The Judgment of Paris  
by Lucas Cranach the Elder:  
Nature, Allegory, and Alchemy

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Among the great German painters of the sixteenth century Lucas Cranach takes a special, and rather controversial, place. Though his humanist friends at the university of Wittenberg, Christoph Scheurl and Philipp Melanchthon, stated emphatically that he would be surpassed only by Albrecht Dürer, and even in spite of the high opinion Dürer himself had for Cranach,¹ he has been treated with condescension and even scorn by art historians more often than not. Significantly this was done for the very same reasons that incited Dürer’s and Scheurl’s admiration, namely his charm, his indomitable productivity, and his amazing working speed. Thus he was put down as a facile painter of charming but superficial qualities, best known for a well-run workshop turning out series of credible portraits and of pretty, frivolous nudes under classical pretexts.² These classical themes—usually suspected to be a rather transparent cover for a sixteenth-century version of pinup pictures—included Venus, Lucretia, sleeping nymphs, the Three Graces, and the Judgment of Paris.

Of this last subject—the Judgment of Paris—about a dozen painted versions as well as two woodcuts by the hand or the workshop of Lucas Cranach have survived.³ Cranach actually was the first German painter of panel paintings of this subject, which before existed only in prints, woodcuts, or book illustrations. This almost instant popularity of paintings of the Judgment of Paris was presumably due to the fact that for the display of piquant nudes it was an


Dürer’s opinion was recorded, 1538, by the humanist Johann Stigel in his eulogy for Cranach’s son Hans (whose untimely death in 1537 is thought to have been the reason for the change in Cranach’s artist’s signet, the folding of the wings of his winged serpent): “Audio Albertum Durerum te (Lucas Cranach) omnibus nostrae aeetatis pictoribus laude venustatis ac facilitatis praeluuisse . . . .”

². A typical example of “official” opinion could be quoted from Meyers Lexikon, 7th ed. (Leipzig, 1925) III, p. 79, under the entry “Cranach, Lukas”: “C. erfreute sich seinerzeit in Deutschland (hauptsächlich wegen seines Verhältnisses zu den Reformatoren, dann aber auch wegen seiner grossen Fruchtbarkeit) des grössten Rufes. . . . Er schuf sich sein eigenes ideal weiblicher Schönheit . . . von zierlicher Bildung, mit einer gotisch anmutenden Schwingung der Umrisslinie. . . . Er liebt es, seine Figuren in eine landschaftliche Umgebung zu stellen, die er stets reinvoll gestaltete; sie ist oft der Hintergrund für kleine mythologische Szenen von sehr ergötzlicher und naiver Auffassung. Im Porträt leistete C. Tüchiges. . . . Die Arbeiten seines Frühzeit, bis etwa 1500, zeichnen sich durch grosse Frische und starkes Temperament aus. . . . Später wurde er trockner, handwerksmässiger; der allzu grosse Werkstat tbetrieb, in den er hineingeriet, hat ihn künstlerisch gelähmt. . . .”


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even better choice than the Three Graces, because it not only offered the chance of presenting three undraped female bodies in three different postures—traditionally front view, rear view, and profile—but it also put them into a teasing contrast with two fully and properly dressed males, and all in a perfectly respectable classical context.

The Metropolitan Museum owns one of the loveliest versions of this delightful subject, which is furthermore of considerable iconographical significance (Figure 1). Its first special point of interest is in the painting’s landscape background (Figure 2) which, far from being the usual romantic stage scenery, is a quite accurate rendering of an actual landscape.

The first English essay about this painting, published soon after its acquisition by the Museum in 1928, described the scenic background as “also . . . characteristic of the later period (after 1530). There is less intensity in the blue sky and more silvery delicacy in the distant landscape with its placid lake, its romantic Gothic city and castled rocks, and its lovely hills.” This description can be elaborated on and corrected insofar as the “placid lake” is in actuality the Elbe River near Schandau, and the lovely hills and castled rocks are some of the landmarks of the Elbsandsteingebirge, the romantically rugged mountain range of towering sandstone mesas and deep-cut wooded ravines about fifteen miles to the southeast of Dresden (Figure 3; map, Figure 4).

The large dominating mountain beyond the river’s bend is the Lilienstein, and the smaller one, even further to the rear, and actually located beyond the loop of the river’s double bend, is the Rauenstein. The rocks on the right side are part of the mile-long cliffs, the Schrammsteine, edging the east bank of the Elbe River, which cuts a winding canyon through this sandstone massif. The vantage point from which Cranach must have seen and presumably also sketched this view seems to be at the edge of the Schrammsteine, facing northwest. Most likely it is somewhere near the ravine of the Breite Klufit, about one mile downriver from the present-day border between Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Repub-

lic. The city at the river’s bank is where the town of Schandau is situated.

Though this painted landscape is perfectly recognizable for someone familiar with the Elbsandsteingebirge, it has to be pointed out that Cranach took some artistic liberties with it. For instance, he put a castle on the Lilienstein where none is today, and he set another one, distinguished by a connecting bridge to an outlying tower, on the Schrammstein cliffs. There were fortifications on the plateau of the Lilienstein in the sixteenth century, but it is doubtful whether they were as conspicuous from afar as those which appear in the painting. This painted castle would be more likely a transplant from the Königstein, the mighty fortress on the mesa on the west bank of the Elbe, directly opposite from the Lilienstein (Figure 5).

The turreted city of Troy—a masted ship near its water gate included—as well as the cliff castle, bridge, tower, and zigzag road leading up the cliffs are clearly borrowed from one of the iconographical prototypes of the Judgment of Paris with Paris as an armored knight, a print by the Master of the Banderoles. Other
dated 1527; no. 253, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel, dated 1528; no. 254, MMA, New York, ca. 1528; no. 255, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, dated 1530; no. 256, Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie, Dessau (lost in 1945), ca. 1535; no. 257, Steiermärkisches Landesmuseum, Graz, ca. 1530–35; no. 258, The St. Louis Art Museum, ca. 1537; no. 409, Landesmuseum, Gotha, post-1537; no. 409a, Hampton Court, post-1537; no. 409b, Bode-Museum, East Berlin, post-1537.

Koepplin and Falk, Cranach, list still another, though doubtful, version: II, no. 537, private collection, England, “ca. 1507 or later.”

Cranach’s woodcut of 1508 was his first attempt at the subject; the woodcut title page of 1530, with the Judgment of Paris, is considered to be workshop work. Koepplin and Falk, Cranach II, no. 528, and I, no. 242 (figs. 116 and 312); Marc Rosenberg, Von Paris von Troja bis zum König von Mercia (Darmstadt, 1939) fig. 11.


5. To give credibility to my claim, it should be mentioned that I grew up and went to school in Pirna an der Elbe (see map, Figure 4).

6. The motif of Paris not as a shepherd youth but as an armored knight goes back to the medieval editions of the fictitious eyewitness account of the Trojan War by “Dares Phrygius” (6th century A.D.), and reworkings of the material by Benoît de Sainte-More (Roman de Troie, ca. 1180), Guido da Columna (Historia destructionis Troiae, 1287), and particularly Jacques Millet (Histoire du Chevalier Paris et de la belle Vienne, 1485). Rosenberg, Paris von Troja, pp. 29–86.
2. Detail of Figure 1, the Metropolitan Museum Judgment of Paris, showing the background landscape

3. View from the Schrammstein cliffs toward the Lilienstein, across the Elbe River (photo: after Klaus Vogt, Zauber der Elblandschaft, Dresden, 1951)

4. Sketch map of the central part of the Elbsandsteingebirge, indicating Cranach's view
details from this print that reappear in Cranach's painting are the war hammer in Paris's mailed fist and the draped veil of Venus (Figure 6). A second print, attributed to the same master, shows the Judgment of Paris with a tiny naked archer in the background, conceivably a prototype of Cranach's arrow-aiming Cupid (Figure 7).

7. The opaqueness of Venus's veil in the Metropolitan Museum's painting must be a later—presumably Victorian—pruderie; the entire veil must originally have been almost as transparent as its trailing end still is.

8. Max Lehrr, Geschichte und kritischer Katalog des deutschen, niederländischen und französischen Kupferstichs im XV. Jahrhundert, 9 vols. (Vienna, 1908-34) IV (1921) nos. 90 and 91; F. W. H. Hollstein, Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts (Amsterdam, 1955) XII, p. 67; Koepplin and Falk, Cranach II, no. 529, fig. 311. The first print survived as a pasted-in illustration for a Historia Troiana by Guido da Columna, acquired in 1464 by the Nuremberg humanist Hartmann Schedel.
5. Königstein with its fortress; in the sixteenth century the mountain slopes would have been treeless for defense purposes and therefore more like the mountains in Cranach's paintings (photo: after Vogt)


The Judgment of Paris was a theme popular with German humanists and particularly with members of the faculty of the newly founded (1502) university of Wittenberg. Indeed, in 1503 the Graecist Nikolaus Marschalk used it as a theme for his academic address at the graduation of the university's first twenty-four baccalauri; the printed edition of this address was illustrated by a woodcut (Figure 8), which was reused in 1504 to illustrate a textbook for the Wittenberg students. Nikolaus Marschalk had come to Wittenberg from the rival university of Erfurt, where he had operated his own printing press. The artist who designed woodcuts for his Erfurt publications was the same one who designed the Wittenberg illustration of the Judgment of Paris. In the library of the university of Leiden there is a

9. Koepplin and Falk, Cranach II, pt. 12, “Urteil des Paris, Entscheidung zwischen Tugend und Laster,” pp. 613–621. The Judgment of Paris was popular as a Shrovetide play (documented 1455, 1463, 1468, 1483), as a tableau vivant in pageants (1494, in the festive entry of Philip the Handsome into Antwerp, where Elector Frederick the Wise, later Cranach’s employer, was present), and as educational Latin plays for and by students, as well as textbook material (1502, 1503, 1512, 1514).

10. Koepplin and Falk, Cranach I, fig. 116; II, no. 528a. This woodcut was reused three more times in Wittenberg publications: 1512 and 1513 in Historia Daretis Phrygi de Excidio Troiae, 1514 in Iudicium Parisis by Giovanni Battista Cantalicius (d. 1514).
manuscript—De alchimia—written in 1522 by Valentin Hernworst, citizen of Erfurt, and illustrated by Johannes Hoch in 1526.\(^\text{12}\) The most important illustration in this volume is a Judgment of Paris (Figure 9), as an allegory on a decisive step in the Great Work, or the Making of the Philosopher’s Stone. Not only does this drawing share with the Wittenberg woodcut striking details of composition, such as the fountain with quadrilobate basin and a bird on the basin’s rim, but a comparison of stylistic features, such as the round faces with heavy-lidded eyes and curiously wide-bridged noses over small, pursed mouths, suggests that the master of the Wittenberg woodcut and the artist of the Leiden manuscript—Johannes Hoch of Erfurt—are one and the same.

The three goddesses in the Wittenberg woodcut of 1503 are demurely dressed, befitting the moralizing tenor of the academic address—the good magister Marschalk used the Judgment of Paris as a horrible example of what would happen if vita voluptaria were chosen over vita contemplativa or even vita activa—but in the illustration in the Leiden manuscript, 1526, they are naked except for coquettish berets and lavish jewelry. Their scanty and provocative attire has a definitely “Cranachesque” flavor, but it should be pointed out that the earliest dated Judgment of Paris by Lucas Cranach, where one of the naked goddesses is wearing a beret, is of 1528 (Basel), and his earliest dated standing nude with a beret is of 1529 (Venus Outdoors, Louvre).\(^\text{13}\) It looks almost as if Cranach must have seen Hoch’s book illustration and picked up the detail of the beret, using it in his own paintings to such a degree that it became a hallmark of what we think of as a typical Cranach nude.

In comparing the different versions of the Judgment of Paris by Lucas Cranach with each other, one is struck by the strange fact that in them Mercury is regularly portrayed as an elderly man with a white beard, and that often—as in the versions now in the Seattle Art Museum, in the St. Louis Art Museum, in the Steiermärkisches Landesmuseum, Graz, Austria, and in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen—he is gorgeously plumed in peacock feathers (Figures 10–12). In the Metropolitan Museum’s painting he wears a headdress crested by two peacocks feeding from an object which resembles a white fruit with red seeds like a pomegranate, but which is probably intended to represent a broken egg with a red yolk.

The use of the Judgment of Paris as an alchemical illustration in the Hernworst manuscript, which Cranach was likely to have known, gives a clue to a possible hidden meaning in Cranach’s treatment of the subject especially in the Metropolitan Museum’s panel.

Alchemy is based on the belief in the transmutation of materials, particularly of metals. All materials were thought to be composed of the Four Elements: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire, representing for our understanding of nature solid state, liquid state, gaseous state, and energy. These elements were thought to be present in all materials in differing proportions; perfection would be found in incorruptible gold. All materials were assumed to be changeable, on the evidence that solid metals could be liquefied by applying fire in smelting, or that liquids could be turned into gaseous state in vaporization. For this reason it

\(^\text{12}\) Petrus Cornelius Boeren, Codices Vossiani Chymici (Leiden, 1975) pp. 83–90, Voss. Chym. F. 29. The manuscript has a colophon: “Beschrieben durch Valentinum Hernworst burger zue Erfurdt zue der gulden laden bey sanct Gothortz wonhaftig’ Anno domini etc. XXII, frigats nach Erhardi der das der zehnte tag des mondes Januarii,” and several other identifying entries with addenda up to 1533. The illustrations are annotated on fol. ggv.: “Anno domini tausent fünffhundert vnd sechsundzwanzig auff Freytag nach Seueri Episcopi der do was der XXVI tag des monden Octobris Im Hause zum weissen schilde genant in der lown gassen zue Erfurdt gele- gen Sindt diese vorgeschriebene Byle vnd Figure durch Joh- hannem Hoch Illuminierer gemacht, auff beueh Valentin Hernworst alias Winterkornn Burgerss zue Erfurdt, vnd bey gedachten Valentinii Kost vnd auch myt seiner Valentinii Hern- worst eygen hantschrift die byestehende notabilia vnd vnderschrift geschrieben vnd geendet at tage vnd Jare wie oben berurt ist” (“Anno domini one thousand five hundred and six-and-twenty on the Friday after St. Severus the Bishop’s day, which was the 26th day of the month of October, in the house called in the sign of the white shield, located in the Lion’s Street at Erfurt, these prescribed pictures and figures were made by Johannes Hoch, illuminator, by order of Valentin Hernworst alias Winterkorn, citizen of Erfurt, at the expense of abovementioned Valentin and also with his, Valentin Hernworst’s, own handwriting the attached notes and captions were written, and finished on the day and in the year as touched upon above”). This manuscript is based upon the first German alchemical treatise, Das Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit, 1419–20, by Brother Ulmannus, a Minorite priest at Constance. The picture of the Judgment of Paris has been published in Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, Alchemy: The Secret Art (London/New York, 1975) pl. 35–15. Friedländer and Rosenberg, Paintings of Cranach, nos. 242 and 253. The other Judgments of Paris in which Venus wears a beret are no. 254 (MMA; ca. 1528), no. 255 (Karlsruhe; dated 1530), no. 256 (Dessau; ca. 1535), no. 258 (St. Louis; ca. 1537).
was concluded that by changing the proportions of the Four Elements within a given material, the material could be changed into another.

In order to arrive at the lofty goal of turning base matter into the perfect material, gold, a suitable raw material had to be put through three major stages of purification, which in their turn consisted of seven to twelve steps each. The English alchemist George Ripley listed them (ca. 1470) as calcination, solution, separation, conjunction, putrefaction, coagulation, cibation, sublimation, fermentation, exaltation, multiplication, and projection.\(^1\)

In the Great Work the raw material could be purified during the first stage—up to *putrefacio*, necessarily a precondition as mystical death for subsequent resurrection\(^2\)—to strip away its impure characteristics, reducing it to *materia prima*, and to release its innate spirit, or spark of life. At the end of the first stage the *materia* turned black in putrefaction (*nigredo*), but soon the blackness was to be relieved by a starry aspect like the sky at night. In the following stage the *materia* turned white (*albedo*) and, according to some authorities, acquired the quality of producing silver, the metal of the moon, with a transitional phase in which a sudden burst of most beautiful colors appeared. In the final stage the *materia* turned red (*rubedo*) and acquired the quality of transforming base metals into gold by changing their elementary compositions to perfection.

The greatest difficulty in finding the formula for the Philosopher's Stone was that the handbooks gave only veiled hints regarding the nature of the raw material; they might call it "something to be found everywhere" and "something considered valueless by everyone"—except the initiate, of course. Others helpfully suggested starting the Great Work with the "spittle of the Moon," the "semen of the stars," or the


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\(15\). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

It might also be suggestive that the scribe of the Leiden manuscript used the alias Winterkorn—the corn that "dies" during its winter rest, but sprouts again in spring. Perhaps this was an alchemical nom de plume; his family name Hernworst (*Hirnwaerst*, "brain sausage," i.e., scrambled brains) might have given rise to uncomplimentary remarks by his fellow citizens in connection with his alchemical studies.
formula *VITRIOL: Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem* ("visit the interior of the earth and by right measure you will find the secret stone"). However, most alchemists seem to have used copper, the metal of Venus, as basic material; the main ingredients to be added in the higher stages were "white Mercury" and "red Sulfur," because quicksilver and sulfur combined between them the primary qualities of the Four Elements. Sulfur was hot and dry, and therefore embodied the element Fire, and mercury was cold and wet, representing the element Water, both with admixtures of Earth and Air. During the transmutation process three types of fire—Hot Fire, Slow Fire, and Mild Fire—were used. The final stage was achieved by the mystical Secret Fire.

All these stages and ingredients were recorded either in symbolical picture writing or in code names understandable only to the initiate. The Great Work with its three stages could be represented as the Tree of Alchemy with three branches and with the Hermetical Spring flowing forth between its roots; the *materia* going through its transmutations could be "the Dragon" (usually shown as a winged serpent), black, white, or red in color; of the three stages the first—*nigredo*—could be called "the Raven," "the Death's Head," or "the Black Man"; *albedo* could be called "the


Philosopher's Stone, and Troy's Fall would be the achievement of the Elixir, the catalyst that would bring forth from base matter the most precious of materials, like victory after strife. The three goddesses could also, as in a treatise in the Vatican Library (Figure 19), be personifications of the three stages of the Work: Athena with her owl and a star representing blackness of night and the starry aspect, for nigredo; Juno with her peacock and the rainbow of Iris—for the Peacock's Tail—for albedo; and Venus with her red roses emerging from the white seashell, for rubedo. The goddesses stood also for the lofty goals of the spiritual alchemist who was unconcerned with the materialistic achievement of goldmaking, but in Zen-like self-purification strove for Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Eternal Love and Harmony. Precisely these three gifts were offered to Paris by Athena, Juno, and Venus in their famous bribery attempt. From the alchemist's point of view—the stern opinion of magister Marschalk notwithstanding—Paris's choice was the only possible one, because copper, the metal of Venus, was the accepted raw material for the Great Work, and neither Athena nor Juno had metals of their own to offer. The alchemists searching for gold were regarded as mere "puffers" by their spiritual colleagues. However, the more practical-minded among those of spiritual bent took the Philosopher's Stone as a key to unlock the secrets of the universe and to create the Elixir of Life.

The Metropolitan Museum's Judgment of Paris contains enough peculiar details to make inevitable the conclusion that it was intended as an alchemical allegory. White-bearded Mercury, whose namesake "white Mercury" is the single most important ingredient in the final stage of the Making of the Philosopher's Stone, has been placed here more centrally than in any of the other versions, and the glass ball—an alchemical vessel?—that he holds in his hand instead of the traditional Apple of Discord is almost exactly in the center of the entire composition. He wears black sleeves and

13. Manuscript illustration showing Athena, Juno, and Venus as representations of nigredo, albedo, and rubedo (Cod. Pal. lat. 1066, fol. 230v.). Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica)

16. Klossowski de Rola, Alchemy, pl. 61, identifies Athena as Lady Alchimia, in a castle representing the philosopher's furnace, with her shield bearing the head of Medusa, emblem of black putrefaction. Below she supposedly reappears in the guise of Iris, next to "Venus on her scallop shell, her body all roses; the red flowering out of the white."

17. Cranach's woodcut of 1508 shows an oversize apple lying in the foreground; in his panel paintings the "apple" is always an orb of goldsmith's work or a crystal ball.
a red skirt with his gilded pseudoclassical armor, demonstrating on his own person the color scheme—black-white-red-gold—of the Great Work. His strange helmet crest of two peacocks feeding from a broken egg with a red yolk could hardly be anything else but a symbol of the Peacock’s Tail, the stage at which the red Philosopher’s Stone would emerge from the Egg.

Red-clad Paris—as “red King” or “red Sulfur”—is sitting under the three-branched Tree of Alchemy, which has two withered twigs for the important and necessary steps of putrefaction; the crystal-clear Hermetical Spring emerges at the Tree’s base. Befitting an alchemical context, the Tree is an oak, because the Hot Fire was fed with charcoal of oakwood, and thepollard tree behind Mercury’s wand is a willow, because the fuel to feed the Slow Fire was willow charcoal. Even Paris’s white steed might have another “secret” significance, preposterous as it may sound, because the Mild Fire, that is, protracted warming just above room temperature, was created by fermenting horse dung. The Secret Fire, which was essential for the final achievement, was described as “the fire that consumes without leaving ashes, that is more powerful than any other fire, and whose smith is the great son of Venus.” It is, of course, represented by Cupid with his fiery red wings. It should be pointed out that Cranach’s Cupid has red wings only in his paintings of the Judgment of Paris; in his numerous other representations of Cupid—as honey thief or as companion of Venus—Cupid’s wings are white, light blue, or multicolored.

The equation of the three goddesses with the three stages of the Great Work has been shown in the illustration in the Vatican manuscript (Figure 13). Because the Judgment of Paris is the symbol of a specific point at the turn of the second stage, there might be subtle meaning in the placement of the three goddesses in the Metropolitan Museum’s painting. Juno, the representative of the second stage, is talking directly to Paris, while Athena, the representative of the first stage, nigredo, stands with her back to us on a dark, bare patch of ground (the other two are standing on the fresh greensward), and finally, Venus with her red hat stands proudly pointing up toward Cupid, the Secret Fire.

Alchemical undercurrents have been suspected in other works by Lucas Cranach, as for instance in the double portrait of the humanist, historian, poet, and physician, Johannes Cuspinianus, and his wife, painted in Vienna, about 1502—03. Lucas Cranach, who from 1520 was the owner of an apothecary shop in Wittenberg, must have been interested in the Elixir of Life, and presumably had alchemical knowledge of his own. In any case, as a good Latinist, as owner of a printing press and a bookshop, and finally as the long-standing and close friend of important faculty members of the universities of Vienna and Wittenberg, he

21. Cranach’s artist’s signet, the winged serpent with a ruby ring in its mouth, was granted to him as his coat of arms by Elector Frederick the Wise, on Jan. 6, 1508. It has been suspected that the winged serpent might have astrological significance, that as a symbol of Sin it might be a canting device for the alleged family name Sünden (Cranach is derived from his hometown, Kronach), that it might be a symbol of speeding time referring to the Latin form Chronus, with which Cranach occasionally signed his work. Schade, Cranach, p. 403, n. 38, ill. p. 27; Koepplin and Falk, Cranach I, p. 20, n. 20. It can be added that the winged serpent can be a symbol of speed, indicating Cranach’s fame as celerrima pictor. According to the Bestiary, in Arabia there were winged serpents, the fastest of all creatures; such a serpent was called laculius, a name that might have been seen as a cryptogram for Lucas. Finally, there might have been an alchemical symbolism involved too: the black Dragon that carries the gold ring with the red stone. The crest of Cranach’s coat of arms, incidentally, shows the serpent writhing on a wreath of thorns, possibly indicating the thorny way to perfection. It would be interesting to know whether the day chosen for the granting of these arms, Jan. 6, i.e., Epiphany or Dreikönigstag, held any deeper meaning. In German tradition the arms attributed to the Dre Kônige—the Three Wise Men—were a black man, a starry field, and a silver half-moon, all three being alchemical symbols for nigredo and albedo, quite appropriate for the gold-bearing Magi searching for the King of Kings and the True Light.

Dr. Edeltraud Wiessner, director of the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Wittenberg, has kindly supplied the following information about Cranach’s ownership of the Wittenberg pharmacy. Cranach bought it for 2,000 gulden from its founder, Martin Polich von Mellertstadt, who was also rector of the university. The purchase was presumably an investment, since Cranach was not an apothecary himself. He had the shop managed by professionals, Basilius Axt and later Caspar Pfreundt, who married Cranach’s youngest daughter, Anna, Dec. 13, 1550. The pharmacy, incidentally, was for centuries the only one in Wittenberg and therefore had no special name; in the mid-19th century it became the Adler-Apotheke and since 1945 has been called the Cranach-Apotheke.
14. Cranach, *Chancellor Dr. Gregor Brück*, dated 1533. Panel, $16\frac{1}{4} \times 15$ in. (41 × 38 cm.). Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum (photo: Nationalmuseum)

was certainly an artist who could be trusted to compose a seemingly harmlessly pleasant picture fraught with deep symbolical meaning, if such was desired by a customer with alchemical inclinations.

Unfortunately, we do not know for whom any of the various Judgments of Paris were painted. It is interesting to see, however, that Cranach’s portrait (dated 1533) of the chancellor Dr. Gregor Brück, whose son would marry one of Cranach’s daughters, shows the chancellor wearing several gold chains—one of them with a portrait medallion of the Elector—and in addition to these he has a close-fitting neck ring in the shape of a serpent biting its own tail: the alchemist’s Ouroboros (Figure 14). It might be also an indication of original ownership that the Judgment of Paris in Copenhagen, dated 1527 (Figure 11), shows Paris wearing an armor with a peculiar surface decoration of lengthwise stripes crossed by wider horizontal bands, and imitations of slashings on shoulders, elbow cops, and knees (Figure 15). These elements are exactly the same as on the armor of the commander of the Saxon forces, Ascanius von Cramm (Figure 16), in Cranach’s portrait drawing of about 1525. Though the simplest explanation would be that Cranach used the drawing as a model for the armor in the painting, there is a strong possibility that the Judgment of Paris as the exaltation of Venus and also as the beginning of the Trojan War would have a very personal significance for Ascanius von Cramm, a distinguished knight who bore the name of Aeneas’s son, grandson of Venus and one of the survivors of the Fall of Troy.24

If we consider the many details in the Metropolitan Museum’s Judgment of Paris by Cranach that can be interpreted as arcane alchemical symbols, it might be the final touch to note that the background landscape shows the two mountains, the Rauenstein (the “Raw Stone,” that is, the materia prima) and the Lilienstein (the “Stone of the Lily”), beyond the river Elbe, whose Latin name is Albis. These names, of mountains and river, would refer to albedo, the stage in the Great Work that is represented in the Erfurt manuscript De alchimia as the Judgment of Paris (Figure 9).25

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22. Schade, Cranach, no. 133.
23. Ibid., no. 120.
24. Though Paris is always dressed in red in Cranach’s Judgments, often with white plumes on his beret, it should be pointed out that red and white were also the livery colors of the von Cramm family, whose arms were in Rot drei weisse Lilien—gules, three fleurs-de-lis argent. The Cramm helmet crest was a peacock tuft between two fleurs-de-lis.
25. Besides the Rauenstein and Lilienstein there are other geographical sites in this area that could be interpreted in alchemical terms: Königstein—Stone of the King, Grosser Bärenstein and Kleiner Bärenstein—Great Stone of the Bear and Little Stone of the Bear (Bear—the alembic vessel). The Philosopher’s Stone is called der Stein der Weisen in German, inviting a play upon words with weise (wise) and weiss (white). The village at the foot of the Rauenstein, in a straight line between the Rauenstein and Lilienstein, is named Weissig. Ironically, this can be made into the punning question: Weiss ich?—”Do I know?”