

**CHYMIA. Science and Nature in Early Modern Europe (1450-1750)  
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### **The physico-mechanico-chymical Drebbel**

Peter Dear has stressed the importance of the category of the physico-mathematical in the emergence of scientific experiment. Yet, as historians of alchemy have pointed out, the entrance of alchemy to the academy also fused alchemy and physics to produce an artisanal philosophy. The works of Cornelis Drebbel (1572-1633) and their academic reception represent an early and important instance of a machine-based but non-mechanical philosophy in an age of new philosophical hybrids.

Drebbel is better known today as a mechanic and an inventor rather than as an alchemist or natural philosopher. In some parts of seventeenth-century Europe, however, he enjoyed equal fame as a writer as well as the inventor of a submarine, a perpetual motion machine, and a score of other wonderful devices. In his own writings, Drebbel fused alchemy, pneumatics, and mechanics. Alchemists and natural philosophers interpreted Drebbel's natural philosophy in light of his famous machines, and his machines in light of his natural philosophy. Andreas Libavius not only translated and annotated Drebbel's entire *On the Nature of the Elements* in his *Syntagmatis Arcanorum Chymicorum* (1613-15), but wrote a dissertation on Drebbel's perpetual motion machine refuting Johann Hartmann's account of the device. Both Drebbel's writings and his machines continued to serve important roles in the thought of Athanasius Kircher, Johann Joachim Becher, and G. W. Leibniz. In this paper, I survey Drebbel's reception in Central European alchemical philosophy over the course of the seventeenth century.

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