

# ROSICRUCIAN BEACON

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### Cover spread

Spring carpet of bluebells





# Eternal Postulants

by **Claudio Mazzucco**  
Imperator of AMORC

**I**n this message I wish to address mainly those who joined the Rosicrucian Order within the last year and who are still forming their first impressions of Rosicrucianism. For the sake of clarity, the first thing that must be said is that the Order is not a correspondence course. This statement seems obvious, and no doubt you have already understood it. But a superficial or hasty evaluation can lead to confusion regarding the true nature of the Order.

In general, people who become Rosicrucians are looking for new answers to age-old questions. They want to know who they really are, whether some part of us lives after death, whether some part of us existed before this life, whether there is some intelligence that governs the world and whether this intelligence is immanent in all things or outside the world itself. Perhaps they want to know if it is possible to restore health in some way other than through traditional medicines, and further questions of this sort. Descartes, the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, proposed the use of



*'methodical doubt'* as a way to truth. Doubt is needed to progress in self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, and methodical doubt is one of several methods used by Rosicrucians.

Our Order encourages us not to accept claims purely on faith but to ask questions and to reflect, to seek through meditation and experience, the answers that satisfy us most at any one time. The Order is not, as I already said, a correspondence course. Its aim is not to provide intellectual information as in a school or university. The *Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis* has its source on the spiritual plane through which it is connected to the so-called *'Primordial Tradition'*, the seat of all spiritual knowledge. It follows that the knowledge that the Order transmits is not proportional to the information presented in its written teachings. In other words, the spiritual growth of a member is not necessarily proportional to the number of monograph lessons they have read. The knowledge we aspire to cannot be written down but must be reached as a result of harmonisation with the psychic and spiritual dimension of our being. What we provide through the weekly monograph lessons is a method that tends to establish a rhythm and an essential discipline for those who seek the answers to the aforementioned important questions.

Our first conclusion, then, is that the Order does not teach truths alone, but, notwithstanding its mystical heritage and exceptional cultural level, it also teaches a methodology for using those truths. With this in mind, it is important to remember that the essence of the Order transcends its material organisation. Our members come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and the monograph lessons issued by the Order to its members are written in a way that makes them comprehensible to everyone. However, we must not confuse the simplicity or complexity of a text with what the Order is actually about. To illustrate this with a simple analogy, we might say that we should not confuse a book of recipes with one of its delicious dishes. The first is but the tool to arrive at the second, and having read the recipe does not mean we are able to make the dish. It may be necessary to try many times before arriving at something that resembles the recipe; otherwise, the world would be full of great cooks.

And this is what a spiritual path is like. There are no short-cuts or simplifications. There are no masters who can *'awaken us'* with a magic word or gesture to make

us masters in our own right. Before we can answer even one of the preceding questions satisfactorily—meaning neither intellectually nor by citing famous texts, nor by repeating what we have heard from others, but rather with words that come from our own hearts and with words that leave the door open to further truths that respect the sensibilities of others—we must master our physical nature, master our passions, use language that represents the nobility of our quest, and develop ethics that reflect our lofty ideals. And all this requires work to integrate it into our lives.

**...we must master our physical nature, master our passions, use language that represents the nobility of our quest...**

Normally, the result comes neither tomorrow nor the day after tomorrow. As we proceed, we realise that the important thing is to be *on the Path*. Fundamentally, *it is the Path itself that matters* for it already contains all the truths we seek. And on the Path we always find other seekers with whom to share the difficulties and joys of the journey, which is to say that we find fraternity.

And here is the second conclusion: for each person, growth and inner development are individual processes, but we can benefit greatly from an environment that welcomes us and creates the necessary conditions for the practice of virtue, the exchange of opinions, and the mystical life of a group. Experiencing diversity is essential for spiritual development and for the awakening of the consciousness of the presence of the divinity within. For this reason, it becomes ever more important that the Rosicrucian Path is supported and strengthened by meeting other members of the Order in a fraternal and formal setting such as in a Lodge.

If you are new to the Order, I would like to repeat my welcome to you and remind you that the Order is always open to your ideas, suggestions and questions. To older members of the Order, I ask that you always keep alive the flame that brought you to the portals of our Order in search of answers to the fundamental questions of life, and that this enthusiasm reminds you that we all remain eternal postulants in the search for truth.





# THE WATER OF LIFE

by **Christopher Nyerges**

**W**ater is a shapeless, odourless, colourless and tasteless compound, scientifically referred to as H<sub>2</sub>O, which we all too often take for granted. Yet, a lack of drinking water, even for a few days, can cause us a great deal of harm. Our need for water is so basic and fundamental, yet we seldom take time to truly appreciate it, unless of course we are without it. Where there is no water, there is no life, and this lack of *drinkable* water has become a major concern in parts of the world.

Even the desert must have some water for its many tough life forms to exist. Few would call a desert an entirely barren wasteland, for water, very ancient water, is present in many deserts if one looks hard enough below the surface. Take, for example, the Sahara Desert. Thousands of years ago, what is now desert, was in fact, an extremely green land of huge lakes, rivers and savannahs. Due to climate change, what we find today is a sea of sand and rock punctuated by very rare oases. There is still water there, but now it is deep underground, though it is being extracted for mining and farming purposes in many countries, with the result that it will one day all be gone.





With only very minimal food but under otherwise favourable conditions, a healthy person can stay alive for a month or possibly two. But without water, you would be lucky to stay alive for a week. Those who know what a desert is like, know that, since water seeks the lowest available level, it can be successfully found by digging deep. They may dig at the base of a palm tree, near reeds, in a dry stream or lake-bed, or at the base of a mountain. And they know that cacti, with their high-water content, can supply them with sufficient water to survive for a while.

Deserts have long been a favourite spot for mystics seeking spiritual enlightenment because there, in the silence of a desert, the arid heat, and utter silence, drives one's thoughts inward. It is there, in the desert, that water is truly appreciated as the sacred element it is. In a desert, some animals that survive in what we would consider hostile conditions, never take a drink of water. They take their water from the plants they eat, and, in turn, the plants must have water to live. All of life is interdependent.

## Rain

The elusive desert water must be sought out, but what about rain drumming on our roofs? In the British Isles, especially on the west coast, there is a lot of rain; but in many parts of the world, people heave a sigh of relief when the much-needed rain eventually falls. Rain is music to

their ears and comforting to their restless spirits. However, too much or too little of it can mean disaster, as we have recently seen in many parts of the world. Truly, rain holds the key to life or death.

We watch rain in wonder and feel appreciation for the complex web of nature. It is a really impressive gift. After the rains, everything is like new; it is as if the air has been washed and the skies are deep blue. The trees, mountains and birds are all strikingly alive with an inner joy all their own. The air is fresh and clean and the warm sunshine as brilliant as ever. In the woods and on our town lawns, possibly a few mushrooms will have popped up to take advantage of the majestic post-rain world, ready for spores to be distributed by light winds far and wide, where they plant themselves in the earth to begin a new cycle of life.

The vast oceans, covering two-thirds of the Earth, support a myriad of marine life. It is also the oceans that contribute most greatly to our planet's oxygen supply including acting as a sink for the absorption of carbon dioxide. These great seas are a source of minerals and foods, as well as fresh water through rain falling on land. Walk along a beach while the powerful waves spray their salty mist upon the shore. Apart from the invigorating salt smell, it is indeed an awesome and powerful experience.



Unsplash: Aaron Burden



## Snow

Snow, which is a form of the purest distilled water obtainable from the atmosphere, melts in the high mountains forming rivers, which ultimately empty into the oceans. In many parts of the world, this melt water is essential to life and, without enough snowfall, drought and hardship is sure to follow downstream.

The mighty rivers, the Nile, the Niger, the Amazon, the Congo and many others, have fired humanity's passion and imagination from the beginning of their existence. Many thought that they could conquer the river, but this is not possible without destroying it. The best we can hope for is to accept the river as it is and adapt to it.

Down the ages, many who are seeking spiritual answers allow their seeking minds to take them to a river's edge. There they allow the normal functioning of the mind to cease, as their consciousness slips into the never-ending splashing and gurgling sound of the river and its intricate, unrepeatable colours, patterns of the water's surface, and its graceful and flawless motion. The comforting and relaxing effects of a river upon the body, mind and soul cannot be overestimated. Every pristine river is a true source of life.

Water is strong medication just by itself. Drinking water is the best remedy for colds, and in the form of steam, it helps to eliminate many poisons from the body through our sweat glands. If you are feeling low, go for a walk along a river, the ocean or in the rain. Let its strong '*medicine*' heal and comfort you. Truly, it is our greatest gift.

And yet, we, the inhabitants of Earth, do not own the waterways and oceans, though many selfish politicians would beg to disagree. Their water has been, if you will, merely loaned to us during our very short stay on this planet. It is our sacred duty to keep it pure, to keep it alive for the production of oxygen, because all of life is dependent upon it. No-one owns land or water and, therefore, none of us has the right to pollute or destroy them.

It could be said that there are no survivors on Earth, as everything is passing through transition, constantly changing. The Earth is our cradle, our home, school and final tomb, and water breathes life into it all. Water is the gift we have been entrusted with to use wisely and protect, so the next generation, and many more to come, will also be able to experience the purity and simple beauty of the water of life.



Unplash: Aaron Burden





# Take Peace!

## Giovanni Giocondo's Letter to a Friend

by Susan Ayles

A talented word-smith can surpass the mundane combination of syllables and sentences and produce text that is truly sublime..., words that touch the heart, reach the soul and lifts one's spirit. A letter ascribed to the Franciscan friar *Giovanni Giocondo* (c. 1433 - 1515) is one such text that has apparently survived down the ages and made its way into numerous august publications of the modern age including now, into the Rosicrucian Beacon.

*Take Peace!* as I call it here, was reputedly written on Christmas Eve 1513 by the elderly friar to one *Contessina Allagia dela Aldobrandeschi*, an Italian countess whom he counted as a friend and addressed as 'most illustrious.'<sup>1</sup> Her family's once extensive lands were divided between two counties in 1265 and ruled by different branches of the family, with one side dying off without heirs and the heiress to the other branch marrying into the Sforza family.<sup>1</sup> A prolonged though not entirely exhaustive internet search







*There is nothing I can give you which you have not got. But there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take [it].*

*No Heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it to-day. Take Heaven!*

*No peace lies in the future which is not bidden in this present little instant. Take Peace!*

*The gloom of the world is but a shadow.  
Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy.*

*There is radiance and glory in the darkness, if we could but see. And to see, we have only to look. Contessina I beseech you, Look!*

*Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by their covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard.*

*Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendour, woven of love, by wisdom, with power.*

*Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the Angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty: believe me, that angel's hand is there; the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing Presence.*

*Our joys, too: be not content with them as joys;  
[for] they too conceal diviner gifts.*

*Life is so full of meaning and of purpose, so full of beauty beneath its covering, that you will find that earth but cloaks your heaven.  
Courage, then to claim it: that is all!*

*But courage you have; and the knowledge that we are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home.*

*And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you; not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem, and with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.<sup>1</sup>*



suggests that being the recipient of Fra Giocondo's letter was the Contessina's chief and perhaps only claim to fame.

Yet the old friar's words are so wise and comforting that they are enough for us to keep the Contessina's memory alive 502 years later. Before continuing with my investigations though, please read now the friar's letter.

Fra Giocondo was certainly an important person in his time, one of those rare enigmas able to transfer his skills across many fields of endeavour, gathering under his brow the understanding of diverse and complex disciplines and, through hard work and ingenuity alone, advancing the global knowledge of humankind.

Born in the city of Verona (at that time ruled by Venice) in 1435, Giovanni became at the age of 18 a friar of the Dominican order, which, after the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, became known as the *Ordo Praedicatorum* the 'Order of Preachers.' Later he switched to the Franciscans and became a teacher of Latin and Greek.<sup>2</sup> He was noted at the time for his great learning in philosophy, theology and classical literature. But it was his accomplishments as an architect, archaeologist and engineer that sealed admiration of him forever in the minds of his peers. Wikipedia records:

He designed a drainage system for the lagoons of Venice, built the fortifications of Treviso, and is universally credited with the design of the Palazzo del Consiglio (1476) at Verona, an elegant, arcaded monument of the early Renaissance. He accompanied Charles VIII to France in 1495 as court architect.<sup>3</sup>

Another online encyclopedia records:

The young priest, a learned archaeologist and a superb draughtsman, visited Rome, sketched its ancient buildings, wrote the story of its great monuments, and completed and explained many defaced inscriptions. He stimulated the revival of classical learning by making collections of ancient manuscripts, one of which, completed in 1492, he presented to Lorenzo de Medici. Giocondo soon returned to his native town where he built bridges and planned fortifications for Treviso, acting as architect, engineer and even head builder during the construction.<sup>4</sup>





Evidently there was no discernible limit to Giovanni's talents, from scholarly theology to maths, nor his contribution to Italian culture and through that to all of us who have been privileged as tourists to explore the Venetian lagoons and the lovely city with waterways instead of roads. He's even credited with bolstering the foundations of the great Basilica of St Peter in Rome, at the request of the Vatican.<sup>5</sup>

## Evidently there was no discernible limit to Giovanni's talents, from scholarly theology to maths, nor his contribution to Italian culture

On top of all that, it seems he brought some of the influential works of the past into his modern era by means of the printed word. He published Pliny's *Epistles* in 1498 and again in 1508, wrote four dissertations on the waterways of Venice and produced a corrected edition of *De Architectura* by the Roman writer Vitruvius, a significant influence on the architecture of the Renaissance, among various other volumes.

With all that to his credit it doesn't seem at all far fetched to assume he could probably write a bit, too. The letter to the countess has been widely attributed to him. Yet, the British Museum pronounced in 1970 that it had proved impossible to identify Fra Giovanni as the author of this letter. It is not known either, how it made its way from the countess to us, the general public, or indeed if the countess existed under that title; for while one branch of the Aldobrandeschi family died out without heirs in Sovana, the heiress of the family's other line, in Santa Fiora, Cecilia Aldobrandeschi, married into the Sforza family in 1439.<sup>1,6</sup>

Certainly the museum is aware of many texts by Giovanni, but not the famous letter. Whoever it was written for, and whenever it was written, it is usually believed that it made its first appearance in print for public consumption in the 1930s, published by one Greville MacDonald, son of one of the most famous fantasy novelists of the day, Scot George MacDonald and his wife Mary.<sup>7</sup>

Greville was himself a man of talent and influence. Born in Manchester in 1856, he was a Harley Street specialist in ear, nose and throat medicine, but also an enthusiastic and

influential member of the Peasant Arts movement which emerged in Haslemere, Surrey in the early 1900s, promoting the enjoyment of home-made crafts of all kinds.<sup>7</sup> The Peasant-Arts Blogspot records that Greville bought The Museum of Peasant Arts for a knock-down price from a clergyman in 1908 and handed control to the Founders of the Peasant Art Guild, for its protection and public benefit, so it would not be swamped in the great halls of the big city museums.

Greville was himself a writer of note, producing many and various titles including a biography of his parents, a learned work called *The Sanity of William Blake*, various works of fiction and his own biography, *Reminiscences of A Specialist*. The Peasant-Arts Blogspot also finds from Greville's own writings that it was he who launched *The Vineyard Magazine* as the organ of the Peasant Arts Movement in 1910. By reputation Greville published the famous letter, attributing it to Giovanni, in the 1930s, with 'Christmas greetings' from himself.

I have been unable to pin the piece down further but a preacher from Lincoln, Massachusetts, the Rev Claire Phillips-Thorlyn, used it in a sermon she gave in the approach to Christmas 2007. Calling it *Take Heaven!* she said:

It was published in the 1930s by Greville MacDonald. MacDonald probably wrote the piece himself as a Christmas greeting, but perhaps to give his Christmas wishes more historical gravitas, he attributed it to the ancient Franciscan monk Fra Giovanni. Whether it was written 500 years ago or 80 years ago it is still a beautiful and true reflection on the season of Advent.<sup>8</sup>

One internet source reports that it was reproduced earlier than Greville's publication, in the Theosophical Quarterly, Volume 8 of 1910, again ascribed to Fra Giovanni. This source, says:



Giovanni



Greville



You may be asked if it is a genuine antique, or a modern composition cast in antique form; and I, for one, cannot tell you. Nor do I see that it matters. The only important question is whether its message is true or not; and I think it is profoundly true.<sup>9</sup>

I entirely agree. Sometimes the true authorship of work is hidden for the sake of the art, sometimes for the protection of the author and often for reasons not made known to anyone save the writers and publishers themselves. Giovanni had a great deal of work published by his own intention but a letter would not normally be written to be publicised at all, however fine the prose. Its purpose would be merely to be shared with the person it was written to..., in this case, apparently, to give comfort in the lady's dark hour. Who knows the circumstances by which it came to light in 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, if indeed it had its origins in the deep past, passed on by a descendant to a relative to a friend to a stranger.

It is rare but by no means impossible that it could survive 502 years, especially as aristocratic families tend to protect their belongings as part of their heritage. Equally it could be the work of a professional writer, one of those who produce

work for all manner of purposes as Greville MacDonald evidently did. It may be a relatively modern interpretation of a document which, if Giovanni had written it, would presumably have been written in archaic Italian and would undoubtedly have been couched in less secular language.

I have found myself unequal to the task of bettering the British Museum's attempts to identify the author, but no matter: Now at least you have the letter with its gentle wisdom, surely as true now as 500 years ago, and every bit as valuable as a resource whether the work of a Franciscan friar or a journalist.

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldobrandeschi\\_family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldobrandeschi_family).
2. [www.bartleby.com/73/1467.html](http://www.bartleby.com/73/1467.html).
3. [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni\\_Giocondo](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Giocondo).
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6. [www.palazzosforzacesarini.it](http://www.palazzosforzacesarini.it).
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9. <http://lists.project-wombat.org/pipermail/project-wombat-fm-project-wombat.org/2010-November/004555.html>

**'Sometimes the true authorship of work is hidden for the sake of the art, sometimes for the protection of the author and often for reasons not made known to anyone save the writers and publishers themselves.'**





# Saying What we Think

by **Adrian Sasha**

There is nothing quite as wholesome and invigorating as expressing our convictions effectively, for by so doing we encourage cooperative understanding and broaden and advance our concepts of life. The fire which burns within radiates outwardly, though if repressed, that same fire tends to destroy the inner walls of our personality.

Therein lays the challenge: How can we express our innermost convictions freely and spontaneously and never evoke resistance or misunderstanding? Should we express our convictions only to those who would agree with us or not be offended by our views? Or should we express them regardless of what others may think? What criteria should we use when deciding how far to go in speaking our minds, for surely hiding our convictions can never lead to mutual understanding,<sup>23</sup> or give our inner selves the much needed satisfaction of living the inner life outwardly?

Fear of evoking animosity may seem to offer no other choice, but that disappears when we discern the basic laws which motivate human responsiveness. We can probably never altogether avoid misunderstandings, but we can surely mitigate them if we realise that the matter of people being ready or unready to understand is dependent on whether or not our convictions are expressed in a way that is freely and readily acceptable. The oft-repeated truism, *‘Molasses catches more flies than vinegar’*, is still worth remembering. As mystics and Rosicrucians we are, after all, practical people.

People resist whatever appears to be an attempt to force ideas on them, for there is an almost biological craving to think freely, to be able to explore unknown avenues and to come to our own conclusions. When we become fully aware of the existence of an innate human self-defensive reaction against the unknown and the seemingly oppressive pronouncements of others, we





not only avoid various frustrations as a result of others' *'unreadiness'*, but we also strengthen our own freedom of thought by granting that same freedom to others. We can at least make our convictions acceptable by stating them from the levels of others' concepts.

Above all, we can discover that the laws of human response serve as a solid foundation in proportion as we seek to understand their functioning: seeing with the eyes of others, feeling their experiences, understanding their reasons for responsiveness with regard to expressed convictions. Through our Rosicrucian technique of assumption, we seek to enter the mind, heart and soul of the one we wish to help, thereby gaining an understanding of how best to speak our truth, no matter how complicated it may be, and still make it understandable and perhaps even acceptable.

## Through our Rosicrucian technique of assumption, we seek to enter the mind, heart and soul of the one we wish to help

There is an old saying: *'Fools learn only through experience; the wise seek other ways.'* But this needs to be qualified, for unless someone's expression of conviction points out a direction, even the proverbial *'fool'* can't learn from experience. Even reading can enlighten only in so far as it carries some understandable directive, and turns intellectual words into inner experience. Convictions should never disregard modes of thinking from which they were born. They should not be presented differently from their source milieu simply in an attempt to make them more palatable to others. They must be expressed in those very modes of thinking from which they arose if they are ever to be *truly* accepted by others; indeed if they are even to be understood.

## Karmic Consequences

When we express our convictions so forcefully and positively that we lead others entirely into our own way of thinking and behaving, we are interfering with their lives in a *negative* way. And there will almost certainly be karmic consequences for us in doing this.

Rosicrucian mystics do not seek to turn everyone

into cloned version of themselves. They seek instead to help each person to find his or her own best path forward, not to enter the path of another. Only where there is genuine concern for the well-being of another, can true advice and assistance be given. The rest unfortunately, is the workings of the ego and a power play we have no need of.

How true it is that a bad experience sometimes has the effect of making us avoid certain situations with all the strength we have, even though those unpleasant situations may be precisely what we need most for our inner growth and maturity. Sometimes, destiny, fate, karma (whatever you wish to call it) saves us from ourselves by forcing us into circumstances that appear entirely implausible, especially from the standpoint of objective logic, but which turn out to be exactly the experiences we needed in order to get certain inner abilities to start functioning outwardly in a practical and useful way. Who knows what kind of situations, big or small, a person should face in order for his or her inner self to be able to express itself outwardly more thoroughly?

Remember to give even your most ardent convictions as if they were opinions only; opinions that may be accepted or rejected freely by others. Opinions are like ripples on the surface of a gently flowing stream whilst convictions are like the deep current inexorably forcing the great mass of water forwards. Ripples come and go but the current persists. Yet the universality and impartiality of justice demands that we merely show how things look to us, namely present our convictions as opinions only; namely, show the ripples first and allow the current to sweep people away (for it certainly will) only when absolutely necessary.

## Opinions are like ripples on the surface of a gently flowing stream...

Every application of force over another person is an open declaration of failure to express convictions understandably and acceptably. The more developed our ability to express our convictions freely and acceptably, the less effort is needed for carrying out measures deemed worthwhile. It will be a golden age indeed when we can express all our convictions naturally and effectively, and with complete sincerity.







# Life on Other Worlds

by **Sven Johansson**  
(Grand Master)

Since the first detection in 1992 of a planet orbiting another star, and by now a strong scientific belief that the majority of stars have planets orbiting them, talk about the possibility of life existing elsewhere in our universe has become commonplace. It has boosted interest in science from grade school up to graduate studies and will undoubtedly continue to be an area of great interest for years to come. That life not only exists but does so abundantly throughout our universe seems, for many, to be a forgone conclusion. But is such a belief reasonable?

The inconvenient reality is that there is no evidence yet for life anywhere beyond the outermost reaches of our planet's atmosphere. Despite our best efforts to discover life on Mars, in the interiors of meteorites on dusty museum shelves, or even samples taken from the tails of comets, not a single primitive life form has yet been discovered beyond the confines of Earth. So, there is perhaps quite a way to go yet before we can start estimating how common primitive life is in the universe; and considerably further to go before we can estimate how much *intelligent* life there is. By '*intelligent*', I mean a life form containing a neurological system sufficiently complex and refined to allow the organism to analyse its own mental processes, namely, being able to think about its own thoughts as humans do.



That we will ever find little green men from Mars, or any other planet in our solar system, is pretty well ruled out by now. From the information gathered and analysed from the various space probes that have penetrated almost the entire solar system, there seem to be only a few planets and moons left that could possibly harbour life. And most of these will almost certainly no longer be candidates in but a few decades from now. Although some planets show definite promise of life, that promise may be more a reflection of our *hopes* than facing up to *facts*. The probability of finding any life form in our solar system outside of our home planet remains low, despite recent discoveries of liquid water and possibly entire oceans within some moons.

### What Sort of Life?

Generally, scientists are not too fussy about what sort of life may exist in our solar system, for it is virtually certain there will exist no life in this tiny part of the galaxy manifesting consciousness to the degree and complexity that humans do. Popular imagination accepted for decades the possibility of finding living creatures, *like our own*, on other planets. But their hopes have been steadily dismantled, one by one so, by now, it would be quite sufficient if we found just a few primitive bacteria species. Whatever sort of life we eventually do find *in our solar system* (I hope for such an outcome), it is likely to exclude anything much larger than microbes.

What we have come to realise though, over the past half century, and especially from deep-sea research, is that life can exist in exceedingly harsh environments. Indeed on Earth it seems to exist wherever we have a suitable energy source. So, we find enormous clams, tube-worms several metres long, as well as extremophile bacteria living in the vicinity of deep-sea hydrothermal vents. The survival of such creatures depends entirely on the radioactive energy of the earth itself and the heat and nutrients that emanate from these hot water vents.

There are great mats of living algae floating in scaldingly hot water around hot springs in many places around the globe, and there are even colonies of algae growing in porous rocks at high latitudes that seldom get warmer than -20° C. Primitive life is certainly a lot tougher than science believed as recently as only 50 years ago.

Yet, even if we do find life elsewhere in the solar system, there is a great gap between microbial life forms and life forms similar to our species. While primitive life forms may be almost commonplace throughout the universe, higher life forms, possessing complex neurological systems, may be vanishingly rare. And furthermore, the time span between the emergence and extinction of such life forms may be much shorter than for most other species, which would make higher consciousness even rarer than we would think.



**What we have come to realise, especially from deep-sea research, is that life can exist in exceedingly harsh environments.**



## Our Vast Universe: How to Communicate?

Thankfully, the universe is a very *big* place, so big in fact that few of us can adequately grasp its full extent. But because of its size and the fact that it has endured 13.8 billion years, it seems reasonable to assume that life forms much like our own have existed elsewhere in the past, are now existing somewhere, and will exist somewhere in the future. Even in our own galaxy, it is almost certain that intelligent life other than our own does exist; for with more celestial bodies in the universe than grains of sand on Earth, surely the chances are even quite good that human-like life forms have sprung up elsewhere in the past, not just once, but maybe thousands or even millions of times, some of them almost identical to our lives on Earth: other worlds, other earths.

**Even in our own galaxy,  
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intelligent life other than  
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It is all very well to know that such advanced life forms may exist in isolated cases and that many such isolated cases, over 13.8 billions years, can add up to millions. But how could intelligent life forms, separated by such vast distances and time, have ever interacted with each other? Given that it could take as long as 100,000 years to send a signal from one end of our galaxy to the other, and then another 100,000 years to get a reply, communication via normal electromagnetic energy transmission cannot be a workable form of communication. By the time we got a reply, we would have evolved to a new species anyway, or as likely, gone extinct. Sending a message to even the nearest star would take 4 years at light speed to get there, and another 4 years to receive a reply, given that any advanced life forms were there to receive the message in the first place, which is not likely.

So, if there is any communication between intelligent life forms in the universe other than on Earth, it must be by some other means, such as via hypothesised '*worm holes*' that cause space-time to fold over itself, thereby providing theoretical short-cuts between places otherwise far separated in space and time. In the Rosicrucian Order

there is active discussion about, and use of, the phenomena of *telepathy*, *astral travel* or '*psychic projection*' as it is also called. It is an art that has been used by mystics and adepts for thousands of years and is sometimes referred to in historical literature.

In the last century, various explanations have been given about the exact nature and transmission method for telepathic messages. Does the information carried in such messages travel from person to person at light speed, or does it travel much faster? If we are rational about it, such information could not travel faster than light if it were to follow the normal laws of physics. But could there exist some form of consciousness available to humans that can transmit information via something conceptually analogous to a worm-hole from one person to another, and therefore much faster than light?

And if phenomena such as telepathy turn out to be near instantaneous, which seems to be a widely, though probably mistaken, belief, then a very deep secret still awaits our discovery. To be absolutely rational about this, however, we must accept that we are constrained by the fact that no information whatsoever can travel from one part of the universe to another any faster than the speed of light, even if it travelled through a worm-hole. Were it possible for information to travel faster than light, then we would be changing our past, though we would never know that our past had changed. This is mere speculation, of course, but it is almost certain that communication with other, highly evolved, life forms across many light years, is almost certainly vanishingly rare, even for highly evolved creatures.

**...it is almost certain that  
communication with other  
highly evolved life forms across  
many light years, is almost  
certainly vanishingly rare...**

## The Meditative State: A Medium of Communication?

When entering a *true* meditative state, it is universally recognised by mystics and religious practitioners







throughout the world, that *time seems to slow down* or *even stop*. Something happens to the human consciousness at such moments, so much in fact, that entire volumes of information could be written in mere minutes. A true meditative state is not a period of contemplation, nor is it exclusively a period of concentration, nor a period of visualisation, and it is certainly not a daydream. It is a specific, though hard-to-master inner process, a mental discipline which may *begin* with all of the above, but ends in a seeming cessation or *near cessation* of time.

**...with the end of time, also comes the end of space, and so the one can never exist independently of the other.**

Of course, with the end of time, also comes the end of space, and to our limited understanding at least, the one can never exist independently of the other. So, with the end of space, do we now have the end of everything? Evidently not, for we do return, and with us comes new information, new experiences and new abilities. Is it not perhaps possible then that the key to intergalactic communication lies not in titanium spaceships plodding along for generations to reach their destinations, nor even with information travelling at light speed, but in

trained and disciplined minds, human minds, right here on earth, managing to traverse a higher dimensional form of space-time where other beings' thoughts and hopes can be shared with little humans on this fragile little Earth. In serene environments where all parties enter into deep meditation, it seems, if higher dimensional forms of space-time are possible, forms of communication just may be possible, even though not possible in our familiar four dimensional space-time existence.

Judging by the increasing complexity, sophistication and refinement that neuroscientists are discovering yearly in the human brain and its related function the mind, is it any wonder that so much interest is now finally being focused on the phenomenon of consciousness and the theoretical means of the transmission of information between islands of consciousness, namely people like you and me on this and possibly, other worlds. Science is not naive by any means and, as seekers of spiritual illumination, we must respect and accept with gratitude and admiration the innumerable useful discoveries that science places at the service of humanity every year. But, although many mystics have had their moments of prejudice against scientific findings that did not fit in with their beliefs, science too has had its moments of prejudice, where anything other than orthodox theory was dismissed out of hand as mere speculation, supposition or even superstition.







The possibility of near instantaneous telepathic communication via a slowing down of time to near zero, may be a valid supposition to make.

Rosicrucians are exhorted ever to be *'walking question marks.'* But sometimes they are far from that ideal, just as the occasional rational scientist may be too. So, while the possibility of near instantaneous telepathic communication via a slowing down of time to near zero is mere speculation, it may, in the absence of any better explanation, still be a valid supposition to make, even if it may, on the surface, appear to be a bit far fetched.

### The Mystical Quest: Old As Humanity Itself.

For millennia, mystics have used various techniques for reaching the coveted goal of *'Illumination.'* That they attained Illumination not once, but repeatedly, many, many times, is beyond doubt within mystical circles. The words, thoughts and deeds of holy men of the past bear witness to what they achieved, and it takes very little imagination to fill in the gaps now missing.

Physically, they were humans, almost identical to us today, and their *direct* experiences of life would therefore have been very similar to ours. They had their moods and happy moments, their times of terror, tranquillity, sadness, happiness, hunger, pain and pleasure, and also times for introspection, just as we do today.

What they achieved in their day, they achieved *despite* having lived under much harsher conditions than we do, and without the benefits of theories of space-time, worm-holes, quantum superposition, etc. Surely we can follow their example and do the same today! From the

pampered vantage point of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, let us never forget that as seekers of ever greater spiritual insight, we all have a quest..., a quest for Illumination and the consequent *Mastery of Life* which flows from it. Science lays out for us a great deal of the journey ahead of us, but not the whole journey. That last bit we will have to figure out ourselves, searching deep within our soul for directions and advice on clearing the last set of hurdles before our cycle of incarnations will be complete.

Let us therefore do all we can, as our illumined predecessors did, to fill in the information gaps where necessary and fulfil our obligations to evolve our consciousness to the highest states we can attain in human form. There is nothing more worthwhile than this.

Science lays out for us a great deal of the journey ahead of us, but not the whole journey...





# The Dewdrop

by Kurt Lossgott

It was early morning and birds sang in anticipation of the sun's first appearance on the horizon. The first ray to appear reflected off a dewdrop, creating a scintillating display of colour. A weary butterfly, who had survived the rigours of a chilly night, was dazzled by the spectacular display and remarked admiringly to herself that she had never seen anything like it.

The dewdrop however, who had been born in the chill of the night, was not aware of its own brilliance, but readily accepted the overheard opinion of the beautiful butterfly, who seemed so much more experienced than he. The realisation of his existence as an independent entity of thought was a revelation to him, prompting him to observe the world around him. He was embedded in the centre of a wide-open, beautiful rose, which grew beside a stream. Nearby, another brilliant dewdrop clung to a blade of grass.

Rose-dewdrop asked the butterfly, *'Do I look like that sparkling dewdrop over there?'* *'Yes, precisely'*, lady butterfly calmly replied.



With developing consciousness, his ego was born and made its first impression on the world as he addressed the winged giant lady: *'Surely, seated in the heart of a rose, I must have a more favourable position than that other dewdrop over there. And being larger as well, I must be sparkling more brightly than him.'*

*'No'*, the butterfly said, *'you both sparkle the same.'*

Rose-dewdrop was annoyed to hear this but kept quiet. Weary lady butterfly, now nearing the end of her lifespan, moved her wings slowly in the early morning sun. Extending her proboscis towards the smaller dewdrop, she drank it in a second. One moment it was there, the next, it was irretrievably gone.

In ignorance, the Rose-dewdrop exclaimed in horror, *'What have you done? My friend has disappeared!'* *'I was thirsty and absorbed a drop of water'*, lady butterfly replied matter of factly.

*'But now it is gone'*, Rose-dewdrop said and a terrible fear gripped him. *'Why did you consume him and not me, your old acquaintance?'* A small ripple ran across his surface, in anticipation of the butterfly's reply.

*'It was closer to me than you are, and honestly, I am getting tired of this talk'*, she said.

*'Are you going to consume me as well?'* asked Rose-dewdrop. *'No'*, she said, *'I have had enough.'*

Anxiously Rose-dewdrop said: *'What did you mean when you said you 'absorbed' that dewdrop? Where is it now? Where is the sparkle, and the brilliant colours? As you have it now inside you, why doesn't it shine through your skin?'*

*'Dewdrops consist of water'* she said, *'like the stream below you, like all the other dewdrops and raindrops in existence; and nothing that lives can exist without the substance you are made of: water.'*

*'Do they all sparkle and radiate like I do?'* asked Rose-dewdrop.

Lady butterfly had never met such a talkative dewdrop before, but she had been revitalised by her recent drink and conversation. As her life force reasserted itself,



she felt better and better with every second that passed, and mused on the enquiring nature of the rose dewdrop. *'No'*, she replied, *'but what were you before the sun gave you colour and brilliance?'*

Rose-dewdrop searched his short memory and quickly reached the void of his pre-existence. Delving into his memory before his condensation as a dewdrop, he penetrated the cosmic storehouse of records about the element water. When his consciousness returned from this timeless journey, it occurred to the little dewdrop that he was part of the universe and there was no space for a budding ego. So, it was discarded in its early development.

*'I would also like to be absorbed'*, Rose-dewdrop said to the butterfly.

*'Sorry'*, she replied, *'not by me. I shall not be your next host. I told you, I have had enough of your life-giving substance. But do not despair, soon the sun will warm the atmosphere and you will become a part of the clouds.'*

*'But I have just been there'*, said Rose-dewdrop; *'my existence was not as concentrated as it is now. The perception of my consciousness is now much clearer and I perceive the purpose of my life cycle. Now I want to join the mainstream of life.'*

The butterfly, who had regained her energy, fluttered onto the rose and, in an instant, Rose-dewdrop fell into the stream below, sparkling in greater brilliance than ever before during his short downward journey.

He had achieved his ambition, he had become part of the great Collective Awareness, linked to countless beings, transmuted into one giant entity, all with the same purpose. Was he one, or was he all? Having achieved this ultimate goal, there was nothing left to be desired, except perhaps to repeat the whole cycle again.



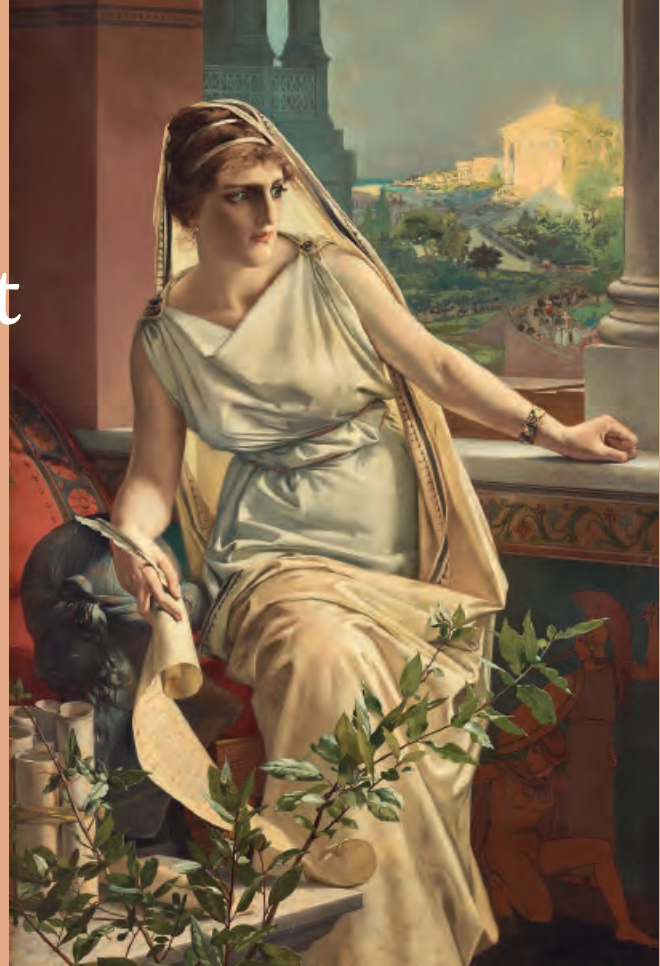


# In the Morning, I Became the Light

Hypatia: Sage and  
Martyr of Alexandria

by **Bill Anderson**

*Hypatia of Alexandria by Julius Kronberg*



The word *'esoteric'* is difficult to define. It encompasses many different belief systems and acts as a storehouse for *'secret knowledge'* passed down from generation to generation. And so it is with the Rosicrucian Order. I recently read a book by Elbert Hubbard, the American writer, philosopher and friend of Dr H. Spencer Lewis, Emperor of the Order between 1915 and 1939. Hubbard perished with the sinking of the cruise liner the Lusitania in 1915, when it was torpedoed by a U-boat off the southern coast of Ireland.

One day, I found an old copy of a book by Hubbard entitled *'Hypatia.'* I knew immediately it could only refer to that great 4<sup>th</sup> century CE woman philosopher, Hypatia of Alexandria (360-415 CE). Although very short and maybe not wholly accurate, it is, nevertheless, a real gem and well worth reading. Hubbard begins the story with the following:

Neoplatonism is a progressive philosophy and does not expect to state final conditions to men whose minds are finite. Life is an unfoldment, and the further we travel, the more truth we can comprehend. To understand the things that are at our door is the best preparation for understanding those that lie beyond.





## Alexandria

On some levels, life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not all that different from life in Hypatia's time. People are people the world over, and they cherish much the same things in the privacy of their own thoughts. We all seek to live a peaceful and happy life. Most of us worry about our jobs, or lack of them. We are concerned about our family and friends – how can we make life better for them? And many people worry daily about where their next meal is coming from. For others, their lives are completed by their religious beliefs, placing their faith in their chosen god or guru, relying on them to assist with any troubles that arise from time to time.

*Hypatia of Alexandria* (360-415 CE), a great 4<sup>th</sup> century CE woman philosopher, was born a citizen of the Roman empire at a time when it was beginning to fracture from enemies on every side. Long gone was the peace and stability of a century before her birth. The empire was sprawling, far too big for one emperor to handle, so it evolved from the '*Principate*', with only one emperor as its leader, to the '*Dominate*', where one or more emperors ruled various provinces concurrently, as emperors within their assigned domains.

*Constantine the Great* (reigned 306-337 CE) had introduced Christianity as the new, official, and thereafter, predominant religion of the empire. Christianity was not fully formed at the time and was beset with schism; but it was evolving rapidly towards becoming a unitary and very different belief system from what had preceded it. For most people in the empire, the Roman act of '*religio*' from which the word '*religion*' originates, was very different from what we would today consider as religious

devotion. *Religio* was something one performed, namely, through the carrying out of certain rites, often in public and usually at specific times of the day and at specific periods of the year.

In modern times, for example, on a Sunday for Christians, Saturday for Jews or Friday for Muslims, the day is set aside for devotion to one's religion. The rest of the time, one was generally free to do everything else, and the more profound aspects of the religion had little or no effect. Even today, for many around the world, little has changed and many don't live up to the precepts of their chosen religion outside of their designated times of religious worship. It was very much the same in Alexandria, though with the added element of bitter hatred between the Christians, Jews and '*Pagans*', some of whom were Platonists like Hypatia.

Alexandria was a living, breathing ancient mega-city, the second most populous city in the Mediterranean region. The three main groups of citizenries were the Greeks, who formed the elite of society, then the Jews who were equally Greek-speaking and lived according to their own traditions, and finally, the native Coptic-speaking Egyptians, who made up the most disadvantaged within of the city. The three groups did not mix well and sometimes it took a detachment of imperial troops to quell the disturbances. Because the native Egyptians had little recourse to power, they took solace in their form of Christianity as practised by the Coptic Church, with its links to a civilisation that had existed far longer than Christianity or Judaism.

Education in Alexandria depended very much on one's position in society. The Greeks and Jews had their own teachers in basic education, though any form of higher, more detailed and precise education depended solely on one's ability to pay for it. And with the Romans, it often meant attaching oneself to one or other teacher connected to the '*Great Library and Alexandria*.' By Hypatia's time, it would have been to the '*Serapeion Lesser Library*', namely the temple of Serapis. Higher learning became synonymous with '*philosophy*' a word which, in a literal sense, meant '*loving wisdom*.' The few who truly sought wisdom, recognised that there was more to life than mere mortal existence; and in Alexandria, there was an ancient and proud tradition of Neoplatonist philosophers who carried the baton of spirituality of Plato and taught

Image: Wikimedia/AHO



*Constantine the Great*



his teachings to those willing to learn.

## Brutal Theophilus

Ten years after the death of the Christian Patriarch of Alexandria *Athanasius I* in 373 CE, the bishopric of Alexandria was bestowed upon a certain *Theophilus*, a man of fiery temperament, ruthless and violent in the enforcement of what he believed to be his Christian duty. Having obtained the consent of the Alexandrian government, he destroyed pagan temples, and the monasteries of monks whose views differed from his own.

When only 20 years old, Hypatia witnessed the destruction of the great library of Alexandria. The Roman Emperor *Theodosius I* (346-395 CE) had openly embraced Christianity, a legacy from his parents' beliefs, and had been baptised in 380. The conversion of this emperor gave massive confidence to Christians in the empire, and in some parts of the empire, they took offensive action against pagans, Jews and Christian unorthodoxy in general.

An edict from the emperor for the destruction of the great statue of Serapis at Alexandria and for the overthrow of pagan temples and unorthodoxy throughout the empire, was seized upon by Theophilus, now the Archbishop of Alexandria. He saw the edict as an imperial seal of approval to wreak destruction on the *'heretics'* and *'unbelievers'* in the city. Theophilus was said to be a *'perpetual enemy of peace and virtue'*, a bold, bad man whose hands were alternately polluted with gold and



*Artistic Rendering of the Library of Alexandria, based on some archaeological evidence. By O. Von Corven.*

blood. He launched a vendetta against pagan culture and was no less cruel to his fellow Christians. His doctrine can be summed up in a few words: *'Noli examinare, modo credere'* – *'Do not examine [enquire], only believe.'* How little things have changed, for we see similar attitudes mirrored in many places and organisations around the world to this day! That is why organisations like the Rosicrucian Order are, among several others, vital parts of the health of our planet and an alternative to the periodic slide of civilisation into barbarity and abusive control.

Any form of learning that was not sanctioned by the Christian church in Alexandria, was deemed to be heretical. Science, mathematics and even rational, civil debate was of no account, much as it is with fundamentalist Christian churches to this day. The street mob was incited to riot by Theophilus' agents. Not only were pagan and unorthodox Christian shrines and temples attacked but so too were the precious libraries and repositories containing what he called *'literature of heretical reasoning.'*

The massive library of Alexandria was ordered destroyed by Theophilus in 390, an act which wiped out the priceless work of centuries of careful preservation and accumulation of knowledge. The great library was started by the Egyptian ruler *Ptolemy I Soter* and extended, stocked and organised by his son and successor *Ptolemy II Philadelphus*. By Hypatia's time, the library comprised two main sites, the *Serapeum*, which contained the



*The Burning of the Library at Alexandria in 391 CE, By Ambrose Dudley.*





great statue of the god Serapis, and the *Brucheum*, which contained, by some accounts, 42,800 scrolls and 490,000 tablets. Other suggestions list the total scrolls and tablets as close to 700,000, the largest collection ever to have been accumulated.

The claim that some of this material was destroyed when Julius Caesar burnt his ships in the harbour at Alexandria is not likely to be factual. In any case, what Caesar failed to do, Theophilus accomplished with devastating effect: wiping out for posterity the most valuable collection of humanity's intellectual achievements in the ancient Western world.

Whether this event had any greater effect on Hypatia than any of the other deeply traumatic events of the time, we will never know. Patriarch Theophilus is on the Egyptian Coptic and Syrian religious calendars, but not on most eastern or any western ones. Although he was pronounced as being *'orthodox'*, he was in fact an exceedingly brutal and repulsive person, even by the standards of his day. Upon his death in 412, he was succeeded as Patriarch of Alexandria by his nephew



*Ptolemy Philadelphus in the Library of Alexandria*  
by Vincenzo Camuccini (1813).



*Map of ancient Alexandria. The Mouseion (which arguably included the Library of Alexandria) was located in the royal 'Broucheion' quarter (listed on this map as 'Bruchium') in the central part of the city near the Great Harbour ('Portus Magnus' on the map).*

Cyril (376-444 CE), known more formally as Pope and Archbishop of the Great City of Alexandria and Patriarch of all Africa, the Holy Orthodox and Apostolic See of Saint Mark the Evangelist.

## 'Saint' Cyril

*Orestes*, the new *'Augustal'* (Imperial) Prefect of Egypt, had arrived shortly before Cyril's accession and the two men soon became embroiled in a struggle for political power. There had been riots between Christians and Jews and, after a brawl in the theatre, the Prefect had one of the Patriarch's followers arrested and tortured. When Christians were killed in a subsequent attack, Cyril led a mob against the synagogues and the ancient Jewish presence in Alexandria ended when he expelled them and had their possessions looted.

The Prefect objected to this forced expulsion and having rebuffed any attempts at reconciliation, was himself assaulted by monks *'of a very fiery disposition'* who had come into the city in support of the patriarch. An assailant was captured and tortured to death, and, although Cyril treated the death as a martyrdom, he was obliged to let the matter rest.

Cyril began his career as Patriarch of Alexandria (412-444) by showing himself to be an ill-tempered, quarrelsome, hasty and violent man. These character traits must have run in the family! He closed the churches of the



Novatianists, a group of Christians who were indistinguishable in doctrine and manner of worship from other Christians, but who, as descendants of those who had stood firm in the persecutions 260 years earlier, would have nothing to do with the descendants of those who had not. Nearly a century earlier, the emperor Constantine the Great had disgustedly told their leader to set up a ladder and climb up to heaven by himself.



*Coin depicting the empress Galla Placidia.*

By the time the schism between Cyril and the Augustal Prefect of Egypt, Orestes, had begun, Hypatia, by then a distinguished Neoplatonist scholar, had been befriended by Orestes who held her in high regard. This was because Orestes resisted Cyril's encroachment into secular prerogatives. Cyril wanted power over both the church and the Egyptian state.

In the Christian church of that time there arose a controversy over the relation between Christ's Divinity and his Humanity. One view, associated with Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, spoke of Jesus as a sinless man in whom the Spirit of God fully dwelt, suggesting that the difference between Jesus and any other good man was a matter of degree. This may not do justice to the subtlety of the Nestorian position, but it is the danger that others saw in it, and the Nestorians were unable to explain

what safeguards their position had against this *'danger.'*

Despite his harshness in all things, Cyril possessed the ability to write in the vernacular of early Christian *'learned conviction'* and did so against the Nestorian position. This was largely the reason that the Nestorian view was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Afterwards, surprisingly in view of his earlier record, he worked to reconcile the two parties, and to bring many of the less extreme Nestorians back into the fellowship of the church.

## Women of Influence

Hypatia lived in times of danger and great flux, times when one never knew where the next *'barbarian horde'* was coming from to descend upon the, by now, rapidly declining Roman empire. It had already become extremely difficult for any emperor to fully guard the empire's borders, and Rome, after all, was no longer the Imperial capital. When the emperor Theodosius I (ruled 379-395) died, he left the empire to his two sons, Honorius, (ruled 393-423) the younger of the two, who ruled the Western half of the empire from Milan and then Ravenna, and the older brother, Arcadius (ruled, 383-408) who ruled the eastern half from Constantinople, the modern Istanbul.

This was, unusually, a great time for women, as the strong-willed female members of the imperial family exercised a great deal of power over their brothers and husbands. The title of the emperor was *Augustus*, while the empress was called the *Augusta*. In those days, if you had an Augustus, you needed an Augusta. Rosicrucians will recognise the polarity inherent in this. Think Ra and Ma, each had their part to play in the imperial ritual and world view. The empress Galla Placidia (388-450), and her cousin Serena (died 409) were dominant in the western half while the empress Pulcheria (398-453) dominated the eastern court. In Alexandria, we find the philosopher Hypatia (360-415) as a singular beacon of Light who lived during the reigns of the Theodosian dynasty.

Relations between the two imperial families could be tense at times. While the western half was faced by



*Cyril of Alexandria*





incursions of Germanic tribes, the eastern half also had problems with Germanic tribes, but more especially with Huns and the resurgent Persian empire on its eastern flank. This Persian empire was just as large and just as civilised as the Roman empire and Nestorian Christianity was soon to compete with Zoroastrianism as the main religion of Persia.

This, then, is the turbulent background to the story of Hypatia. I must admit, I would have loved to have experienced Alexandria at its height; perhaps I did. By the time of Hypatia's birth it was already 600 years old and for most of that time, it had been the pre-eminent intellectual and cultural centre of the Mediterranean. Life was never dull. The great Library, the philosophical and medical schools, and the often violent religious and ethnic clashes that took place between the Greek, Jewish and Egyptian factions, no doubt made life at time quite precarious. By the time of Hypatia's school, the cultured Greek elite, harking back to the revered philosophical principles of many centuries before, were labelled as Pagans by the other two factions.

The famed brightly-coloured temples of Egypt, now associated with evil spirits, either lay in ruin or had been crudely converted into Christian churches with colourful wall paintings. The hieroglyphs stood forgotten in the remains of the temples while no-one was left who understood them. Coptic, the language of the Church of Alexandria, although written in a script based on Greek, was a continuation of the ancient Egyptian language. Three hundred years of domination by Rome and a Greek elite, made ordinary Egyptians in the countryside feel even more out of place.

And along came a new popular religion which replaced the revered goddess Isis with the Virgin Mary, that replaced her son Horus with Jesus, the son of God not the son of Osiris. We find statues of Isis with the child Horus sitting on her knee being replaced by Mary the Theotokos (God-bearer) with the child Jesus on her lap. And there was as well now the new Christian *'trinity'* of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit instead of the ancient Egyptian trinities of the sacred father, mother and child. The ancient temples had *'bearing places'* where ordinary people could take their problems to the local god or goddess. Now one could go into a church and do confession where, as before, one's sins would be forgiven.

Ordinary ancient Egyptians could go into the

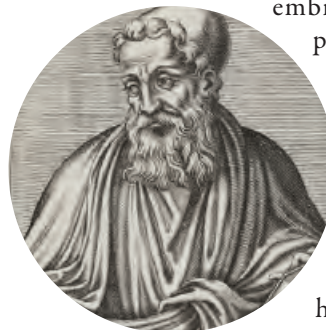
ancient temples for a month at a time to be priests, now they could become Christian and go to church any time and take part in the mysteries. It was a win-win situation for them. So, although not a lot had changed in this regard, the big difference was that the new religion of Christianity was addressed in that Egyptians could understand and with images they could recognise from a dim and distant past. The songs they sang were now about saints and the holy family rather than the ancient gods. They could escape from the drudgery of their daily life by entering a monastery or convent which owed their allegiance, not to the imperial governors, but to the Pope and Archbishop of Alexandria. The title of Patriarch only appeared later but is used here as it is better known.

The river Nile was now a most holy river that the power of Christ brought the flood every year to bring prosperity to his Egyptian children. People were still visiting the ancient spring beneath the Osireion at Abydos, where the Nile surge had once been welcomed by the priests of Osiris. Coptic graffiti relates how they watched the water rise *'by the will of God and the prayers of the saints on the day of the holy man of Abydos, Apa Moses.'*

Alexandria vied for spiritual supremacy with Rome and Antioch, and they were unhappy when the Roman Emperors elevated their capital in Constantinople to be equally important to the other three cities. Alexandria especially viewed Constantinople with hostility. It saw itself as the founding city of Christianity.

## Synesius of Cyrene

*Synesius* was a true convert to philosophy long before he became a Christian. He joined the school of Hypatia, where he found an inner spiritual transformation. It was a turning-point in his life. His letters tell us that he felt that his soul had been reoriented and he experienced a great change in his consciousness. The letters reveal him



embracing his conversion to philosophy as a new and noble way of life into which he had been initiated. A sentiment we Rosicrucians can understand. He remained devoted to Hypatia for the rest of his life and considered her



a saintly example of the Neoplatonist philosophy and continued to ask her for advice even after he became a Christian bishop.

The school of Hypatia was not attached to any religion or mystery cult. She did not consider any religion to be superior to philosophy. She gave lectures while the patriarchal society of the time ensured that women were second-class citizens. She stood out and dazzled her contemporaries. Hubbard wrote: *'with her Thursday lectures, she was the chief intellectual factor of Alexandria.'* Such was her fame that her students came from all over to sit at the feet of Hypatia.

### To her, philosophy was the key to the riddles of the universe and the path to the soul's salvation.

Her teaching made possible a less hostile attitude to Christianity as she had Christians, Jews and Pagans in her school. Each may have had a part of the truth but could arrive at the whole truth only through the discipline of philosophy. Does this sound like our modern Rosicrucian Order to you? I can imagine Hypatia, if she had been alive today being a member of our esteemed Order. To her, philosophy was the key to the riddles of the universe and the path to the soul's salvation. Synesius found the teachings of Porphyry in her classes as a means of building a bridge eventually to Christianity.

Of Hypatia's mother, we know nothing, though it is likely that she came from a family of intellectuals. Her father Theon (ca 335-405) was the head of the Neoplatonic school before her, and except for being under the shadow of his daughter, would have been regarded as a very great man. He was her tutor and teacher. She was a promising student and all that he knew, he taught to her. She received the typical upper-class education of her day, usually designed for men, but Alexandria had a tradition of great female thinkers. It soon became obvious that her intellect was surpassing her contemporaries. Elite education in the 4<sup>th</sup> century started at home with a basic introduction to proper modes of speech and stories that taught lessons about appropriate behaviour. At about the



Image Source: Wikimedia

*This (fictional) portrait of Hypatia by Jules Maurice Gaspard, has now become the most iconic and widely reproduced image of her.*

age of seven, elite girls would learn about language and the rules of basic conduct. In early adolescence she would be taught grammatical training, how to express herself eloquently and study famous works of literature. After that she moved on to rhetorical training. Some women then moved on to a study of philosophy. Strangely, from our point of view, the philosophy student needed to study astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and the texts of Plato and Aristotle.

Theon had strong scientific and mathematical interests and was also said to have written commentaries on Hermes Trismegistus and Orpheus. Theon also produced commentaries on the works of Euclid. Certainly, he produced a commentary on Euclid's *Optics* and on his *Data*. Theon's commentary on the *Data* is written at a relatively advanced level and in it Theon tends to shorten Euclid's proofs rather than to amplify them. The *Optics* on the other hand is elementary and written in a totally different style. Some historians conjecture that it is really a set of lecture notes by one of Theon's students. Many times the manuscript contains a phrase such as *'he said'* and it is thought that a student is indeed writing down what *'Theon said.'* He also wrote extensive commentaries on the astronomical works of Ptolemy. We know from his own writings that he observed a solar eclipse on 16 June 364 at Alexandria and a lunar eclipse, again in Alexandria, on 25 November 364.

This was the milieu that the young Hypatia grew up in. Her father trained her fully in mathematics and philosophy and she acquired a clear mastery of language,





*Porphyry, a detail of the Tree of Jesse, 1535, Sucevița Monastery.*

grammar, as well as philosophy in its widest sense, which was to stand her in good stead for her future life. Her enquiring mind absorbed all that she was taught, but still she yearned for more. Her thoughts turned inward. Theon taught his daughter that all systems of religion that pretend to teach the whole truth were to a great degree false and fraudulent. By instructing her in all religions she grew to know them comparatively, and so none of them took possession of her. To have religion thrust upon you and be compelled to believe in it or suffer social ostracism, is to be cheated of the right to make up your own mind.

How like contemporary life this is. A child does not need religion until they are old enough to evolve their ideas and then they must not be robbed of the right of independent thinking by having a fully-prepared plan of salvation handed to them. Doing so is tantamount to letting another person live your life for you. Her father told Hypatia: reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.

While Hypatia, wearing a *tribon* or philosopher's cloak, lectured from her raised dais in many subjects in various audience halls around the city, amongst which were subjects such as astronomy and geometry, all of her written works are now lost to us. It was said of her that she had the gift of communication with the holy mysteries of philosophy. It is generally agreed that Hypatia followed Porphyry's version of Neoplatonism rather than Iamblichus' version. And the doctrines of Porphyry had a special place in her school.

By all accounts, Hypatia's school must have involved quiet, refined meetings, unlikely to cause tensions and not involved in anti-Christian or anti-Jewish propaganda. She had many Christian students and was fortunately tolerated by Patriarch Cyril's uncle and predecessor Theophilus who, as we have seen, was extremely cruel towards Pagans, Jews and those Christians who did not share the same version of Christian belief that he did.

That being the case, why was Hypatia murdered? Philosophy was a real way of life for her, a striving for perfection and a love of wisdom. Her martyrdom likely had more to do with jealousy arising from her charisma, popularity, influence and steadfast reputation for piety and purity than to the religious beliefs of her contemporaries.

## Porphyry

Porphyry considered the Soul to be a part of the intelligible realm and placed the soul and nous (mind) as parts of the unity of the One. We have some extant commentaries on some of his works. As an example, there is one *'On the Cave of the Nymphs'* in Homer's *Odyssey*, which gives us an insight into his teachings. Homer is describing a cave on the island of Ithaca, Odysseus' homeland, and to which he spends many years trying to return to after the end of the Trojan War.

High at the head, a branching olive grows  
 And crowns the pointed cliffs with shady boughs.  
 A cavern pleasant, though involved in night,  
 Beneath it lies, the Naiades delight:  
 Where bowls and urns of workmanship divine  
 And massy beams in native marble shine;  
 On which the Nymphs amazing webs display,  
 Of purple hue and exquisite array.  
 The busy bees within the urns secure  
 Honey delicious, and like nectar pure.  
 Perpetual waters through the grotto glide,  
 A lofty gate unfolds on either side;  
 That to the north is pervious to mankind:  
 The sacred south to immortals is consigned.

To Porphyry the cave is an allegory for the world itself, as there doesn't seem to be such a cave on the island. The cave has two entrances, one leads upward towards the gods (triangle pointing up) while the other leads down (triangle pointing down). The olive





tree planted on top of the cave is sacred to Athena, the goddess of wisdom. So, the olive tree is a symbol of wisdom, which like the tree is perennial. It stands on the summit of a place where the soul has two options or paths which can lead upwards to the divine (macrocosm) or downwards to the earth (microcosm). It is said that the white leaves of the olive in summer turn upwards, while in winter they are bent downward.

## Plotinus

Hypatia's philosophy was called Neoplatonism, a term coined by the philosopher *Plotinus* (204-270 CE). He had made a study of all philosophies and all religions and had travelled through Egypt, Greece and the Middle East. Out of all this Plotinus returned to Plato as a starting point for all of the truth which humankind can understand. He believed in all religions but had absolute faith in none.

Plotinus was born in *Lycopolis*, Egypt in 204 or 205 CE. When he was 28, a growing interest in philosophy led him to the feet of the philosopher *Ammonius Saccas* (175-242 CE) in Alexandria. After ten or eleven years with this obscure though evidently dominating figure, Plotinus was moved to study Persian and Indian philosophy.

Like all his successors, he regarded himself simply as a Platonist, that is, as an expositor and defender of the philosophical position whose greatest exponent was Plato himself. Originality was thus not held as a premium by Plotinus. Nevertheless, Plotinus realised that Plato needed to be interpreted. In addition, between Plato and himself, Plotinus found roughly 600 years of philosophical writing, much of it reflecting engagement with Plato and the tradition of philosophy he initiated.

Consequently, there were at least two avenues for originality open to Plotinus, even if it was not his intention to say fundamentally new things. The first was in trying to say what Plato meant on the basis of what he wrote or said or what others reported him to have said. This was the task of exploring the philosophical position that we call '*Platonism*.' The second was in defending Plato against those who, Plotinus thought, had misunderstood him and therefore unfairly criticised him. Plotinus found himself, especially as a teacher, taking up these two avenues.<sup>2</sup>



Hypatia had already established herself as a formidable intellectual force in Alexandria by her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday and stood out in the Alexandrian intellectual establishment. So, when she started teaching, she drew a large crowd of students, with many Christians among them. Some came from as far away as Upper Egypt and even Syria. All her students had an interest in philosophy, they also came to her school for cultural training, and many went on to become bishops in the church, government officials or became estate owners with an interest in high culture. At a time of profound change in the Greek-speaking world, her Platonism was perfectly pitched for the time and city in which she lived. It can be said that Hypatia stood on the Roman empire's intellectual cutting edge. That is why her fame has come down to us some 1,500 years later.

She advocated training her students' minds through contemplation, by which the mind could ascend to the Divine. She taught that philosophy was a mystery that revealed profound truths about God and the nature of the world. She particularly favoured the pure platonic philosophy as propounded by Plotinus, claiming that one must reach a state of higher meditation to get a view of ultimate reality, which Rosicrucians refer to as Actuality. This was the soul's journey towards understanding the Divine.

She encouraged all her students to think of themselves as a family and Synesius often refers to them as brothers or family in his letters. He and many of her other students often refer to the secrecy they were bound to keep regarding the philosophical truths she taught them. This is echoed down through the ages in the Rosicrucian Order.





## The Assassination of Hypatia

Alexandria had been under the rule of Rome since the time of Cleopatra, but it had been the policy of Rome to exercise great tolerance in religious matters. There was a state religion, but it was mainly for the nobility or those helping to build the state. Most people were left to their own religious views. Hypatia's position as the head of her school meant that she had a prestigious place in Alexandrian society.

However, at that time, her gender prevented her from holding most civic offices which may have exercised any real power. On the other hand, because of her fame, it was not unusual for imperial officials newly stationed in Alexandria to pay her a visit first before the Patriarch. She enjoyed close relationships with both governors like Orestes and local city councillors. This did not please the Patriarch, who resented her obvious importance in *'his'* city and the fact that she was an outstanding woman in a predominately male environment.

At this time, the church in Alexandria was trying to take on the functions of the state, *'substituting the gentle Christ for Caesar.'* In those days the adjunct to *'love thy neighbour'* seems to have been long forgotten. It was an age when the church preferred coercion rather than love. As Hypatia is reported to have said: *'to rule by fettering the mind through fear of punishment in the other world is just as base as using force.'* The Patriarchs of Alexandria were always clashing with the Augustal Prefects over who had the most power.

Orestes is reported to have been in the audience when she said the above and clapped his hands. When this was reported to Cyril he threatened to excommunicate Orestes. Orestes reported Cyril's activities, how he was misusing his office and threatening people to the emperor in Constantinople. Cyril's next step was to declare that Hypatia was trying to found a church of her own, with pagan Greece as a base. He also hinted that Hypatia and Orestes were another Anthony and Cleopatra. What followed was a convenient way for Cyril to get back at Orestes.

Thanks to Cyril stirring up trouble with the city's Jewish community, this led to rioting between the two communities. The next day, Cyril assembled a large group of his own followers and counter-attacked, seizing Jewish possessions and synagogues. Does this seem to be



Illustration by Louis Figuier from 1866, representing the author's imagining of what the assault against Hypatia might have looked like

an earlier form of the Kristallnacht in November 1938 in Nazi Germany? As the temperature increased, one day Hypatia, by now around 60 years old, going in her carriage from her lecture-hall to her home, came across a procession of Parabolani, fanatical Christian monks loyal to Cyril, when she was recognised and set upon by the mob. Bishop John of Nikiu (7<sup>th</sup> century) describes everything that happened in his Chronicle:

They dragged her from her carriage and on to the Caesareum, the city's cathedral, dedicated to St Michael which was the Patriarchal headquarters in the city, probably with the impression of making her recant. But the leaders lost control and the mob tore the clothes off this old woman, then dragged her through the streets of the city until she died. Others say she was beaten to death with broken tiles. Then the monks took her to a place called Kinaron, dismembered her and placed her remains on a funeral pyre which quickly consumed what had been a short time before, a human being.

The original St Mark was arrested during a festival of Serapis and was martyred by being dragged through the streets. No doubt this was in the minds of the mob that terrorised the city on that particular day. I do not doubt those fanatics considered themselves, like fundamentalists in our own times, to be good Christians. We must each judge for ourselves.

Orestes made a report of the murder to the emperor Theodosius II [reigned 402-450], resigned his post and left the hateful city behind him. Cyril managed to cover up what happened, and no-one was punished for the wicked deed.



## Epilogue

In her mind, Hypatia divided society into two parts: those who regarded her as an oracle of light, and those who looked upon her as an emissary of darkness. Elbert Hubbard called her the Ralph Waldo Emerson of her day and her philosophy is in full accord with the American Transcendentalist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His regard for her was high and he placed her in the same lineage as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato.

Hypatia's writings have disappeared in their entirety and all we have left are passages attributed to her, quoted by her contemporaries and a few that followed after her. She was a remarkable woman whose place, in the same filiation as our Rosicrucian Order, is justified. Like Rosicrucians, she sought to enlighten peoples' minds at a time when early Christianity contrived to do the exact opposite. She did not share the idea that people from different backgrounds must be at odds with each other. Instead, she taught a philosophy that encouraged her students to love one another regardless of their religious background.

The highest goal of her teaching was a contemplative union with the Divine which, she considered, all could strive for together. If the Rosicrucian Order had been around at that time, I do not doubt that she would have been a leading member. Such is her fame and importance that modern Egypt has erected a statue to her in their new capital. She was a symbol of light in an increasingly darkening world, and we, today, stand on the shoulders of veritable giants such as her.

Many historians view Hypatia's murder as the symbolic death of classical antiquity, the advent of a thousand-year period of intellectual darkness, whose eventual coda was the Renaissance. It would take over 1,100 years for Nicolaus Copernicus to reinvent the work of Aristarchus of Samos, who correctly determined that the Earth orbits the Sun and not the other way around. And Galileo, some 60 years after Copernicus' death, was forced, on pain of death by the church Inquisition, to recant Copernicus' heliocentric model of the solar system.

Hypatia has a statue in the New Administrative Capital of Egypt. In a tribute to her in the Egyptian *Rosa al-Youssef* magazine, the editor remarks that Hypatia's death marked the end of an era of intellectual enlightenment

and advancement of knowledge that Alexandria had experienced for 750 years. In the wake of her murder, scholars fled the city for Athens and other countries.

Of the inestimable intellectual treasures lost in the pyre at Alexandria are included the works of Sappho<sup>3</sup>, Berossus<sup>4</sup>, and Hero of Alexandria<sup>5</sup>, an extraordinary mechanical genius, who invented steam engines, wind turbines and automated machines, the forerunners of today's cybernetics. And while the great Hypatia was all but forgotten by history, Cyril was made a saint!

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1. The Panion was an artificial hill in the south of the city with gardens and water features.
2. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy
3. Sappho was a poetess from Lesbos, an island in the northern Aegean Sea.
4. Berossus was a Hellenistic-era Babylonian writer, a priest of Bel Marduk and astronomer who wrote in the Koine Greek language, and who was active at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE.
5. Heron of Alexandria, also called Hero, was a Greek geometer and inventor who lived and worked in Alexandria and whose writings preserved for posterity a knowledge of the mathematics and engineering of Babylonia, ancient Egypt, and the Greco-Roman world.



# Moments of Revelation

*Not many better descriptions of the state of being of the Rosy Cross can be found than the following 18<sup>th</sup> century statement attributed to Cagliostro.*

I hail from no particular epoch or place. Beyond time and space, my spiritual being lives its eternal existence, and I turn my mind within, entering again the stream of ages, and extending my consciousness towards a state of being far beyond what you perceive.

I become whomever I desire. Consciously participating in the Absolute Being, I adapt my actions according to where I find myself. My name is that of my function and I choose them both because I am free. My country is where momentarily I halt my steps. You may pride yourselves on the past glories of your ancestors, who are strangers to you, or you may give yourself importance with illusory thoughts of future glory, which alas, may never be yours.

I am he who is. I was born not of the flesh but of the spirit. My name, which is of me and from me, the one I have chosen in order to appear amongst you, is that which I claim. That which I was given at birth, that which I was called in my youth, like those from other times and places, I have left behind, discarding them as I would discard unfashionable clothes, now become useless.

Here I stand, a Noble Traveller. I speak and your soul trembles, recognising words from long ago. A voice within you, long silenced, responds to my call. I act, and peace returns to your hearts, health to your bodies, hope and courage to your souls. All men are my brothers. All lands I hold dear. I journey through them so that everywhere I pass, the Spirit may descend and find its way to you. Of kings, whose power I respect, I ask but the hospitality of their lands, and where this is granted me, I pass, doing as much good as I can, but merely pass. Am I not a Noble Traveller?

Like the South wind, like the dazzling light of the midday sun, which characterises the full awareness of things, and active communion with God, I am heading North to the mist and the cold, leaving in my wake, parts of myself, exhausting and diminishing my energies at each resting place, but leaving you a little light, a little warmth, a little strength, until finally it is finished, and I will have reached the end of my journey, the hour when the Rose will bloom on the Cross. I am Cagliostro.





# Karma in Reincarnation

by **Ken Alexander**  
(1929-2016)



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Ken Alexander, a life-long Rosicrucian, practised as a psychotherapist in England for many years. Lecturing in several countries and appearing on many radio and television shows, his gentle nature and deep insight into human nature endeared him to many, though particularly to Rosicrucians seeking a deeper understanding of their spiritual nature. He retired from professional practice in 1990 and successfully edited and produced this magazine, the *Rosicrucian Beacon*, until his retirement with the June 2000 issue.

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A man came to see me one morning, asking if I could help with a medical problem. It appeared that he had undergone two operations which had not been successful and was at that time waiting entry into hospital for a third operation. Naturally he was concerned that the third operation might also be a failure. He asked me if I could use hypnosis or any other method to ensure that his body healed itself properly after the operation so he would not have to undergo any further surgery.

When he had finished telling me about his problem, I sat in silence for a few moments before answering him. It was not that his request was particularly unusual, for I imagine that most psychotherapists who use hypnosis as one of their methods have had similar requests. At the time about which I am writing I had been in practice many years and doubt that very few, if any, requests would have surprised me!

What did surprise me though was my own reaction to the client; it was something I had never experienced before. For some reason I had an instant aversion to the man the moment he entered my consulting room. He was smartly dressed and pleasant in manner, but my instant recoil from him seemed to have no logical explanation.





Quite obviously he was very distressed. However, instead of accepting him there and then as a client, I told him that I needed time to consider the matter. I made an excuse that his request was an unusual one and would need further consideration. It was left that he would call me the following morning when I would let him know my decision. I felt uncomfortable about the procrastination on my part.

The young man's request for help was on my mind all day. I was able to push it to the back of my mind while dealing with other clients, but as soon as each one left and I had a few moments alone, back would come my thoughts about my morning visitor, whom I shall refer to as Mr. O. During lunch and later dinner, I had no appetite, for all I could think about was Mr. O. Why, I asked myself, had I felt such an overwhelming repugnance? Was it because I had doubts about being able to help anyway? After all, his problem seemed to be a purely physical one. Wasn't my work in the realm of the mind, problems of the emotions, not ones that were entirely physical like his? However much I tried to convince myself that I worked only with problems such as depression, phobic conditions, emotional disturbances, etc., I knew I was making excuses. I went to bed that night with the matter still undecided.

Normally I slept well, but that night I could not sleep at all. I continued to present arguments to myself about Mr. O's problem. If I were to make the excuse that his problem was entirely physical, would I not

have disregarded his obvious anxiety? If the Simonton technique practised by many psychotherapists could help with conditions like cancer, how could I justify rejecting Mr. O's request for help? In the early hours of the morning, utterly exhausted, I murmured a short prayer to the Cosmic for guidance and fell asleep.

Then followed the most realistic dream I had ever experienced. I was being pursued by several men on horseback in wooded countryside. I was astride a white horse but it was obviously in some difficulty as my pursuers were gaining on me. As I entered a thicker part of the forest, hoping thus to slow down the pursuit, I came across a man and a youth. The man was perhaps in his fifties and the youth fourteen or fifteen years of age. They, seeing that my horse was lame and realising that I was in flight, bade me dismount and follow them on foot, which I did. They led me through the forest to a clearing where a large stone building stood which I took to be a monastery of some sort. I and they crouched down as we ran forward stooped over until we reached a doorway of what seemed to be a cellar under the main building. The older man opened the door and ushered his companion and me inside whereupon he entered too, closing the door behind him.

Although the room was not lit by any torch, a certain amount of light filtered into the place from cracks or vents in the wall and the doorway from which we had entered. It was sufficient for me to make out several wine barrels

**"Then followed the most realistic dream I had ever experienced."**





**“I could make out several wine barrels and a flight of stone steps leading up to the floor above.”**

and a flight of stone steps leading up to the floor above. A stout door was placed at the top of the steps. My two somewhat dubious companions sat down to the right of the steps with their backs against the wall. I decided to sit apart from them, slipping into a crouching position to the left of the steps. Their attire was rough and the older of the two was looking about him, his head moving as his gaze shifted from one side of the wine cellar to the other. I was aware that he was giving me a scrutiny, albeit furtively.

The two began whispering together and I strained my ears that I might understand all that was said, in case they were plotting to harm me. From what I heard I was able to grasp that they had been poaching in the forest and had been alarmed by the approaching horsemen. They had deduced that as I was being pursued I must have committed a crime and that I might have money or other valuables in my possession. The young man said very little but from what I heard I formed the impression that he, and quite evidently his companion too, had taken refuge in the cellar before.

The older man had a very cunning face, dark hair turning grey, and a somewhat swarthy complexion. The youth had reddish-brown hair, was very thin and seemed to be in some awe of his companion. I knew that my own clothing although dusty and a little dishevelled was of a better cut and style than that worn by the two men, and it seemed to me they were very much aware of it too. As I watched them I recalled the chase. My pursuers had

been soldiers or guards of some sort connected with the Church. Their work had something to do with the Inquisition, of that I was sure. I had been sought out for my beliefs which had been judged heretical.

Several minutes passed and then the men began sharing some food which the younger of the two had been carrying in a bag about his waist. They did not attempt to offer me any but that did not concern me; I was far from interested in eating. So, I watched them eat their simple fare and presently began to doze. As I did not trust them, my sleep was fitful. Suddenly I was awakened by the sound of shouting and opened my eyes to see a man dressed in the clothing of a monk descending the last two or three steps into the cellar. My two companions had fled, leaving the cellar door open to the garden. I could hear shouting outside too and leaped to my feet. The monk was now positioned between me and the open door clutching in his right hand an iron bar several feet in length which he obviously intended using as a weapon. The shouting outside was coming closer and, realising that my retreat in that direction would be doomed to failure, I ran up the steps and through the open door at the top.

The door led into a large hallway where there were many monks dressed similarly to the one behind me in the cellar. He was shouting to warn the others of the direction I had taken. I was horrified to see that these men were now taking hold of various weapons and seemed intent on advancing on me. In the centre of the hall was a



large stairway and I ran towards it, ascending the stairs at breakneck speed. On the landing above I could make out several doors and, by some miracle, the upstairs appeared to be deserted. I believe the monks had either been at prayer or dining when I had been discovered. I had no idea what I should do but hoped that on the floor above I might find some refuge from the milling crowd below me on the stairs.

As I ascended the final stairs I saw a man on a balcony opposite me. He held a crossbow in his arms and the arrow was aimed at me. At the exact moment I saw him, he fired the bolt and I felt a momentary pain as the arrow entered my body. Then I watched my body roll back down the stairway to the sound of excited cheering from the monks below. I watched with a sort of elation, for there I was, floating above the hall, beyond their reach! The man who had fired the cross-bow seemed quite unaware of me as I floated beside him; but I recognised him all right. Although the face was different, I had no doubt at all who he was. I knew!

In a loud whisper which echoed in my head, I heard the words: *'...forgive them for they know not what they do.'* The scenery changed and I found myself lying in my bed back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My dream, or my past-life recall, call it what you will, had been so real, so vivid, that I couldn't at first distinguish if I was awake or still dreaming. It was several minutes before I could adjust to

my environment and I even pinched my arm quite hard to prove that I was really at home in my bedroom. The man in my dream with the crossbow had without a doubt been the man who had called to see me the previous day, Mr. O.

I knew then that I had to accept him as a client, and I phoned him later to confirm. He attended several consultations prior to his entry into hospital, and at our final meeting he shook hands with me thanking me for having helped him. He was relaxed and confident, and it was the last time I saw or heard of him. For my part, all the rational explanations I could have given for my experience in that particular episode of my life would not have satisfied me, neither then nor now, save that of Karma in reincarnation; for Mr. O had told me that on our first meeting he had had the distinct impression that he had met me somewhere before.

During a subsequent consultation, he also mentioned that he had had a very strange and vivid dream in which he had been taken prisoner by soldiers. He explained that he did not dream very often but that particular dream had been so unusual that it had impressed itself upon his memory in some detail. He placed the time of the experience as being about that of the Roman Empire. Having been wounded in battle, he was buried alive by soldiers, along with those who had been killed in battle. The commanding officer, he said, bore a striking resemblance to me!



**“He attended several consultations prior to his entry into hospital, and at our final meeting he shook hands with me thanking me for having helped him.”**





# Hermetism, Alchemy & Jean Bourré

by Paul Goodall



The intention of this article is to provide a concise discussion surrounding the character of the French court official *Jean Bourré* (1452-1506), in particular his interest in alchemy and the set of images painted on wood panels which he commissioned in the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century at his home, the *Château du Plessis-Bourré*, situated 12 miles (19km) north of Angers, France. It is meant to serve as a supplement to a previous article in the Beacon on this topic and to supply the reader some context for the subject matter that was presented. Initially we will briefly consider the rise of Hermetic philosophy and its historiographic problems; then quickly survey early 15<sup>th</sup> century alchemical imagery to provide background to the discussion. Since both topics are considerable, much will be left out for the sake of brevity. The operation of alchemy is not discussed.

## The Rise of Hermetism

Concisely, the term '*Hermetica*' is used to describe a broad variety of mystical and philosophical texts written in Greek in Hellenistic Egypt. These were attributed to the mythic '*Thoth-Hermes*', a fusion of the Egyptian god *Thoth* and the Greek god *Hermes*, jointly known as '*Hermes Trismegistus*' (the '*Thrice Great*') and believed in Classical and Renaissance times to have lived, in person, as a sage shortly after Moses. Some of the text is theological and



*Egyptian god Thoth*



philosophical in character, mostly written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE, while elsewhere we find more magical, astrological and alchemical content, the so-called older *'technical'* treatises that may have been in existence as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. A central theme running through the treatises concerns the search for salvation through transcendent knowledge (*'gnosis'*). It has become conventional to label any text relating to Hermes as being part of the *Hermetica*. A select body of these texts, 18 treatises (treatise XV being lost), was collected together at Byzantium and known as the *'Corpus Hermeticum'*, the *'Books of Hermes.'*

Another important companion text from this early period is the *'Asclepius'*, a philosophical tract possibly as old as the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. It focusses on the pantheistic doctrine of *'oneness'* which was widespread during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The mystical-Neoplatonic nature of the *Asclepius*, though not a Christian text, resonated with the beliefs of *Augustine* and *Aristotle* relating to the concept of a *'Divine Trinity'*, lending validation to the text in terms of Christian theology. This accounts for the acceptability of the *Hermetica* despite some of its more dubious aspects concerning magic, astrology and alchemy.

This supposition is reinforced when we consider Hermetism in the writings of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian apologist *Lactantius* (c.250-c.325 CE). A. Wlosok, in his *Lactantius and the 'Philosophical Gnosis'* writes:

According to Lactantius, almost every essential feature of Christianity was foretold in Hermetism; it spoke of the one God Father, spiritual and transcendent; of His revelation through the Son;

*Medieval scholars had access to Hermetic philosophy only through the Asclepius, but other texts became available when the 'Byzantine manuscripts of the Corpus Hermeticum were translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino (pictured) (Tracts 1-14) and Ludovico Lazzarelli (Tracts 16-18).*



of the forlornness of man and the fore-ordainment of his immortality, of his redemption, his duty to mete out justice, and of future retaliation.<sup>0</sup>

It is certain then, that Hermes Trismegistus was known in the early medieval period before being rediscovered by the Neo-Platonist *Marsilio Ficino* (1433-99) in his translation of the Byzantine *Corpus Hermeticum* (treatises 1-14) from 1461-1463 from which the so-called *'Hermetic Tradition'*, as suggested by Frances Yates (in her *'Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition'* of 1964), became a strong philosophic force in Italian Renaissance thought and culture, seated between paganism and Christianity.

Ficino collectively entitled the 14 treatises *'Pimander'*, a title meaning *'Shepherd of Men'*, though that name is only related to the first tract of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The last three tracts (16-18) were translated later by the lesser known *Ludovico Lazzarelli* (1447-1500), a person who has lately been found to have played an important role, perhaps even greater than Ficino's, in the transmission of hermetic philosophy in this historical period.

## Historiographic Problems

Recent scholarship from the esteemed Neoplatinist and cultural historian, *Maurizio Campanelli*<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated that the first publishing in print (*editio princeps*) of Ficino's 14 treatises at Treviso on 18 December, 1471, was *unauthorised*. Ficino had in fact made no attempt to get his *Pimander* into print. The publishing of the work occurred on the initiative of two humanist scholars: the Flemish *Geraert van der Leye Gherardo de Lija* and an Italian colleague, *Francesco Rolandello*.<sup>2</sup> It was published as *'Hermes Trismegistus' Book on the Power and Wisdom of God.* In Campanelli's words it was an *'authentic textual disaster'* through *'scandalous negligence.'*

Two things he notes: firstly, the printers were apparently working to a strict time schedule and made many errors in assembling the typeface for printing each page and secondly, both van der Leye and Rolandello didn't check and correct the proofs. Although the original Greek text was comprehensible, Campanelli found that many passages in the 1471 Latin version were confusing and did not make sense. The consequences of this unauthorised version, with its defective content,







Third edition of Pimander (treatises I-14), printed in Venice by Lucas Dominici (1481), rebound in 1700, and now housed at the Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, USA.

was that it became the formative work for more than 40 extant manuscripts and 24 printed editions up to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Renaissance translations in many vernacular languages.<sup>3</sup>

In view of an ever-expanding number of mistranslations and misinterpretations, and further emendations of the texts during the period, *Wouter J. Hanegraaf* asks the question: ‘*Did the Renaissance admirers of Hermes Trismegistus in fact understand the message that the authors of the ‘philosophical’ Hermetica had sought to impress upon their readers?*’ If ‘yes’, then there may have been some kind of Hermetic Tradition. If ‘no’, then the transmission and reception of the Hermetica had no meaningful sense and we are left with a Renaissance discourse *about* the figure of Hermes but with no *actual* Hermetic Tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Coupled with these facts, it is also now accepted that the history and development of Hermetism and the character of its eponymous representative, Hermes Trismegistus, is fraught with a multiplicity of doctrines and concepts which make categorising *Hermetism/Hermeticism* problematic. Florian Ebeling, in his ‘*The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*’ said:

Both the figure and writings of Hermes Trismegistus were the product of the syncretic Hellenistic philosophy of nature, which itself was a conglomerate of Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic and

Pythagorean doctrines interspersed with motifs from Egyptian mythology and themes of Jewish and Iranian origin.<sup>5</sup>

From the foregoing it can be argued that a diverse range of texts, treatises and imagery could be associated with Hermetic content, allowing, for example, an interpretation of the Plessis-Bourré ceiling imagery in favour of hermetic influence. To reinforce the point, Heinrich Dorrie called the *Hermetica* a ‘*thing without corners or edges*.’<sup>6</sup> Further, Kegan A. Chandler in his ‘*Hermes and Hermeticism*’<sup>7</sup> assesses the influences between Hermeticism, Judaism and Christian Gnosticism in the medieval period. He says, for example:

... the exchange between Judaism and Hermeticism continued during the medieval period, in which mystical Rabbinic commentaries and works of Kabbalah demonstrate signs of inadvertent Hermetic influence.

Ebeling also states, not without some opposition from his peers, that two currents of Hermeticism existed from early on. The first, embracing the *Corpus Hermeticum*, was based in Italy, forming a Hermetic Tradition mystically related to Neoplatonism. The second was centred on the ‘*Tabula Smaragdina*’ (the ‘*Emerald Tablet*’) along with other Arabic texts and identified with an older alchemical-medicine practice.<sup>8</sup> The fabled *Emerald Tablet* is ascribed to Hermes and was known from the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Latin form. Its text provides the canon for European



Logdovico Iazzarelli presents a manuscript of *Fasti christianae religionis* to the king of Naples and Sicily.





alchemy and summarises the principles of change in Nature at the heart of alchemical doctrine. According to Holmyard it is ‘...one of the oldest and long-lived of all alchemical documents mythically found in a cave inscribed on a plate of emerald in the hands of the dead *Hermes Trismegistus*.’<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the idea of a Renaissance Hermetic Tradition has increasingly come into question from modern scholars such as Wouter J. Hanegraaf, who argues against the Yatesian (Frances Yates) thesis of a Hermetic impulse that seemingly emerged as a new phenomenon, following the translations of Marsilio Ficino and Ludovico Lazzarelli (mentioned earlier).<sup>10</sup> He states:

It is therefore advisable to abandon the popular term ‘*Hermeticism*’, as it is burdened with the Yatesian legacy, and use the alternative ‘*Hermetism*’ to refer strictly to the religio-philosophical writings attributed to or connected with *Hermes Trismegistus* (most importantly the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*) and their commentaries.



A manuscript page from *Aurora consurgens* showing an alchemist or sage (*Hermes Trismegistus*?) consulting his tablet within a church-like building.

## Alchemical Imagery

The domain of manuscript alchemy up to this time had been almost entirely through textual treatises but from the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century we begin to see more visual imagery appearing.<sup>11</sup> The earliest known occurrence of a visual image in the western alchemical corpus can be found in the ‘*Book of the Secrets of Alchemy*’, compiled by Constantine of Pisa in 1257. It is a diagram representing the generation of metals in the form of a stack of ten labelled horizontal crescents. But by the mi-14<sup>th</sup> century more figurative illustrations appeared showing the *personification* of metals. At the same time alchemical apparatuses, such as furnaces and vessels, are included to supplement texts.<sup>12</sup>

By the time we reach the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, alchemical imagery has become more emblematic and refined, exhibiting greater artistic quality. Manuscripts were beginning to circulate widely and a coherent set of visual metaphors was being created. A prime example of these manuscripts is ‘*Aurora Consurgens*’ (‘*Dawn Rising*’) from the 1420s which hosts 37 images. Interestingly, the images in this work appear to demonstrate an evolution of emblematic imagery from the Arabic genre to a more westernised representation.

In *Aurora Consurgens* we are witnessing the alchemical process in much more detail in the form of allegorical and figurative visual metaphors, not necessarily requiring text to support them. Another alchemical work from this period is ‘*Das Buch der heiligen Dreifältigkeit*’ (‘*The Book of the Holy Trinity*’), clearly a Christian text. Its emphasis is on the suffering Christ and the alchemical stages of *mortification*, *calcination* and *purification*. The completion of the ‘*Great Work*’, namely, the production of the *Philosophers’ Stone*, is symbolised by the resurrection of Christ from the tomb



Image from *Aurora consurgens* showing craftsmen.





*The earliest known occurrence of a visual image in the western alchemical corpus can be found in the Book of the Secrets of Alchemy of 1257. It is a diagram representing the generation of metals in the form of a stack of ten labelled horizontal crescents.*

(the alchemical vessel).<sup>13</sup> The nature of these books begins to set a Western standard, with the whole gamut of alchemical content becoming more apparent in these early visual works and laying down a path toward the industry of emblematic books of the Renaissance.

## Introducing Jean Bourré and the Château

Let us now turn our attention to a few images on ceiling panels in the *Château du Plessis-Bourré*. This castle-like residence, with its four conical towers, was constructed between 1468 and 1473 at the instruction of *Jean Bourré* (1452-1506), the Grand Treasurer of *Louis XI*. It has an interesting array of what appears to be symbolic imagery, which he commissioned, set into 24 sections on the ceiling of the *Salles des Gardes* (*Guardroom*), the first 16 of which appear to represent alchemical themes.

The iconography is not just confined to this one room but is complemented throughout the castle by other decorative artefacts such as the athanor from which *Beya* and *Gabricus* emerge, representing the alchemical sun

(*Sol*) and moon (*Luna*).<sup>14</sup> They make an interesting study. Before briefly surveying the imagery and considering a few examples, we must first consider the man himself and ask whether Jean Bourré was an alchemist or simply an enthusiast of the subject.

## Was Jean Bourré an alchemist?

We can begin by looking at the website of the photographer Jean-Jacques Dejeunes who hosts an interesting gallery of images from the Château. When considering the Coat-of-Arms of Jean Bourré he says:

Jean Bourré, grand treasurer of Louis XI, shared the refined and universal taste of medieval society for the rebus and the symbol. It was in the guard room of his castle in Plessis-Bourré, with its ceiling richly painted with alchemical frescoes, that he exhibited, through iconography, the occult concerns that *he so perfectly veiled from his contemporaries under his official personality*.<sup>15</sup> (my italics and underlining)

The word '*refined*' is descriptive here because the alchemical art was only practised among the educated, meaning clerics and scholars and perhaps those of independent wealth. It was a restricted and niche subject. We can also imagine that Bourré may have wanted to keep his interest in alchemy secret from his societal peers and friends which would mean, perhaps, that very few would have seen the illustrated ceiling in the Salle des Gardes. Bourré's interest in occult topics appears to continue when we consider the image of the lock (see illustration) to a

particular door with its strange shape in the form of the letter 'Z' in which the key is inserted.



*Painting of Jean Bourré*

In Hebrew, the word ZIZA means light, clarity, brilliance, radiance or resplendence. The Z is also made up of two 7s joined together, upside down, recalling, according to the famous formula of the Emerald Table, that '*what is above is like what is below*'.<sup>16</sup>





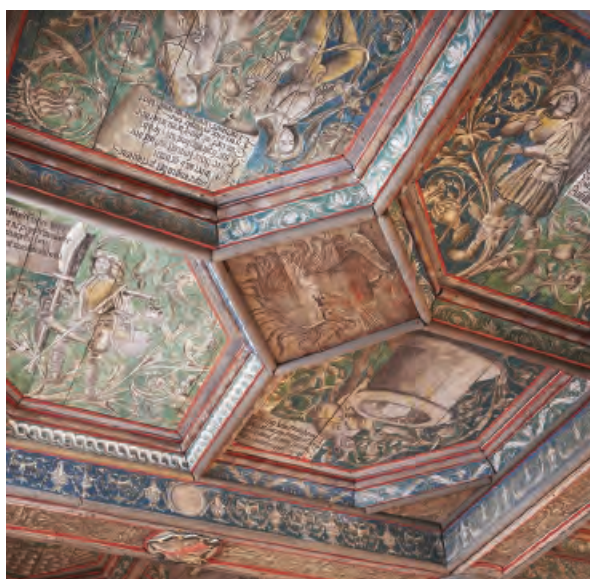


*Above: The strange shaped lock found at Plessis that appears to exhibit esoteric symbolism related to Hermeticism.*

*Right: Château du Plessis-Bourré*



Here Dejeunes considers the shape of the lock from a hermetic perspective invoking the well-known maxim concerning the relationship of macrocosm and microcosm. The round circle above the Z-shape may represent the sun or the universe. Does this suggest an interest in hermetic symbols on the part of Bourré? Is the shape of the lock intended to convey an esoteric premise based on hermetic principles? The Emerald Tablet was already in circulation during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps his interest was more than just passing, given the overall extent of the symbolic imagery displayed at the Château. There are four things to consider:



- There is an assumed alchemical role/interest on the part of Bourré based on the ceiling imagery which has an alchemical style...
- It is plausible that the official occupation of Bourré (finance minister of France) predisposes him to an interest in a method by which money can be generated relatively cheaply, if not as an alchemist himself, then using those who can perform the work.
- Bourré's high position in society would perhaps have allowed him the opportunity to see and read the earlier Greek texts through the Arab cultural milieu and the early 15<sup>th</sup> century emblematic works like *Aurora consurgens*, thus stimulating his imagination in this area.
- Although speculative, we read in *'The Rough Guide to France'* (2009, David Abrams et al) a description of Bourré as having a *'fashionable interest in alchemy'*,<sup>17</sup> suggesting that he was merely a dilettante, rather than a working alchemist and that the images were more aesthetic than meaningful.

### **Does the ceiling imagery embody or express actual alchemical subject matter?**

The first emblematic alchemical works were introduced in





Western Europe in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century: for example, the already mentioned, *Das Buch der heiligen Dreifältigkeit* (c. 1415-18), *Aurora Consurgens* (c. 1420, attributed to Aquinas), and the later *Pretiosissimum Donum Dei* (c. 1450/75). The ornamental sunken ceiling panels (caissons) at the Plessis-Bourré castle were produced towards the end of that century so we might speculate that these early illustrated alchemical manuscripts had an influence on the commissioning of the ceiling imagery by Bourré. As a point of interest, particularly when taking into account Bourré's motivation and original influences in the commissioning of the ceiling imagery, we might consider these four categories regarding alchemical images in relation to their artistic meaning and context.<sup>18</sup>

They are:

1. Images made within the alchemical culture proper.
2. Genre images which portray alchemists and their environment.
3. Religious, mythological or genre images with appropriate alchemical ideas or motifs as a kind of Panofskian *'disguised symbolism'*.<sup>19</sup>
4. Images which show structural affinities with alchemy without iconographically alluding to it.

The last two categories, 3 and 4, would seem to fit the bill when considering the Plessis ceiling imagery. We cannot be sure, for instance, that the images are strictly visual alchemical metaphors like the later Renaissance

emblem books, even though they convey the appearance that they are. It might be noted here that alchemy has been consistently used as a source for Art.<sup>20</sup>

It would be interesting to know who the painter was because from that information one might find out if the artist had any knowledge of alchemy himself and, if so, were the images his own creation or did Bourré give instructions regarding the whole layout and style of the ceiling. On the subject of style, while one might see a pattern of imagery that appears to represent alchemical motifs, their representation varies from the manner of contemporary alchemical emblems found in *Aurora Consurgens*, for example, or the other manuscripts mentioned above.

But some tentative borrowing from older imagery such as depicted in *Aurora Consurgens* is apparent at Plessis: the Griffon in combat with the Lion, for instance. It should be noted that this is early in the history of full emblematic visual metaphors and the Plessis artist did not have as much to draw on regarding alchemical sources. His style may even have been regarded as outside the contemporary genre we see in alchemy at this time. In conclusion I refer the reader back to the last two categories (3 and 4) listed above.

### Are the Images Hermetic?

So much has now been exposed through modern critical research concerning the history, content and nature of the *Hermetica* (touched on above) which allows greater room for interpretation and appreciation of its influence when considering the Plessis images, for instance. Hermeticism is considered essentially a synthetic tradition that brings



<https://ijdejanus.com/alchimie/plessis-bourre>

*The Griffon and the Lion in Combat: A tentative example of borrowing from Aurora Consurgens by the creator of the Plessis ceiling images.*





*A Plessis image showing the Pelican piercing its breast to feed its young, being a metaphor of the Red Elixir.*

together diverse texts and images to form a cohesive whole. However, the debate continues as to whether the *Hermetica* actually formed a 'tradition', which was only termed relatively recently by Frances Yates in her 'Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition' of 1964.

The esoteric scholar, Henrik Bogdan, wrote that: '*Yates' arguments for a single tradition were simplistic and did not take into account the highly complex nature of cultural phenomena.*'<sup>21</sup> During the Renaissance, this stream of knowledge, its texts and imagery was termed '*philosophia perennis*' (*perennial wisdom*) reflecting the admiration, at the time, of classical knowledge from Hellenistic Greece. Because the figure of Hermes Trismegistus permeates the corpus so fully, the idea of a '*Hermetic Tradition*' seems natural.<sup>22</sup>

The Emerald Tablet, the keystone of Alchemy and Hermeticism, was translated into Latin in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by *Hugo of Santalla*<sup>23</sup> so its philosophical text was around before the construction of the ceiling at Plessis. However, the first Latin translation of the first 14 books from the *Corpus Hermeticum* was not produced until 1463 by the Florentine Greek scholar *Marsilio Ficino* and not in print until 1471. Given that the construction of Plessis was not completed until 1473, we might surmise that the ceiling imagery was created at this end stage, meaning that it is possible Jean Bourré could have had access to Hermetic literature from this date because of

his education and high position in society at the French Court, although it would have been largely textual and not likely emblematic yet. Of course, the images from *Aurora Consurgens* might have influenced him, given its hermetic content. So we cannot entirely exclude the insertion of Hermetic ideas into the ceiling imagery. With that in mind, let us now look at some examples from Plessis that exhibit hermetic and alchemical content.

## Image Examples from Plessis

**The Griffon and Lion in Combat:** The griffon is a symbol of the cold, moist and passive principles represented as *argent vive* or mercury. This mythical creature with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion is often paired with its opposite, that of the lion representing the hot, dry and active principles. This pairing of opposites is featured in the Comedy performed in '*The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*' where the two are in combat with the lion being victorious. The conflict between them represents *dissolution* and *separation* followed by *coniunctio*, the union of opposites.<sup>24</sup>

It is argued that the roles of sulphur and mercury can reverse; the naked figure of a female on the griffon in *Aurora Consurgens* is a contemporary association based on medieval and religious culture which evolved from more ancient philosophies of the past. Alchemical opposites do not really need the inferred references to male and female; we should, perhaps, only refer to sulphur and mercury which correspond to, or are at least analogous to the sun and moon, *Sol* and *Luna*.<sup>25</sup>

**The Pelican:** Representing the penultimate stage in the alchemical process, the Pelican symbolises the red elixir (Red Stone). The reason for this appears to have come about during medieval times when it was observed that this bird would pierce its breast before feeding its young, resulting in the mistaken belief that the Pelican fed its chicks with its own blood. The red blood seen on the breast was actually the fallen regurgitated remains of fish. Seeking to make the connection between alchemical philosophy and Christianity, this perceived sacrificial act came to represent the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>26</sup>

The Pelican also belongs to the *rubedo* colour stage







*In the Plessis image we see the puffed up figure of the phoenix subduing the rooster with a talon holding the bird to the ground. In alchemical terms this action denotes the fixed and volatile aspects of the process.*

in alchemy and became a symbol of the *cibation* (the feeding of the physical matter being acted upon, usually by liquid)<sup>27</sup> when the *'infant Stone'* is fed with the *'mercurial blood.'* The potency of the red elixir is multiplied a great many times through the generosity of the Pelican thus accelerating the drive toward *coagulation* (fixation), the goal of alchemical work which is symbolised by the Phoenix.<sup>28</sup>

**The Phoenix:** Probably the most obvious of the alchemical bestiary found in alchemical art of this period is the Phoenix. In the Plessis image we see the puffed up figure of the phoenix subduing the rooster with a talon holding the bird to the ground. In alchemical terms this action denotes the fixed and volatile aspects of the process. The fixing of the volatile implies a resolution between the *Sol* (Sun) and *Luna* (Moon) principles, namely, sulphur and mercury. It is the quintessential symbol for rebirth and renewal. It represents the culmination of the work, synonymous with the *Philosophers' Stone*, attainment of the red stone at the *rubedo* stage and with the ability to transmute base metal into pure gold.

## Conclusion

Essentially, then, the Plessis images hail from a repository of alchemical knowledge that existed in medieval Europe

and derived from Greek sources through the Arabic literature which was translated into Latin. Certainly, the images remind one of the medieval genre of representation which is observed in the art of the period. If we look at the emblematic imagery in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century work *Aurora Consurgens*, for example, we might comfortably find a comparison, particularly as alchemical metaphors that relate to human and animal procreation and alchemical stages like calcination and putrefaction are found there.

The best option in viewing the ceiling in the Guardroom is to consider that Europe, at the time when Plessis was being built, was on the cusp of a new approach to learning, the Renaissance. The images at Plessis, being rooted in the past, do not conform to the later representations we find in the plethora of alchemical manuscripts and treatises produced from the printing presses of later Europe. Furthermore, the symbolism of the natural objects and animals at Plessis align with contemporary and universal ideas which marked certain



## THOUGHTS ON THE WIND AND SAIL

*'The sun is its father. The moon is its mother. The wind carried it in its womb. The earth is its nurse.'* (Lines from The Emerald Tablet.)

*The wind (pneuma = breath or air in motion) on the sail as the agent of volition, the hermetist (First Matter) being carried forth on the journey of spiritual attainment via a wheeled vehicle, prefiguring, perhaps, that found as the later visual metaphor known as the 'Invisible College of the Rosicrucians.'*







Another Plessis painting - The two Rams

fauna (and flora) exhibited in the numerous bestiaries that were around from the Medieval period with their accompanying moral lessons, many of which derived from Greek sources through the translation of Arabic texts into Latin. Today, the images at Plessis remain a source of curiosity, providing an array of fascination for those who come to view them and perhaps wonder if they hold secrets yet to be uncovered.

### Endnotes

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12. Peter J. Forshaw, 'Alchemical Images' in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Springer, 2022, p. 33
13. Ibid., pp. 34-35
14. See further: Thomas Willard, 'Beya and Gabricus: Erotic Imagery in German Alchemy' in *Mediaevistik*, V. 28, 2015, pp. 269-281
15. See, [https://jjdejeunes.com/alchimie/plessis-bourre/plessis\\_bourre\\_3.jpg.html](https://jjdejeunes.com/alchimie/plessis-bourre/plessis_bourre_3.jpg.html)
16. See, [https://jjdejeunes.com/alchimie/plessis-bourre/plessis\\_bourre\\_4.jpg.html](https://jjdejeunes.com/alchimie/plessis-bourre/plessis_bourre_4.jpg.html)
17. 'The highlight of the tour comes in the Salle des Gardes... where the original, deeply coffered ceiling stems from Bourré's fashionable interest in alchemy. Every inch is painted with allegorical scenes: sixteen panels depict alchemical symbols such as the phoenix, the pregnant siren and the donkey singing Mass, while eight cartoon-like paintings come with morals attached...' David Abrams et al., *The Rough Guide to France*, May 2009, 11th edn., p. 494
18. See: Jan Bäcklund and Jacob Wamberg, 'Introduction' in *Art and Alchemy*, 2006, Museum Tusulanum Press, pp. 13-15
19. Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) was a German-Jewish art historian whose work represented a high point in the study of iconography, particularly in his use of historical ideas to interpret artworks.
20. Bäcklund /Wamberg, op. cit., p. 10
21. Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and the Rituals of Initiation*, SUNY, 2007, p. 10
22. See: Shawn Gray, *Initiation and the Hermetic Tradition*, <http://blog.shawngray.name/>
23. See: <https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk/emerald-tablet-hermes-trismegistus#/media=4351>
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25. See further, 'Gender in Alchemy', <http://levity.com/alchemy/gender.html> for a discussion on this subject.
26. Adam McLean, 'Animal Symbolism in the Alchemical Tradition', <https://www.alchemywebsite.com/animal.html>
27. See Adam McLean, 'Alchemical Processes', <https://alchemywebsite.com/alch-pro.html>
28. Lyndy Abraham, op. cit., p. 40, 143





The Rosicrucian tradition has, for centuries, fought superstition, ignorance and fear as the three greatest enemies of humankind.

The Rosicrucian Order receives requests about how one can eliminate or at least alleviate misfortune and tragedy. How often do some people blame whatever is wrong in their lives on an outside agency? Some people attribute misfortune to bad luck, black cats, ladders, bad economy, viruses, etc., while for others, witchcraft is to blame. The perception of black magic, voodoo and other superstitions has plagued humanity all over the world for millennia. Today, fear, ignorance and superstition can still infect our consciousness, often through no fault of our own. There are some people, however, driven by their ego, narcissism and desire to control the thoughts and actions of others, who play on the irrational fears and ignorance of some poor gullible unfortunates to get what they want.

In some areas of the world, fear and terror are still an open part of everyday life and may openly paralyse. In other parts of the world, fear and superstition appear in a more subtle guise. In the Western world, for example, although witchcraft may be outwardly ridiculed and fears are seldom, if ever, admitted, nevertheless their effects may still be operating on an unconscious level. Yet, in both cases, fear is in control and determining how we perceive situations.





Many of us could offer excuses for the overwhelming problems that may infest our own lives. As far as excuses for fear are relevant to our lives, know that fear can still rule us, if we let it. Is knowledge of fear important, then, to the Rosicrucian student who desires mastery of self? How do we deal with fear? We should ask ourselves is self-mastery better achieved when fears are ignored or suppressed? To some the strong, invincible hero is the ideal? But that is not the answer.

## Constructively Dealing with Fear

One of the first pieces of literature about the Rosicrucian Order that a prospective member reads is a paper or online booklet entitled *'The Mastery of Life.'* This document says that the Order has constantly fought superstition, ignorance and fear as the greatest enemies of humanity and the obstructions to its mastery of life. Therefore, the importance of this subject to seekers who feel drawn to us is clearly stated at the very beginning of the student's quest.

Even though we may want to face our fears, the following response is typical: *'The first thing I want to do when confronted with fear is to run away!'* Many psychologists agree that we tend to hide our fears. We hide them rather than bring them out into the open where we can consciously deal with them. Acknowledging that fear exists in our realities can be the biggest task of all.

A member once wrote:

Some people can ignore fear and just hope it will go away. They'll be right in the emotion of fear, but they'll wade in it. They'll whine and cry and use their fear as an excuse in their lives. Then there's another way; they see fear and attack it!

Both running and attacking, however, can be a mindless reaction to fear. Perceiving a threat, we desperately seek safety in a way most familiar to us: fight or flight. Yet, for the Rosicrucian student, being a victim who merely reacts to the world does not fulfil the quest for self-mastery.

Another member wrote:

We are not victims of the world we see; we are victims of the way we perceive the world.

These are the words of someone who is actively engaged in letting go of fear and superstitious beliefs. In letting go of their fearful realities, they discover that they are not a victim. Rather, for them, self-mastery brings ever greater self-awareness and self-realisation. As another member put it:

We are what we are aware of.

We cannot allow fear to dominate our lives; we need to overcome it to realise our full potential.

## Eliminate Fear

Another member wrote: *'The more I eliminate fear, the happier I am.'* Still another wrote: *'Fear has become a non-reality to me. It is a perception, not a fact.'* A point with which yet another agreed: *'Fear is only what I perceive it to be. Although it is still there sometimes, it is there only because I allow it.'* And finally, another one affirmed: *'I am responsible for the world I see. I choose the feelings I experience, and I decide the goals I would achieve. Everything that seems to happen, I ask for and receive as I have asked.'*

The intention of people trying to take responsibility for their lives is clear. One member wrote of his intention:

Every experience I deal with I want to look at objectively and take myself out of that fear. I want to look at it, experience it and think logically, instead of letting it get hold of me.

Such intentions can be practical even if requiring courage and presenting difficulties and challenges to address. For instance, learning to overcome fear saved one war veteran many restless nights.

I know some others who did not face their fears, who even now are a little bit off, being still attached to those days. They keep having dreams, nightmares, the shakes... and they are still totally into the emotion of it. They just cannot break away.

Regardless of the form, whether it be war experiences, voodoo, witchcraft, what other people think, or just a nameless anxiety, there is only one problem... fear. If we are all faced with this same problem, how are we to deal with it?





When asked how they overcame fear in their own lives, one member responded:

If I want to get out from under fear and expand life, I must be willing to allow my realities and perceptions to change.

Another member added:

To face fear, I assume a different mentality, or a different reality in my mind. I assume that reality is just an illusion. I need to assume this mentality whether I believe I can do something or not.

The importance of transmuted realities was also brought out by a member who said:

Fear must first be recognised and then discarded. I ask myself what benefit this fear has in my life? In keeping it, what do I get out of it? What do I get to do or not to do, believe or not believe about myself? Then I ask what would be different if the fear was eliminated? My experiences with fear have proven to me that the realities and values of my life are my choice and my responsibility.

According to some, dependence on outside things

such as drugs, alcohol, other people or physical tools can have a stifling effect on our desire to escape from the shadows of fear. In contrast to common sense, one mountain climber wrote that he chose to go mountain climbing alone, not so much because he did not want companionship and greater safety, but because of the opportunities that solitude offered to deal with the fundamentals of his mind. He wrote:

‘When I climb, I encounter incredible experiences because I must face myself and even push myself to extreme limits... I have to get to that point where I can tap into the inner strength we all have. Prior to that point I am depending on physical and intellectual abilities only. But in this kind of situation, we can chip away at the outer iceberg and get down to the deep resources.’

We all seek to express the Source lying deep within us. Exercises, principles and life-experiences are all used by Rosicrucian students to support our purpose of realising self-mastery. Armed with courage and confidence in the powers of the Inner Self, we do not need to give credence to mere shadows standing in the way of our ultimate mastery of life. With knowledge, confidence and courage, we dare to acknowledge what we actually are.

