

## The Story of Gellert's Book at the Osler Library

In 1997 I asked our librarian at Laval University to locate and borrow for me the German book by Gellert *Anfangsgründe der metallurgischen Chemie* [Figure 1] published in 1751 because it has historical interest - - Christlieb Ehregott Gellert (1713-1795) was the first professor of chemistry and metallurgy at the Mining Academy in Freiberg on its foundation in 1765. His name would be translated in English as Love-Christ Respect-God Gellert. He was a member of the Imperial Academy of Science in Saint Petersburg. Before accepting the teaching position he was the Chief Administrator of Foundries and Forges of Freiberg in Saxony. The book is a little known work today although it was translated into English, French, Italian, and Russian during his life time [Figure 2]. Gellert broke the tradition of his time by writing in German instead of Latin. The English translation was done in 1766 by John Seiferth, apparently at the request of the Royal Society in London, but printed ten years later. Gellert's book is of special importance for the following reasons:



Figure 1- Front cover of the German edition

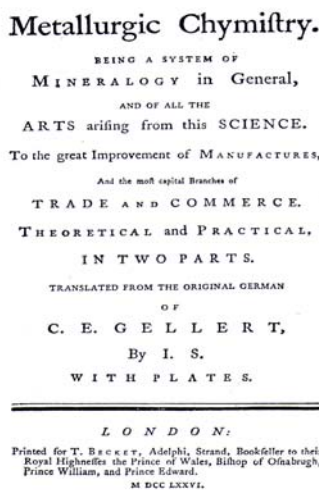


Figure 2 – Front cover of the English and Russian translations



- It was written towards the end of the Age of Alchemy few years before the Chemical Revolution by Lavoisier in 1777
- It was the first and last book combining chemistry and metallurgy, a course Gellert was giving at the Academy. His successor Wilhelm Lampadius (1772-1842) separated this course into two: one for chemistry and one for metallurgy.

The book, therefore, gives a glimpse at a critical period in the history of chemistry and metallurgy. To my surprise, the librarian located an English translation entitled *Metallurgic Chymistry* at the Osler Library. In this connection, I would like to thank Mrs. June Schachter, Librarian and her assistant Mr. Wayne LeBel for lending me the book under a special agreement that I gladly signed when I went personally to pick up the book since the Library does not lend old books through the Inter-Library Loan service.

After reading in the book for few days and found that it uses the alchemists' symbols and it adopts the theory of phlogiston I was impressed and decided to make a facsimile edition and publish it with a short introduction to make the book known to the scientific community.

Since the book is more than two hundred years old it was very fragile and difficult to handle. The paper was yellowish with many brown spots and many pages showing some of the back printing. However, it was possible to reproduce in a fairly good shape after a great deal of effort was taken to mask these defects. Minor changes had to be made in reprinting the book. The folded Tables and diagrams were reduced or divided to fit in the pages to facilitate reproduction. No attempt was made to correct the pagination when it was discovered that pages 191 and 192 do not exist. The book is reprinted on "tan" paper to simulate the original. I dedicated the book to those who appreciate the preservation of the scientific and technical heritage. To them and to those who study the history of chemistry and metallurgy, this book will be of great value and enjoyable to read. It is written in very clear language. I hoped that by making this book available I made a small contribution to the history of technology - - thanks to the Osler Library.

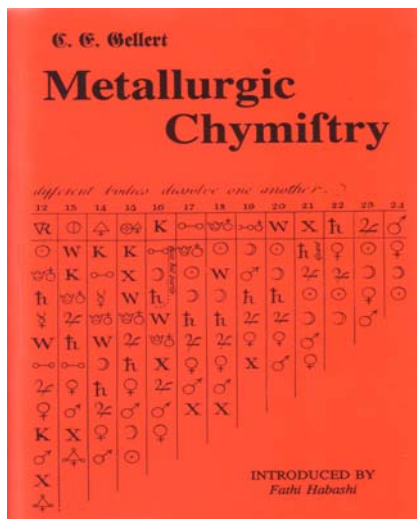


Figure 3 – Front cover of the facsimile edition

A facsimile English edition of Gellert's

**Metallurgic Chymistry**

First published in German in 1751, with an introduction by **Fathi Habashi**. ISBN 2-980-3247-3-6

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 Métallurgie Extractive Québec  
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<http://www.infiniti.net/habashi/>

Figure 4 - Flyer

The book was published in June 1998, the front cover is shown in Figure 3 and the flyer for the book is shown in Figure 4. I contributed an article to the *Bulletin of History of Chemistry* [Figure 5] and another to the German journal *METALL* [Figure 6]. I was much impressed and grateful to the Library and read a great deal about William Osler and published an article about the Osler Library [Figure 7]. Two copies of the facsimile edition were donated to the Osler Library.

Few years later I received a letter from the Curator of the Gellert Museum in Haynichen, a suburb Freiberg where the Gellert family resided, inquiring about the book *Metallurgic Chymistry*. I discovered that the museum was for Gellert's brother Christian Furchtegott Gellert (1715-1769) (in translation would be Christian Fear-God) studied theology, but switched over to literature and became a famous story teller in Germany. It seems that Gellert came from a strongly religious family as attested by his and his brother's unusual first names. After sending a copy to the Museum I received a photograph of a painting of Gellert that is now at the Mining Academy in Freiberg [Figure 8].



Figure 5 – First page from *Bulletin of History of Chemistry*



Figure 6 – First page from German journal *METALL*



Figure 7 – First page from *CIM Bulletin of the Osler Library*



Figure 8 - Colored photo of Gellert. Courtesy Christian Furchtegott Gellert Museum in Haynichen

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