



ON THE ORDER OF THE ASIATIC BRETHREN

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PREFACE

In the following chapters you can find an exploration into the historic roots and occult teachings of an 18th century secret society often referred to as the 'Asiatic Brethren'. Much has been written about this order and many have hailed it as a critical link between late Renaissance magic and our modern occult traditions in the West. Due to the rarity of the original order's German-language documents and because they were never meant for publication most of them have been almost completely inaccessible to scholars until the advent of the digital age. Even today collations of folio pages of the original documents are traded for thousands of Dollars on the antique book-market.

As a native German speaker I began my own research into the order's original materials as well as more recent publications on them in 2013. To my surprise what I found were two things above all: (1) Much of the authentic material of the order had never been published or even partially translated into English. (2) However, many of the online sources commenting on the order and interpreting their impact and influence were written by English speakers who quoted other English speakers as their reference.

As I dug deeper into the fascinating past of this order and its intriguing connections to other heretic currents of the 17th and 18th century, I began to organise the material for my own use. Finally I decided to summarise much of what I had learned and to publish it as an essay online - including as much reference, translated quotes and first-hand analysis of the genuine sources as possible.

Looking back most of all this work taught me two things: First, that most stories as legendary and mythical as they might sound initially still contain at least a small grain of truth. And secondly, often this grain of truth has



no resemblance whatsoever to the stories we tell ourselves or call 'our tradition'.

Before we start out, let me emphasise that this essay is flawed. It is flawed because I am not an academic student of religious history and because I could only piece this work together during rare private time. It is also flawed because I don't speak Hebrew - a fact in itself that should disqualify me for much of this work. On the other hand, however, at least I am a native German and thus was able to explore all the first-hand sources of the Asiatic Brethren as far as I had access to them. Finally - and maybe most importantly - what might give me some permission to do this work is being unbiased: I don't hold any occult agenda or affiliation. I am not part of any occult order and have no interest in occult lineages.

What drives me is to better understand what drove the occult practitioners before us. If we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants, it would be good to understand where these giants came from? And whether it's worthwhile being passively carried around by them? Or whether it could be more adventurous to jump off these ancient shoulders - break free from assumed traditions - and find our own paths? After all, for the last two millennia magic has been the discipline of heresy. We might want to be careful with acknowledging any orthodoxy; especially when it comes to our own occult past.

LVX,

Frater Acher

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Each man is a memory to himself.

— *William Wordsworth*



On the Order of the Asiatic Brethren

Foundations

1. A Curious Theory about Collective Memory

There is a curious theory on the collective memory of groups. According to Jan and Aleida Assmann - two leading German scholars on Egyptology and Cultural Studies - one has to differentiate between a 'cultural' and a 'communicative memory' of groups. While the former is vast in scope, relatively structured and embraces all archeological and written inheritance of a group, the lat-

ter is much more fluid and only contains knowledge perceived as still relevant to everyday communication by group members.

One of the fascinating features of the ‘communicative memory’ is that studies proved that it tends to contain only knowledge of the past three generations. I.e. as long as our identities are built upon on our communicative memory, there is a cliff of forgetting and blindness that sets in around 80 years in the past from the present day. Whatever falls of that cliff sinks into oblivion of everyday communication - i.e. it is still recorded in writing and possibly part of academic studies, but ceases to form part of the everyday set of symbols of a collective. Often the ‘communicative memory’ then reappears about 500 years into the past, marked by a much more mythical terminology and narrative.

Well, let’s see what happens if we apply this theory to the make-up of our Western occult roots? If we travel back into our past 80 years from today we find ourselves back in the 1930s. Maybe due to the significance of certain individual biographies of that time our ‘communicative memory’ stretches back a little further, another 20 to 30 years? We recall the foundation of the Golden Dawn, events in the life of Aleister Crowley, the impact of the two World Wars on society and maybe how many spiritualists strived to combine latest technological discoveries with theories of the occult... But what do we recall about the 19th century? Except for a few guidepost names such as Eliphas Levi, Papus, Bulwer Lytton or Frederick Hockley I’d assume most of our minds come up blank? And even considering these names: how much of them do we truly remember? How much of their personalities, their personal struggles and desires, their biographies and characters versus their writings and a few of their occult theories?

But what happens if we travel further back in our memories and bridge this strange gap between 80 and 500 years of our past? Now we are in the 16th century. Here we meet John Dee and Edward Kelly, we hear the echo of mythical names such as Johannes Trithemius, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Francis Bacon or Giordano Bruno... Yet, these names have taken on a different form. Instead of calling out an individual multi-faceted personality, for most of us they became mirrors of their times, collective ideas, archetypes almost. Or how much difference in shades do we truly find between our memories of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and one Dr. Faust?

What I am trying to say is this: For as much as our occult history has craved to build chains and links of lineage into our past, our actual memories beyond the time of our great-grandparents are pretty narrow and patchy at best. Now, why does that matter? It matters because the more we travel back in time from this edge onwards, the more our ancestors made us believe our feet rest on the solid ground of occult history and tradition. Yet, upon closer examination it rather seems the opposite. It might be much wiser to assume our tradition is an invention of creative people who depended on it just as much as we do with our own desire for genuineness and originality. It might be much wiser to take such a sceptic approach to the dazzling mirror we call our occult tradition. At least until we have done our own research on facts and myths. A story is a story, until we have proven it to be a record of events.

2. Getting to know the Asiatic Brethren

Now let's dive into an actual and most fascinating example of these patterns of collective memory. It is an example that for most of us is buried in that strange abyss between 80 and 500 years of our past. This example is the German 18th century masonic order of 'The Knights and Brethren St. John the Evangelist of Asia in Europe' or in short simply the 'Asiatic Brethren'.

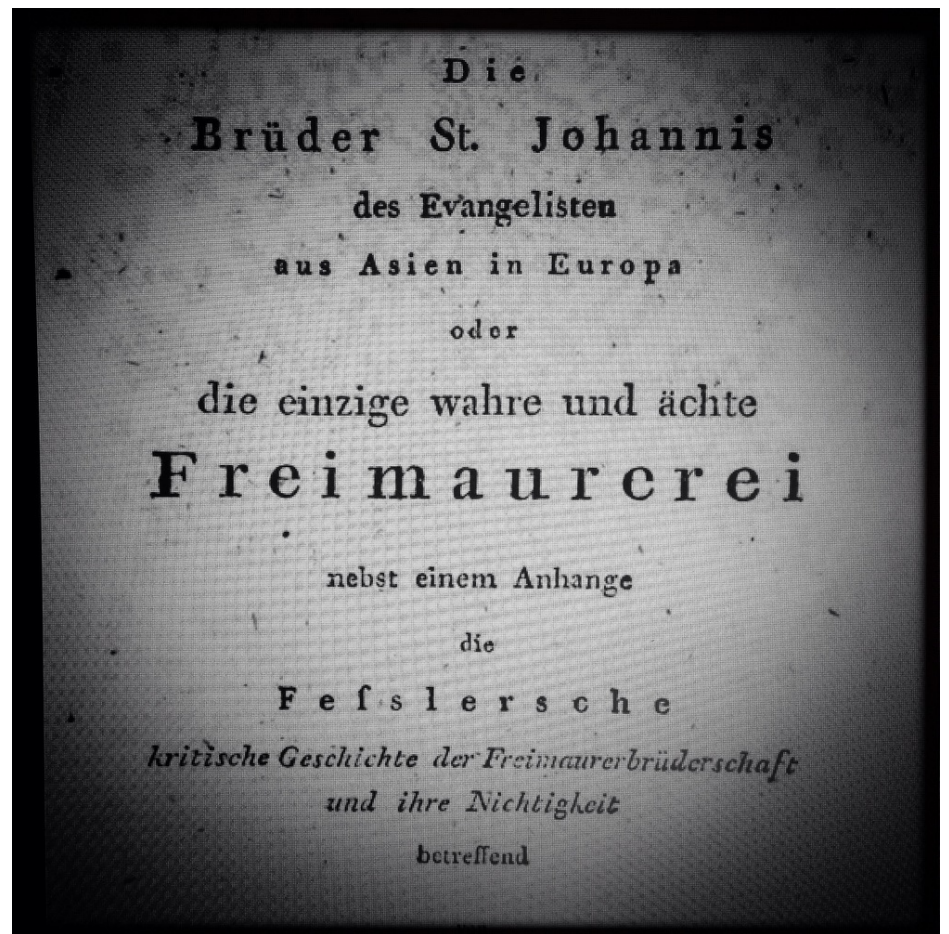
You can read about their general history in [Hanegraaff's wonderful Dictionary](#) which we highly recommend as an essential reference book for anyone interested in magic. Should you read German you can also look up some key facts on the order [here on Wikipedia](#); however, to my knowledge as of 2014 there is no English language entry. Thus I will provide a highly abbreviated outline here: The Asiatic Brethren were founded by a Bavarian Officer, Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen (HHEE, 1750- 1790). Their foundation followed the rather unsuccessful earlier attempt of the latter to bring to life a new rosicrucian order, the 'Ordo Rotae et Aureae Crucis' (The Order of the Wheel and Golden Cross) in 1776. While this order played a significant role in the emergence of Adam Weishaupt's order of the Bavarian Illuminati they ceased to exist relatively quickly as HHEE couldn't attract many members. After his expulsion from the order of the 'Gold- und Rosenkreuzer` (Gold and Rosy Cross) in

1780, HHEE moved from Munich to Vienna where the order of Asiatic Brethren was founded.

Now, before we continue it might be important to point out that secret societies and orders flourished like weeds during the 17th and 18th century in Germany. Most of them also had the life-expectancy of weeds and disappeared rather quickly into forgetfulness. So why were they so popular? Well, a secret order or masonic lodge during these days offered the unparalleled opportunity to gain access to a powerful network of allies as well as to earn

money through membership fees for their leaders. Remember, this was a time when no political parties or workers' unions existed, most European countries were still ruled by emperors and kings and the French revolution was only a few decades away. Having a personal network of strong relationships into the various sectors of society was a tool so priceless and powerful - most men were happy to pay for it, especially if the price was as low as regularly wearing strange robes, standing silently in candle-light and listening to the enigmatic babbling of one 'master of the chair'. On the other hand occult books and manuscripts were incredibly rare and often accessible to the privileged only. Thus anyone with a genuine interest in the occult needed a broad network of allies to tap into the oral or written tradition they aimed to become a part of...

In light of the above it might not come as a surprise that the Asiatic Brethren were dismantled only nine years after their emergence in 1781. Given that they had attracted quite a large amount of followers over a short period of time small and isolated groups continued to exist. However, we hold almost no historic evidence of any lodges' existence by the end of the 18th century. Seventy years after their official end, in a source from 1863 we learn about how quickly they actually were dismantled and disappeared from public:



Cover of the original teachings of the Asiatic Brethren, published in 1803

The asiatic lodges disappeared everywhere with a fabulous pace. After excision of the characteristic details the costumes of the various degrees found their way to junk dealers and theatrical costumiers. The Gold- and Silversmiths of Vienna, for as far as the brothers had been freemasons, were occupied for weeks with the melting down of asiatic alliance-insignia and gems, the laboratory on the Landstrasse fell into decline, however, not before becoming the place of a peculiar event which didn't cause little agitation and dismay in the neighbourhood. Namely, one had agreed to (...) sacrifice to the flames many of the asiatic diplomas and certificates - a purpose that was executed with such haste and vehemence that black clouds of stinking smoke flooded the whole neighbourhood and scraps of burning paper rained on the streets which caused the sudden call 'Fire!'. The guardians of the fire watch gave the known signal, the fire engines rushed to the street, yet the mob showed more appetite to loot the place than to quench the fire and showed all signs of being ready to storm the building. It was only with trouble and effort that the poor brothers (...) managed to escape from the 'Goldcookerhouse' and saved their bacon.

— from: *'Die Asiatischen Brüder in Berlin und Wien'*, *Latomia* 22 (1863),
transl. by Frater Acher

So what is it that makes this short-lived order stand out from the crowd of other secret societies of its time? Why has it been hailed - rightly or wrongly so - to be one of the critical forerunners of the Golden Dawn and many its descendants - as well as to be an influential force on so many of our ancestors such as Eliphas Levi, Papus, P.B. Randolph, Frederick Hockley or Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie?

Well, the answer is mainly down to two men. However, we are not talking about the founder of the order, HHEE, nor of any of its prominent members. Instead it were two men that most of us have never heard of and even academic history had almost forgotten about until the 1960s. The man we want to begin with was baron Franz Thomas von Schönfeld - an adventurer and nobleman whose born name he kept secret to everyone throughout his adult life. Because knowing him under his real name, Moses Dobruška would have given away a lot - not only about his Jewish ancestors but also about their particularly unconventional believes.

In order to truly understand von Schönfeld's situation we have to travel back a little further in time... However, as we will see such context is not only critical to understand one of the order's most important founding fathers but also to understand the order itself. So in order to find access to the halls of the 'Asiatic Brethren' let's not follow the main route. Let's leave the tourist road instead - and take a look at the lesser known heretic currents that prepared the soil for the order of the Brethren to emerge.

3.1 Excursus: On Sabbatianism

3.1.1. An Abbreviated Overview

Here is how a short version of the official (Wikipedia) story sounds: Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676) declared himself the new Messiah early on during his education as a Rabbi. In order to prove his divine status to his followers he pulled quite a few eccentric, yet effective publicity stunts: such as pronouncing the holy tetragrammaton in public, officially marrying the Torah and later on

wedding Sarah, a young Polish prostitute who proclaimed she would be married by the Messiah. However, different to most other self-proclaimed 'new messiah' that we know of, Sabbatai's influence already spread and extended significantly during his life-time. Despite being banished by local rabbis several times and causing shock and outrage amongst orthodox Jewish leaders, he and his charismatic wife gained a large following and eventually established their power-base in Smyrna. From their his influence grew further and quickly spread all across Europe.



Sabbatai Zevi as the crowned Messiah (Amsterdam, 1666)

So far the general version. And here is what we don't learn unless we dig a little



Sabbatai Zevi (1666)

deeper: In his amazingly detailed biography ‘Sabbatai Zwi - The mystical Messiah’ Gershom Scholem puts forward many proving points to his argument that Sabbatai actually was psychologically ill, i.e. that he suffered from strong manic-depression throughout his life. Rather than being ‘publicity stunts’ or attempts to prove his divine status to his followers, Scholem argues, his paradox and hugely provocative acts should be interpreted in light of this specific mental condition. In fact some of his followers realised his condition as a sick-

ness, yet perceived it as a divine gift and further prove of his special status as a mediator between man and godhead (Scholem 1980, p.319).

Thus Sabbatai turned into a prominent example of Jewish antinomianism and coined the related term of ‘Ma’assim sarim’ (strange or paradox deeds) amongst his followers. While being a student of theoretical Kabbala of average quality at best, Sabbatai’s real impact and charisma stemmed from the ‘divine acts’ which he performed - often just after emerging from the dark night of depression or after having sung psalms for hours in a seeming state of emotional ecstasy. As shocking as they were, Sabbatai proclaimed, that the meaning of these paradox acts was obvious to him while he was in ecstasy and utterly inaccessible and heretic even to himself once he had returned to his normal state of being.

Large sections of the Jewish people gave themselves over to highly eccentric penances, of which contemporaries said that ‘never something like this had ever been before and never ever will be something like this again, until the true redeemer appears.

— Scholem 1980, p.316, transl. by Frater Acher

After a very eventful life - as one would expect given the short outline above - Sabbatai ended up in imprisonment under the Ottoman Sultan Meh-

med IV. The Sultan gave him three choices: (1) to subject himself to trial of his divinity (if the arrows of the Sultan's archers would miss him, his divine status would be proven), (2) to be impaled or (3) to convert to Islam. On the next day, September 16, 1666 Sabbatai "came before the sultan, cast off his Jewish garb and put a Turkish turban on his head. Thus his conversion to Islam was accomplished." (source).



Nathan of Gaza (1667)

While Sabbatai's conversion caused dismay amongst many of his followers and invited ridicule from others, still about 300 of his disciples as well as his wife Sarah converted to Islam as well. Since then a small group of followers is said to have continued to keep Sabbatai's teachings and heritage alive; the Dönme being the most popular ones amongst them. The legend further goes that Sabbatai actually never dropped his heretic beliefs - yet that he chose his conversion to Islam as a disguise which would allow him to continue to teach and spread his cult in secrecy, while officially being protected through his new Islamic affiliation. Thus for the follower's who held this belief, converting to a foreign and publicly accepted faith such as Islam or Christianity - once perceived to be one of the most significant sins possible for Jews - actually turned into an expression of their true and secret faith... Only in light of this can we understand what Sabbateans meant when even after their conversion to another faith they continued to call each other 'Ma'aminim' (believers). They didn't emphasise their commitment to their newly gained religion, but to the divine mission of their original messiah, Sabbatai Zevi (Scholem 1980, p.332).)

What we have not mentioned so far in this hugely abbreviated overview on Sabbatianism is what actually turned the deeds of this originally little known sinner, mystic and ascetic from Smyrna into the most prominent and long-lasting Jewish heretic movement ever since. The reason are the writings of his self-proclaimed prophet, Nathan of Gaza. Only through the latter's mystical interpretations of Sabbatai's situation and heretic deeds did the story of this new messiah gain the mystical depth, the spiritual weight and kabbalistic mean-

ing that created the necessary gravitas to turn it into such a strong movement. In fact it is Nathan of Gaza's peculiar mix of Lurianic Kabbalah, qliphothic-
gnostic interpretation, quotes from the Zohar and his own mystic exegesis that - as we will see - should turn Sabbatianism into a future, hidden cornerstone of our Western occult lore (Scholem, p.328).

3.1.2 *On the Treatise of Dragons*

Now, before we conclude this first excursus let's look at a short, yet critical example of Nathan's particular explanation of Lurianic Kabbalah. We can find it in his small 'Treatise of the Dragons' (Drusch ha-Tanninim, ref. Scholem 1980, p.325f / Scholem 1992, p.317f).

Lurianic Kabbalah creates the background for the Sabbatean movement. The attempt to give a short overview of its main elements (...) bears the risk of errors and misunderstandings. One has to take it in order to adequately explain the origins and later development of the Sabatean movement.

— Scholem 1992, p.49

One of the most essential elements of Lurianic Kabbalah is a term called 'tikkun' or 'tikkun olam' (repairing the world). Luria's idea was that when the first divine light pierced into the void that G'd had withdrawn from to make space for his creation a kind of cosmic accident happened (*schebira*). The particular accident happened when the light began to fill the fifth sephira of *geburah* (strength); the related type of light was too strong and overwhelming for the vessel it poured into and thus broke the cosmic vessel. The shells of the vessel dropped into the vast, dark ground of the void.

However, some sparks of divine light stuck to them just like drops of oil stick to potsherd. After the cosmic creation had been recovered by use of an incredibly complex process of restoration (*parzufim*), these animated 'shells of clay' remained at the bottom of the new creation, causing dismay and all evil among living creatures. Man's role in creation thus was to collect the invisible pearls of divine light from every broken fragment of the original fifth vessel. These fragments could hide anywhere; in fact many Kabbalists began to assume all of the created physical world as an expression of these qliphothic

shells. Now, the act through which man could 'repair the world' is to treat everything s/he encounters with empathy, devotion and respect. And this is what Lurianic Kabbalists came to know as *tikkun*. It is the reason why everyone of us exists, it is what we and in particular the Jewish people are here for: the picking up of divine sparks from amongst the darkness of qliphothic shells (Scholem 1992, p.60). A process that will only end with the advent of the new messiah.

(...) And when the potsherd sunk to the bottom of the (fourth and last) world of asija they originated the four elements - fire, air, water and earth - which in turn brought forth the four stages of mineral, vegetable, animal and human form. Once these had been fully materialised some sparks still remained amongst the elements. Which is why it should be the purpose of any Jew to gather these sparks from where they are trapped into and to resurrect them through the power of their soul to holiness.

— Israel Sarug, a famous Lurianic Kabbalist, quoted after Scholem 1992, p. 61, transl. by Frater Acher

So far the highly abbreviated, yet original Lurianic teaching on *tikkun*.

In his treatise of the dragons Nathan expands this interpretation in a way that would allow him later on to explain the behaviour of the new messiah, Sabbatai, in deeply mystical and kabbalistic terms. According to Nathan of Gaza the qliphothic forces already came into existence when G'd originally withdrew into itself (*zimzum*) to create a void that could be filled with creation. In fact the entire void was filled with such hylic, formless powers as well as at the same time with powers that strove towards creation. Creation thus was a process of constant forming, bonding and integration of these qliphothic forces into the newly formed worlds (Scholem 1992, p.32of). When the divine light shattered the fifth vessel and collapsed into the abyss, what fell into the dark amongst these sparks of light was also the soul of the messiah itself (Davidowicz, p.117). This is why, according to the Sabbateans, since the beginning of the world the soul of the messiah is locked into a cave of darkness. And together with it in this darkest of places dwell the qliphothic snakes or dragons that were contained outside of creation who plague and torture the messiah's soul.

This kabbalistic re-interpretation gains further meaning when Nathan refers to the messiah's soul as a 'holy snake' amongst snakes (Scholem 1992, p.327) - as the hebrew word for snake (nachash) has the same numeric value as the term messiah. Each act of tikkun thus not only becomes an act of repairing the world, but takes further meaning in that it also refers to a cleaning and restoring of the messiah's soul itself. (Note: This earliest Sabbatean myth which puts the snake (dragon) into the middle of its messianic teaching shows interesting parallels to the gnostic teachings of the Ophites.)

The earlier referenced soul (of the messiah) which had sunken amongst the qliploth sent out sparks into each generation. If they proved worthy and the respective spark proved to be of value in service of the Lord, then eventually it could turn into the soul of the messiah and pull out its entire root of his (holy) soul from amongst the qliploth. This is also how AMIRAH (Sabbatai Zevi) originally emerged as a spark of this root from amongst the qliploth; yet in his struggle he pulled out the entire root. Hence the Lord, once he had pulled out the entire root and turned into messiah, led him into great temptation. (...) Because these snakes always aimed to beguile him, and always after he had struggled to pull out great holiness from the qliploth, they managed to take power over him once the state of enlightenment had withdrawn from him. Then they would show him that they also possessed great powers...
— from a letter by Nathan of Gaza, quoted after Scholem 1992, p.329/p.156, transl. Frater Acher

Now, earlier I referred to the significance of Sabbatean Kabbala to our Western occult lore. Having examined the re-interpretation of the originally Lurianic term tikkun we are now at a point where we can better understand one of the main reasons for its longstanding impact on our own tradition: It was the Sabbatean interpretation of Salvation that made all the difference. Suddenly the idea of salvation first and foremost didn't refer anymore to the exoteric redemption of the Jewish people from slavery amongst other people. Instead it pointed to an inner salvation, an esoteric process of mystical healing and restoration of one's own soul (Scholem 1980, p.334).

Thus it is in Sabbatianism that we find the central myth of Kabbalah re-told: From an exploration of the process through which the Jewish kingdom would be restored, its central concern changed into a mystical path that would

lead to a radical change and sublimation of substance. Both, the substance of all worlds created as well as the substance of the human soul.

3.2 Excursus: On Frankism

3.2.1 The Early Years

In the mid-eighteenth century, Podolia became for Judaism what twelfth-century Languedoc was for Christianity: a seditious province where dissenters gathered and heterodoxy was practiced openly and publicly. Podolia was the only place in the world where - almost a hundred years after Sabbatai Tsevi's conversion to Islam - many Jews openly adhered to Sabbatianism.

— Macieko, p.10

Jakob Frank (1726 - 1791) was a Polish Jew born as Jacob ben Leiba into a family with strong Sabbatean ties. When he was only a few months old his family moved to the Ottoman Empire and once arrived continued to lead a restless life. In short sequence we find them in Czernowitz, Smyrna, Bucharest, Sofia and even Constantinople. Early on he gained the nickname 'Frank'; it betrayed his foreign European origins as it was a general appellation in the Ottoman Empire for Europeans since the time of Charlemagne and the Crusades.

On the night of his wedding in 1752 'the mystery of the faith' was disclosed to Frank by his groomsmen. Such ritual was the practice for initiating new members into the Sabbatean elite. The 'mystery of the faith' refers to the final revelation of Sabbatai Zevi which originally had only been shared with those disciples who converted to Islam together with him; its content was transferred orally only for decades among the sectarian elite. Frank, however, was sceptical and told his mystagogues he would only believe them if he saw that they indeed possessed "the wisdom of making gold" (Macieko, p.12; note: This early reference to Frank's alchemical interest is significant for our subject - yet, might also provide a hint about the nature of the 'mystery of the faith' revealed

to Frank.) Despite his hesitations Frank decided to go to Salonika, a centre of Sabbatean faith at the time created and maintained by the famous and close-knit Dönme community.

(...) the Dönme's brand of Sabbatianism acquired a very pronounced antinomian tendency, whereby ritual violations of the principles and the rites of Jewish religion became a significant part of religious practice.

— Macieko, p.13

Here one of the official successors to Sabbatai Zevi, Berukiah Russo (in Islam: Ottoman Baba, 1677-1720) had established a radical version of Sabbatianism and was declared by his followers to not only be the reincarnation of Zevi but also of the G'd of Israel itself. Again, Frank questioned the divine status of Berukiah given that the latter not only died like an ordinary human, but also because he lived a life in relative poverty and with little political power... It was during this early time and contact with the Dönme sect that Frank's own spiritual agenda took shape: he set out to take up where Sabbatai and Berukiah both had failed - that is to establish a significant centre of worldly as well as spiritual power for the Sabbatean movement, with himself as the central figurehead and leader.

In the years to come we see Frank rise amongst the various Dönme groups - accelerated by his visionary and mediumistic skills through which he revealed many secrets and mysteries to his followers. Equally he continued the tradition of 'strange deeds' that was so critical for the foundations of Sabbatianism:

He threw himself into the sea, which did not want to take him and resuscitated him alive, and performed 'strange deeds' publicly violating the Shabbat or - during a service in a synagogue - taking the Torah scroll, lowering his trousers, and sitting on it with his naked buttocks. (...) At the grave of Nathan (of Gaza) he formulated his program for the first time: "The Ran (Rabbi Nathan of Gaza) ordered after he died, a bag of earth should be placed in his coffin, thus giving a sign that he wished to convert the spiritual world into the world of flesh. But I tell you that already in this world, everything that is in spirit must be made into flesh like our flesh. Then everyone will see, as any visible thing is seen.

— Macieko, p.16

Despite his meteoric rise amongst the Dönme, Frank refused to become a leader amongst the sect and instead returned to Poland in 1755. Here we quickly find him imprisoned together with his disciples as part of an incident that ultimately would have tragic ramifications on many Jewish communities in the area. In short the incident on the night of the Shabbat is best summarised by its one of its earliest sources:

And they took the wife of the local rabbi (who also belonged to the sect), a woman beautiful but lacking discretion, they undressed her naked and placed the Crown of the Torah on her head, sat her under the canopy like a bride, and danced a dance around her. They celebrated with bread and wine of the condemned, and they pleased their hearts with music like King David ... and in dance they fell upon her kissing her, and called her 'mezuzah', as if they were kissing a mezuzah.

— Rabbi Jacob Emden, *Sefer Shimush*, 1760, quoted after Macieko, p.22

Interestingly, it is Frank himself who is purported to have pulled the heavy rugs from the shutters that night and opened the windows - for anybody to witness their Sabbatean celebration. In fact, what we encounter here is a rite based on the well known mystical marriage with the Torah amongst orthodox Jews. As we might remember, already Sabbatai Zevi himself had celebrated his wedding with the Torah in public - sat under the canopy, cradled the sacred scroll in his arms and sang her love-songs. However, Frank had gone too far in pushing this rite even further: Instead of turning the Torah into a metaphorical bride, he had turned a naked woman into a physical Torah, by placing the sacred crown on her and allowing her to sit under the holy canopy. In essence, Frank proved to true to his program announced at the grave of Nathan of Gaza: he aimed at nothing less but to turn all things spiritual into human (more specifically: female) flesh (Macieko, p.27).

By no means was this the only time sexual transgressions were reported for the Sabbateans. In fact we have evidence that it is not unlikely they still practiced 'sexual hospitality' as known from the Hebrew Bible. I.e. upon the commandment of their husband women were supposed to offer themselves up to visitors and even strangers coming to a Sabbatean's house. Here is a report

from a member of the Polish Sabbatean community by the time Jacob Frank was their leader:

(...) it is permissible to have children and to have sexual intercourse with someone's else wife or one's own sister, or even - through only in secret - with one's own mother. As I am old now, I no longer do it, but twenty years ago (and I have professed this faith for twenty-four years), I had carnal relations with the wife of my son. (...) And I believe that all this is permitted because of God commanded us to do thus.

— *testimony of Samuel of Busk as part of the investigations against Jacob Frank, quoted after Macieko, p.32*

Not surprisingly, what unfolds in the four years to come, from 1756 to 1760 is a storm of religious bans and detentions, book burnings, political manoeuvres and powerful intrigues between all four major players involved: the orthodox Jewry, Catholic Church, Polish nobility and potentates as well as of course Frank and the various Sabbatean groups. For a short period - only three months right before its collapse - the star of Jacob Frank seemed to rise beyond anything orthodox Jewry, the Church or European potentates had seen ever before. Through the forging of powerful alliances as well as ruthlessly exploiting Jewish stereotypes such as the blood sacrifice of children for his own interest, Frank had managed to gain support from both the Church as well as the local nobility.

Clearly Frank was a man on a mission - not only to bring the rise of Sabbatianism to completely new heights, but more importantly maybe to lead all of his followers out of exile and gain large lands in the district of the former Podolia for settlement of his Sabbatean followers. As part of this strategy during 1759 - 1760 more than three-thousand Jews converted to Christianity - hoping to follow in the footsteps of Sabbatai Zevi and to be led into worldly and spiritual freedom under their new leader, Jacob Frank (Macieko, p.32).

After the baptism, Frank conducted himself with ostentatious splendor, attended theatres, and visited the homes of the most important magnates in Warsaw. He traveled in a chariot pulled by six horses, tossed handfuls of gold coins to the poor, 'clothed himself like a king' and ate on gold and silver. (...)

Frank's aim was to establish a separate, semi-independent colony for Christian Sabbatians. (...) Little is known about the character envisaged for

the projected colony. Frank demanded total rule over the neophytes and envisioned a strict military regimen. He was always surrounded by armed guards and forced his followers to train with weapons. (...) After the baptism, Frank presented the abandonment of official Judaism as a double liberation: emancipation from the tyranny of religion and the tyranny of landlessness. The Frankists were to become soldiers and the Frankist leaders - military commanders.

— Macieko, p.159-160

Jacob Frank was for the Polish-Russian Jews of the eighteenth century what Sabbatai Tsevi was for entire Jewry of the seventeenth.

— Simon Dubnow, quoted after Macieko, p.18

While this narcissistic pomp and these wanton plans read like an episode of ‘Games of Thrones’ they were all over on 7th of January 1760. On that day Frank was arrested and spent the following twelve years in captivity. The Christian clergy had achieved exactly what they had aimed for: thousands of freshly converted new Christian church members, a significantly weakened orthodox Jewry - yet still strong enough to continually be exploited financially - and with the imprisonment of Frank himself no further thread to the established power balance in their Polish-Russian territories (Macieko, p.166f).

3.2.2 The Female God

What now began was a new and completely unexpected phase of Frankism. Here is how it went: The goal of the bishop and potentate simply was to isolate Frank from his followers, to lock him up safely and ideally for the world to forget about him. At first glance there could not have been a better place than the one they chose: the remote Jasna Góra monastery in the South-Polish city of Częstochowa. Frank was the only prisoner here and special chambers, separated from the pilgrims to the shrine of the famous Black Madonna, had been prepared for him. Frank would spend the next twelve years confined to this place; initially completely isolated, then slowly with increasing contact to

his family and followers and ultimately residing in the monastery with an entire entourage where they would hold their own services next to the monastery.

The unexpected turn, however, was initiated through Franks encounter with the cult of the Black Madonna of Jasna Góra. Legend tells that the enigmatic icon treasured in the monastery had been painted by Luke the Evangelist on a fragment of the table of the Last Supper and subsequently been brought to Constantinople from Jerusalem by Constantine the Great. When Frank arrived at the monastery the icon had already been the central locus of pilgrimage for Polish Catholics for centuries. Records tell us that in 1762 more than 200,000 pilgrims visited her sanctuary within a month and a half only - making her the most ardent object of spiritual devotion, both popular and learned (Macieko, p.169).

For Frank this was nothing but a revelation as well as a call to action: He evolved his teachings in no insignificant ways and interpreted Częstochowa as the actual Mount Zion. From here the Shekhinah would 'raise from the dust' and she would do so in the icon of the Black Madonna. While other kabbalists had hinted at the parallels between the concept of the shekhinah and the Christian devotion to the Virgin Mary before Frank, only he was bold enough to postulate transformation of the former into the latter (Macieko, p.175).

But he even went further: according to Frank there is no separation between G'd, the shekhinah as well as the messiah. Because of the female gender of the shekhinah, thus, he assumed even the messiah as well as G'd herself were female. With this single act of revolutionary re-interpretation Frank identified not only G'd and the messiah as female - but also the Virgin Mary and the messiah as the very same spiritual principle. The gate through which according to Christianity the messiah had passed into the material world, now turned into the principle of salvation itself.

To put it into a nutshell, unlike Christianity, Frankism was not about a male God who took a human body upon himself through a human woman, but about a feminine goddess who acquired a human form. (...) Frank appropriated elements of Catholic Mariology but departed from Christian doctrine in two crucial respects: he claimed that the Maiden was an element of the Godhead (and not as the Christians would have it, the human mediatrix

Virgin Mary) and he declared that She was actually present (and not only pictorially present) in the Częstochowa icon.

— Macieko, p.175/176

You think that's quite a handful for the pious Polish society of the late 17th century? Well, Frank had a dozen years of isolation right next to the black icon to even take the next step in his private cosmology. Take this:

The final and complete revelation of Frankism amounts to the true incarnation of the divine Maiden in a true human maiden: Eve Frank (Frank's daughter, ed. Acher). (...) From the very outset, Frank presented her as a semidivine being and a future leader of the group (...). Wherever she appeared, she was accompanied by a cortege of the daughters of prominent Frankists, who were trained to attend to all her needs. (...) The Frankist dicta give detailed directions of the way an initiate should behave in order to be 'worthy to come to the Maiden': he should come dressed in white and fall on his face without raising his eyes toward her, then kiss her feet, then stand up with his hands folded without looking at her, and then slowly look at her but without looking her directly in the face. Finally, he will be allowed to kiss her hand; she will address him as 'brother' and ask about his dearest wish, to which he will answer with a phrase from the Son of Songs 5:2, 'Open to me, my sister, my love!'

— Macieko, p.177

Clearly the welcoming of the 'Maiden' was staged by Frank rather as a mystical vision than a royal rite. However, we know from an authentic source, a visitor to the Frankist court in its final stages in 1798 - i.e. more than thirty years after Frank had initiated this cult and seven years after his own death - that precisely this ritual was still performed when approaching Eve Frank. Finally, we should mention as well that of course Frank developed a related doctrine stating that he himself was both the father and (allegorical or not) husband of his daughter Eve, the true messiah (Macieko, p.178f).

When Frank finally was released from captivity in 1772 he had regained a large fellowship and was again recognised as one of the most important Sabbatean leaders in Europe. However, in truth he had moved on from many of the

original teachings of Sabbatai Zevi and founded his own female cult of divine worship - as well as a strong outer circle of military defence.

3.2.3 The Asiatic Connection

While in the 1750s and 1760s, Frankism was first perceived as a sect within Judaism and then as a movement on the border between Judaism and Christianity, its expansion in the 1770s and 1780s was defined by the reformulation of its tenets in terms of something that can best be called a secret society.

— Macieko, p.230

From South-Poland Frank and his entourage relocated to Moravia, and in particular to the city of Brünn. It was here that not only a Sabbatean stronghold had remained throughout the years, but it also proved to be connected much closer to the local nobility and their necessary funds to entertain a growing circle of Frankists.

In Brünn Frank found shelter at his cousin's estate, the powerful Schöndl Dobruschka. Schöndl, equally famous and infamous for her beauty, sometimes carrying the epithet 'the whore of Brünn' was perceived as a strong female leader of local Sabbateans, possibly even within all of Moravia. She gave birth to twelve children; the most talented of them being young Moses who was 18 years old when Frank and his entourage arrived at their house. And here it is that our circle closes: Moses Dobruschka is the name we encountered in the beginning of our story on the Asiatic Brethren. A founding member of the order and - as it turns out - a member of the Sabbatean community by birth as well as a strong ally to Jacob Frank himself.

As we will see in the next chapter on the actual teachings of the Asiatic Brethren, there were quite a few interests and spiritual convictions these two men shared. The passion for alchemy was certainly not the least of it:

Jacob Frank also devoted time to alchemy and established a special laboratory at his court for this purpose. The laboratory was said to produce large quantities of Hoffman's Liquor (a mixture of ethanol and ether), which Frank consumed daily, believing that it would make him immortal. (...) He

also made frequent use of alchemical imagery, telling his disciples, for instance, that as 'the whole world seeks and desires to make gold, so I desire to make pure gold of out of you.' The importance of alchemy can be gathered from the fact that he derided his Sabbatian former teachers precisely for not mastering its mysteries: 'On the 10th of October (17)84, the Lord, dressed in white, said: If I knew at least that you had achieved the wisdom of making gold, then I would say nothing to you. And that is what I told Rabbi Issahar and Mordechai. I will not believe that you are chosen, unless I see that you possess that wisdom.

— Macieko, p.352

Jacob Frank and his court remained in Brünn for almost fourteen year until the spring of 1786. As we shall see these were the formative and most essential years during the short life-span of the Asiatic Brethren. During this time Frank developed strong connections into the Masonic communities of Vienna as well as into Germany. However, it is questionable at best whether his actual doctrines and teachings ever spread far beyond his own circle of fanatic followers. Freemasons and secret societies during this period most of all were interested in re-discovering the ancient wisdom and purported truth hidden in the Jewish mystery tradition. While it remained highly ambiguous to most of them, what this tradition truly was and what it was comprised of, Frank's teachings suffered two fundamental flaws in order to attract wider attention in such circles.

First, his teachings were incredibly fluid; they were not fixed on paper, they constantly changed and never assumed a homogenous, fixed form that could easily be transmitted orally or in writing. His eclectic body of beliefs and syncretic dogmas drew upon all three major religions of the time and were constantly evolved further by their teacher according to his personal needs (Macieko, p.263). Secondly, his actual rites and 'strange deeds' as performed in his inner circle simply might have been too radical for even the secret societies of his time. Noblemen and adventurer of the time had a huge interest in alchemy and the mystical arts; they wanted to wear robes and masks and listen to the master's voice in hushed silence. Jacob Frank instead was playing in a completely different league. The example of the death of his first wife might illustrate this: When people approached him mourning his wife's death, Frank

scolded them and instead introduced new celebration rites to honour femininity. Shortly afterwards he was witnessed sucking at the naked breasts of two of his followers during such an honorary rite... Shocking of course to everyone who didn't know that Frank and his wife Hanna had been reported to perform public nude sex themselves (Lenowitz, footnote 1069).

The final chapter of the Frankists takes place in Germany, in the city of Offenbach beginning in 1786. Once more - even though in a much more confined and smaller environment than in 1760 - Frank took up all the pomp and mystery that had made him famous before his long captivity next to the Black Madonna. He and his court resided in an old palace they called the 'house of God' (Gotteshaus) and where their spiritual and worldly centre should reside for even many years after his death in 1791. Upon his entry into Offenbach Frank managed to receive exemption from communal laws for his entire entourage and his palace and thus was able to create his own little kingdom, a rampart against the rising tide of Enlightenment (Aufklärung):

The Frankists' life in Offenbach began at once to follow a strict regime. No one had free access to the castle. Heavy curtains covered the windows. A section of the castle was turned into an alchemical laboratory, where mysterious experiments took place. The yard in front of the building became a parade ground on which military manoeuvres were executed; every day young Frankists could be seen training with weapons. On the rare occasion when someone from outside of the sect was permitted to enter the castle, he would be escorted to a guarded room, where Frank, always accompanied by an interpreter, sat on an ottoman smoking a water pipe. (...)

— Macieko, p.233

Only a few years after Frank's death the fame of the court at Offenbach had spread even further. When the young German writer and novelist Bettina Brentano reported on her impressions from the Frankists' way of life in Offenbach we already see the myth beginning to mix with memory. While Frank might have failed in bringing the new female messiah to his fellow cult members, he still might have prevailed in his original programme - which was to turn everything spiritual into human flesh.

Offenbach has changed into some kind of a magical tale. (...) A mystical nation wanders the streets in strange, colourful clothes, old men with long

beards, wearing purple, green, and yellow robes, young beautiful boys in gold, one half of the leggings green, the other in yellow or red. They ride horses with silver bells on their necks; in the evenings they play guitars and flutes under the window of their beloved. (...) A prince at the head of these people, with silver beard and long white robes, rests on luxurious carpets and pillows in front of the gates of his castle, surrounded by his court. Each person wears the emblem of his function and status.

— Bettina Brentano, 1785 – 1859, quoted after Macieko, p.2383.3



Two portraits of Jakob Frank and a photo of his skull as excavated from his grave in Offenbach

3.3. Conclusions

So here we are - having returned safely from our excursions into Sabbatianism and Frankism. Maybe let's pause for a moment and reflect. Considering everything we learned about these two heretical currents within Jewry, let's look at a simple question: If the teachings of any secret society or magical order had been heavily influenced by either or both of them, through which characteristics could we recognise such influence?

In essence: what would be the marks on any occult order that would allow us to assume a strong influence of Sabbatianism or Frankism respectively? Well, here is a short overview and with that a brief summary of what we discussed during Part 1 and 2 (see next page).

Now, if for a moment we broadened our view to look beyond the order of the Asiatic Brethren, we might already be able to see how significant the heritage of these currents is on our modern day occult tradition? Take a moment to compare many of the practices and rituals in modern occult movements or even in Crowley's own work with the above list?

The most stunning resemblance - in terms of its sexual affinity as well as its emphasise on turning spirit into flesh - I can think of are the works of Austin Osman Spare, a genuine wunderkind of 20th century magic. Allow me to share a quote from his Logomachy of Zos might highlight this strange connection:

All ways to Heaven lead to flesh. Our re-orientation and ascent from Earth must start here: nothing is obtained except by desire and our only medium is flesh—mouth and hand. (...) No escape but to breathe the human smell, touch the hirsute flesh: shall again adventure... must transgress. (...) Flesh exists to be exploited. It is in all things and all things will be through it. All emanations are through the flesh and nothing has reality for us without it. The Soul is ever unknowable because we can only realize by finite form in Time-Space. (...) This is your great moment of reality—the living flesh!

— AOS, The Logomachy of Zos

Sabbatianism

- a specific tendency for heretical rituals, i.e. ritually fostered and encouraged overstepping of established religious laws and rules
- a generally strong Kabbalistic influence, in particular continuing the thought tradition or/and utilising kabbalistic terminology as coined in the writings of Nathan of Gaza and Isaac Luria,
- displaying a strong emphasis of a messianic or redeemer tradition
- specifically advising on ritual and everyday acts of salvation (possibly both of one's own soul as well as the community one is a member of)
- and vice versa showing emphasis of dark and demonic powers (*qliphoth*) that are naturally ingrained in every man's constitution and oppose each act of salvation

Frankism

- a distinct tendency for heretical rituals, i.e. ritually fostered and encouraged overstepping of and inversion of established religious laws and rules
- displaying a strong emphasis of a messianic or redeemer tradition
- a distinct tendency to avoid the overly subtle and theoretic and instead 'turn everything into flesh', i.e. physical experiences / ritual acts amongst its members
- a cult of female divinity, possibly in the shape of a sacred maiden or whore that is subjected to collective practices of devotion and adoration
- possibly the inclusion of and expressed encouragement for ritualised sexual intercourse outside of monogamic relationships
- an integration of both esoteric as well as practical alchemy
- a tendency to reinforce military customs, including application of hierarchical structures and a single, autocratic leader as the head of the organisation



On the Order of the Asiatic Brethren



The Order

4. On the Founding Fathers of the Asiatic Brethren

With this let's return to the order of the Asiatic Brethren and begin to identify their actual origins and teachings. In doing so we will concentrate on three main aspects. The first of which will be the focus of this current chapter:

1. **Origins:** Who were the most influential founding members of the order?

2. Teachings: What were the actual teachings of the order as we know them today?

3. Sources: Which trusted sources do we know influenced the orders' teachings?

We already introduced two of the leading men of the order during the first chapter, Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhofen (HHEE) as well as Franz Thomas von Schönfeld. However, when we compare the various, scattered contemporary German sources that have come upon us as well as more recent research on the order, several other important members stand out. The chart on the following pages provides an condensed overview of the five most influential members of the Asiatic Brethren (AB) - legendary or authentic (ref. Katz 1983 / von Goue, 1805).

Now, it needs to be called out that by no means were these five men also the most powerful members of the order. Quite the opposite: most of them had lost much of their wealth and social power before joining (Katz, p.241). Still, quickly after the foundation of the order these men were able to attract a significant amount of followers in various European power centres of the time. This is an even greater accomplishment if we recognise that the order throughout its relatively short life-time always remained isolated from other and more established Freemasons' organisations. Lodges of the Asiatic Brethren have been confirmed for Vienna - where their original headquarter was - Prague, Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt and Innsbruck. Equally, due to member lists found amongst the order's papers memberships of several powerful potentates of the time are confirmed, the most influential of whom certainly was the future King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II (Katz, p.253).

This order has spread from Italy to Russia already. The ruling heads of this order were unknown still at 1788; however it is not unlikely that the baron von Ecker und Eckhofen is one of them. They refer to Masonry as their basis, they even call it the nursery (Pflanzschule) of their entire system. Their gatherings they call Melchisedek-Lodges and offer their services to include Jews, Turks, Persians and Armenians. The order aims to be a fraternal association of all righteous and (currently) separated human children. (...) The order's teaching are partly moral, which means one is taught how to govern the spirits by breaking the seven seals, and partly physical, which means one is taught how to produce miracle cures (Wunderarzneyen) and

Azariah

- born: ?
- religion: member of a kabbalistic sect, possibly Sabbateans
- real name: ?
- role: travelling advocat of the kabbalistic sect
- background: mythical founding figure of the AB, supposed to have handed the original documents over to Justus, likely an invention of the founders of the AB to provide proof for oriental origins of their order

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Hans Heinrich von t

- born: August 1750, died: August 179
- religion: Roman Catholic
- order name: *Abraham*
- role: official founder of the Asiatic Bre
- background: former member of the F that denounced the Rosicrucians late Brethren instead, propagated mystic Jews throughout his life

Franz Thomas von Schönfeld

- born: July 1753, died: April 1794
- religion: born Jewish (Sabbatean), converted to Roman Catholicism 1775
- role: founding member of the AB, responsible for developing much of their foundational materials and translating several kabbalistic source works for the order
- also known as: Moses Dobruška, Julius Frey
- order name: *Isaac ben Joseph, Sacharia*
- background: offspring of the most powerful Sabbatean family in Moravia, great-cousin to Jakob Frank, talented freemason, poet and adventurer, died under the guillotine during the French Revolution

Justus

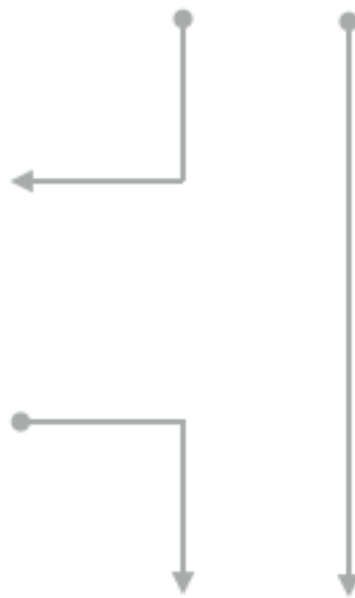
- born: ?
- religion: member of the Franciscan order (Roman Catholic)
- real second name: Bischoff
- order name: *Ish Zaddik* (the righteous one)
- role: emissary between Orient and Occident
- background: lived several years in the Orient and in Jerusalem, held close ties to oriental kabbalistic circles, received original order materials from Azariah that became the foundation for the order's ceremony, theosophy and teachings, likely to be a real person

Ecker und Eckhofen

790

Brethren

→ Rosicrucian order, published a book later on and brought to life the Asiatic tical freemasonry and the inclusion of



Ephraim Josef Hirschfeld

- born: ca. 1758, died: January 1820 at Offenbach
- religion: Jewish (possibly Sabbatean)
- also known as: Ephraim Josef Hirschel
- order name: *Oker Harim* (the one who moves mountains), *Marcus ben Binah*
- role: initially order's scribe, then most influential contributor
- background: joined the order probably 1782, purported to have been a direct student of Justus, close friend of Ecker, due to his significant Hebrew and Kabbalistic skills quickly turned into the most influential contributor to the order's (higher) teachings, actively aimed to recruit more Jews for the order and leveraged his brother **Pascal** for several kabbalistic translations, excluded from the order in 1790

how to create gold. The order expects blind faith and blind obedience; it's regulations are the true teachings of the son's of Loyola.

— von Goue, Leipzig 1805, p.411

Like any good occult order the AB strived to provide a founding myth leading back into an ancient lineage. This was particularly important as the order had been established without any support from either the side of other Freemasons' nor Rosicrucian organisations of the time.

Moreover, as we see highlighted in the order's name, the aim was to establish a particularly strong connection to Asian occult traditions. The term 'Asia' in this context, however, needs explanation: It is not a reference to the land-mass we have come to call Asia today. Yet instead it is a vague reference to Asia-Minor at best. Thus it indicates a tradition that doesn't stem from the European mainland, but from the Orient instead. Secondly, the term aimed to function as a name-tag which in the 18th century marked a tradition that was equally - or possibly more - ancient than the established Roman Catholic and Jewish orthodoxy.

The Asiatic Brethren would like so much, just like any fraternity seems to be marked by this weakness, to be of ancient decent.

— von Goue, Leipzig 1805, p.420

The plot of the Asiatic Brethren's founding myth is relatively straight forward: According to the order the original teachings were passed on to them by a Franciscan monk called Justus. His born second name was believed to be Bischoff (engl: bishop), a common German name indicating ancient religious ties of a family. Justus had spent several years living in the Orient, in Jerusalem in particular. Here he came into contact with kabbalistic circles, began to immerse himself deeply into the study of their teachings and ultimately managed to receive original manuscripts from these circles. It is on this material that much of the order's ceremony and teaching were built and expanded later on.

As part of their foundation myth they also remembered the name of the kabbalistic teacher from whom Justus had received the original material. His name was Azariah and he was said to be a member of a kabbalistic sect himself, possibly of Sabbatean origins. Due to his strong devotion to Kabbalah he

handed over management of his daily business to his sons and became an emissary of the sect, traveling from city to city to expand and strengthen the sect's network. This is how he got to know Justus and despite the latter's European and more importantly Christian background began to unveil the teachings of the Kabbalah to him (Katz, p.241f). — Of course not all of these details can be verified today. However, historic evidence of the person of Justus are sufficiently strong to erase most doubt about his existence (Katz, p.242 / von Goue, Leipzig 1805, p.419).

We will not repeat here what we have said in the first chapter about the Bavarian officer, Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen and how he founded the actual order in 1781. However, it should be highlighted here that Ecker himself explained he had been introduced to the order in 1774 by a friend, Georg Hasting. According to the former at this point the order had already been established for 38 years in a loose form after some of the original brethren had decided to move to Europe (Frick, p.457). -- We will also not repeat again the background of Franz Thomas von Schönfeld who contributed as a founding member of the order and developed much of its constitutional teachings, structure and ceremony (Katz, p.248). As far as we can tell, it was down to the work of this original triumvirate that the basic and distinct tenet of the AB were shaped and designed. We will take a closer look at them in the next chapters. Before that, however, there is one more founding father of the order we need to go get to know. His name is Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld.

It is with Hirschfeld that we encounter the true prodigy who helped to elevate the AB above the crowd of other mystical orders and secret societies of the time. In his liminal essay from 1962 Gershom Scholem was the first one to re-discover this 'forgotten mystic of the age of enlightenment'. Unfortunately as Scholem died briefly after publishing this essay he never was given the chance to finish his planned book on Hirschfeld (Davidowicz, p.135). However, in a nutshell here is what we know about him and his influence on the AB:

Hirschfeld was born as a son to a Jewish cantor in Karlsruhe who held considerable knowledge in talmudic and kabbalistic studies (Katz, p.245). It was also Hirschfeld's father who already had aimed to create and strengthen his family ties to several Christian families of noble decent. As a protege of these powerful allies the young Hirschfeld was allowed to visit a higher school and study medicine initially.

(...) Instead he acquired primary knowledge in languages, philosophy and literature and achieved a level of self-confidence on the social parquet which was unusual for Jews at that time. In addition to his acquired skills Hirschfeld had some strange inherent features: on the one hand he tended to reclusive behaviour and stay by himself, where on the other hand he shone in every kind of public conversation, radiated charm and self-confidence and steadily advocated his well thought through opinions.

— Katz, p.246

Early on in his life we find him working as a teacher and accountant for several aristocratic families, such as ultimately the famous 19th century banker David Friedländer. In 1782 Hirschfeld relocated to Innsbruck where his momentous encounter with the founder of the AB, Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen (HHEE) took place. The two of them quickly formed strong bonds and became close friends, repeatedly traveling together across Germany and Austria on the quest to spread their new-formed order. Contemporary sources actually called them “a pair of originals who ran the risk of mutually ruining each other.” (Davidowicz, p.139)

Different to many other Jews of the time who aimed for access to Christian secret societies and a place on the social parquet, Hirschfeld never converted to Christianity and always held on to his Jewish roots. Still after receiving permission to join the order of the Asiatic Brethren, it was him who gradually took over the work of Franz Thomas von Schönfeld and - as we will see - began to put his kabbalistic mark especially on the teaching of the higher grades of the order.

Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld, a Jewish Kabbalist and Freemason, is one of the figures towards the end of the 18th century in whose works we can equally find traces of Kant as well as of kabbalistic elements of one Isaac Luria. It is through him that we can see how Sabbatean and Frankist bodies of thought (...) lead to the upheaval from tradition to modernity in the minds of many thinkers of his time.

— Davidowicz, p.135

Surprisingly, in 1790 we find Hirschfeld being banned from the order. The reasons for this event remain somewhat in the dark due to papers relating to a law court that only have been rediscovered partially so far (Davidowicz, p.146). However, it seems relatively proven that the root causes for both his eventual exclusion from the order as well as his temporary imprisonment were public conflicts with his former close friend and ally, HHEE himself. The conflict seemed to revolve around two main aspects: (1) unfulfilled financial promises towards Hirschfeld as well as (2) a lack of respect for his work and increasing discrimination due to his Jewish background.

Now, what is particularly interesting about this conflict is Hirschfeld's opinion on Kabbala as he expressed it in public documents as part of the related law court. He argues very confidently that Kabbala as such was not based on any particular religion, but rather formed an open path for anybody interested - be they Muslim, Catholic or Jewish - to transcend the limitations of one's own religious tradition and to gain access to "the one and only, true, pure and all embracing religion." (Katz, p.267)

But because it is in the principles of the true Cabalistic that lies the one and only, true, pure and all-embracing religion, nothing is more natural than that all kinds of religious members are coming together here (in this order). It is here for example that the orthodox Jew, Mohametan and Christian learned the sacred three-in-one as well as the true faith in the unbiased doctrine of Christ - of which the first two mustn't know and the third downrightly knows nothing (...).

— Ephraim Josef Hirschfeld, quoted after Katz, p.281

Now, let's pause for a moment and consider why this is such a significant quote for our Western tradition? Well, most of the mystical orders founded in the 19th and early 20th century that form our more recent mystical heritage were deeply syncretic by nature. While several of them maintained a relatively Christian facade, their teachings converged in so far as they assumed one true source of divine wisdom and teaching which was located beyond the confines of any particular religion. This is why Eliphas Levi, Papus, Mathers, etc. were obsessed with 'piecing the puzzle' together and felt at liberty to take elements of traditions from all cultures and histories of our past to unblock their magical

paths. Pragmatic syncretism was the perceived key to 'reconstruct' (or invent?) entire systems of magic and bring them to life again.

It is in light of this that the work of Ephraim Josef Hirschfeld assumes its most important meaning: At the turn of the 19th century we find a kabbalistic Jew becoming one of the earliest pioneers of this occult spirit. While Western society was obsessed with the rational mind and pushing through the barriers of the past into the new Age of Enlightenment, at the same time we discover in Hirschfeld the emergence of a current that used this momentum to pave its way into a completely different direction. 'Enlightenment' for Hirschfeld was to recognise the false and artificial limitations each religious tradition confined itself to. 'Enlightenment' for him meant to break free from all of these man-made containers altogether - and to push through to the actual, unifying mystical truth behind each of these belief systems.

That this spiritual attempt obviously was flawed again in itself should not diminish its general accomplishment. Not everything in Kabbala will still work and function if you take away the Jewish context and current underneath it; not everything in the teachings of Paracelsus, Jacob Böhme or Ignatius of Loyola will still be coherent and touch your soul, if you deviate too far from the paths each of them had carved out. In fact, much of magic, mystic and the occult simply will become muddy and all mixed up if you think you can hold their essences in your hands without accepting the particular vessels they were taken from. However - and this is the significant thing to remember - at the time Hirschfeld introduced his revolutionary ideas into the higher grades of the Asiatic Brethren most of the liquid essence had been lost over the adoration of the man-made vessels.

But let's return to our almost forgotten founding father. In 1792 we find Hirschfeld imprisoned in Schleswig, excluded from the AB and deprived not only of the fruits of his work but more importantly even of the public recognition. The aristocratic potentates who protected him for most of his life had either died of age or turned away from him.

Suddenly, historic documents tell us, one Isaac ben Joseph, a leading head of the order appears in the city where Hirschfeld is held captive. The order's brethren in the area who had heard about ben Joseph in the past, believed him to be another of their legendary founders rather than a real person - and so were shocked to see him alive. ben Joseph meets the authorities who

had ordered the imprisonment of Hirschfeld, pays the significant amount of 550 thaler to free him of his asserted debts and gets him released from prison. Together they leave Schleswig and neither of them should ever return.

In May of the same year both of them reappear in Strasbourg where they depart. Hirschfeld returns to Germany and his home city of Karlsruhe. Until the end of his life this is where he resides; as well as in Offenbach very close to the court of Jacob Frank. Hirschfeld continues on his life's mission and in 1796 publishes the first Jewish-Kabbalistic book in German language ever, 'Biblisches Organon oder Realübersetzung der Bibel mit der mystischen Begleitung und kritischen Anmerkungen'. It remains one of the rarest German language occult books until today.

However, above all Hirschfeld never stopped waiting for his brethren to keep their promise - and to allow him to return to his order. When the news reached him that most of the lodges of the order had ceased to exist, he even took efforts to re-establish it himself. He remained without success and died in 1820.

Which leaves us with one last question. Who was the mysterious brother who appeared out of nowhere when Hirschfeld was imprisoned in Schleswig? Well, it seems Hirschfeld after all wasn't without any allies from his former order. Isaac ben Joseph was just another name Franz Thomas von Schönfeld assumed while traveling from one adventure to the next all across Europe. Hirschfeld and Schönfeld - the two authentic kabbalistic scholars within the AB - first had been rivals within the order, both aiming to establish their authority and control over the order's teachings. At that time Schönfeld succumbed, Hirschfeld prevailed and the former had to leave the order. What drove Schönfeld years later to support his former contender, to pay for him and to travel together with him subsequently, is what we do not know.

We do know, however, that together in Strasbourg they finally got to meet another mystic whose work had a strong influence on both of them and therefore on teachings of the AB. This was the 'unknown philosopher' and disciple of one famous Martinez de Pasqually, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin. But I guess we are getting into another adventure already. Enough for now.

Let's save the secrets of Pasqually and St.Martin and how they influenced the order of the Asiatic Brethren for our next chapter.

The syncretic tendencies of the 'Asiatic Brethren' who aimed to unite Jewry and Christianity by all means resembled the related tendencies amongst the Frankists, who leveraged writings from these circles, such as Hirschfelds 'Biblical Organon' (Offenbach 1796) for their propaganda. It is on this soil that Schönfeld and Hirschfeld met. What attracted the Frankist Schönfeld to the Freemason Hirschfeld was what attracted the Freemason Hirschfeld to the Frankists with whom he maintained the closes relationships later on in Offenbach.

— Gershom Scholem, quoted after Katz, p.142

5. On the Teachings of the Asiatic Brethren

Let's begin by calling out that anything we are about to hear in this chapter we were never meant to hear. The Asiatic Brethren were founded in 1781; in 1701 the 15 year old maidservant Dorothee Tretschlaff had been the last victim of a German witch-trial and was beheaded in public. Of course 80 years later the executive power of the Catholic Church had further diminished and the struggle for the Age of Enlightenment had captured large parts of society.

Yet, precisely these dynamics were the reason why any members of mystical freemasonry now had to defend themselves towards two critical fronts: On the one hand the Catholic and increasingly Protestant churches still held considerable power. While they couldn't place people on the pyre anymore, their ability to discredit and damage one's public reputation amongst noblemen and potentates remained exceptionally strong. However, at the same time people interested in the occult now needed to defend themselves against the social forces of Enlightenment. Academics and philosophers now advocating the critical importance of reason, individualism and the advantages of the scientific method perceived advocates of a mythical path towards knowledge as highly reactionary and a thread to their rapidly emerging cultural movement.

Furthermore, the founders of the order could look back at a history of private kabbalistic, alchemical or magical writings leaking into public - and doing no insignificant damage to their purported authors whenever their anonymity

was compromised. Of course this was exactly what happened to themselves, when in 1787 an anonymous booklet was published and revealed entire chapters of their secret order's documents. Finally, keeping one's actual teachings secret was the third most important purpose of any secret society, preceded only by coming up with these very teachings in the first place and attracting a sufficiently large amount of members to sustain themselves.

So naturally we have to assume that the Asiatic Brethren took according precautions. The most obvious and secure of which obviously would have been to establish two streams of transmission: one in writing, and a second, more closely guarded of individual oral instructions. By evaluating the accessible sources of the former category we will aim to understand if so and what types of secret teachings the Asiatic Brethren might have held in reserve for the latter.

The most important source on the teachings of the order is a large, anonymous tome published in 1803. Until the advent of the internet and digital book collections it remained so incredibly rare that in fact very few people knew it had ever been printed. Even today small collection of pages of the original book are sold for thousands of dollars. During the research for this article we found but one source that offered 48 pages of the original book in a loose collection for a stunning 1600 USD. While the price seems excessive the rarity of the original print seems to have justified it for decades. The full title of the book is *'The Brethren St.Johannis the Evangelist from Asia in Europe or the only true and genuine Freemasonry next to an appendix, Fessler's Critical History of Freemasonry and its voidness, by a High Advanced One'* (*Die Brüder St.Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa oder die einzige wahre und ächte Freimaurerei nebst einem Anhang, die Fesslersche Kritische Geschichte der Freimaurerbrüderschaft und ihre Nichtigkeit betreffend, von einem hohen Obern, Berlin 1803*)

Now, a lot has been written about the Asiatic Brethren, their members, history as well as their purported influence on later magical and theosophic orders. However, when we dig a little deeper and see how many of these articles - may they be in print or online - actually researched the content of this book from 1803 we come up surprisingly empty handed. The most thorough research to date we found was done by Gershom Scholem. However, that was back in the early 1960s when the book wasn't even available as a digital copy.

So the absence of any proper evaluation of first-hand source material seems rather staggering when compared with the abundance of references to the order. (Note: a simple web search for the term ‘order of the Asiatic Brethren’ currently comes up with 36,000+ results.)

To begin our evaluation of the order’s teachings we simply decided to take a thorough look at the content of the book. However, upon reading the whole tome it became apparent why this proved to be more challenging than assumed. Here is why: (1) unfortunately the book doesn’t provide a content or index section, (2) within the numeric sequence of chapters errors remained uncorrected, (3) many of the chapter titles are very broad and general, and (4) some of them are simply missing.

With this in mind we set out to consolidate a complete index of the book - except for the appendix as it doesn’t relate to the actual teachings of the order. To our knowledge it is the first time this has even been consolidated or even published in English language (for [overview ref. to online version here](#)).

Now, as with any good book we learn a lot about it by looking at its index. In the case of this book we quickly realise that the entire first part (pages 1-64) is dedicated to formal matters of organisation. Of course any order that spread as quickly as the AB did needed to ensure its matters and processes remained organised and were built to scale with the growing demand and scope of members. However, for anybody unfamiliar with the internal organisation of masonry lodges, the amount of detail covered here can easily be overwhelming and feel unnecessary detailed.

As we have previously learned establishing most of these foundations of the order was the work of Franz Thomas von Schönfeld. However, Schönfeld didn’t write up all these rules and regulations from scratch. Instead he was able to build upon a large existing body of work that stemmed from two other orders which had been assimilated into the AB upon its foundation: These were the ‘Order of the Knights and Brethren of the Light’ (*Orden der Ritter und Brüder des Lichts*) as well as the ‘Grünstädter System’ (Bolle, 1979). (Note: More about the interesting background of this order can be found in A.E. Waite’s ‘Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross’.)

5.1 On the Order's Titles and Grades

The grade system that the AB leveraged to organise themselves is of particular interest to us. As admission to the order was only possible (in theory of course) to anyone who had successfully completed the three traditional masonry grades, these were assumed as the basis of their own grade system. Following on they implemented five additional grades from 1st Probationary Grade to the 3rd Chief Grade. Next to this system they also established a hugely complex framework of various titles that came with highly specific ceremonial, teaching or organisational responsibilities. The image to the right provides an impression on the vast array of titles in the order; below you can find the actual order's grade system.

Despite having come across more evidence that most male-dominated magical orders are obsessed with structure, hierarchy and organisation, there is something more meaningful to the AB's title system. Their seemingly cryptic nature actually stems from the fact that many of them refer to rabbinic honorary titles which were very little known at that time outside of Jewry:

We can capture for now that the grandiose nomenclature of the order's grades stemmed from Hirschfeld's knowledge of rabbinic Hebrew. Other Freemasons lodges where Jews didn't play a role might have shown a similar tendency to assume ceremonial Hebrew nomenclature, which however remained within the confines of biblical Hebrew according to the educational standards of its authors who often stemmed from Protestant clergy. Only the 'Asiatic Brethren' used this purely rabbinic terminology which must have stemmed from a Jew accustomed to rabbinic titles. The three functional titles Chacham Hackolel, Rosch Hamdabrim and Ocker Harim represent such typical honorary titles.

— Scholem 1962, p.262

Secondly, there is another meaningful aspect to the AB's titles. As they were the only order that accepted people of all religious denominations, and Jews in particular, it meant that they had a much higher degree of cultural and

Grades of the Asiatic Brethren

Grade	Title	Stage
3 rd Chief Grade	Royal Priest, True Rosicrucion or Melchidezeck One	5
2 nd Chief Grade	Wise Master	4
1 st Chief Grade	—	3
2 nd Probationary Grade	Sufferer	2
1 st Probationary Grade	Searcher	1
3 ^o	Master	-1
2 ^o	Fellowcraft	-2
1 ^o	Apprentice	-3

religious diversity amongst their members than any other occult organisation. Rather than shying away from this and emphasising the common bonds, the AB actually decided to do the opposite: Upon admission into the order Christians were required to assume a Jewish internal lodge name; Jews on the other hand were asked to assume a Christian-sounding pseudonym.

Jacob Katz pointed out that it is precisely in these types of admission rites that we can find the influence of Franz Thomas von Schönfeld's (aka Moses Dobrushka's) Sabbatean and Frankist roots: Where the original heretic currents would have advocated a full conversion to another faith, the AB mimicked this rite on an individual level by assuming a lodge name that had its roots in the adversary believe system of the member's family background. Along the same lines the AB celebrated both Christian as well as Jewish holidays within their

lodges. This went as far as stating in the order's constitution that even Jewish members would have to eat pork and drink milk during some of their annual ceremonial rites (Katz, p.250f).

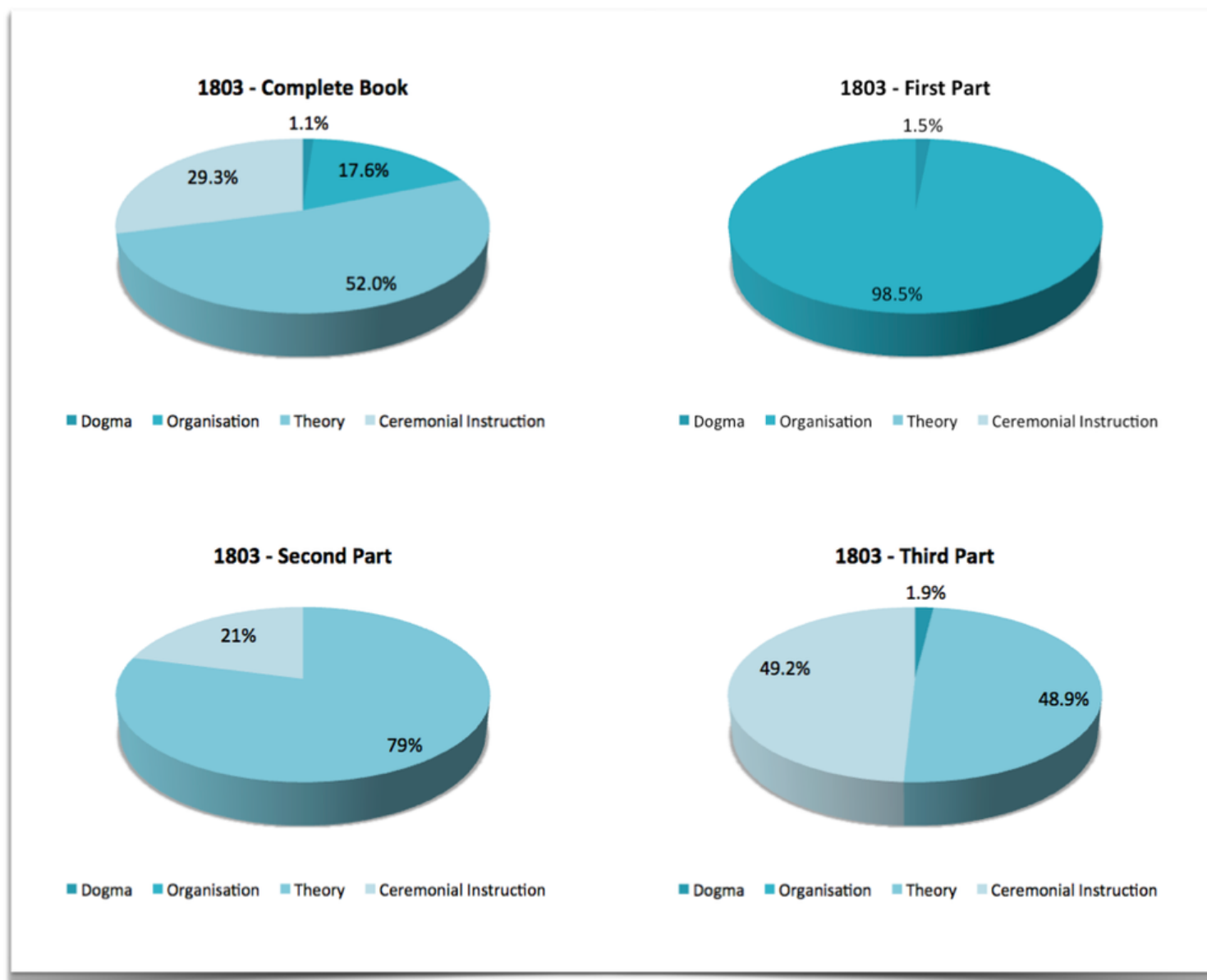
5.2 On the Content of their Teachings

Now, let's return to our source book from 1803 and take another look at its content. Upon closer examination it actually becomes possible to understand quite a bit about the nature of the order purely by looking at keywords for each chapter. In the following you can find an overview we created based on the book's content section shared above. As a second step we applied broad content keywords to categorise each chapter.

In particular these were: dogma, organisation, theory and ceremonial instructions. Here are the results:

We know that the content of the First, Second and Third Part of the book correspond to the hierarchical grades within the order. Thus from the analysis above we can tell that the higher one advanced the more practical their training became. (Note: At least this assumption presents itself if we follow their written sources; we want to emphasise again that a strong oral transmission possibly should be assumed running in parallel to their written teaching.) Along the same lines we can tell that the entire first two Probationary Grades - as laid out in the First Part of the book - contain almost nothing but theory in terms of their training.

With regards to the category 'Ceremonial Instruction' we want to call out that these teaching refer to group ceremonies only. We deliberately chose the term 'ceremony' here instead of 'ritual'. In none of the order's teaching as laid out in these material did we find any reference to what we would call a magical ritual. There are no invocations, incantations, evocations or any other spiritual rituals included in the AB's official order documents. However, we do find plenty of reference to magic as such - and sometimes even to specific ritual aspects of working with spirits:



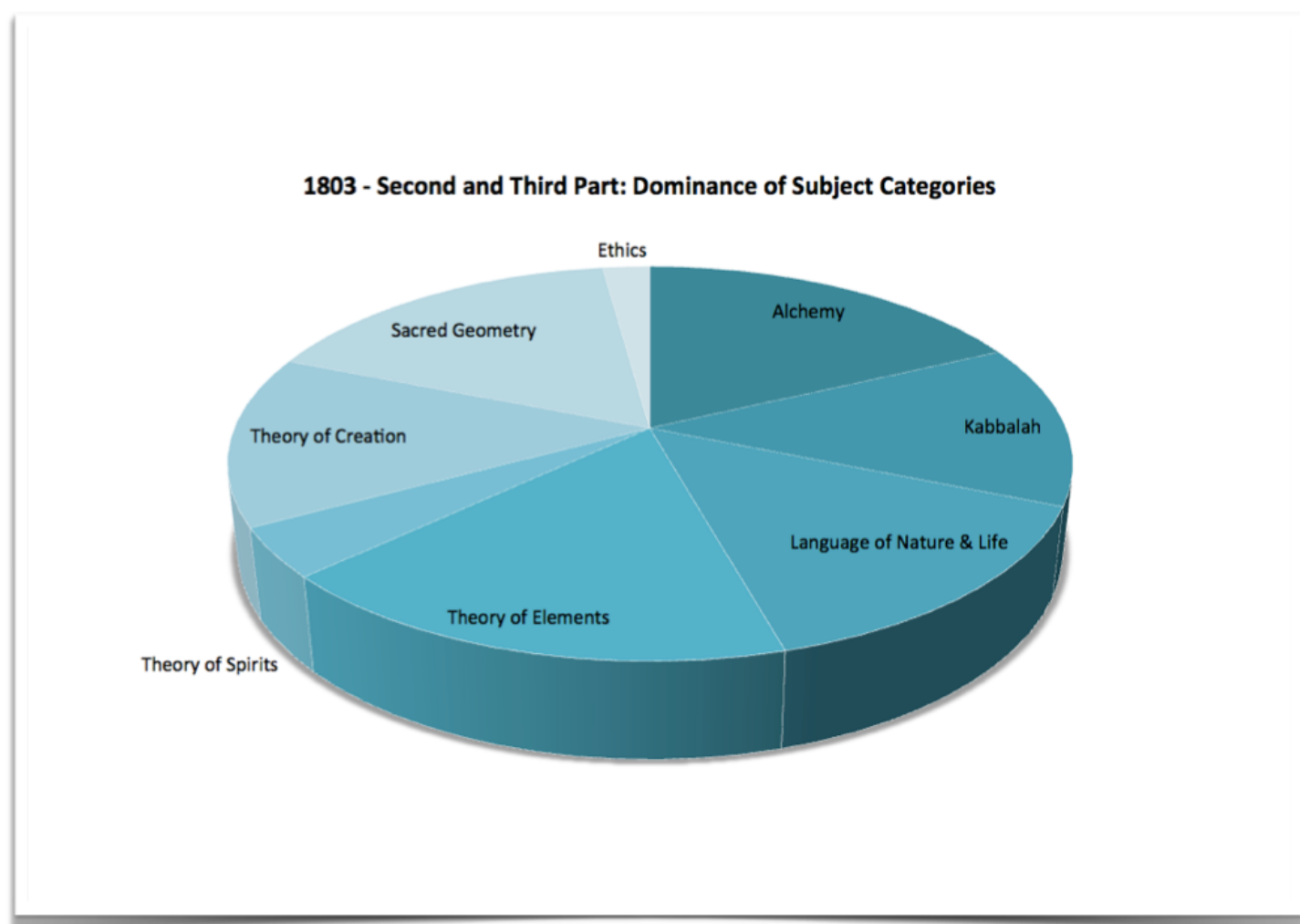
This is why the ancient sages applied certain kind of mirrors, for example created from iron and mixed together from several other metals during specific times, within which one could see all things. Equally they produced bells of the same kind for what they applied kabbalistic as well as magical characters in order to dominate the spirits.

— anonymous 1805, p.134

It is interesting to note that the book doesn't provide any further instructions on how to create such magical mirrors, bells or how to work with the spirits it refers to. Instead what we find is chapter upon chapter on the emergence of the cosmos leveraging terminology and ideas of Christianity, the gnostics, magic, alchemy and astrology in order to come up with a cohesive theosophical worldview. Despite the absence of practical advice in the AB's written material, we want to point out that it's in the same region as the original order's head-

quarter that 150 years later Franz Bardon was the first adept to ever publish specific instructions on how to create such magic mirrors through the use of metal condensers. Certainly as of today there is no factual evidence for an oral transmission of magical teachings from the AB's 18th century order to the much more recent magical teachings of the early 20th century. However, the parallels in the actual practice of the Art have to be recognised.

As we have dealt with the content of the First Part (rules & regulations of the order) earlier, we can now concentrate on the other two parts. After reading through all of the material we equally applied some broad content categories against each of these chapters. I.e. in this case a single chapter could be tagged with multiple categories if for example its content included alchemical, magical and ceremonial instructions. Utilising this approach we created the following broad overview on the make up of the order's teaching in the latter two parts of the book.



5.3 The Asiatic Brethren as a Theosophic Order

In the ‘instructions’ of these rituals we learn that the Order is the continuation of a very ancient alchemical, theosophical and magical tradition transmitted over the centuries through various channels, not least the Knight Templars.

Prevalent are a cosmogony and a cosmology of a theosophical character, blended with arithmology. We find, among other mythical narratives, a vivid description of the original Fall, in which a “Son of the Dawn” (Luzifer) plays a major part. The symbolism of these rituals resonates with those of the Gold- und Rosenkreuz, which interpreted the first degree regular masonic symbols in an alchemical sense.

— Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.108

Antoine Faivre’s quote exemplifies how many authors summarise the actual teachings of the order. They confine the rich and highly textured web of content within a few critical keywords. Of course these keywords are fully applicable to the teaching of the order; however, outside of the ivory tower of specialised academics few people actually know what is meant with them. If on the other hand, we happen to know what they mean they don’t provide much additional value beyond what we knew already.

Thus let’s begin with the term Theosophy and examine it closer as it relates to the order of the Asiatic Brethren. Carlos Gilly in his wonderful article in the new edition of Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* provides us with a great definition of this often misunderstood term:

From the middle of the 16th until the 18th century Theosophy represents the attempt to walk the worldly way of gnosis (Gotteserkenntnis) which has been neglected by theology: the way of exploring nature in order to achieve gnosis of God. At the same time Theosophy refers to the application of these insights in order to achieve a more intimate vision of reality and thus to generate new knowledge about nature. The recoinning of this term by more modern movements in the 19th and 20th century should not make us forget that since

the publication of Balthasar Flötter's edition of the philosophia magna by Paracelsus 1567, the publication of the book Arbatel in 1575 and since the emergence of Johann Arndt's De antique philosophia ca. 1580 'Theosophy' (and not 'Pansophy', 'Cosmosophy' and similar other more recent expressions) had been a highly precise term to characterise a movement that extends from Paracelsus over Weigl, Arndt, Sclei, Crollius, Haslmayr, Nollius, Hirsch, Fludd, Böhme, Franckenberg, van Helmont, Kozák, Comenius all the way to Maul, Welling and Oetinger - while not forgetting the the 'Bortherhood of Theosophists of the RosyCross' (Brüderschaft der Theosophen vom RosenCreutz) as mentioned by Adam Haslmayr.

— Carlos Gilly, p.11, transl, by Frater Acher

Indeed the teachings of the AB were truly theosophical: Long chapters, especially within the Second Part concern themselves with elaborate descriptions of how matter was created, which forces actually hold creation together and how these dynamics and processes can be enlightened by the use of alchemical and Paracelsian terminology, numerical speculations and kabbalistic interpretations. Not surprisingly, this is precisely what modern advocates of Enlightenment criticised in the harshest way about the AB: In their eyes the order was guilty of only pretending to provide rational explanations, logical deductions and applying a scientific method to a spiritual matter. The language chosen by the order only mimicked what the pioneers of Enlightenment truly tried to achieve. Below a shallow surface of pseudo-scientific language their actual teachings remained as reactionary and 'scientifically unfounded' as they always had been. It's no exaggeration to say that in the eyes of the proponents of Enlightenment theosophy was nothing but putting lipstick on a pig.

This tension and need for the AB to defend themselves towards both religious potentates as well as modern scientists can be exemplified by the following quotes. Both sections are taken from the very same page of a book published 1805 anonymously by August Siegfried von Goue on the order of the Asiatic Brethren:

They have the intention to create the human state of being both in body and in soul, which is why they strive for remedies and occupy themselves with the exploration of natural things. While they don't want to be Rosicrucians, in

their third chief grade they still call themselves true Rosicrucians and truly carry the stamp of rosicrucian authenticity; authentic both in their chymical, theosophical, kabbalistical and magical work that their genuineness is out of question to anyone.

— anonymous, Leipzig 1805, p.415

Amongst their leaders one encounters people who aim to teach magic but hold no grasp of the most basic physical tenets; who aim to engage in Kabbala and hardly know the five species of numeration; who assume power of the spirits and hardly know what is meant by the word spirit. Their so-called sage fathers are blockheads in all solid sciences, yet conduct an evil business with all sorts of deceitful arts.

— anonymous, Leipzig 1805, p.415

Finally the actual challenge the AB were up against reveals itself to us - and so does a significant contribution they made to our Western Mystical tradition: In a time when orthodox religious institutions were fighting to maintain their inherited communal power, while emerging scientists and modern philosophers were fighting to tear down the pillars of traditional society, the Asiatic Brethren stood right at the crossroads. They aimed at nothing less than to engineer 'the human state of being both in body and soul' - yet two-thousand years of Christian tradition were at risk of becoming obsolete, its language had lost its numen and power, while at the same time the new human and natural sciences hadn't emerged sufficiently to fill this void. This was the reason why the terms 'kabbalah', 'alchemy' and 'magic' carried such weight for our theosophic forefathers. At a time when everything was at stake they were willing to immerse themselves into the occult, driven by the hope they would find the key to unlock their own past.

Of course the AB were not alone in this attempt. As we have seen in Carlos Gilly's quote above, many had gone before them and some were walking with them at that time. And each of them gathered more lost pieces of gnostic wisdom. The teachings of the Asiatic Brethren tried to re-assemble these pieces into one huge, coherent pattern - with the goal of turning what used to be a mystery into a new form of mystical science.

What stands out so glaringly from the AB is the scale on which they attempted to achieve this work. As we have seen in the previous chapter even a future king was rumoured to have joined their order. And despite all contrasting influences of the time, the AB were hugely successful in spreading their teachings and order quickly across Europe. If we follow Antoine Faivre it is not unlikely that a few years after the order's inception "it counted as many as several thousand members" (Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.108).

In the next and fifth instalment of this series we are taking a closer look at the particular magical and kabbalistic teachings of the order. As we can see from the quote below - both of these disciplines hold essential tools for any Theosophist to realise his dormant occult faculties:

According to the theosophers, man possesses in himself a faculty – generally dormant but always potentially present – that enables him to connect directly with the divine world or generally with superior beings, and that is able to “branch out” to them. This faculty is due to the existence of a special organ within us, a kind of intellectus, which is none other than our imagination – understood in quasi-magical fashion as a force of creation as well as perception. Once achieved, this contact (1) permits an exploration of all levels of reality, (2) assures a kind of co-penetration of the divine and the human, and (3) gives our spirit the possibility of ‘fixing’ itself in a body of light, that is to say, of effectuating a ‘second birth’.

– Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.259

5.4 The Asiatic Brethren's Magical Teachings

Magic. According to their definition this is nothing else but a glance at and a special momentum into the higher natural history, where one gets with the proper view and reliably is getting to know the chain of cause and effect as well as the alternating forces.

– anonymous, Leipzig 1805, p.433/434

As a final step on this journey we will examine the kabbalistic tendencies of the Asiatic Brethren - one of the most well known aspects of the order that led us to the excursus into Sabbatianism and Frankism. Before that, however, let's aim to better understand their particular magical teachings first. In the order's documents we find precise confirmation of the definition of magic as highlighted above: To the AB magic first and foremost represented a higher kind of natural science. They stated specifically that they understood it as the particular way through which insights into the higher order and eternal chain of cause and effect was possible (anonymous 1803, p.95).

What they did not state explicitly was what kind of techniques or practices they would assemble within this term. However, from their further explanations we can deduct that they held a strongly Neoplatonic worldview. Accordingly through the use of magic they aimed to better understand

- 1. the transmission of cause and effect from one link in the chain to the next as well as*
- 2. the interconnectedness of the various celestial chains and how they influenced each other.*

Well, at this point maybe let's recall the legendary founding myth of the AB? Remember the story of Justus, the Franciscan monk living in Jerusalem in the early 18th century - as well as the occult adept Azariah from whom he was alleged to have received most of the foundations of the order's teaching?

Now allow me to bring up the memory of another secret society. One that is hardly known still today and which operated around 700 years before the AB. However, even though little known its literary work turned out to become a cornerstone of our Western Magical tradition. We are talking about the secret society of the 'Brethren of Purity' which existed in Basra (Iraq) towards the end of the 10th century. Until today incredibly little research has been done on the details of their order or who belonged to it; however, their most important work the 'Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity' (Rasa'il Ikhwan al-safa') became a hugely influential book on theology, philosophy, science as well as magic in later centuries.

As Hellmut Ritter and Heinrich Plessner pointed out in their liminal 1962 introduction to the first German edition of the Picatrix it was precisely this secret society's syncretistic approach to Greek, Christian and Muslim philosophy as well as their deep, Neoplatonic understanding of cosmology and astrology that laid the foundations for the type of planetary magic we encounter in

the Ġāyat al-Ḥakīm or ‘Goal of the Wise’. Thus through a direct line of transmission we can see the work of the Brethren of Purity influence the Muslim world in Spain during the Middle Ages, as well as the flourishing Jewish diaspora. From there we know that the Picatrix went on to become one of the most influential compendiums on magic ever written.

Now, what if we assumed the legendary founding father ‘Azariah’ in fact wasn’t an adept of Kabbalah only, but maybe also had come in touch with the occult teachings of the Arab world? In fact, as we saw in the third chapter we have to assume that ‘Azariah’ might not have been a person at all, but rather an literary vessel for all of the esoteric currents Justus came in touch with while living in the Orient. Given the writings of the Brethren of Purity had reached Spain within less than a century, we have to assume that their work was equally read and absorbed by occult authors much closer to their homeland, i.e. in Palestine. This assumption is supported further by the fact that religious groups such as the Isma’ilis accepted the ‘Rasa’ as belonging to their religion and regarded it as an esoteric cornerstone of their own teachings. (Hossein, p.27)

Certainly such a potential line of occult transmission requires further study and evidence. Could it be substantiated, however, it would provide a fascinating explanation for the roots of many of the teachings of the AB. Let’s glance at two examples right here: As we discovered earlier the AB’s teachings are distinctly marked by the seeming paradox of both accepting a deeply mystical worldview as well as advocating the faculty of the rational mind. Strangely, we encounter exactly the same pattern in the teaching of the Brethren of Purity - coupled with the same openness to a syncretism that strives to unify teachings from all ages and cultures (Hossein, p.28f).

All the sciences they consider - wether astronomy, angelology, or embryology - are discussed, not with the aim of purely theoretical or intellectual interpretation or for their practical application, but to help untie the knots in the soul of the reader by making him aware, on the one hand, of the great harmony and beauty of the Universe and, on the other, of the necessity for man to go beyond material existence. And in order to reach this end they combine in their ideal education the virtues of many nations.

— Hossein, p.30

“

They are called spirits (ruhanijun) who hold the purpose to maintain creation, to govern the creatures, and to make the spheres rotate, and to cause the orbit of the planets, and the changing tides of time and the change of ages and to support the elements while upbringing and maintaing all plants and animals.

— The Brethren of Purity, quoted after Plessner, p.xxvi

“

When then the dark magnet called Earth mediated through Air and Water receives these various astral spirits, and sucks in their Earth-stock, the 7 Earth-spirits, the penetrating ones, the astral ones, each grasp their magnet or the part most homogenous to them through which these Earth-spirits are brought to life and made able to vegetate and reproduce. (...) All this is made possible through the 7 decending sidereal spirits that penetrate the universe and become active in it.

— The Asiatic Brethren, 1803, p.136

“

The characteristic of such form of Neoplatonism is that the emanations of the celestial world are mediated to the world below by use of intermediary beings who - the higher they are positioned in this ladder - begin to resemble the character of gods or demons, and the more they unite with matter the more they resembe spiritual forces slumbering in all animals, plants, stones and all other creatutures of nature.

— Plessner, p. xxvii

A second example can be found by directly comparing aspects of the actual teachings of the two orders. The following side-by-side comparison of two quotes on the Neoplatonic chains of beings might provide further evidence of a historical link between these two schools of thought:

So what we should take form both of these order's view on magic is this: Magic in their teachings was not thought of as one end of a dimension on which opposite end we would find science or the rational mind. While magic even for them might have been closely linked to the imaginative faculty of the mind, this faculty did not exclude or stand opposed to the logic or reason. Instead either of them represented ways in which the nature of the Neoplatonic chains could be explored.

Let's emphasise this point again - as it seems so easily misunderstood in much of what is said about magic these days: The Asiatic Brethren just like the Brethren of Purity believed that each link in the cosmic chains - that stretched

from the first cause to the smallest grain of sand - was both open to understanding of human reason as well as governed by a conscious, living spirit.

Thus the practitioner was supposed to explore several pathways at once in order to achieve a state of gnosis and develop insights into the occult side of nature:

- Firstly, leveraging arithmetic the AB taught sophisticated numerological speculations. As they believed in the rational order of nature, numerology combined with arithmetic was one way of uncovering the hidden site of creation.
- Secondly, both practical as well as spiritual alchemy was another way of discovering how the chains of creation were interlinked and could be influenced.
- Thirdly, the AB equipped their higher members with the magical names, seals and ruling hours of the planetary spirits. In a curious turn on the grimoire tradition, they even provided the names and seals of the Olympic Spirits of the Arbatel and called them the ‘adversary spirits’ of the planetary angels.

The challenges they expected each of their practitioners to face was not to settle for one of these pathways towards gnosis - but to explore each of them in parallel, enriching one discipline through the practice and insights of the others.

Having said that, obviously the magical way towards nature is the least openly explored in the order’s writings that have come upon us. While alchemy, numerology and even kabbalistic speculations take large part of the material, references to magical practices are few and most of them indirect. Certainly nobody could have practiced ritual magic only based upon the few hints and glyphs provided in their documents. But let’s remind ourselves that precisely this aspect of magical books is what defines an entire genre of it, called magical Grimoires. None of them were meant to be ‘how-to’ books on performing ritual magic. Instead they were ciphered notebooks covering the most essential facts only that could not easily be included in an oral tradition. Or to put it differently: anything except for names, seals and hours was not supposed to be written down - as it formed part of an oral transmission that proved much more reliable as well as secure for these orders.

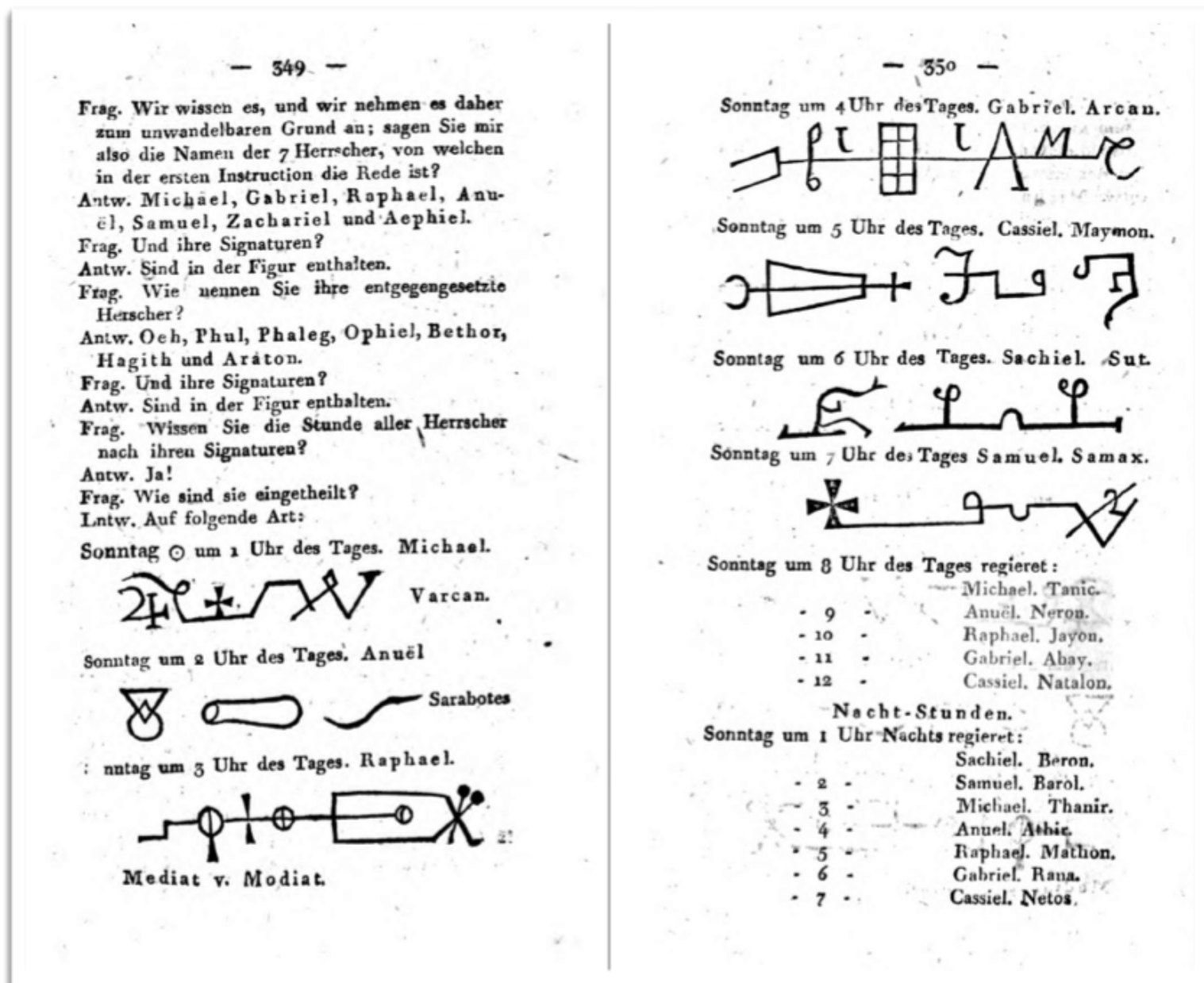
The sacred fire. It consists of cedar, acacia, juniper, aloe, brasil, almond oil, myrrh, salt and flour. — Incense. Is made of the following ingredients:

verbena, asafoetida, cloves, cinnamon, saffron, mastic and the feathers of the right wing of a white dove.

— *the sacred fire and ritual incense of the Asiatic Brethren; in: anonymous, Leipzig 1805, p.428*

So in the Asiatic Brethren's system Magic was but one of three essential pathways towards the occult. True gnostic insights only revealed themselves to whomever was able and skilled in walking all three paths at once: alchemy, numerology and kabbalah as well as magic. These were the disciplines that the order strived to combine - and thus bring to live the occult science of Theosophy (Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.266).

Despite the public scorn of the pioneers of Enlightenment, with this particular approach to magic the AB continued the tradition they had inherited from previous generations of mystics and mages - may these have lived as long



Angelic names, seals and planetary hours as shared in the third Grade of the order of the Asiatic Brethren (anonymous, 1803)

ago as the Brethren of Purity or as close to their own time, such as Heinrich Khunrath. In his famous self-portrait in his *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595 and 1609), we see Khunrath representing exactly this notion of magical practice as part of a broader theosophic approach towards nature (click here for a hand-coloured high-res version): The theosophic laboratory is comprised of an alchemical laboratory to the right, a table full of instruments of the natural sciences as well as the praying (or invoking?) adept to the left. Not one path but three led the theosophist towards the true state of divine gnosis.

In his highly recommendable article on Christian Theosophy Antoine Faivre summarises three key features of Theosophy, each of them we find deeply embedded into the AB's system:

(...) (a) a conception that Nature can be viewed as a text that must be deciphered with the help of correspondences, (b) the postulate that the universe is a living being comprised of several levels of reality, and (c) the affirmation of an identity, or at least a co-naturality, between Spirit and Nature.

— Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.265

5.5. The Asiatic Brethren's Kabbalistic Teachings

Since the 15th century, initiated through the groundbreaking works of Picco della Mirandola and Johann Reuchlin, Christian Kabbalah had emerged as a new and exciting field of study amongst European scholars. All the way until the 18th century 'cabala' remained closely connected to the idea of magic. Therefore both terms required sufficient re-definition and -interpretation in order to avoid the ever present suspicion of heresy. Of course for Christian thinkers of the time this re-definition was exactly the opposite: In their eyes it was an exposing and uncovering of the true purpose, ancient roots and genuine tradition of Christian cabalistic teachings and methods.

The essential assumption that made this re-interpretation seem so natural and effortless was the idea that even before the times of Christ other relig-

ious and philosophical traditions had discovered the importance of the advent of the Christian messiah and thus hinted at it in their scriptures. Thus all previous traditions that held true divine wisdom came to fulfilment with the advent of Christ. Cabala now was understood as a divine and yet highly scientific method that allowed scholars to precisely uncover these hidden hints amongst other ancient traditions about the truly divine and unique status of Christian faith. What made the whole endeavour even more exciting was that this scientific method leveraged the power of the spoken and written word - an idea at the heart of both Jewish and Christian theology.

According to Schmidt-Biggemann's essential 3-volume study on Christian Kabbala the most important tenets of it were:

- a '**Pythagorean Christology**', i.e. being able to prove that all ancient religions already hinted at the advent of the Christian messiah and thus indirectly acknowledged the superiority of the Christian faith
- the ten **Sephiroth** as characteristic descriptions of the divine being and properties of G'd
- the initial emergence of divinity into creation in form of a **trinity** as reflected both in the kabbalistic teachings of the first three Sephiroth as well the Christian trinity
- a direct connectedness of the divine tetragrammaton IHVH with the 'cabalized' notation of the name of Jesus **IHSVH**

This context is necessary to understand how the term 'cabala' was still being used during the days of the Asiatic Brethren towards the end of the 18th century. As an example of how broadly it often was defined we may take a look at Johann Arndt's theosophic commentary on Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*:

If now someone realises the light and is able to perceive it amongst the invisible creatures as in the angels and in the human soul, yes in all spirits, and is gifted to see and use all such angelic force, now that man is a Cabalist and his art is called Cabala and is much higher than Mageia (...).

— Johann Arndt, 1608 in: Heinrich Khunrath, p.121

A book that proved to be highly influential on the AB as well as many other occultists of the 18th and 19th century was Georg Welling's 'Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum' (1709/1719/1760). As a matter of fact the AB

adopted entire sections of the book into their own material with very little adjustments if at all; a striking example are the explanations on the 'Sun of the Dawn' (lucifer) and his fall. Equally much of the alchemical musings and cosmological speculations of the AB can be found in Welling's work. Now, the term 'cabala' features prominently in the book's title. Yet, it is exactly the above type of mystical, speculative Christian Kabbala that we encounter in Welling's influential book. In fact, the chapter that specifically deals with cabala is titled 'On the true religion and mago-cabbala'. Yet, what we encounter in it is 95% of mystical and even alchemical speculations on the nature of the true Christian religion and maybe 5% of faint kabbalistic echoes as in the brief examination of Hebrew names of divinity.

So how does this understanding of Christian Kabbala relate to the teachings of the AB? The answer is not a simple either or. Instead what we find especially in the lower Probationary Grades of the AB clearly relates to the above usage and description of cabala. One of the most striking examples probably are the speculations on the Hebrew term 'schamajim' (heaven) as used in Genesis 1:1 as an alchemical-cabalistic reference to the essential role of Fire (aesch) and Water (majim) during the creation of the cosmos (anonymous 1803, p.viii and p.204f).

The so-called kabbalistic orientation of the order is pseudo-kabbala in its essence, and what observers have called so in its true nature is an amalgam of various elements which can be clearly identified. The two main elements are the speculations of Saint-Martin as laid out in his work 'Des Erreurs et de la Verite' published in 1775 as well as - mainly devoted to Jakob Böhme and Paracelsus - the strangely Christian-kabbalistic explanations of the extraordinarily influential 'Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum' of Georg Welling which had been published several times since 1735.

— Scholem 1962, p.266

As Scholem also points out in his wonderful analysis none of these essential source texts are ever referenced in the AB's materials. While other authors of the time - even Welling himself - openly pointed to their spiritual ancestors such as Paracelsus or Jakob Böhme from whom they adopted many theories, we find none of it in the AB's order documents. It is precisely this practice - still common today amongst many occult orders - of referring to a legendary

founder and then cutting out all intermediary steps of transmission to the present day, that makes it so hard to trace the origins and currents of our Western Mystery tradition. Ideas and concepts that once emerged from a highly specific historic or spiritual context thus often are leveraged completely out of context - and are misperceived as fluid raw material simply to underpin one author's personal notions on a particular subject.

When Ephraim Hirschfeld joined the order of the Asiatic Brethren much of this lower-grade material was already in existence. Later on in his life he gave very open testament about how he felt about many of the syncretic Rosicrucian teachings that were so prominent during the 18th century. Here is a direct quote of his that says it best:


If with all moderation I judge the entire amount of printed and most hand-written mystical booklets which I had the chance to leaf through until the present day, then I have to admit openly that I didn't discover anything but obvious deceit and palpable nonsense. Sometimes I have been emotionally touched through pity for an aspiring Searcher when I saw him concerning himself almost to the extreme of encephalitis with the diffuse figures that adorn these works and characterise them at first glance.

— Hirschfeld, quoted after: Scholem 1962, p.253

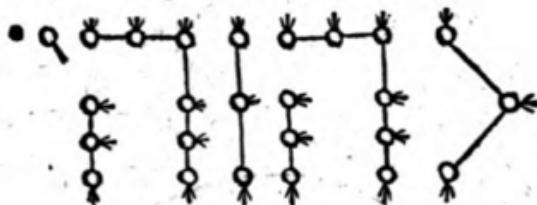
These “self-created monstrous private-systems” (Hirschfeld) must have seemed a very far cry from his own background from a genuine Kabbalistic and more specifically Sabbatean family tradition. However, at the same time he must have realised the striking resemblance between some of the existing Theosophic teachings e.g. about the emergence of the cosmos or the fall of the 'Sun of Dawn' with original kabbalistic ideas such as the Lurianic concept of Zimzum, the breaking of the vessels and the creation of the qliploth. Thus according to Scholem it is likely that Hirschfeld revised much of the lower grade's material and infused it en passant with specific kabbalistic ideas that, however, were not called out as such but remained tightly integrated and aligned to Theosophic concepts (Scholem 1962, p.267/270).

The Asiatic Brethren's approach to Kabbala changes as we reach the end of the Second Probationary grade and then enter into the higher Chief Grades. Here we begin to hear about a book of ten leaves that is sealed with seven seals and directly linked to Kabbalah:

und aus einer Linie und einem Punkt, welche denn, wenn sie in Eins, ins Strenge gezogen werden, einen einzigen Punkt machen, dieses Viereck soll Ihnen ein Bild der Kenntnisse seyn, die die Obern Ihres Ordens mit Demuth und Reue im Licht gesucht; und wiedergefunden haben.

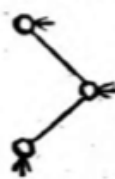
4, Sie sehen hier den flammenden Stern, in welchem Sie diese Signatur  angemerkt finden, dies ist das Zeichen,

- a) Der zweiten Seite des Vierecks.
- b) Des Universal- oder saamlischen Geistes, seine Benennung ist Ge, seine Signatur



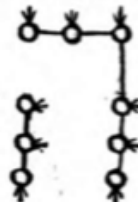
Sie können sich aber diese Vorstellung noch verständlicher machen, wenn Sie Ihrem Verstand zwei Parallelzirkel vorlegen, deren Mittelpunkt gemeinschaftlich ist, von denen aber einer den andern einschließt. Im flammenden Stern ist nichts anders als das Jot, von Jehova der erste wirkende Urborn des Lichts, der erste wirkende göttliche Punkt; weil aber keine Einheit in der Natur möglich, sondern sogar der kleinste Punkt selbst besteht aus Anfang, Mittel und Ende. Die erste Bewegung des göttlichen wirkenden Wesens geschah also nach der Tradition der alte-

sten Weisen bis auf unsere Väter, auf diese Art



und hieraus wurde der erste Buchstabe des größten selbstständigen Namens Gottes Jehova, und weil diese drei Punkte, jeder weder Anfang, Mittel noch Ende hat, so

wurden daraus 9 und zwar in dieser Figur



und dieses wurde der zweite Buchstabe im größten selbstständigen Namen Gottes, alles wurde also dadurch Eins, welches drei ist, und drei, welches neun ist und mit dieser sich immer gleichbleibenden Zahl wurde auch das große Werk der Schöpfung, der sich immer vermehrenden und doch immer gleichbleibenden Natur ihrer Ordnung und Einklemmung des Ganzen, und dieses ist auch der Aufschluß über die heilige Zahl des drei mal drei der Brüder Freimaurer.

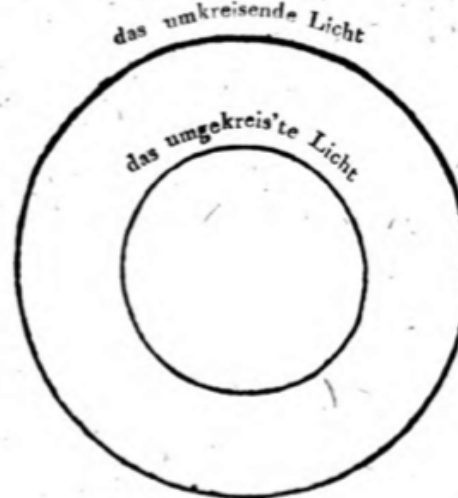


illustration to Hirschfeld's explanation of a core concept of Sabbatean Kabbala (anonymous, 1803)

Kabbalistic principles of the order. The origins of their knowledge are to be sought in the book of man. This book consists of ten leaves and is sealed with seven seals and contains the realisation of all things past, present and future. Its common number was 70, but its secret one was 72. The power to open the seals rests within the brethren; a single key unlocks it and it has to be sought within Schamaim.

— anonymous, Leipzig 1805, p.433

The idea of the book of ten leaves stems from a theory we encounter in Saint-Martin's writings; it specifically relates to the importance of the Pythagorean decade in numerological speculations. However, it is only in the documents of the Chief Grades that Scholem was able to peel back the theosophic language entirely and discovered some arcane and authentic kabbalistic teachings that Hirschfeld had introduced for the highest grades of the order. A

wonderful example is Hirschfeld's explanation of the ten sephiroth (anonymous 1803, p.265); here in a language that was fully accessible to his predominantly Christian readers he introduces the ten divine configurations as 'lights', explains their order and function during creation - even touching on deeply kabbalistic concepts such as the Parzufim without ever referencing their Jewish terminology.

But Scholem's analysis even goes further. He actually finds evidence for the strong Sabbatean ties that influenced the higher grade's teaching. Specifically Hirschfeld introduced the main idea on which Sabbatean Kabbalah rests since the days of Nathan of Gaza's interpretation of the Sepher Bahir. Here we have to relate back to what we said about the 'Treatise of the Dragon' and the emergence of the qliploth in the first chapter of this series. In a fascinating turn Hirschfeld initially introduces the pure and essential teachings of Sabbatean Kabbalah on the emergence of evil without ever referencing their actual terminology. However, he then goes on to create a unique and unprecedented "synopsis and syncretism of Jewish and Christian Theosophy" (Scholem 1962, p.271) that merges into one the authentic kabbalistic teachings on the qliploth with the Christian-theosophic myth of the 'Fall of the Sun of Dawn'.



On the Order of the Asiatic Brethren



Conclusions

After these detailed explorations of the historic roots, the founding fathers and the teachings of the Asiatic Brethren, let's pause and reflect. In addition to the insights we came across in each chapter - which definite conclusions can we draw about the order? While we'd encourage everyone to come up with their own conclusions, here is a short list of the six most important features that stand out to us:

1. We can call out with confidence that one of the elements that sets the Asiatic Brethren apart from other Rosicrucian traditions of the same time is

that they were much less influenced by and orientated towards orthodox Christianity. From their legendary founding myth amongst the occultists in Palestine all the way to the fact that they were the first order to allow Jews amongst their members, it is clear that the order was set up from the beginning to provide a platform for occult learning, teaching and practical research hidden from the realm of influence and control of orthodox Christianity - or Jewry for that matter.

2. We see the order deeply embedded in the Theosophic current of its time and as shaped by its predecessors of the 17th and 16th century. A current that is which over the course of the 19th century should merge with the broader river of Romanticism as a counter-movement to the strong forces of Enlightenment. As a classical Theosophic order the AB advocated and embraced a multitude of paths towards divine gnosis: May it be through the use of the rational mind, numerology or natural sciences, through practical or spiritual alchemy or even through kabbalah or magic. This particular approach was deeply Neoplatonic in essence, yet allowed the brethren to look at and relate to nature in both a scientific as well as pantheistic way. However, different to orthodox Christian theology it was the individual practitioner's life's purpose to walk this path on their own and continuously strive towards a direct experience of the divine.

3. We identified the order's teachings to be of a deeply syncretic nature. While this is a shared feature with many other Theosophic orders of the time, the extend to which the AB were open to integrate and amalgamate other culture's and time's occult heritage clearly set new standards. So much so that it became one of the most influential factors shaping most if not all magical orders to be founded in the 19th and early 20th century. Amongst the order's heads it were Franz Thomas von Schönfeld as well as Ephraim Hirschfeld who allowed for this new and unprecedented influx of specifically Kabbalistic, Sabbatean and partly Frankist bodies of thought.

4. Over the course of our exploration into the history and teachings of the order we were able to identify a few clear lines of transmission that came together and were united within their teaching. Especially important to identifying these lineages were the works of Gershom Scholem, Karl R.H. Frick and Jakob Katz. The below synopsis represents a highly simplified overview on the most important influences on the documented teachings of the Asiatic Breth-

ren. Of course, many interconnections exist between these lineages, such as the influence of the Sepher Jetzirah on the original work of Martinez de Pasqually (Scholem 1962, p.257f). As we discovered in this chapter, in particular the influence of the Brethren of Purity's groundbreaking syncretic occult teachings in their 'Rasa' require further study.



Abbreviated overview on the main lines of transmissions into the Order of the Asiatic Brethren

5. What of course had to remain unexamined by this work is the content of a possible oral tradition within the order. As we have seen during our analysis of their magical teachings the existence of such a parallel stream of transmission is highly likely and should be assumed. Not only is this underpinned by the inclusion of material from actual magical Grimoires in their order's documents. But it is also likely in that the AB as we have seen were strongly influenced by Saint-Martin and his teacher, Martinez de Pasqually. The latter, founder of the order of the Élus Coëns that preceded the AB, had created and evolved a 'general index' (Generalverzeichnis) of spirits, their names and characters very similar to what we found in the AB's highest grade material. However, different to the AB we have prove for the fact that within Pasqually's order, especially during its early phase, actual spirit evocations and magical operations were officially taught and conducted as part of the order's teachings (Frick, p.523).

6. Finally, it has to be called out that even for the late 18th century, and the ideas on intellectual property people held at that time, the writings of the AB are marked by a particular disinterest or neglect of identifying its actual sources. From our research we know that their authors held very specific knowledge about the provenance of the various elements of occult tradition that they merged together. Still none of them are ever referenced anywhere in the body of work they created. By means of this the AB created the deliberate, yet misleading impression for the learners they were tapping into an ancient and unbroken stream of wisdom that had been secretly guarded by the elders of their order. This characteristic of the order's teachings sheds a dubious light on its founding fathers; in particular so if we acknowledge that biographic prove exists for each of them to having bend the truth for their own good more than once.

When we set out on our adventure into the history of the Asiatic Brethren we shared the following thought on why such journey might be worthwhile:

(...) the more we travel back in time from this point onwards, the more our ancestors made us believe our feet rest on the solid ground of occult history and tradition. Yet, upon closer examination it rather seems the opposite is true: It is much wiser to assume our tradition is an invention of creative people who depended on it to underpin their authority just as much as our own desire for genuineness and originality. It is wise to take such approach to the dazzling

mirror we call an occult tradition, until we have done our own research on facts and truths. A story should remain a story, until we have proven it to be a record of events.

— Chapter 1

Looking back at the distance that we travelled together - through the insights into the people and times that shaped the order, into the soil of currents and traditions it emerged from and over the fields of facts that created the order's rich tapestry of teachings - we hope to have lived up to this initial promise? Of course such a glance behind the mirror can always be disenchanting - and begin to replace captivating myths with seemingly dry encounters of people no different from you and I. What it certainly does is to force us to acknowledge that during the times of Ecker and Schönfeld and Hirschfeld and even Justus and Azariah the magical torch shone no brighter than it does today. The practices, the spirits, the land - it all remains the same today. It might just be us who we make ourselves believe to see the light shine brighter in the past than in our own present days?

What remains to be mentioned is that the scope of this study so far was focussed on the Asiatic Brethren as a phenomenon of the past in our Western Mystery tradition. Beyond the traces of their influence we discovered as a by product to the analysis of the order itself, the goal of the previous chapters was not to determine if or how the AB influenced later occult organisations. As we can see from the quote below, Antoine Faivre holds a clear opinion on the significant and wide-spread influence of the order's teachings. However, he fails to provide any evidence or sources for such claims. It seems therefore this last chapter of the order's history remains to be written.

After Ecker und Eckhoffen's death (1790) the Asiatic Brethren only maintained itself in an apparently limited number of lodges, but they were spread all over Europe throughout the first Empire. This survival was due in part to the never weakening efforts of Hirschfeld, and in Scandinavia to the tenacity of Karl A.A. Boheman. Furthermore, its discreet but enduring presence is documented well into the 20th century in a variety of similar Systems who took their inspiration from it. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in England, Francesco Brunelli's Arcana Arcanorum in Italy, and even

*Theodor Reuss's original Ordo Templi Orientis idea, were all more or less
inspired by the Asiatic Brethren.*

— Antoine Faivre, in: Haanegraaff, p.108

Selected Resources

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