

— ROSICRUCIAN —
BEACON 

September 2023, Vol 32, No. 4



Find your Deeper Self

In the depths of your being resides your deeper Self, an aspect of your being which breathes, in calm reflection, the very rhythm of the universe. It is in touch with all things and communicates with all that matters for life on Earth. Its purpose is to instruct and guide you in learning how to live a good life, and it does so with great care for your wellbeing.

Your Self knows why you are here and what you are meant to accomplish. It knows what your chances are of attaining the goals you have set for yourself, and whether they are beyond your reach or are fully attainable. Your deeper Self is a veritable slumbering genius, eager to help you express your hidden talents with great refinement and sophistication. The most productive thing we can ever do is to find and communicate with this Self.

For thousands of years, seekers of universal truths have known of the existence of a kernel of perfection lying dormant in every person, manifesting supreme confidence, calmness, maturity and wisdom. This deeper Self is called by Rosicrucians the 'Inner Master', for it has in abundance, qualities of refinement, high purpose and spiritual maturity that we would expect only of the most accomplished of humans.

You can discover how to access this high level of achievement and embark on the definitive, true journey of your life simply by learning how to commune with your deeper Self. If you are searching for a way of accomplishing the most fulfilling and rewarding things in life, in a fair and ethical way, then learn from the wisdom of your own inner perfection.

To find out more about the Rosicrucian Order and how it can help you achieve your most treasured goals, find us at one of the following contacts below...

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Cover spread

What would life be like
without our forest friends?





Pantheism

Consciousness in All Things

by **Sven Johansson**

An important question uppermost in the minds of many scientists, psychiatrists and philosophers who deal with neural systems and artificial intelligence, is what the true nature of consciousness is at its deepest level. Namely, what is the actual, true nature of consciousness? What is it *actually*, as opposed to our subjective perception and interpretation of it, something we commonly refer to as *reality*? That *subjective perception* of *'actuality'* is what Rosicrucians refer to as a person's perceived *'reality'* and the difference between these terms boils down to a single question: *'Does consciousness depend exclusively on our perception of material reality?'* Or to put it another way, can consciousness exist without a brain, in fact without anything material at all?

On the surface, it seems a foolish question to ask, for clearly it is something science cannot answer..., at least not yet; for no instrument has so far been devised that can measure anything that may be occurring outside of our familiar space-time experience, namely in the so-called



'non-material' or 'psychic' realm, if indeed it is reasonable to categorise human experiences into such 'realms.' From a scientific standpoint, words such as 'non-material' or 'psychic' understandably have no meaning. Yet, despite the fact that the very question is non-scientific and seems even to go beyond our four-dimensional universe, it is being asked with ever greater urgency each year by more and more people who have the greatest of confidence in, and respect for, science.

The great psychiatrist and philosopher Carl Jung (1875–1961) believed that consciousness exists in a realm 'beyond matter' when he said: "I do not doubt the existence of mental states transcending consciousness." By this, he was referring to the consciousness that, first psychiatrists and later scientists, associated exclusively with the brain. Jung's statement implies that the word 'consciousness' was for him a physical process associated with that wonderfully complex organ, the brain, while the 'mental states' he referred to were something entirely different and beyond our familiar four-dimensional experience of material reality.

When speaking of 'mental states', was he referring to a sort of universal, pantheistic consciousness common to all living creatures, something above and beyond ordinary material, neurological consciousness? Or was he referring specifically to their human analogies, namely, the *égrégoire* or *collective* of human consciousness? It is not clear, for he was a universalist in many ways and merged many of his psychiatric discoveries with his personal philosophy and beliefs in an era long before neural mapping of the brain had become a reality. In this instance however, it is quite likely that he was referring to human consciousness *only* and not a pantheistic type of consciousness occurring in all living creatures. Despite this, with only minimal changes to the definition of Jung's understanding of the expression 'mental states', and the word 'consciousness', the

essence of his beliefs can indeed easily be extrapolated to all living creatures, which would then give his words the more universal appeal that much of his writings contained.

The French philosopher *Henri Bergson* (1859–1941) made an extensive study of the relationship between the mind, the brain and consciousness, and concluded that mind and some forms of consciousness, are separate from the body and its brain. Of course he was not the first to come to this conclusion and he had nothing but his own deep, introspective thoughts to guide him, i.e. no physical proof of anything. But for 14 years, Albert Einstein also had very little besides his deeply analytical logical mind to guide him until in 1919, the great scientist *Arthur Eddington* observed the bending of a star's light by the gravitation of the sun during a solar total eclipse, thereby confirming a key consequence of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.

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For thousands of years people have believed that some intangible or non-material substance 'inhabits' the human body and directs its actions at a deep level. And it is this 'spirit' or 'soul', rather than the body itself, which possesses the traits and qualities that we associate with human consciousness and our true self.

Of course, neither Jung nor Bergson were neural scientists or investigators of artificial intelligence; for such fields, and in particular PET and MRI scanning, have only existed for a few decades. Great as these men were in their time, neither could have had the insight and knowledge that modern science has acquired only relatively recently regarding the strong correlation that exists between the brain and our thought processes. For example, they could therefore not have been aware of the close link that is now believed to exist between some of our thoughts and emotions, and specific areas of the brain. Had they known this, they may well have adopted a similar approach to that taken by many research workers dealing with cognition and the brain today, namely that our entire experience of consciousness is due to the electro-chemical activity of the brain alone and ceases to exist when the brain dies.



Carl Jung



Henri Bergson



That there exist strong correlations between certain thoughts and emotions and certain areas of the brain has been proven beyond doubt. I am aware of course of the strong arguments for the so-called '*brain-only*' or '*brain-first*' origin of both consciousness and simple awareness. Yet, there is one stubborn part of me which, perhaps against my better judgement, simply refuses to accept that something as refined and apparently '*non-physical*' as human consciousness, can have a source *exclusively* in the physical substance and structure of the brain. I do not doubt that the bulk of what we would call '*objective consciousness*', including virtually everything we consider to be our earthly identity, could not exist without the brain. But is that really all there is to consciousness? Here today, completely and forever gone tomorrow? I have an open mind on this but also doubts.

A Pantheistic Guiding Power of Life

The deeper forms of consciousness that we, and no doubt most other animals possess..., things like the subconscious and unconscious states that do the main housekeeping work of keeping us alive..., are they exclusively the result of neural activity within the brain? Without doubt, certain aspects are, and it may merely be my more unruly, less rational side that needs to be suppressed in the face of scientific facts. But try as I may, I cannot ignore the nagging feeling that this simply cannot be the whole story. Something deep within

either wants to believe a less material-only explanation, or simply cannot accept the still relatively unsophisticated current models of consciousness.

Putting science aside for the moment and thinking like a mystic, there exists a type of '*fundamental reality*' pervading the entire universe, an overarching pantheistic sort of simple awareness (at the least) or, more likely, the most highly developed and refined form of consciousness that can exist within the finite bounds of our universe.

This pan-universal awareness or consciousness is considered by some mystics as a fundamental *part of the life force itself*, a mysterious '*something*' which infuses and '*inhabits*' all living creatures, from whales to viruses. And if it does not possess objective consciousness, then certainly it possesses a more diffuse form of consciousness which, for us, would be analogous to the subconscious or the unconscious that all humans possess. This is no new theory of course, for Plotinus in the 3rd century CE, wrote widely on matters closely related to consciousness. But in modern terms, although Plotinus had a formidable intellect in his day, we would be more inclined to dismiss his musings as mere beliefs, some of them unsupported even by the logic of his day.

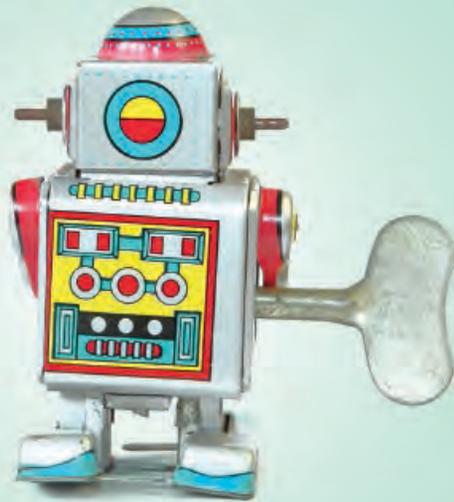
Mystically speaking, consciousness, at the level of the subconscious or unconscious, is the guiding power of all life and the pattern or design through which life is expressed.



**The vast cooperative
collection of cells making up
our bodies and brains gives
us the rich experience of
human life.**



I find it hard to accept that any universe can be purely mechanistic, like a great wind-up toy which slowly winds itself down...



It meshes with all other qualities, laws and forces of the universe under a single overarching intelligence which, in esoteric circles, particularly in the Rosicrucian Order, is known simply as *'the Cosmic'* or *'the Divine Mind.'* Of course I know this is no more than a personal belief based on nothing more than an *'inner feeling'* on the one hand, and reasoning based on inner assumptions on the other. And I am fully aware of the reputational risk I'm taking every time I air such matters. Yet, despite the fact that there is no scientific basis yet for believing that there exists a non-physical origin for consciousness, and there exists no pantheistic, universe-wide consciousness..., I simply cannot shake off the strong, intuitive feeling that there exists a mystery which is profoundly deeper and, as yet undiscovered, by science. My personal life experience and the beautiful thoughts that my mind has obligingly gifted me over the years, makes the existence of a sentient sort of pantheistic *'Divine Mind'* an inner certainty for me and not merely a remote possibility.

A Collective Consciousness

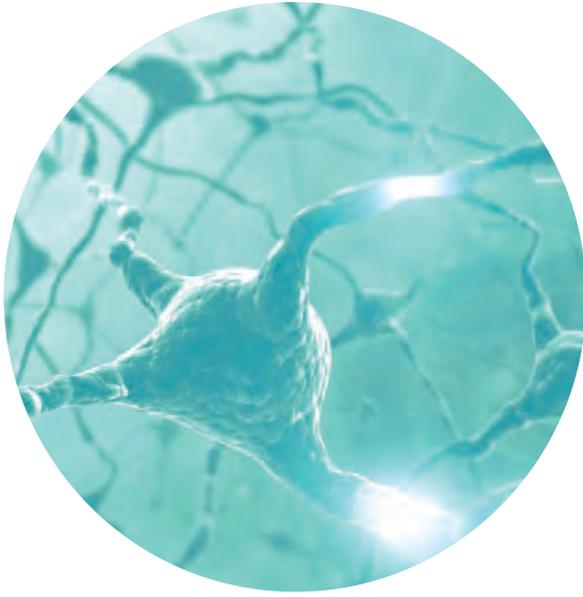
Furthermore, can we really envisage a universe as sophisticated as ours *not* possessing some form of universe-wide *'collective consciousness'*, a pantheistic sort of *'sentient natural law'* which guides and cajoles all things to follow their particular *'templates of ideal existence'*, thereby allowing them to achieve the highest possible states of

fullness and excellence in their lives? I find it hard to accept that any universe can be purely mechanistic, like a great wind-up toy which slowly winds itself down and, in the process, causes all things to happen in a fully predetermined manner. Once again this is a belief of course but, increasingly so, one which is based on a firmer and firmer footing as the wonders of quantum physics unfold in the pages of respected scientific journals.

The vast cooperative collection of cells making up our bodies and brains gives us the rich experience of human life. Ask any serious research workers involved with cognition on a daily basis and they are likely to agree that this cooperative work by billions of cells in our bodies is a wonder of refinement in its highest material form. And just as humans have an ideal state to which they are biologically driven to strive for, no doubt all creatures have their own ideal states, and all strive for those states without ever wondering why. For members of any living species, the *'cooperative collection'*, *'égrégoire'* or *'group consciousness'* that they are a part of, creates for them rich, commonly perceived experiences that benefit all members of the species; and humans are, of course, included as well.

By definition, any type of *'group consciousness'* must possess greater complexity and therefore a potentially higher form of intelligence than any individual member of the species is able to possess within that group. This





'group intelligence', being of a higher, more refined sort than individual intelligence, is, I believe, the closest we can ever get to a sensible definition of a *'God'* or *'Divine Mind'* suitable for our human species. Of course, it is not the highest concept of God that can exist, but it is the highest form that any member of a group can ever become conscious of. While the experience of a God or Divine Mind, as experienced by an individual within a species group, is slightly different from all other members of the group..., overall, there exists an experience common to all members of that *égrégoire* or group consciousness, one which bonds all members of the group more powerfully than anything else possible.

A Super-Égrégoire

With the human intellect, because of its ability to reflect upon its own capacity to think and to analyse its own thoughts, there is the possibility of a God higher, more refined and more all-inclusive than that perceived by all other creatures on Earth. It is a God therefore that not only incorporates the qualities, thoughts and hopes of all humans but of all living creatures possessing less refined, less complex forms of cognition than even the lowest that humans can possess.

And that *'super-égrégoire'* or super collective consciousness can be assumed to be the highest form of Divinity that humans can ever aspire to become aware of. There are almost certainly elements of that super-

consciousness which are at least partially separated from the physical, neural systems of all creatures in the universe, humans included. And certainly, this group consciousness, this super-égrégoire, continues existing regardless of individual members of any species dying off.

The consciousness of any individual creature within a species group must therefore include within itself a focused and highly specific form of consciousness, specific to one or more areas of excellence within the group. But it must also have access to a much more general, more diffuse awareness of the collective consciousness as a whole, a consciousness of the species within the group as a whole. In the Rosicrucian Order we often use the coined term *'égrégoire'* for such a group consciousness. It appears the word was first used by the French poet *Victor Hugo* in the 19th century (1802–1885), though admittedly not with quite the same meaning as ascribed to it in esoteric circles today. In modern usage, an *égrégoire* refers to a *'field of collective consciousness'* and it is this form of broad consciousness that may exist in all living creatures to some extent, and which powerfully binds together members of each species.

...overall, there exists an experience common to all members of that *égrégoire* or group consciousness, one which bonds all members of the group more powerfully than anything else possible

I am not deluding myself, for I know there exists, as yet, no objective, factual evidence to support such speculations. But speculating is, after all, one of the primary tools-of-trade of all philosophy and, as an aspiring philosopher then, my temporal experience of life could amount to nothing more than a fleeting period of highly focused, objectively conscious awareness of a very small portion of a much wider field of consciousness known as the *'human égrégoire.'*

In its entirety, that *égrégoire*, namely everything that a human can ever become, may well be part of an even broader collective consciousness called the *'Divine Mind'*, of which all other living creatures also happen to be a part.



As the great sage of Nazareth is reported to have once said: “...*in my father’s house are many mansions.*” Maybe, just maybe..., this refers to the many forms of collective consciousness or égrégores that exist, one for each species among countless such égrégores, some nested within others, and others merely overlapping a bit with others and ever striving for greater expression and all-inclusiveness within the rules governing those égrégores.

Life is Unique in Every Instance

As far as we know, each individual life experience, down to its most intimate details, can never be repeated. Each creature born into our world is unique in some way, and the consciousness associated with it ceases, according to science at least, at death. Taken to the limit then, the greatest manifestation of life may be the collective consciousness of everything that has ever existed, rolled up with the collective consciousness of everything that could ever exist. Such consciousness would have neither past nor

future, only a fixed, unchanging present. Everything that could ever happen, happens permanently, in the present moment, in this *‘life’*, and we could comfortably refer to it simply as the *‘Divine Mind.’*

This greatest of all actualities, this Divine Mind, would possess an intelligence that at one and the same time vastly lacks the focus and specificity of our objectively conscious experience of life in the microcosm..., but also possesses in parts of it, the highly focused, objective awareness of individual humans for example. It could therefore operate both as an impartial natural law acceptable to science, and as a personal, loving, caring God with which countless humans of the past believed they communicated with on deeply intimate levels, and from Whom great happiness, peace and fulfilment in life came.

That Divine Mind may therefore be the broad *‘actuality’* mentioned at the start, which is common to all things in existence in our universe, and which



underlies the myriad small *'personal realities'* of all living creatures, humans very much included as well, of course. And to some extent at least, aspects of that both broad and specific consciousness, may be the sort of consciousness that we experience after life on planet Earth has ceased for us.

Even after this so-called *'death'*, when you no longer have a physical brain with which to pick and choose the parts of that vast pantheistic *'Divine Mind'* from which you experience your *personal reality of life...*, that *'Universal Actuality'* that clearly must have existed before any life began on Earth, would still continue to exist, unchanged. The experience of your life could conceivably continue existing within the permissive bounds of that vast *égrégoire*, and it is perhaps from that *égrégoire* itself that something else, something perhaps quite different from earthly life, is able to take up the thread again in a new form and continue the life experience which was briefly interrupted at the moment of your transition from this life to the moment of your re-birth into another form of life expression. No doubt, that new life expression would not be identical to the one you have just left, though it would, of necessity, contain all the karmic links from that former life that have any chance of being taken to fulfilment in this new form of life expression.

Our dreams may be disconnected fragments of such a form of consciousness..., a bubbling up from the subconscious of experiences that we can't have unless the will is quiet and a door to deeper, less objectified forms of consciousness has been opened. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says to Arjuna: *"You and I Arjuna, have lived many lives. I remember them all, but you do not remember."* Although any discussion of consciousness more or less assumes that we are referring primarily to the focused, objective type that we associate with thinking, we must leave the door open for the possible existence of a host of other forms of consciousness, less focused, less specific and less analytical than our ordinary thought processes constantly demand. They may be forms of consciousness which exist in other life forms in the universe, entirely unknown to us, perhaps life forms that aren't even carbon-based. And some of these may experience types of consciousness similar to what some have hypothesised occurs after death. Of course, although this is still mere speculation, it is nevertheless rich food for thought.

Consciousness, Intelligence and Complexity

We must remember that consciousness and intelligence are not necessarily synonymous. The word *'intelligence'* almost exclusively refers to a form of consciousness that *'moves'*, namely a form of consciousness that experiences things in a focused and purposeful manner, moving linearly through time and three-dimensionally through space from past to present to future. On the big assumption that some aspects of past experiences can be stored for a certain amount of time, a suitably structured form of intelligence could potentially gain an ever expanding ability to *'grow'* its ability to acquire broader fields of experience and hence, acquire as well, ever more focused and *'real'* experiences of three-dimensional reality. That, in turn, allows this intelligence to project itself into future possible scenarios of what may happen, and opens up the possibility for the intelligence to plan for possible future realities. Whereas *consciousness*, in a broad sense, is not necessarily synonymous with *intelligence*, it is more akin to what we know as *'intuition.'*

...intelligence is always associated with complexity; the greater the complexity of a system, the greater the chances are for intelligence to emerge.

An important matter to remember is that *intelligence* is always associated with *complexity*; the greater the complexity of a system, the greater the chances are for intelligence to emerge. In a nutshell, *consciousness pairs with intuition* while *complexity pairs with intelligence*. Ultimately, the two pairs differ only in one respect, that of outward complexity. I use the word *'outward'* deliberately, for there exists with intuition a far greater degree of *hidden complexity* and therefore *hidden intelligence* (also known as *'inherited wisdom'*) than the *outward* form of complexity that is associated with any creature possessing what we would recognise as intelligence.

In wars of the past, soldiers have used their intellect and reasoning powers to devise the best strategies of survival while trying to defeat or escape from their





There exist forms of consciousness both broader and more all-inclusive than humans possess...

enemy. But in critical situations when there is *'no time to think'*, they throw caution to the wind and follow instead their intuition in an apparent override of the intellect. This is often the case where urgent life-or-death decisions have to be made and the objective intellect cannot respond quickly enough on its own. By very definition then, intuition must be tapping into a sort of *'super intellect'* or knowledge-base far superior to the specific and highly focused type of intellect we use when applying our *'intelligence.'* And this font of knowledge is none other than the collective consciousness or *égrégoire* of the human species itself which, in turn, exists independently of any specific individual being within it. Whether we, as individuals are alive or not, this human intuitive group consciousness continues to exist and, almost certainly, can continue being drawn upon *'beyond the veil.'*

Only Human Consciousness?

Humans are not the only ones who possess consciousness of course. There exist forms of consciousness both broader and more all-inclusive than humans possess, and some creatures possess *'packages of cognition'* much more focused and objective than anything we are capable of. There is a need therefore to expand a bit upon what is meant by the word *'consciousness'* when applied to non-human life forms.

Let us begin with minerals for example (I'm being serious), and then move up the ladder of complexity to plants and animals, the latter of which we are a member species. I can hear you say *"but minerals have no life"*, and yes, in the normal sense of the word, that is true. But minerals do possess structure, organisation and specific rules by which they *'self-assemble.'* For the purposes of the present discussion, I am therefore extending *'life'* (temporarily) to include any form of *self-organisation* or *self-assembly* and of course that would include even a computer.

Each form of consciousness in the universe has associated with it a *'cluster'* of energies of which that consciousness is formed. The energies in this cluster come from a wide range of frequencies, but they are not necessarily contiguous. This is not to say that consciousness itself *is* the energy involved..., only that consciousness, in some form, however primitive, is present wherever energy exists. One may postulate further that no energy can exist without some form of consciousness being *inherent* to it. Rosicrucians often refer to the so-called *'law of the triangle'* whereby all manifestations in nature have *two causes* or two inherent properties by which a third, *the effect*, is born. In the present context then, we have *energy* and *consciousness* being associated with every kind of *living creature* or even every kind of self-organising, self-assembling, sort of *'inanimate matter.'* This is analogous to two other universal



properties, namely *space* and *time* being associated with the dynamics of *all perceivable reality*. As space and time cannot be experienced (or even thought of) in isolation from each other, energy and consciousness can also not be conceived in isolation of each other. The two come together always; without one, the other does not exist, and this is undoubtedly true for many other pairings throughout the universe.

At the level of minerals, how can we speak of consciousness? Admittedly we do so only with considerable difficulty, for the concept is so far removed from the analytical form of consciousness we use, that most people would fail to see a link. But this is merely a problem of *scale* and *complexity*. The highly focused form of consciousness that humans possess, exists because of the complexity and hierarchical organisation of the brain. The human brain has several orders of magnitude greater complexity than exists in the structure and self-organising processes of, for example, the crystals in a mineral. Just as various laws of nature ensure that certain crystals self-assemble in one way only, and others in other ways only, a wider set of laws ensure that humans too *'self-assemble'* only in specific ways. I'm sure you're thinking of DNA by now, but more specifically I'm thinking of the self-assembly *coding* that causes DNA to come into existence in the first place, not the self-assembly which is *caused* by the DNA structure once it has been formed.

These ways of assembling an organism may give greater degrees of freedom to the human self-assembly process, thereby resulting in people with red hair, others with brown hair, some with freckles, some with blue eyes, others with green eyes, etc., but all conforming to a basic body plan from which there is little deviation. And conformance to that body plan, and the intellect that comes with its brain, differs conceptually *only in scale and complexity* from the very simple laws governing the self-assembly of crystals. So, we are different to crystals, very different, but truly only in the sophistication that comes about through scale and complexity. Crystals and humans could therefore both be governed by *égrégores* or *islands of group consciousness* that define what they can and cannot accomplish, and the extent to which their *'intellects'* can grow.

Where 'Dead Matter' Becomes a Living Organism

Just as our thoughts manifest as energy which can at times be perceived by other humans, so too it can be said that the self-assembly of mineral crystals is caused by definite laws which provide the information necessary for the atoms and molecules to assemble themselves in the only ways possible for that mineral. And this self-assembly process may, perhaps with a stretch of the imagination, be considered as a form of *'life'* too, though of course nowhere near as complex and sophisticated as even the smallest bacteria. Self-organisation and assembly occurs



at all levels in nature and it is merely a matter of *scale and complexity* to decide at which point we agree that *'dead matter'* ends and *living organisms* begin.

Arbitrary points on a scale are okay if we can all agree on them; but in absolute terms, each point isn't much use by itself and the scale itself is all that should interest us. We may use inches or centimetres as our scale of length, but there is nothing universal or absolute about those units. So, the point at which life begins and ends may be arbitrary as well, and precise agreement on where that point lies is not universally accepted. Therefore, putting arbitrary agreements aside, on the basis of this universal self-organising, self-assembly principle, we can say that even simple minerals possess *'life'* as well.

The laws governing the *'self-organisation'* of simple elements are well known today, but thanks should go to one man in particular, the 19th century Russian scientist Mendeleev for his creation of the periodic table of the elements, a simple arrangement of the basic atomic elements which is still used in chemistry classes today. His table has of course been superseded by much more detailed and useful tables, and the rules governing the self-organisation of elements are much more complex than they were only 50 years ago. But, in principle, we have at least a clear set of laws of nature that govern the manifestation of *'life'* at these simple levels.

This corpus of natural laws come under the overarching governance of an *égrégoire* or *group consciousness*, something that science would perhaps refer to as the *'laws of physics'*, though without the quality of consciousness. People of past centuries would probably have referred to it as something like the *'Cosmic Mind'* or *'Divine Intelligence'*, in the same way that the laws governing higher, more complex life forms have been considered by some of the brightest minds of past centuries as coming under the umbrella of a sort of *'intelligent guidance.'*

In the plant kingdom, many plants actively turn towards the sun as it moves across the sky. Some close their petals at nightfall, and others, like the Venus Flytrap, close their flowers or leaves quickly in order to capture and consume their prey. Simple awareness, if not what we would accept as consciousness, is certainly revealed in a plant capable of trapping a living insect, just as consciousness, or even simple awareness, is present in a plant that actively tracks the motion of the sun.



Simple awareness, if not what we would accept as consciousness, is certainly revealed in a plant capable of trapping a living insect

Primitive Consciousness

An early 20th century experiment to try and demonstrate the presence of consciousness or, at the very least, simple awareness in plants, was done by *Satyendra Nath Bose*, the great Indian mathematician and one of the co-founders of Quantum Mechanics. Born in colonial-ruled Calcutta, he had a deep and abiding love of all living things, including plants. Turning his attention to the possibility of plants possessing at least a rudimentary form of consciousness, he built an instrument sufficiently sensitive to record the moment at which a stalk was cut. His results were that plants are well aware of trauma to their physical integrity.

Much more delicate instruments have, since then, proven this beyond doubt, and many psychically sensitive people have reported perceiving the discomfort that a plant undergoes as its stems are cut. That is not equating that conscious response to what we would experience as *pain* if we underwent similar treatment. It merely highlights that plants are aware of the integrity their own living structures and, to some extent, possess consciousness of a form that we humans undoubtedly also possess in the most primitive parts of our brain.





Border collies, learn quickly through observation, repetition and a conscious understanding of the intent and purpose of the farmer's voice.

The varied patterns of consciousness existing in all things becomes more apparent as we move up the ladder of complexity. The greater the complexity of the organism, the more sophisticated are its faculties of perception, observation, knowledge and even memory. Migrating birds that fly thousands of miles across oceans and continents at fixed periods of the year are undoubtedly helped by the earth's magnetic field and the polarisation of sunlight entering their eyes. But they are almost certainly also influenced by a higher *group awareness* or *égrégoire* that is linked to the Cosmic Mind of the universe. Border collies, the working dogs of many sheep farmers, learn quickly through observation, repetition and a conscious understanding of the intent and purpose of the farmer's voice, what each instruction means. And for many, their intelligence is in some cases almost human-like.

In wild creatures, consciousness is closely influenced by instinct or intuition, much as a mother plover for example (a ground-nesting bird), becoming aware of an approaching predator (a human, a dog or a cat for example) deliberately leads the predator away from where the chicks or eggs are hidden, by behaving as though it were wounded and therefore a potential easy meal. As they become aware of the danger, their instinct or intuition warns them of the gravity of the situation and their bird intellect causes them to act injured as they lead the predator away.

Karma and Reincarnation

With humans, as with animals, people have many levels of consciousness, though roughly conforming to what we easily recognise as being of common human experience. According to mystical lore, the exact nature of their consciousness is determined by their past thoughts, words and actions; in other words, their karma (from the Sanskrit root *krm* meaning *'action'*). The 2nd to 3rd century CE Christian scholar *Origen* (185-254 CE), in his work *De Principiis*, says: "*Every soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of his previous life.*" and "*... by reason of his merits in some previous life, Jacob had deserved to be loved by God....*" This strongly suggests that he believed that at least some, if not all, humans reincarnate and that their present lives are influenced by what they did in their past lives.

Human consciousness is that *'continuing essence'* within the person upon which is recorded these actions. Is that *'continuing essence'* none other than the soul itself, the carrier of one's personal karmic load? Whatever we wish to call it, it is special, it is individual and unique to that person alone, though it also shares many of its qualities with the great human group consciousness known to us as the *'human égrégoire.'* Like animals, primitive hominids were conscious at



first only of the most basic of conditions, such as the fear of fires, storms, floods, etc., but also danger from predators like bears and lions who undoubtedly ate them whenever they could.

Slowly, as challenges in their environment grew and they were forced to adapt to harsher conditions, their consciousness adapted to the ever greater complexity of their evolving brains, and they became conscious of things such as devotion to one's loved ones and the need to protect them from harm. Much later in evolutionary terms, they realised the many advantages that exist when living, with inevitable compromises, in larger social groups, such as a clan or tribe. And from this, social life as we know it, finally started emerging.

At this level, early hominids knew of their world only by means of their five senses. They became aware of simple facts such as the similarity of some physical objects to deeper principles of life..., and from this, symbolism, as a pure artifice of the intellect, evolved. Much later, of course, aspects of thinking such as reasoning and memory became the dominant feature differentiating hominids from all other creatures.

Inner Apprehension

As the complexity of human cognition increased, so did the complexity and sophistication of interactions between people. Consciousness of higher, less tangible qualities of life slowly emerged and this led in due course to moral and spiritual philosophies and religions. It was the deep-rooted consciousness of something hidden, unknown and apart from the individual that led to the formation of all belief systems.

With the acquisition of a higher inner apprehension of greater forces in life than those they were aware of through their senses, early humans began using faculties of the mind such as imagination, concentration and visualisation to plan their futures. And inevitably, a time eventually came when the first person experienced what we today refer to as an *'afflatus of the soul'*, from which true spirituality finally emerged into the open.

Our early ancestors became conscious of a much more intricate world than that of previous times, and over tens of thousands of years, systems of governance, moral codes of conduct and inner levels of personal

discipline became the hallmarks of what was considered civilised or not. Eventually, advanced language use, writing, mathematics and science emerged and made human life more pleasant and easier to bear. Evolution had moved beyond mere random mutations of DNA, to deliberate choices made in the minds of humans who could see better ways of living and treating each other.

I have no doubt that this inner apprehension of *'something better'*, emerged not only through the labours of a few pioneering individuals, but was almost imposed upon them when they realised, from communion with their inner self or their conception of a universal God, that there exists something far greater and more awesome than any human being. And it is this *'great something'*, this *"Great Eagle"* of ancient Native American beliefs, which ultimately guides and directs all people in their evolution.

We have come a long way from the first microbes to emerge on Earth billions of years ago, and we have a wonderful evolution of consciousness ahead of us if we can but survive our present world crisis. But one thing is certain, the broader issues of our cognitive evolution, while governed certainly by physical laws of inheritance and random selection, are also governed by something more subtle, something I referred to above as the *'human collective consciousness'* or *'human égrégore.'* And to drive the point home as far as it will go, let me just say one more time that this human égrégore exists with or without us as individuals, and will continue existing, as a template of life, even when the last human has gone extinct in preparation perhaps for the re-emergence of a new human-like species again somewhere in some small part of eternity.

The broader implications of holding such a belief are that consciousness is not merely something *'physical'*, not merely the result of electro-chemical signalling within a complex system such as a brain. Consciousness in some form also exists entirely independently of the human form, though undoubtedly of a form we do not easily recognise or can relate to the objective, rational, analytical form of consciousness we use every waking moment of our lives. This is all a personal belief of course, yet it is one based on deep philosophical introspection that has evolved over many years, indeed tens of thousands of years. You can take it or leave it, but I urge you to at least think about it.





Mortuary temple of the 18th Dynasty Queen Hatshepsut at Deir-el-Babri.

by **Bill Anderson**

Ancient Egyptian Temples



Nowadays, we are used to thinking about religious buildings as Eastern temples or Western churches, mosques, synagogues, etc., which are congregational in nature and where the public have access to and can participate in rituals and ceremonies. In Western religious traditions, people go to hear sermons or join in with or listen to the singing of hymns. In Eastern religious traditions, people participate in the reciting or chanting of ancient sacred texts or collectively intone mantras or the sacred names of various deities.

The temples of ancient Egypt, known as *Hat Neter* (*Mansion of [the]god*) or just plain *Per Neter* (*House of [the]god*) were not like this. They were a potent source of power where the incumbent god or goddess resided within the *Ngos*, the most sacred part of the complex. The Egyptian temple, with its massive pylon entrance is one of the most



instantly recognisable building-form of the ancient world. To us, it was the abode of strange gods and goddesses, some with the heads of birds or animals which seem quite alien and mysterious to us today.

There were two types of temples: the *cult temple*, the easiest for us to understand, where the deity was manifested, and the *mortuary temple*. The cult temple was where the statue of the god or goddess was housed and where, through rituals, the priest could approach the god or goddess and establish a kind of relationship of reciprocity for mutual benefit. If the priesthood provided the deity with food, clothing, incense and music, the deity would be happy and continue with the maintenance of cosmic order, namely the ancient Egyptian concept of 'Maat.' And the deity would as well regularly be asked, by an oracle, to answer prayers or other pressing requests for accurate information.

However, the mortuary temple, known as the 'Mansion of Millions of Years', was regarded as a place of great sanctity, where funerary rites could be performed, and offerings could be made for the continuing sustenance of the soul of the deceased in the afterlife. By the time of the New Kingdom, the mortuary temple had been physically detached from the tomb of the deceased pharaoh. The most famous example of this is the celebrated mortuary temple of the 18th Dynasty *Queen Hatshepsut* at *Deir-el-Babri*.

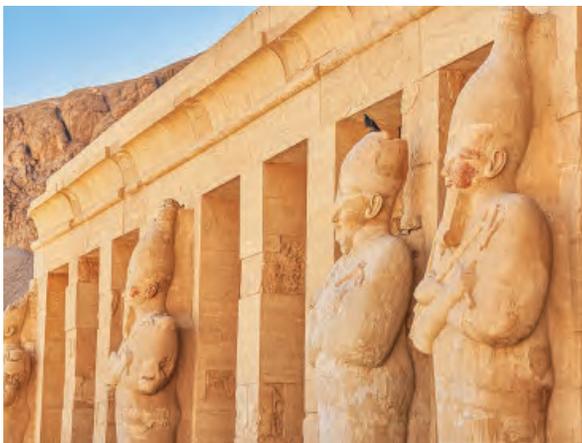
On the one hand, the cult temple itself was a closed-off space, a holy place, made holy not just by

the presence of the god or goddess but by the countless generations of priests and priestesses who participated in the many rituals associated with that particular deity. It was a piece of the divine in the land of the living, maintaining the force that ensured the prosperity of the country.

While it may seem elitist that the vast majority of people would have no access to the holy precincts, it is offset by the fact that a person could become a priest or priestess for one month in every three. Whatever we see nowadays, we should not think that religion was organised only for the pharaoh and the elite. Every ancient Egyptian had a relationship with some of the gods, whether through prayers or worship.

The temples carried out not only set religious rites, but also acted as administrative centres, such as at *Madinet Habu* on the west bank at *Luxor*, wielding political and economic power over the regions they administered. The fundamental role of the Egyptian temple priest as an intermediary between the central government and the local people was as essential as ever.

While the larger temples had a lot of paid staff, smaller temples, like the provincial temple of *Anubis* at *Kahun*, had six permanent priests and 44 part-timers who operated in shifts. Only a very few ancient Egyptian temples remain today in good states of restoration. I will be using the Temple of Amun at Karnak on the East bank of the Nile as an example, as a lot of it has been accurately reconstructed.



Detail - Mortuary temple of the 18th Dynasty Queen Hatshepsut at Deir-el-Babri.



Temple of Madinet Habu.





Temple of Amun at Karnak.

Daydream

In a daydream I see myself being ferried across the Nile from the west bank to the great temple of Amun on the East bank, called the *'Chosen of Places.'* Relaxed, calm and deep in thought, I dangle my hand in the water, feeling the water rush past and against it. It is a hot day today, but the water is cool and inviting. Fortunately, there have been no crocodiles around here for a long time.

Nearing the eastern river bank I gaze at the great pylon temple gates. A flock of white egrets fly overhead and I watch them intently, sending them a silent blessing for continued life. As the boat reaches the bank I get off and walk up the steps to the top of the bank. The egrets are surely a good omen as they are sacred to the god *Thoth*, the god of wisdom.

The huge temple walls rise up before me. In my reverie I see the great bronze-plated wooden doors of the pylon gateway with coloured flags on tall flagstaves waving gently in the breeze before the processional way of ram-headed sphinxes. That is the main entrance, but it is not for me and I head for a small side portal on the south side and enter the area immediately west of the Sacred Lake. Here, inside the compound and especially in the temple itself, there is a feeling of power, something still there after millennia of abandonment.



The goddess Seshat.

The Temple

The great stone temples of Egypt we see today, retained the essential elements that were already present in the reed shrines of the Predynastic Period, where the chieftains made offerings to the local deity. In its layout, the main axis of the temple on one side was a mirror image of the other side, symbolically uniting the two lands of Egypt (north and south) with the deity at the centre. One can also find images of a winged sun-disk over the main entrance to most temples. It was a symbol of good in its fight against evil which ceaselessly tried to disrupt pharaoh's Egypt.

There was a night-time ritual ceremony performed for the foundation of temples, involving the pharaoh and the goddess *Seshat*. Together, they drove two poles into the ground around which a rope was extended. This was called *'Stretching the Cord'* which provided the orientation of the temple from which its four corners were then located and fixed. Once the construction was completed, the building had to be purified before it could be dedicated. The ritual was known as *'Strewing of the Besen'*, with *Besen* translated as either *gypsum* or *natron*. It is generally agreed that natron is more likely because of its use in mummification to purify the body.

The final ritual was the dedication of the completed temple to the god for whom it was built. The Pharaoh stood before the temple *Naos* shrine in which a statue of the god was placed, and offerings and prayers were said to dedicate the temple to its resident god. The ceremony was known as the *'Opening of the Mouth of the Throne of the Protector of my Father.'* The ritual opened the way for the god to inhabit its statue, which, until then, had not been divine but merely an inert statue created by humans. Animals were then sacrificed and offerings were presented to the god. Finally, associated ceremonies were repeated in all parts of the vast temple edifice, thereby imbuing the entire building with the sanctity and magic associated with the new home of the god.

The reason the ritual was so important was that it aligned the whole temple by careful astronomical observation and



measurement. In the case of the Karnak temple, it was aligned east to west next to the east bank of the Nile according to the rising sun in the east at the winter solstice. This was probably done by sighting northern circumpolar stars through a notched stick called a *'merchet'*, which was perhaps accomplished by sighting the star on an artificial horizon as it rose in the evening, and again as it set. Determining the halfway point between these two points would give the builder's true north.

The Pharaoh, it was believed, carried out the ritual with the aid of the goddess *Sesbat*. In reality though, trained temple personnel probably carried out the measurements and the Pharaoh's role was purely symbolic or even taken over by the incoming High Priest. In fact, while we do not know how often the Pharaoh actually participated in the rites, symbolically, at least, all stages of a temple's construction and consecration were performed by him.

The basic form of the temple was determined by an underlying mythology and rituals associated with it. The texts at the temple of Horus at *Edfu* provides details about the names and sometimes the uses of the various halls and chambers. Everything had its own name, every chamber, obelisk and pylon gateway. The temple evolved. The Karnak temple was in use for some two thousand years and saw continuous rebuilding and reshaping. Older structures were torn down and used as stone fillers in newer structures, so the holiness imbued in every stone was never lost but merely incorporated into the new structure.



Horus Temple in Edfu.

In essence each deity had three visits per day: one, first thing in the morning to feed and dress the statue, which was, at half human size, not seen as the god himself but only a vehicle through which he could manifest. There were other visits at noon and in the evening before the god retired for the night.

Let us go back in our minds to the very earliest time when darkness and chaos reigned and an island emerged from the primeval waters. This mound of land provided a landing place for that particular deity and their arrival made the island-mound a place of great sanctity. The Egyptians believed that every temple was part of this original island of creation and was therefore deeply sacred.



Papyrus of a Chantress of Amun at the 'weighing of the heart' ceremony.

Met. Museum / Rogers Fund, 1930





The sun-god Ra in the form of a Khepri beetle.

At the highest point in the temple, as if on the very mound of creation itself, stood the *Naos*, the shrine in which the god lived in safe seclusion in the deepest recesses of the temple. The shrine became inaccessible to all but the most senior priests and the pharaoh, and was more veiled, mysterious and imbued with magic (*Heka*) than the state of the *Duat* (the underworld), more revered than the inhabitants of the *Nun*, the primeval ocean.

And before dawn, during the 12th and final hour of the night, the temple assistants were extremely busy preparing for the arrival of the great god Ra in the form of the *Khepri* beetle pushing up the solar disk at dawn. All sorts of preparations had to be made in the kitchen, bakery and brewery south of the Sacred Lake. The offerings would include, fruit, vegetables, meat, loaves of bread and jugs of wine, beer and milk.

Priests

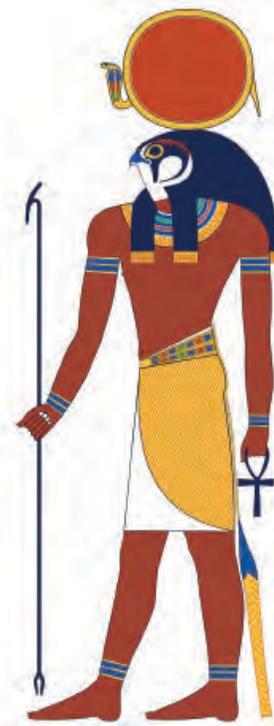
Priests could interact with the divine on a level forbidden to the general populace, for they were servants in divine houses who cared for the divine images they protected. They were the only ones who could look upon the divine images and survive. Their purified physical bodies, shaved from head to foot, allowed them to do this. However, the spiritual reality as depicted on the temple walls, was the Pharaoh who always

stood entirely alone before the gods, while the priests served as *twt ankh*, mere vessels or living images of, or stand-ins for, the pharaoh.

While working in the temple, they had to remain pure. They wore only white linen kilts and sandals made of papyrus. They bathed regularly each day and rinsed their mouth out with a natron-based mouthwash. There were various ranks of priests organised into *phyles*. In the lower echelons were priests assigned to many varied duties such as kitchen staff, janitors, porters, scribes, and anyone else who worked in the temple complex and who had any association with the god. They were all known as priests. Even the cult singers and musicians needed to have undergone some form of training in the priesthood before starting their duties, though probably not the kind of initiation or education which actual priests went through.

A candidate priest would enter the job as a *Wab* or pure priest with jobs including carrying the sacred barques, cleaning the temple or supervising the tradesmen who worked in the temple. There were also opportunities in the so-called '*House of Life*' which we will come to later. The hour-priests were astronomers who kept the calendar, determined lucky and unlucky days and interpreted omens and dreams. There were also medically trained priests who combined both medicine and magic in order to heal various illnesses. A Ka-priest was paid by a family to perform daily offerings at the tomb of the deceased.

Up until the New Kingdom, being a priest or priestess was not a full-time job. They served in rotating teams for a month at a time, which allowed more of the populace a chance to serve in the temples. However, from the New Kingdom onwards, we find the tendency for the priesthood to run in families. Father to son to grandson, etc., and it became hereditary until they formed a priestly caste. Just below the High Priest was the Lector Priest or *Khery-heb* who wrote down the religious texts, instructed other clergy, and recited the '*authoritative utterance*' the *heka* (magic spells) in the temple and at festivals.



Ra the sun god.



By the end of the 20th Dynasty, the High Priests of Amun became so powerful that they started bestowing upon themselves regnal titles and ruling Upper Egypt as Pharaohs themselves. Notable high priests with regnal titles include Herihor (reigned 1080-1074 BCE) and Pinedjem I (reigned 1070-1032 BCE.). In time, Upper Egypt (the south) became a theocratic state within a state while the real Pharaohs ruled from Lower Egypt's delta capitals (the north).



Herihor

Priestesses

Chantresses belonged to a group of musician-priestesses who sang and made music for the deity. Music played a very important part in ancient Egyptian religion. Among several other instruments they could play, they would also shake a sistrum (ritual rattle) or a *menat* collar (beaded necklace). The idea was to calm the gods and make them more amenable to protecting and helping the people. These temple singers pacified the god “...with a sweet voice!”

Overall, the musician-priestesses were a very important part of the temple staff with the earliest known evidence of them dating back to the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BCE). At that time, they carried the title of *Heset* and formed part of groups of men and women called the *Khener*, a professional troupe of singers and dancers. During the Middle Kingdom (2134-1690 BCE) a new class of Singer-Priestesses appeared called *Shemayet*, usually translated as Chantress.



Female dancers in a painting from the Tomb of Nebamun, c. 1350 BCE.

By the time of the early New Kingdom (1549-1069 BCE), these priestesses were drawn from elite families, even princesses and queens. However, during the 19th and 20th Dynasties, they started to be drawn from less elevated and more diverse backgrounds, and some were even married to priests or tradesmen associated with the temples.

After the 21st Dynasty (post 1078 BCE) things changed. Not only was the job opened up to many more women, but a new title appeared: the *‘Chantress in the interior of the temple of Amun’* who came from the highest strata of society, and were usually accompanied with the title *‘Divine Adoratrices of Amun.’* They were daughters of the pharaoh and in a few rare instances attained almost as much authority and power as the pharaoh himself.

Singers and Chantresses were organised into four ranks or *phyles* to use the Greek term. They were in place for a month of 30 days at a time and then returned to other duties before they were rotated back into the temple. These Chantresses and Singers acted like a divine choir who accompanied the High Priest as he performed his rituals thrice daily.

House of Life

Other religions, such as the Roman, Etruscan, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Chinese religions, were divinatory where priests observed the skies, flights of birds or the entrails of animals for signs of the will of the gods. In Egypt, it was the reverse. They sought to maintain regularity, recurrence and predictability, such as it was from the very first time that the mound of land appeared above the waters.

In the other cultures, things such as rainbows, earthquakes and eclipses were carefully observed and recorded, while in Egypt, such phenomena were passed over in silence. In Egyptian religion, the will of the gods was bound up with the maintenance of the status quo and the cosmic process.

Creation was never over and done with; it continued indefinitely. The process had to be constantly reinforced by human efforts to wrest the

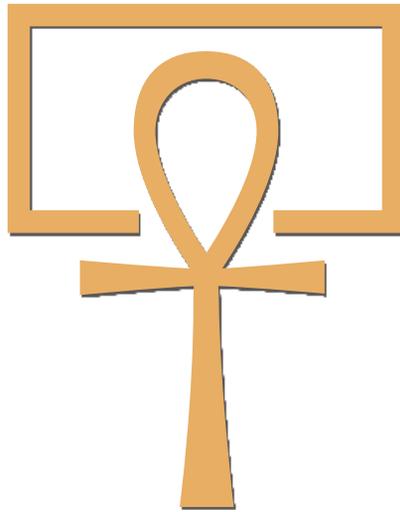


cosmos from descending into chaos. There are known 'Houses of Life' in Memphis, Abydos, Amarna, Heliopolis, Akhmim and Edfu, as well as in Thebes/Luxor. There are also indications that there was a House of Life attached to some of the bigger mortuary temples, though it may be simply that the Scribes of the House of Life were simply there on attachment.

- The *Per Ankh* or *House of Life* was a complex institution dedicated to the educational process of specialised scribes in the service of temples. Its main task was the preservation of manuscripts from royal documents to ritual texts. Though it was in no way like a modern university, it was a repository of stored, reproduced and developed knowledge of the highest sort available at the time. Linked to the House of Life was another institution called the *House of the Book*. In the Temple of Horus at Edfu, the House of the Book was located in the temple pronaos. Though the Per Ankh was not necessarily inside the temple, it was probably attached to the temple, as can be seen from what is believed to have been an actual Per Ankh in Amarna, the city of *Akhnaton* and *Nefertiti*. Every House of Life had a four-fold function:

- Library
- Scriptorium
- School for priests
- Sanctuary of knowledge

Here you would be taught the secrets of writing, first of all the hieratic script which was in common daily use and was a shortened form of hieroglyphic writing. You had to be really good to be allowed to study how to write and paint the actual hieroglyphics as they were more complicated. You would not only be able to write them but also read and speak them out loud, especially during a ritual called the '*Call to the Living*.' In the late period of Egypt, we read about the House of Life from a '*Book of Rituals*'...



House of life symbol.

- It shall be very, very well-concealed.
- No-one shall know it, no-one shall see it, except the sun disk that looks into its secrets.
- Those officiating shall enter in silence, their bodies covered, so as to be protected against sudden death.
- Outsiders may not enter; they must see nothing.

This secrecy command was especially found in the later Hermetic teachings.

The House of Life, as a cultural institution, was a sacred space where language and writing were learned, texts were copied and theological and philosophical works were compiled and collected. In essence, the House of Life was the centre of a cultural endeavour to preserve and ensure the ongoing progress of cosmic, political and social life. The scribes of the House of Life were able to rise to high positions in society.

The temple archives were available for research in whatever subjects were of interest. This led to a lot of discussion among priests. The Kheri-Hebs or Lector Priests were expected to be able to answer any question when asked. In a sense, they were an early precursor of the scientists of today. There is a story that Imhotep who was the architect of the first pyramid of Djoser at Sakkara was the earliest known Chief Lector Priest in a House of Life.

The temple was the focal point of intellectual activity, in the manner of the monasteries of medieval Europe. As the prestige and fame of these institutions increased, they became celebrated across the Mediterranean. In much later times we find that the House of Life attached to some of the temples such as the temple of Ra at Heliopolis, did open themselves up to admitting followers, as we find in the writings of some early Greek philosophers. And so, the teachings continued to be expounded down through the centuries, from country to country until they reached you and I through the portals of the Rosicrucian Order, and we, as custodians, will pass them on to the future.





Greenwood Gate REGENERATION

by **James Wilson**

I remember the day so clearly. I had been invited to Greenwood Gate once again to discuss further decorating work. After speaking over the phone with Sven, our Grand Master, I was aware that there were some serious ongoing issues with the house. He had explained to me in some detail the problems that had recently surfaced with the building. However, when I arrived, I wasn't prepared for what I saw when I walked through the large, welcoming front doors. What I saw can only be described as a massive, open wound, a building in great distress and ailing enormously! My heart sank.

I have been working at Greenwood Gate as a professional decorator on and off for 15 years and have grown to know this old building intimately. I deeply love this gentle place of spiritual refuge. So, to see this fine old building with all its beautiful oak flooring lifted to reveal the concrete ground below; to see oak panelling and oak window seats removed and no longer in situ; to see gaping trenches in the floors and deep vertical channels in the walls, areas sealed off with timber frames and heavy-duty plastic, racks of power tools everywhere and the dust and dirt that inevitably comes with their use; to see work that I had lovingly done previously, now being undone, well..., it was a wrench to say the least and if I'm completely honest, it brought me close to tears.

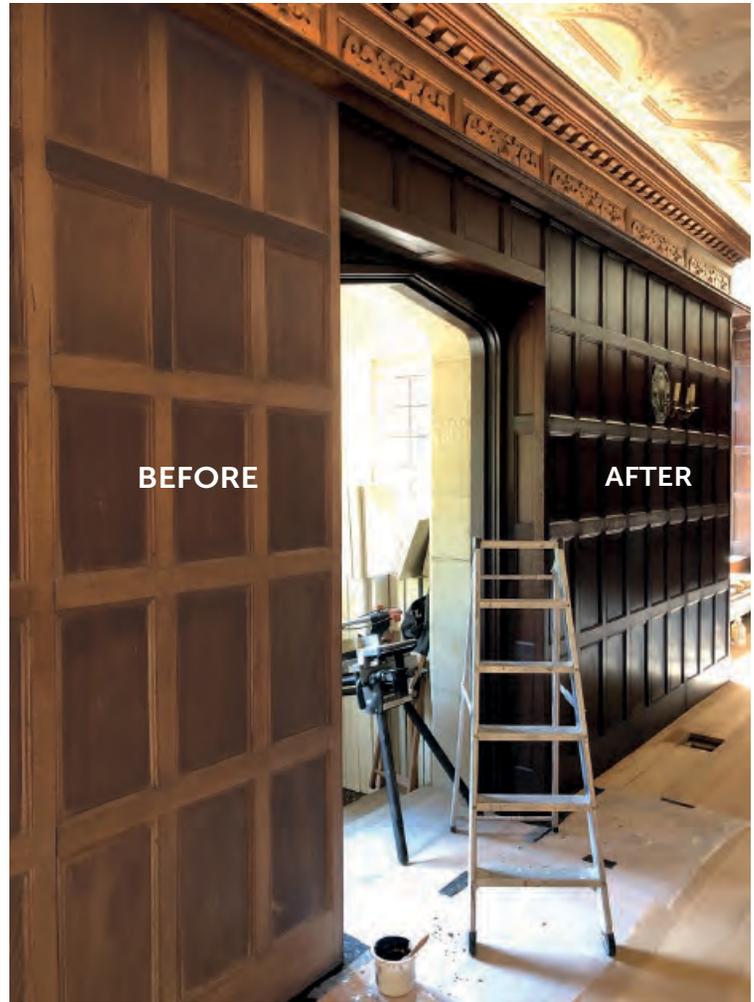
Here was a building, badly injured and now facing a long and slow process



of healing and recovery. It may sound overdramatic to describe it in this manner, but it felt as though Greenwood Gate was undergoing major surgery. While there was no question that it would survive the ordeal, I could not help feeling that a dear old friend was unwell and badly in need of all the love and attention I could offer. Still, I was there as a professional and had to overcome my personal feelings and view this as I would any other job.

If you have read some of the Grand Lodge monthly bulletins, you will be aware of what has been happening at Greenwood Gate over the past year and a half. In a nutshell, the original hot water plumbing system had, after a century of faithful service, failed completely. It had served its purpose but was now old and infirm and in desperate need of retirement! It therefore had to be removed entirely and replaced, and this has been a huge undertaking, for all pipes ran under the flooring and up through hidden wall cavities, all of which had to be forcibly opened. To exacerbate matters, the old pipes were insulated with chrysotile asbestos which, as I'm sure you are aware, is an extremely dangerous substance. If disturbed, it can cause very serious health problems. It must be removed very carefully by specialists and is a slow and costly procedure.

So, after my initial visit, when I arrived to begin work, there was already extensive work going on with several tradesmen on the scene doing whatever they were there to do within their particular skill-sets. It was a hive of activity. I soon came to the realisation that this was going to be a challenging job, not just because of the scale of the work but also because to keep things to a reasonable time scale, I would need to be decorating while other work was being done very close by. In an ideal world I would do my job when everyone else has finished and left the premises. It is by no means ideal to be applying paint when there are other people around kicking up dust and putting dirty hands on newly painted surfaces! Nevertheless, this was what was expected of me and I have



A work in progress. On the left are the oak panels in the Great Hall as they were before work began, and on the right after being re-stained and waxed.

had to get on with it and do my best. I have to say though that the other chaps have been very accommodating and done their best to give me space to work. It could have been a lot worse.

I have always felt that it is truly a privilege to work on this fine old building. It is very hard work, no question, because my job is physical in every way, and everything is large-scale at Greenwood Gate compared to the domestic jobs I usually do. If elbow grease could be quantified, I have certainly used by now several large bucketfuls here. And as I am no longer a young man, my body protests constantly. There are easier decorating jobs I could do, undoubtedly, and while I get an immense satisfaction from completing most of my jobs, nothing





The Great Hall is an exceedingly beautiful room where many inspiring Rosicrucian meetings have been held for the past 46 years. The solid oak panelling and floors, when completely restored, will add greatly to the ambience of this inspiring meeting place.

really compares with the satisfaction I get from helping to beautify Greenwood Gate, helping to improve its appearance which in turn helps to improve the whole ambience of the place. Yes, it's hard work, harder than most jobs I do, but if I still have to work (which I do!) then I would rather be here than anywhere else. I feel a deep bond with the place, as, I'm sure, many other members do too. Apart from being a beautiful structure within beautiful, forested grounds filled with birdlife and small mammals, I consider it my spiritual home, at least on a mundane level, and I have always found peace here, even when working.

I can't say that it has been particularly peaceful over the last few months though. It has been a noisy experience, the noise mainly coming from power tools, both my own and from those working around me, and it has been hard sometimes to get through the day with the constant assault on my ears. This isn't meant to be a complaint, just a truthful observation. I am grateful though for the fact that I have the grounds and woodland to escape to for a short while during my lunch break. I like to relax and meditate there for a few minutes and do some deep breathing and stretching and it certainly helps to rejuvenate me enough to tackle the second half of the day.

Greenwood Gate, in its time of need, has been fortunate to attract reliable and skilled tradesmen to undertake all the work that needed doing, tradesmen who really know what they are doing and are professionals in every respect. In my working experience, I'm sorry to say, that is rarely the case among trades in this country. I take my hat off especially to Mike and Colin who have been working here now for many months, Mike over a year and Colin for eight months. They go through the painstaking process of not only doing the bulk of the hard physical work, but Mike also manages the entire project down to minute details. The re-laying of the oak flooring has, in itself, been a huge undertaking, as it covers a very large area. The task has been accomplished with care, skill, superb craftsmanship and humour. They are true professionals from the local community and it has been a pleasure to work alongside them all these months. Over the past 40 years I have worked alongside many other trades people and I can say genuinely and sadly that I can count on the fingers of one hand the number that I grew to respect as real professionals who I enjoyed working with.

It has certainly been a long haul to bring Greenwood Gate into the 21st century, with the modernisation of the plumbing and heating systems. If you have ever been a



visitor here during an event that was held in the spring, autumn or winter, I'm sure you will recall the discomfort of sitting for a few hours in the Great Hall with the cold slowly seeping deep into your bones even though there were always logs burning in the large fireplace. It has never been a cosy place, but that is about to change. It will still be the same old Greenwood Gate with all its character and welcoming appeal, but there will be one very noticeable difference – it will be warm when you next visit. Please come again! This Rosicrucian home longs for the sort of spiritually motivated people it has welcomed for over a century.

I can't finish this brief account without acknowledging my gratitude to our Grand Master, Sven and his PA, Margaret. I'm certain this last year and a half has been very difficult for them. They have had to work (and in Sven's case, live) all these months in a noisy and inevitably dusty and disruptive environment, trying to complete their daily tasks with the constant distraction that these works have inevitably brought. And no doubt hardest of all, they have had to find the funding for all of this, and I know this must be the greatest stress in both their lives.

Even though I am a long-time member of the Rosicrucian Order, I don't pry into the financial affairs of Grand Lodge, I just trust them absolutely to do what they do. I do know however that keeping this Grand Lodge financially viable has always been a tremendous challenge. So, I am grateful for their hard work and dedication to our Grand Lodge and for allowing me to do my best to care for this wonderful building with its century-old spiritual presence. I hope sincerely that I have proven worthy of the trust placed in me when working here. I am also grateful to and wish to thank all members who have given generously over the years to help keep the place running, you have been a vital lifeline.

And so, with pride and joy, I can say that the wound is healing, slowly but surely and, if I may give the house a gender, our wonderful Greenwood Gate will soon be back on her feet, healthy and happy, to welcome members once again. In a couple of months, when work is completed, if you carefully attune yourself to this old house, you may hear, coming from the offices of Sven and Margaret, a very audible sigh of relief!



Decorating, at the same time as a great deal of other work has been going on around me, has been an eye-opener to see how work can be accomplished at great speed and efficiency when everyone feels they are part of a great team.



TORRENTIUS

Johannes van der Beeck
(1589 - 1644)

by Walter Maybrook



In the early part of the 17th century, the first versions of Rosicrucianism appeared in Holland and found an appreciative, though harried, audience. At the time, Holland was one of the most favourable places for the study of natural history and alternative approaches to spirituality. And there was enough tolerance in the country to allow the *'Brethren of the Rose Cross'* to work in relative freedom for a short while.

By 1622 there were reputed to be centres of Rosicrucianism in Amsterdam and the Hague and, a few years later, in other centres in Holland as well, such as Warmond (near Leiden) but also in several other European cities, such as Nuremberg, Erfurt, Hamburg, Danzig, Mantua, Venice and Paris. There is no doubt that despite these reported *'sightings'* of Rosicrucians, the Brethren worked deeply under the cover of secrecy, though not so much as to bar entry to their ranks by





Watercolor painting by Torrentius (1615)

people with sincere motives and no hostility to the broad tenets and inclusiveness of these early Rosicrucians. The French natural philosopher and physician *Samuel Sorbière* (1615 – 1670) during his stay in Holland (1645 – 1655) wrote:

There is no country in the world that is so favourably disposed towards the Brethren of the Rose Cross as Holland, where those who know the secret of the great work enjoy so much freedom.

Interest in the study of *natural philosophy*¹ in Holland was so great, that in Dordrecht in 1619, *Irenaeus Agnostus* published his *Regula Vitae*, in which he spoke highly of the '*hochberühmte tugendhaften Fraternität des R.C.*' (the highly renowned, virtuous Fraternity of the R.C.) In 1615 a Dutch translation of the *Fama Fraternitatis* appeared, and in 1616 the well-known English physician and Rosicrucian apologist Robert Fludd published his *Tractatus Apologeticus Integritatem Societas de Rosae Crucis* in Leiden, which spoke highly of '*the brethren*', though Fludd himself was careful to say that he was not one of them.

In the early 17th century, the people of Holland cherished and were permitted a degree of freedom of thought unheard of elsewhere at the time. Many different ideological and philosophical groups were tolerated. The *syncretists* and *alchemists* even enjoyed the protection of the *Stadtholders* (vice-regents) of the Netherlands.

One of them, *Barnaud*, openly introduced the Stadtholder of all the provinces (except Friesland), *Prince Maurits of Orange* (ruled 1584-1625), as their protector. From 1575-1577, Maurits had studied in Heidelberg. He was the uncle of *Friedrich V* and godfather to some of Friedrich and Elizabeth's children, and offered them all a home in The Hague. His half-brother, *Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange* (ruled 1625-1647), who had married a lady of the court of Frederick V, was favourably disposed towards the emerging rigour of scientific enquiry and had been introduced to a Rosicrucian circle at *Kassel* (present-day Germany). In time, he took several prominent people with close connections to this Rosicrucian group under his direct protection.

Persecution in Holland

However, the Rosicrucians of Holland did not entirely escape the more general persecutions of 17th century freethinkers and those who sought knowledge of a



Frederik Hendrik by Michiel Jansz van Mierevelt.





Haarlem, Cornelis Beelt, c. 1640.

deeper nature. One example of this persecution can be seen in the history of the painter *Johannes Torrentius* (1589-1644) an older contemporary of *Rembrandt*.

The period of greatest oppression began innocently enough before the Thirty Years War (which started in 1618), merely as polite criticism of the Rosicrucians, though no physical violence or prohibition as yet. Under the influence of a new and more intolerant form of Calvinism that emerged during those 30 years of terrible bloodshed and suffering, things steadily deteriorated for all people who had, until then, believed they had a right to freedom of thought and speech. One of the first stirrings of what was to come was a 1622 booklet, *'Spiegel der Broeders van den roose kruysse, in dicht beschreven door een liefhebber der waerheyt'* (*Mirror of the Brethren of the rose cross, written in verse by a lover of the truth*), informing readers in alarmist tones of the presence of Rosicrucians in Warmond, providing lurid, though undoubtedly false, accounts of their secret activities.

In a hardly disguised manner, the author was acting as a mouthpiece for urban myths and unfounded gossip concerning anything perceived as a challenge to church orthodoxy, particularly in a time of vast and

brutal trans-European religious wars. Rosicrucians in particular were portrayed as *'disciples of Satan'*, heretics and scoundrels worthy of incineration. From a reply to this criticism we learn that, among other things, the Rosicrucians of Warmond regularly met in the palace of *Prince Frederik Hendrik* on the Noordeinde in The Hague. Calvinist orthodoxy could not tolerate the free intellectual inquiry and philosophical propositions espoused by the Rosicrucians, for this, they believed, was an evil defilement of Holy Scripture.

In 1624 the Delegated Council of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland ordered the Court of Holland to start an inquiry into the Rosicrucians and asked for an opinion about them from the theological faculty at the University of Leiden. The over 3,000-word long Latin-worded *judicium* (judgement) of the Leiden theologians was devastating and entirely what the church had wanted. As a result of this, the Council of the City of Haarlem received a letter warning that a sect, calling itself *'Broeders van den Roosen Cruce* (Brethren of the Rose Cross), *"...which each day more and more increases and expands itself..."* had also been established in Haarlem and that these people were *"...very erroneous and heretical in religious affairs."* The lords of Haarlem



were requested to do everything necessary to bar the sect and to pay special attention to the already well-known painter Johannes Torrentius, “...*who was said to be surely one of the most important ones of said sect.*”

Torrentius the Martyr

Without warning, Torrentius was accused of being a “*dangerous individual.*” And so, this young and highly gifted incautious painter became the victim of a cruel, medieval desire for persecution. He was lied about and slandered, statements were fabricated and notarised acts were drawn up of the utterances allegedly made by him or through a third party, and of the drinking toasts that he and his friends were supposed to have proposed. Some utterances were reported to have been made 15 years earlier and, in the majority of cases, the allegations were not upheld by the witnesses when they were called to testify.

Without warning, Torrentius was accused of being a “dangerous individual.”

Finally, after several years of malignment, Torrentius and his friend Coppens were eventually arrested on 19th August 1627, with the authorities claiming that “...*public opinion had demanded it.*” From the transcript of the trial against Torrentius, it became apparent that there were other powers after him, with the principal persecutors being two Dutch Reformed Church ministers, *Henricus Geesteranus* and *Dyonisius Spranckbuysen*, who were careful to remain behind the scenes while they ran a relentless campaign of incitement of people to come forward to testify against this highly creative artist. The result was that Coppens was exiled, but Torrentius was tortured in an effort to extract confessions from him.

Finally, on 25 January 1628, Torrentius was tried in court. He had to be carried into the court as he was paralysed from the waist down due to the severities of the torture he had endured on the rack. A large crowd of people had come from far and wide to see this ‘*heretic.*’ Among them was *Lodewijk van Nassau*, the natural son of the formerly powerful Prince Maurits of Orange who

had ruled the Dutch Republic from 1585 until his death in 1625 and who had provided a degree of protection to the early Rosicrucians. Lodewijk had come to Haarlem with his retinue specifically to attend the session of the court. But by then public opinion had been manipulated and set against the defenceless Torrentius. Quite remarkably, he was tried *extra ordinariis*. Why he was not tried *ordinariis* is made clear from the *Formbook of Willem van Alphen* (1682). In it he wrote:

From extraordinary procedures no minutes were kept in the Cause List of the Procurator-General, contrary to the case of those towards whom ordinariis actions were taken. When the actions are taken extra ordinariis and justice was delivered on the confession of the delinquent, the latter is not allowed to appeal against the condemnation.

According to surviving documents, the city of Haarlem did not want to get involved in an “*unnecessary and endless*” trial and so Torrentius was conveniently denied the right to defend himself. Although Prince Frederik Hendrik tried to intervene with a personal letter to allow Torrentius to take legal action *ordinariis* and to be freed on bail, this had no influence on the by then all-powerful Lords of Haarlem. Inconveniently, however, Torrentius had not confessed to any wrongdoing, despite having been “...*tortured with heavy torments*”, and the



Emblematic Still Life (1614) by Torrentius.





*Torrentius at the time of his conviction.
Print by Jan van de Velde.*

Haarlem judges were deeply frustrated that they could therefore not close the case.

The advice of five lawyers from The Hague was obtained and their conclusion and advice ended with the words:

Also notwithstanding that said T [Torrentius], having been tortured, had given no further confession, this means that he shall be sentenced not as a confessus, but as a plenario convictus.

And so, he was sentenced on the basis of conviction alone. In the trial, not the slightest attention was given to counterstatements by witnesses for the defence, and Torrentius was convicted because of *“his godlessness, abominable and horrifying blasphemy, and also for terrible and very harmful heresy.”* In the comfort of our 21st century democracies where the rule of law is upheld, it seems incredible that such injustice could have taken place. It was an affront even to the norms of the day and a blatant manifestation of deep corruption.

Rerieved

The sentence demanded was burning at the stake, but instead, the verdict given was 20 years' imprisonment. A second attempt by Prince Frederik Hendrik to intervene was also unsuccessful. Finally King Charles I of Britain, who was a great admirer of the paintings of Torrentius, sent a personal letter to the Prince of Orange (whose son had married Charles' daughter) in which he wrote that he was very sorry that such a unique talent would be lost. Tactfully, the King said that Torrentius had been rightly punished for such a tremendous crime but that the two-year imprisonment he had already suffered, and other chastisements, should have satisfied the judicial authorities.

The Lords of Haarlem resisted all attempts to free their victim, but, unexpectedly the Prince signed a pardon and Torrentius travelled to London in 1630 where he became Court Painter to Charles I. There he remained until 1642, but the damage caused by the

Torrentius and his friend were associated with the 'Remonstrant' movement, which the Church saw as a great threat to its authority...

tortures he had undergone before his trial had left him with a broken and deformed body. Of his once robust appearance, only a wreck remained when he returned to Amsterdam to his mother. He came home to die, and on 17th February 1644 his mortal remains were buried in the Nieuwe Kerk, in Amsterdam.

Although the tortures had done irreparable damage to his physical body, his mind and talent had not weakened under the misery he had endured, as is reflected in one of the few works he is known to have painted in England. It is the tableau of Jesus with the Pharisees and the adulterous woman (John 8:3-11). This painting is also a sort of revenge of this great artist. In it he depicts those who were the chief offenders of his persecution as the sinister figures of the Pharisees. We can recognise in the painting the portraits of the clergymen *Geesteranus* and *Spranckhuysen* as well as the cruel bailiff of Haarlem, *Cornelis van Teylingen*.



Torrentius and his friend, the wealthy merchant *Coppens*, were associated with the ‘*Remonstrant*’ movement, which the Church saw as a great threat to its authority and the unity of the state. Furthermore, Torrentius was accused of being part of the “*secte den Roose Cruce*”, and, in the words of the Mayor and Alderman of Haarlem, “...*one Torrentius, who is said to be one of the principal members of the aforesaid sect.*” Merely being accused of being a Remonstrant was sufficient cause for incarceration, for civil war had nearly broken out in 1623 due to the widening gulf that had opened up between the Remonstrants, who sought freedom of thought and speech, and the increasingly conservative forces within Calvinism. But being accused of being one of the principal members of the ‘*Broeders van het Roozenkruis*’ was an entirely more sinister matter and one deserving of burning at the stake.

The arrest and incarceration of Coppens and Torrentius, and later the torture of Torrentius on the accusation of being one of the brethren of the Rose Cross, was a heavy blow for the Rosicrucian presence in Holland. But the influence of the *Broeders van het Roozenkruis* remained ‘*sub rosa*’ and influenced, for example, the pioneering philosophical work of Holland’s greatest philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. Indeed, some of the core principles of the original brethren of the Rose Cross finally became a formalised system of philosophical thought through the life work of Spinoza. His ethics were, even in his own day, seen as rising above the bickering differences of belief between the three Abrahamic faiths which had for centuries persecuted each other.



Baruch Spinoza

Tellingly, in one of his treatises Spinoza ends with a rose, which in Rosicrucian symbolism represented the human soul and eternal link with the Divine. Attached to a key, Spinoza wore this seal as a symbol of his entrance to a divine truth. Like a true Rosicrucian, Spinoza sought as far as possible to live the life of an unknown servant of humankind and even forbade his name to be mentioned on his *Ethica*, which was completed in 1665. Both in his *Korte Verhandelingen* (Short Discourses) and the notes of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* he recommends secrecy. His desire for secrecy, coupled with not mentioning his name on his writings, is wholly in line with the traditions of the early 17th century authors and defenders of the allegorical Brethren of the Rose Cross. In times when free thought and free speech could lead to severe punishment and even execution, such advice was a reflection of the times and place in which he lived.

In times when free thought and free speech could lead to severe punishment and even execution, such advice was a reflection of the times and place in which he lived.

Torrentius was not the only, nor even the first, Rosicrucian martyr. In 1620, *Adam Haslmayr*, secretary to Archduke Maximilian von Habsburg, together with others accused of being Rosicrucians, were sentenced as heretics and dabblers in magic and were sent as slaves to work on galleys for the rest of their lives. *Wassenaers Historisch Verhael* (Wassenaer’s Historical Story) states that at the same time, five fratres Rosae Crucis were hanged in Germany.

Rosicrucian Symbols in the Art of Painting

Although it was alleged during Torrentius’ trial that he was connected with the Rosicrucians, indeed, was one of their main leaders, some argued that this was merely a fabrication to try to bolster the case of the prosecution. However, we can see in the few of his surviving paintings some secret signs that would indicate that he may have had some Rosicrucian connections.



In modern times, Rosicrucians reach a certain part of their studies where they are given the title *Frater (or Soror) Rosae Crucis*, designated nowadays as *FRC* and *SRC*. Similar titles existed in Rosicrucian circles in Torrentius' day. In his painting, *Emblematic Still Life* (1614), the letters 'ER+', or *Eques Rosae Crucis* (Knight of the Rose Cross), appear. Instead of a specific letter being used for the word 'Kruis' or 'Cross', a '+' sign was used. The work as a whole appears as an emblem of moderation, one of the key Rosicrucian principles of his day.

There is yet another item worth mentioning. In the painting of the adulterous woman, in which Torrentius depicts Jesus writing the initials 'RV' with his finger in the soil, we can see at the head of the 'R' a small rose in the still wet paint. An important discovery in the field of painting is the fact that several of the old Masters painted according to a geometrical system when determining the size and composition of their paintings. De Haas has shown that geometrical Rosicrucian symbols are not only the basis of the paintings of Torrentius

but also of some works of Rembrandt, especially the *Nachtwacht* (Night Watch). It is possible that several of these old master artists were secretly associated with the Rosicrucian Order.

The connection between Rembrandt and the Order, although perhaps tenuous on the surface, is reinforced by the fact that in the foreground of the *Nachtwacht* a red rose was originally painted, though *Banning Cocq* (who commanded the Company in the painting) later replaced it with an orange on the copy in the British Museum. It can also be shown that the geometrical basis of the composition of the *Nachtwacht* is founded on the aforementioned Rosicrucian symbols.

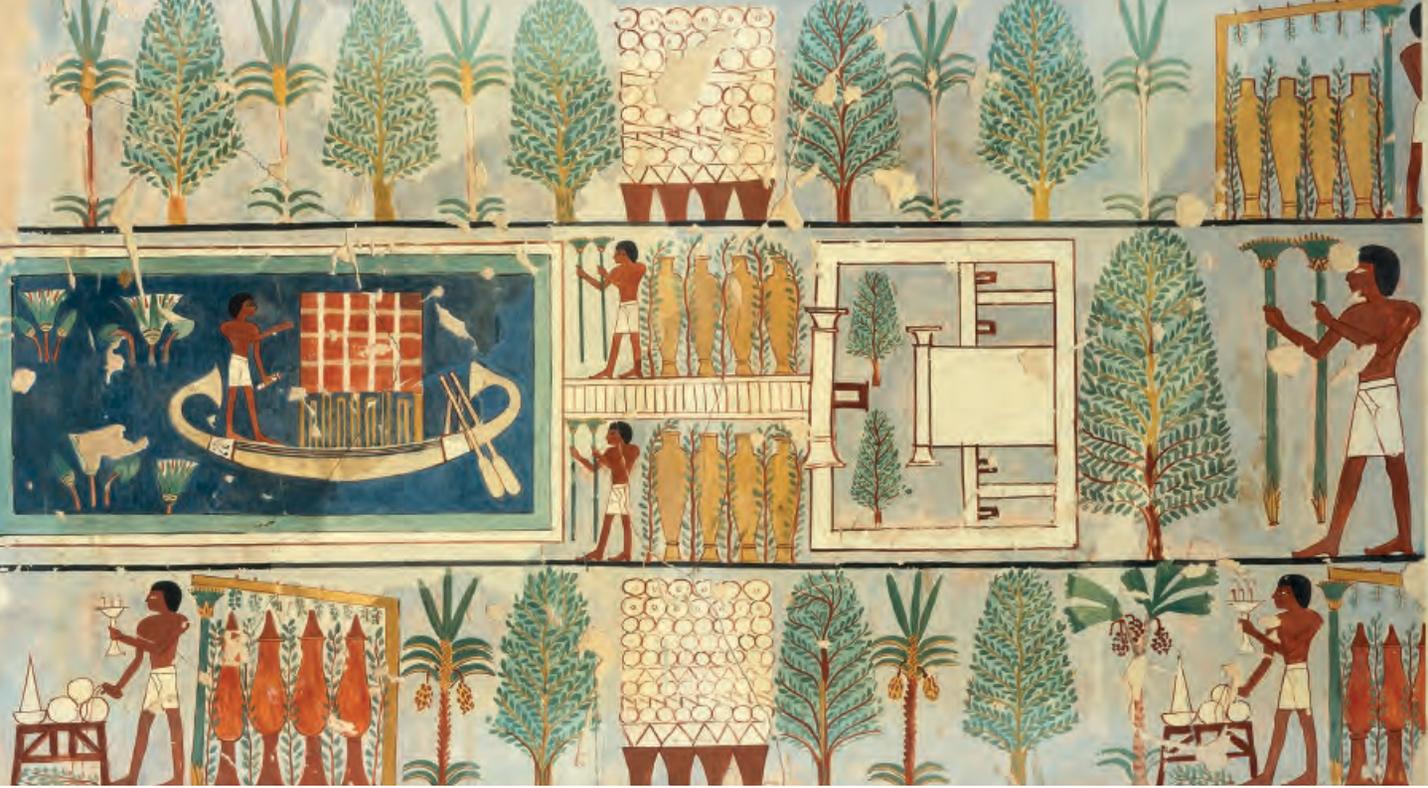
Footnotes

1. *Natural Philosophy* (Latin *philosophia naturalis*) was the precursor of *Natural Science*, which took hold in Europe during the mid to late 17th century. Natural Philosophy was the philosophical (as opposed to empirical) study of nature and the physical universe.



The Nightwatch (detail) by Rembrandt.





Funeral Ritual in a Garden. This facsimile painting copies a section of wall painting in the tomb of Minnakht (TT 87) in western Thebes.

by **Mary Jones**

Ancient Egyptian Gardens



Modern Egypt consists of a wide river bordered by green fields with the ever-present threat of the sands of the Sahara to the West and Eastern Deserts slowly creeping towards the river. That is probably what most visitors remember. But there is another part of the country that is less visited and that is the northern Delta area with its river branches and lakes.

From space, the outline of the Nile Valley and the Delta is prominent and reminds one of the lotus flower which features so prominently in ancient Egypt. However, any traveller to Egypt in our own time will visit the temples of Upper Egypt and what we see amounts to viewing an ancient mummy compared to what the original landscape must have looked like. So, what did ancient Egypt actually look like?

Back in Time

If we could travel back more than 3,000 years, we would find a completely different scene. To us it would seem like a paradise. The temples were a riot of colours, flags waving in the breeze, sunlight glinting off the gold-plated tops of obelisks and all surrounded by orchards and gardens. It is sometimes hard to visualise this today, so let us go on a brief journey back in time.

Ancient Egyptian gardens were filled with birds and plants, sometimes they were arranged in terraces, like Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, and decorated with papyrus clumps which would be harvested to provide writing materials for the household or temples. In tombs, we find images of pergolas covered



with vines and artificial ponds with fish and many different fruit trees and flowers chosen for their beauty and fragrance such as waterlilies, roses and jasmine; and among the trees you would find apples, grapes, olives, persea, sycamore, date palms, figs and pomegranates.



It wasn't just Egypt that treasured its gardens, all ancient civilisations built and adored their gardens. We need only think of the *'Hanging Gardens of Babylon'*, the gardens of Persia, and the vast market gardens of Central Mexico that so astonished the Spanish conquerors. These were not primitive people, but sophisticated and cultured societies. In Egypt, gardens were small oases of peace and tranquillity. From their writings, we know that the ancient Greeks and Romans expressed admiration for Egyptian gardens which contained elements which, in due course, were brought to Europe. We have the following description from the temple of Horus at Edfu:

The countryside is for Horus: its birds are more numerous than locusts, its fields flourish with cereals, all its basins are filled with lotus buds and flowers, and the land is thriving. No weeds grow there, the grain harvest is abundant, the branches of trees are well-placed and the basins are filled with flowers.

We find terraced gardens, like the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut, long before the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were even thought of. Egyptian gardens were cooled by water channels long before the first of the Persian Paradise gardens had been started. And they even had atrium gardens far in advance of the ones found in Pompeii.

Queen Hatshepsut's Temple

Trees and plants were a vital part of all gardens, particularly those attached to the great temples. It is difficult to believe today that every temple had its own garden inside the temple walls as well as in the fields surrounding the great house of the god. On the walls of Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir-el-Bahri, we see images of incense trees and plants that her expeditions brought back from the land of Punt, believed to have been located

in either modern-day Somalia or Yemen.

We also see gardens in paintings and models of the tombs. For those fortunate enough to pass the test of having their heart weighed against the feather of Maat, the afterlife was portrayed as an image of Egypt with its idyllic gardens. We can see this in many of the famous tomb paintings, where life continued in an idealised version of the life they had known when alive.

Every temple needed their special incense trees and bushes for daily use. The trees and bushes in the gardens as well as the lotuses (actually African water lilies) in the sacred lakes surrounded by flowers and trees, were considered holy, as they lay both inside and in the immediate surrounds of the *'home of the god'* or *'goddess.'* These trees and plants provided food, fruit, fuel, wood and perfumes for personal use as well as for bouquets.

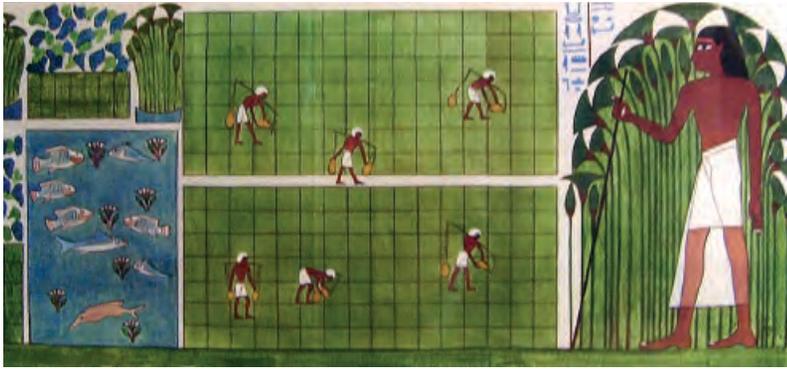
Temple Gardens

Ancient Egyptian temples represented a sort of heaven, even if not the whole known universe, where the *divine essence* would manifest. The symbolism continued inside the temple where columns, such as in the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak represented a papyrus marsh and the tops of the columns had capitals of various plants.



Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple features images of trees and plants.





Tomb painting of the gardens of Amun at the temple of Karnak, from the tomb of Nakht, the chief gardener. Early 14th century BCE.

Recent excavations in the Eastern Delta, have revealed the great extent of orchards around the temples and palaces there. Also at Amarna, traces of extensive gardens have survived because the city was abandoned and not disturbed until the excavations in the 19th century. Those parts of houses and temples which have been uncovered were painted with images of papyrus, lotuses, palm trees and other plants, flowers and fruits.

We have a description of the gardens at the mortuary temple of the 11th Dynasty Pharaoh Mentuhotep II at Deir-el-Bahri next to Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple:

Sycamore-fig trees formed an avenue beside the ramp up to the temple. On either side of them were rows of tamarisk trees. Between the sycamores were two rectangular flower beds about 2x7 metres. The area covered by the plantation was about 50 square metres, the length of a standard Olympic-size swimming pool.

Gardens were an integral part of temples. Inside the main gateway, there was usually an open space which often contained trees and flowers. Between the buildings were larger gardens, usually consisting of a vineyard and pools surrounded by papyrus, mandrake, poppy, cornflowers and daisies. In the pools were water lilies and papyrus reeds. There were gardens inside courtyards and gardens were also created at points along the processional



way between temples. Think of the processional avenue of sphinxes between Karnak and Luxor with gardens on either side. It must have been a magnificent sight.

Amarna or Akhetaten was a new city which Pharaoh Akhenaten filled with parks and gardens. Cypress and willow trees and almond and pistachio trees were also grown along with figs, juniper berries, castor oil bushes, carob trees, plums and the moringa and olive trees.

Funerary Gardens

Funerary gardens were miniature versions of house gardens that were placed in tomb courtyards. They usually had a small square house or pavilion with wooden columns, surrounded by a wall. Within the wall was a pool surrounded by a row of trees or bushes. The house resembled a kiosk within a garden.

We know what funerary gardens looked like as one was actually found in Luxor at the entrance to a 12th Dynasty tomb on Luxor's West Bank. The garden was small – 3x2 metres (10x6½ feet) sectioned into squares. The plants grown there each had a symbolic meaning. Each small compartment possibly contained a different plant, one of which we know was lettuce, which was associated with fertility and, as a result, the return to life of the deceased in the tomb. There were also two raised beds which probably contained trees because a tamarisk stump was found in one of them.

Trees

Many of the plants had symbolic meanings. In some paintings we can see the Lotus (water lily) symbolising Upper Egypt and the Papyrus symbolising Lower Egypt, often intertwined in a symbol of unity. Trees were sacred to certain *Neters* or deities: the date palm to *Ra* and *Min*, the doum-palm to *Thoth*, the sycamore to *Hathor* and the tamarisk to *Osiris*. As I said before we find images of



plants and trees in the remains of the city of Akhetaten and in the Akh Menu building at the eastern end of the Karnak temple complex in Luxor.

The sycamore-fig tree was especially sacred to Hathor. It could grow some distance from the Nile, at the edge of the desert, but only in well-watered areas. The tree's life-versus-death symbolism was down to the fact that it lost its leaves during the winter months when it looked barren and lifeless. But in early spring the *'flowers of life'* buds appeared which became new green fruit even before the leaves had returned. Like the winter evergreens in other parts of the world, the sycamore-fig was seen by Egyptians as bringing life in the midst of death.



Hunting in the papyrus thicket; excerpt from a mural in the tomb of Nebamun in Thebes-West, British Museum, tempera on plaster, height 81cm, 18th Dynasty, before 1350 BCE.

During the 4th Dynasty, the goddess *Hathor* absorbed the attributes of the sacred sycamore spirit at the ancient city of *Heliopolis*, known as *Iunu* to the Egyptians. Just a short distance to the south Hathor was worshipped as the Mistress of the Southern Sycamore at Memphis.

One of her aspects was as the goddess connected with the *Duat* or underworld and the sycamore-fig was imagined as existing in the afterlife in order to provide nourishment to departed souls. She was the tree-goddess who nourished the *ba*-souls of all the dead who entered the *Duat*, the world beyond this one.

The *Tamarisk* tree was associated with *Osiris*. In ancient Egyptian religion, when the body of Osiris was imprisoned in a chest and thrown into the Nile, it floated to Lebanon where it came to rest and a tamarisk tree grew up around the chest and enveloped and protected it with its trunk. Isis found the tree which was, by then, a pillar in the local king's palace. She retrieved the chest and returned it to Egypt.

It is not clear if Tamarisk species are fire-adapted, but many of the trees are able to resprout from the stump after fires. The ancient Egyptians saw in this tree the death and rebirth of Osiris. A tamarisk tree in a garden was a powerful link to the resurrection of Osiris.



Funerary Garden Example. From Luxor, Southern Asasif, Tomb of Meketre.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1920





Rectangular fishpond with ducks and lotuses planted round with date palms and fruit trees, in a fresco from the Tomb of Nebamun, Luxor, 18th Dynasty.

It is uncertain where the date palm was first cultivated; it was so long ago in the past. It probably originated from the Fertile Crescent region between Egypt and Mesopotamia and was a treasured garden plant because its fruit.

The pomegranate tree had a very old and symbolic meaning, representing prosperity, fertility and wealth. The sheer number of seeds within each fruit symbolised wealth, while the blood-red seeds symbolised blood or life energy. As far as we can tell, the pomegranate appeared in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom but became much more prevalent during the following New Kingdom. Pomegranate juice was added to or made into wine. It was also used in medicine in preparations against intestinal diseases, dysentery and stomach-ache.

There is a scene from the tomb of Nebamun showing his beautiful garden filled with pomegranate and date palm trees surrounding a pond. And the

pomegranate is also found on many funerary offering tables and even in love songs. Pomegranate plants have also been found flourishing in gardens providing shade in royal palaces or villas and funerary or cult temples, as well as the villas of officials and wealthier citizens.

The Persea is a tree name associated with an ancient Egyptian tree that was cultivated for its fruit long before it was called the avocado tree. It is an evergreen tree belonging to the laurel family.

Water Lilies not Lotus

In our view of ancient Egypt, we often refer to the '*Lotus*' flower, even though it is not found in Egypt but is native to South and Southeast Asia and has been known in Persia as well for thousands of years. It is called '*Nelumbo nucifera*' and is not the same as the '*lotus*' referred to in Egyptian tourist brochures.





Pomegranate



Olive



*Avocado Tree,
member of the
Persia species*



Poppy



Date Palm



Juniper



Willow



White Water Lily



However, because the name *'lotus'* is so widespread and associated with Egypt and wetlands throughout Africa, we may as well continue using this term to refer to the two water lily species native to Egypt that have erroneously been assigned the name *'lotus.'* The Egyptian lotuses are the *'blue water lily'* or *'blue lotus'* (*Nymphaea caerulea*), which appears during daylight only, and the *'white water lily'* or *'white lotus'* (*Nymphaea lotus*) which flowers only at night. They are both true aquatic plants where the roots and stems stay submerged while the leaves float on the surface and the flowers emerge above the water.

The blue lotus flower-bud rises out of the water at first light and as the day progresses, it opens wide, on or slightly above the water's surface where the fragrance attracts beetles or other insects, especially bees, which pollinate it. Towards sunset, the flower closes back into a bud and, with its precious trove of fertilised seeds now safely protected from predators, it sinks into the water. A new stem emerges the next morning, either with a new leaf or a new flower-bud, and the process repeats itself.

The *Blue Lotus* grew wild and was sacred to the Egyptians as a symbol of creation and rebirth. In one of their creation stories, a single blue lotus was instrumental

in bringing the entire universe into being at Heliopolis (Iunu). Heliopolis, was where the sun god first emerged from a lotus appearing above the *'primordial waters.'* At night, the sun god was enveloped by the flower as it sank into the *Duat*, the underworld. Due to its colour, it was identified, in some beliefs, as having been the original container, like an egg, of *Atum* or *Ra*, both solar deities. It was also the symbol of the Egyptian god *Nefertum* who was the son of *Ptah* of Memphis. In Utterance 249 of the Pyramid Texts in the tomb of the 5th Dynasty pharaoh *Unas* we read: *'Unas appears as Nefertum, as the lotus flower at the nose of Ra, as he comes forth from the horizon each day.'* They also saw, in the flower's daily re-emergence from the waters, a beautiful symbol of their own personal resurrection one day.

Also native to Egypt, is the *White Lotus* which is often depicted in ancient Egyptian art and stone carvings, including on the walls of the temple of Karnak. Unlike the blue lotus, the white lotus, which appeared only at night, may have been associated with the rites pertaining to the *Duat* and the afterlife. A number of pharaohs' mummies were covered with the petals of the white lotus. In many tomb paintings, there are depictions of mourners at a funeral banquet wearing a wreath of white lotus flowers on their head or holding them to their nose as a symbol of resurrection. There are indications that it was grown in special farms over 4,000 years ago to produce enough flowers for votive offerings.

The ancient Egyptians cultivated the white lotus in ponds and marshes and believed that the flower gave them strength and power. Whereas the blue lotus opens in the morning, the white lotus tends to open in the late afternoon and early evening. Egyptian tomb paintings from the 18th Dynasty provide some of the earliest evidence of ornamental horticulture and landscape design, depicting lotus ponds surrounded by symmetrical rows of acacias and palms.

In temples we find that the white lotus was one of the two earliest Egyptian column capital motifs, the topmost part being the opening bud of the flower. At that time, the most important column capitals were those based on the lotus and papyrus plants, and these, with the palm tree capital, were the chief types used by the ancient Egyptians. Perfume was extracted from the white lotus and added to the cones shown on peoples' heads at social gatherings. It has also been suggested that, at such gatherings, the guests



Mesu Smelling a Lotus.
Relief, Tomb of Heri (TT 12), woman, Mesu. Circa 1525–1504 BCE.



would dip lotus flowers into their wine to produce a mildly narcotic effect!

The *Pink Lotus* (*Nelumbo nucifera*), which is the one common to South and South East Asia, is not, strictly speaking, a water lily and is commonly referred to as the '*sacred lotus*', for it is revered in Hinduism and Buddhism as a symbol of rebirth, re-emergence and spiritual enlightenment. It spread through Persia to the Middle East and can now be found in Egypt as well. The whole flower is edible and boiled young leaves are eaten as a vegetable supplement. The stamens are used for flavouring tea as are the dried petals. The roots are eaten throughout Asia where they can be eaten fresh or used in soups and curries. So far, we have no direct evidence as to whether or not the ancient Egyptians used their blue and white lotus plants for food as well.

Incense

The ancient Egyptians went to great lengths to cultivate incense trees. In Queen Hatshepsut's temple on the West bank of the Nile at Deir-el-Bahri, we see paintings and carvings of people bringing living trees in baskets back from the land of Punt (either Yemen or Somalia). They may have been frankincense trees or myrrh shrubs. Myrrh has a thorny trunk and branches and issues a reddish gum. Frankincense is a resin released from the tree by cutting the bark and allowing the white sap to drain out into bowls, much like the tapping of rubber trees.

Incense was burned to counteract or obscure bad odours and to appease the gods with its pleasant aroma. Resin balls have been found in many prehistoric Egyptian tombs too. One of the oldest extant incense burners originates from the 5th Dynasty in the years following the building of the Giza pyramids.

Many people, including Rosicrucians, produce their own incense today. The raw materials are made into a powder and then mixed together with a binder to form a paste, which, for direct-burning incense, is then cut and dried into pellets. You can also make incense by powdering frankincense or resin and mixing it with essential oils. Floral fragrances are the most common, like the Rosicrucian Moss Rose incense cubes. After preparation,



Egyptian papyrus paintings featuring water lilies.

the damp incense mixture is rolled out into a frame and left until it has become firm. It is then cut into small cubes, coated with clay powder to prevent adhesion, and allowed to fully harden and dry, either in direct sunlight or, more commonly nowadays, in a low-temperature kiln.

The Acacia tree has yellow or white flowers, depending on the type of tree. It grows throughout Egypt and its gum was used in fixing paint and various curative remedies. The Tamarisk produces a resin similar to frankincense and these trees were found around the Osireion at Abydos.

All the plants that appeared in Egyptian gardens had some use, either as food, medicine, incense or aromatic oils, and they were carefully planted to take advantage of the beauty of each plant. A pool in the garden provided a cool spot for relaxation and contemplation, as well as a small habitat for fish and water lilies. Small buildings in the garden provided places to honour ancestors and deities, and arbours, filled with grapes, both decorated the gardens and provided fruit and wine for the family.

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Mysteries of the Château du Plessis-Bourré

by Johan Arnesson

The story of the *Château du Plessis-Bourré* begins with the French merchant *Jacques Coeur* (c. 1395 – 1456) who rose from humble origins to become '*Maître des Monnaies*' (*Master of the Mint*) in 1436. In 1439, he further rose to become the '*Grand Argentier du Royaume de France*' (*Minister of Finance*) to King *Charles VII* of France (reigned 1422 - 1461).

It was during this period in history that *Joan of Arc*, the '*Maid of Orléans*' (c. 1412 – 1431) lived and inspired the hearts and minds of thousands of French soldiers to fight for the French king. Jacques Coeur amassed great wealth through banking, trade and the mining of precious metals. It was darkly rumoured as well that he had mastered the alchemical art of transmuting base metals into silver and the castle, which forms the main theme of this article, is said to have many early signs of alchemical activity from the period in which Jacques Coeur's wife managed works at the castle. His motto was proudly proclaimed: '*To the valiant heart, nothing*





Jacques Coeur

is impossible. But transmuting base metals into gold? Maybe some things weren't possible even for him!

While driving through the French department of Cher I checked into a B&B in the town of Bourges. Over supper, the husband and wife politely asked if there was anything in the area I would like to see. I explained I was on a private journey through France to soak up its ancient heritage, though especially to discover whatever Rosicrucian connections might still exist. The atmosphere in the little kitchen changed immediately as the husband, assisted by his gentle wife, told me in hushed, solemn tones that they advised me therefore not to leave town until I had visited the house of Jacques Coeur; for this man, they said, was reputed to have had a close historical association with the *Château du Plessis-Bourré* which, as far as they were concerned, had been a major centre of Rosicrucian activity many centuries ago. It was, they earnestly assured me, by far the most important place I could visit in the region, if seeking the pre-Renaissance roots of the Rosicrucian brotherhood was what I sought. A lump rose to my throat as I realised that I could be about to realise the major purpose of my journey of discovery.



Old house in Bourges thought to be Jacques Coeur's birthplace.

The house that Jacques Coeur had lived in for part of his life was very interesting from an esoteric point of view. There was a definite feeling of mystery and presence, and clear signs of someone's preoccupation with alchemy. The stone work in particular had intriguing engravings suggesting that a great alchemist had once lived there. I was filled with joy and excitement that I had found the first hint of the esoteric mystery that had been the main reason for my meandering journey.

Plessis-Bourré

Château du Plessis-Bourré, is described in travel brochures as a “...medieval fortress, 15 kilometres from Angers in idyllic countryside.” Bourré, the second half of the château's name, refers to one of the area's most enigmatic historical figures from the late medieval period. *Jean Bourré* (1424-1506) is virtually unknown today, despite the extraordinary competence and loyalty of this man to successive French kings who bestowed upon him their utmost trust in permitting him to manage their finances. He was secretary, treasurer and confidant of *King Louis XI* (reigned 1461 – 1483) and later treasurer under *Charles VIII* (reigned 1483 - 1498) and *Louis XII* (reigned 1498 - 1515).

The first half of the name of the château, ‘*Plessis*’, refers to a woven hedge around a property. Jean Bourré and his wife *Marguerite de Feschal*, bought the property, then called *Plessis-du-Vent*, and began their project of building a magnificent, if large, home. While Jean carried out his royal duties for the king at court, far away, his wife managed the construction of the château, organising roughly hewn stone to be ferried down the Loire river from Saumur to be dressed on site and used in the construction of the château.

While many of the buildings listed in guidebooks for the area have long since fallen into ruin, Plessis-Bourré is a remarkable exception, for it is largely unchanged from the structure raised in the years between 1468 and 1473, having survived many turbulent times. Its rectangular shape, with four round towers on the corners, a wide moat and drawbridge, hints at something exceptional. It was





Painting of Jean Bourré.

clearly not for an ordinary person or family, but for a man of considerable wealth and more than just a hint of esoteric mystery.

A Magnificent Ceiling

The most intriguing part of the Château is found on the first floor in the 'Guards Room' with its exquisite 11x7½ metre ceiling, with six painted sections separated by wooden beams. Each section has four hexagonal compartments depicting, all in all, 24 allegorical scenes harking back to the early years of alchemical enquiry in Europe. Eight of the scenes depict people from medieval legends accompanied by text. The other 16 scenes depict symbols that would have been well-understood by the early alchemists of the time, though some of these scenes are difficult to relate to hermetic symbolism from later centuries, the sort that are well understood nowadays. Despite the difficulty of interpreting some of the scenes, the ceiling is undoubtedly one of the finest examples of 15th century hermetic art to have survived into our times.

Some of the paintings had been hidden for a long time behind a false ceiling and were rediscovered only relatively recently. The paintings are mainly grey on a blue-green background and it is believed they were made by the hand of Bourré himself. They reflect the height and richness of French medieval art in a visual, story-telling medium that, from the Renaissance onwards, had generally appeared in print rather than in buildings.

When I entered the room for the first time (I have visited many times since) I was aghast at the atmosphere and sheer aura of presence it evoked. Even after so many centuries of constant use, I could smell the ceiling wood, as fresh as if it were newly erected. It caused me to involuntarily breathe in deeply as I closed my eyes while trying to intuit what the room had been like when new. With a sense of depth of both space and time, I could feel

something very special still there, a sort of presence or reminder of something beautiful and spiritually majestic that had once occurred in this very chamber, not once but many times and carrying into our times echoes of spiritual accomplishment at the highest levels attainable.

The rich imagery was quite staggering as I looked at these 24 enigmatic pictures of animals and strange creatures, as well as male and female figures in bizarre poses surrounded by abundant vegetation. The alchemical symbolism on several panels was obvious and of special interest to me, but the majority seemed curiously at odds with the more conventional images of alchemy that I had seen countless times in modern books. Virtually all panels, however, appeared to be early precursors of the style and contents of alchemical symbolic art which became standardised in Europe during the following century.

Alchemy

Modern mystics, like the Rosicrucians, often refer to themselves as '*transcendental alchemists*', referring to the '*Great Work*' of turning base metals into gold as an inner, spiritual process, rather than a physical one. From the discoveries made in the 20th century, we know of course that transforming one element into another, heavier element, can only occur through the nuclear process of fusion of two or more atomic nuclei into a new single nucleus. And while this occurs in the heart of a star or in a nuclear fusion reactor, it is not likely to occur at ordinary room temperature and pressure through ordinary chemical processes; at least as far as we know thus far!

Transcendental alchemy is, today, usually explored through dry academic treatises and metaphysical abstractions. But for me, the attraction of old alchemical imagery prods my mind to discover questions, associations, insights and plain silence before a mystery that maybe, just maybe, is based on historical fact and chemical processes that the modern world has yet to discover, or perhaps re-discover. Only a psyche immersed in ancient mythology, bible stories, myths and other old literature of the times, along with a

When I entered the room..., I was aghast at the atmosphere and sheer presence it evoked.





The Guard's Room - The painted ceiling.



The Guard's Room.



The goose that one shoes.

good knowledge of old French, Latin and Greek, as well as an ear for sounds and puns, could produce this particular imagery. Alas though, this is no longer part of any modern curriculum, to our great loss.

Some time later I discovered a connection between Jacques Coeur and Jean Bourré. It was through the writings of the French alchemist Eugène Canseliet (1899 – 1982). It is said that Canseliet was the only student of the mysterious *Fulcanelli*, a pen name used by a French alchemist and esoteric author whose identity is still not definitely known. Fulcanelli was a 20th century alchemist who had revived interest in the subject through his and Canseliet's 1926 book *'The Mystery of the Cathedrals'*, republished in 1976. Apparently, Fulcanelli urged Canseliet to put *'FCH'* after his name to denote himself as an adept. Perhaps these letters, that had first appeared in the 18th century, scratched onto the walls of this château and other buildings, referred to *'Frères Chevaliers d'Héliopolis'* (*Brother Knights of Héliopolis*).

The connection Canseliet made between the two residences in Bourges and Plessis-Bourré was evidently based on circles and triangles (suggesting fire and water), the rose and small sculptured figures tucked into the masonry. A key was the *'marmoset'*, a quaint figure from the *'Arabian Nights'* holding a jug and a cup, with a banner of mysterious words. But what of the paintings?

The Paintings

The two groups of four hexagonal scenes nearest the fireplace of the *Guards Room* depict various folk tales and proverbs to warn would-be seekers and alchemists of the dangers that lay in store for them if they embarked on the *'Royal Way'* without adequate preparation. Their satirical and moral intent, set within the harsh, sexist mindset of the times, is clear. A few examples follow:-

Loie qu'on ferre (*The goose that one shoes*): Here a woman holds a goose while a man attempts to put a shoe on





The fable of the eels.



The sayings of Chichiface.

its ill-fitting webbed foot. This suggests that a seeker should not waste time on useless tasks or attempt to do things that can never happen in real life. The saying can be understood as telling people that they are spending their time doing something pointless, wasting time and applying effort on something that does not need doing.

La fable des anguilles (*The fable of eels*): This shows a man and a woman trying to break eels across their knees as though they were sticks ready to start a fire. Eels are as long as broom handles but completely non-rigid and floppy, which suggests the two are engaged in a futile task. Doing something that is unachievable, should never be started.

La pie cousue (*The pie sewn*): This cruel act of rough justice depicts a woman sewing up the supposedly pie looking anus of a magpie with the intention of silencing its constant chattering. But the woman evidently does not know front from back or that the squawking comes from the other end of the bird. It has been suggested this rustic act is meant to tell the visitor that talking too much does more harm than good, in this case both fatal harm to the bird, and harm to those who have to continue listening to its incessant chattering. The magpie's *'speech'* symbolises communication and creative

expression. When a magpie speaks, we need to listen with great attention to what is being said, regardless of our distaste for the painful home truths being spread about us. The magpie's chatter is also a symbolic message that we need to say what is on our minds more clearly, articulate our words properly, and not chatter like a magpie. Speak up, express your opinions calmly and rationally, be creative with your spoken words. So, the woman sewing up the bird's anus rather than its beak is wasting her time, because the uncomfortable message about her will still come out of the magpie's beak.

Le dit de la Chichiface (*The sayings of Chichiface.*): This shows an animal, gaunt of face and body, having been forced for 200 years to feed only on *'faithful women'*, an odd analogy to the modern mind but not so in mediaeval times. In the painting, however, the creature is happy as it bites the flesh of a fleeing woman. In other words, finding its food, namely a faithful woman, was depicted as being as rare as creating the Philosopher's Stone. In the male-dominated society of the time, no thought was given to the difficulty (or ease) of finding a *'faithful man.'*

The remaining 16 paintings clustered in groups of four have early alchemical themes but accurate interpretation,





The two Rams.



The female Bear and two Monkeys.

while difficult, is not impossible. A few however, clearly depict particular stages of alchemical transformation, while others appear to be supplementary comments on the alchemist's required attitude, the nature of the process or the substances used.

Les Deux Beliers (The Two Rams): This, the first stage of the alchemical process, denotes the constellation of Aries. The terrestrial and celestial rams suggest that aspiring alchemists must deal with both a spiritual and earthly struggle, hidden initially from sight, but ultimately attracted to each other so powerfully that the quest denoted by Aries becomes objectively realised by the aspiring alchemist. Symbolical of sulphur, denoting the soul, the ram is also the carrier of the fabled Golden Fleece from Greek mythology (Philosopher's Stone in this context) and finding the fleece is the ultimate goal of the aspirant's quest.

L'ourse et deux Singes (The Female Bear and two Monkeys): This painting commenting on *'the work'*, suggests the balancing act required by the adept to steer the work through all its stages. One monkey, chained by its neck, follows nature while the other, chained by its stomach and blowing a long trumpet, lets itself be carelessly carried along. The bear hints at the

constellation of *'Ursa Major'* (Great Bear) and the Pole Star in the constellation *'Ursa Minor'* (Little Bear), a light source denoting the constant, unchanging, guiding though faint light of all seekers. The bear in the painting also represents the *'materia prima'*, the primordial, original material of the universe, associated by alchemists with Mercury (both the element and the Greek/Roman fleet-footed god), which in turn symbolises the wisdom of sages of the past that all alchemists, aspiring or accomplished, must eventually seek to understand and to live by their spiritual tenets.

L'âne chantant sa messe (The donkey sings his mass) suggests that the fool is the wisest. The Great Work required a positive disposition, courage, enthusiasm and both spiritual maturity and innocence. The ass which carried Jesus into Jerusalem, was the carrier of a priceless treasure, the Sun. The ass is therefore the carrier of the Mystery sought by all true alchemists. Those who have visited Chartres cathedral may have seen on the outside of the south tower a small, now-eroded, statue of a donkey holding a type of zither. As a carrier of the Mystery, the donkey plays music and thereby provides the key to the cathedral's strict harmonic proportions. The Mystery



involves the laws of vibrations and harmony that the student or adept must learn to use in order to completely transform their being.

La fontaine philosophale (The philosophical fountain) This image has historically caused the greatest amount of comment and outrage. From the middle of a hexagonal fountain, a lion spits 'water' into the mouth of a naked young man. A young woman, with head shaven and skirt lifted, urinates in a male manner into a hat held by another naked young man. This scene depicts polarities and the two philosophical waters that eventually coagulate into a unity to finally produce the Philosopher's Stone. Philosophical mercury, a source of rejuvenation, is a solvent that whitens the dark earth.

We must not forget, in our alchemical researches, that alchemical paintings, engravings and statues, almost without exception, allude to well-known spiritual processes. Aspirants seeking the Golden Way and its ultimate prize the Philosopher's Stone, seek, above all, to become harmonised with the forces of the body and soul that come together in a special manner with the purpose of transforming the consciousness from its usual, always-on-show, base, outer human cares of daily life, to the ever hidden, refined, inner concerns of the soul.

La jeune fille et la tortue (The girl and the long-tailed turtle): An adjoining painting depicts a young girl on a turtle (symbol of the Roman god Mercury), suggesting that the process of not only finding the Philosopher's Stone but merely finding the entrance to the Golden Way, is a painstakingly slow process, requiring extended periods of concentration and arduous work on oneself. The secret is hidden well beneath the turtle's shell, and the youth of the girl suggests the innocence and purity of intent required when attempting to both begin the journey and to reach its ultimate destination.

L'homme anguipède et la fileuse (the anguiped or snake-legged man and the spinner): This depicts a curious mythological figure, half-man, half-snake, with his arm around a naked, pregnant woman who is spinning with the aid of a spindle and distaff. A small child is sitting on the anguipede's back and sucking the anguipede's tail through a horn-like tube. Surrounded by heavy foliage, the scene suggests a stage close to the end of the alchemical process, for the transformation has finally produced the child (which is within the mother); namely, it has produced 'the red stone within the philosophical egg.'



The [indecent] Philosophical Fountain.



The Maiden and the long-tailed Turtle.





The Elephant, the Monkey and the Two Chests.



The Lion-man.



The Tamed Unicorn.



The black pregnant Siren.



The sailing trolley and its female guide.



The battle between the Eagle and the Lion.

Jean-Jacques Dejeunes - jjdejeunes.com





The snake legged man and the spinner.



The Phoenix.

With the foliage representing regeneration, the mother represents water, the universal solvent. Her work is to simmer the concoction with a secret fire at a precise temperature and for a precise period of time in order to produce the alchemical child. The man, symbolising the ‘*elementary fire*’, is related to the more delicate fire of maturation (the art of spinning) of the feminine nature that the adept must master.

Le phénix (The phoenix): Finally, the quintessence, the rising sun, the Golden Fleece, the Philosopher’s Stone, the firebird, emerges.

As for the rest of the paintings, commentary on them will be left for another article on the Château du Plessis-Bourré.

The Dragon and the Lion

The Centaur, the Elephant and Monkey

The Unicorn

The Two Dogs

The Pregnant Siren

The Chariot with Sails

In addition to the above, there will be other

articles on this topic, for it is an inexhaustible source for contemplation. If you read French, explanations for many of the paintings can be found in the book *Le Plessis-Bourré*.

In the room there is a small sculpture, an athanor or alchemist’s furnace with a mysterious fire supplying constant heat, here depicted as a nest from which two youths emerge. It is an unusual property for an athanor to possess, but placing my hands around it and briefly going inwards into my being, I could feel centuries of thoughts and high aspirations of previous aspirants come through to me as a deep emotion of reverence for the once secret quest of mediaeval alchemists before the advent of science.

Rational, scientific thought and procedures were not necessary for their quest. Knowledge about the rotation of the planets around the sun, the existence of other suns, galaxies and even the finite size of our universe, were not required. Through their methods, however archaic they may seem to our 21st century minds, these mystics still accomplished the spiritual liberation and illumination that so many of us yearn for today and would give a king’s ransom to acquire.

If you ever have the opportunity of visiting the Château du Plessis-Bourré, be sure not to miss it, for it is well worth the journey, and it could, for you, as it was for me, be a journey of true discovery.



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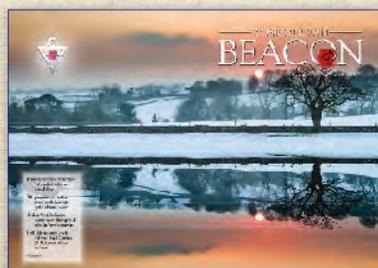
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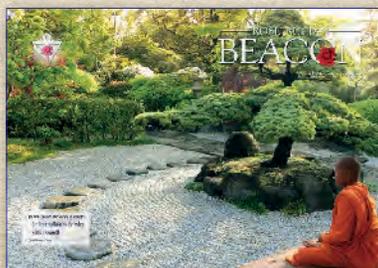
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What would life be like without our forest friends? If they were not here to care for their domain, who would we turn to when seeking solace in the deep silence of their forests? Who will look after the forests when our friends are gone?

Oh great source of all Light, the bright, the beautiful, the deep, the mysterious, guide us to find better ways of protecting our planet and its precious diversity of life.