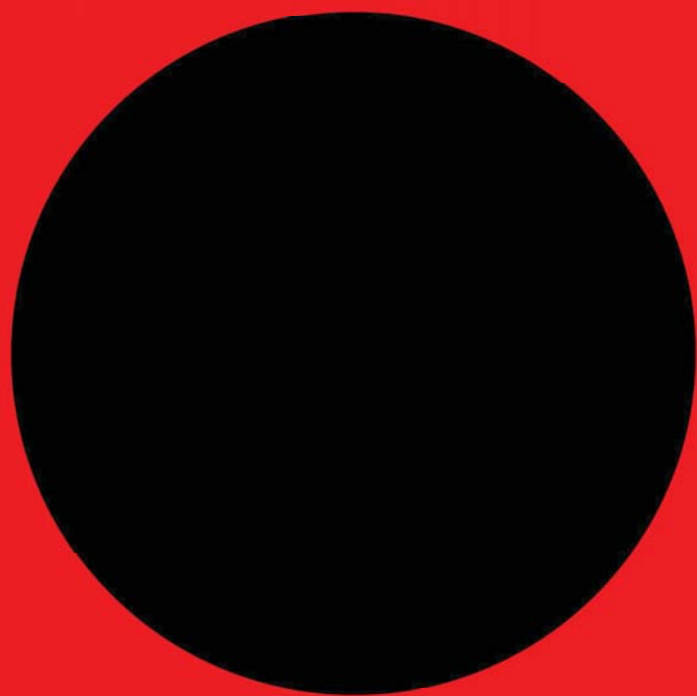


# **THE SYMBOL OF SPIRIT**



**ARTURO REGHINI**

**BERSERKER**  

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**BOOKS**

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Arturo

Reghini

# SYMBOL OF THE SPIRIT

*Under the species of interiority*

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>KNOWLEDGE OF SYMBOLS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>HOLY NUMBERS IN THE PYTHAGOREAN TRADITION OF FREEMASONRY</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>ITALIAN ALCHEMICAL TEXT ON THE LEAD TABLETS</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>SUB SPECIE INTERIORITATIS</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>HIGHS AND LOWS IN MAGICK</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Afterword</b>	<b>61</b>

**ARTURO REGHINI:**  
*A Glimpse of Eternity*

Arturo Reghini (1878-1946), A 'pagan' and Pythagorean, a professor of mathematics and philologist, a Mason and magician, a man whose name or reflections can be found in every serious study concerning the secrets and problems linked to esotericism, Freemasonry and Hermeticism. This descendant of an aristocratic Florentine family was a great connoisseur of the Western subterranean current which we call the 'Eternal Wisdom'. He believed in a single, uninterrupted Western *Tradition*, transmitted through time to the present day, and held that 'spiritual Freemasonry'—as an initiatory, and not as a secularised, subversive and anti-traditional organisation—was its heir and guardian. And it was precisely because of the excessive politicisation of Freemasonry and its involvement in the Italian social affairs that, in 1908, he and a group of 'dissidents' broke away from the Grand Orient of Italy.

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Reghini was a close collaborator of the famous traditionalist, former Freemason and future Sufi and Sheikh, René Guénon, and was the first to translate his work *The King of the World* into Italian, and he, alongside Guénon, was most responsible for introducing Julius Evola to the world of traditional thought, the occult and the esoteric. Evola largely adopted his Roman-pagan and warrior worldview from him, and even the literal title of his first openly rebellious and controversial book, *\*Pagan Imperialism\**. Reghini is the man who met Evola and Mircea Eliade, the greatest historian of religion. Furthermore, Reghini is also largely responsible for the translation of Cornelius Agrippa's famous *Occult Philosophy* into Italian, in whose preface he states:

*In the West, there still exists a tradition that has nothing in common with the circus hubbub, parody and semblance of what is today considered occultism.*

From 1930, Reghini, Evola and Guénon pursue separate paths in the quest for *the Centre*, on one path – the path of criticism and rejection of the modern world. Namely, Guénon withdraws to Egypt and devotes himself to the mysteries of the Sufi worldview; Evola turns his back on Reghini and Freemasonry, rejecting the idea that Freemasonry possesses any *Secret* other than *the Secret of Subversion*; and Reghini remains where he was – attacked and

despised, disillusioned by the results of fascism and the alliance between the fascist regime and the Catholic Church, against which he rebelled decisively in 1929 – without abandoning his pagan and utopian worldview and dedicating himself, until his death, the secret of numbers, relationships and harmony, and the attempt to renew and revive Pythagorean philosophy, and its numerical and geometric symbolism.

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The Centre for the Study of Tradition 'Ucronia', in its thirteenth issue, presents the 'magical' studies and writings of Arthur Reghini which were published in Evola's and Reghini's journal *UR*, in 1927-1928. In these writings, Reghini's erudition and his mysterious knowledge and experience can be more easily recognised, and *experience* is what Reghini insisted on the most.

*In the specific case of my personal experience, the change occurred independently of any scientific or philosophical speculation and of any cerebral activity. I am inclined to think that this independence is neither accidental nor an exception. Indeed, it seems that rational speculation cannot take one any further than a mere conceptual abstraction of a rather negative character, and is therefore incapable of suggesting or evoking a direct experience or perception of immateriality.*

In the reflections before us, Arturo Reghini – or rather Pietro Negri, as he signed his studies in the journal *UR*- leads us through the hidden chambers of the Western Tradition, gathering in his knowledge the centuries of secret lore and preserving from oblivion the mysterious and forgotten authorities who dedicated their lives to the quest for the Hermetic and Alchemical 'Gold' and 'Stone of Wisdom.'

## **KNOWLEDGE OF SYMBOLS**



As Dante says (*The Banquet*, II, 1), 'texts can be understood and should be presented on the basis of four meanings': the *literal* meaning; the *allegorical* meaning, which is - Dante writes - 'the truth hidden behind a beautiful lie'; the *moral* meaning; and the *anagogic* meaning. This anagogic meaning is present when 'the written passage is read in a spiritual manner, which, in its literal sense and in accordance with what it signifies, points to things of eternal glory;' in other words, it is the deepest meaning of a text which, even in its literal sense, deals with matters of a spiritual order. This latter sense must be clearly distinguished from the allegorical and moral senses, which, in comparison with the anagogical sense, have—at least from a spiritual point of view—only a secondary importance. In my opinion, an anagogical interpretation of the *\*Comedy\** has yet to be undertaken.

Dante calls this anagogical meaning *the 'over-meaning'*; ἀναγωγή means "leading", "leading up", or "lifting up". Furthermore, when used as a technical nautical term, it denoted the act of weighing anchor and setting sail. Metaphorically, when applied to spiritual matters, anagogy then indicates a spiritual ascent or a lifting up from *the earth*. In symbolism

For the 'sailor', anagogy signifies the departure from the 'shore'—or *terra firma* in which human beings are firmly anchored—in order to set sail and find a better current, one that carries the ship to the 'open sea'.

Dante was referring to the writings of the 'poets', although the distinction between the four senses can, without doubt, also be applied to sacred and initiatory writings, and to every means of expressing and presenting spiritual works and teachings. According to this distinction, the supreme meaning, *the over-meaning* in every type of symbolism, will always be the anagogical meaning; the complete understanding of a symbol will consist in the perception of the anagogical meaning hidden within it; if symbols are understood and used in anagogic fashion, they can even contribute to spiritual elevation. Symbols are, in this sense, endowed with anagogic *virtue*.

Of course, not all symbols are endowed with this virtue. Sometimes, by extension, the name 'symbol' is bestowed upon mere abbreviations or characters which have a value almost exclusively as pictorial foreshadowing. Therefore, mathematical and chemical symbols, as such, do not possess a similar anagogic virtue, and in this area it is possible to attribute the same meaning to very different symbols. For example, the operations of algebraic multiplication can independently be represented by the usual symbol of a cross or a dot. But the word 'symbol', taken in its most essential sense, has a very precise and complex meaning, which is very easily concluded from the etymological analysis itself.

In Greek, the term συμ-βολή denotes the act of joining or putting together; the related term σύμ-βολον indicates an agreement, and thus *a sign or mark*. Both of these words are based on two elements: the first is the prefix συμ (Latin: *cum*), which simply indicates a union, while the second part denotes and specifies the nature of this connection. Βόλα or βόλος indicates the act of throwing or casting. These terms are related to the verb βάλλω, which means 'to throw'.

"to strike", "to reject". The verb συμ-βάλλω ('to unite'), and the analogous expression σύμ-βολον, ('symbol'), denote *the act* of unification, whereas synthesis (συν-θεσις, Lat. *compositio*) indicates *the result* of that action, the completed act. The dynamic nature of the symbol is contrasted with the static, immanent nature of synthesis. As for the effect of the action, the verb συμ-βάλλω ('to unite') is opposed by the verb δια-βάλλω, ('to separate, to oppose', "to cross over"); likewise, σύνβολον is the opposite of "devil" (διά-βολος, "one who opposes", "one who slanders", "adversary"). Viewed from a philological standpoint, it is evident that there is a spontaneous attribution of dynamic and magical virtues to symbols in order to overcome the diabolical obstacle and opposition. And just as the symbol leads to synthesis, its opposite, the 'devil', leads to the opposite of synthesis, that is, to analysis. In fact, ἀνά-λυσις is a loosening, a breaking, a dissolution, death.

The dynamic virtue of the symbol, in a sense, opposes all analysis, and acts as both an instrument and a means of attaining synthesis. Just as in discursive knowledge the thesis is reached *conceptually*—in a logical manner, starting from a hypothesis—so too, in initiatory *endogenesis*, it is possible to reach synthesis by using, in a magical manner, the dynamic power of the symbol, starting from the initial human condition. Even these simple etymological considerations allow us to see how in higher knowledge, symbols play a role corresponding to that which concepts have in discursive thought. The correspondence between symbols (σύνβολοι), on the one hand, and concepts (Lat. *con-ceptus*, *con-cipio*) and syllogisms (συν-λογίζοναι, Lat. *computo*, "to calculate"), on the other, is perfect. In logic, the syllogism is united with the word (λόγος) and with the act of reflection, (from *the Latin pondus* = Italian *peso*, "weight"; Latin *pensare* - Italian *pesare*, "to weigh"), and leads, in a discursive manner, to proportion, to measurement (Latin *mensura* from *mens*, mind [Italian *la mente*], related to *mensis*, month, and thus to the Moon, which possesses no light of its own but *a reflected*, or rather, *a reflected ray*). The symbol in magical science, or in the pure and purifying science of Magi (Persian *majidan*, 'one who purifies' *by fire*), operates with βολή, emanation, projection, a flash. *The word* of logic corresponds to the operation, or *action* of magic, just as *the Work*, the 'Great Work', of the Hermetic and Masonic traditions corresponds to philosophical *discourse*.

By the very nature of its formation, the symbol is distinct from and superior to the emblem, sign, parable, metaphor, and allegory.

The emblem (from ev-βάλλω, "to insert") and the sign have more of a representational than a cognitive and spiritual character; the parable, metaphor and allegory only partially possess the quality of a symbol. In allegory, something different, something other (ἄλλο-ἀγορεύω, 'I speak another thing') is said from what is truly intended. The literal sense is a 'beautiful lie', and the true sense is different, probably in opposition to the literal meaning. In a symbol, there is no contrast or actual difference between what appears on the surface and what is meant. Between the symbol

and its meaning there is usually a relationship of harmony, analogy and correspondence. Unlike in allegory, it is not a matter of grasping the true meaning by avoiding being misled by the obvious and irrelevant meaning, but rather it is about the two being in harmony. (so long as it is a matter of simple comprehension) a return from the obvious meaning to hidden meanings, in order to grasp the *full* significance of the symbol, thereby fulfilling (rather than transcending) the initial meaning. Moreover, allegory is always verbal for this very reason, whereas this limitation does not apply to symbols, since there are many types of symbols besides verbal ones.

A parable also has no symbolic value. It is (from παραβολή and παρα-βάλλω, "to place things side by side") simply a comparison, a comparison or a similitude. Parables cannot take us beyond the term of comparison. The fact that they were successfully used by Menenius Agrippa and Jesus shows that they are useful for the plebeian and profane masses. As for metaphor and trope – and both terms are very suitable for use in rhetoric – we should note that they also refer to verbal expressions, and indicate that it is usually necessary to translate the meaning of words or phrases used metaphorically from concrete to abstract terms. Metaphor (Lat. *trans-latum* 'carried across') simply means "to carry over" (μετά-φέρω: Lat. *trans-fero*) or "to carry".

Therefore, allegory, parable and metaphor, strictly speaking, are not symbols: they are figures of speech that can deal with symbols, which they often do, and in that case the properties of the argument, or of the symbol, are often found, at least partially, even in the verbal expression in question. In that case, on the basis of symbols and a set of symbols, or a particular symbolism, an entire allegorical language is built up, and sometimes even a jargon or a secret and agreed set of sentences develops.

We have already mentioned that symbols occur in great variety. In practice, any object can become the basis of a symbol; however, there are, of course, criteria for their selection and determination. Thus we have numerical symbolism, in which whole numbers (*abstraction per se*) constitute the symbols, while their *powers* (*δυνάμεις*), their residues or roots (*πυθμήν*), their simple ratios and properties symbolically constitute their analogic virtues. This symbolism was particularly used by the Pythagoreans, then the Kabbalists and the Freemasons. There is a symbolism of the letters of the alphabet, which is obviously connected with the numerical symbolism that lies at the foundation of the Kabbalistic tradition. With these symbolisms, and particularly with the first, we can connect the geometric symbolism of the Platonists and Neoplatonists. Geometric and numerical symbolism are connected with the symbolism of all those sciences and sacred arts in which there are relationships, proportions, rhythm and harmony, such as architecture, chanting, music, dance, poetry and painting (together with the symbolism of colours, etc.). Heraldry and emblem-making are the emanations, derivations and applications of these symbols in the social and political domain. From natural phenomena come polar, solar and meteorological symbolism, the symbolism of the elements, the symbolism of the seasons, the symbolism of the months, the symbolism of the days, the symbolism of the hours, the symbolism of the parts of the day, the symbolism of the parts of the night, the symbolism of the parts of the year, the symbolism of the parts of the month, the symbolism of the parts of the day, the symbolism of the parts of the night, the symbolism of the parts of the year, the symbolism of the parts of the month, the symbolism of the parts of the day, the symbolism of the parts of the night, the symbolism of the parts of the year.

Biological phenomena provide the symbolism of fermentation, decay and the germination of plant seed, as well as sexual symbolism, the symbolism of metamorphosis and resurrection, and the symbolism of spiritual food, drink and immortality (e.g. Hindu *soma*; Zoroastrian *haoma*; Hindu *amrita*; Greek nectar and ambrosia; ancient Latin *\*anna perenna\**; Judeo-Christian *bread and wine*). Regal symbolism arises from various forms of human activity (Philaetetus's *royal palash*; the royal or regnal Neoplatonic and Masonic art; *via regia*; *aqua regia*; the Hermetic royal wedding; the symbolism of war, especially the 'holy war' (*Bhagavad Gita*); the symbolism of the pasture is found both in *the Pimander* and in *the Gospel*; the symbolism of the cultivation of the 'earth', or Georgic symbolism; the symbolism of 'navigation' (Homer, Virgil, Dante); the symbolism of the founding of temples and cities and, in general, the symbolism of 'building' (hence the title *Pontifex*, 'bridge-builder', which was given to the Roman High Priest), and 'construction', which is the foundation of traditional Masonic symbolism, and which is naturally connected with architectural symbolism (hence 'the Great Architect of the Universe'); the symbolism of the preservation and defence of sacred objects, temples and lands (the Knights of the Grail and the Knights Templar). Finally, historical and legendary events themselves – on both an individual and a collective level – can become the basis for symbolism and serve as symbolism (e.g. the Trojan War; the Labours of Hercules; the voyage of the Argonauts; the life of Jesus). Myths (μῦθος, 'story'; Lat. *traditio*) and fables (*fabulare*, "to tell") are just stories; mythology is the storytelling about gods and heroes. Myths are not symbols, but they can have a symbolic character and can become the basis for a certain symbolism. Thus, pagan mythology supplied the Hermetists with numerous symbols, such as Michael Maier<sup>1</sup> and Perneti<sup>2</sup>. What we have presented here is a partial and incomplete list, although it should be sufficient to give the reader an idea of the scope and variety of symbolism.

Verbal expression cannot, for the reasons stated, compete with the vital, synthetic nature of the symbol, not even in its various figurative forms. The symbol transcends words, and even when we consider it in its limited capacity as a means to express and communicate works and teachings, it still holds the advantage over language. Words differ across time and space, and are subject to wear and tear and to passing through variations, both in form and in meaning, and cannot attain the stability and universality of the symbol.

Nevertheless, the word and the symbol have a common fundamental trait, namely the metaphorical nature that links their concrete value to their abstract meaning. Both presuppose the recognition of the existence of universal unity, correspondence and analogy, and thus implicitly acknowledge human 'likeness'. We said 'likeness' and not identity or

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1 Michael Maier (1568-1622), alchemist, physician and adviser to Emperor Rudolf II of Habsburg. (trans. note)

2 Dom Perneti, librarian to Frederick the Great and author of *the Mito-Hermetic Dictionary* (1758). (trans. note)

equality. We allow as a postulate that beings – and especially human beings – are similar to one another, from both an internal and an external point of view, and that the senses and internal organs of different people are similar and equal, just as their physical organs are. Once we acknowledge this, our inner experience transcends our individuality, and can be expressed in words and symbols that can be understood by those who possess the same experience, and can help to evoke it in those who have not yet experienced it. This is what happens with ordinary language in relation to common human experiences. When we speak of light, sound, or colour, we are in fact assuming not only that those who listen to us have perceived the sound of our words – just as we are able to perceive the sounds that reach our ears – but also that, thanks to the comparison with a similar, known and experienced event, the listeners understand our experience expressed in words.

At the basis of symbolism, and also at the basis of metaphorical language, lies a universal analogy; it is therefore possible for symbolism to adapt to determined norms, just as the transition from the concrete to the abstract meaning of a word obeys the laws of semantics. "The Emerald Tablet", which the Hermetic tradition attributes to Hermes Trismegistus<sup>3</sup>, begins with a solemn affirmation of this connection and universal analogy: *Verum sine mendacio, certum et verisimum: quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius; et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetranda miracula rei unius.* (Truth without a lie, certain and most true: that which is below is like that which is above; and that which is above is like that which is below, for the accomplishing of the miracles of one thing.)

There is an analogy between the physical and the metaphysical, between the external and the internal, and there is an analogy between man and the cosmos. Therefore, man is potentially a god, and the microcosm is potentially the macrocosm. God, says *the Bible*, created man *in his own image*. The analogical relationship that connects one thing with another makes each thing a natural symbol of those things with which it corresponds; hence in magic the concept and use of *the \*signaturae rerum\** (the signature of things). The similarity between a thing and its symbol, between an object and its image, can be direct or inverse. In the first case, the relationship is like that which exists between a note and its octaves: it ascends from the symbol to that which it denotes through anagogic transposition. In the second case, the relationship is like that which exists between an object and its reflected image: it elevates the ce from the symbol to that which it represents through reflection and inversion. When symbols are interpreted, this fact must be taken into consideration.

3 The text of the 'Emerald Tablet' was first presented by Jābir ibn Hayyān (an 8th-century Arab alchemist, better known in Europe by his Latinised name Geber, ed.), who claimed to have received it from the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana. (See E. J. Holmyard, "Chemistry in Islam," *Scientia*, I/11, 1926.). According to the Hermetic tradition cited by Albert Magus (*De alchemia*), the *Tabula Zaradi-y* was found by Alexander the Great in Hermes's tomb. According to this tradition, after the 'Deluge', Hermes found the tablets which the ancient sages and Enoch had engraved, before and because of the flood, in order to preserve the tradition. The Masonic tradition attributes the discovery of these plates to Hermes and Pythagoras.

Furthermore, it is not necessary for the two similarities to be mutually exclusive. Thus, sunlight, refracting and reflecting in drops of water, causes the phenomenon of two concentric rainbows, in which the colours appear in the opposite order. Descartes' theory explains the creation of the inner rainbow by the simple reflection of a ray of light, and the appearance of the concentric outer rainbow by a double reflection. Analogously, a double inversion, or inversion repeated an equal number of times, returns the other type of symbol to the type of simple transposition. Conversely, one might think that in symbols where correspondence occurs through transposition, the inversion of the symbol is not perceived simply because it is repeated an equal number of times. The meteorological phenomenon of the rainbow, thanks to the dispersion of the 'sun's' ray in

'leads', it has the value of a natural symbol of the process of universal analogy itself; and just as in pagan mythology Iris was the messenger of the gods, a special envoy of Zeus and Hera – for the rainbow was a symbol of the union of heaven and earth – in the same way, the similarity between the process of analogical inversion and that of inversion in optical reflection points, by analogy, to the connection that unites heaven and earth, spirit and matter, interior and exterior, the divine and the human.

The analogical character inherent in the symbol gives it a vagueness and indeterminacy of meaning, which, on the one hand, makes it rich and fertile in contrast to the precision and definiteness of the word, while, on the other hand, makes its penetration and use less simple and easy. Even with words, an awareness of their etymological meaning and connections with related words allows one to discern their hidden sense, thus opening the door to higher knowledge; but in the case of the symbol, the analogous process reveals a very different breadth and depth. Understanding the meaning is a step towards the acquisition of further meanings in incidental and higher domains, and in this case, we are not compelled to abandon the constant mastery of the secret of the ultimate roots of the language, which is inevitably present at the foundation of every etymological analysis.

Through constant reflection, the symbol is ultimately imprinted upon the mind, and by its constant presence, it is ever ready to inspire it, to suggest the analogical connections it has with that which is, from time to time, the object of thought. The symbol – independent of its reference to various ideas, on the basis of the analogical connections it contains within itself, and also thanks to its innate syncretism – supplies the mind with the elements with which it will work, and fertilises it – so to speak – by providing it with creative power. In this sense, symbols constitute expressions of movement and action, factors of endogenesis, which push, direct and lead towards states of consciousness not yet experienced, and thus towards effective, direct and *significant* knowledge. In this way, it is possible to ascend from the hidden meaning in signs to conscious possession; thus, what is acquired through signs [Italian: *in-segnamento*] is also equivalent to practical knowledge. From a historical and philological point of view, it is not insignificant to note how the language uses a word of this kind to denote knowledge [*l'insegnamento*].

This fruitful, magical action of symbols upon the mind corresponds perfectly to the similar action of symbols in politics and religion, an action which everyone can confirm. Think of the waves of enthusiasm, the heroic resolve which a hymn, a flag, a national or political symbol can awaken in individuals or in the masses; think of the enthusiasm and fanaticism that religious symbols can arouse, and you will understand how in magic the symbol can also possess a similar energetic virtue, a similar stimulating power and power of spiritual upliftment. There is, of course, an essential difference: In politics and religion, the symbol relates to patriotism, party spirit, religious faith and prejudice, that is to say, only to the sentiment which the symbol stimulates and manifests. But in esotericism, the symbol never relates to sentiment, but rather to the higher spiritual faculties of understanding and the creativity of the mind. Sentiment, beliefs, theories, and the very notion of any framing or submission to the masses are merely human elements; it is a mistake to rely on them or to compromise with them if one wishes to rise above the plane of mortals and succeed in the transition from the human to the divine. Magic, and with it all initiatory traditions, is entirely consistent when it replaces the dogmatism of religious and philosophical beliefs, or the simple representative verbalism and relationships of some sciences, with symbolic knowledge, that is, with a spiritual process which, through symbols, provides explanations for inner experiences and states, with the perception and direct knowledge of the transcendent.

The magical use of symbols is traditional in Hermeticism and in the ritual books of certain organisations that were partly under its influence. It is also found in the practice *of the rituals* that lead to the accomplishment *of the Work*.

The Hermetic tradition claims that only one *vessel* is sufficient to accomplish the Work from beginning to end, or at most two (which is apparently what happened in Flamel's case).

This vessel, the 'Wise Man's' *athanor*, must be hermetically sealed in accordance with the Hermetic rite (the expression 'hermetic sealing' to this day denotes the corresponding chemical operation), so that work can be carried out within, after it has been isolated from the outside world. Therefore, the well-known Hermetic maxim states: *Visita interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultam lapidem!* ("Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectification you will find the hidden stone!", Basilus Valentinus, *Aurelia occulta philosophorum*, *Theatr. Chemic.* II ed., 1613; this saying can be found in a slightly altered form earlier). The vessel, *the grasale* or the chalice of the Holy Grail, is in fact 'the earth'; and 'the earth', according to the archaic symbolism found in many languages, is the human body. Human beings [Lat. *homo* from *humus*, 'earth'] are earthly, terrestrial creatures; their body is made of earthly clay (see the etymology of the word *Adam*), and the earth is their place of habitation (see the German expression *Boden*, 'soil'; and the English expressions *body* and *abode*). By visiting the interior of this vessel and *rectifying* (another technical term retained in chemistry to describe the corresponding operation) the Stone

Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) says (*Opera*, Basel, 1563, p. 632) that the teacher *descends* from Jerusalem to the rough desert mountains to cut and shape the stones for the holy edifice (the place of the theophany), and that the soul, chosen as a bride for the Son of God who dwells in immortality, is conformed to the transformation, *sicut lapides poliuntur*, as the polished stones used in the building of the Jerusalem Temple, in which a vision of God is attained. This symbolism of construction in Nicholas of Cusa is precisely in keeping with the later Masonic symbolism, in which the builders (*fellows*) polish the stone, squaring it and shaping *it into a cube*, or perfect stone, in *the inner chamber*. Dante, at the beginning of his *De vita nova*, says: 'I declare, *sincerely*, that the spirit of life dwells in the most secret recesses of the heart'. If the hermetical vessel and the earth are nothing other than the human organism, then the interior of the earth, the 'heart' of the organism, can be only the heart. The heart is the sanctuary or *crypt* of the temple, pictorially represented just *beneath the earth* in the crypt of ancient temples. We can understand why an old French alchemist – whose name we cannot now recall – explained the name of the Holy Grail by the incorrect, but significant, etymology *sang real*, or 'royal blood'. Such a connection between the vessel and the heart can be traced all the way back to ancient Egypt, since the hieroglyph for heart is a vase with *handles in the shape of ears* (the 'ears of the heart'). When we recall the Egyptian origin of the Hermetic tradition, the similarity between the heart and the athanor is particularly interesting.

We spoke of *the descent* into the interior of the earth. The symbol we used is as widespread as it is overlooked. We know very well that our consciousness is not an object located *within* the body; that there is no up and down; that it is absurd *to pray* to God, raising one's hands to hypothetical 'heavens' and adopting the pitiful and pleading expression of a dog that, not without a vain fear of a beating, waits for its master to give it the scraps. The feeling of consciousness merging into its deepest corners cannot be expressed in human language other than by resorting to analogous sensations from material human life. The origin of many important and ancient symbols – if we can speak of an origin – and thus of their interpretations, is also found in *the need* to express inner feelings through analogy (an analogy that *exists* and is recognised and used by the human mind) between these feelings and the feelings of ordinary life. The entire symbolism

The 'descent into hell' is connected with this. Thus in Egypt *the underworld*, *neter khert*, the dwelling place of the dead, was called *Amenti*, from the word *amen*, which means invisible, hidden. Likewise, the Greek Hades is invisible (ἀειδής). It is necessary to descend into this underworld, an invisible world, illuminated by the hidden sun or *Amen-Ra*, the *Midnight Sun* of initiation in the cult of the goddess Isis. This descent must be made without the loss of self-awareness, without drinking or coming into contact with the *dangerous* effects of Lethe's water. On the contrary, one must drink from the fresh spring of Mnemosyne, the bestower of immortality in Orphism, or from the waters of Dante's Eunoë. Mnemosyne, *mother of the Muses*, is memory, recollection [Italian: *ri-cordarsi* from *corda*], is opposed to Lethe and rules over it. In the same way, truth in Greek is *a-letheia*, a



learning is nothing other, to put it Platonically, than *an-amnesia*, or memory.

Even the symbolism of the stone, the *lapis occultus*, which is found by rectifying the interior (*interior* or *inferior*, as it is written, and now we can understand why, in the later variations of Basil Valentine's expression), originates, though not chronologically, from an inner feeling. This is ultimately made very likely. Although the initial, uncertain feeling of immersion in the inner corners of consciousness is easily accessible, to attain the feeling of 'petrification' a long period of diligent ritual performance is usually required. A sixteenth-century Italian text entitled *The Practice of Philosophical Ecstasy*, probably by Campanella, was published by D'Ancona, in his work (Turin, 1854, vol. I, p. CCCXLIII), says that at a certain level of practice one becomes 'as calm as a plant or a stone.' This confirms how spontaneous and accurate is the comparison of attaining such a state with the discovery of the stone. According to the Rosicrucian Michael Maier, the Philosopher's Stone is the very stone which, at the instigation of Cybele, Saturn swallowed, in order to save Jupiter from his father's gluttony. Jupiter was thus able to escape his fate and become king of Olympus. The 'Black Stone', a symbol of Cybele, was brought to Rome by the Romans and kept on the Palatine, and they also possessed and revered another *\*lapis niger\** for centuries in the forum, at the beginning of the Sacred Way, the *\*via sacra\**. That stone fell from the heavens and the Romans called it *abadir*, and the Greeks βαίτωλος. According to René Guénon (*Le Roi du Monde*, 1958, p. 76), the word βαίτωλος is the same as the Hebrew word *Beth-el* (*House of God*), which is the name Jacob gave to the stone he used as a pillow when he saw the house of God and the heavenly gate in his famous dream. It is also the name Jacob gave to the city near the place where he had the dream. Interestingly, according to *Genesis*, the city's original name was *Luz*. And 'luz' in Hebrew is the name of the small, *indestructible* bone to which the soul is attached after death until the day of the 'resurrection'. 'Luz' is also the name of the almond tree. Near the city of Luz stood an almond tree, in the root of which was a hole through which one could enter an underground, completely hidden passage leading to the city of Luz. Thus, we return to the symbol of the subterranean passage, which was associated with the symbol of the stone. The entire symbolism of 'spiritual building' used in *the Gospel*, and typical of Freemasonry, just as the symbolism of the Stone of Wisdom, is a development of this fundamental symbol which cannot be understood (nor learnt) until the 'hidden stone' is found.

We have seen that we are touching upon the *lapis niger*. We could make further observations and comparisons concerning the importance of *black stones* in ancient Rome, in the Muslim tradition and in the tradition of *Agartha*, the subterranean world mentioned by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre in his *Mission of India*,<sup>4</sup> Ossendowski in his famous work *Beasts, Men and Gods*<sup>5</sup> and Guénon in *The King of the World*.

4 Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842-1909) was one of the most influential thinkers, philosophers and mystics of the 19th century in France. He was the founder of the Masonic-Templar Order of the Strict Observance. Interestingly, during the Second World War, the Gestapo seized copies of ' ' of his famous, posthumously published book, *Mission de l'Inde*. (trans. note)

5 Serbian edition: *Beasts, Men and Gods*, F. Ossendowski, Ukronia, Belgrade, 2005. (trans. note)

The fact that this hidden gem, which can be found by descending into 'Infernal' or 'dark realms', invariably black, may simply seem a logical consequence in the development of this symbolism. However, if we recall how much can be associated with the full blossoming and fertility of this symbolism, it seems to us that even this symbol may have a specific connection to the feeling *of the* hermetic *blackest of all*. We must not forget that the 'hidden stone' is the Stone of Wisdom and not the philosopher's stone: in other words, it is an object used in the work, not a matter of perfecting the work; when the stone is found, a feeling of 'petrification' occurs along with a feeling of ultimate darkness.

When this state is reached, the understanding of symbols becomes effective; from it, the meaning of further symbolism is illuminated, and thus it becomes capable of suggesting what needs to be done and of guiding towards the next phase of the work. The recognition of the relationships and limitations of symbols is not left solely to the eye of reason. As soon as one moves on, the inner voice ('the voice of the heart') and the inner ear ('the ears of the heart') are set in motion. Thus, hermetically and literally speaking, the transmission of symbolism is accomplished. At certain moments, such a voice answers the question the mind poses about a given state and feeling; at other times, it intervenes directly at the right moment and succinctly reveals the secret. Let us be clear: this is not a question of the 'voice of conscience', the 'categorical imperative', or similar outpourings of what Nietzsche called 'pitiable morality', nor of mediumistic voices or phenomena. It is a matter of the internal senses to which people do not usually pay attention, since they have become deafened by external noise and are unable to perceive and distinguish subtle internal impressions. We can indeed agree that *oculos habent et non vident, aures et non audiunt* (They have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear). This inner voice and this inner hearing can be at work during waking life and in dreams just as much as at the various levels of consciousness attained through the performance *of rites*. At the same time as their induction, real, sensible phenomena sometimes occur, dispelling any possible scepticism. These phenomena often possess a manifest symbolic nature, and sometimes display an incomparable beauty and sublimity. We could offer some examples, but we have not emphasised this topic merely to mention facts that cannot be confused with ideas or hallucinations, as one might think when it comes to inner voices and perceptions; it should also be emphasised that the symbolic character extends to these manifestations. The symbolism is so innate in them that it becomes a kind of universal, initiatory language which finds its correspondence and expression in the initiatory language through signs, gestures, or 'universal words' used by some organisations more or less connected with the initiatory tradition.

# **Sacred Numbers in the Pythagorean Tradition of Freemasonry**

***For they seek freedom as precious as that known by those who  
would give their lives for its virtues.***

Dante, *Purgatorio*. I, 71-72.

According to the old Masonic rites and laws, the goal of Freemasonry is the perfecting of man. The ancient classical mysteries had the same goal and gave rise to the concept of τελετή, the perfection of initiation. This technical term was, as the Pythagorean Plutarch claims, etymologically linked to three meanings: those of end, death, and perfection. Jesus also uses the word τέλειος when he teaches his disciples to become 'perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect', as well as when he asserts, in one of the frequent passages where the Gospels disagree, 'no one is perfect except my heavenly Father.'

This definition might seem explicit and precise; and without a doubt, a slight change in form can seriously alter the substance of a matter. We shall take as an example the dictionary of Piana, which asserts that the aim of Freemasonry is the perfection of humanity; a great number of laymen, as well as numerous Masons, accept this definition. At first glance, it might seem that the perfecting of man is the same as the perfecting of mankind; but the meanings are diametrically opposed, and their apparent similarity causes ambiguity and conceals a misunderstanding of the whole matter. Others use the expression: the perfection of man – just as misunderstood. It is evidently almost impossible to determine which expression is correct, for any Freemason can proclaim as correct the expression that coincides with his own inclinations, and can even be content with a false interpretation. However, since we are speaking of determining the historically and traditionally correct interpretation, which fits within Masonic symbolism, the question changes and is no longer one of individual priorities.

A manuscript discovered by Locke (1696) in the Bodleian Library – and which was not published until 1748 – is attributed to Henry VI of England and defines Freemasonry as 'the knowledge of nature and the understanding of the forces that operate in it'; explicitly emphasises the existence of a link between Freemasonry and the Italian School, and claims that Pythagoras, a Greek, travelled to Egypt, Syria, and to all the countries where the Venetians [read Phoenicians] introduced Freemasonry in order to gain an education. Having been received into all the Masonic lodges, he acquired immense knowledge, returned to Magna Graecia... and founded a significant lodge in Croton.<sup>6</sup>

The manuscript actually speaks of Peter Gower; and as the surname Gower exists in England, Locke remained rather undecided as to the identification of Gower with Pythagoras. But other manuscripts and Anderson's *Constitutions* openly mention Pythagoras. The Cook manuscript states that Freemasonry is the principal part of geometry, and that Euclid, a wise and ingenious inventor, laid down the principles of this art and called it Freemasonry. There are also other traces of Pythagorean reminiscences in both *the Old Charges* and the earliest printed rituals<sup>7</sup>

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6 Hutchinson, *Spirit of Masonry*, Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*; G. De Castro, *Mondo segreto*, IV, 91; A. Reghini, *Noterelle iniziatiche*, *Sull'origine del simbolismo*, y *Rassegna Massonica*, 1923.

7 *The Grand Mystery of Free-masons discovered wherein are the several questions put to them at their Meetings and installation*, London 1724.

(1724) which attaches special importance to odd numbers, in accordance with the Pythagorean tradition.<sup>8</sup>

All the old Masonic manuscripts designate the perfecting of man, the ordinary individual, as the sole aim of Freemasonry. The proofs of initiation, the symbolic journeys, and the work of the apprentice and fellow craft have an obviously individual, and not a collective, character.

According to the oldest Masonic understanding, the 'Great Work' of perfection is achieved by working on the 'rough ashlar', i.e. on the individual, hewing, dressing and squaring the rough ashlar into a right-angled form, until it is transformed into the 'cubical stone of Masterhood', through the traditional rules of the Masonic 'royal art' of spiritual elevation. There is a perfect analogy with the parallel tradition - the Hermetic tradition, which, from as early as 1600, is found within it and shows that the 'Great Work' is accomplished by working on *the materia prima*, transforming it into the 'Stone of Wisdom' according to the rules of the 'Hermetic Royal Art'. An undertaking that follows the principle of Basil Valentine: V.I.T.R.I.O.L. (*Visita Interiora Terrae Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem*, or, Visit the interior of the earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone) or the *Emerald Tablet*, which modern Arabists attribute to the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana. In contrast, according to a more contemporary and secular Masonic understanding, the work of self-improvement is to be realised in the human community, humanity or society, which is to be changed and perfected; and in this way, the spiritual elevation of the individual is replaced by collective politics. This means that Masonic undertakings have a primarily social aim and character, and sometimes an exclusively social one. The true aim of Freemasonry – the perfecting of the individual – is relegated to a secondary position, if not genuinely neglected, forgotten and ignored.

Traditionally, the first understanding is undoubtedly correct, and in 18th-century Masonic literature, exaggerated and fanciful denials and identifications of the Eleusinian Mysteries with Freemasonry were in vogue. It is indisputable that the spiritual and symbolic heritage of the Masonic Order is in harmony only with the oldest conception of the aim of Freemasonry; Indeed, the candidate's vow at initiation, the symbolic journeys, the terrible trials, the birth into the Light of initiation, the death and resurrection of Hiram, cannot be understood in relation to the undertakings of Freemasonry and its purpose if all is to be reduced merely to politics.

Historically, the interest and involvement of Freemasonry in political and social affairs is not seen until 1730, and even then only in some parts of Europe, with the penetration of English Freemasonry onto the continent. What little is known, on the other hand, about the old lodges before the 17th century, shows the presence and use of the symbolism of the builders' guilds in Masonic undertakings; architectural, geometric, and numerical, which by its nature has a universal character. This is

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<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues*, Eclogue VIII.

a symbolism which is not associated with any civilisation, nor with any particular language, and remains independent of all prevailing political and religious norms; this is the reason why the Mason, in accordance with the ritual, knows neither how to read nor how to write.

With the legend of Hiram and the building of the Temple, a Hebrew element is introduced; and the sacred words of the Entered Apprentice and the Fellow Craft (the only gradations or degrees then in existence) which relate to this legend are Hebrew. But this legend does not belong to the traditional property of the Order; the death of Hiram does not appear in the old Masonic manuscripts, and Anderson's *Constitutions* do not recognise the third degree. In any case, there is nothing particularly surprising in the presence of Hebrew elements and words at a time when Hebrew was considered the sacred language which God used to address man in the Garden of Eden; it is a fact whose importance should by no means be exaggerated and which is not sufficient to justify the affirmation of Hebrew characters in Freemasonry. The letter G of the Greek-Latin alphabet, the initial letter of geometry and of the English word *God*, which appears in the Flaming Star or in the Masonic Delta, seems to be nothing more than an innovation (of no value to the illiterate), while the two fundamental symbols of the Order are also the two most significant symbols of Pythagoreanism: the pentalfa or pentagram and the Pythagorean tetractys. Masonic skill or royal art, terms used by the Neoplatonist Maximus of Tyre,<sup>9</sup> was identified with geometry, one of the sciences of the Pythagorean quadrivium, and it is difficult to understand how one Oswald Wirth, a Masonic erudite and Hermetist, managed to write that the Masons in the 17th century<sup>10</sup> proclaimed themselves adherents of the Royal Art because in earlier times there had been kings who were interested in the works of the privileged associations of builders in the Middle Ages. Elements of a purely Masonic character, together with numerical and geometric symbolism, constitute the symbolic heritage, the archaic and authentic rite of the fraternity. We do not call it its characteristic heritage, because these elements also appear, at least individually, in compagnonnage, which is otherwise very close to Freemasonry.

Later, between the 17th and 18th centuries, when English lodges began to accept as brethren *accepted masons*, men who did not practise the work of an architect or a stonemason, Hermetic and Rosicrucian phenomena appeared; such as Elias Ashmole (1617–1692), as Gould points out in his history of Freemasonry. Contact between the Hermetic and Masonic traditions outside England occurred at approximately the same time, which implies that Masonic lodges independent of the Grand Lodge of England existed on the continent. The title page of an important Hermetic text, published in 1618,<sup>11</sup> bears Hermetic symbols (*Rebis*) together with strictly Masonic symbols: the square and compass; the same is true

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9 Maximus of Tyre, *Discours philosophiques*, 1764: XI discourse.

10 Cf. Oswald Wirth, *Le Livre du maître*, 1923, page 7.

11 Johan Daniel Milius, *Basilica Philosophica*, Frankfurt, 1618.

It also occurs in an Italian alchemical booklet, printed on lead plates, which dates from that time.

In that booklet, Tubal-Cain is depicted, among other things, with a square and a compass in his hands. Today, according to the Bible, Tubal-Cain is considered the first blacksmith. By an error in etymology, which was very common at the time and was adopted by the erudite Vossius, he was identified with Vulcan, the smith of the Gods and God of fire, who, according to alchemists and Hermetists, rules over the Hermetic fire (or spiritual zeal), a fire that enables the great undertaking of transformation. In one of our youthful works<sup>12</sup> we gave a mistaken interpretation of the password *Tubalcaïn*, because we ignored the erroneous identification of Vulcan with Tubalcaïn, which was accepted by the Hermetists and erudites in the 17th and 18th centuries. Today, it seems obvious to us that this password, like some others, derives from Hermeticism and was probably introduced into Freemasonry and attached to the sacred words, representing proof of the link established between the Hermetic and Masonic traditions. The passwords for the 2nd and 3rd degrees do not exist in the Preston Rite (1730). Hermeticism and Freemasonry have as their aim the 'great undertaking of transformation', and both traditions transmit the secret of a single *art*, which they designate by the term 'royal art', a term used by Maximus of Tyre. It was therefore natural that Hermeticism and Freemasonry should consider themselves close. We can see that the adoption of Hermetic symbolism is not at the expense of Masonic universality or its independence from religion and politics, since Hermetic or alchemical symbolism is also, by its nature, opposed to all that is religious and political. Masonic and Hermetic art, or simply art, is a single art, not a doctrine or a religious affiliation.

Until 1717, every lodge was truly free and independent; the brethren of one workshop were received as guests in other workshops, provided they underwent a 'roof repair' (a type of examination to ascertain that the brother was indeed a brother); but only the 'Worshipful Master' of a lodge had unique and supreme authority among the brethren. In 1717, a great change occurred with the founding of the first Grand Lodge - the Grand Lodge of London, and shortly afterwards the Protestant clergyman Anderson began to issue Masonic *Constitutions* for lodges under the patronage of the Grand Lodge of London; thus, theoretically, a lodge could—and can—maintain its autonomy, or join the patronage of the Grand Lodge.<sup>13</sup> In practice, only those lodges which derive, directly or indirectly, from the Grand Lodge of London are considered regular today, and only as such can they be called 'regular'.

Therefore, it is very important to note that *the Anderson Constitutions* explicitly affirm that, in order to enter and belong to Freemasonry, the only condition is to be a *free man* of an unblemished character, and that

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12 Cf. A. Reghini, *Le parole sacre e di passo ed il massimo mistero massonico*, Todi, 1922.

13 This opinion is categorically expressed by O. Wirth; cf. *Le Livre du maître*, page 189.

(in contrast to various Christian sects) they extol the principle of tolerance towards every religious belief in particular, adding only that a Mason will never be a 'stupid atheist'. One might think that Anderson, in *the Constitutions*, acknowledges that a Freemason can be an intelligent atheist, but it is more likely that, as a good Christian, he thinks that every atheist is necessarily an imbecile, according to the saying he uses: *Dixit stultus in corde suo: Non est Deus* (The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God). Here it would be necessary to digress and note that in this debate, both the one who affirms and the one who denies generally possesses no knowledge of that which is asserted to exist or whose existence is denied, and that the word God is used in such a vacuous sense that any discussion becomes pointless. Be that as it may, *the Constitutions* of Freemasonry are emphatically theistic; and the laity who accuse Freemasonry of atheism, either do so with malicious intent, or do not recognise that its works are in praise of the Great Architect of the Universe. We shall also observe that this definition, which is in harmony with the meaning of Masonic symbolism, has an equally precise and clear meaning as opposed to certain empty, meaningless definitions such as: 'Our Lord', 'the Father of all men', etc.

The quality of a free man, which elevates a layman to initiation or makes a Mason worthy to be considered a brother, is of great importance. Anderson never ceases to call Freemasons '*Free Masons*', and so nothing remains but to study what this *freedom* of the Freemasons consists of. Is it merely a question of the economic and social privilege that does not apply to slaves and servants, and of the privileges and advantages enjoyed by the *Freemasons'* association in relation to the governments of states and distant lands in which it conducted its activities? Or perhaps this designation of the masons as French or 'free' should be understood differently, as if they were people who are free from prejudice and religious convictions; is this a freedom that would be pointless to reveal? If this is the case, then it would be futile to look for documented proof, and the question would remain unresolved. However, an explanation can be offered thanks to a document from 1509, the existence or importance of which has not been highlighted until now.

It concerns a letter, written on 4 February 1509 by the Italian Landolfo to his friend Cornelius Agrippa, in order to recommend an initiate to him. Landolfo writes to him:<sup>14</sup> "The German is like you, originally from Nuremberg, but lives in Lyon. A curious little investigator of the mysteries of nature, *he is a free man, completely independent of others*, who wishes, because of your reputation, to explore your abyss as well... Send him then to test him in that space; to fly, borne on the wings of Mercury, from the regions of Austria to those in Aquilon, to take up the sceptre of Jupiter; and if our newcomer wishes to swear our oath, admit him to our brotherhood." There was talk of a Hermetic secret organisation founded by Agrippa and exists an obvious analogy between the trials

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14 Cornelius Agrippa, *Epistulae*. Cf. also A. Reginii's monograph in the preface to the Italian translation of Agrippa's *De occulta Philosophia*.



the space the initiate must confront, and the terrifying trials and symbolic journey of Masonic initiation, even if the trial in that case does not take place on the wings of Hermes. Hermes Psychopomp, the father of philosophers according to the Hermetic tradition, is a guide of souls in the classical afterlife and in the mysteries of initiation. In this letter, the virtue of a free man is also revealed, sufficient to open the doors to the profane who knocks upon them; in essence, this marks the beginning of freedom of thought and tolerance. Both parallel traditions, the Hermetic and the Masonic, set the same condition before the profane in initiation - that he be a free man, from which it can be concluded that this condition did not relate to the individual privileges of the builders' association, as it would otherwise have been inappropriate to require *the 'accepted Masons'* to follow these rules, since they were not builders by profession but Freemasons.

The fundamental meaning of *the Andersonian Constitutions* is based on the principle of freedom of thought and tolerance, which allows non-Christians to belong to the Order. In Anderson's *Constitutions*, Freemasonry retains its universal character; it is not subordinated to any particular philosophical belief, nor to any religious sect, and shows no inclination towards the social and political action of the Order. It may be that this liberal sense, devoid of religious convictions, inspired Freemasonry equally before 1717, and that Anderson did nothing other than confirm it in *the Constitutions*.

Having become established in America and on the European continent, Freemasonry largely preserved its universal character of religious and philosophical tolerance and remained distant from political and social movements, even at times emphasising, as in Germany, its interest in Hermeticism. Around 1740, new rites and high degrees began to multiply, but while carefully preserving the rituals and the rite of the first three degrees of that true Freemasonry, which was equally called symbolic or blue Masonry.

The rituals of these high degrees were in some cases a development of the legend of Hiram, or are connected with the Rosicrucians, Hermeticism, the Templars, Gnosticism, the Cathars... and still lack an authentic Masonic character. From a Masonic point of view, they are completely superfluous. Freemasonry is complete in the first three degrees, recognised in all the rites on which the high degrees and the supreme councils of the various rites are based. A Companion Freemason, once he becomes a Master, has symbolically completed the great undertaking. The higher degrees can have only one truly Masonic function, if they contribute to the correct interpretation of the Masonic tradition and to a more intelligent understanding and application of the ritual, i.e., the Royal Art.

This certainly does not mean that the higher degrees should be abolished, since the brethren who are distinguished by them are free, and those who like to unite in rituals and bodies—to work on that which is not contrary to Masonic undertakings—should have the freedom to do so. However, with

From a purely Masonic point of view, their belonging to other rites and other supreme councils does not place them above Master Masons who feel no need to act except on that which is contained in the first three degrees of universal Masonry. Furthermore, it is evident that the various rites, such as the Swedenborgian, the Scottish Rite, the Rite of Strict Observance, the Memphis Rite, etc., are not universal, being merely variations based on the first three degrees, as they are diverse. To forget or attempt to render unnatural the universal, free and tolerant principle of Freemasonry in order to impose a viewpoint or individual goals upon the Brethren in the Lodges would mean to go against the spirit of Masonic tradition and against the principles of the *General Rules* of the Brotherhood.

In France, at the same time as the flourishing of the high degrees, the first perversion appears. The flourishing of ideas in that period, the Encyclopaedist movement, also leaves its mark on Freemasonry, which is expanding and growing rapidly. For the first time, the Order's interest is directed and concentrated on political and social issues. To claim that the French Revolution was the work of Freemasonry—it seems to us—is by no means an exaggeration; on the contrary, it is undeniable that Freemasonry in France suffered; and had it not been so, it would have been difficult for the influence of a great secular movement to lead to a revolution and culminate in an empire. French Freemasonry was thus reborn and continued to exist as a compromised Masonry, interested in political and social issues; some have tried to see it as 'traditional' because it represented the French Masonic tradition, very different from the ancient tradition. This deviation and this compromise are the main causes—and perhaps the only ones—of the difference that has thus arisen between Anglo-Saxon and French Freemasonry. This caused discord in Italy over the last fifty years, which resulted in disunity and weakness in the face of Jesuit and Fascist attacks and persecutions. In any case, even the brethren who follow the tradition of the French Freemasons have not forgotten the principle of tolerance, and in the Italian Masonic lodges, long before the Fascist persecution, there were brethren of all faiths and all political parties, including Catholics and monarchists.

It should also be remembered that, in the period preceding the French Revolution, not all Freemasons had forgotten the true nature of Freemasonry, even when they were disorientated by the multitude of different and conflicting customs. At the Monastery of Philalèthe, Freemasons of all rites met, driven by the same desire: to restore unity. Only Cagliostro, who founded the Rite of Egyptian Freemasonry, composed of three degrees and exclusively dedicated to the undertaking of spiritual building, refused to attend the assembly in this monastery for reasons which it would now be too long to set out.

The influence of French Freemasonry, after the Revolution and during the Empire, was also felt in Italy. Even today, the presence of certain technical terms in Masonic 'enterprises' is proof of that influence, such as the Venerable's *malle* (literally translated into Italian as *maglietta*), as well as others.

terms (*louve-ton*, a phonetic-semantic translation of the name *Lufton*, and son of Gavaon, a generic name for Freemasons according to the first English and French rites). French and Italian Freemasonry were closely linked throughout the last century, and at times had a revolutionary-republican relationship, but also a materialist-positivist one, which followed the philosophical fashion of the era. It can be said that Italian Freemasonry became a materialist Freemasonry, because it was always tolerant of all opinions, and for this reason it never ceased to celebrate particularly great spirits such as Giuseppe Mazzini and great Freemasons such as Garibaldi, Bovio, Carducci, Filopanti, Pascoli, Domizio Torrigiani and Giovanni Amendola, all idealists and spiritualists.<sup>15</sup> It was only the furious savagery and vandalism of the fascist brutes that desecrated our temples, libraries, and smashed the busts of Mazzini and Garibaldi that adorned our seats.

On the other hand, it should be noted that English Freemasonry has always preserved its spiritualist character and has never gone so far as to deny the existence of the Great Architect of the Universe. It has often been tempted, and still is, to give a certain Christian tone to its whole spiritualism, thereby moving away from the spirit of absolute and non-denominational impartiality of *the Andersonian Constitutions*. It cannot be denied that the obligation to take an oath on the Gospel of St. John is not proof of intolerance towards laymen, agnostics, and pagan brethren, Jews and freethinkers who have no particular fondness for the Gospel of St. John and ignore all that is of the Johannine tradition. Intolerance is also shown by the bad habit of inserting the text and commentary of the Gospel chapter into the course of the Lodge's proceedings. If this custom, which is open to criticism, gains in importance, it will result in reducing the Lodge's proceedings to an ordinary Quaker or Puritan worship service, to a kind of

'The rosary' or 'evening services', useless and unbearable for the free thought of so many brethren who in England and America neither go to Mass, nor accept the infallibility of the Pope, nor the authority of the Bible. Is it necessary to create a bad climate and irritation in our ranks without a single respected counter-party? Can it be believed that the others will follow this path and return to their own religions, thereby defending themselves from the godlessness of the English and Americans?

These conclusions serve as a reminder to preserve the universal character of Freemasonry above religious and philosophical beliefs and political compromises. This does not mean that politics should be ignored. In fact, it should be

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<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini (1805 - 1872), founder of 'Young Italy' (a secret society which worked to establish a republic in Italy). Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807 - 1882), an Italian patriot who fought to liberate Italy from Austrian rule, from the Bourbons (the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) and, finally, from the Papacy. Giovanni Bovio (1841 - 1903), philosopher and radical left-wing politician. Giosuè Carducci (1835 - 1907), poet. Quirico Filopanti (1812 - 1894), patriot and university professor. Giovanni Pascoli (1855 - 1912), poet. Domizio Torrigiani (1879 - 1932). Giovanni Amendola (1882 - 1926), politician, philosopher, founder of the Movement for National Democratic Unity.

to protect against it. Intolerance cannot make room for tolerance, but tolerance can accept everything except overtly aggressive intolerance. From the moment Anderson's *Constitutions* appeared with their principle of freedom and tolerance, the Catholic Church excommunicated Freemasonry, which was solely guilty of tolerance; and, on the other hand, cruelty towards Freemasonry never ceased. In Italy, the persecution of Freemasonry during the last twenty years was initiated by the Jesuits and nationalists;<sup>16</sup> as for the Fascists, to win the favour of the aforementioned gentlemen, they did not hesitate to provoke the civilised world's aversion towards Italy on account of the vandalism against Freemasonry. The Jesuits lost that war, but the disease of intolerance is constantly spreading, taking on new forms, and one must protect oneself from it. On the other hand, the time has come, if we are not mistaken, for Freemasonry to spread throughout the entire country and to establish a brotherhood among people of all races, cultures, and faiths; and for this undertaking to be successfully carried out, it is necessary that Freemasonry does not adopt the form and tone of a minority, which is repugnant to the great Eastern civilisations: China, India, Japan, Malaysia and the Islamic world. This is possible, so long as Freemasonry refrains from religion and remains faithful to its spiritual heritage, so long as it consists of no single official denomination, or philosophical and religious system, so long as it does not belong to any group of dogmas or ideological and moralistic prejudices, until it drags after it some scientific burden which is considered the bearer of the truth to which the infidels must be converted. It is illusory to imagine, if a true faith or philosophy even exists, that we can conquer and communicate with others through conversion, confession, or the utterance of certain formulae, for each person understands these words of conversion in their own way, in accordance with their own culture and intelligence; but in essence they are nothing more than, as Hamlet said: *words, words, words*. Until this is realised, it seems that these words are understood in an identical manner, but as soon as reflection occurs, sects and heresies arise, each one convinced of its own truth. Knowledge can no longer be grasped rationally, nor expressed, nor transmitted; it is *a vision*, essential and necessarily indeterminate, uncertain; only when the eyes are opened to the light with the birth into a new life can this vision be perceived. The Masonic or Royal Art is the art of working on the rough stone, to enable the transformation of man and the gradual perception of the initiatory light, which certainly does not mean that Freemasonry has a monopoly on the Royal Art.

Over the last two centuries, most opponents have attacked Freemasonry systematically and solely through lies and slander, relying on moralistic and patriotic sentiments. It was thus claimed that Masonic undertakings consisted of abominable orgies, and for this reason the rites were distorted, the ceremonies exposed and ridiculed; Masons were accused of treason because of the Order's international character, it was claimed

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16 Cf. Emilio Bodrero in *Civiltà cattolica*, the Jesuits' organ, and in *Roma Fascista*, in the periodical press; also in *Ignis* and *Rassegna Massonica*, in 1925.

that Freemasonry was nothing other than a Jewish instrument, it was always attempted to deceive and stir up the faithful and the people in general against the 'Secret Society'. The Freemasons, of course, knew very well that these were merely slanders, and since nothing had succeeded in shaking them, an attempt was made to prevent them from associating in their work, or to make them respond to the slanders and defend themselves. Recently, a certain Catholic writer<sup>17</sup> published a study on "Secret Tradition", where he, skilfully and with skill, instead of continuing to circulate the incessant and customary slanders intended to impress the layman, replaced them with a cunning and crafty criticism with which he intended to impress the learned reader and the spirit of our brethren.

This critique proves that the foundation of the sacred tradition contains nothing but complete emptiness (page 139) and confirms that 'the school of initiation—or through it, the Secret Tradition—has taught humanity nothing' (page 155). It is incomprehensible how it can be claimed at the same time that this absolute emptiness, 'this secret tradition' (page 149), corresponds, albeit often distorted, with the Gnostic teachings, but let us not demand too much. Freemasonry is therefore, according to the author, a Sphinx without a riddle that teaches no doctrine; the reader comes to the conclusion that, being devoid of substance, Masonry has no value. On the previous pages we have demonstrated that Freemasonry teaches no doctrine and *ought not* to teach one, and that this characteristic is its greatest value. Therefore, to conclude that *the secret tradition* contains a void instead of a doctrine, one must believe that only a doctrine can fill the void. On page 153, the author still asserts: "the system of initiation presupposes that man can, by the exertion of his intelligence, comprehend the inexplicable questions of the cosmos and the beyond"; on page 152 it reads:

"The Catholic Church refutes the vain and diligent studies of those who are self-styled initiates, the untouchable force of dogma must be the only one because two truths cannot exist," and that the system of initiation is incompatible with Christianity. To this claim we respond by ignoring the existence of the initiation system, for we do not recognise any initiates who possess authority, and we can even less accept the illusion that there is a possibility of resolving inexplicable questions through their intelligence or diligent study, but we find it difficult to acknowledge that faith in a single dogma can lead to knowledge; therefore, to know is not the same as to believe. We truly believe that truth is necessarily ineffable and inexplicable; and we leave to the laity the comforting and naive illusion that they can believe it is possible, in some way, to formulate this truth and this knowledge in the form of beliefs, formulae, doctrines, systems, and theories. Moreover, even Jesus knew that his parables were merely parables; but he also told his disciples that he had 'enabled *them* to understand *the mystery* of the kingdom of heaven.' Obviously, *\*sola fides sufficit ad firmandum cor sincerum\** (Faith alone is sufficient to strengthen a sincere heart), but *it is \*non sufficit\** (not sufficient) to reveal the mysteries, which is equally important for simple reasoning. By this we do not wish in any way to diminish the value of faith and reason, but faith alone leads to philosophical despair; and

17 cf. Raffaele Del Castillo, *La tradizione segreta*, Milan, 1941.

both are a bit like tobacco and coffee - two poisons that complement each other; but it is certainly not enough to smoke a pipe and drink coffee to rise to knowledge. To knowledge *multi vocati sunt* (many are called), but not all; and among the many, *pauci electi sunt* (the few are chosen). In contrast, according to the Catholic Church, it is enough to have faith in dogma, and knowledge and paradise are accessible to every pocket at truly paltry prices.

To summarise: there is no secret Masonic doctrine;<sup>18</sup> but there is a secret art, called the Royal Art or, more simply, *the Art*; it is the art of spiritual construction to which sacred architecture corresponds. The Masonic tools therefore have a symbolic meaning in the undertaking of transformation, and the secret of the Royal Art corresponds to the architectural secret of the builders of the great medieval cathedrals. It is natural that Freemasons praise the Great Architect of the Universe, even if it is not defined what is actually meant by that formulation.

In ancient architecture, especially sacred architecture, questions of relationship and proportion were of paramount importance; classical architecture defined the proportions of the various parts of a building, particularly temples, based on *the secret ratio* to which Vitruvius refers.<sup>19</sup> There is a whole body of reference literature dedicated to Egyptian architecture, and most of all to the Pyramid of Khufu, which illustrates its mathematical character; and, proceeding with the utmost caution, it is true, for example, that this pyramid is situated exactly on thirty degrees latitude, so as to form an equilateral triangle with the centre of the earth and the North Pole; it is true that it is perfectly oriented and that its north-facing side is exactly perpendicular to the axis of the earth's rotation, in accordance with the position the pyramid held at the time of its construction. As for the buildings of the Middle Ages, they were not guided solely by architectural principles; they concerned themselves with the orientation of the church, the number of naves, etc.; the art of building was linked to the science of geometry. The square and compass are the two basic symbols of the builders' guild and are a fundamental symbol in the Masonic art; while the ruler and compass are the two basic tools in elementary geometry. The Bible teaches us that God ordained *omnia in numero, pondere et mensura* (all things are in number, weight and measure); the Pythagoreans coined the word *cosmos* to describe the beauty of the universe in which they established the existence of unity, order, harmony, and proportion; and of the four sciences of the Pythagorean quadrivium – arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy – the first was the foundation of all the others. Dante compared the Heaven of the Sun to arithmetic, because

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18 O. Wirth said the same thing after 1941: "Since the method of initiation refuses to instil anything that already exists, it is hardly permissible to teach a specific doctrine within the Mysteries," in *\*Le Livre du maître\**, page 119. Del Castillo, on the contrary, maintains—without any proof—that Freemasonry attempted to teach a secret doctrine and claims that there is no trace of this particular doctrine. Instead of accepting that his viewpoint is untenable, he accuses Freemasonry of being too unwieldy and incompetent. *O vos qui cum Iesu itis e, non ite cum Iesuitis* (O, you who walk with Jesus, do not walk with the Jesuits).

19 Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, 1st century BC, author of *De architectura*, dedicated to Augustus, the only work on the subject to have survived from antiquity. (trans. note)

"as all the stars are made bright by the light of the sun, so all the sciences are made bright by the light of arithmetic," and likewise "as the eye cannot look upon the sun, so neither can the eye of the mind look upon the infinite number." (*The Banquet*, II, XIII, 15 and 19).

Without commenting on this passage, one cannot determine the place that arithmetic holds for Dante. On the other hand, both the Bible and architecture point to the importance of numbers. Even today, when it is not yet accepted that there exists a unity of order, harmony and law in the cosmos, nor is anything more accepted than the limited determinism of the laws of probability, modern physics nevertheless boils down to the consideration of numbers and the relationships between them; indeed, nothing else remains but numbers. so both Einstein and Bertrand Russell have stated and accepted that modern science has returned to Pythagoreanism.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Freemasons equated the art of architecture with geometry and gave such importance to the understanding of numbers, which justifies their traditional intention to be the only ones who understand the 'sacred numbers'.

But we must also consider some things. Geometry, in its part concerning measurement, i.e. in measuring, requires knowledge of arithmetic. Therefore, in antiquity, the acceptance of the word *Geometry* was less common than it is today, and geometry generically denoted all of mathematics, so that the identification of the royal art with geometry in Freemasonry does not refer only to geometry understood in its modern sense, but also to arithmetic. Furthermore, we must note that the connection between geometry, the royal art, architecture, and spiritual building is the same one that inspires Plato's dictum: 'Let no one enter here but a geometer'. The saying is of dubious origin, as it is not recorded except by one later commentator, but in works that are undeniably Plato's we can read: "...geometry is a way for the soul to be directed towards the whole of being, a preparatory school for the scientific spirit, which is capable of directing the activity of the soul towards superhuman things; (...) "It is even impossible to attain true faith in God without knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, and the inner unity of the latter with music."<sup>20</sup>

This Platonic understanding and attitude probably originate from the Italian or Pythagorean school, which had a great influence on him, allowing it to be claimed that Freemasonry found inspiration in Plato, who in the final analysis always turns to Pythagorean geometry and arithmetic. The fact that there is a connection between Freemasonry and the Pythagorean Order—that it is an uninterrupted historical link, and not merely a spiritual kinship—is certain and clear. The Archpriest Domenico Angera, in the preface he wrote for printing "General Statutes of the Masonic Society of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite" (1874), which had already been published in Naples in 1820, categorically asserts that the Masonic Order is identical to the Pythagorean Order.

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20 Gino Loria, *Le scienze esatte nell'antica Grecia*, 2nd edition, Milan 1914, page 110.

But even if we do not go so far, the similarity of both orders is certain. The geometric skill of Freemasonry essentially derives, directly or indirectly, from Pythagorean geometry and arithmetic; before them, it did not exist, for it was the Pythagoreans who created the liberal sciences, according to what can be historically concluded, beginning with Proclus' testimony. "Apart from some geometrical achievements, which can, without a doubt, be attributed to Thales, geometry," says Paul Tannery, "sprang whole from the mind of Pythagoras, as a fully armed Minerva sprang from Jupiter; and the Pythagoreans were the first to study arithmetic and numbers'.

To study the properties of the sacred numbers of Freemasons and their role in Freemasonry, the path that opens up for this is the study of ancient Pythagorean arithmetic; and it should be studied both from an arithmetical point of view and from the point of view of symbolic or formal arithmetic.

- as Pico della Mirandola calls it - which corresponds to the philosophical and spiritual vision that Plato gives to geometry. Both meanings are closely linked in the development of Pythagorean arithmetic. Understanding Pythagorean numbers facilitates the understanding of the sacred numbers of Freemasonry.



**AN ITALIAN ALCHEMICAL TEXT  
ON LEAD LEAVES**

In the year 1910, a small work appeared entitled: *A Little Book on Alchemy Written on Lead Sheets in the 14th Century*, preserved in the library of the late Professor Scipio Lapi. It was published with an introduction, notes and thirteen facsimiles by Angelo Marinelli, with a preface by Professor Cesare Anibaldi. (Città di Castello Tipografia dello Stabilimento S. Lapi, 1910.)

The original lead text is 'a rectangular booklet of 36 pages, numbered *recto* and *verso*, made of lead sheets about one millimetre thick.' According to Marinelli and Anibaldi, the book undoubtedly dates from the fourteenth century. Carbonelli, however, in one of his works (Giovanni Carbonelli, *Sulle fonti storiche della Chimica e dell' Alchimia in Italia*, Rome, 1925.), wrote about this book and compared it with another similar lead manuscript preserved in the Diplomatic Archive of Florence. Carbonelli dated both these manuscripts to the same period – according to him, they were written in a script of the first half of the sixteenth century. We believe, and shall set out our reasons, that the booklet published by Marinelli is even younger; to be precise, that it dates from the first half of the seventeenth century. As for the second text – on which Cesare Guasti gave a lecture in 1859 (the lecture is found in Guasti's *\*Opere\**, vol. III, part I, pp. 93-102, Prato, 1896.) – if nothing else, it is slightly younger than the first text. This is not a matter of a purely scientific nature; among other things, the problem is also linked to a question of a very uncertain and controversial historical nature, namely the relationship between Hermeticism and Freemasonry.

The cover of the booklet has a polished background, and in the centre of the front we see an image of a sun-person, surrounded by alternating straight and wavy rays. In the middle of the fourth page, we see an image of a crescent-person, whose pointed beard forms one of the moon's horns. The text of the booklet is interspersed with illustrations reproduced by Marinelli—though not photographically. As we refer to Marinelli's work, we shall briefly describe these images in the order they appear, thus following the sequence and repeating the text of the booklet step by step.

The first plate shows a richly decorated carriage, drawn above the clouds by four horses, in which sits a fully clothed human figure, whose head is surrounded by a radiant halo. In one hand he holds the reins and in the other a whip with many straps; he has no beard – a detail that led Marinelli to conclude that this is Dawn in his chariot, illuminated by the sun, which, in turn, is seen in the upper right-hand corner.

At the bottom of the illustration is the inscription: *Pater eius est Sol; mater eius est Luna* (His father is the Sun; his mother is the Moon). This is a maxim from the 'Emerald Tablet' attributed to Hermes, 'the Father of the Philosophers.' The charioteer controlling the four horses is reminiscent of *the Currus Triumphalis Antimonii* (1604) Basil Valentine, and more precisely to *the Auriga ad quadrigam auriferam* (1601) of Nicholas Barnaud. The proximity of the Latin words *auriga*

(charioteer) and *aigit* (gold) is evident and is typical of the Hermetic style. However, this comparison is etymologically incorrect, as *auriga* derives from the Sanskrit *\*arv\** = horse (runner), although in Barnaud's time the comparison must have seemed indisputable and very suggestive. The four horses represent the four elements; the clouds tell us that this scene does not take place on earth, but in heaven; in other words, one should seek not a material meaning but a spiritual one.<sup>21</sup>

On the other side of the booklet, we see a bearded and half-naked man with a beard sitting on a small hillock beneath a tree. A symbol of Saturn is inscribed on his chest; at the bottom of the plate we read: *Hic est pater, et mater eius, sive lapis noster et philosophorum* (This is the father and mother of it, that is, our stone and the Philosopher's Stone). The fact that this figure symbolises Saturn can be confirmed by the hair. Saturn, the Italian deity of sown fields (Varron recorded: *ab satu dictus Saturnus* – Saturn was named after the sowing), wears a beard for the future harvest. It will not surprise us to encounter Saturn right at the beginning, especially when we think of the *\*saturnia regna\** (the reign of Saturn) of the golden age.

In the language of alchemy, Saturn is lead, the metal from which our alchemical text is made, just as is another manuscript. Ancient Egyptian alchemists considered lead to be *the progenitor* of the other metals. Its name also referred to any white, fusible metal or alloy, namely to tin (white lead), and to alloys of copper and tin, which were likewise combined with antimony, zinc, etc. Our lead is the lead which Pliny and the ancients called 'black lead' (this is the obvious etymology of the Latin word *\*plumbeum\**), as opposed to white lead, that is, tin. Lead ores often contain silver, so that when working with them, it seemed the only thing to do was to imitate and assist nature in its work of transformation. The specific gravity of the metal and the slow movement of the planet Saturn, the most distant from the earth (Uranus and Neptune had not yet been discovered), make lead a natural symbol for that which is dense, slow, and heavy in the human body, and thus a symbol of the entire physical organism. The correspondence is not a mere result of our reasoning, but is a fact in itself, as can be seen in this French stanza of six lines:

*He has gone into the man Whose  
six-letter name is complete.  
If you add a 'P' and then  
permute the 'S' with the 'M'  
You will find without any  
preamble The true name of the  
subject of the Sages.*

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21 This may also mean that we are dealing here with operations and elements that point to a subtle plane. (UR's note)

(In man a part exists Whose  
name contains six letters.  
If you add the letter Π And  
rename the S as a M  
You will find without effort some True  
name of the matter of the Sages.)

The third figure of our Hermetic booklet depicts *the Rebis*, or the Hermetic hermaphrodite.

This symbol – probably the most important Hermetic symbol – can be traced, from alchemist to alchemist, all the way back to Zosimus of Panopolis, who was initiated into the Egyptian mysteries either at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century AD.

According to Zosimus:

*This is a great and divine mystery - that which was sought. This is the All. From this the All (proceeds) and for this the All (exists). Two natures, one essence; for one attracts the other and rules over it. This is the silver water (ἀργύριον), the hermaphrodite (ἀρσινόθηλος, from ἀρρην = male and θήλυς = female), which always eludes us and is always drawn to its elements. This is the divine water that the whole world has neglected, whose nature is difficult to conceive, for it is neither a metal, nor a moving water, nor a (metallic) body; it is not subject. (Collection of the Ancient Alchemists, Paris, 1888; vol. III, p. 146, from ms. 299 Library of San Marco, Venice, eleventh century.)*

This androgynous nature is attributed to the Mercury (Gr. υδράργυρος, liquid silver) in Zosimus.

This symbol appears in the oldest alchemical records of the Middle Ages, which are nothing other than translations or direct extracts from Arabic or Judeo-Arabic texts. This symbol records it as *Magnesia, petra Diabessi*, and by one name as *Rebis*, that is, *res bis*, or

"a twofold thing." Thus in the writings attributed to Rosimus (probably corrupted from Zosimus), which certainly predate the year 1330 (since Rosimus was cited by Pietro Bono of Pula in 1330), we read: 'Take the stone which is found everywhere, called Rebis... which means *binas res*, or two things, namely moist and cold and dry and hot' (*Rosimi ad Sarratantam episcopum in Auriferea Artis quam Chemiam vocant antiquissimi autores, sive Turba Philosophorum*, Basel, 1572, pp. 333-34). Furthermore, the Alemannic alchemist Richard Anglikus, who was a contemporary of Pietro Bono, writes: "The Stone is unique, just like the medicine which the philosophers call Rebis, that is, a double thing (*res bina*), made from the body and the white or red spirit" (Richardus Anglicus, *Correctorium in Theatrum Chemicum*, 1602, vol. II, p. 453). Lorenzo Ventura of Venice says: "That thing of which the Stone is made is called Rebis, that is, it is made of *res bis*.... It is made from two things, the sperm of a man and the menstruum of a woman; it is born from the red and the white..." (Laurentii Venturæ Veneti, *Liber de conficiendi Lapidis philosophicis ratione in Theat.*

*Chem.*, 1602, vol. II, p. 286). This list of alchemical writers who wrote on Rebis could easily be continued. We shall also mention Gaston Clavius (*Apologia Chypsopeia* or *Theat. Chem.*, 1602, II, 46); Philalethes (*Introitus apertus*, Amsterdam, 1667, p. 63, ch. XXIV); and Ireneus Philalethes (*Ennaratio methodica trium Gebri medicinarum...*, Amsterdam, 1678, p. 13).

Beginning with the second half of the sixteenth century, in Hermetic books and manuscripts we find several engravings and portraits of Rebis, and all of them depict him as an androgynous being. The images should be briefly considered in order to examine their variations and to establish the origin and date of the androgyne depicted in our Hermetic booklet.

As far as we know, the oldest of these depictions is found in the second edition (1539) of the work *De Arte aurifera* and in the third edition (1610) of the same work. The second volume of this work contains a text entitled *Rosarium philosophorum* (here mistakenly attributed to Arnold of Villanova), which is also included without illustrations in Magenta's *Biblioteca Chemica Curiosa* (II, 87), as the work of an anonymous author. This is one of the alchemical texts of the fourteenth century, and is derived—if not a translation—from an Arabic or Judeo-Arabic text. The tenth figure (*Artis auriferae quam Chemiam vocant*, Basel, 1593, II, p. 291; and 1610, II, p. 190) represents (see our figure 1) the Hermetic androgyne who stands on a crescent moon. On its back it has wings and in its right hand it holds a cup from which the heads and bodies of three small snakes protrude; in its left hand it holds a coiled snake. At the bottom on the right-hand side we see a bird, and on the left-hand side a small tree with six pairs of lunar faces and one separate face at the top. The seventeenth figure (p. 359, 2nd ed., and p. 235, 3rd ed.) is merely a variation of the tenth figure; The androgyne is clothed and not naked, and instead of standing on a crescent moon, he stands on a mound from which three snakes peek out; behind his legs lies an old lion. The androgyne has bat's wings, and on the right-hand side we again see three serpent heads, while on the left-hand side we see a coiled snake. At the bottom right is a swan or pelican with its young; on the left, we can see the same tree mentioned earlier. At the top, we read: *Perfectionis ostentio* (a display of perfection).

Figure 1. Hermetic androgyne from *the Rosarium Philosophorum*, reproduction from vol. II, p. 291, *Artis auriferae quam Chemiam vocant*, Basel, 1593.



According to the authoritative opinion of Michael Maier, this figure "expresses the summary of the whole art with an allegorical description, in verses in the German language, of a two-headed figure with a male and female face, which holds in its right hand three snakes, and in its left a viper." (*Symbola Aerae Mepsae Duodecim Nationum*, Author Michael Maiero, Frankfurt, 1617, VI, p. 274). See also what Abrasax wrote about this in the VT chapter.

Three years after the last edition of *De Arte aurifera*, in the famous Hermetic work we find the depiction of Rebis, with a significant innovation which is also present on our tablet; namely, the substitution of the Hermetic symbols in the hands of Rebis with the two most important symbols of Freemasonry, namely the square and the compass. In fact, the second edition of *Theatrum Chemicum* (Strasbourg, 1613), contains (IV, p. 468) a work entitled *Aureliae Occultae Philosophorum Partes duo*, which can be easily identified with the *Azoth* of Basil Valentine, whose text is also found in Manget's 1702 work. (*Bibl. Chem. Cur.* II, 217), in which it is attributed to the Arabian author Zadith. *Aurelia Occulta Philosophorum* is adorned with a multitude of figures, the fifth of which is shown here (see figure 2) and it depicts the Rebis.

At the top we read *Materia Prima*. The entire figure is enclosed within an egg (the philosophical egg of Hermetic creation); in the centre, Rebis, fully clothed, stands on the back of a winged dragon which has four legs and which spits fire. The dragon, in turn, stands on a winged globe, within which we can see a cross, an equilateral triangle and a square. On the upper and lower beams of the cross we can read the numbers 1 and 2; along the side of the triangle we read the number 3, and along the side of the square, 4.



Figure 2. Rebis of Basil Valentine: reproduction from *Aurelia Occulta Philosophorum*, in *Theatrum Chemicum*, Strasbourg, 1613, vol. IV.

Rebis of Basil Valentine holds a pair of compasses in his right hand and a protractor in his left. The right hand corresponds to the masculine part of the figure (a detail that is inverted on the plate of the Italian alchemical text). On the androgyne's chest we read *Rebis*. It is very interesting that the letters of the word *Rebis* are written from right to left and are reversed; the word will appear if one looks at it in a mirror. From the centre of the chest, two rays lead to the astrological symbols of the seven planets, or to the alchemical symbols of the seven corresponding metals, all arranged in a circle which begins with the left - the feminine side - and then continues in this order: Saturn, Jupiter, Moon, Mercury, Sun, Mars, Venus. Thus, the symbol of Mercury is in the upper centre between the two heads, the masculine and the feminine. After this table comes a broad and very vague explanation, which I shall not set out now for the sake of the length of our exposition.

Rebis, in a departure from Basil Valentine—and thanks to the importance of this author—soon became a very popular Hermetic symbol. It is not known whether it appeared in the German edition of Valentin's *Occulta Philosophia* (1613), but it is found in the French editions of *the Azoth* (Paris, 1624; 2nd ed., 1659) and in the third edition of *the Theatrum Chemicum* (1659-61). It was also reproduced in the 140th engraving at the end of the third volume of Milius's *Basilica Philosophica* (1620), and therefore, along with the other figures from Milius's work, in Daniel Stolz's *Hortulus hermeticus* (Frankfurt, 1627). We could easily supplement this list of reproductions with those of Rebis by Basil Valentine, right up to the most recent depictions by Silberer, Poussin, and Wirth: However, it will suffice to note how this symbol only appeared in 1613 and how it became widespread in the first half of the seventeenth century.

The androgyne painted on the board of our Italian Hermetic text is obviously derived from that androgyne; only the crudeness of the drawing could have led Marinelli and Carbonelli to attribute an earlier date of origin to it. Even the inscription at the bottom is clearly taken from the figure found in *Amelia Occulta Philosophorum*.

The Rebis of Basil Valentine is different from all other earlier representations of the Hermetic androgyne - and particularly from those of *Artis auriferae* - thanks above all to the Masonic and not alchemical symbols that replace the coiled serpent, the three-headed serpent and other symbols in the other variations. Another novelty - without leaving the field of Hermeticism - is the appearance of the seven planets around the Rebis, the appearance of the dragon and the winged globe.

This dragon and globe have disappeared from the plate of our booklet, as has the word *Rebis*, which is found on the androgyne's chest. Instead, our Rebis is adorned with an eye on each elbow, which is clearly a representation of extraordinary vision. Furthermore, on the thighs, on the corresponding male and female sides, we find two crude drawings of male and female genitalia. Above the vulva, the artist has drawn a globe surmounted by a cross; above the penis, a diamond. This globe surmounted by a cross and the diamond on the side form the symbol of antimony (cf. *Theatro d'Arcani* by the physicist Lodovico Locatelli,

Bergamo, 1644, p. 409); thus, in open contradiction, *the prima materia sapientis* (the prime matter of the wise) is no longer lead, but antimony. The fact that it is indeed antimony is confirmed by the first plate of the Florentine Lead Codex, which contains an equilateral triangle with its apex pointing upwards and nine letters written along its sides. Above is written: *Benedicta* (sic!) *lapidem Prima materia est* (Blessed be the stone - **OH**, the Prima Materia). The nine letters (*nine*, like the nine lead plates of this codex) form the word *antimonio*; it is strange that neither Guasti nor Carbonelli were aware of this. Beneath the triangle is written: *Ego sum Ambagasar quo dabo a tibi veri secretum secretissimum noster*. Written grammatically incorrectly in Latin, this sentence means: 'I am Ambagasar who will give you the true, most secret secret of ours.'

The Florentine treatise ends with the sentence that the matter on which one must work is "simple, called Saturn, father and son"; then it continues: "Look at the triangle." In this way, Lead (Saturn) and Antimony are equated. Marinelli's book, on page VII, says the same: "This matter is called the chosen and immature mineral, or your Saturn *ex hoc*<sup>22</sup>NØ, that is, black mineral earth." After all, the identification of Saturn with Antimony had been theoretically made at the beginning of Artefius's work, *Liber Secretus*. **HE** was the first (eleventh century) to use the word *antimony*, which probably derives from the Arabic word *athmond* or from the Greek *ithmé* (σίτημι) with the addition of the letter *al*. This identification also takes us back to the time of Basil Valentine and to his *coach* and his *antimony regulus*. By smelting the mineral with *black sulphur*, i.e. with antimony (SD2S3, antimony trisulphide; antimonite), sulphur produces sulphides with the metals, and the gold of the mineral unites with the metallic antimony which is now free (the ancient regulus of antimony), producing a regulus or lump of antimony and gold. It is sufficient to heat this regulus, using the lowest degree of fusion and volatility of antimony, to isolate the gold. This fusion with (sulphurous) antimony was called the 'royal bath,' or 'sun's bath' (*balneum solis regis*); Antimony, by which all metals are consumed and only gold remains, was called *the wolf* that devours all metals.

Gwasti concluded that Ambagasar was the author of a small treatise, although he admits that he was unable to establish the true author and work. The key to the mystery lies in the fourth plate of Marinelli's alchemical booklet, which we describe here. According to Marinelli; "In the fourth figure we can see a man, poorly dressed in a flowing robe, who in his right hand holds a small globe covered with a cross. In his left hand he has a clock, and on each elbow there is an eye; this is a clear, though strange, personification of time."

At the bottom of the plate it says: *Ego sum Tubalchaino qui dabo tibi verissimum secretum secretissimum nostrum*. This sentence is the same as in the Florentine Manuscript, only this time without grammatical errors, and with

22 *From this.*



replacing Ambagsra with Tubalcain. This figure holds the first symbol of antimony in its right hand; in its left hand is a tablet which is cut into a semicircle on its upper side. On it is the symbol which Marinelli mistook for a clock, and in it Carbonelli saw, instead of a clock, the symbol of fire  $\Delta$  and of gold  $\odot$ . However, this circle is found within a square, which is reminiscent of the square which overlapping a triangle, another symbol of antimony which was popular in the seventeenth century. We can also observe that these four elements, namely the circle, the cross, the triangle and the square, are found—albeit in a different order—within the winged globe of Basil Valentine. In the circle within the square, we can once again see a representation of the *squared circle*, another symbol used in a Hermetic sense during the first half of the seventeenth century (see Michael Maier, *De circulo phisico quadrato, hoc est auro...*, Oppenheim, 1616). It should be noted that what is on the board is not actually a representation of a circle, but rather of a spiral; and if this was done intentionally, and if it is not the result of the artist's inexperience, we should consider another interpretation. The spiral is not a common alchemical or Hermetic symbol: it represents *the vortex* of life, and if placed within a square, which is a symbol of form, and beneath the symbol  $\Delta$  of Hermetic fire, it symbolises the vortex of life in its unfolding creation, within the interplay of two opposing aspects of form represented by two pairs on opposite sides of the square.

Tubal-Cain<sup>23</sup> is 'the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron' mentioned in the Holy Scriptures (Genesis 4:19-22), and this is, in short, the reason for his place on the alchemical table. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most scholars sought to explain all languages in terms of their relationship to Hebrew, which was spoken by Adam and Eve and by the Eternal Father himself in the time of the Garden of Eden. Thus, Hebrew was considered the mother of all languages. Following this logic, Tubal-Cain was identified with Vulcan, both because of the phonetic similarity and because Vulcan was also the smith of the gods. Johann Funger, in his *\*Etymologicum Trilingue\** (Frankfurt, 1605 – see pp. 859, 916, 917, 1607 ed.), writes: "Tubalcain, Thubalkain, that is, *\*terrenus possessor\**, or Vulcan, the master of brass, or of metals..." (Christian Beckman, *\*Mapiitio ad latinam linguam\**, 5th ed., 1672, p. 1124; 1st ed., 1626). Samuel Bochart: "Vulcan is Tubal-Cain, as the name implies." (*Opera omnia*, 1712, vol. I, p. 399; 1st ed., 1646). Vossius (1662) and Stillingfleet (1662) also came to the same conclusion.

While scholars identified Vulcan with Tubal-Cain, alchemists and Hermeticists attributed an alchemical or Hermetic nature to him. Gerhard Dorn, in the second half of the sixteenth century, mentioned a certain 'Vulcanicus Abrahamus Tubalchajna, an alchemist, astrologer and mathematician who brought various arts and sciences from Egypt into the land of Canaan,' (G. Dorn, *Congeries Paracelsicae* in *Theatrum Chemicum*, 1613, II, 592; Dorn's works appear between 1567 and 1569). Michael Maier mentions how  
- very understandably - "many people attribute the first chemical practice"

23 In Daničić's translation, he is called Tovel. (translator's note)

with Tubal-Cain. Olao Borichio, a historian and apologist of alchemy, also identifies Vulcan with Tubal-Cain (*De Ortu et deprogressu Chemiae*, Hafniae, 1668). This identification and this alchemical figure of Tubal-Cain were popular throughout the eighteenth century, and this trend is probably responsible for the adoption of Tubal-Cain as a password in French and West German Masonic lodges between 1730 and 1742. This password appears mainly in *\*Orare des Franc-Masons trahi...\** (Geneva, 1742) and *\*Der Neuauftgesteckte Brennende Leuchter...\** (Leipzig, 1746), at the time when the typical Hermetic degrees begin to appear in Continental Freemasonry.

The Tubal Cain of our tablet is, therefore, evidently the Tubal Cain who invented the art of working metals, and hence of transformation, which he rightly claims and asserts will reveal the secret to us. However, this identification brings us back to roughly the first half of the seventeenth century, the time of its peak popularity. Everything, therefore, points to placing the creation of our alchemical booklet in that period.

As for *Ambasagras* from the second leaden treatise, we can suppose that it denotes *ambus agar*, 'May I be guided to perform both' (i.e. the operations, *albedo* and *rubedo*); or perhaps it means *ambus agam*, that is, 'May I perform both' (i.e. the operations). On the other hand, it may be that these nine letters stand as the initials of some Hermetic maxim, just as is the case with the word *vitriolum*. It is almost certain that the words *Tubalcain*, *antimonio*, *ambasagar*, *vitriolum* were deliberately composed of nine letters, and the end of the little book tells us why. The tradition that attributes nine letters to the name of the 'prima materia' is very old. The Greek alchemists demonstrated this in the following way:

Ἐννεα γράμματα ἔχο, τετρασύλλαβος εἰμι, νόει με.  
Αἱ τρεῖς μὲν πρῶται δύο γράμματα ἔχουσιν ἑκάστη,  
Αἱ λοιπαὶ δὲ τὰ λοιπὰ, καὶ εἰσιν ἅφωνα τὰ πέντε.  
Οὐκ ἀμύητος ἔσῃ τῆς παρ' ἐμοὶ σοφίας.

(I have nine letters, I am four-syllabled, know me.  
If the first three [syllables] each consist of two letters,  
and the last remaining [letters], and has five consonants.  
You will be initiated into the secrets of my wisdom.)

The key to this riddle is the word ἄρ-σε-νι-κόν = arsenic, composed of nine letters, four syllables, four vowels and five consonants. Arsenic was an ancient name for auripigment (from *auripigmentum*), arsenic sulphide. It was considered the second mercury on account of its similar behaviour. It is easy to see how *Ambasagar* is composed of the same number of letters, vowels, and consonants as *ar-se-ni-kon*. With some modifications, they conform to the same law of composition as the words *Tubalcain*, *vitriolum*, *antimonio*, and other less important words in

hermetical literature, such as ἀμ-πε-λί-τις = *terra vinealis*, which the Hermetists of the seventeenth century considered to be the true solution to the aforementioned riddle. Even in alchemical writings we find traces of this tradition; an example can be found in Gerber's representation in an old manuscript referred to by Carbonelli (op. cit. p. 57), which bears the word *Riovrabet* at its base.

The fifth plate of the alchemical booklet contains these words:

*Benedictum lapidem LAPIS NOSTER.* And further: *Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini.* Then the text begins, divided into seven short chapters which we intend to present here with a few explanations.

The first short chapter is an introduction to the following five, which are all devoted to various operations. The last chapter is an epilogue, unless it was added by someone else. The first short chapter consists of plates VI-XII. Here is the text:

The Great Work can be performed either by the moist or the dry way.<sup>24</sup>In the first method, pure alum, saltpetre, or *fleur de sel* are used.<sup>25</sup>

In the second method, a material is used which nature has prepared for an imperfect metallic work:<sup>26</sup>

This material is called the chosen and immature mineral, or "your Saturn." This NØ is a black mineral earth<sup>27</sup>which is still green and heavy, and is called *mafesias*<sup>28</sup>or brown marcasite.<sup>29</sup>If that matter had been cooked longer in the earth's cauldrons, and by chance had not been mixed with various impurities, it would have been the holy sun or moon: for

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24 Even today, analysis in chemistry can be carried out in a dry or a wet manner.

25 The text reads *fior coclis*, but this is clearly a misspelling of the word *fior coeli*. *Flos coeli* [*flos* is the Latin term, while *fior* is the later Italian] is in fact an alchemical expression that denotes a kind of mane. Hermetically speaking, *fior coeli* (i.e. 'heavenly flower') is the heavenly grace that descends in the mystical dew that exudes from the heavens to nourish the dry earth. In mysticism, something moist or raw is revealed which is not exactly palatable to the followers of the dry or royal way.

26 According to the alchemists, metals are generated in the earth's cauldrons; nature always strives for perfection, but sometimes the metallic work is imperfect. Thus, the alchemists are duty-bound to take this imperfect metal and transform it. The same thing happens, and must be done, in Hermeticism with our Saturn.

27 G. Johnson's Dictionary (cf. Manget, *Bibl. Chem.*, 1702) states: "Antimony is called the Tallow of Lead, Our Quicksilver, Marcassite, Digged Lead, Dead Lead, Black Earth. It is still green because it is immature; it is crude because it has not yet been purified; it is heavy because it is still subject to the law of gravity.

28 This is a miswritten word for *Magnesia*. Johnson's Dictionary says: *Magnesia communiter est marcasila*. (Manget, I, 250)

29 Today, the iron sulphide, which is distinguished from common pyrite by its mode of crystallisation, is called *marcasite* (white pyrite). This word formerly denoted various minerals containing the sulphides of other metals. According to G. Johnson: "Marcasite is an immature metallic substance, of various kinds..."In an anonymous letter found in the third edition of *Theatrum Chemicum* (VI, 475) we read: "Besides common lead, there is another lead which interests philosophers, namely *Magnesia*. *Magnesia* is a black earth with white eyes. Such a black earth is lead-bearing *Marcasite*, that is, *Antimony*. In fact, *Antimony* is the *Lead* mentioned by the philosophers; from it is extracted the red vegetable quicksilver which contains the secret of secrets."

Saturn was the first metal and was therefore called leprous Gold ☉.<sup>30</sup>

This gold must be purified of that dross and other impurities in the easiest and quickest way. But for the gold to be used, it must first be reduced to a seed,<sup>31</sup> so that the first matter may grow as is fitting for such a land. From it we must extract the true mercury or pure water which we find in the royal bath.<sup>32</sup> This material can be found in many places where lead and tin are mined, although it is purer in one place than in another.

In Bohemia, not far from Prague, there is a good mine in which lead has been found that resembles butter, but it is black and has an acid smell. Many have found such a substance in the well-preserved stores of Saturn, and this is the virgin lead called *Saturno pater, et Saturno filii* (Saturn father and Saturn son).

The first operation is described on plates XIII-XVII. At the top of plate XIII is written: *Si volunt procedere fiat totum in nomine domini. Hop. Prima*. This means: 'If they wish to proceed, let everything be done in the name of the Lord.'

The following text:

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30 Leprosy gnaws away at the limbs and leads to death.

31 In other words, it must acquire the ability to multiply. According to the Alexandrian alchemists, the procedure for obtaining gold consisted of *diplosis* or doubling. For practical reasons, since antimony mixes very easily with gold, all that was needed to change the *malleability* of the gold was a small quantity of antimony vapour evaporating from a basin filled with molten antimony. Considering the imperfect methods of separation, it might have seemed that the quantity of gold had increased. Analogously, in Hermeticism, Gold was multiplied by bathing in *our* antimony.

According to Cosmopolite (Novum Lumen Chemicum, X, 1604): "Gold can produce fruits and seeds, in which it multiplies by the action of the wise creator who knows how to guide nature..." but for this to happen, it is first necessary, if the spirit does not appear in the solid metallic body, to melt the body and allow its pores to be opened so that nature can act. There are two solutions, the natural and the forced (which includes all others)... The natural solution consists of allowing the pores of the body to open in *our water* so that the dissolved seed can be released and imposed upon its matrix. Our water is heavenly water that does not wet the hands: it is rainwater (that is, it comes from the heavens) and not ordinary water. The body is Gold which produces seed."

On this, see what Lucifer wrote in chap. I, and what Abrasax in chap. III and VI.

32 In chemical terms, the minerals must be transformed into water, or into a liquid state. This is accomplished by the royal or solar bath, that is, by melting the minerals together with black sulphur (antimony sulphide). From experience, it is known how a chemical reaction is facilitated, if not made possible, by dissolution or melting.

Hermetically speaking, see what Abrasax wrote in chapter III which relates to

'the first extraction of Mercury from the Mine.' True Mercury is *our Water*, pure or transparent Water (Gr. ὑδράργυρος or silver water). See again the aforementioned section of Cosmopolite. In this *dissolution* lies the *solution* to the problem. One of the sentences taken from the two dialogues of Giovanni Braccasca (De alchemia dialogi duo), translated from the Italian and inserted into the preface of the Latin edition (Lyon, 1548), says: "From the dissolution of the vitriol arises a double vapour (*fumus*), and the philosophers call these two vapours 'Sulphur' and 'Mercury'."

## FIRST OPERATION

R.  $\text{e}\hat{\Delta}$ <sup>33</sup> the centre of this matter  $\rightarrow \text{N}\hat{\Delta}$  works as if it were in the womb lands. Since it has been precisely and very subtly ground into a powder,<sup>34</sup> and since it has passed through a very fine silk sieve,<sup>35</sup> place it in a  $\hat{\Delta}$  and subject it to  $\hat{\Delta}$ <sup>36</sup> After it has been placed on a very strong flame, distil it in the open vessel; this operation is called "extraction of the elements."<sup>37</sup> To withstand the flame, the retort must be sealed at the bottom<sup>38</sup> and the fire must last at least sixteen hours. At the beginning, until the spirit or mercury is obtained, it must be a quiet fire fed with charcoal.<sup>39</sup> At the end, the fire must be strong and fed with wood so that the  $\hat{\Delta}$  can ignite in the retort.<sup>40</sup> Keep the spirit properly sealed in the retort<sup>41</sup> and scrape off the sulphur as gently as possible through the second vessel.

The chapter ends with a drawing of a seven-pointed star. Along each arm, we see the symbols of the seven planets in the same order as in Basil Valentine's Rebis. Each point of the star is divided into two parts, light and dark. Within the star is a circle in which we can see a child with a crown on his head. Inside the circle is written: *Qui rex natus a Philosophis est Lapis Noster* (This king born of the philosophers is Our Stone).<sup>42</sup>

Plate XVIII bears the inscription: *Infantem natum debes alimentare usque ad*

33 R.  $\text{e}\hat{\Delta}$  an abbreviation for *recipe*, "take". One must direct oneself towards the centre (*the heart*) of our Saturn or Antimony, as a dwelling place within one's own interior (*interiora* [interior] of Basil Valentine). The symbol of this Earth is the symbol of the land N, that is, a circle surmounted by a cross (the cross symbolises the dedication to the equilibrium and neutrality which we have previously acquired by placing *ce* at the centre and separating *ce* from periphery) and the symbol  $\hat{\Delta}$ , which is probably formed by the overlap of the symbols  $\Delta$  and  $\nabla$ , for, holding in a certain sense the same concept.

34 It is a matter of the transformation and separation of the subtle from the gross which mentions "The Emerald Tablet". This is the transition to a *fluid state and the body* mentioned by Abrasax.

35 This 'very dense silken sieve' corresponds visibly to the pores of our metallic body, which Cosmopolite mentions in the passage we mentioned earlier. These pores must open for the body to dissolve. A few of us, myself included, have even had a visual perception of this sieve on numerous occasions. Some might think of the connection of the sieve of the Eleusinian Mysteries and this *chymica vannus*; but however suggestive it may be, I think this comparison is nevertheless unfounded.

36 Set it aside and set it on fire. This is the second regime, or ignition, which Abrasax mentions in chapter VI.

37 The mercury of, C of pure water and of the interna  $\hat{\Delta}$  fire or . . .

38 The Hermetic seal which separates the interior of the vessel from the exterior.

39 At first the fire must be light and quiet (see Abrasax's essay in chapter III) because *first* the spirit or Mercury must be separated.

40 In the second phase, *the fire* must be very strong, so that the sulphur  $\hat{\Delta}$  may be seized and stick to the alembic.

41 It is necessary to keep the spirit imprisoned so that it does not escape from the earthly tube.

42 This is Cosmo Polite's *infans secundae generationis*; this is Valentine's *regulus* (prince). This is also the divine child whom Lucius mentions in chapter II.

*aetatem perfectam*, that is, 'You should nurse the born child until it reaches perfect age.' What follows is the operation according to plates XVIII-XX-XXI.

## THE SECOND OPERATION

Take your ☿ and purify it three times by sublimation; each time return to the vessel what has settled at the bottom together with what has been expelled. R. "the spirit which is C; together with this add forty grains of this sulphur."<sup>43</sup> Place it on the lowest point a, then forty days<sup>44</sup> into an alembic with an airtight lid. After forty days remove it; replace the lid with another stopper; distil everything and remove the residues from the bottom. Take care that during distillation the vessel does not stick to the alembic and does not leak. Afterwards, place it in a well-sealed glass vessel and hide it in a cool place, so that the spirits cannot escape and wander about.

The chapter ends with the following sweet morsel: *Hie est donus* (sic!) *dei optimum*, (This is the best gift of God). On plates XXII, XXIII and XXIV is found:

## THE THIRD OPERATION

R.<sup>E</sup> as much of your ☿ as you can, in proportion to the amount of your C in the flask or vial through which you will infuse ten times more of your C. <sup>45</sup>Then place another flask above it, setting it on sand; use a gentle heat until the sulphur dissolves.<sup>46</sup> Take care that the flask into which you place your material has a long neck, and that the other flask has a short one; moreover, ensure that the short neck can be inserted into the long one so that the spirits cannot escape as they circulate through the interior. neck, and the other has a short one; moreover, ensure that the short neck can be inserted into the long one, so that the spirits do not escape whilst they circulate through the interior. This solution, well sealed, serves for the following work.

At the bottom of the plate we read: *Item, in rerum multitudine ars nostra non consistit*, (Our art does not consist in a multitude of things).

On plates XXV and XXVI it says:

43 As for this mixture of mercury and sulphur, see what Abrasax says in chapter IV.

44 Regarding the number forty in alchemy and esotericism, see A. Reghini's article: *La quaresima iniziatica in Ignis*, December 1925. Proposition 74, found in *De Alchemia Dialogi duo* from 1548, states that the alchemical *nigredo* lasts for forty days.

45 The prescribed dose to be used was of paramount importance. On this, see A. Reghini's essay: *La quaresima iniziatica in Ignis*, December 1925. Proposition 74, found in *De Alchemia Dialogi duo* of 1548, states that the alchemical *nigredo* lasts for forty days. A gentle fire was sufficient to cause the fusion of sulphur, without causing the evaporation and boiling of mercury or the bursting of the retort.

46 A gentle fire is sufficient to cause the fusion of sulphur, without causing the evaporation and boiling of mercury or the bursting of the retort.

## THE FOURTH OPERATION

R.<sup>e</sup> Takethis solution of sulphur and place it in an alembic as in the second operation, with the stopper in sand. At first use a gentle heat so that the spirit may ascend. This spirit, because of its purity, is called "virgin's milk."<sup>47</sup> Then increase the heat so that the e<sup>ss</sup>es will cling to the stopper: this is our perfect sulphur, which you must carefully collect. After that you place the stopper on the alembic, keep it just as you would the spirit, or C.

At the bottom we read the following statement: *Si fixum solvas faciasque volare solvitur, et solutum ridas, faciat te vivere lietum.*<sup>48</sup>

In plates XXVII-XXX we find:

## PETA OPERATION

R.<sup>e</sup> your perfect sulphur, which you will saturate with ten parts of mercury<sup>49</sup> which you have prepared. Place it in an egg  $\triangleright \circ$ .<sup>50</sup> Sealing it with Hermes' seal, place it above a small fire; the heat should not exceed the temperature of a person with a fever. Then the various materials will disintegrate.

At the bottom of Plate XXVIII, in the lower right-hand corner, we can see a crow carrying in its beak a kind of plaque on which is written *nigro nigrium*, which should more accurately and completely be read as *nigrum nigri nigrius* (blackest of blacks). This symbolically refers to the first phase of the operation, namely *the stone in black*. The treatise continues on plate XXVIII and says:

After it is disintegrated, it will become white.

In this context, we see a figure representing a chariot drawn above the clouds by two doves. In the chariot sits a woman with a crescent moon above her head.

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47 The milk of the Virgin. See the essay on Abrasax in Chapter VI. The philosophical child, the prince, should be fed with 'the milk of the Virgin'. *Lapis, ut infans, lacte nutriendum est virginali*, says Michael Majep (*Simbola Aureae mensae*, 1617). This is the milk of the Virgin Mary in the Rosicrucian allegory. See also the 'milky ocean' mentioned by Lucius in Chapter I.

48 Or more precisely: *Sifixum solvas, faciasque volare solutum, et solutum deddas, facit te vivere lietum*. (If you dissolve that which is fixed, and make the dissolved fly, and restore the dissolved, you will live happily). This is a variation of the saying:

*Sifixum solvas, faciasque volare solutum, Et*

*volucrem figas, facit te vivere lietum.*

Chemically speaking, the operation is divided into three phases: fixation, volatilisation and reduction.

49 This time the sulphur is finished and the mercury is ready. In Greek, the word  $\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$  means both "divine" and "sulphur".

50 Noah's egg, hermetically sealed.



with a radiant aura behind her head. In her left hand she holds a flowering twig, "Diana's Tree."<sup>51</sup> After this figure the text continues:

This is our Diana, whom you, if you wish, through the work in white, can stop here.<sup>52</sup> If you wish to continue, keep the fire burning until the upper end becomes red like blood.<sup>53</sup>

At the bottom of the table we see a man with a crown on his head. In his right hand he holds a kind of sceptre, and in his left an elliptical crown with the symbols of the seven planets in the following order: Moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Sun. In this way, Mercury is always in the centre, as in Basil Valentine's Rebis, only this time at the bottom.

Plate XXXI in the upper left-hand corner contains an image of a chalice with its cover, held by a hand reaching out from a cloud. It is possible that this is an image of the Grail. Beside it we read: *Hic est lapis noster: fortuna medius granus huius est cura omnium morborum incurabilium*; that is, "This is our stone: half a grain of it is enough to cure all incurable diseases." The following text is written on this plate and continues:

R.<sup>o</sup>one ounce ☉ purified by N♄. Melt it, examine it, and when it comes to the point of boiling, add a drachm of your medicine to it and you will immediately see how it

☉ stops and no longer moves. What remains is a reddish, brittle stone: this is the Philosopher's Stone.

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51 Diana's wood is one of the so-called 'metallic woods'. It is first mentioned in the work of Eck de Sulzbach, *Clavis philosophorum*, from the end of the fifteenth century. See *Theatrum Chemicum*, IV. It is created by pouring a concentrated solution of silver nitrate over mercury; or by pouring water over a concentrated solution of silver nitrate, taking care that they do not mix, and then dipping a silver plate to the bottom. Hermetically speaking, silver, m, the dove, and Diana's wood are symbols of the Work *ad album* (in white).

52 Diana, that is the moon—bright, shining with reflected light—is silver. Etymologically, *argentum* (silver) means 'bright white' (hence Arjuna, Argus, the Argonauts). The two doves (*binæ columbae*; two is a symbol of duality, passivity, the feminine side) indicate her by their colour; they replace the raven, just as forty days after the Flood, the raven was the first to fly out, followed by the dove.

53 That is, the work in red. As for the work in white and red, see Abrasax's essay in Chapter VI. To the comments found there, we can add that the zodiacal symbol of Aries, a, the masculine sign, was also a symbol of Sulphur in the time of Zosimus.

It follows that Sulphur (♁ = a), when through combustion or *mbedo* is plunged into C, passive and feminine Mercury, transforms that Mercury into C, active and creative Mercury. This C symbolically unites sulphur♁ and mercury C. To complete the symbolism of the crow and the dove, which corresponds to the colour black (Saturn, Lead) and white (the Moon, Silver), we shall say that the colour red corresponds to the crimson Phoenix which is reborn amidst the flames (Latin: *Phoenix puniceus* = 'red'; *puniceus* is etymologically the same as the Greek word φοινίκεος).

Next follows plate XXXIII, which contains an allegorical figure. High above, a crowned human figure holds a crown in both hands; slightly lower, three crows ride through the air. Lower down, we find personifications of the Moon, Mercury and Saturn, identified by their alchemical symbols. These figures extend their arms towards the three crowns. In the upper right-hand corner is the sun: the head of the central figure is surrounded by a radiant halo. Here too, as with the figure of the Hermetic charioteer and the figure of Diana, the entire scene does not take place on earth, but above the clouds.

At the bottom we see the inscription: *Et hoc est donus Dei qui omnia imperfecta metalia in aurum comutat*; that is, 'This is the gift of God which changes all imperfect metals into gold.' As for the Hermetic meaning *of the metals*, see what Lucus says in chapters I and II. Plates XXXIV and XXXV contain this warning:

Ensure that at the beginning the wick has no more than four or five threads before it turns black, and this is called putrefaction (rotting). After the seventh thread, it becomes white, which is the white daughter of the wise man. After the ninth thread, it becomes red. The lamp oil must be very pure. In the middle of the furnace, place a copper plate, and upon it, ash from oak galls, from which the co must be extracted; into this, place the philosophical egg. The lamp must be at a distance from the plate—that is, from its flame—of at least four fingers. Continue thus until

*Finis.*            *L.*  
*D.<sup>54</sup>Non*    *plus*  
*ultra*

This is followed by the final tablet, which contains the key to the enigmatic alphabet in which the booklet is written, preceded by the maxim: *hic est via veritatis*; 'This is the way of truth.'

The two lead booklets even correspond in this detail: the Florentine codex is also written in code, and on the eighteenth page, the word key is preceded by the title: *Hic est via veritatis*.

The fact that two lead codices are inscribed in code is not insignificant. The owner of the alchemical booklet clearly considered it valuable, and wanted to ensure that, should it fall into the wrong hands, its meaning would be obscure. The great similarity between the two codices indicates that one was derived from the other, or that both originated from some secret ritual which was their common source. The presence of Tubalcaim and the Rebis of Basil Valentine in the alchemical booklet shows that it was created after 1615 and belongs to the period 1615–1650, the golden age of Hermeticism and the Rosicrucians, after the Cosmopolite and before the Philalethes. We know that during this period, secret Hermetic organisations existed. Hermeticism in that

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54 Kpaj. Glory to the Lord ["*Laus Deo*"].

Time has even penetrated British Freemasonry; its influence in the ancient Masonic orders can be traced over two centuries. Are we then looking at the ritual of one of those secret organisations? Or should we attribute an exclusively alchemical meaning and value to this codex? Should the crudeness of the drawings and the errors in the spelling and grammar of the Latin and Italian be attributed solely to the author of the booklet, or are they merely evidence of the low cultural level of the book's owner? Are these shortcomings sufficient to exclude the symbolic and Hermetic value of the booklet, and to guarantee that we will see in them nothing more than the exposition of the norms of a purely chemical process for obtaining gold?

Modern chemists assume that every alchemical record deals with chemical operations, despite the explicit declarations of many authors, such as Cosmopolites and Philalethes, that the contrary is true. However, we must be careful not to fall into the opposite error, of attributing symbolic value to something that is entirely divorced from it. In the accompanying text to the alchemical booklet, we have attempted, within the limits of our abilities and the space available to us, to illuminate its literal-alchemical and spiritual-hermetic meaning. In doing so, we have pointed out what Abrasax and Lucus have emphasised in an exceptional manner. We do not wish to assert that its true symbolic meaning can be attributed solely by means of the methodical correspondence traditionally established by the Hermetists between the phases of chemical transmutation and the phases of inner transformation; but we do not wish to assert either that the meaning the author of the booklet had in mind concerns the inner transformation and that he was merely endeavouring to conceal it *\*more philosophico\** (in a philosophical manner) under the guise of chemical transmutation. Furthermore, it may be that for the author both transformations were possible, and that he dealt with both at the same time, and that the Hermetic symbolism was a simple and natural consequence of the analogy of procedures. The careful reader will judge for themselves whether it is possible to answer these questions and which answer would be the most plausible.

## Under the Specie f Interiority

*Heaven ... is nothing other than spiritual interiority.*  
Gilbert, *On the Pledges of the Saints*, IV, 8

*The eagle flying through the air and the toad  
walking upon the earth is the Magisterium.*  
M. Maiero, *Symbola Aureae Mensae duodecim Nationum*,  
Frankfurt, 1617, p. 192.

Many years have passed since I first experienced *disembodiment*. But despite the passage of time, the impression that this event left upon me was so vivid and powerful that it remains in my mind to this day, if one can transfer and retain transcendent experiences in the mind. I shall now attempt to express this experience *in human words*, summoning it anew from the deepest recesses of my consciousness.

The feeling of an immaterial reality suddenly flashed into my mind, without any prior warning, without any obvious cause or particular reason. One day – about fourteen years ago – I was standing on the pavement of Piazza Strozzi in Florence, talking with a friend. I remember what we were talking about, although we were probably discussing some esoteric topic – in any case, the subject of our conversation did not influence this experience. It was a day like any other; I was in perfect physical and mental health. I was not tired, excited or intoxicated, but rather free from worries and without heavy thoughts. Quite suddenly, while listening or speaking, *I perceived* the world, all things and life itself in a different way. Suddenly *I became aware* of my own disembodiment and of the radical and obvious immateriality of the world. I realised that my body *was within* me, and that all things were within me; that everything led towards *me*, that is, towards the deep, abyssal and hidden centre of my being. It was a sudden transformation; a sense of immaterial reality emerged in the field of my consciousness and, linking with the usual feeling of the mundane everyday, allowed me to see everything in a new and different light. It was like when a sudden opening in a thick blanket of clouds lets a ray of sunlight through, and the plain or sea below is immediately transformed into a bright and ephemeral light.

I felt myself to be dimensionless and like an ineffably abstract point; I felt that within this point everything was contained, in a completely non-spatial way. It was a complete inversion of the usual human way of feeling. It was not only that the self no longer had the sense of being enclosed by or situated within the body; not only did the self feel the incorporeality of its own body, but it felt its body within itself, experiencing everything *sub specie interioritatis*. It is necessary to understand the expressions I use here: 'in', 'within', and 'inner' are used in a non-geometrical sense, as simply the most suitable expressions to express a feeling that is the reverse of the position or relation that exists between body and consciousness. But to speak of consciousness contained in the body is as absurd and inappropriate as to speak of the body contained in consciousness, considering the heterogeneity of these two elements of the relation.

It was a powerful, devastating, overwhelming, positive and unique impression. It came spontaneously, without transition or warning, *like a thief in the night*, sneaking in and engraving itself into the usual, everyday way of perceiving reality. It emerged very quickly, imposing itself and then remaining in its pure form, allowing me to experience it intensely and become aware of it. Then it vanished, leaving me dumbfounded.

"I heard the eternal song of *THOU...*" wrote Dante; summoning it again and

further, in the deepest awareness, I feel its sacred solemnity, its peaceful and quiet strength, and its starry purity.

This was my first experience of bodilessness.

I have tried to describe my experience as faithfully as possible, even at the cost of being criticised for not submitting to the norms of precise philosophical terminology. I can accept that my philosophical capacity was not, nor is it now, equal to these spiritual experiences, and that, from the standpoint of the philosophical sciences, it would probably be preferable that they, and they alone, who have great philosophical merits should experience such things. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the viewpoint of the philosophical sciences is not the only acceptable one, and that 'The Spirit breathes where it will' (John 3:7), regardless of one's philosophical capacity.

In the specific case of my personal experience, the change occurred independently of any scientific or philosophical speculation and of any cerebral activity. I am inclined to think that this independence is neither accidental nor an exception. Indeed, it seems that rational speculation cannot take one any further than mere conceptual abstraction of a rather negative character, and is therefore incapable of suggesting or evoking *a direct experience or perception* of immateriality.

The ordinary way of life is founded on a sense of material reality or, if one prefers, on a material sense of reality. What exists resists; it is compact, massive and impenetrable; things *are* what they are so long as they exist and occupy space outside and even within our bodies; the more real they are—so to speak—the harder, more impenetrable, and more insurmountable they are. The empirical and common-sense conception of matter—as *res* (Latin for 'thing') which per se occupies space, is tangible, and offers resistance to touch—is the product of bodily life. The necessity of a life lived in a solid, dense, heavy body, accustomed to resting on firm and rigid ground, creates a habit of identifying the sense of reality with this particular human way of apprehending reality, and a priori gives rise to the conviction that this is indeed the only possible way, and that there are, nor can there be, any others.

However, the typical features of material reality become more subtle and finally disappear when a change from solid matter to liquid, fluid, and gaseous matter occurs. Scientific analysis then, through successive stages of molecular and atomic disintegration, leads to a vision of matter that is very far removed from the original, empirical concept which at first seemed the most certain and immediate fact of experience. Moving from science to philosophy, the universal dematerialisation of physical bodies necessarily corresponds to an idealistic conceptual abstraction and the dissolution of wholeness into selfhood. However, the conceptual affirmation of universal spirituality does not lead to the conquest or effective attainment *of perceptions* of spiritual reality. It is possible to follow an idealistic philosophy and at the same time

remain spiritually blind like a staunch materialist. It is possible for one to present oneself as an idealist philosopher and believe they have reached the pinnacle of idealism solely through laboratory-like conceptual conquest, all the while excluding or not even considering the possibility of perception *ex imo* (from below). Again, it is possible to confuse any spiritual epiphany with a mere act of thought, and even to believe that this is necessary to do.

Naturally, with such thoughts in mind, one can climb the tree of absolute idealism without any other consequence than breaking a few branches onto the heads of neighbouring climbers. One should not look upon the positivist philosophers of the past with so much contempt, for they were miserable, but honourable, victims of a simplicist acceptance of the empirical criterion of material reality! To deprive this materialistic and empirical sense of reality of its character of uniqueness, positivity and irreplaceability does not deprive it of all value, but rather determines its value. It continues to be a citizen of the world, alongside and together with all other ways of experiencing reality.

The attainment of an idealistic conceptual abstraction is no reason to sing victory hymns prematurely. Nor does the existence and revelation of the immaterial reality require us to view things from a different perspective, giving the new sense of reality the privileges of the old, elevating the new at the expense of the old. The truth of one does not imply the falsity of another: the existence of one does not preclude the coexistence of the other. It is arbitrary and illusory to believe that there is, and must be, only one way of experiencing reality. If, in the final analysis, the empirical criterion of material reality is devastatingly reduced to a mere illusion, this mode of consciousness founded on illusion nevertheless *truly exists*, and so powerfully that this feeling is the foundation of the life of countless beings, even when this criterion is conceptually or spiritually transcended and swallowed up by a sense of immateriality.

My experience, however transient, has practically shown me the possible, effective, and simultaneous existence of two perceptions of reality: pure spiritual perception and ordinary bodily perception, however contradictory that may seem to the reason. It is a fundamental experience and one should certainly not take pride in it; nevertheless, it is a foundational experience similar to that of Arjuna in *the Bhagavad Gita* and that of Tat in *the Pimander*; it is the first, effective and direct perception of what the Kabbalists called *the holy inner palace*; that which Philalet called *the hidden palace of the King*; that which St. Teresa called *the inner castle*. But how elementary it is, this experience that initiates one into a new and double life; the Hermetic dragon receives its wings and begins to fly, able to live on earth or to fly away from it.

Why, then, are we largely deaf to this perception, and why was I not aware of it before? Why has it faded? What purpose does it serve? Is it not better not even to suspect the existence of such a disturbing secret? And why have we not been taught how to regain this feeling? To restore the right to only

Why do some feel it and others don't?

It is not easy to give exhaustive answers to these and other questions that may arise. As for spiritual deafness, it seems to me that it stems from, or is dependent on, the fact that our conscious attention is usually so focused on the sense of material reality that every other feeling goes unnoticed. So, it is a matter of listening: the melodic themes played by the violins usually draw all the attention, while the themes of the cellos and double basses go unnoticed. Perhaps the monotony of this deep and low tone also escapes everyday perception. I clearly remember a captivating experience in the mountains. I was standing in the middle of a vast meadow, and suddenly the monotonous sound of the buzzing of countless insects reached my ear. Quite by chance, or rather, all at once and for no apparent reason, I became aware of a buzzing that had certainly been there even before my sudden perception of it.

The answer, as we shall see, can only be found by comparing it with other similar phenomena, and it will probably not satisfy the reader. I am therefore afraid that I shall not be able to give satisfactory answers to any other question, and shall therefore conclude this essay, submitting myself, if not to consideration, then to the time limit.



# **HISTORY OF MAGIC**

*Those who take the time to read ancient and modern magical literature will quickly realise that it contains an extensive collection of experiences and undertakings, some of which were perfectly successful, whilst others were complete failures. Judging by the accounts of these experiences, the magician can be compared to a hunter or mountaineer, who, when recalling their adventures, always conquers the beast or the mountain. The narrator never fails to enumerate and magnify the obstacles that stood in his way and the dangers that threatened the brave adventurer or explorer, but all this is usually presented as a welcome warning and instruction for the benefit of the reader-neophyte; and whether the narrator seems to take notice of it or not, everything is geared towards the glorification of the skill and mastery of the experienced magus who, \*mirable visu\*, plunges into the jungle of difficulties as securely and victoriously as a rain-bear through fire.*

*This is why readers—for a change—can enjoy the following true and modest account of the fiasco that befell our friend. We have neither omitted nor added anything to his story.*

## A TRUE ACCOUNT OF A MAGICAL INVOCATION PERFORMED IN ROME ON THE DAY OF THE SPRING EQUINOX, 1927.

That night, unlike the Prince de Condé on the eve of the Battle of Rocroi,<sup>55</sup> I had barely slept. Although I had set the alarm for three in the morning, I did not trust that mass of springs and cogs much, knowing full well from personal experience that the clock would occasionally miss a certain hour only to ring mercilessly twelve hours later. Thus, after two hours of sleep, broken up by frequent glances at the clock, I suddenly awoke before the alarm went off. I must say that the alarm did sound at the right time, to my own relative satisfaction and, no doubt, to the great delight of the people sleeping in the next room. It is not that my neighbours do not truly deserve much attention. I began the operations over the past full moon, and although I said nothing about it, the neighbours sensed that something strange was happening and decided to place obstacles in my way. It wasn't just that they sensed it; they actually smelt various odours that, despite my precautions, were emanating from my room during the use of smoke in the ritual operations, and especially during the use of sulphur smoke, which prompted the simple folk to complain. One evening, while peeping through the keyhole which I had forgotten to cover, they saw a strange or mad fellow dressed in white robes, standing in the middle of a thick cloud of black smoke, performing and saying strange things. They became extremely excited when that madman began to leave his flat every night at around three in the morning, returning to rest at about six or seven o'clock.

When the infernal racket of the alarm clock had finally subsided, I immersed myself in the usual ritual operations, which I need not describe on this occasion. When I had finished with that, and having completed the ritual washing, I quickly drank a cup of coffee, got dressed, and made my way to the place I had chosen and prepared for the invocation. Given the nature of my neighbours, it was out of the question to continue the rituals in my room. How could I explain and justify to them possible and noticeable phenomena, such as moving objects, noises, voices and *conversations*? And how was I to continue my endeavour in the days and weeks to come? It was far better to walk for twenty minutes and go to my underground space, where I was certain no one would see, hear, or disturb me.

To be honest, the entrance to my hideout was not the most pleasant: I had to crawl on my stomach through a narrow passage dug beneath a three-metre-thick old wall. Then I had to pass through a series of vast, high, and deserted underground chambers. Deep darkness and solemn silence filled

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55 Duc d'Enghien (1621-1686). He defeated the Spanish army at the Battle of Rocroi (1643) and subsequently took the title of *the Grand Condé*. (trans. note)

the rooms even during the day. Only at the very end, in the middle of a spacious chamber, descending a few metres down a slope, does one enter a wide crypt, about fifteen metres long and over two metres high, completely isolated from the outside world, perfectly dark and silent, with no other opening besides the entrance.

The previous night, I had prepared everything I needed at the bottom of the crypt: a lamp filled with pure olive oil was already hanging from the ceiling; there was a brazier, coal, and a sword. In addition, I had marked the places on the ground where the magical symbols were to be drawn. The crypt had no door, but that was no problem, as no one knew of its existence. Even if an unfortunate visitor were to find it—crawling through the tunnel and reaching the great hall where the entrance to the crypt lies—he would surely stop short upon catching sight of the faint glow of a mysterious light emanating from the magical lamp in the darkness. And that ghostly light discouraged me too, though I knew where it came from. And who would dare to step inside when, looking in, they would meet the gaze of a white apparition standing in a cloud of smoke and brandishing a sword?

The night before, I had prepared everything I needed to take with me: the cellar key, a torch, matches, a white linen robe, ritual incense, and so on. I put as many things as I could into my pockets and tied the rest into a bundle. Then I left. The night was cold and quiet. Every so often, the moon could be seen in the narrow, deserted streets. Thanks to a rare and favourable coincidence, the full moon had occurred three days earlier (the preparatory operations require three days); I was thus able to begin my invocation precisely when the sun entered the first degree of Aries, and to complete it at the time of the first spring full moon, which this year coincided with Easter Sunday.

I walked briskly to ward off the cold of the night and not to waste time, for the operation was to begin before dawn. Rome was very quiet: only the occasional night tram and the sound of a few cars disturbed the silence that lay over the streets, the Forum, and the mighty ruins of Rome. On the other hand, the fewer people I encountered, the better. After all, a moonlit stroll through the streets of Rome at three in the morning, with a suspicious-looking bundle under my arm, could prove rather conspicuous. The thought that I might run into a police patrol worried me, especially as I had inadvertently forgotten my identity card at home. Imagine that! What could I say, and how could I explain where I was heading at this hour and what this bundle of strange objects was? So I walked on briskly: I only had one more square, a narrow alley, and a corner to go, when bam!... I ran into two policemen and an officer. Bloody hell! Fortunately, my old habit of self-control kicked in automatically: I didn't panic, and I didn't draw their attention. I was convinced they wouldn't stop or question me: that's what I thought, that's what I wanted, and that's what happened.

Two minutes later I was through; the unfortunate obstacles were now behind me, or so I thought.

The lamp, the brazier, the sword and the charcoal were neatly arranged. It wasn't cold down here, but the dampness was bone-chilling. The matches I'd left there the previous night were useless: thank goodness I had another box with me. Even the wicks of the magic lamp had failed, and I struggled to get them lit. Still, when I lit them, the three flames burned perfectly. There was no breath of wind to disturb them, and they cast a clear, warm, and diffused light. After I had lit the fire, I turned to the coals. I took it out of the crypt to make it easier to light the coal with the flame from two candles. But I realised the coal was so damp that I couldn't light it. Blowing with all my might, I finally lit the damned charcoal; now I just had to keep the fire going. By this time, more time had passed than I had reckoned.

I quickly changed and, donning a linen robe, I went into the crypt, carrying a brazier and taking care not to let it go out. I took the ritual perfumes and sprinkled a handful onto the embers; suddenly a thick, fragrant smoke appeared, though not strong enough to obscure the light of the lamp that burned steadily. As the incense spread through the crypt, I took a piece of charcoal and with it traced the magical symbols of the rite in the four main directions, and then, with the same charcoal, made the sign of the operation in the centre. I placed the embers, from which the smoke was spreading, upon this central point. Here I am; all I need to do is add a little more incense to the fire and begin the invocation.

I began to concentrate when my mind—until then preoccupied with various described details and material difficulties—suddenly realised what I was trying to do. I was neither afraid nor did I hesitate; yet I asked myself whether it was not too presumptuous of me to raise my earthly gaze to the heavens, to the mighty powers of the solar hierarchy. The presumption was, of course, great, but that was all the more reason for me to act decisively and resolutely... and that at once, for this damned charcoal was tormenting me. If it were to stop burning, farewell to smoke and farewell to invocation: I would not have time to relight it and—worse still—I would not be able to change the order of operations. I bent over it and began to blow with all my might; at last, thank God, the fire began to burn again, spreading light and heat.

I threw another handful of incense on the fire; I held the sword as prescribed by the ritual; I put on my goggles; with my left hand I took the scroll I had prepared earlier so that I could unroll it with one hand, and began to read the long invocation. I turned towards the east, pointed the sword in the direction of the sigil of the operation and, fully aware of my actions, began to read slowly and decisively: "O highest power over powers..." I was glad that the lamp's light allowed me to read the words of the invocation and that everything was going according to plan. But what is happening? What kind of wind is this? Why is it blowing right now, why is it shaking the lamp's light, disturbing the reading? What now? I can't see anymore! By all the gods of Olympus! My spectacles are steamed up! I've worked myself into a sweat thanks to the damned coal, and now, with my perspiration and the damp air, tiny rivulets are covering my lenses. It was clear to me

a physical explanation for this phenomenon, but - I can no longer see... I would have to take off my spectacles and wipe them, but I would have to interrupt the operation. I have only two hands, and in one I held a sword whose course I must not alter, and in the other a scroll. Worse still, how could I stop the ritual halfway when such forces had already been unleashed? I noticed the wind lifting the smoke and shaking the flame. By all the gods! The lamp almost went out.

In a matter of seconds, thanks to a minor hitch, events took a turn for the worse. The good Socrates used to say that the eyes of the soul see more clearly when the physical eyes lose their sight. A comforting thought, but it would still have been better if my glasses hadn't steamed up. I didn't like the way events were developing. Suddenly I felt faint, I felt sick. Careful! - I told myself. Stay calm and be careful! I began to shake - was it because of the fear? Suddenly, I feared the fear itself, and I couldn't suppress it. I imagined the consequences and saw myself lying dead on the floor... and I reacted immediately. I pulled myself together and, with a sudden, sharp determination, decided to see it through to the end, no matter what. Meanwhile, the fog on my glasses was slowly beginning to clear. When I began to recite the words of the invocation, my memory came to my aid and I managed to finish it, albeit with some difficulty. However, in the struggle against the wretched and unpredictable difficulties, and despite the ensuing perils, I could not properly marshal my spiritual energies: this was probably why the invocation did not have the desired outcome.

When I got home at six in the morning, I was exhausted. And I slept... like the Prince of Conde.

The next morning, I took care of the glasses.

# **BERSERKER**

## **BOOKS**

