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«The water of the philosophers is fire.»

MINERAL RECIPE

Lydia Xynogala

Lydia Xynogala, born 1983, is an architect and doctoral fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich where she writes about the making of a culture of care centered around natural resources in 20th century Greece. Her practice constructs architecture, landscapes, objects and stories (ALOS). Lydia taught at Columbia GSAPP, The Cooper Union, City College and RPI and studied architecture at the Bartlett, The Cooper Union and Princeton University. She received a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Greek Architecture Award for best built project by a young architect. Recent texts have been published at «gta papers» and «e-flux architecture».

*«First regimen: Earth to water.
Second regimen: Water to air.
Third regimen: Air to fire.» (1)*

... or so did the alchemists believe. Elements can be converted into one another, or, as C. G. Jung posits, «synthesized in the quintessence» (2). For him, transmutations of substances also apply to psychic realms. These «regimina» or «procedures» were central in alchemistic thought: oscillating between earth, water, fire and air, and the four qualities of being hot, cold, dry and moist.

This text is an alchemical recipe.

I source ingredients from my own field work and from other co-travelers in Greece. It is a recipe with fire, earth and water, mixed with bodies. To bathe in mineral waters, a form of care. To immerse in the environments constructed around them. Sulfuric hallucinations and saline immersions in a time of pandemic. Transmutations of minerals through fire, of aching bodies (and minds) to healed ones. Water and fire are believed to be antagonistic, but perhaps we should reconsider this perception, since «the water of the philosophers is fire» (3).

The recipe follows the twelve operations of the alchemists as established by Josephus Quercetanus, the French alchemist and physician in 1576. (4) These steps should be followed in a precise sequence in order to create the philosopher's stone. While these operations were not originally written about water, thermal baths or the body, we can notice the affinities between transformations of matter as they are found in alchemical texts and the elements participating in a mineral bath.

Each of these steps can have more than one meaning or action. You can interpret and associate them freely with C. G. Jung, Josephus Quercetanus or other companions.

INSTRUCTIONS (IN TWELVE STEPS)

*«The alchemist, like the smith, and like the potter before him,
is a «master of fire». It is with fire that he controls the passage
of matter from one state to another.» (5)*

For any good alchemical recipe one needs fire and a vessel. Choose yours: pit, tub, bath, basin, pool, hydrotherapy building. The vessel, in whichever form it is found, must be resting on a mineral spring. Bodies, waters and minerals will be mixed in this vessel. Fire, coming from within the core of the earth, will heat them. But do not forget that «the vessel of the philosophers is their water» (6).

I CALCINATIO (CALCINATION)

Fire. Burning. Magma. Lava. Fumes. Ashes. Steam. Heat.

«He asks [...] to be sprinkled with his own moisture and slowly calcined till he shall arise in glowing form from the fierce fire [...] Behold a wondrous restoration and renewal [...].» (7)

○ Enter the thermal zone. ○ Notice the invisible tectonic shifts releasing the fire from the earth's core. ○ This is your furnace and laboratory: Greece, mainland, the islands, there are many moments of release. ○ Find the openings on the ground, follow the smell and feel the temperature of water. ○ You know that the fire is there, things are burning.

II SOLUTIO (SOLUTION)

The water operation.

«Because of the bath of rebirth he takes a new name, which the philosophers call the natural sulphur and their son, this being the stone of the philosophers». (8)

○ Enter into the solution. ○ Take time for the body to get used to this new form of floating. ○ Of being in space. ○ Whichever your choice of vessel, it determines your body's movement. ○ Close your eyes and let the minerals do the work. ○ Tubs: of marble. Pools: of concrete or tiled surfaces. ○ Notice the leeches that grow on them. ○ Pits: rocky, sometimes smooth, sometimes rough. ○ Hydrotherapy buildings: often of the volcanic stone that makes up their ground geology. ○ Solitary structures in the landscape.

III ELEMENTORIUM SEPARATION (SEPARATION OF ELEMENTS)

«Roger Bacon says: The first destruction of the world took place by means of water; the second will take place by means of fire; therefore it is already here.» (9)

○ Sulfur, iron, calcium, magnesium, they will leave the waters and enter your body. ○ Try it for example in Methana Vromolimni (Stench Lake). ○ Enter the water through the remains of a former slaughterhouse. ○ Notice the bubbles and yellowish sea water hue. This is the sulfur. ○ You may have tried to enter the bathhouse close by. ○ Dormant for years but watch the water bubble around it, the fire continues from below. ○ Architectures are connected to earthy fluids through pipes. (fig. b) ○ Everyone is mitigating their healing in the sea nearby. ○ Ropes attached to the rocks assist the elderly bathers. Hold on to them.



(fig. a)

In the spring in Methana. Image: by the author

IV CONIUNCTIO (CONJUNCTION) (10)

Continue here, in Vromolimni:

○ Enter the waters with S. early on a spring morning, at 8 am, no other bathers around. ○ Adjust from 28.5 to 34.4 degrees Celsius. ○ Small white particles, flake-like, float in the water and look like organisms. ○ On the rocks, look at myriads of insects that seem to multiply. ○ Realize that the water has other life forms besides us humans. ○ Invisible to the eye, a type of bacteria that proliferates in thermal waters. ○ Ingredients now for pharmaceutical companies. ○ Organisms that survive under extreme conditions, are collected and cooked into new drugs. ○ Healing new bacteria they say. ○ Other substances from here have also migrated. ○ Sulfur pigment was exported to Italy, a bather once said. ○ The mud, another ingredient, extracted and used in the bathhouse. ○ Rocks, prickly pears, sulfur all around. ○ Hold the makeshift ropes and float. Really, try to float. No sulfur in your eyes. ○ You will stay for twenty minutes. ○ This is the average recommended time, so take care not to exceed this. ○ Not sure what happens to you if you do.

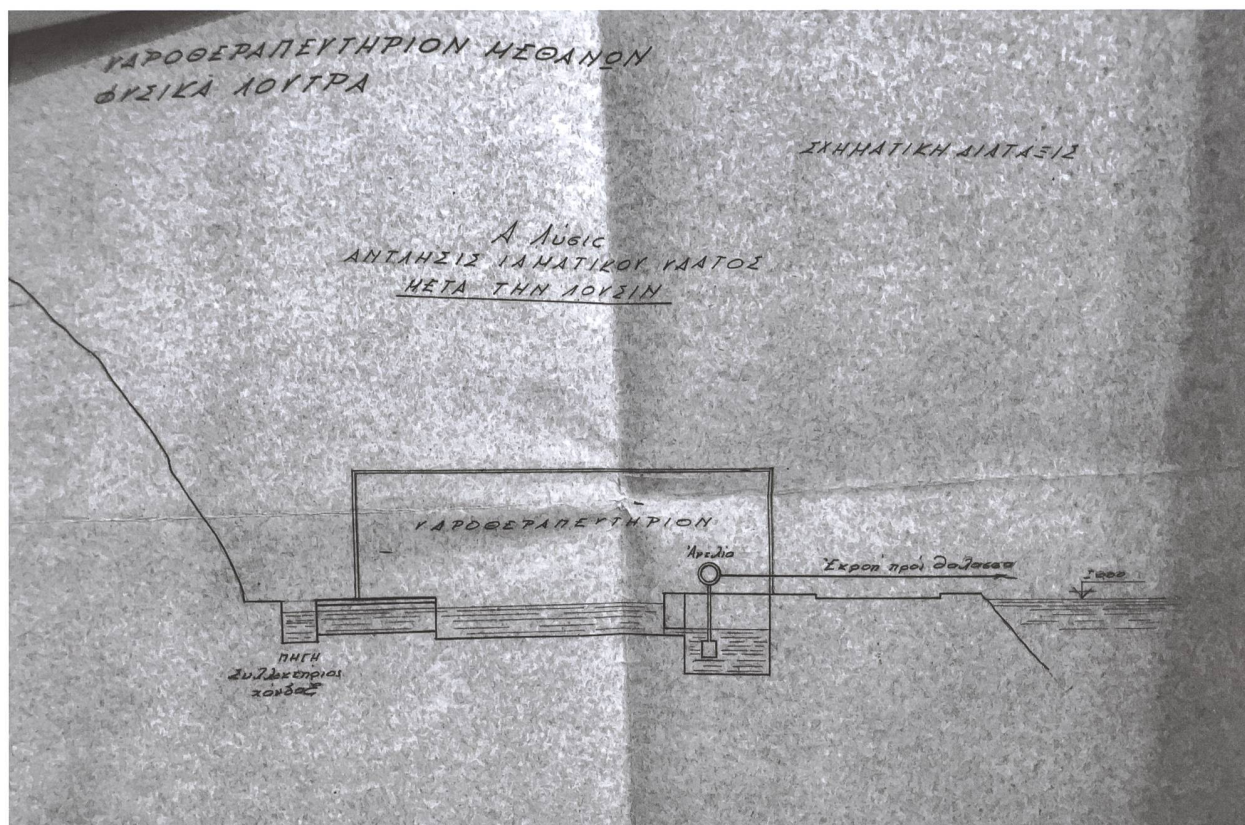
V PUTREFACTIO (PUTREFACTION, ROTTING)

«There are two kinds of water; the first dissolves and makes its subject spongy ; the other completes the operation. This is truly fire, and even stronger than fire, for it is a universal solvent. One is simple, though evil, the other is composite; both are philosophical. The Water is Adam, the Earth is Eve, and these two are one flesh. They are also called [...] Salt Water, [...] Sea Water, [...] Soul, Wind, Air, Life, the Illuminating Gift, Broad Daylight, [...] Red Sulphuric Water, Gummy Water, the Male, Tartar, Saffron Water, Burnt Ore, White Composition, Putrid Water, Putrefaction of Dead Bodies, [...] Vase of the Philosophers, of which the upper part is called the Grand Man, or Head-piece, the middle is called Belly, the end is called Foot. When the vessel is put in the oven, a vapour rises into the funnel, and passes as water.» (11)

○ Go to Aidipsos. (fig. c) ○ The spring crosses a concrete platform and ends on a rock. ○ If the Vase of the Philosophers is a Body, then feel the spring with your Foot. ○ You may stand under it, touch it. Like glue, like slime, minerals are stratifying on its surface.

VI COAGULATIO (COAGULATION)

○ In this step watch the substances crystallize into solids. ○ To turn something into earth. (12) ○ Here, find heaviness, permanence, fixed shape and position. ○ In this process, nothing disappears into the air. ○ Things no longer adapt to the shape of the vessel as water does. ○ Liquids become solid,



(fig. b) Blueprint showing the location of the spring relative to the hydrotherapy bath building in Methana. Image: by the author



(fig. c) The mineral springs in Aidipsos. Image: postcard found by the author

like the skin healing from a wound. ○ Be earth. Stop moving. Stay where you are, just for a while. ○ Be solid and not water.

VII CIBATIO (CIBATION)

The feeding of a substance in a vessel, with liquid.

«But if the powers have tripled, and you desire to increase the potency and strength still further, then take water. If, on the other hand, you wish to increase the substance and the quantity, then take sulphur, or the first matter of the stone, and cook it with the elixir.» (13)

○ Take the boat to Nisyros, find the location Loutra (Baths). ○ The building sits next to the spring. ○ Enter. Rooms, along a long corridor. ○ Each contains a marble tub. ○ Water evaporates, drips, echoes, watch its reflections. ○ Now it is time to feed the vessel with fresh matter. ○ Refill the tub the next day. ○ Let the water flow once again for a new immersion, this is the way. ○ Try it daily. An elixir. ○ Stay, two weeks or longer. ○ Return, every year. You must return.

VIII SUBLIMATIO (SUBLIMATION)

«Most of these, [...] were once hot. Then the fire originally in them was extinguished, but the earth through which they percolate still remains like ashes and cinders. There exist in many places springs and streams with all kinds of flavours, and the cause of all these flavours must be the fire that is or was present.» (14)

○ Environments around you will change from solid to vapor state and back. Remember, in 1937, one hundred thousand baths were taken here in Methana (15). ○ At the other end of the bay, find the second spring. ○ NaCl. No sulfur here, different taste, no smell. The book says, to adjust to the 41.2 degrees Celsius. (16) ○ Try the water with S. upon arrival one evening. ○ Lukewarm, salty, but you remembered it hot last August. ○ Observe F. bathing there in the mornings. ○ Consult F., if you have questions. She knows. (fig. a) ○ She came to Methana in the 60s as a model to advertise the bath town. ○ She has been coming back since.

IX FERMENTATIO (FERMENTATION)

○ Aidipsos, rocks fermenting for centuries. ○ Feel them, steaming hot at the beach. ○ Inhale the vapors coming out of a nook, like an incision into the earth's core. ○ Covered in an earthly crust, dripping water, constantly enriches it with minerals. ○ Join those who sit on it and who, once in a while,

take some boiling hot water with their hand and thrust it into their bodies. ○ A woman pours warm water onto the back of another woman. ○ A gathering of nature, matter, corporeality. ○ Two stalactites above you. ○ A. has climbed over the rock and observes, «it glitters».

X EXALTATIO (EXALTATION)

«Exaltation is achieved by means of successive lustrations. Wash away the impure refuse, and reduce the matter to a pure state». (17)

○ Aidipsos. ○ Find the pits by the sea where men and women lay still in the shallow water. ○ Be careful, one man spent a long time in there and felt weak. ○ His body replenished by all of the minerals, 60 degrees Celsius. ○ The body at that temperature can no longer receive new minerals, it is detoxifying. ○ Along with that, it loses minerals. In a basin nearby, at the municipal hydrotherapy building, the water temperature is close to the body's. ○ With this water to body equilibrium, the pores open up, minerals enter. ○ Here you stock up, you do not lose. ○ Wash away, don't worry. ○ Find the platform over the rock at the beach with pink concrete. ○ Pink, orange ground and the blue of the sea. ○ Follow the stream of water down the concrete channel. ○ Sometime ago the municipality charged for touching and inhaling the rock. ○ Stone into gold, into stone.

XI AUGMENTATIO (AUGMENTATION)

«Lapis Philosophicus- [...] Outwardly, it is a Tincture. Or it is that Universal Medicine by which age is renewed in youth, metals are transmuted, and all diseases cured [...] It is the Stone of the Wise whereby the imperfect metals are improved. The augmentation of the Philosophical Stone takes place [...] in such a way that itself becomes elixir.» (18)

○ Thermopyles (Hot Gates). ○ Go with L. and sit by the waterfall. ○ In the building next to you, women used to knit while inhaling the vapors. ○ Behind you, the former bath hotel is now a refugee unwelcoming welcome center. ○ Around you children splash in the waters. ○ The possibility of renewal and its shadow.

XII PROIECTIO (PROJECTION)

«Fire played the same role as water.» (19)

Some others have tried the twelve steps.

- (S) said that his feet felt warmer.
- (K) who could not walk from pain said she could now climb the volcano.
- (C) said if she missed a bathing season she could not get through the winter.
- (G) hallucinated in a spectrum of colors after a sulfuric immersion.
- (L) said she was relaxed.
I had a heavy head but a light body.
- (S) said her eye irritation went away.
- (F) treated her Osteoarthritis. When she stopped coming for nine years the pains returned.
- (A) said his skin irritation went away.
- (F) goes every year.
- (A) said he did not believe in it.
- (S) wanted to return to the waters.