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**Urszula Szulakowska.** *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation.* Leiden: Brill, 2006. xii + 180 pp. $155.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-15025-6.


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In this volume, Urszula Szulakowska unveils a too often forgotten branch of the history of ideas in the early modern period: alchemical conceptions developed in a mainly Protestant context that nonetheless differed from the orthodox definition of Lutheranism. Relying upon the iconography of alchemical images and illustrations, she illuminates a discourse that saw itself as Christian but transformed dogmatic topics such as the teaching on the Lord's Supper and the end of the world by means of presupposed pansophic concepts. Six names appear again and again in this impressive book: Jacob Boehme, Robert Fludd, Abraham Franckenberg, Heinrich Khunrath, Michael Maier and Stefan Michelspacher. One could argue that not all of these men should be seen as alchemists in the strict sense, but that instead "theosophy" would be a more appropriate concept for binding them together. These men do, however, play a significant role in the author's main argument. The bibliography is extensive, and the sources have been analyzed carefully by the author, who develops her picture on a broad source basis, justifying a comprehensive theosophic, or if you prefer, alchemist corpus.

In the first chapter, the author shows the conflicts between originally pagan and Christian iconography in Renaissance alchemy. She demonstrates how Khunrath and Fludd made the relationship of microcosmos and macrocosmos the center of their images and concepts, based on Paracelsian speculations. The wide use of ancient material in her sources makes one wonder why Szulakowska does not look for parallels to Hildegard of Bingen, a strategy that could open the discussion to another, more visionary motivation for these images and concepts. But one point is important for understanding the author's argument: Szulakowska stresses that speculation about the microcosmos and macrocosmos was closely related to an understanding of Christ mainly as "Son of Man," which is an apocalyptic term by origin that underlines the connection between alchemical and apocalyptic thinking.

Szulakowska's second chapter is very impressive. Starting with a discussion of an engraving by Khunrath that shows an alchemist praying in

front of something like an altar in his laboratory, the author examines the parallels of alchemical thinking with the Catholic interpretation of Eucharist, particular as both concern the transmutation of substances. Even if some of the author's discussions of Reformation teaching look a bit scanty from the perspective of a theologian, Szulakowska provides convincing insights about the crossovers that were possible in the confessional age.

As the author shows in the third chapter, it is their interest in the changing of substances that leads alchemists to reflect not only on the Lord's Supper but also on the Last Day and its foretold reunification of the bodies and souls of the dead. This discussion brings her, in the fourth chapter, back to her opening questions. The themes discussed up to this point in the volume center around the problems of the relationship between the body of Christ and the bodies of men, and form the basis for reflections on a cosmological Son of Man. Szulakowska brilliantly brings her topics together, opening a deeper understanding of the relationship of Christian and theosophic, or alchemical, discourse. Indeed, with this chapter, she convincingly proves her argument, which makes her work an important contribution to our understanding of early modern times. Subsequent chapters are no less precise, but seem to be more like supplements to the main theme, illustrating the main thesis and looking for its outgrowths in early modern societies. They discuss the question of religious tradition, Fludd's concept of sacramental medicine and the teachings of Boehme and Falckenberg.

This book is important, but it would have profited from a closer look at actual historical debates in early modern scholarship. While the study is a great addition the cultural history of this period, the German reader, at least, is astonished to find that the author writes about the confessions and an alternative to the confessional culture of Lutheranism without reflecting on the theory of confessionalization, which appears to be the most influential theoretical concept of the last three decades for understanding the period in question. One also would like to know more about how Szulakowska's results would affect the dominant view, which suggests that territories consolidated themselves increasingly by means of confessional self-definition in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The author hints that the ways in which thinkers conceptualized the spiritual and material world during this period were not only more subversive but more open-minded and creative than is normally thought. This implicit assertion leads the reader to questions about the impact of this way of thinking for the fate of the Enlightenment, and could explain Johannes Fried's theory on the connection between apocalyptic and scientific thinking from medieval to modern times.[1] The author does not point out questions like these, but her rich book nevertheless provides a foundation from which to pursue these topics. This interesting and provocative volume deserves to be discussed and used and by scholars of early modernity.

Note

[1]. Johannes Fried, *Aufstieg aus dem Untergang. Apokalyptisches Denken und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaft im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 2001).

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