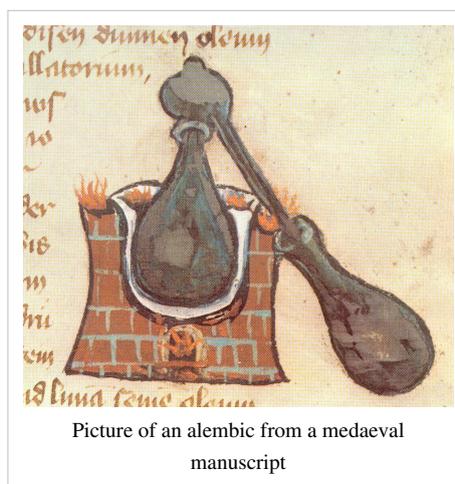


# Alembic

An **alembic** (from Arabic *al-anbīq* الأنبيق, from Greek ἄμβυξ *ambyx* possibly from Semitic)<sup>[1]</sup> is an alchemical still consisting of two vessels connected by a tube, used for distilling chemicals. Technically, the alembic is the lid with a tube attachment (the *still-head*), which is placed on top of a flask, the **cucurbit**, containing the material to be distilled, but the word is often used to refer to the entire distillation apparatus. If the lid and flask are in one piece, it may be called a retort. The liquid in the cucurbit flask is heated or boiled; the vapour rises into the alembic hood, where it cools by contact with the walls and condenses, running down the spout into a receiving flask.

A modern descendant of the alembic (used to produce distilled beverages) is the pot still.



Picture of an alembic from a medaeval manuscript

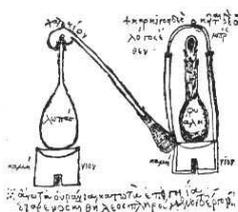
## Etymology

The word "alembic" is also used metaphorically for anything that refines or transmutes, as if by distillation (as in "the alembic of creative thought"). The word, like most alchemical terminology, comes from the Arabic: *al-anbīq*, meaning "still". The French spelling *alambic* is also commonly used, especially as the apparatus is often associated with cognac where it is known as *alambic charentais* (Charente alembic). In Shakespeare's plays, the older variant "limbeck" appears.

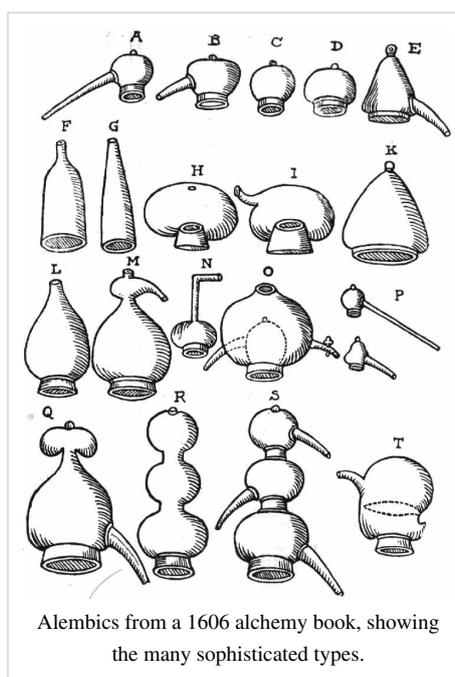
The alembic symbol is Unicode U+2697 ALEMBIC (♁).

## History

The earliest appearances of alembics are to be found in the works of ancient Saracen alchemists<sup>[2]</sup> who conducted the first documented scientific studies on distillation.<sup>[3]</sup> This work was extended during the Middle Ages by Muslim alchemists like Jābir ibn Hayyān.

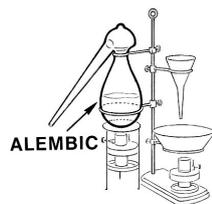


Ambix, cucurbit and retort of Zosimos, reproduced in *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* by Marcelin Berthelot



Alembics from a 1606 alchemy book, showing the many sophisticated types.

Image of a glass alembic



More modern alembic used in chemical experiments



Large "charentais" type alembic for distilling spirits, manufactured by Chalvignac Prulho Distillation, France



Copper retort

## References

- [1] Forbes, Robert James (1970) *A Short History of the Art of Distillation: from the beginnings up to the death of Cellier Blumenthal*. Leyden: E. J. Brill ISBN 978-90-04-00617-1; p. 23
- [2] Encyclopædia Britannica 1911, *Alchemy* (<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Alchemy>).
- [3] Forbes, Robert James (1970) *A Short History of the Art of Distillation: from the beginnings up to the death of Cellier Blumenthal*. Leyden: E. J. Brill ISBN 978-90-04-00617-1; pp. 20-23

## External links

- Small images of alembics ([http://www.coppercrafts.eu/index.php?option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=80&lang=pt](http://www.coppercrafts.eu/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=80&lang=pt))
- Picture of a traditional alembic ([http://www.premiumdestillen.de/components/com\\_virtuemart/shop\\_image/product/Destillieranlage\\_4c17a825e34c1.jpg](http://www.premiumdestillen.de/components/com_virtuemart/shop_image/product/Destillieranlage_4c17a825e34c1.jpg))
- A definition (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/alembic>)
- All Kind of Alembics (<http://www.copper-alembic.com/products.php?lang=en>)
- Soldered and Riveted Unions (<http://www.copper-alembic.com/manufacturing/especificacoes.php?lang=en>)

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