."

The above are evidence of the important role the owl played in the lore of magic.

Eighteenth century plate by Echenau, called "La Credulité sans reflexion". (66) (At the Cartomancer's) Owl depicted with Cartomancer, perhaps assisting.

(Two) During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [it] that the last of the important books on magic and witchcraft were published. These dealt with a topic that reached its peak in earlier times. Therefore we shall only mention this in passing here. Typical of these is Calendrier Magique, (67) in which prescriptions and recipes for the accomplishment of "evil eye", "hatred", "love", "enchantment", "disenchantment", etc. and their proper dates for action are discussed. In general terms it can be said that owls play a secondary role, and only in certain potions (for mainly) disenchantment and animal conversion are they important. For instance, owlets' wings, owlets' eyes, claws, etc. are used. Figure 2 of an owl with a ring of keys is typical of many of these publications.

It is possible in a sense, to gather that owls were frequently used in sorcery and witchcraft for the following purposes: Direct magical powers of the owl or portions of it, And just as a lugubrious adornment for the creation of a supernatural mood, with special emphasis upon the occult, or perhaps a symbol of wisdom.

That groups did not fear the name "owl" is proven by the following fact: "Chouvans /from Breton owl/ insurrectionary peasants of the west of France who rose against the revolution-

ary government in 1793. The movement was rather disorganized, more religious than royalist in feeling...." (68)  
 "Owls hoot in B<sup>b</sup> and G<sup>b</sup> or in F<sup>#</sup> and A<sup>b</sup>. (69) This probably is the main reason for their eeriness.

In our search for material in the early modern times, which, for our purposes, approximately cover from the years 1500 to 1770, we find a great wealth of information, particularly concerning the alchemical field. In this period, which produced the seeds for the phlogiston period in the history of chemistry and the phlogiston theory at its best, we find the great studies conducted in calcination and combustion. Could it be that the drawings which we shall discuss later, depicting owls always accompanied by flaming torches or candles or other forms of energy----could it be that these drawings were really allegorical representations of phlogiston, made consciously or subconsciously by the illustrating artists who were employed by the authors of the current publications to represent that latent property which the alchemists chose to consider of negative weight? Among the material found, the following seems interesting:

"The owl-jug with the arms of Saxony might well commemorate the good relations between Ferdinand I and Moritz, Elector of Saxony in 1542, when they fought together against the Turks in Hungary. (The jug at Kreuzenstein has on the top a drawing of a Turk's head in blue) ... As regards the purpose or symbolism of these curious jugs, the suggestion was made long ago by Jacquemart that the Delaherche owl (now in the Berlin Schlossmuseum) was intended as a prize in an archery contest (since it was painted with the William Tell subject). This has been doubted by Stengel and others, who favour the view that the jugs were gifts from the Emperor. Falke has pointed out that both hypotheses may be correct; the jugs may have been prizes given by the persons whose arms they bear. It is difficult indeed to avoid the conclusion that the Tell owl was an archery prize, and there is in fact a record of a silver owl being a prize at the imperial festival at Vienna in 1568. A silver-mounted wooden owl is also on loan at the Historisches Museum at Berne from the

local archery society. I have not been able to ascertain what target was used in Austria in this period, but a reference to a silver parrot as a prize-winner's badge at a 'popinjay' (stuffed parrot) archery contest at Bruges in 1656, suggests the possibility that the target was a stuffed owl. It has also been pointed out that potters have commonly taken the owl as their symbol. The Guilds of Rhenish stone-ware potters were the Ulner (Fulner) and vessels in the form of owls are known in Cologne stoneware....The potters' nightly occupation with their kilns has been thought to explain this, while the fact that one of the jugs was for long in the possession of a mine official's family has suggested to one German authority a similar association of a night-bird with the darkness of a mine. The conception of an owl as a symbol of drunkenness has also been brought into connexion with these drinking vessels. But none of these explanations seems wholly satisfactory, and if we are correct in ascribing the earlier of the jugs to the workshop of Augustin Hirschvogel it seems possible that they were a fanciful invention of that artist, perhaps in play upon his own name or even possibly his habit of working at night, and that the form was only later thought appropriate for the archer's trophy." (70)

Figures 3, 4, and 5 are samples of owl-jugs. (71)

The literature of this period is rich in owl lore, and among the principal authors contributing to this we find Swan, Shakespeare, Sir Philip Sydney, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Samuel Butler, Samuel Rowland, Chatterton, and Drayton. Also, here belong the following works which remain anonymous, or whose authorship is in dispute: Tyll Eulenspiegel, the chap-books, and The Owle's Almanack. The following quotations, taken from some of the above-mentioned authors, bring forth again the same group of conflicting symbolisms as regards the owl.

"And Swan, in his Speculum Mundi, recommends owl's eggs to be broken, and put into the cups of a drunkard, or one desirous to follow drinking, with the result that 'they will so work with him that he will suddenly loathe his good liquor, and be displeas'd with his drinking'." (72)

"Then nightly singe the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note" (73)

"It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,  
Which gives the sternest good night" (74)

"The clamorous owl, that nightly hoots and wonders  
At our quaint spirits" (75)



fig. #3



Fig #4



fig #5

"The screech-owl, screeching loud,  
Put: the wretch that lies in woe  
In remembrance of a shroud" (76)

"The hell-broth of the weird sisters in Macbeth is seasoned with owl's wing" (77)

"Among the numerous prodigies which Casca witnessed the day preceding the great dictator's assassination (Julius Caesar, 1, 3), he says: 'The bird of night did sit, Even at noon-day, upon the market-place, Hooting and shrieking'."

"The cry of the dreaded bird is heard by Lady Macbeth, while the bloody deed is being done, the murderer asks: 'Didst thou not hear a noise?' and she answers, 'I heard the owl scream and the cricket cry'. And in the same tragedy (Macbeth 11, 3) Lennox says that on the night of Duncan's murder, 'The obscure bird clamoured the live-long night'."

"Why the owl has been called the 'bird of wisdom' it is not easy to determine. Possibly because it can see in the dark, and is the only bird which looks straight forward. Shakespeare frequently alludes to its 'fine wits'". (78)

"In the play of Henry VI (Part 1, v, 6) the king says to the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard III: 'The owl shrieked at thy birth --- an evil sign!' In Richard III (iv, 4) the king interrupts the messengers of evil tidings with, 'Out with you ye, owls! --- Nothing but songs of death?' In Henry VI (iv, 2) 'Thou ominous and fearful owl of death!' ... The sprite Ariel (The Tempest, v, 1) couches 'when owls do cry'. 'Poor Ophelia, in her incoherent babblings, says (Hamlet, iv, 5): 'The owl was a baker's daughter', alluding to a folk-tale, which recounts how the Saviour, having been refused bread by a baker's daughter, changed her into an owl. --- According to another legend, it was an earl's daughter who was transformed into an owl for disobedience, and condemned to cry --- 'Oh, hoo! hoo! my feet are cold! In the north of England she is advanced to the lofty rank of a Pharaoh's daughter, and sings or screeches: 'Oh! ooo---oo---

I once was a king's daughter, and sat on  
my father's knee,  
But now I am a poor howlet, and hide in a  
hallow tree'.". (79)

"O you virtuous owl,  
The wise Minerva's only fowle." (80)

"Spenser speaks of the 'ill-fated owl, death's dreadful messenger' ". (81)

"Ovid makes Medea consummate her horrid cauldron of 'wonder-working juices' with 'A screech-owl's carcass, and ill-omened wings'; which Ben Jonson modifies into 'The screech-owl's eggs, and fathers black'.". (82)

"That, even in grave England, and with rare Ben

Jonson, Master Owl, less was a favorite, we may see from two allusion which he makes to him; one in the 'Poetaster', Act III the Third, Scene the Fourth, where Tucca explains: "What, do you laugh, Owlglass?" And again in the 'Masque of the Fortunate Isles', produced in 1626, Ben Jonson introduces Howleglass: and Jophiel says to Merefool: 'Or what do you think of Howleglass instead of him?'

Merefool. -- 'No, him

I have a mind to'

Jophiel. -- 'O, but Ulen-Spiegle,

Were such a name --- but you shall have your longing!

And later on the remark is made --- 'Whether you would present him with an Hermes

Or with an Howleglass?

Skeleton. -- 'An Howleglass

To come to pass

On his father's ass;

There never was,

By day, nor night,

A finer sight,

With feathers upright

In his horned cap,

And crooked shape,

Much like an ape,

With owl on fist

And glass at his wrist'." (83)

(Tyll Owlglass, will be discussed further shortly)

"The Roman senate, when within  
The city walls an owl was seen,  
Did cause their clergy, with lustrations

\* \* \*

The round-fac'd prodigy t' avert,  
From doing town or country hurt" (84)

"Samuel Rowland, a prolific writer of the 17th century, in his More Knaves Yet (a supplement to his Four Knaves), printed in 1613, thus girds at the popular belief in the Owl's ominous screech: 'Wise Gosling did but heere the scrich-owle crye, And told his wife, and straight a pigge did crye'" (85)

"Chatterton, 'the marvellous boy', says:  
'Hark! the death-owl loud doth sing  
To the night-mares as they go'." (86)

"The association of the owl with ivy is thus referred to by Drayton: 'Like an owl, by night to go abroad,  
Roosted all day within an ivy-tod'." (87)

"In the story of the invisible picture there is one slight reference to alchemy; and in that where he is led forth to the gallows, the multitude regard Owlglass as a magician, who will rescue himself by the aid of demons" (88)

If we speculate on the word 'owl' in the name of the hero, there is an immediate impulse to assume buffonery, yet upon further

consideration the idea of devilish wisdom appears even stronger. For the alchemist of the period was regarded as wise, but in an evil sense, just as *Ulenpiegel*, who was clever enough to get away with his pranks.

"... And Edward Longshanks sleeps unregarded save by a few antiquarian English, Tyll's native village is pointed out with pride to the traveller, and his tombstone, with a sculptured pun on his name --- namely, an Owl and a Glass --- still stands, or pretends to stand, at Kollon, near, Lubeck, where since 1850 ...." (89)

"At Kempen there are also carvings of ... an owl viewing its face in a mirror, a rebuke of the typical mediaeval wag Tyll *Ulenpiegel*". (90)

"1532. This year we find the first French edition, stated to be translated from Flemish into French (probably from the Antwerp edition), printed at Paris, the title being as follows: - 'Between four flowers there is first an owl, then the word *Ulen-spiegel*' and after it a round glass'." (91)

"The cry of the Owl ... has also its signification in weather-lore. According to an old chap-book, 'when the owl screecheth in foul weather it is a sign of fair weather at hand'; and in several districts of England its cry is sometimes taken as an indication of approaching hail or rain, accompanied by lightening." (92) It is to be noticed, the emphasis of the owl's connection with good weather, already cited in a previous reference. Further connection between the owl and lightening will be seen in section devoted to ancient China.

Towards the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century there flourished in England the publication of "almanacs", whose chief aim it was to collect odd data and experiment in prophecy. It is perhaps the extreme popularity of these, combined with their authoritatively expounded superstition and complete lack of organized scientific method that led to the creation of the Owle's Almanack, an answer to another popular almanac of the day and a satire on almanacs in general. This work is attributed by many to Thomas Dekker, eminent Elizabethan playwright, and indeed throughout the book the works of Dekker are highly advertised and praised. Yet there are other authorities who state that the style differs markedly from that of Dekker and decline to ascribe its authorship to any one individual. Figure # 6 is a reproduction of the plate on page 25 of The Owle's Almanack.

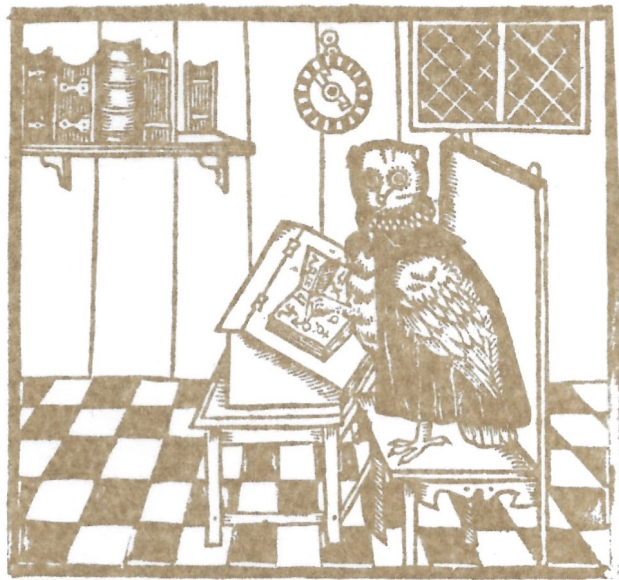


fig. # 6

It will be noted that while alchemical symbols appear here, they do not appear to make much sense and are to a great degree obliterated by the quill in the picture. Both the plate and the work as a whole express the spirit of buffoonery. This effect is in no sense lessened by the signature of each of the articles by the name "The Owle". We can therefore only conclude that the owl is represented in this work in the spirit of buffoonery, and that it was the symbol in nature chosen because the owl, when faced with the bright light of day, appears so awkward and incongruous. (93)

A "bit of Scottish folk-lore:

"When a snowy owl takes to (haunts) the neighborhood of a home, some one in it will die....

"Comes the lowly Owlet, bearing death to broken hearts;

And he haunts the house whence sorrow  
Never more departs.

Hound the cat, on noiseless pinion  
Flits the unkin bird;

And the dying wife has seen it,  
And her soul is stirred.

'Welcome,' says she, 'well I ken thee,  
Phantom bird of snow;

Thou hast come to call my spirit,  
And I gladly go.'

"....Full of melancholy dreamings,  
Broods he /the owl/ all alone." (94)

In English folklore the barn, or screech owl is specially invested with supernatural power, and it is probable that the Irish 'Banshee' superstition had its origin in the horrifying cry of this species." (95)

We have, with all the information gathered up to now, encountered sufficient interpretation to prepare us for a more specialized study into the field of scientific owl-lore. We feel that we can now approach the subject of owls in alchemical literature. Figure #7 is from a curious work by Heinrich Khunrath entitled Magnesia Catholica Philosophorum.... pub-



Khunrath, 1615.

fig #7

Courtesy Edgar Fahn Smith Library  
U. of P.

(96.)  
 lished in Madgeburg, 1589. This figure is found as tailpiece  
 in this publication and contains the dark saying "Was helffen  
 Fackeln/ liechte oder brilln/ man die leut nicht sehen wölle."

In 1609 Heinrich Khunrath published his Amphitheatrum  
Sapientiae Aeternae (Amphitheater of Eternal Wisdom) in which  
 an owl flanked by two torches and candles is to be found, (97)  
 in which the saying is, "What good are torches, light, or  
 spectacles, if folk won't see!" In 1708 Heinrich Khunrath's  
~~publizierte~~ "Vom Nylealischen, <sup>das ist</sup> ~~Antik~~, Pri-Materialischen,  
 Katholischen oder Allgemeinen Natürlichen Chaos der Natur-  
 gemakssen Alchymaie und Alchymisten" <sup>was published</sup> in Frankfurt, in which as  
 frontispiece is again an owl flanked by torches, with candles  
 at its sides. Yet the poem accompanying it has been consider-  
 ably expanded to fourteen lines and a Latin motto is included,  
 VOLENTI NON FIT INFURIA, (No wrong arises to one consenting.)  
 The poem reads as follows:

"Was helffen Ranken PACKELN, LICHT, und BRILLEN,  
 Weil jedermann nach seinem Willen  
 In der CHYMIA angstlich sucht,  
 Dass ih ihm das HERTZ im Leibe pucht!  
 Er suchet zwar die creutz und quer,  
 Alleine NICHES das findeter,  
 Und setzte er auf alle Brillen  
 Weil er nur thut nach seinem Willen,  
 So vvid er doch nicht treffen an  
 Die WAHRHEIT, so erfreuen kan,  
 Versuchs, und lis das mit VERSTAND,  
 Und tapp nicht blindlings nach der WAND,  
 Gebrauch recht PACKELN, LICHT und BRILLFN,  
 So vvid GGTT deinen Wunsch erfüllen.  
VOLENTI NON FIT INFURIA

(97.)  
 Figure No. 8 is a reproduction of this drawing. It is  
 to be noticed that the first drawing is extremely simple in its  
 development. The drawing has shadow on the left side, and the  
 feathers on the owl are poorly drawn. The owl itself is very



Fig. No 8

Courtesy Edgar Fahs Smith Library  
U. of P.

*and the torches  
at candelabra*

flat. Portions of it are not drawn clearly. Its beak is towards the left. The candelabra are exceedingly primitive, while the second drawing, although more simply shadowed, is more effective. The shadowing in this is to the right in all the objects. The torches are held in both drawings by the fingers of the clawed animal. The candelabra here are more elaborate, yet still simple. This drawing seems to have been made from the first one with a clear intention to improve upon it. Somehow we cannot help feeling that the second was traced from the first and then improved. The beak in the second therefore points towards the right, and the motto-holder at the feet of the owl has been converted into a fragment of a stone. In both drawings the left candle is slightly off center from the candelabra.

In 1767 a book "Puff curieuse & Tragtätlein" was published in Frankfurt and Leipzig, and contained within its covers a work by "Anonymus von Schwartafuss" (a pseudonym, undoubtedly) entitled "Brunnen der Weisheit und Erkenntiss der Natur...." In the latter work, figure 9, as a tailpiece, appears. It is again our friend, the bespectacled owl, flanked, rather smaller torches (burning less fiercely and smoking quite a bit), bordered by awkward candelabra, with the left candle again off center. The owl in this particular drawing is facing front, and at his feet the stone, which adorned the previous drawing, has become a shell that extends to the front in a small depression on the ground, surrounding the owl with a branch of leaves and fruit to each side, and extending up to the smoke of the torches. The vegetation in this drawing is



Courtesy Edgar Fahs Smith Library  
U. of P.

9  
Fig. ■

much to the rear of the owl. This tailpiece is quite small and is preceded by a new modification of the original verse:

"Die Fackeln, Licht und Brillen diesem Werk nicht  
targen,  
Wann du in deinem Kopff hast finstre Eulen Augen,  
Wo nicht das wahre Licht erleuchtet deinem Sinn,  
Hast du vor deine Müh nur Schößen zum Gewinn." (98)

In Berlin in 1771, Hans von Osten wrote "Eine Grosse Herzstärkung für die Chymisten...." in which again we find our allegorical drawing as a frontispiece to his work (figure 10). (99) Here we find the owl much improved as far as its natural appearance is concerned, with only the long tufts of feathers in the head simulating <sup>ears</sup> ~~beaks~~, being exaggerated. There is a considerable amount of shading in the whole drawing, especially upon the body of the owl, which gives a particularly weird effect. We find the owl staring almost frontwise, although with a slight angle to the left. The background, candle, and candelabra shadowing is to the right on the right side and to the left on the left side of the picture. The saying is the same as the original, and is mounted in an especially becoming frame of late design. The most important addition to this drawing as compared to the previous ones is the presence of the sun in the upper center of the picture with rays beaming in the background. The sun is here drawn with a mouth and nose. The rest of the face does not show, as probably the drawing was cut down from its original size to give the owl a larger share of attention. The candelabra are very elaborate and tastefully ornamented. In all, this last drawing is by far of a more advanced stylistic design and undoubtedly was the result of closer observation and clearer object in mind. While the first owl (figure



fig 10.

courtesy Edgar Fahs Smith Library  
U. of P.

7) is a caricature of an owl, figure 8 is only a slightly exaggerated drawing of one, and figure 10 is a very accurate depiction of the common European owl.

The first three owls have a restful, dignified, and benevolent appearance. The last one, although a bit weird, still does not give an eerie, fatal effect. Undoubtedly the authors of the drawings had in mind only some of the attributes and symbolism of the owl.

It is possible that none of these four owl drawings are original, nor the sayings which accompany them. As we shall see later, the Greeks gave the owl some symbolic meanings which are not far from the plausible meanings applicable to the owl drawings in these alchemical publications. Could it be possible that some obscure and forgotten Greek artist was the real originator of the representation of an owl flanked by torches and candles?

It may be possible that the owl as a symbol in alchemical literature comes as a further indication of man's emerging from the middle ages towards a period of greater enlightenment, vital curiosity, and concern with knowledge. The torches in the afore-mentioned drawings rather tend to strengthen this theory, and may perhaps be interpreted as additional tools in the study of alchemy.

Yet it is possible that these allegorical drawings may, without the intention of the authors, express the position of the alchemist towards the world, with the alchemist being represented by the owl, and the spectacles, torches, and candles appearing as his devices against intolerance, superstition, and above all, ignorance.

Other owls appear in drawings of alchemical books, although the owls are not as large nor as prominent in the picture as those described already. As a rule, some appear next to representations of Pallas Athene and in drawings in which the owl is only symbolizing its own species. Among these, "The Hermetic Museum" has a handsome title page bearing name M. Merion. This book<sup>was</sup> published by Lucas Jennis at Frankfort in 1625 with 483 pages and a revised edition with 863 pages, issued in 1678 at Frankfort. (100)

The following paintings also have owls in them: "The Witch of Ender Evoking the prophet Samuel", by Johann Heinrich Schonfeld (101), "Reading the Black Book" by Franz von der Wyngaert (102), and "Departure for the Sabbath" by Queverdo, engraved by Maleuvre (103).

The author of the book entitled Witchcraft, Magic, and Alchemy (104) states, "Three creatures only are shown, toad, owl, and cat, and these are inseparable companions of every witch." Furthermore on he adds, "An owl seen in attendance upon all witches has no very definite province." (105)

"In Southern India, according to Thurston (quoted by Lauffer) the same dread prevails, and there the natives interpret the birds' cries by their number, much as they did those of crows. 'One such screech forebodes death, etc. and nine signify favorable results.'" (106)

"Worshipped by sorcerers among the Menominee Indians (Eastern Wisconsin) 'who believe they can assume the shape of an owl, and can in this disguise attack and kill their enemies.'" (107)

"The tucur (owl), chan, or cumatz (serpent)...[in Mayan-Quiche lore]...are other animals whose names are applied to prominent families or tribes in these nearly related myths. The priests and rulers also assumed frequently the names of animals, and some pretended to be able to transform themselves into

them at will." (108)

(In Yucatan) "the owl is looked upon as an uncanny bird, presaging death or disease, if it alights on or even flies over a house." (109)

In the period we have just discussed there are many more drawings and quotations referring to the owl, yet it is dubious that their inclusion would give more light in our search for the trend that did develop in the previous periods covered in our work. Because the human mind seems to run from one extreme to another in its search for an understanding of nature, it should hardly surprise us to find that the antithetical points of good and bad as symbols for the owl are used regardless of date and age. They are logically, therefore, repeated in this period, although with a great amount of intermingling.

We have tried to gather some of the available information concerning the owl in the period of the Middle Ages, from about the year 500 to 1500 A.D. The following quotations should cast further light upon the motives and purposes of the owl's use in alchemical publications.

"The Owl and the Nightingale" is a middle English poem generally accredited to Nicholas de Guildford of Dorsetshire, England, late in the thirteenth century, although its authorship has never been irrevocably established as definite. Containing two thousand lines of octosyllabic riming couplets, the work was known as a debate, a form popular and typical of the period. The discussion concerns the relative merits of each of the two birds, each one evidently symbolic of a group in England, with the poet favoring the owl, although actually the debate ends in a draw, with neither side victorious. This

work is one of the best of its day, yet to us of the present its very argumentative qualities reflect the immaturity of the period in which it was written. (110)

"Chaucer says, 'The owl brings tidings of death.'" (111)  
 Or, in the language of his day: "Thus Chaucer, in his Parliament of Foules, mentions, 'The oule, that of ceth the bode bringeth.'" (112)

Witchcraft was in high repute and very widespread during the middle ages. Its concern with the owl even then is evidenced by the following:

"I know on the authority of [a] Shetland witch, that the Katyogle [Owl] is the inhabitant of another world in disguise." (113)

"The owl was the favourite bird into which witches transformed themselves, so that they could carry on their nefarious practices by night." (114)

The period of the middle ages was further typified by its deep concern with religion. Its attitude emphasized a theory of faith.

"In the middle ages these symbolisms, which seem to us farfetched and obscure, were constantly referred to in sermons and in sacred and profane literature, as well as in common discourse, and appear, therefore, to have been generally understood, so that a passing allusion to them in a book or address was assumed to be intelligible without further comment. Thus we find in a Latin poem, published by Du Meril in his Poésies populaires latines antérieures au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, p. 191, a line in which Christ is said to have been put to death by owls ----

"Christus a noctuis datus supplicio."  
 This is, however, a figurative expression for the Jews, who, in the Physiologus, are compared to the nycticorax, night-raven or owl, which cannot endure the presence of the sun, ----" (115)

Christian art of the period is also rich in owl lore.

"In religious art the owl is associated with the idea of mourning and desolation. 'The owle betokeneth alwaies some hevie newes, and is most emurable and accursed. He keepeth ever in the desertts, and is the verie monster of the night, neither crying nor singing out cleare, but uttering a certaine hevie grone of dolefull moning. Therefore if he be seene

within citties or otherwise abroad in any place it is not good, but prognosticateth some fearfull misfortune.'

"In some cases no doubt the Christian symbolism was a deliberate reaction from the pagan. Thus the owl, as the bird of Athens, was held in especial esteem by the Athenians who claimed that goddess as the patron and founder of their city, and stamped her emblem on their coinage. Hence therefore the early Christians would feel an objection to the introduction of the bird." (116)

#### Owls in church:

"One is an owl surrounded by birds, on a capitol in the cathedral of Le Mans. /(117)/ There is no doubt as to the meaning of this. The Bestiaries teach that the owl has eyes of a kind which cannot see clearly in the daytime, and that when he ventures into the light the birds chase him. The owl became a type of the Jews. /(118)/ ....It is evident that the subject of the capitol at Le Mans was taken direct from the bestiaries, for the symbolism of the owl is not found in the Speculum Ecclesias. /(119)/"

"In Christian art later was attributed to the owl the symbolism of false wisdom and was represented with a cross over the head of this bird; the triumph of the cross over the enemies of Christ." (120)

This period seems to rely more heavily on the owl as a symbol of buffoonery and less [so] as a standard of false or veal wisdom. The misunderstandings of nature's symbolism during this period are well known; therefore the antithesis in the symbolism is prone to be of great significance. Yet statements on prudence and wisdom are to be found, although at a minimum, in this period. Greater notice of the usefulness of the owl as a bird is also found here (for example, its help in the elimination of rats and other vermin from barns.)

It is the period of antiquity which is the richest in owl lore, for it represents the accumulation of facts of many and varied civilizations and cultural groups. It is in this period that we can hope to gather information least affected but more true to man's innate feelings. Unfortunately, interpretations during translations and outright modifications by

workers in the field have obscured some points in the symbolism, mood and origin of the use of owls. We shall attempt to group information as much as possible from primary sources and shall avoid inserting words for the purpose of clarification when such words do not appear in the original.

Among the earliest people to show concern over the owl were the Egyptians. Not only are some of the earliest owl relics found among their excavations, but it becomes more and more apparent as we study their civilization that a respect and awe of the bird affected even their daily code of ethics. The following quotation illustrates this well:

"The Egyptians and the Ethiopians employed an image of the Owl as a messenger of death, as a bull's head was formerly used in Scotland and some other European countries. When this grim token was sent by the king it was considered as a point of honour for the recipient to kill himself at once, as any attempt to evade the message would be an indelible stain on the family. Diodorus Siculus tells of an Egyptian mother who strangled her son with her girdle, because he sought to escape the doom thus announced." (121)

Other findings indicate the following:

"Frequent representations of the white and horned owl are found in Egypt. The owl does not appear, however, to have borne at any time a sacred character among the Egyptians although many mummies have been found in the necropolis of Thebes." (122)

"Vessels in the form of owls are also found in Egyptian, Chinese, and Japanese pottery." (123) [broken]

But perhaps the following is most interesting and pertinent of all, for it takes us back to one of the earliest owl relics of early Egypt: (translated by author from French

original:)"Without eliminating the religious aspect, which is never absent from these antique works, it is permissible to dream that these little pliable pieces could have had a practical use. Now the form recalls a little that of certain weights representing an ox with tucked-under feet like those of our bird. And the latter weighs 660 grams, is exactly fifty times the 13,6 grams of a small object of malachite, tallied in almond, found in Abydos in the tomb of King Djer and that can scarcely have been but a standard of dében, or

sicle /Hebrew weight/ of this time. The value of this unit varied in the course of the Ancient Empire; it has never even been completely fixed for any given epoch....Why did this object represent an owl? It is understood that the ox furnished a type of weight. But one did not currently weigh with owls. It is true that some authentic weights carry pictures of serpents, but did not have to be sold as weights, either. There is perhaps here a play of ideas or words that escapes us; or even the difficulty of guaranteeing the exactitude of a weight in putting it under the patronage of a sacred and dreadful animal.

"The owl was sacred, since it is found mummified in the curious masses of birds of prey that were perhaps the collective offering of a village.

"The owl was feared, for the mummified specimens are always ~~not~~ mutilated. They have been completely amputated at least to the finger and to the posterior claws. Thus the claw was no longer able to close; the spirit of the bird no longer had any influence. The same mutilation is noticeable on the pictures. They are numerous in relief and in painting, the owl having borrowed its hieroglyphic form from the letter *n*. All these representations, and finally that, in the round hump, that concerns us here, deprived the animal of its front claw. This claw, being allowed to remain in eagles, hawks, and in general all wild animals, it must be believed that wild night-animals inspired a particular mistrust, more than lions and serpents, whose pictures are mutilated only in certain funeral texts. Must it be concluded from this that the owl was a sethian animal?" (124)

Here again is another example of the conflicting views that we find in our search in the symbolism of the owl. Two authors (Cheyne, Black vs. Gilbert) interpret a fact in opposing ways. The presence of mummified owls in Egyptian tombs is assigned by one author as of religious significance in the symbolism of the owl, while the other author chooses to assume that its religious significance is nil, and he makes light of the owl's supposedly sacred qualities.

For perhaps the very oldest traces of owl lore that have come down to us from ancient times we must turn to China. Figure 11 illustrates a few samples of ancient pottery in the shape of owls found in Egypt and Japan, as well as in China. But for even older owl lore we turn to the following quotation, which deals with the oldest period of Chinese art yet discovered:

change  
not follow

"The bird is one of the oldest Oriental symbols, but the Classical Chinese texts give only an incomplete idea of its meaning; a wealth of ancient myth was lost through the Confucian recension. There can be no doubt as to the connection of birds with certain sacrifices, with planets, and with the direction south....Often whole birds are represented as vessels with a movable head for a cover. (Examples of this, identified as owls, are in the collections of Mrs. W. H. Moore (New York), Mr. R. W. Bliss New York, Mr. G. Eumorfopoulos London, and Baron K. Sumitomo Kobe)....For approximate dating of the bronze the only possibility is with known material. The surface shows incrustations, cracks, and scars which are especially peculiar to the Anyang finds of the twelfth century before Christ. The treatment of ornament also corresponds to this period, which is the oldest period of Chinese art yet discovered....Consequently we must count this kettle among the most ancient pieces, dating it immediately before the Chou period....It is beyond all doubt that the owls also have a meaning here. M. Granet has ascertained from the texts their connexion with the drum, with metal casting, and with thunder and lightning....He also mentions that an owl was sacrificed to Huang ti, the first legendary ruler. This raises the question whether the owl may not be used in China as a totem, as the image of the protecting animal ancestor. Various authors give contradictory answers to this question. The chief exponent of the existence of totemism is E. Erkes (Totemism among The Chinese and their Racial Relatives, In Memoria Karl Weule, Leipzig, 1929.) But association with the hunter's belief, with totemism, that is to say, does not at first glance seem to fit the agricultural Chinese. But this can be explained if we consider that from earliest times the Chinese maintained lively relations with their northern neighbors, the barbarians of the Eurasian steppe. Their works of art are, to be sure, a thousand years younger than the Chinese bronze which is the subject of this inquiry. But the fact that peoples of slight culture preserve the most ancient of heritages requires no proof today.

"In point of fact we find the owl in almost all parts of the steppe land....In an unpublished piece in the Minussinsk museum the disk is filled in with an owl's head. Proof of the wide dissemination of this type lies in the fact that A. Heikel was able to describe a similar pair from the neighborhood of Tobolsk in West Siberia (Antiques of West Siberia, Helsingfors, 1894, pl. X, 9-10). Why this night bird should appear on an ornament may be gathered from reports on late shamanism.

"Y. Nicoradse reports (Shamanism among the Peoples of Siberia, p. 74, Stuttgart, 1925) that the eagle-owl pursues and devours evil spirits. 'Therefore the Shaman who wears the skin of an eagle-owl on his head is safe against evil spirits.'....A bronze piece from Uchta depicts the owl as the protector of man. The head has the characteristic features, while the wings have become rods and the body a broad panel. On the panel the man is depicted in a sketchy drawing, the meaning of which, however----the man embraced by his totem----is most distinct. The fact that this use of the owl is only found in the central and eastern parts of the steppe land, and not in the south-western Scythian-Sarmation part, proves that we are

dealing with a native motive. For its transference over into Chinese art we have many parallels. These, however, can seldom be traced to such an early date as can the bronze of the Moore collection.

"With the Han period (206 B. C. - 220 A.D.) Chinese art gradually outgrows its relation to mythology. The border provinces of the Empire were probably not entirely penetrated by the advance to a conscious method of artistic and decorative creation. This is not the place to prove that the tradition of the northern nomads survived on the Ordos and in southern Mongolia at least up to the end of the tenth century. In these districts we must consider, as descendants of the Siberian animal style, the simple and almost geometrically stylized animals, the smooth state of whose yellow, brass-containing bronze is the first indication that they belong to a later period. The owl also occurs in this art....As soon as the interest of collectors turns towards this forgotten group, in style lying between China and Siberia, the number of monuments should increase. And the owl, one of the dominating animal symbols of the north of Asia, will of course not be lacking.

"....Whereas other bird patterns on Chinese bronze appear frequently in profile, the owl may be represented only in front face, in the position best befitting its magic power to protect man and ward off evil....the earliest instance of the owl as a decorative motive in Chinese bronze art....is in a collection in the United States." (125)

Figure 12 illustrates some of these early owl decorations.

It appears that the symbolism of the owl in these urns is of a beneficial nature. As is to be noted, many of the earlier works on owl lore are usually of a benevolent type.

It seems that a vast amount of legendary material concerning the owl originated to account for many of the aspects of early Chinese culture. It is curious to notice, in the following quotation, how many entirely separate themes are related to this bird of night:

"The Clutton, represented on the Gauldrons of Hia with its eyes under its armholes, had for its name....P'ao-hiao, the Owl of the ferocious cries. Clutton, it is known, is the nickname of the Three-Miao. These latter, whose power Yu the Great subdued by means of a dance, live on the Three Wei Mount where one sees a bird of triple body and single head, who has the aspect of great rapacity and is named Owl....The Three Miao, banished, went to live very close to the Mount of the Heaped-Up Stones, built and excavated by Yu, and became the ancestors of the people of the blacksmiths. The Mount of the San Miao is a Mount of Birds. Kouan, father of Yu, punished for having uncovered the Magic Ground to the Sovereign, was, on another Mount of Birds, cut in pieces by the Owls....



fig 11.



fig. # 12

"K'ouei who, from the Black Woman, engendered the Glutton, seems to have been the animal of a mountain rich in red copper, where one finds also a bird that, like K'ouei, had but one foot, but nevertheless is an owl, the owl T'o, the T'o-fei.

"The T'o-fei is an owl with a human face, a single foot, that is seen in winter and hides in summer....that does not fear thunder....Tambour metamorphosed himself into a large bird; he had the aspect of an owl, red claws, straight beak, yellow marks, white head. His voice resembles that of a swan; where he appears the country suffers a great dryness....

"Is it because the owl is the animal of the founders----the metals, in order to enter into fusion require a human victim (and preferably a woman)----that he is pleased to seize little girls? A victim may be replaced by his nails; the owl is the thief of nails----The owl practices his ravages at the beginning of the year. He is called the Bird-demon, the Chariot of demons (he is also called the daughter of the Sovereign of the Sky; it is said that he is a woman dead of childbirth. There remain to him only nine heads of the ten that he had; the Dog devoured one of them: if the blood that flowed from the wound stains the clothing of a child, left out during the night, the poor little one falls into convulsions. The owl takes the souls.

"The first month of the year is a dangerous month; children born in that month are consecrated to have an unlucky destiny; in the same way those born in the fifth month and, worse yet, the fifth day of the fifth month...It is...the day of the rule of the Owl.

"On Kharix this day, in the time of Han, functionaries would receive owl-broth to drink; they still drank the owl-broth of Mia-ma....another date is assigned to this ingestion: the day of the full moon of the fifth month. Houai-nan tseu, in this connection, uses the expression kou-tsoo....that means, (if one translates word for word) the inventor of the drum; it is believed that it is applied to the owl (isn't Tambour an owl?)

"....The kou-tsoo (inventor of the drum) has the same virtues: he repulses arms and makes old age arrive at the appointed time. The kou-tsoo is an owl without doubt....At the angles of roofs, under Han, were placed, we are told, an ornament called....owl-corner or....owl-tail. (In fact, at the top of the columns that supported the roofs of palaces, figured on the sculptured bas-reliefs at the time of Han were frequently seen owls represented in their natural form.)....This ornament that served to protect against calamities of fire, was also called, it seemed....fish-tail. He who carried on himself certain flying fish had nothing to fear of thunder and that served again to repel arms....It is known that there exists at least a band of local proximity between the Owl (Tambour) and certain fish that fly by night.

"....The fifth of the fifth month, after a battle of flowers, and infusion of aromatic plants was drunk: one manufactured also with the aromatic plants some little figures of humans and suspended them....on the top of doors. (The word....to suspend.... is the equivalent for the word....that signifies to hang a head to a post and that is the current name for owl.)

Children who were born the fifth month (above all the fifth day), ~~when~~ when their size attained the height of the door, kill their parents. Now, two animals are parricidal: the p'o-king and the owl destroy their species....Owls sculptured on the angles of roofs in order to protect them against fire from the sky have without doubt replaced real owls, dried up and planted on the houses. Perhaps they were planted, like figurines of aromatic plants, above the doors.

"....The role of the owl is great at the time of the equinox in the periods where the action of Yin and Yang find themselves reversed, and above all, the fifth of the fifth month at the full of Yang....The cauldron 'glutton' is a ferocious owl that puts an end to its race....The owl (female) raises her young (males) with love. When they are big, 'they eat their mother.'

"....On the day of the equinox, one would cut owls in quarters....Owl-broth was gulped in the middle of the summer. This consomme was furnished by the prince to his vassals. Now a prince is the father and the mother of his subjects. The potion with which he gratifies them is both poison and anti-poison. It is a purge that expulses the germs of filial impiety. It is also a sacrament. Thanks to owl-broth, loyalty of the vassals is proven, at the same time that it is strengthened.

"The owl was, without doubt, at all times a terrible ~~being~~ being. Was he always an unlucky being? Did Houang-ti detest this species? If he nourished himself with owl, it is that they were sacrificed to him.

"It is known that Houang-ti is Hien-yuan. Hien-yuan is the god that presides over thunder. Houang-ti was conceived by the effect of lightning on the mountain of Hien-yuan. There exists a mountain Hien-yuan at the summit of which copper abounds. One also finds there a bird that has the aspect of an owl, and is called the Yellow Bird.---- Did Houang-ti (the Yellow Sovereign) wish to destroy an associated species? If he nourished himself with owl, it was, indeed, to the contrary, in order to feed the substance to his genius.... To him are connected all royal lines.

"The owl is the bird of thunder, and one draws on him with snake-like arrows. The snake-like arrows of the Sky (like owls) appear to have feathers: those of men (like flashes of lightning) are said to carry fire.... T'o-fei is a leather-flask owl; he is also anti-thunder. The word 'owl' figures in the name of leather-flask.... The owl-sack is the bellows of the forge: one sets it in action by beating it like a drum.... He (Houang-ti) nourished his virtue with them owls..... The son of Cheou-sin, saved at first, revolted; when he was, in turn, killed, the victor mocked the vanquished; in triumph, he called him: Owl.

".... The T'o-fei resembles the owl... whose cries pass as unlucky.... The word... kiao (composed of the sign bird and the sign wood) means: 'owl, villainous, eminent man, to plant a head on a post'.... The joining of the themes: head planted on a post, Owl-parricide and Child-parricide (when he attains the height of a door) suggests the idea that owls could be planted on median posts of doors.

".... A tradition... pretends that the woods of the game of tablets were sculptured: one represented an owl, the other a pheasant...The blow of the owl permitted eating, that is to say, to advance or name a piece, try a blow, to make a bet on Destiny.... One recalled the stroke of the owl to princes attempting a dangerous action in view of hegemony". (126)

It is interesting to notice that the owl is definitely connected with not only the earliest legendary ruler of China, but with a famous, non-fictitious one as well, namely Genghis Khan. There exists a figure in the arms shield of the Tartar in memory of the saving of Genghis by an owl. (127) This tale is given more fully in the following quotation:

".... that the Tartars attributed to the barn-owl and the saving of the life of their great commander Genghis Khan.... Genghis Khan had his horse shot under him in a certain fight that was going against him, and he ran and hid it in a thicket of shrubs, whither, when the enemies were returned, with purpose to spoil the dead carcass and seek out such as were hidden, it happened that an Owl came and sat upon those little trees or shrubs which he had chose for his court, which when they had perceived they sought no further in that place, supposing that the said bird would not have sat there if any man had been hidden underneath." (128)

There are other periods of Chinese art in which the owl plays an important role. Shang and early Chou periods are among these, and it is believed that all of the objects discussed in the following paragraph can be assigned to a common workshop:

"The decoration is largely symbolic. After discussing various other figures of animals and monsters, the development of the owl is considered. Almost every monster mask on the Shang and Early Chou bronze is dominated by the owl, which forms the central part (nostrils, nose, eyes and forehead) of each mask. From near naturalism the figure becomes conventionalized, and often difficult to recognize. No matter what form the monster mask takes (buffalo, ram, stag, etc.) the owl always appears. In the Chou dynasty (ca. 1100 to 200 B. C.) it gradually disappears, for a reason as yet unknown." (128)

China, for which some claim the origin of chemistry, can again be considered also as the originator of many symbolisms, moods, and significances concerning the owl. The great

antiquity of the country makes it very suitable for claims of originality and initial impulses. If through the contact of western and eastern civilization the symbolism of the owl might have been transferred from Asia to Europe, in this case the origin of the symbolism would be Chinese. But it is also known that spontaneous appearance of similar beliefs pertaining to the same object in different localities is not only possible, but indeed probable. The fact of the isolation of China in early times can only add further weight to the idea of an independent western development of symbolism without direct support in its symbolism from the East, and if any influence occurred, this must have been surreptitious. This would seem to strengthen claims for origin of owl symbolism for the Greek and other early European cultures. Yet until more is known of the large migrations and their cultural remains and influences claimed to originate from Asia towards Europe, no absolute definite conclusion can be drawn, and China's claim for paternity cannot be ignored.

A wealth of material on the owl originates in India, where we find two general sources: first, the folklore of the people, imbued with superstition, ignorance, [ignorance], and fear; and secondly, the Panchatantra, a Sanskrit collection of beast-fables originated by Hindus who wished to delete the Buddhist references from the JATACAS, then-famous stories of the reincarnated lives of Buddha. We shall present some of this material here, with emphasis upon its original qualities rather than a later interpretation of these:

"The women of India, hearing the hooting of the ghugu /owl/ shut the ominous sounds from their ears by wrapping their sarees round their heads.... Of the nocturnal accipitres of Ceylon, the most remarkable is the brown owl, Syrnium indrani, Sykes, which from its hideous yell has acquired the name of the devil bird. The Singhalese regard it literally with horror, and its scream by night in the vicinity of a village is bewailed as the harbinger of impending calamity. There is a popular legend in connection with it, to the effect that a morose and savage husband, who suspected the fidelity of his wife, availed himself of her absence to kill her child, of whose paternity he was doubtful, and on her return placed before her a curry prepared from its flesh. Of this the unhappy woman partook, till, discovering the crime by finding the finger of her infant, she fled in frenzy to the forest, and there destroyed herself. On her death she was metamorphosed according to the Buddhist belief, into an ulama, or devil bird, which still at nightfall horrifies the villagers by repeating the frantic screams of the bereaved mother in her agony....Mr. Mitford, of the Ceylon Civil Service, also regards the identification of the Singhalese devil bird as open to doubts. He says, 'The devil bird is an owl. I never heard it until I came to Kornegalle, where it haunts the rocky hill at the back of Government House.'" (129)

"Its voice, heard mostly after dark, is a mixture of harsh discordant screams and weird snoring and hissing notes. It is eerie and unpleasant, and no doubt responsible for many of the superstitions prevalent in India which brand the owl as a bird of ill omen....The flesh and bones of the Barn-Owl are highly prized by quacks and medicine men as charms, and as a cure for rheumatism and paralysis." (130)

"In the Panjab, the Owl is the symbol of extreme stupidity." (131)

"In the Sanskrit collections of apologues and tales called the Panchatantra (Five Chapters) and the Hitopadesa (Friendly Advice) the King of the Crews compares the hostile Owl, who arrives towards night, to Yama, the god of the dead." (132)

Other parts of Asia have similarly developed their beliefs which are reflected in owl lore, and which reiterate the mood and superstition already mentioned. Typical of these is the following:

"Even amongst the Land Dayaks of Borneo, the owl is considered a bird of ill omen," (133)

In the Bible and in other materials closely related to Biblical times, and in the general Biblical geography, we find references to the owl. Unfortunately, in the Ancient Talmud there is no specific word for "owl", and some words used to signify it also mean other night-birds, rendering material for our purposes confusing. Still [and all], we find references in this group of early Biblical and related times that we should like to mention:

The owl, "like the Raven, is used by a prophet to typify the desolation of Zion." (134)

Leviticus 11, "And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten....And the owl and the night-hawk, and the osprey, and the hawk after his kind, And the little owl, and the screech-owl, and the great owl." (135)

Job 30, 29: "I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls." (136)

Psalms 102, 6: "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am an owl of the desert." (137)

Isaiah 13, 21: "But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of desolate creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and scorpions shall dance there." (138)

Micah 1, 8: "Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls." (139)

"....and in view of the bad association of these birds in the Old Testament, where they are pronounced 'unclean', and relegated to the desert as companions of a dreadful company (Isaiah XXXIV, II) it was natural that owls should be regarded with almost insane fear and aversion in the Middle Ages, as the record shows they were." (140)



fig. # 13

owl through the air was carefully watched by the leader of a defeated army and to the spot where he alighted he would lead his men, 'protected by the wings of the owl.' Many stories are told of escapes from imminent danger due to an owl....The ancestral shark gods....appear in other than shark forms, as owls." (146)

In two of the greatest civilizations of ancient days, the Greek and the Roman, we find numerous references to the owl. It is undoubtedly true, to a certain extent, that much of the owl-lore of the Romans was derived from Grecian influences, just as were many other aspects of Roman culture, yet a good deal of the superstition concerning the owl in Rome was inherently and intrinsically its own, just as we find similar superstitions arising independently in various countries of the ancient world. The literature of the great Roman age presents much of this owl-lore from the pen of many writers, thus reflecting a most strong belief of the times. The following quotations are representative of this:

"The dead body of the Owl was used for magic charms and in incantations. Horace makes it one of the ingredients in Candida's infernal mixture. Propertius mingles it in his love-charm. Ovid makes Medea consummate her horrid cauldron with 'wonder-working juices' with  
"A screech-owl's carcass, and ill-omened wings." (147)

"Medea's incantation:....'the heart of a boding owl, and a hearse screech-owl's vitals cut out alive.'" (148)

"Ovid, in the 5th book of his Metamorphoses, relates how Ascalapus was transformed by Ceres into an owl and condemned to predict evil, because he had accused her to Jove of having eaten a young pomegranate in secret, against the prohibition:

"Ill-omened in his form, the unlucky fowl,  
Abhorred by man, and called a screeching owl." (149)

"According to Ovid, the screech-owl was supposed to destroy children if they were not watched." (150)

"Ovid gives a graphic description of the striges, or screech-owls, monsters allied to the harpies, who carried off children in the night-time when their nurses' backs were turned." (151)

"The horror of the owl's nocturnal scream has been equally prevalent in the west as in the east. Ovid introduces it in his *Fasti*, L. vi p. 139, but Tibullus in his elegies, L. i. El. v. says Pliny, lxi. c. 93, doubts as to what bird produced the hated sound; and the details of Ovid's description do not apply to the owl." (152)

"In the fragments of Menander it is said that 'if the owl should cry we have reason to be afraid.' Pliny terms the bird 'bubo funebris et maxime abominatus.'" (153)

"Pliny (Gaius Plinius Secundus, A.D. 61-115) informs us that on one occasion a horned owl entered the very sanctuary of the Capitol!...in consequence of which Rome was purified on the nones of March in that year." (154)

"Night birds also have hooked talons, for instance the little owl, the eagle-owl, and the screech-owl. All of these are dim-sighted in the daytime. The eagle-owl is a funereal bird, and is regarded as an extremely bad omen, especially at public auspices; it inhabits deserts and places that are not merely unfrequented but terrifying and inaccessible; a weird creature of the night, its cry is not a musical note but a scream. Consequently, when seen in cities or by daylight in any circumstances it is a direful portent; but I know several cases of its having perched on the houses of private persons without fatal consequences. It never flies in the direction where it wants to go, but travels slantwise out of its course. In the consulship of Sextus Palpellius Nister and Lucius Pedanius an eagle-owl entered the very shrine of the Capitol, on account of which a purification of the city was held on March 7th in that year.... I also notice that the bird named by the ancients 'clivia' is unidentified---some call it 'screech-owl', *Labeo* 'warning-owl'; and moreover a bird is cited in Nigidius that breaks eagles' eggs....On the subject of the auguries of foreign races the writings of an author named Nylas, are deemed to be the most learned. He states that the night-owl, eagle-owl, woodpecker, trygona, and raven come out of the egg tail first, because the eggs are turned the wrong way up by the weight of the heads and present the hinder part of the chicks' bodies to the mother to cherish. Night-owls wage a crafty battle against other birds. When surrounded by a crowd that outnumbers them they lie on their backs and defend themselves with their feet, and bunching themselves up close are entirely protected by their beak and claws. Through a kind of natural alliance the hawk comes to their aid and takes part in the war. Nigidius relates that night-owls hibernate for 60 days every winter, and that they have nine cries....But in the matter of the withdrawal of birds, it is stated that even night-owls go into retreat for a few

days. It is said that this kind does not exist in the islands of Crete and even that if one is imported there it dies off." (155)

"Virgil introduces it /the owl/ amongst the prodigies and horrors that preceded the death of Dido, and make of it

"....complain,

In lengthened shriek, and dire funereal strain." (156)

"Apuleius tells us that a draught of spring water, mixed with laurel leaves and a little anise, restores a witch to her normal shape after she has turned herself into an owl." (157)

"As Jove assumed the shape of an Eagle, so Juno selected that of an Owl, for, as Aldrovandus tells us, it was not decorous that the queen should take on herself the likeness of any small or vulgar bird, but rather that she should be embodied in one whose reign by night was equal with that of the eagle by day." (158)

Aside from the literature of the time, there were many beliefs and superstitions current in that period, some of which we shall mention here:

"In Rome it was customary to nail the dead bodies of owls to the doors of houses, in order to protect the inmates from the dreaded influence of the living birds." (159)

"The Romans twice purified the city with water and sulphur on account of the appearance of the Great Owl in the temples, to which allusion is made by Butler in his Hudibras." (160)

"History tells us that an owl once flew into the city of Rome and as a result the place was purified and sacrifices offered to propitiate the gods and avert trouble.

"Before the death of the Roman emperor Antonius, an owl was observed to sit over his chamber door.

"The Actian Wag was foretold by owls flying into the Temple of Concord in Rome." (161)

"The owl was reckoned a bird of evil omen with the Romans, who derived this opinion from the Etruscans, along with much else of their so-called science of augury. It was particularly dreaded if seen in a city, or, indeed, anywhere by day." (162)

It is also worthy of mention that the Romans adopted the Greek goddess Athena for one of their own dieties, naming

her Minerva in/ the Roman version. And "when the Romans took over Athena or Minerva her owl came with her, but its symbolic importance quickly faded." (163)

The following two quotes<sup>163</sup> we believe to be worthy of mention in our discussion of ancient civilizations:

"Paley thinks that the notion that these birds were a sort of magic creation arose from their hovering about the tombs at night; and hence, in turn, their feathers were used in incantations." (164)

"In the ancient pharmacopoeia [medicaments] which savoured not a little magic, the owl appears to have been great medicine." (165)

Greece, the mother of much of our culture and civilization, that has led and forged for the world a path of wisdom, appears also to have been wise to nature. For it was in this great civilization with its infinite logical and aesthetic feeling that owls, instead of being cast into oblivion or avoided, were respected, and as our following quotations prove, the Greeks felt honored by their presence.

"Aristophenes (translated by Frene)....

"The grizzly sprite of Chaerophon  
Flitted round him, and appear'd  
With the eyebrows and her beard  
Like a strange infernal fowl  
Half a Vampire, half an Owl." (166)

"It is said that Demosthenes, before going into exile, declared that Pallas Athens delighted in three fear-inspiring beasts----the Owl, the dragon, and the Athenian people." (167)

"This bird /the owl/ was an attribute of the goddess Minerva, signifying serious meditation." (168)

"The Katyegle (or Owl) is consecrated to the goddess of wisdom....the Bird of Pallas----the bird of 'profound meditation' and 'prophecy'. The Serpent, which was also one of Pallas Athene's 'familiar' represents her

wisdom, and the Owl her reflective and prophetic attributes." (169)

"Among the ancients the owl was regarded on the one hand as a portent of dire calamity and its appearance near a sick chamber an omen of death; on the other, it appears as the bird of wisdom, the symbol of the goddess Athene." (170)

"Minerva (Athena), the goddess of wisdom, with helmet, golden staff, and shield bearing an image of Medusa's head, is associated in the engraving with the owl, which was sacred to her in Greek mythology." (171)

"Owl....Sacred to Athene. Car drawn by owls, Pallas Athene." (172)

"Athene was styled Glaucopsis owl-eyed. This symbol of the Owl, according to Payne Knight, was adopted for the goddess of wisdom because the owl 'was a bird which seems to surpass all other creatures in acuteness of organic perception, its eye being designed to observe objects which, to all others are enveloped in darkness, its ear to hear sounds distinctly, and its nostrils to discriminate effluvia with such nicety that it has been deemed prophetic, from discovering the putridity of death, even in the first stages of the disease.'....Its alarming scream has probably often had such effect on the weak nerves of an invalid as actually to hasten death." (173)

"Their /owls'/ retired habits, the desolate places that are their favorite haunts, their hollow hootings, fearful shrieks, serpent-like hissings and coffin-maker-like snappings, have helped to give them a bad eminence, more than overbalancing all the glory that Minerva and her own Athenas could shed around them." (174)

"Athena: As a diety of the sky, she, with Zeus, is the mistress of the thunder and lightning." (175)

"In many statues, accordingly, she /Athene/ is represented as hurling the thunderbolt. She also sends down from the sky to earth light and warmth and fruitful dew, and with them prosperity to fields and plants. A whole series of fables and usages, belonging especially to Athenian religion represent her as the helper and protector of agriculture.

"Athenè was very generally regarded as the goddess of war....she was supposed to be able to send storms and bad weather....But her courage is a wise courage, not a blind rashness....As the personification of victory (Athene Nike) she had a second and especial temple on the Athenian Acropolis....She is the protectress of growing children; and as the goddess of the clear sky and of pure air, she bestows health and keeps off sickness....Speaking broadly, Athene represents human wit and cleverness, and presides over the whole moral

and intellectual side of human life. From her are derived all the productions of wisdom and understanding, every art and science, whether of war or of peace. A number of discoveries, of the most various kinds, ~~is~~ ascribed to her ....invention of the plough and the yoke....inventress of horse-taming and ship-building....Even in Homer all the productions of women's art, as of spinning and weaving, are characterized as 'works of Athene'....She is the inventor of the flute and the trumpet, as well as of the Pyrrhic war-dance....goddess of peace." (176)

The close relation between Athena and owls is usually encountered by her representation in the form and shape of an owl; sometimes the owl was modified in its shape to represent more of the shape of a woman. Coins in Athens usually had owls engraved on them. It has become symbolic to represent Athens ~~by~~ with an owl. Even the popular saying "Owls to Athens" emphasizes their importance in the religious and everyday life of the Athenians. Medals and prizes given by the Greek government emphasize the close relation between the city and owls. During the centenary of Marcelin Berthelot (177) the Greek government sent an official testimony from which the head-piece is reproduced in Figure 13. It is a symbolic drawing of a small owl followed by typical Greek adornments. The drawing is reminiscent of old coins used in Greece. It is evident the owl was greatly esteemed and liked by the ancient Greeks. Their respect and appreciation is easily seen by the subsequent quotations:

"The Athenians, however, amongst whom the bird /owl/ was the symbol of Pallas Athene, regarded its appearance on the eve of battle as a presage to victory." (178)

"Therefore one need not speculate on the reputed 'wisdom' of the owl----said to be proved wise by its

There is apparently no  
page numbered 55.

being the only bird that looks straight before it---- for that reputation is merely a reflection from the attributes of its patron, the stately goddess. Homer makes Athene the special protector of those, chiefly women, engaged in textile crafts; and there is an old saying that the owl was a weaver's daughter, spinning with silver threads. When, therefore, in the midst of the momentous naval battle of Salamis an owl alighted on the mast of the flagship of Admiral Themistocles, as tradition attests, it was received as an assurance from Pallas Athene herself that she was fighting with and for the harrassed Greeks." (179)

"Owl, Sacred to Athene, goddess of wisdom. Owl-headed vases....found." (180)

"The owl was sacred to Athene, goddess of wisdom. Owl-headed vases....were unearthed by Schliemann. These sacred vases were associated with the archaic Greek worship of Athene. Some were found with wings showing their sacred character." (181)

"Only the Athenians loved it [the owl] without reserve, to the point of making it an attribute to Pallas, the bird of wisdom and the emblem of their city. All over besides, one cursed the birds of night, in spite of their usefulness as great hunters of rats. Their silent theft, the piercing light of their eyes, winking bizarrely during the day, the cry, so gentle in certain species, but husky, inhuman, put good people very ill at ease.

"These birds, like cats, have their secret. The dog lives for man. The cat and the owl have their world to themselves, independent of ours. And their calm seems to be able to come only from a satisfaction that escapes us. That is why, probably, the Athenians believed in the wisdom of the owl. And that is why, also, other peoples made it into a demon. They understood only themselves, and what they did not understand was an enemy to them. From there come those popular customs, too often cruel, towards cats and night-birds, whose placidity is an injury to our agitation. They do not need us. We will not pardon them for this." (182)

Following this information, we can only conjecture on why the owl was used symbolically in alchemy. It appears clearly that its symbolism is mainly represented by two opposite trends of thought:

one trend the symbolism of protection, wisdom, wit, social introversion, perception, thoughtfulness, inventiveness, intelligence, intuitiveness, sagacity, calm, reflection, healing prophecy, bondship between people, honor, and even holiness; the other trend one of cruelty, perversion, fiendishness, ominous calamity, horror, fear, hatred, trickiness, terror, frenzy, stupidity, death, sickness, theft, bad luck, taciturnity, foolishness, buffoonery, melancholy, loneliness, eeriness, weirdness, illegal behavior, gruesomeness, treachery, destruction, plague, defeat, and evil.

We feel that in the alchemical mind the owl definitely stood for the first of these trends because of the very nature and behavior of the alchemists, their search for power and the wisdom that led to it, their working custom determined by the inadequacy of equipment and facilities which we consider today fundamental not only to work, but to essential life comforts.

The symbolism in its other form could only apply to a small number of the alchemists, really only determined to gain power through fear, bias, and low morality. Yet the "people" during the alchemical period sometimes regarded the alchemist as a social outcast, a libertine, and the devil's friend, with the unavoidable result that his association with the owl, in their minds, did not represent integrity, profundity, and wisdom. This occurred partially because of the gullibility, ignorance, and superstition of the people. Also the

serraptitious methods and "quackery" of the alchemists themselves did not help to dispel this popular misconception.

*John de Witt Powell*  
[The future] showed that when the alchemist did abandon some of his early intuitive methods for basic experimental procedures, his serraptitiousness and taciturnity diminished, and in the mind of the people, the association of the owl changed. Later, as chemistry integrated itself the owl as such was no longer associated with the earlier alchemical manifestations. The symbolism of the owl, no longer touched by alchemy, then returned to its earlier associations, and in present days it is only with some exceptions that the tint of "chemia" impinges upon it.

*in present times  
or  
at the present day*

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