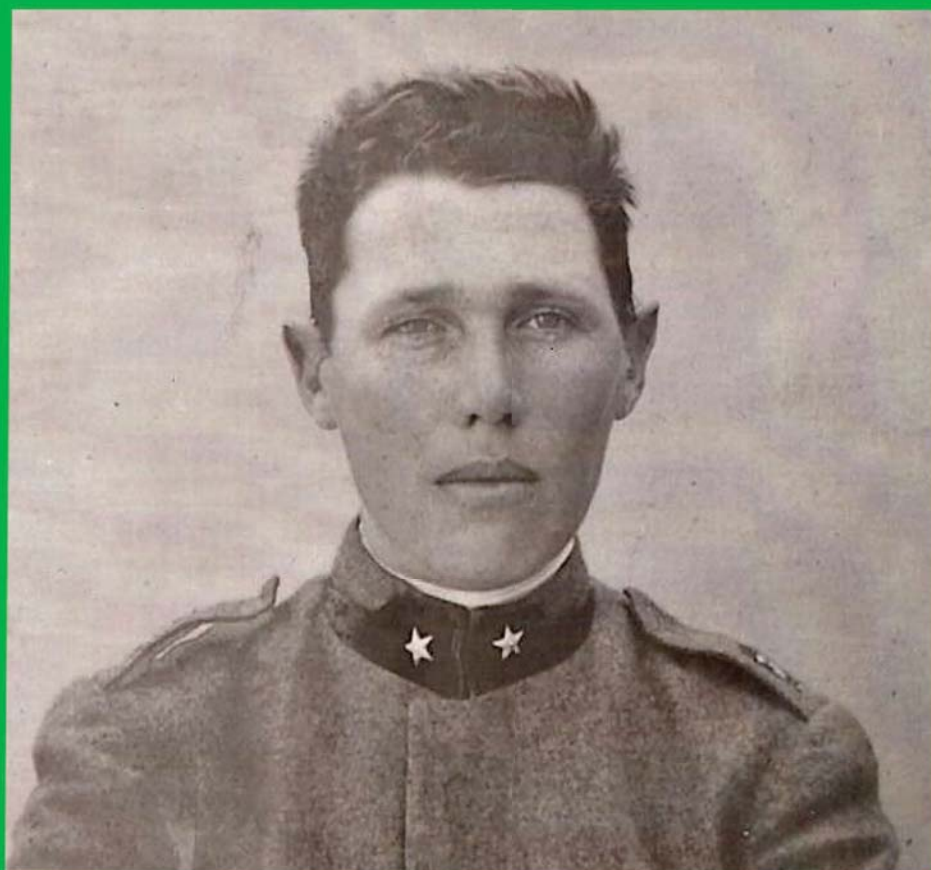


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Arturo Reghini

CAGLIOSTRO

in unpublished documents of the Holy Office

MANUSCRIPT 245 OF THE VITTORIO EMANUELE LIBRARY.

The most important source of information about Cagliostro, and especially about his trial in Rome by the Holy Office, is the: *Collection of legal documents concerning the trial of Giuseppe Balsamo, known as Alessandro Conte di Cagliostro, and Father Francesco Giuseppe da S. Maurizio Cappuccino, before the Tribunal of the Holy Office in Rome* (Vittorio Emanuele National Library in Rome. Manuscript Fondo Vitt. Emanuele 245, consisting of almost 800 pages).

These are not the actual trial records, with the minutes of the interrogations of witnesses and defendants and so on, but a voluminous file, compiled in 1790, perhaps for use by the court itself, containing the essentials of what emerged from the preliminary investigation, as well as expert reports, the indictment, the defense, and many documents of great interest. The existence of this manuscript was first reported in 1881 by Alessandro Ademollo in No. 175 of the "Rassegna Settimanale" VII (1881); and four years later it was purchased by the State.

Strange as it may seem, almost none of Cagliostro's biographers and historians, even recent ones, have made use of it. Haven did not see it and merely mentions it in his Bibliography (/); Maruzzi only refers to it in a few notes in his work (²) and Petraccone (³), who is perhaps the only one to have examined it, does not seem to have made accurate and impartial use of it, since he used it to confirm and reiterate all the accusations and slanders against Cagliostro contained in Monsignor Barbéri's infamous *Compendio* (⁴). Petraccone's incompetence in esoteric matters, to say the least, prevented him from drawing from this precious manuscript the true light it sheds on Cagliostro and his relations with the Church of Rome, a light which is not at all, as Petraccone claims, the same as that in which he is presented in the *Compendio* of 1791 (⁵).

The compiler of this *Compendium*, Mgr. Barbéri, "Procurator General of the Government, admitted to the oath of secrecy of the Holy Office since January 11, 1790, given the nature and quality of the present case and for the good order of the same," was, during the Cagliostro trial, assistant to Abb. Giuseppe Lelli, one of the substitutes of the Chancellery of the Tribunal of the Holy Office, who acted as Notary in this trial, and when Cagliostro was convicted of heresy and magical practices and of belonging to and propagating the sect of the Freemasons, the trial came to an end, he set about compiling the *Compendium*, which was published in 1791 and widely distributed, and had

* In "Ignis" I, January-February 1925, no. 1-2, pp. 4-17.

(/) Dr. Marc Haven: *Le maître Incorniti - Cagliostro*. Paris, page 326.

1. Pericle Maruzzi. *Il Vangelo di Cagliostro*. Todi 1914.
2. E. Petraccone, *Cagliostro nella storia e nella leggenda* 2nd edition, 1922.
3. *Compendio della vita e delle gesta di Giuseppe Balsamo denominato il Conte di Cagliostro*. - Rome, 1791. Printed by the Apostolic Chamber.

4. Even Dr. Ludovico Petraraja, who is publishing his book in installments: *Freemasonry, in its history, rituals, and aims*, and deals extensively and hostile with Cagliostro, makes no mention of Ms. 245.

Immediately followed by other Italian editions and versions in French, German, and Spanish. The main and declared purpose of the *Compendio* is to show the imposture of Cagliostro; and, since until now the *Compendio* has been the main source of information on Cagliostro, the concept that the public has formed of the Italian initiate has been based on this book for over a hundred years, and the work of denigration, begun by Mgr. Barbéri and continued, even in good faith, by a crowd of people in Italy and abroad, has been perfectly successful. The rehabilitation and apology made by Haven have been partly undermined by his ignorance of Ms. 245 of the Bib. Naz. Vitt. Eman. in Rome, as well as by Petraccone's subsequent assertion that this Ms. confirmed what the *Compendio* had said.

Barbéri, in the preface to his book ⁽⁶⁾, does not hesitate to write: "We intend to talk about the life of Giuseppe Balsamo, known to the world under the name of Count Alessandro di Cagliostro. To put it bluntly, this man was a famous impostor" (emphasis in the text). And the book is nothing more than the unfolding of this program.

While waiting for the Sicilian Historical Archive, which for over ten years has announced the publication of Ms. 245, to decide to keep its promise and enable everyone to judge who was the real impostor in this whole affair of the Rome trial and the related publications, we wish here, with the help of official and unpublished documents from the Office, to give some small proof that Cagliostro was not an impostor. Uffizio, provide some small proof that Cagliostro was not an impostor, that Mgr. Barbéri and the Tribunal of the S. Uffizio knew very well that at least some of his prodigious experiences were genuine, and that, since they could not explain them or do the same, they had to deliberately give and spread an altered version of the facts, creating the reputation of Cagliostro as a recognized impostor, in order to destroy his prestige and dispel the disturbance caused by the "impostor" to the blissful serenity of religious conscience.

We note, however, that it is absolutely indisputable that the *Compendio* was compiled using the papers contained in Ms. 245 of Vitt. Emanuele or copies conforming to the writings contained therein. Entire pages are found exactly as they appear in the manuscript and in the book, and the respective dates of the manuscript and the publication of the *Compendio*, as well as the evidence of the context, clearly show to anyone who compares them that Mgr. Barbéri used these very papers to compile his denigration of Cagliostro. It is not unlikely, indeed, that this manuscript 245 is precisely the one that Barbéri used, and that, once the compilation was complete, it remained in his hands and subsequently passed through the hands of private individuals until it was purchased by the Italian government in 1885. On page 89 of the manuscript, which is the second page of the fourth writing ⁽⁷⁾ contained therein, entitled: "*Report on the sect of the Free Masons extracted from documents existing in S. Uffizio*," there is, for example, a long passage of twelve lines (2nd page of Chapter II) that is reproduced verbatim on page 70 of the *Compendium*; and the exposition of the 'spiritual quarantines' is also reproduced in its entirety from the manuscript in the book. The comparison between the handwritten papers and the pages of Barbéri is therefore very instructive because it shows the criteria followed by the compiler of the *Compendium*, who omitted, distorted, falsified, and even invented as he saw fit.

But regardless of Barbéri's particular effort, it is clear from the manuscript with what fanatical incomprehension, preconceived hostility, and *determined purpose* the trial was conducted. The eighteenth writing (pp. 743-756 of the Ms.), for example, entitled: *Annotations to the papers for Giuseppe Balsamo*, and which is in the hand of Mgr. Carlo Luigi Costantini, one of Cagliostro's defenders during the trial in Rome, offers clear proof of this ⁽⁸⁾. The 22nd annotation (page 752 of the manuscript) contains this significant outburst by Costantini: "The fscs wants Cagliostro to be a heretic, indeed a heresiarch, and then claims (and we believe

1. *Compendio della vita...* Rome, 1791, page 4.
2. Petraccone, in the bibliography at the end of his book, has provided a list of the writings that make up this manuscript.
3. To the ordinary defender, Count Gaetano Bernardini, lawyer for the defendants of the Holy Inquisition, was added as defender Mgr. Carlo Luigi Costantini, lawyer for the poor for all other courts in Rome. The thesis supported by both

let us say it well) that he believed nothing of his book ⁽¹⁾ and of his impostures. Happy is he who knows how to reconcile the taxman with the treasury. What is not believed is not heresy, because heresy is an ERROR, a FALSE OPINION that has come to be believed and fixed in the INTELLECT, even though it is known to be CONTRARY to Catholic doctrine.

Mgr. Costantini, poor man, was not entirely wrong. However, he was wrong in not understanding that the Church did not care at all about falling into contradiction. It was both *judge and party*; it was not just a matter of judging a crime against religion, but of acting politically; *and it was necessary* not only to condemn Cagliostro, but to destroy his prestige and influence. It mattered little if logic had to pay the price for this policy. The Church's concerns about the activities of Freemasonry, and of Cagliostro's Egyptian Freemasonry in particular, had become increasingly serious with the threatening unfolding of the revolution in France, and these are clearly evident in all the writings contained in Ms. 245, especially in the first three writings, entirely devoted to the sect of the Free Masons and Egyptian Freemasonry. The Church of Rome sensed the danger that Cagliostro's work represented for it and, when it had him in its sights, it did not stand on ceremony. It condemned him, defamed him and perhaps even killed him. From its point of view, it was perfectly right. However, historically and esoterically speaking, it is not possible to share the opinion that it did so and that it was artificially created and spread about Giuseppe Balsamo, known as the Count of Cagliostro, Grand Master of Egyptian Freemasonry.

AN EXEMPLARY WIFE AND A VORACIOUS WOLF

It was his wife Lorenza (identified by the prosecutors as Serafina) who, *to ease her conscience*, as stated in the Ristretto, of the trial contained in Ms. 245, denounced Cagliostro to the court of the Holy Inquisition. Here is how the edifying affair is reported by the fiscal aw. Giov. Domenico Libert, consultant to the Holy Office ⁽²⁾:

"While residing in Trento, she persuaded him to move to Rome, that is, into the bosom of the Church. She was ultimately the one who, during his stay in Rome, left no stone unturned to ensure the salvation of his soul and that of her husband, as she did in fact by voluntarily denouncing him. There is no need

here to make much ado about her fall with the Capuchin. The unfortunate combination of circumstances in which she found herself at the time diminishes her malice. Her husband, becoming suspicious and also warned of the steps his wife wanted to take to uncover the mysteries of his iniquity, was trembling, threatening, and was about to take the most violent measures against her. In the meantime, he entrusted her to the care of the Capuchin [Borri, who was tried together with Cagliostro] and rested assured that he would watch over her jealously and keep her in a kind of confinement so that she would have no opportunity to make any move. The woman sees the fatal trial, she sees that suddenly all the plans she had made to achieve her righteous desires are destroyed, and she sees the moment approaching when she will fall back without hope of ever rising again in a life of evil. Therefore, she found no way to save herself from imminent ruin except to corrupt the guard, tempt him, carry out her plan [!], and achieve her goal”⁽ⁿ⁾.

To this page of applied Christianity, only this should be added: After sacrificing herself in this way to save her own soul and that of her husband, the most pious woman did not disdain, shortly after the rescue, to accept 18 scudi and some gifts brought to her by the Capuchin. But the fiscal lawyer and consultant turned a blind eye to this and not only granted her full indulgence, but even awarded her a medal of merit. The stakes were high and there was no need to make “such a fuss” over such trifles. Here is what Libert thought ⁽³⁾:

“Say what you will, Serafina will always be a person of merit before this Holy Court, as she is the one to whom we must mainly attribute the merit of having eradicated a *voracious wolf that was ravaging the vineyard and destroying the flock*.” She was therefore anything but an *impostor*. Let us see, within the limits of space, what the complainant testified.

The fifth writing in Manuscript 245 contains ⁽⁴⁾ the *Summary of the Cagliostro Trial*. Due to its historical and initiatory importance, we reproduce Chapter 6 entitled: “Loggia di Lione” (Lodge of Lyon).

“After eleven months in Bordeaux ⁽⁵⁾, the accusing wife reports that she moved with her husband to Lyon ⁽⁶⁾, and that there the accused (Cagliostro) founded a Lodge called ‘Trionfante Verità’ ⁽⁷⁾, but she specified that he did not admit women.

This statement was partly contradicted in the trial, not only by the authentic document seized during the search of the accused's home in Lyon in 1784 ⁽⁸⁾, but also by another authentic document describing the architecture and layout of the Egyptian Lodge established there by the accused (the accused (a copy of which is provided in n. 13) ⁽⁹⁾, from his correspondence with various individuals in Lyon, which confirms the complainant's statement, as well as the instructions and teachings subsequently given by the accused to the aforementioned individuals to work according to his Egyptian Rite. Furthermore, in the manuscript booklet marked 43 in § 14, the following is written in Cagliostro's own hand ⁽¹⁰⁾: *Arrival in Lyon, where I stayed for three months* and became the founder of a divine Order.

The Inquisitor Cagliostro fully contested this account in the Constitutions, as well as the respective foundation of the Lodge in Lyon, and his subsequent instructions to his proselytes, and his correspondence with them, of which he was aware as above; indeed, he further added that he himself demanded of the Freemasons of Lyon that they choose twelve ⁽¹¹⁾ Master Freemasons to whom he

alone intended, before anyone else, to communicate the secret of his Lodge, as follows: that among his followers there were Protestants, Calvinists, and other religions (¹²); and that he gave them the design to build a Lodge according to the Egyptian Rite and Rules, which he gave the title of Mother and Master Lodge, or Lodge of Primacy, from which all others were to be governed. That this foundation was carried out with the ceremonies, customs and formalities, tools, paintings, vestments, oaths, invocations, psalms, use of Pupils, devotions, and everything else prescribed by the Constitutions, of which he claimed to have left the original marked with his own seal (¹³), inculcating them to always regulate themselves in everything according to the aforementioned Constitutions.

The Inquisitor added that he had created two Venerables as founders of the said Lodge, whom he appointed, and of whom there are various letters in the proceedings, and that he authorized them to act in his stead and to preside over those meetings (¹⁴).

Noteworthy is the liveliness and eloquence with which he expresses the solemnity of his foundation, the splendor and luxury of this Mother Lodge, and the Egyptian finitions celebrated therein, the happy success of his divinations and predictions, and the works of the Pupils or Doves, his zeal that everything should be for the glory of God and the benefit of the Sovereigns; and finally the gift of speech granted to him from above, to the common surprise of all, and of himself, by means of which he spoke in the Lodge for several hours at a time, improvising on sublime subjects relating to the Divinity, the Mysteries of the Faith, and Sacred Scripture, and moral matters, *although on these (as he expressed himself) he had made no study and knew nothing, nevertheless he succeeded admirably, and was transformed in such a way that, losing his dialect and all the roughness that could be found in his native speech, he became almost a new and supernatural man.*

The Inquisitor then went on to explain the meaning of the words of his manuscript quoted above, first arguing that they referred to the foundation in Lyon of his Mother Lodge of the Egyptian Rite, and then, when questioned as to why he called the Order of the Egyptian Rite *divine*, he maintained, even after being warned, that having communicated a recipe for a wonderful Egyptian wine in the Lodge, and wishing to note the foundation of the said Lodge in the book, *so that* it would not be understood that he had founded an Order of Freemasonry, he noted it with this curious title: Order of Wine; and when the material evidence of the writing was presented to him, in which the expression: *Divino* (Divine) appeared, and therefore related not to wine but to the Divinity, he replied: 'I may have written it badly, but in reality I meant to write wine, and to refer to the recipe I mentioned to you'.

The excuse was very flimsy and the prosecutors did not accept it. But what other expedient could poor Cagliostro resort to in order to exonerate himself from the abominable crime of dealing with divine matters? The wine Cagliostro spoke of actually existed; it was a red wine used in various ceremonies and which, at the very least, had the value of a hermetic symbol (¹⁵), and on the other hand, even ordinary Freemasonry used and still uses wine in the so-called "chewing works." The Church would have had no objection to an Order of Wine, or even of the Holy Drunkenness, but it could not admit that wine should play a role in Masonic functions similar to that which it plays in the celebration of Mass; and even less could it admit that a layman should constitute a divine order and claim to have direct relations with the Divinity.

The Church claims a monopoly on the divine and forbids God to manifest himself without her consent and outside her jurisdiction. This, at least, is the view of Fr. Tommaso Vincenzo Pani, general commissioner of the Holy Roman Inquisition, in his *Censura e qualifica della Massoneria Egiziana e di varie proposizioni che si incontrano nei suoi catechismi e statuti* (Censorship and classification of Egyptian Freemasonry and various propositions found in its catechisms and statutes), which constitutes the second writing of Ms. 245. He expresses himself as follows (¹⁶):

“The Grand Cofto wants people of every sect to have a place in Egyptian Freemasonry, and then claims to raise them to such sublime perfection that they become worthy of being transported close to God. In this prescription I find a double error, one contrary to the divine and ecclesiastical provisions regarding forbidden commerce between Catholics and heretics (¹⁷), the other contrary to the fundamental maxim of the Catholic religion, which teaches that salvation is found in her alone.”

And a little further on (¹⁸):

“Who can imagine such a connection between heretics and Catholics without danger of scandal and seduction, and if the danger exists, who does not know that it remains prohibited by natural and divine law? In our case, however, it is also absolutely prohibited for another reason, because without any mention of abjuration, or any practice of the Catholic religion, they are expected to be led by Masonic works to a state of primitive innocence (²⁸), and even close to God, which is repugnant not only to the aforementioned maxim, which admits no perfection or salvation outside the Catholic Church, but also to many other dogmas of the Catholic religion.”

Pani was not alone in supporting this thesis at the trial. In fact, Fra Francesco Contarmi, a minor conventual, consultant to the Holy Office, in his *Sentimento teologico sopra la Massoneria Egiziana* (Theological Opinion on Egyptian Freemasonry) and *censura di proposizioni estratte dai suoi statuti e catechismi* (censorship of propositions extracted from its statutes and catechisms) was also of the same opinion (²⁹):

“There can be no greater argument for heresy, nor any more certain, than promising to lead men to the truth and to the attainment of true Light outside the Gospel, claiming thus to lead them to eternal happiness. Jesus Christ said of himself: *Ego sum via, veritas et vita. Nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me* ()”.

These last words, understood in a slightly more intelligent sense than usual, also express for us a profound and elementary spiritual truth. Only by entering the “Universal Church,” the “Communion of Saints,” that is, only by universalizing one's consciousness, can one attain perfection. But then, by virtue of the very definition, it is necessary to overcome all limitations, not excluding those inherent in the feelings and beliefs of the various forms assumed by Christianity in the consciousness of the countless number of the faithful. And the Father, the Georges of whom Jesus speaks, the unity from which every manifestation and differentiation proceeds, can only be reached through the intimate and radical profound reality of the “I”: and not through the fetishistic worship of a shapeless aggregate of ideas and sentimental residues, to which the flocks and sometimes the shepherds attach miraculous signs with the words: this is Buddha, this is Mohammed, *und so weit*. As Dante said (Par. XIX, 103-108):

...To this kingdom

No one who did not believe in Christ ever ascended,

Neither before nor after He was nailed to the wood.

But, see! Many cry: Christ! Christ!

They will be far less close to judgment

to him than those who do not know Christ.

THE CLAIRVOYANCE OF THE PUPILS ¹⁹

Among the wonderful experiences that Cagliostro and his disciples performed during their Masonic work, the divination obtained by means of the famous Pupils or Doves deserves particular attention. Even the Tribunal of the Holy Office was concerned about this, all the more so as it became increasingly clear that the phenomena were genuine and that it was not easy to explain them without resorting to the usual simplistic explanation: the devil. In this regard, we quote § 10 of the *Ristretto del Processo di Cagliostro* (Summary of the Cagliostro Trial) entitled: *Qualità dell'Egiziaca Massoneria* (*Qualities of Egyptian Freemasonry*) ().

“The complainant (³²) then went on to specify the spirit of these lodges erected in the places mentioned above, reporting that the accused introduced boys and girls aged six, seven, and older, whom he called Pupilles or Colombe, among whom he identified the daughter of Mr. Strauss of Strasbourg, and that once they entered the lodge, he made them kneel

1. By means of the two spiritual quarantines, which we will discuss shortly.
2. III writing of Ms. 245 Vitt. Em., p. 78.
3. Giov. 14, 6.

and recite a prayer invoking God's help and imploring the seven angels to appear. He placed a carafe full of water before them, saying a few words in a low voice while striking the air three times with his sword and stamping his foot three times on the ground. After this, the Pupils were questioned by the Inquisitor, who reported that they should answer that they saw one thing and then another, and specified that the Inquisitor should tell them to see the seven Angels, whom he called by name: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Anael (²⁰) and hiding them in a tabernacle, because, as he reports, he said that the non-innocent bystanders could not see them, he questioned them at will about things relating to his vaunted secrets or to the persons and adventures of the other Egyptian associates, and he made sure that the Pupil, or Dove, always respond according to his aims and his genius, to make them believe that, at his pleasure, the seven angels or Enoch and Elijah (²¹) appeared in the Lodge or in the vial, and when the souls of the aforementioned relatives of the defendants revealed to the Pupils what they then reported in the Lodge concerning the adventures that were to befall the associates, or the precise location of the hidden treasures, or the value and success of the Philosopher's Stone, the secret of which he boasted of possessing in order to make gold and prolong life, even passing off in the Lodge that the Pupils received the said Lapis from the Angels, and that by the same means Adam, Noah, and others had lived for several centuries; and he coerced the Baroness Redi in the Lodge of Mittau and the widow Duchess of Cheilus in the Lodge of Paris into believing that the brother of the former and the

husband of the latter, already defined, had appeared to the Pupil, and that the Pupil herself, when questioned by the Inquisitor, had described them perfectly. The complainant also claimed that in the Lodge of Bordeaux, the Inquisitor had the Pupil say that she saw in that act in the vial the husband of the widow Marchesa di Merville, mentioned above, and that she told her that there was a treasure hidden by spirits in one of her country houses, and that with the usual divinations of the aforementioned Pupils, and alleged apparitions of angels, she had deceived, among others, the Emo de Rohan, making him believe in the Lodge of Strasbourg that she would restore him to health with the Philosopher's Stone, the dry part of which, he said, served to make gold, and the liquid part to preserve life for many years; and in Paris, at the request of Madame La Motte, he made the Pupil, or Colomba, predict certain things relating to the Queen's childbirth, to her displeasure with the Cardinal, and other things: that if the Queen had done any harm to the Cardinal, it would all fall upon her and upon France, which would become a republic and regain its freedom: with this art and imposture (concluded Cagliostro) ⁽²²⁾ besides having won the heart of the aforementioned cardinal ⁽²³⁾, who from then on consulted him in all his affairs, and called him *Master*; the Inquisitor also gave himself the authority to command, and was considered an oracle, an extraordinary man, a prophet, a god, and opened the way to ask for help or money, or to defraud him, as will be explained more fully in the third chapter of this summary.

She also reported that the Inquisito sometimes led those who believed in Jesus Christ to believe that he himself appeared in the Loggia alle Colombe and said that Jesus Christ himself was a Free Mason of Egypt and the twelve apostles were twelve Masonic Masters.

This is the image of Cagliostro as seen through the mind of Lorenza Feliciani and through the editing of her testimony given to the Tribunal of the Holy Office. Certain inconsistencies in Feliciani's statement must also have been noted by the prosecutors. It would seem, in fact, that it was disputed and questioned how Cagliostro made the Colombe say whatever he wanted, not to mention the predictions, because the *Ristretto* continues as follows:

“Although the Complainant *supposed* that the aforementioned Pupils, or Colombe, had been previously instructed, she nevertheless testified that she had *never* ⁽²⁴⁾ been present at such instruction, and that she sometimes doubted that the art of the devil was involved ⁽²⁵⁾, especially since the Pupil, aged about six, was suddenly taken to the Lodge by the Duke of Orleans, without the Inquisitor having been able to instruct him beforehand, gave such adequate answers to the questions put to him by the Inquisitor that (as the aforementioned continues to report) the Duke himself believed him to be a supernatural man, and she herself, astonished, confirmed her suspicion that there was some tacit pact with the Devil, all the more so (she adds in her last examinations) *because, having sometimes made me suffer in the Lodge, he told me several times that I was too timid and not strong enough for him to communicate the secret to me, from which I deduced that there was some devil involved.*

The truth, therefore, is this: Phenomena so genuine, indisputable, and marvelous that Lorenza, in order to explain them, had to *suppose* prior instruction of the Pupilli and Colombe, which she acknowledged she had *never* witnessed, or *suspect* and *infer* the intervention of the usual providential devil, as omnipotent as God, and always so charitable as to rescue good Christians from embarrassment. With the omnipotence of God, or that of the Devil, at the Church's choice and convenience, everything is

clearly *explained*. Who would dare to investigate how the Lord God and his antagonist perform miracles? Since we cannot satisfy our curiosity, let us take revenge at the expense of the distinguished Mgr. Barbéri. We have already said and seen that, after attending the entire Cagliostro trial, Mgr. Barbéri used the manuscript to which the passage now quoted belongs to compile his *Compendio*.

Here is how he reports the matter in his *Compendio* (²⁶):

“Let us now hear what the WIFE had to say. In essence, she *testified* that, *although some* of the Pupils had been PREPARED by her husband as to what they were to say during the trials, SOME OTHERS, as if chosen and brought to him suddenly, could only act by DIABOLICAL art (²⁷). She mentioned that she had asked him more than once to tell her the origin of these troubles, but he always refused to satisfy her, saying that she was not *brave* and *strong* enough to bear the mystery.”

As can be seen, the champion of faith cannot also be called a champion of good faith!

This disciple of St. Eusebius, so casual in consciously and deliberately altering circumstances and facts, is the very same, let us not forget, who, “to put it in a nutshell,” defines Cagliostro as “a famous impostor.” And to think that for Petraccone “it is truly possible to conclude definitively on the veracity of the Compendium” (²⁸).

Hail, hail, three times hail, champions of Faith and Science, dignified and upright consciences, most honest champions of Truth!

THE MYSTERY OF THE CARAFES

The testimony of his wife was confirmed by Cagliostro's own statement. Here it is, as it appears in the Summary of the Trial (²⁹).

“He also stated that in order to convince the Duke of Orleans of the truth of his Egyptian system and the falsity of that of the Illuminati, to which he belonged, in the Lodge of Paris in the presence of His Excellency Mo De Rohan, the Prince of Luxembourg, and others, he performed the usual experiment on the Pupillo, who had been brought to him suddenly by the Duke himself, and insisted that, after the usual ceremonies, and with the help of the vials, and even without them, the Pupillo describe the Royal Palace, the people who were there at that moment, and the exact rooms where they were, the clothes they were wearing

, the letters they were reading, and that finally, when the Duke himself had verified with his own eyes the truth of these divinations, he reported that he was extremely surprised.

Other testimonies about these experiences of clairvoyance of the Pupilli with or without the vials could easily be reported (⁴³), so as to fully confirm the authenticity of the phenomenon.

The Tribunal of the Holy Office was far from believing that it was a trick, as was loudly proclaimed after the trial. So much so that, intrigued by this mystery of the carafes, it decided “to carry out a chemical analysis of the liquids contained in the ampoules seized during the searches, and entrusted the task to four experts, including Dr. De Micheli” (⁴⁴).

We do not know the outcome of this chemical analysis. Certainly, both the Holy Office and the experts attached great importance to this analysis. We can only guess what the Holy Office expected or demanded from the experts; what we do know for certain is that the experts demanded exorbitant sums of money, and they made these demands in such a decisive tone that it suggested that there must be something fishy going on. In fact, in the XXIV Writing of Ms. 245 entitled: *Correspondence relating to the defense and treatment of G. Balsamo*, in the margin of an autograph letter from the defense attorney Costantini, the following rather cryptic note is found, written (it seems) by Giov. Domenico Libert, tax attorney and consultant in the Cagliostro trial ⁽⁴⁵⁾:

"I will speak more clearly. The doctors (there were four) who carried out the experiment on the garaffine notes are demanding FIVE HUNDRED scudi for EACH ONE ⁽⁴⁶⁾; Dr. Micheli, as Chief Physician, WANTS his fee doubled ⁽⁴⁷⁾: There remains the apothecary Conti: There remains the surgeon. Is it surprising that Cagliostro, with his chemistry and medicine, has made so much money? Let us come to the point ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

The tax lawyer was not wrong to be alarmed by these demands, and we do not know if and how the demands of these doctors were silenced. It is a pity that Giov. Domen. Libert did not speak even more clearly. We would not then be obliged to conjecture and suppose, for example, that the Tribunal of the Holy Office would have willingly paid a large sum in order to be able to attach to the trial file a medical report explaining, in the light of science, the *imposture* of the Pupils. The trial file, if it has not been destroyed, is probably in the Vatican archives, and it is only there that more light could be shed on this enigmatic affair of the *notes garaffine* ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

In any case, what we have reported from the unpublished manuscript of the Bib. Vitt. Em. seems sufficient to conclude that Count Alessandro di Cagliostro is not the famous impostor he is generally believed to be, thanks to the dishonest, systematic, and relentless defamation organized against him by the champions of Christian charity, who were evidently not satisfied with saving the soul of the "lost sheep" and his very modest wife, but felt it necessary to persecute even the name and memory of the daring initiate, guilty of knowing those magical and spiritual mysteries that are the heritage of every true and legitimate priesthood, and of proving his wisdom with facts ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

1. See the "Compendium" on pages 80, 98, 109, 135, 144, etc.; and Marc Haven: *Le maitre Incornili*, on pages 54, 55, 56, 58 and the notes contained therein.
2. See Petraccone E.: *Cagliostro*, p. 181.
3. Petraccone reproduces it in a note on p. 181 of his book, but without the first and last sentences, which are nevertheless very significant.
4. In the manuscript, the word 'five hundred' is underlined twice; the words we have italicized are also underlined. Comparing this with the devalued post-war lira, we can calculate that the cost for the four doctors alone was around one hundred thousand lire. My dear expertise!
5. The distinguished Chief Medical Officer was not one to mince his words!
6. In other words: let's be careful not to do anything stupid.
7. The adjective note makes it clear that this matter of the cruets must have been the subject of repeated discussions.

8. In the next issues of “Ignis” we will publish other unpublished documents on Cagliostro, Egyptian Freemasonry, and the Rome Trial.

The defense, in order to defend Cagliostro from the serious accusation of belonging to Freemasonry, of having spread it in the Papal States, and of heretical, magical, and superstitious beliefs and practices, argued, in short, that Cagliostro was nothing more than a charlatan.

1(⁹) This is the French manuscript of the “Statutes and Constitutions of Egyptian Freemasonry,” seized from Cagliostro and then burned *coram plaudente populo* in Piazza della Minerva in Rome. The Holy Office took care to have an accurate French translation made (as can be seen on page 4 of Ms. 245), which may still exist. A copy in French was left by Cagliostro to the Sarasin couple in Switzerland, and another to the Lodge of Lyon, of which two copies must still exist. Some passages were published in “Initiation” (August 1906 - April 1908), but the manuscript of the Constitutions of Egyptian Freemasonry is still unpublished. Ms. 245 of the Bib. Vitt. Em. contains numerous passages and an accurate summary.

(¹⁰) Writing IX of Ms. 245, p. 444 of Ms.

2(¹¹) Let the reader consider what magnificent fruits confession can bear and what inscrutable ways Providence follows to save souls. In writing XVI of Ms. (Summary of the Trial of Father Fr. Gius. Borri da S. Maurizio Cappuccino), one can also read the details of the “crime”: It reads that the Capuchin “*subsequently, with the prior agreement of the aforementioned went to her one morning and had carnal relations with her, and that on another day, carried away by his passionate love for her, he even (to use his own words) ut manum ejus admo- verem mihi, et me educante ipsius marnipeccaverim: p. 603.*”

3(¹²) Ms. 245 of Vitt. Em., p. 457.

4ⁱ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-241.

5(¹⁴) Cf. Petraccone: *Cagliostro...* 1922 edition, p. 73; and cf. Maruzzi: *Il Vangelo di Cagliostro*, p. 68.

6(¹⁵) In early October 1784.

7(¹⁶) This is an error, perhaps by the copyist, instead of *Sagesse Triomphante*.

8(¹⁷) See Maruzzi, op. cit., p. 69.

9(¹⁸) See the “*Letter from the Lodge of Lyon to Cagliostro*,” p. 703 of Ms. 245. 13th attached document, writing XXII.

10(¹⁹) These are clearly travel notes and notes written by Cagliostro and confiscated from him.

11(²⁰) On the initiatory importance of the number twelve in this regard, see the article by René Guénon: *Il Re del Mondo*, in the 1924 issue of “Atanòr.” This same traditional concept of the number 12 is also connected with the 12 disciples of Jesus, as well as the 12 disciples of Blavatsky and the “twelve eyes of light” sometimes mentioned by Kremmerz.

12⁽²¹⁾ This tolerance was one of the main charges against Cagliostro: the Church, in the name of love for one's neighbor and Christian charity, forbids tolerance. In promiscuity and even in mere contact between heretics and unbelievers and his followers, it sees a danger, obviously for the faithful. What esteem and trust in the intelligence and superiority of the orthodox over the heterodox!

See pages 15-16 in this regard.

13⁽²²⁾ This refers to the “Rituel de la Ma[^]onnerie Egyptienne”; see note 9; see also Maruzzi, op. cit., p. 71.

14⁽²³⁾ They were J. M. Sain-Costar and his substitute Gabriel Magneval. See Maruzzi, op. cit., p. 70.

15⁽²⁴⁾ See Raimundo Lullo: *De Secretis Naturae*, Venice 1543. p. 22. Pernety, on p. 523 of his *Dictionnaire mytho- hermétique*, 1^a ediz., says on this subject: *Le vin des Sages est leur menstrue ou dissolvant universel*.

16⁽²⁵⁾ Ms. 245 Vitt. Em., p. 36.

17⁽²⁶⁾ From this we can see that the reasons given today for fighting Freemasonry are nothing but pretexts. It is not because the alleged internationalism of Freemasonry constitutes a danger to the homeland, but rather because intolerance cannot tolerate tolerance without condemning itself, and because we do not want wolves, more or less voracious, to prevent the monopoly of the sheep industry, which the lackeys of the intolerance cannot, without condemning itself, tolerate tolerance, and because no one wants wolves, more or less voracious, to prevent the monopoly of the pastoral industry, that the Jesuits' henchmen still fight Freemasonry today.

18⁽²⁷⁾ Ms. 245 Vitt. Em., p. 37.

19 In “Ignis,” I (3), March 1925, pp. 65-73.

⁽³¹⁾ Writing V of Ms. 245 of Vitt. Em., p. 149.

⁽³²⁾ Lorenza Feliciani, wife of Cagliostro.

20⁽³³⁾ The names of the other two: Zobiachel and Anachiel, a little more Ostrogothic, remained in the pen of the amanuensis.

21⁽³⁴⁾ Enoch, son of Cain, belongs to the Masonic tradition, as recorded in the *Old Charges* .

Elijah owes his presence in Egyptian Freemasonry to his “quarantine” to reach Mount Horeb, on Sinai, and to his role in Hermeticism. But this Enoch, associated with Elijah, is more likely to be Enoch, son of Lared. Both Enoch and Elijah *did not die*. St. Jerome (commentary in Amos, book I, chapter IX) says that both were taken up bodily into heaven (Gen. V; IV Reg. II), and St. Eusebius Hier, in his commentary on Zechariah, book I, chapter VI, verse 11, makes them the two *olives* on the right and left of the candlestick. Scripture says that the Lord took Enoch from the world at the age of 365. This is clearly a reference to the annual renewal.

22⁽³⁵⁾ Here we learn that predicting the future is the work of impostors. What about the prophets of Israel, then?

23⁽³⁶⁾ As can be seen, the prosecutors do not hesitate to call His Eminence De Rohan, their superior in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a fool!

24⁽³⁷⁾ This emphasis and the previous one are ours. Moreover, not only Lorenza but no one else ever witnessed this supposed instruction.

25⁽³⁸⁾ Lorenza's suspicion became *certainty* for the prosecutors. Since, as we have seen above, divine intervention could not be admitted, the only *Deus ex machina* available was obviously the devil.

26⁽³⁹⁾ *Compendio della Vita e delle Gesta di Giuseppe Balsamo denominato il Conte di Cagliostro* (*Summary of the Life and Deeds of Giuseppe Balsamo, known as the Count of Cagliostro*), Rome 1791, p. 135.

27⁽⁴⁰⁾ The words in capital letters are underlined in Barbéri's text.

28⁽⁴¹⁾ See E. Petraccone: *Cagliostro nella Storia e nella Leggenda*. 1922, p. 9.

29⁽⁴²⁾ Ms. 245 Vitt. Em., p. 154.

Arturo Reghini

COMMENTARY ON THE

MAXIMS

OF INITIATIC SCIENCE

BY AMEDEO ARMENTANO

Warning

Continuing with the re-edition of the writings of Arturo Reghini, which we began in 2006 on the website www.hyssopus.org and subsequently continued on www.lamelagrana.net, we now present in a single text this *Commentary on the Maxims of Initiatic Science* by Amedeo Annientano, the first part of which was originally published in the May and June 1924 issues of the magazine “Atanòr” (preceded by a partial publication of the Maxims themselves in the January-February and November-December 1923 issues of the magazine “Mondo Occulto”), while the second part appeared in the last issue (November-December 1925) of the magazine “Ignis.”

Reghin's commentary, which in the author's intentions was supposed to cover all fifty Maxims, stopped at the first eleven due to the suspension of Ignis, which occurred with the last issue of the magazine's first and only year of existence¹.

In this reissue, which involved a standardization revision by d^Wediting, which was not homogeneous in the transition from Atanòr to Ignis, we have maintained the division of the text into two parts, the first corresponding to the commentary on the first two Maxims printed in Atanòr and the second to that on the remaining nine published in Ignis.

The Editor

of www.lamelagrana.net

I

With this issue of “Atanòr,” we begin the publication of some Maxims of Initiatic Science by Amedeo Armentario.

Some of them have already appeared in issues of “Mondo Occulto,” and we thank our sister magazine for granting us permission to reprint them. Others, such as the first one published in this issue, which have remained unpublished until now, will be added to the first ones.

In “Mondo Occulto,” these maxims appeared without any commentary; however, we felt it appropriate to accompany them here in order to make the meaning and connection of the text more accessible, as it is not always easy to understand in its masterful concise expression. We ask the Master and our readers to forgive any errors of interpretation and commentary; our good intention to offer pure, fresh spring water to those thirsty for knowledge prompts us to undertake a task that perhaps exceeds our abilities.

1 — Is it possible to know?

— It is possible.

— How?

— By mastering thought, dispensing with belief, and freeing oneself from passions and fear of nothingness.

Although the text, in its lapidary conciseness, does not say what kind of knowledge it is, it is implicitly understood that the question can only refer to knowledge worthy of the name, that is, to a synthetic, integral knowledge that can be called knowledge.

Knowledge limited to a finite area bordering on an indeterminate and unknown field does not deserve the name of knowledge; and although men are generally content with knowledge of this kind and believe in the inevitability of its character, the question may be asked whether it is possible to attain a higher knowledge, a true knowledge free from all limitation and error.

Of course, this problem cannot be solved by the means that give ordinary knowledge; and it is therefore natural that it is not possible to give a logical demonstration of the accuracy of the positive answer that our text gives to this question. In fact, the assertion that knowledge is possible is already necessarily the result of an experience that transcends thought, unless it comes from religious or philosophical belief, from illusion or from conscious falsehood. But in our case, these are hypotheses that we must exclude, because the text says, immediately and categorically, that we must free ourselves from beliefs and passions and that thought must be dominated and therefore kept immune from the influences of passions and beliefs. The positive affirmation of the text is therefore the result of experience.

That it is necessary to transcend thought in order to obtain this knowledge is something that can also be understood logically. Thought, in fact, by its very nature, defines and represents, referring to and coordinating itself with sensory experiences. To understand is necessarily and etymologically to limit. The faculty of the mens is that of measuring (*mensuraf*), and therefore not only the indefinite but also the incommensurable with respect to it escapes it.

Assigning to thought, as is generally *done*, the function of knowledge, and conceiving the universe as infinite and unlimited, is equivalent to condemning oneself for two reasons to an inexorable and Spencerian unknowability. The modern mentality, which has no repugnance to limiting the universe in time and calmly accepts the various religious and scientific cosmogonies, complete with the creation and end of the world, is instead inclined to admit a spatially infinite universe, a conception that seems inevitable because a *nec plus ultra* without a spatial beyond seems logically absurd.

. And if the universe is spatially infinite, how can thought ever come to know it all? And without knowing the whole universe, can we ever truly speak of knowledge?

All this, however, is based on the human intuition of space and in particular on the concept of an indefinite straight line above which there can be neither a first point nor a last point. That is, on the implicit assumption that the conception of a three-dimensional, Euclidean external universe corresponds to reality and is indeed the only adequate and precise one. This concept of *absolute* space, which seemed so obvious, has recently been shaken by Einstein's discoveries and theories, which, among other things, lead us to accept the concept of a three-dimensional *fluid* universe. But since they imply the existence of a fourth dimension, even with Einstein's theories the problem of the finite or infinite spatial universe continues to exist; and it is only from the three-dimensional universe that it

shifts to a multidimensional universe, leaving the question unresolved and reduced to its purely abstract analytical form without any reference to the human spatial intuition of the concrete universe.

It is curious to note that while thought finds it absurd that a straight line drawn in space should stop at a final point, it cannot imagine anything other than segments. Therefore, if logic leads us to admit the infinity of the universe, imagination leads us to the conception of a limited universe.

We dwell on these considerations solely to show that there is no real reason to accept this postulate of the infinity of the universe.

The Pythagorean concept of the Monad, of the single and *limited* Being, is therefore not at all an *outdated* concept, to use an unfortunate but fashionable expression.

Pythagoreantly, Being is necessarily limited in its uniqueness. Unity is unique, without anything else or anyone else. Duality and multiplicity are appearances that do not destroy the uniqueness of being. Moving from unity to units, from the one to numbers, from integral unity to indefinite numbering, we move from the uniqueness of being to the infinite variety and diversity of nature. The unlimited universe in its variety is contrasted with the characteristic limitation of being; and this gives us the first *pair of Pythagorean opposites*, the fundamental duality on which all nature rests. But Pythagoreantly, the indefinite unlimitedness of nature does not lead us to infer analogically a similar unlimitedness of Being, but quite the opposite. To deduce the infinity of God from the infinity of the world is to drag the concepts of this world into the kingdom of heaven, to rely on ideas in order to understand what transcends ideas, and ultimately to claim to take flight without freeing oneself from impediments.

Those who have come to *feel* their own body *within* themselves, and who can therefore, with Plotinus, intuit that, similarly, the Macrocosm is in God as the Microcosm is in us, can also understand how one can speak of the limitation of Being and also of the Macrocosm. Dante, having reached the end of his ascent, saw that “in *its* depths it *internalizes itself*

bound with love in a volume

That which spreads throughout the Universe.

This is the *connection*, the only one, of unlimited multiplicity; and human consciousness, *connecting itself* in turn, can reach the consciousness of universal connection, and in it and through it reach knowledge.

It is an entirely interior, non-spatial connection. Exoterically, spatial geometric symbolism corresponds to and represents this connection with the *volume*, the Pythagorean *ᾠαὶκό* of the sphere enclosing the world spread out in the four elements, a volume that envelops the world; and it shows that only from the *center* is it possible to have a synthetic, simultaneous, global vision of the entire sphere and its volume or connection. Arithmetic, temporal, musical, and rhythmic symbolism perceives and represents this connection in *Var-monia*, which makes the world a *cosmos*, and shows that only with *Vaccordo* is it possible to harmonize with the whole and live in unison with the harmony of the spheres.

* *

By this we do not mean to detract from the value of thought.

The “little light” in the darkness of night can serve to prevent us from stumbling, but it would be absurd to expect it to make the darkness disappear. Indeed, those who, in complete darkness, with all lights extinguished, accustom their eyes to the night, end up obtaining a more or less indistinct perception of things near and far; while a nearby light, allowing the vision of nearby things, makes the darkness around them denser and prevents any perception of distant things. Only the sun, which dispels darkness, illuminates both what is near and what is far away. And before dawn breaks, it is wise to be content with the night vision provided by the stars without resorting to artificial light. The owl, sacred to Minerva, can see in the darkness; although it cannot compete with the eagle sacred to Jupiter, it is accustomed to staring at the sun. For our purposes, it is useless to replace the modest oil lamp with a powerful arc lamp; it will always be a light in the midst of thick darkness. Indeed, the arc lamps of our cities, by driving the stars from the sky, deprive our senses of that constant reminder of the immanence of the heavens. But thought has its function; and even the synthetic vision it achieves does not exclude or contradict rational analytical consideration, voluntarily restricted to a specific subject.

If consciousness entrusts itself, identifies itself, and binds itself to thought, never taking its attention away from the small light of reason, not only will it end up losing even the notion of the sea of darkness that surrounds it and deluding itself into seeing, but it will also place itself in a state of insensitivity to any possible dawn.

Thought must therefore renounce its dominion over human consciousness. We must renounce thought, its explanations, theories, imaginations, and *a fortiori* beliefs.

And since thoughts are provoked, determined, and dominated by passions, we must free ourselves from passions. And since human life is entirely woven from passionate and mental elements, we must in practice eliminate all attachment to life.

Nor is this elimination sufficient to place consciousness absolutely beyond the reach of the disturbances of thought. It is necessary to eradicate from consciousness the attachment to its human mode of conditioned existence, so that the impression of annihilation caused by the disappearance of this mode does not give rise, with the complicity of the organic and instinctive horror of the body, to a sudden dismay that stifles the flight at the outset and brings the daring back down to earth.

Even the idea that human consciousness has of itself is ultimately an idea, and as such must be overcome and dominated. The horror of annihilation is a feeling, and it must not be allowed to reawaken, in its own time, to agitate and disturb the consciousness. As long as consciousness remains attached to its own isolation as a necessary condition of existence and affirms individual independence, it *alters* the unity of Being; by differentiating and fragmenting itself, it denies itself the perception of unity. Self-abandonment, abdication, breaks down the barrier and makes assimilation with unity, amalgamation, indigitation, and the attainment of knowledge possible.

In conclusion, in order to attain knowledge, it is therefore necessary:

1. To free oneself from passions: that is, from passivity, from servitude to the feelings and emotions provoked by the senses. One must cease to suffer their influence, to be their subject and patient.
2. Renounce all beliefs, religious, moralistic, philosophical, scientific, and pseudo-esoteric. Overcome and break down all prejudices, conventions, local and temporal superstitions, race, caste, school,

tradition, habit, vice, virtue, and temperament. Dissolve all layers and encrustations of concepts and evaluations inherent in language and in the individual and environmental *forma mentis et sentimentis*. In hermetic terminology, this is the universal solvent, *Alkaest*, which accomplishes the *solution of the dense*.

3. Renounce oneself completely. To be born into a new life, it is necessary to die to the old one. This renunciation of oneself is necessary because the instinctive terror of annihilation could otherwise arise at an inopportune moment, at an important stage of the great work, and prevent the “fixation or coagulation of the subtle.”

4. Control your thoughts by fixing your mind and ceasing to think. The agitation of thought (Latin: cogitare) occupies the consciousness, binding its attention and disturbing its calm, preventing its transmutation into the superhuman mode.

This operation is terribly difficult and requires unfailing constancy and patience. Thought is by its nature as mobile as quicksilver, and fixing it is as difficult as fixing the mercury of philosophers, which is volatile and fleeting by nature. The mind must coagulate in a serene, imperturbable calm. Not even a sudden sense of annihilation must take hold of this immobility and disturb it.

The coagulation of the subtle is made possible by the solution of the dense, because the two operations allow and help each other, and as the alchemists say, “the solution of the dense is the fixation of the subtle.”

It is perhaps not superfluous to mention that as the operation progresses, certain special transcendent sensibilities are awakened and sharpened, and “hostile forces” are determined, capable not only of disturbing the serenity of the soul but even of overwhelming it; and this is particularly the case in the culminating phase of the actual operation of palingenesis. This is one of the reasons why the great work is not only difficult but also dangerous, and why it is not advisable to venture into it without having completed the preliminary catharsis, and without the guidance and assistance of a Master or without the grace of God, as the alchemists say. And it is one of the reasons for the Pythagorean and Hermetic silence that binds all the children of the art.

What we have considered so far is the preliminary and negative part of the great work. In this phase, the matter of the philosophers is subjected to a process of rectification and sublimation. A continuous aspiration maintains in the philosophical Athanor the holy fervor of asceticism, the moderate and uninterrupted fire, sufficient and necessary for the completion of the great work, since everything depends on the regime of fire. It is the sacred fire, the ardor to become the expert world that nothing could overcome in the consciousness of Dante's Ulysses.

Separating the subtle from the thick, and the dense from the subtle, with great skill; volatilizing what is fixed and fixing what is mobile; dissolving the dense and coagulating the subtle, the conversion of the elements is accomplished. The will of the craftsman brings them together and separates them, just as the central axis brings together and separates the two snakes of the Caduceus in the hands of Hermes, the winged messenger of the Gods and guide of souls.

Before beginning the positive phase of the work, it is therefore necessary for the human part to rot and die. For this reason, the first thing to appear in the philosophical Athanasial Trifecta is the black color

of the Caput mortuum, the blackest black, symbolized by the raven. What is dense, material, mortal must die, so that the gray and heavy lead can be transmuted into a more noble metal, so that Saturn, son of Cronus, may lose the power of his deadly sickle.

The uninterrupted action of fire brings about the whitening, the *blanchissage* of matter. At a certain point, the *whiteness*, *Valbedo* of Silver, of the moon or of the white doves of the naked Diana appears. And by maintaining and pushing the fire in the Athanor, bringing the matter from white to red, the *rubedo* of solar and philosophical Gold finally appears, symbolized by the purple Phoenix, which is reborn flaming and immortal from the divine flames of sulfur (Osio = divine: Osio = sulfur).

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* *

2 — Contemplation gives knowledge.

The first maxim of Amedeo Armentano told us what conditions must be met in order to know. This one tells us the sufficient condition: Contemplation gives knowledge.

We can already hear some readers muttering that this is nothing new. We are perfectly aware of this; and since we do not seek to appear original, to construct new philosophical systems, or to make the usual small contribution to the edifice of Science, but only to be faithful interpreters of esoteric knowledge and tradition, this criticism leaves us indifferent. Nor do we intend to entrench ourselves or rely on any authority; there are now so many occultists who are the only, the true, the sole spokesmen, representatives, delegates, licensed patent holders (and what else?) of the true Rosicrucians, of the guaranteed Templars, of the famous White Lodge of Tibet, that we poor wretches do not even dare to enter the fray and declare ourselves the true heirs of the wisdom of this or that association or school. What we say is based solely on our experience; and, of course, verification can only be obtained through similar experience.

The recognition of the inability and inadequacy of thought to attain knowledge raises the question of the means to be employed for this purpose. From Indian yoga practices and Taoist, Buddhist, and Christian asceticism to mystery ceremonies, from Plotinian ecstasy to illuminating grace, from the Pythagorean assimilation to God to Bergson's intuition, there is a whole range of different designations and more or less accurate and precise conceptions of the path to follow.

To us, the word contemplation seems the most appropriate to designate the means of attaining knowledge.

It has nothing to do, we repeat, with reasoning. To speak of rational contemplation is to fall into a contradiction. The contemplation we mean is not meditation, it is not absorption in thought, nor is it an insistent concentration on a particular thought. Nor is it prayer, sentimental exaltation, or devotion. Contemplation places the consciousness of the contemplator in communication and communion with undifferentiated consciousness. There is assimilation, identification.

Our consciousness becomes the consecrated Temple, of which pagan, Christian, Templar, and Masonic temples are the image and outward symbol. In this temple, all limitations disappear; it is the symbol of the universe. For this reason, the Masonic temple extends ritually from East to West, from North to

South, and from the dark depths of the Nadir it rises to the heavenly heights of the Zenith. In the same way, the Etruscan augur circumscribed and consecrated a *tempulum* on the ground with a purely ideal separation from the remaining space. And the *beautiful and angelic temple* (*Parad.* XXVIII, 57) which Dante reaches as he rises from the earthly Nadir, and where the *contemplators* dressed in *white Templar stoles* are found.

According to the Pythagorean cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, the temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem is the vision of God. "*For the temple built there by Solomon was nothing other than the place for the vision of the Gods, which the prince of priests consulted, where the responses of the prophets were kept in writing, from which the priests investigated occult things*" (Niccolò da Cusa, *Opera*; Basel 1505, p. 632).

This temple of Cusano is therefore not for reciting prayers or celebrating services, but for performing the mystical wedding *telV* "*of the zealous soul, who is chosen as bride for the son of God, who dwells in immortality, that is, heavenly incorruptibility*" (Cusano, *ibidem*), the alchemical wedding of the King and Queen, the Sun and the Moon, Gold and Silver.

All this must be done with the same calm and impersonal serenity with which a mathematician integrates a system of equations and a chemist works on his reagents. This is real art or science, not mysticism. The Christian language lends itself as well as any other to expressing the conditions and stages of the operation, but unfortunately Christian readers are usually inclined to misunderstand spiritual matters and to confuse the practices of hermetic science with those of devotion.

And this is a huge mistake! Because if it is true that contemplation is not achieved through thought, it is equally true that it is not achieved through feeling, and even less so through the womb.

Sentimental hysteria and spasms of love for Jesus are feelings, passions, pathologies. Not only are they useless, but we have seen that they are harmful and obstructive, and must be eliminated.

The grace of God that Sendivogius, Filalete, and others say is necessary, if there is no guidance from a Master, has nothing to do with Christian charity and love of neighbor; and in general, all hermetic terminology avoids the danger of degenerating into mysticism. With it, it is clear that we are dealing with science and not religion, initiation and not mysticism, experience and not belief, contemplation and not devotion, sublimation and not humiliation of consciousness.

We could quote countless passages from ancient sages who reveal a practical awareness of these things. Plotinus, Bruno, Campanella, and Cusano are veritable mines in this regard. But to give an example of Christian terminology used wisely, we will quote a page from an alchemist and spagyric physician of the early 1700s, a page that must be read with equal wisdom, and in which it would be a mistake to see anything other than one of the usual mystical outbursts based on love and devotion, with a mixture of the usual expressions and consecrated and venerated platitudes that no one bothers to understand.

Here is the passage we translate from Oswald Crollio's *Basilica Chymica* (Frankfurt 1608), specifically from page 105 of the *praefatio admonitoria*:

"Whoever does not unite himself by adherence to this most united Source and unique unity, must perish eternally, and by the second death be separated from the Light and Life, and be cast into the outer

Darkness of the Murky World, which absence from the presence of God is the most bitter of all punishments.

To know that God Himself is the Creator of all things, and to pass into Him with the complete image of His likeness or with a certain essential contact without bond, by which God Himself is transformed and fulfilled, is precisely the true and solid philosophy. Therefore, the minds of the Adept philosophers, whose JioMiSDga is in heaven due to the maturity of their earthly life, for whom one is all in all, and all things are one in one; who always see these transitory things with the left eye, and heaven with the right, the minds of these were always long removed and alien from higher sophistry. For, leaving behind the world placed in evil, with calm and religious meditation, awakened from the tomb of their bodies or from the dead works of darkness with the cooperation of divine grace, they were able to open the eyes of their hearts and, by separating their minds from earthly obstacles, they were able to delight in God in the Sabbath of their hearts, and with most blessed vision, that is, with a single and simple intuition from within, with a kind of essential contact with the Divinity, they were able to see all things in one, and in the light of God, as in a mirror of eternity, they were able to contemplate the beauty of the Supreme Good, incomprehensible to the Old Creature, and they considered misfortune that which is the dwelling place in this valley of misery and ignorance: For our heart is restless until, leaving behind the beautiful nothingness (that is, the region of Darkness and Dead Shadow), we return to the Being of Beings (from whence we wander), as the predetermined goal of every desire and will, for which every creature yearns and sighs. Therefore, stripped naked and abandoned by every creature, they abandon themselves and come out of themselves completely, despising all things corporeal and incorporeal, and hasten with sighs to the one and perfect, whose knowledge and contemplation (which the most wise Hermes, venerable in his gray hair and most pious forerunner of the philosophers of nature, and first prophet in his pure Monad, also knew) is the sacred, heavenly, and occult silence, the quiet of the senses and of all things, where finally, having fulfilled the task of miseries, labors, and wanderings, with unanimous friendship, all men in one Mind, in a certain ineffable way, deeply one, arrive. Intimate vision of God and intuitive knowledge of God, which also exists in this world for the soul separated by the light of grace, if anyone alone wishes to free himself and become a subject of God. Thus many holy men, by virtue of the deifying spirit, tasted in

noUTEupa: association, corporation, or government (Note by the Editor of <http://lamelagrana.net>).

this life the first fruits of the Resurrection, and they tasted the flavor of the heavenly homeland. That is, the spiritual death of the saints (which the Jews call Mortis osculimi/ precious in the sight of God, if death must be called the fullness of life. One must die to the world, to the flesh, to the blood, to the whole animal man, whoever wants /'excessum of the mind to enter these inner sanctums of secrets, and enter Paradise. The living man of mind alone, like an angel, evades; and with his whole breast (so to speak) in a certain way, God conceives.

This is what is found in a book apparently dedicated to medicine. But the medicine in question is the spagyric medicine of Paracelsus, of whom Crollio is a follower. And according to Crollio, this is precisely how spagyric medicine capable of giving long life must be understood. This, says Crollio, is Paracelsus' elixir of long life.

And on page 106 he adds: “These most secret of secrets were always hidden from the masses of philosophers, especially after men began to abuse the Wisdom that God had granted them for their health and benefit, turning it to evil.”

II

In the January-February and November-December 1923 issues of the magazine “Mondo Occulto,” some of Amedeo Armentano’s initiatory maxims saw the light for the first time. We began reprinting them in the now defunct magazine “Atanòr,” which preceded “Ignis,” of which “Ignis” is the continuation. Thus, the first two maxims appeared, accompanied by extensive commentary, in the May and June 1924 issues of Atanòr. We are now publishing a few more, grouping them together according to their subject matter, preceded by the two maxims already published in Atanòr and followed by commentary. For commentary on the first two, please refer to the aforementioned issues of Atanòr.

1 — Is it possible to know?

— **It is possible.**

— **How?**

— **By controlling your thoughts, dispensing with belief, and freeing yourself from passions and fear of nothingness.**

2 — Contemplation gives knowledge.

3 — To contemplate, you must be free in your senses.

4 — To be free in the senses, use the senses freely.

5 — Do not deny or blaspheme the senses, they accompany us from the first to the last day... Listen to their voice and obey only wisely.

6 — What are the senses?

— **A link between animal life and life.**

7 — To be able to consider pleasure is the same as possessing the abstract truth of it: the same law applies to pain.

8 — Renunciation deprives us of the spiritual truths contained in the things we renounce.

9 — Things are elements of experience, and those who renounce them blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

10 — We must renounce the false self, not things.

11 — What is to be understood by false self?

— **The dominion of the senses over the self.**

In the commentary on the first two maxims, published in “Atanòr,” we saw what was to be understood by knowledge, and then that it was possible to attain knowledge. First, it was necessary to satisfy certain necessary (but not sufficient) conditions. Specifically, it was first essential to free oneself from all beliefs, prejudices, feelings, passions, and fear of nothingness, that is, fear of annihilation. We also

saw that it was necessary to control one's thoughts. This preliminary purification, which has nothing moralistic about it and is depicted and accompanied by cathartic rites in initiation ceremonies, is technically indispensable, and once accomplished, it makes possible the contemplation that gives knowledge.

by the cathartic rites of initiation ceremonies, is technically indispensable, and once accomplished, it makes possible the contemplation that gives knowledge.

Amedeo Armentano, with his third maxim, now tells us that in order to contemplate, it is necessary to be free in the senses.

The senses in question are all the senses, all the bonds that unite our animal life to life. They are the five ordinary senses of man, which correspond to anatomical organs known to all, and they are the other less common and less defined senses, more difficult to refer to and locate to specific anatomical organs; and they are also the senses of sensuality, from which the pleasures and pains of the senses originate.

It is clear that in order to contemplate, it is necessary not to be dominated by the senses, because those who are slaves to them or simply incapable of abstracting from them cannot absorb themselves in contemplation. This third maxim, however, adds something more, which is far from superfluous or tautological, saying that this freedom must be conquered by remaining within the senses, and not by fleeing from them; by accepting them and not fighting them; by using them and not denying them.

The distinction is of the utmost importance and reflects the abyss that separates esotericism from mysticism, as well as paganism from Christianity. Christianity, in fact, realizing that the subjection of consciousness to the senses was an obstacle to spiritual liberation, placed all the blame on the senses and saw no other solution than to attack them and their organs. Both Matthew and Mark, without the slightest hesitation or discretion, express themselves clearly, categorically, and violently on this point. Here is what Matthew says (18), faithfully echoed by Mark (9): "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life crippled or maimed than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. *And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.*" Now, let us not talk about esoteric interpretations, this way of looking at the question is brutally simplistic; it is, worse still, grossly materialistic in its view of both the obstacle and the remedy. Attention is paid to the outside, to the body, to matter, and not to the inside, to consciousness. And, without stopping to examine whether there might be other methods, we throw ourselves onto this supposedly only path, trusting that it is practicable and that it leads to the goal.

Having established this horizon, this arbitrary antagonism between the spirit and the senses, poisoned and magnified by absurd and morbid beliefs about sin, temptations, the devil, hell, etc., Christianity claimed to apply its soteriological methodology indiscriminately to all, based on the democratic postulate of the equality of our fellow men and our neighbors, and other persuasions that Jesus had come to redeem all, to make the specifics of salvation available to all. In practice, Christian believers were careful not to follow the practical advice of the two evangelists (^), and Christianity succeeded only in replacing the serenity and sincerity of paganism with its moral prejudices and the hypocrisy

characteristic of Western moralism, with all the accompanying evils, infamies, disorders, and follies, so serious and

^ In practice, the “*servite Dominum in laetitia*” often prevailed. To limit ourselves to the past, the depravity of the church people, especially in convents, could be reported from the texts of the Fathers of the Church themselves, and abundant material can be found for those who are curious in the fundamental work of Vilfredo Pareto. The customs of priests and friars were such as to deserve to be painted and branded by Boccaccio, Rabelais, and many others, and to give impetus to reform and Puritanism; but all this does not detract from the fact that in the theory and practice of Christian asceticism, the antagonism between spirit and body was fundamental, and it was considered indispensable and almost sufficient to despise mistreating the flesh in order to elevate the spirit was considered indispensable and almost sufficient. For our part, we consider the consequences of this *technical error* to be far more serious than all the unbridled greed and sensuality. We find a hint of paganism in St. Francis, for whom the earth ceases to be a valley of tears and the sun and moon become brother sun and sister moon. St. Francis said to the body: “Rejoice, brother body, for now it is time to satisfy your desire”; and if the thesis put forward by Emilio Gilardi in his *L'Evangelo sconosciuto di Gesù* (The Unknown Gospel of Jesus) (Florence - 1916; Libreria della Voce) is well-founded, the preaching of the Gospel itself would have been completely misunderstood on this point.

This is not, as far as we know, the only sign of a return to sanity, a return that we cordially hope for, since we do not want the death but the return to sanity of the non-sinner (Note by A. Reghini).

so widespread that it has even given rise to the formation of a special science (psychoanalysis), which studies and deals with part of it. And it has added an additional obstacle to the many that in the “wild forest” block the way to the “delightful mountain,” the obstacle of moralism, which must be overcome in a double battle: externally, by resisting and yielding to the pressure of external impositions, which are exercised through the enormous social force of prejudice, and internally, by recognizing, unraveling, confronting, and silencing within ourselves the prejudice of Christian morality, unconsciously shared by everyone, skeptics, materialists, spiritualists, theosophists, Freemasons, and so deeply rooted that it is mistaken for the voice of conscience when it is nothing but foreign rubbish; we must disinfect ourselves by eliminating “moralizing” and overcoming the feeling of “bad conscience,” as Nietzsche called it.

Inapplicable to the masses, the Christian method proves spiritually ineffective, especially with certain temperaments in which sensuality seems to draw ever greater vigor from the repression it undergoes. St. Jerome, who had retired to the desert, fought in vain against his sensuality: “In the company of scorpions and wild beasts, I was often harassed by the chorus of girls. *My face grew pale from fasting, and my mind burned in my cold body; in the already dead flesh of a man, only the fires of lust raged*” (D. Hieron., *De custodia virginitatis*, Ep. XXII, t. I, p. 141). St. Jerome could thus see the futility of his efforts and perhaps meditate on the truth of Horace's saying: *naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*².

It is therefore futile to try to act on the senses to put an end to their dominion over the conscience; and all that remains is to work on the other end of the relationship: all that remains is to work on ourselves. We must free ourselves in the senses, not from the senses. The fourth maxim tells us how to be free in

the senses: use the senses freely. This, let us be clear, does not mean unrestrainedly, madly; but it means using the senses without allowing their activity to disturb the serenity of consciousness. It means preserving, while using them, the indifference and independence of the spectator and also of the actor who, while playing his part, knows and does not forget that it is only a part, and that, even in the interest of the performance itself, it is good to remain always conscious and in control. One must observe and consider what is perceived, felt, and experienced, just as one can calmly observe and consider the beating of one's heart; one must immerse oneself in the sea of the senses, even if the waves are rough, with the water perhaps up to one's throat, but always keeping one's head above the water and its agitation.

In Masonic symbolism, this inner attitude is expressed by the ritual attitude of the Free Mason Apprentice who stands *in order*. And the five symbolic journeys that the Free Mason Apprentice must ritually undertake in order to learn about the Blazing Star and the letter G, that is, to become a Free Mason Companion and to learn about geometry, the fundamental science of spiritual edification, are the symbol, as is well known, of the experiences gained through the use of the five senses and the wisdom attained in using them and through using them.

The senses are a treasure of the human condition, and those who are blind or deaf are at a disadvantage, not a privilege, in acquiring knowledge of things and gathering experience, because they lack one of the links between animal life and human life. To deny the senses is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. For it is not they that hinder contemplation and prevent the attainment of knowledge, but our subjection to them. They are a treasure of human life, and there is no need to deny them, even for the sake of transcendence. Nor, if it were convenient to do so, would it be enough to give knowledge. Instead, it is necessary and sufficient to know how to take the right position in relation to them, and then the existence and activity of the senses *allow* contemplation.

To violate nature by renouncing things is therefore to deny God's grace; it is a vain, useless, and even dangerous action. One must renounce oneself, the false self, not things. It is useless to renounce the world and its pomp out of fear of hell or out of selfish desire for one's own salvation; the false self, which loves and hates, which thinks of itself, which identifies itself, differentiates itself, limits itself, worries and defends itself, continues to exist and hold its ground.

The senses must live on their own, as the heart beats on its own, and conscience must not allow itself to be entangled by them, disturbed, upset, and distracted by identifying itself with them. The senses must live on their own, as the heart beats on its own, and consciousness must not allow itself to be ensnared by them, disturbed, upset, or distracted by identifying with the false self, with the miserable human animal that vibrates in unison with the senses, feels their repercussions, and suffers their domination. But, by abstracting oneself, by placing oneself inwardly apart, one must watch the unfolding of external and internal life with Olympian detachment, considering pleasure and pain serenely, recognizing and grasping imperturbably the spiritual truths contained in things. To do this is to possess the spiritual truth of pleasure and pain.

There are therefore no spiritual reasons that can justify the method advocated and followed by Christianity to free oneself from the domination of the senses. And the pagan attitude, which does not deny the senses, is exquisitely and wisely spiritualist, while Christianity, in considering the problem of

“liberation,” remains grossly materialistic. This is not surprising, and other examples of this crudeness of attitude and conception could be adduced. It could easily be shown how Christians, and with them many who call themselves and believe themselves to be spiritualists, are nothing but materialists, who do not even suspect immateriality, who do not even have a hint of incorporeality. And with such flaws and deficiencies, Christianity dares to condemn the pagan attitude, accusing it of irreligiousness and immorality. As if, even admitting the justice of the reproach, one could resort to reasons of a social and moral order, that is, external and contingent, to invalidate a process of inner spiritual technique. We say that spiritual maturity is and must be completely independent of all morality and immorality; we say that moral norms are not only perfectly useless and ineffective in the spiritual realm, but that one cannot transcend humanity while continuing to drag along the human baggage of morality. One need only think of the mutability and limitation in time and space of such impediments to see their contrast with initiatory universality. As for the immorality of paganism, it suffices to recall that it is absurd to claim to judge one morality by the prejudices of another; it is not permissible to leave the right of judgment to the party concerned. And in general, the very fact of appealing to one's own faith and morality, taking a question out of its proper sphere, is already an indication that good reasons are lacking.

Furthermore, it seems to us a singular form of strategy for freeing oneself from the domination of the senses over the self to bind oneself with the constraints of morality.

As long as one is forced to deal with the senses, even as a jailer or sentinel guarding prisoners or as their servant, one is not free, but a slave to the senses. To achieve liberation from the senses, to be able to contemplate, morality is useless. It is not a question of morality but of virtue; of *virtue* as understood by the Romans, that is, of capacity, power, virtuosity, and not of virtue as understood in the distorted sense assumed by the beautiful Latin word thanks to the deleterious action of Christianity.

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It was our intention to continue the publication of Amedeo Armentano's Initiatory Maxims and their commentary next year; but, as we said at the beginning of this issue, we must put an end to the publication of “Ignis.” Reserving the right to continue this work in another way, we are publishing, without commentary, the following maxims by Armentano:

1 — To communicate with things, it is necessary to identify with them.

2 — How is identification achieved?

— **By identifying oneself.**

— **How does one identify oneself?**

1 Last issue, since we cannot take into account the ephemeral resurrection of Ignis with its single issue in 1929, which was in fact essentially dedicated to and instrumental in the controversy with Julius Evola that arose after the editorial initiative of the magazine Ur (1927-1928) and the publication of Evola's essay on *L'Imperialismo Pagano* (1928). Regarding the magazines “Atanòr,” “Ignis,” and “Ur,” as well as the disagreements with Evola, see the two biographies of Reghini: DI LUCA N. M., Arturo

Reghini. *Un intellettuale neo-pitagorico tra Massoneria e Fascismo*, Atanòr, Rome, 2003, pp. 79-123; Sestito R., *Il figlio del Sole. Vita e opere di Arturo Reghini filosofo e matematico*, Associazione Culturale Ignis, Ancona, 2006², pp. 168-212.

Regarding the figure of Amedeo Rocco Armentano (1886-1966), in addition to the two biographies by Reghini mentioned above, which deal with him extensively, see the entry http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amedeo_Rocco_Armentano and ARMENTANO A. R., *Massime di scienza iniziatica*, Ignis, Ancona, 1992 (with writings by R. SESTITO, G. ARMENTANO and L. ARMENTANO).

2 *Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*: “Even if you drive nature away with a pitchfork, it will always return” (Horace, *Epist.*, I, 10, 24) - Note by the editor of <http://lamelagrana.net>

The Maxims

- Through experience and contemplation of experience.

14) We and other phenomena are individualized manifestations of the same life, and if we do enough to remove from our minds the part that distinguishes us, nothing divides us from the whole.

15) Who am I?

- The immanent considered in three times: yesterday, today, tomorrow.

16) Only by accepting present truths is the meaning of things eternal.

17) Just as night is a phenomenon of the single day, equally divisible into nights and days by the movement of the sun and the earth, so form and thought, and the succession of forms and thoughts, are a phenomenon of immanence manifested and unmanifested in time and space.

18) The immanence of phenomena escapes us as the perpetual day escapes us, which, while sensibly eclipsed, continues to exist far from us until its return.

19) Sophia, what are you doing?

- I am distinguishing.

- I abandon you, I contemplate.

20) One cannot know except synthetically.

21) Truth swallows analysis as water swallows lead.

22) What is the absolute?

The immanent sum of causes and effects in immanence.

23) The principle of causality is negative for the purposes of knowledge.

24) The nature of causes excludes the possibility of a first cause.

25) The chain of causes and effects is foreign to the metaphysical idea of *causa causarum*.

26) The concept of *causa causarum* is a principle of theological expediency.

27)

- Who is God?
- The conceivable.
- What are the limits of the conceivable?
- The indefinable conceived.

28) Silence is the virtue of God.

29) God is indefinable, and in order to have a sense of his indefinable reality, it is not at all necessary to resort to interpretations.

30) Thought, when faced with the mysteries of being, is either satisfied or diverges.

31) As long as you are human, since you do not understand, live for yourself alone, live your life in joy without questioning.

32) Distant things are the closest, oh! Eternity incarnate in meaning!

33) The necrophilia of prophets and philosophers has created the hundred myths of death.

34) Is there a problem of death?

The living are life and concern themselves with life: only the dead think about death.

35) If you want to know about death, abandon dreams.

36) It is enough for us to know that if there is conscious continuity after death, this continuity cannot be in opposition to life.

37) Humanity is infected with hypotheses.

38) It is better to know that you do not know than to believe.

39) The ancients believed that the center of the universe was the earth (so they say), we believe in progress!

40) To progress is the same as not to be.

41) It seems incredible that men are so naive as to delude themselves that they can achieve order by aiming at progress!

42) Where there is order, there can be no progress.

43) Knowing what you are is the only possible happiness.

44) What lives in you from the beginning is yours.

45) What passes through you is not yours.

46) Wisdom is inversely proportional to imagination.

47) As long as the search for truth is based on reasoning, paroxysm is the only reasonable philosophy.

48)

- What is the difference between philosophers and us?

- Philosophers do not care about knowing, they only care about reasoning. We, on the other hand, are interested in knowing and do not care about reasoning.

49) Speaking without contradicting is a quality that says nothing for or against the affirmation of truth.

50) Thought, by its very nature, cannot separate the pure spirit of things, for it sees all things in two aspects.

ARTURO REGHINI

Considerations

on

The Ritual of the Free Mason Apprentice

with a note on the life and Masonic activities of the author

by GIULIO PARISE

EDIZIONI DI STUDI INIZIATICI

Via San Bartolomeo, 47

NAPLES

Arturo Reghini was born in Florence on November 12, 1878, into an ancient and illustrious family. Gifted with a lively and uncommon intelligence, a profound critical spirit, and broad clarity of vision, he was blessed by his native land with pure elegance of expression, profound and sometimes biting wit, and a polemical impulse. His diligent study of every discipline developed his talents, enriching his mind with vast and profound knowledge; balancing the achievements of his inner *discendi cupiditas* with the demands of the most rigorous criticism, so that his inner and outer actions found strict norms in his habit of science. The Florentine environment he frequented served to refine his dialectical skills, bringing him into contact with writers, artists, philosophers, scientists, and politicians of the most varied tendencies, with the finest minds of the age. I believe that it is rare for such a wealth of knowledge to be found in a single person: a humanistic education that allowed him to delve deeply into classical thought in the original texts, knowledge of the main modern languages and many ancient ones, a refined taste and an ability to understand art in all its manifestations. He became what is commonly referred to as a scholar. In addition to this, he possessed rare talents, far exceeding those of the best, guided and developed in the discipline of art, which made him an exceptional being.

He visited Rome several times, even for long periods, before settling there. He arrived in Rome in 1896 and met Mrs. Isabel Cooper Oakley, delegated by Hélène Petrowna Blawatsky. Together with her and others, he founded the Italian headquarters of the Theosophical Society in 1898, participating in its activities with lectures that were often lively due to his sharp criticism.

At the end of 1898, he went to Turin, where he formed a theosophical group headed by Dr. G. Sulli Rao at the *Ars Regia*.

In 1902, in Palermo, he was initiated into the Royal Lodge “I Rigeneratori” (The Regenerators), of the A. and P. Rite of Memphis and Mizraim; returning to Florence, in 1903 he joined the Royal Lodge “Michele di Landò,” under the authority of the Grand Orient of Italy based in Milan, of which Malachia De Cristoforis was Grand Master. The “Michele di Landò” Lodge was dissolved and

reorganized, without interruption of its work, in 1905, under the name “Lucifero,” and A. R. was one of its founders. During that period, the Grand Orient of Milan merged with that of Palazzo Giustiniani.

In Florence, A. R. frequented the Caffè delle Giubbe Rosse and sometimes the Paszkowski, participated in the “La Voce” and “La Fronda” movements, and met Papini, Prezzolini, Campa, Macinai, Augusto Hermet, Roberto Assagioli, the “Lacerba” group, etc. In 1903, he founded the Biblioteca filosofica (Philosophical Library), which he directed until 1908, where he collected precious works, including Masonic ones.

Welcomed into the best society, sought after for his conversation and knowledge, he contributed to the revival of spiritual values that reacted against the suffocating materialism of the end of the century. It was a time when theosophy and spiritualism, occultism and magic, and all the so-called initiatory sciences aroused the greatest interest.

Some may remember hearing or reading fleeting references to an indigenous tradition, of a purely Italian character, handed down from ancient times and still existing today. Some scholars of Masonic matters know that after the creation of the Grand Lodge of London, during the period of maximum expansion of the initiatory brotherhood, so renewed in form, there were those who, from England and France, came here to seek those rules of the Art that were known here and nowhere else.

A. R., a student in Pisa, heard himself called one evening by a young stranger; they were together, and with others, for many years, in a communion of work and spirit that sometimes appeared to the astonished eye of the common people as a prodigy and a fairy tale. That encounter marked the beginning of what was to become A. R.'s mission in Italian and universal Freemasonry, in the political field and in that of initiatory studies. A. R. was initiated in the highest sense of the word: he experienced the trials of the *five* elements not only as a participant in a ceremony that is now just a distant echo and has retained an outward resemblance to the ancient mysteries, but as a profound reality, a tenacious yearning, and the arduous realization of his spirit. Crossing the threshold of death was not only a ritual symbol, but a real experience, a vision, and knowledge. Having attained enlightenment, he quickly decided on the action to be taken, unique in essence, twofold in form: to restore Freemasonry to its initiatory function, stripping it of its deteriorated elements; to orient society towards an order based on spiritual values.

An action from within, in Freemasonry as it was constituted, found its greatest difficulty in the friction it would undoubtedly cause among brothers who followed other paths; hence the idea of creating a new organization, which was the Italian Philosophical Rite, founded in

1909 by Eduardo Frosini, A. R., Alessandro Cavalli, Umberto Maggi, Amerigo Bianchini, Alberto Gennari, Vittorio Falorsi, and others.

In addition to its initiatory content, the Philosophical Rite aimed to bring together the various Italian Masonic lodges into a single body, initially through a federal system, which was achieved with the Scottish Rite of Cerneau, the Eastern Rite A. and P. of Memphis and Mizraim, the Martinist Rite, and later with the Templars and other smaller groups. It enjoyed considerable success, managing to bring together elements of the highest order, but its ranks were disrupted by the events of the First World War. In 1919, it merged with the Scottish Rite Masonry of Piazza del Gesù. Later, E. Frosini

reconstituted it as an independent organization, and it still exists today, having been reconstituted again after the fall of fascism.

In order to act on a social level, A. R. conceived a movement, whose ideal content was declared in an article written in 1913 and published in 1914 in the magazine *Salamandra*, entitled *Imperialismo pagano* (Pagan Imperialism). In it, A. R., referring to the best and universally recognized qualities of the Italian people, their common talent, the genius of many, their constant industriousness, to everything that our land had given to humanity over the centuries, he hoped for a renewal of concerted action that would allow us to regain our lost primacy in every field, spiritual, moral, artistic, legislative, commercial, etc.; and to reestablish '**imperium**' not with the violence of arms, but by becoming and being '**better**' than all other peoples. History teaches us that religious intolerance, which paganism did not know, had its roots and bitter fruits in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; intolerance is contrary to all freedoms (and not only to freedom of religion, worship, or thought); and in the thought of A. R., in the vision of a universal society organized according to a hierarchy of spiritual values, where *empire* is synonymous with order and freedom, tolerance and mutual respect, these concepts were expressed with the adjective *pagan*.

It is not possible, at this point, to clarify further this particular aspect of A. R.'s thinking, which only his closest friends were able to understand in depth, while to others it appeared as a banal form of pagan anti-clericalism. I will also refrain from dwelling on the fortunes, deviations, and derivations of the movement started by A. R.

A. R. loved his country deeply and had a special fondness for Rome. Here he found himself in 1911 organizing a demonstration for April 21, with a manifesto that surprised the forgetful Romans; here he found himself even later, when, as a fervent interventionist, he animated with his eloquence the popular uprisings that demanded the redemption of their brothers from foreign rule; it was here that, in May 1915, at the end of a demonstration on the Capitol, he raised a flag and led the crowd to the Quirinale to demand and obtain a declaration of war, in which he actively participated; he reached the rank of Captain of the Engineers.

In 1921, he returned to his beloved studies, collaborating with newspapers and magazines, and moved to Rome where, already well known and appreciated, he took on the role of editor-in-chief of the *Rassegna Massonica*, which he held until 1926, also carrying out fruitful work with foreign Masonic powers, many of whom wanted to appoint him honorary member of their respective Supreme Councils.

Our meeting was, in a sense, fateful; I met A. R. when he was preparing his book on "Le parole sacre e di passo ed il massimo mistero massonico" (The Sacred Words and Passages and the Greatest Masonic Mystery), published in 1922. At that time, he lived in a modest room, where the most interesting thing, after him, was a small bookcase with his books. I had the opportunity to see him often, forming a deep friendship that lasted for 25 years, until his death.

In 1924, he founded and edited the journal of initiatory studies *Atanòr*, which continued in 1925 as the journal "*I-gnìs*"; these are two precious volumes, in which A. R. lavished his erudition, his spirit, and his high teaching in many articles. Then came the dissolution of Freemasonry.

The figure, work, and thought of A. R. were too well known for him not to become the object of particular attention on the part of those who, for many years, were the arbiters of the destiny of Italy and of every single citizen. A. R.'s Masonic activity had to diminish considerably after the dissolution of the order, the devastation and occupation of the headquarters, limiting himself to contacts with the very few trusted people who remained close to him and frequented him at their own risk. The problem of daily bread also had to be resolved, as all his modest sources of income gradually dried up; the publication of the magazine *Ignis* could not continue because almost all of its numerous subscribers had disappeared; his contributions to newspapers and magazines ceased

because the signature of A. R. could raise suspicions of who knows what obscure links with the Freemasons operating in the shadows. Thus, in 1926, A. R. was forced to resume his freelance teaching profession.

Even without *Ignis* and burdened by his professional work, A. R. never ceased his research and scholarship. Between the winter of 1925 and the spring of 1926, he completed an extensive monograph on the person and writings of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, which was published in the 175 pages preceding the Italian translation of Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy*. When the complete work was ready in draft form, as it had been done from a French translation, it was sent to A. R. for revision of the original text, and he took it with him to Calabria, where we went together to spend the summer.

In Calabria, in the land of Klingsor, we were together more than once in one of the mighty towers erected in ancient times to defend the coast. It was a tower built on a rocky platform resting on the seabed, which until a few years ago was completely isolated but is now connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of sand. The place is evocative because of the many legends associated with it, because it was one of the very first places inhabited by man in the Mediterranean basin in the Paleolithic era, because of its fossil strata, and because of the many traces, not only material, that its inhabitants left behind during the slow passage of centuries and millennia. Some enthusiasts of the so-called metapsychic may be interested to know that there are spontaneous "manifestations" of all kinds and that fragments of bones can normally be seen moving in a macabre dance around a skull that sometimes moves in the air, sometimes slides across tables, clattering its jaws and making the strangest noises, all in broad daylight. There are also tactile sensations, which can lead to the violent expulsion of unwelcome guests. After some protests about the disturbance, we became good friends with the local inhabitants, who also became our collaborators and companions. In that unique environment, isolated from all contact with the world, with no other concern than to provide ourselves with water and food, the days and nights passed as if we were living in a fairy tale world.

The revision of Agrippa's text could not be completed: the publisher protested that he would have to rewrite everything from scratch; the work was published in October 1926.

Two things were very important to A. R.: to have a periodical in which to continue publishing initiatory studies, in order to maintain or establish relationships with suitable people and prepare them to contribute their knowledge when Freemasonry could reorganize itself; and to gather the scattered ranks of Freemasonry. The publication of the magazine was quickly planned and decided upon; in 1927 and 1928, the magazine UR saw the light of day, and it was undoubtedly the most beautiful and complete publication of its kind ever produced to date. For obvious reasons, it could not be directed by A. R. or

by me, so the task of directing it was given to a man who ended up, among other things, demanding that the text of our articles be changed to remove anything that could even remotely be suspected of having any hint of Freemasonry. Naturally, UR ended up suspending publication.

At the end of 1927, after meeting with various brothers, A. R. was able to ascertain that there was a desire among all of them for an efficient reorganization of the order and the rite; but that too many of those who had once held positions of dignity and office appeared disorganized, hesitant, isolated, and discouraged any attempt. A. R. and two other full members of the Supreme Council, after careful examination of the situation and having ascertained that a regularly constituted Supreme Council no longer functioned in Italy, ritually constituted themselves, assuming the powers to reorganize the rite, with all the caution that the moment demanded, that is, with the rigorous selection of members and the establishment of personal relationships with individuals, such as to be able to find a perfect secular justification in any event.

Something was achieved and more was hoped for. Two meetings were held, with the participation of highly trusted members, one in June 1928 and a second a few months later. In implementing our program, we also took into account the fact that some organizations were still efficient which, being less conspicuous or less well known, had been able to escape the violence provoked by the law against secret societies and were affiliated with the Rite of Memphis and Mizraim, the Philosophical Rite, the Martinists, and the Templars.

With the closure of UR now decided, we decided to resume publication of *Ignis*; the first issue of January 1929 came out with some delay due to the completion of the relevant

formalities; the composition of the next two issues was already ready when the storm broke: first there was the sudden madness of a man who, pushing certain ritual practices too far, at a certain point was unable to maintain his balance due to excessive wine consumption and fell, letting slip some compromising remarks; then came the agent provocateur of the ever-infamous company, dressed in a cassock, who came within a hair's breadth of saving the soul of A. R. and mine with a few shots from his pistol. And the hurricane broke, with an article entitled *Manovre di massoni (Masonic maneuvers)* in the periodical *Patria*, simultaneously with another on *Roma fascista* (Fascist Rome) and then others, published in newspapers in Rome and the provinces, all written by the same author, with few variations in title and content. More than the work of the lawyers, it was undoubtedly good luck that saved us from worse trouble, but all that commotion resulted in such close and multifaceted surveillance of us that we were unable to have any contact with anyone, for fear of compromising even those we greeted.

After 1930, A. R.'s activity became increasingly limited to teaching, where his high standing, mastery of the subject, and teaching method had placed him among the very best in the esteem of his students, colleagues, and scientists. In our free time, we would get together with a few of our remaining friends; we would play chess, discuss the political troubles of the moment, but above all we would talk about what was closest to our hearts: the possibility, still too distant but certain, of better forms of civil life in the future, of a return of Freemasonry; and we thought about the need to lay solid foundations so that order and ritual could securely support the initiatory edifice and restore that knowledge and that Art, now almost universally ignored by those who had become Freemasons only by virtue of a patent. The aim of Freemasonry, defined in Anderson's Constitutions as 'the perfection of man', has not really been

achieved, not so much because of the inadequacy of the Masters of the Craft, but because of the clear prevalence within Freemasonry of external and hostile forces that wanted and brought about its decline, diverting it from its main purpose; all means were used, the field was left open to pride and vanity, discord and jealousy were stirred up, and with diabolical skill, the seeds of different, foreign concepts were sown, concepts that were easier to understand and more appealing, which spread, overwhelmed and ended up prevailing to the point of losing sight of even the essential things, or to postpone them and adapt them to others of lesser importance.

How many are there today who know the secret laws of the Art, to build a lodge or a temple according to justice and perfection of proportions? And how can one claim to build the inner temple according to the anagogical meaning of unknown norms?

A. R. had already seen the need to strip Freemasonry of everything that the succession of times and the incomprehension of men had superimposed on the original doctrine; he was perhaps the only one capable of doing so, thanks to his ability, preparation, depth and balance as a scientist, his knowledge and direct relations with those who could validly help him, and indeed he suggested the work plan. In three years, he completed the *Ricostruzione della Geometria Pitagorica* (Reconstruction of Pythagorean Geometry), which was published in 1935: it bears the flaming star on the title page; its scientific value was recognized by the Accademia d'Italia with an award. It is a work that all free masons should know, not only because it is accessible even to those with only a modest middle school education, but above all because it contains many pages that free masons could meditate on with profit. Unfortunately, the wickedness of the times did not allow the literal meaning to be developed in a Masonic way and the symbolic meaning to be unfolded; nevertheless, the brothers would have much to learn from it.

After completing his study of geometry, A. R. began work on *Dei numeri pitagorici* (On Pythagorean Numbers) in seven books, which took ten years to complete; it is an immense work, still unpublished. At the end of the introduction, A. R. says: "The laws, properties, and numerical harmonies that offer themselves to our contemplation are not human inventions; they pre-exist, they *are* in the abyssal depths of interiority and prove that the beauty of the visible cosmos corresponds to an equally admirable beauty of the inner universe. From the recognition of these beauties and harmonies, it will then be possible, Socratically and Pythagoreanly, to ascend and transcend, rising from material and human life to spiritual and divine life and to bring about that palingenesis which is the essential purpose of the 'Scuola Italica'.

The importance of this work is absolutely exceptional for the many lofty problems that find their solution in it; it is destined to arouse enormous interest in the field of science. And one cannot help but consider with melancholy how billions have been squandered in the most insane folly,

as even today millions are squandered on gambling and pleasures, while it is difficult to find the necessary funds for a publication of such value, a value that is not only mathematical and literal, but transcends form and requires a key to its understanding, which will be given in due course.

Meanwhile, political events were coming to a head, the problems of everyday life were becoming more difficult to solve, and the worst was yet to come, while A. R. had an urgent need to be freed from cares and worries in order to complete the work he had begun. Thus, in September 1939, he left Rome and

moved first to Bologna, then to Budrio, where he taught at the Quirico Filopanti Middle School. But our correspondence was more of a hindrance than a help, and we were overjoyed to be together again. Even though we were not completely isolated in our Calabrian tower, the great peace of the place was conducive to concentration and spiritual liberation. We communicated the results of our work, planning future projects and regretting that there were too few of us given the immense amount of work we saw needed to be done.

Then the war, with the so-called liberation of Rome, divided us; A. R., who remained in Budrio, just a stone's throw from the Idice stream, which for many months was the line where the fiercest fighting took place, did not move; artillery shells fell all around and many exploded in the small garden, damaging the house a little and seriously wounding a dear person. The war passed. A. R., unharmed, resumed freer contact with his old friends; he was animated by a new fervor, an eagerness to work; time was running out, for the Fates had already touched the thread of his life and the warning had been given. I asked A. R. about the philosophical and initiatory development of his work on Pythagorean numbers; in about two months, he was able to complete a volume on *Sacred Numbers in the Pythagorean Masonic Tradition*, wrote several articles, and sketched out plans for works he was unable to complete.

On the first day of July 1946, the spirit of Arturo Reghini broke its bodily bonds and passed into the Eternal Light. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The sign had appeared. Arturo Reghini turned to the setting sun for a final farewell, for the last rite; then he leaned with his right hand on the nearby shelf, bent his gigantic stature toward the Great Mother, stood upright, and was free.

He left articles scattered in newspapers and magazines, which will be difficult to collect; much of him can be found in the *Rassegna massonica*, in *Atanòr*, *Ignis* and *Ur*; I have already mentioned his main works: *The sacred words and passages of the first three degrees and the greatest Masonic mystery* - the study on *Enrico Cornelio Agrippa and his magic - For the restoration of Pythagorean geometry* - *The sacred numbers in the Pythagorean Masonic tradition* - and the unpublished one: *On Pythagorean numbers*.

He left behind a legacy of thought to ponder, a program to be realized: to bring Italian Freemasonry back to its purest origins, to restore the values of initiatory knowledge and science in the lodges and among individual Freemasons, to develop and coordinate studies, in order to revive Italian communion in the esteem of sister communions, to reestablish a spiritual primacy that will allow posterity to see once again the turreted crown on the brow of Italy and the mystical star shining its True Light upon the peoples.

A. R. left behind an example of life, industriousness, work, spiritual elevation, and profound serenity, even when words and the pen lashed out; he left behind an example of what the Masonic spirit truly is, of brotherhood and solidarity beyond all vulgar prejudice, which knows how to appreciate effort, the will to elevate, purify, improvement, and does not seek out doubts, uncertainties, or errors, near or far, with the vile and abject aim of suffocating, demolishing, or preventing a revival. He left behind an example of tolerance that is free from malice, gossip, and defamation, which values one's own freedom and that of others, whatever the action may be or appear to be.

It is now up to us to gather his spiritual legacy; to become ever more worthy of understanding, continuing, and perfecting his work; to persevere in the unceasing struggle against our open enemies and hidden false friends;

so that the Light of knowledge may shine forth in its entirety, the Freedom of the spirit may triumph, and Peace may reign in the hearts and minds of men.

GIULIO PARISE

The Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca (Dictionary of the Academics of the Crusca) says (1): “Frammassone, one who is enrolled in a *once* secret society.” Eight years after this definition by the Crusca, in 1907, Ottorino Pianigiani, in his *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana* (2) (Etymological Dictionary of the Italian Language), in turn states that Freemasonry is that vast philanthropic association, *once* secret, also known simply as Masonry, whose emblem is the tools of the architect and mason as a symbol of universal progress, which is precisely its purpose, adding that Freemason is the exotic name for free mason from the French *franc-maçon*.

It is not easy to sum up so many inaccuracies and absurdities, even of a philological nature, in a few lines. In fact, about twenty years ago, we had the opportunity to show, with documents in hand, that the word “Freemason” is an old Italian medieval term (as is the word “lodge”), although it is historically true that the modern word “frammassone” is a derivation and Italianization of the French “franc-maçon,” introduced into the Italian language about 150 years ago. But this is not the point.

What is important is to note that no Masonic ritual has ever stated that Freemasonry has universal progress as its goal; and even a layman such as Pianigiani should have considered that this cannot be the case, because Freemasonry existed long before the belief in universal progress spread in the West, and because it would be quite absurd and superfluous to set as an aim something that, by definition and by nature, would be inevitable if the law of universal progress really existed and which, moreover, once achieved, would render Freemasonry meaningless. It naturally follows that it is not true that the tools of the architect and mason are the uniform of this alleged universal purpose and progress; this is a flawed consequence of the previous erroneous statement.

All Masonic rituals, ancient and modern, Italian and foreign, agree, beginning with Anderson's original and fundamental Constitutions (1723), that the purpose of Freemasonry is the perfection of man, and only in recent (and more *advanced!*) times have the unwise and the profane been able to assimilate and confuse this end with the concept and belief in universal progress, an absurd identification that makes the stated purpose of Freemasonry ridiculous, just as ridiculous as an association whose purpose was to work to ensure that spring follows winter. Furthermore, the idea of human perfectibility is an ancient idea and not a corollary of the modern theory of universal evolution, and refers or concerns only man and not the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, or humanity as it belongs to the kingdom of beasts.

Over time and with progress, the ancient definition of the purpose of Freemasonry has undergone alterations due to misunderstanding, and modern rituals present variations that are apparently slight but substantially profound, affirming that the purpose of Freemasonry is the perfection of men (confused with the perfection of the individual), and then that it is the perfection of humanity (forgetting that of

the individual) and finally that it is the perfection of the human community, that is, of society. These are all chronologically later definitions, which are influenced by subsequent profane ideas and aims, although verbally the difference from the ancient initiatory definition is slight and goes unnoticed. Only by forgetting the initiatory character of Freemasonry is it possible to deny that the aim of Freemasonry is the perfection of the individual, to be achieved through ritual, or, in Masonic language, through the squaring of the rough stone and its transmutation into the cubic stone of mastery according to the rules of the Craft.

Without doubt, Freemasonry is still today an initiatory institution despite the alterations, deviations, and misunderstandings, and it is solely for this reason that it is the subject of our study. Freemasonry makes use of initiatory ceremonies as was the case in the ancient mysteries, and according to the present

) *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*; 5th edition, 1889; Vol. VI.

1. Ottorino Pianigiani - *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana*; pp. 558 and 824.

and incitements of the ritual, actual initiation (i.e., perfection) can be achieved and conferred by full understanding and *support* of Masonic symbols. Many confuse ceremonial initiation with symbolic initiation, in that it symbolically represents the actual initiation, of which there appears to be no trace in Freemasonry; we clearly distinguish ceremonial initiation from the actual initiation represented by the initiation ceremonies and closely connect the actual initiation with the symbolic one, because in the Masonic tradition and ritual, initiation is both actual and symbolic, not in the sense of opposition between actual and symbolic, but in the technical, traditional sense, in that the symbols of the Masonic craft serve as a support, a basis for the work aimed at the transmutation of the rough stone and the perfection of the great work, in accordance with what happened in ancient times and in general in the guilds of arts and crafts.

Not only is Freemasonry an initiatory institution, but it is the only Western institution in which the mysteries handed down to us from classical antiquity survive, and this characteristic alone would be enough to make it a valuable subject of study, as a Romanian writer, Matila G. Ghyka, recently recognized. To avoid misunderstandings and to avoid offending sensibilities, let us say clearly from the outset that we do not intend to claim that Freemasonry is the only institution in the West today that transmits initiatory knowledge and that all other modern Western initiatory institutions and associations are worthless; we merely wish to point out that Freemasonry is a historical and spiritual offshoot of the ancient mysteries, founded at an unknown time and by unknown persons, and is a contemporary remnant of the classical mysteries; while other modern associations, or at least some of them, which have or claim to have a traditional initiatory character (such as theosophical, Templar, Rosicrucian associations, etc.) date back to a fairly recent and well-defined time and have well-known founders who have deliberately, for better or worse, linked them to previous institutions and occult *centers*, real or imaginary, excellent or not, but in any case and avowedly distinct from them. Freemasonry derives from Masonry, its symbolism is *its* symbolism, the symbolism of the material tools of the trade and of the science of building, architecture identified with geometry, which in the classical sense of the word also includes the science of numbers.

As for the secrecy of Freemasonry, we note first of all that the impartial and disinterested testimony of Crusca and Pianigiani denies that modern Freemasonry is a secret society, although it affirms that it

once was. We have dealt with this important question at length in our writings in the magazine “Ignis” and in the “Rassegna massonica” in 1925, reporting the categorical statements of two authoritative writers, Hughan and Keller, who deny that Freemasonry is a secret society (3), as well as the official statement made in 1917 by the Bulletin, *Organe Officiei dii Bureau des relations maqonniques*, Berne 1917, which in its first paragraph explicitly states that Freemasonry is not a secret society. The source and date of these authoritative and competent statements are not suspect; but Senator Prof. Emilio Bodrero, a nationalist who in August 1921 began a campaign against Freemasonry in the official organ of the Society of Jesus, *Civiltà Cattolica*, and Benito Mussolini, who in May 1925 sponsored a bill against secret societies in the Chamber of Deputies, ignored or pretended to ignore the opinion of the Crusca and Pianigiani dictionaries, paid no attention to authoritative statements on the subject, and maintained that Freemasonry was a secret society, because otherwise the bill against secret societies would have been legally inapplicable to Freemasonry, and at that time the fascist regime was still concerned with appearing to observe the law. The Jesuit and Mussolini thesis was naturally accepted by the party and the fascist press and inspired the politics of fascism for twenty years, which saw Freemasonry as the regime's number one enemy; but it also found, impossibly, supporters in a small group of fanatical and uninformed Freemasons, who, at that very moment, went to great lengths to argue that Freemasonry was and had to be a secret society, thus handing the fascists the only weapon they could use against Freemasonry. We will not mention names and facts for the sake of brevity and because some

1. Hughan - *History of Free and Accepted Masonry*, 1881; p. XVI of the introduction. Keller - *The Spiritual Foundations of Freemasonry*, 1923.

of these Freemasons were probably unaware of the service they were rendering to the Jesuits; and also because today Italian Freemasonry has overcome fascist persecution, works and prospers, and, if it were to remember its adversaries, it would begin with those who were fully aware of what they were doing, such as Father Tacchi Ventura, Bodrero, Federzoni, Anfuso...

Apart from statements motivated by religious hatred, political interests, or partisan blindness, Freemasonry is not a secret association, but according to some, it once was. And in fact, it was so in Italy recently during its clandestine period, and it was so in Italy between 1820 and 1859; but this was not due to its intrinsic nature but to the necessity caused by oppression. Two centuries ago and more, Freemasonry was a trade guild known to all, which also had secret signs of recognition, a special language or secret jargon, and used trade symbolism. No more and no less than other trade guilds, which have almost all disappeared. None of these things are sufficient to constitute a secret society. Even today, the language used by mathematicians, doctors, and chemists is understandable only to initiates, but no one thinks of accusing mathematicians, doctors, or chemists of belonging to a secret society.

However, there is something secretive, something clique-like; there is something secret that arouses interest in some and suspicion and hatred in others. Recently, a Catholic writer *published a book* (4) *against Freemasonry, accusing it of false claims*, that is, of falsely boasting of possessing and transmitting a secret doctrine through a secret tradition, while according to Del Castillo (p. 139), at the heart of this secret tradition there is absolute emptiness. “The initiatory school,” says Del Castillo, ‘and through it the secret tradition, have taught absolutely nothing to humanity (p. 155)’; and therefore

Freemasonry has no value, and the reader is warned against those who want to foist the usual nonsense on him. How one can then support this thesis and at the same time (p. 141) claim that this secret tradition, that is, this absolute void, coincides, albeit in a corrupt form, with the Gnostic traditions, is something that only Del Castillo understands.

However, Del Castillo does not know or pretends not to know that with this “new weapon” he is breaking down an open door, because Freemasonry does not claim to transmit a secret doctrine and knows that it must not make such a claim. In fact, in 1921, an authoritative and competent French Freemason, Oswald Wirth (5), wrote: “Since the initiatory method refuses to indoctrinate anyone, it is hardly admissible that a positive doctrine was taught within the Mysteries.” Freemasonry knows very well that enlightenment comes through light and not through words, it knows that it is absurd to attempt to express ineffable wisdom, to enunciate, codify, and condense truth into a creed, it knows well that even intelligent acceptance of a creed is not knowledge, that believing in a creed is not knowing what the creed affirms, even if it is right. Believing is one thing, knowing is another; and instead of believing that we know, it would be better to know that we believe.

Ordinary Christians are and call themselves believers; they may sometimes be wise, but the two terms are not synonymous, quite the contrary; because those who know no longer have any *need to believe*. Listen to how the creed is recited and you will be convinced that the believer not only understands nothing, but recites it without giving the slightest thought to the meaning or any meaning whatsoever of what he is reciting. Freemasonry is identified with geometry: and in geometry, understanding and knowledge make sense, and believing makes no sense; anyone who claims to *believe* in Pythagoras' theorem would show that they understand nothing. Geometric knowledge can be communicated verbally, but it constitutes a science and not a doctrine about the mysteries of being. We therefore agree that there is no secret doctrine in Freemasonry, which, moreover, does not exist and therefore cannot be contrary to Catholic doctrine. The absence of such a secret doctrine may be judged a demerit or a merit, but it should at least allay animosity;

1. Raffaele Del Castillo - *Le tradizioni segrete* (Secret Traditions) - Milan, Bompiani, 1941.
2. See Oswald Wirth - *Le Livre du Maître* (The Book of the Master) - 1921, p. 119.

But this does not happen; and, just as nature once abhorred a vacuum (what nature and a vacuum are is not clear, but it does not matter), so the Church abhors the absolute vacuum that constitutes the secret doctrine transmitted by Masonic tradition. At least, this is according to Del Castillo's conclusions.

However, this observation is not enough to conclude that in Freemasonry absolute emptiness takes the place of a positive doctrine, spouted in a creed, communicable verbally, and acceptable and recitable by the believer, the parrot, and the phonograph. This is in turn another belief: the belief that words are necessary as well as sufficient to express and communicate wisdom. Del Castillo's belief has a crude, materialistic basis; it presupposes absolute ignorance of the possibilities of the spiritual order. If, on the other hand, wisdom is ineffable, it is necessary to resort to means transcending verbal communication in order to attempt, if possible, to acquire it; and the traditional transmission of an art or set of technical means that serve this purpose constitutes something more than absolute emptiness and even something more than a positive doctrine, even if not erroneous. Only that, instead of an easy and often unintelligent transfer of formulas and beliefs into the submissive and receptive minds of others, it is

necessary to *work*, to accomplish a task, a great task, in a workmanlike manner; instead of filling the skull of the faithful believer, it is necessary to free the craftsman himself from all kinds of constraints, to ennoble him, to transhumanize him.

The perfection of man is the goal of Freemasonry, the means is Masonic work based on and supported by symbolic initiation, that is, conferred and obtained through the intelligence of familiar Masonic symbols, just as a work of art is obtained by using the tools of the trade. This language makes understanding, intuition, mental and spiritual contact, inner guidance, and initiatory transmission possible.

The initiatory value of Masonic symbols is not limited to Freemasonry, where they are at home, but is also recognized by other associations where they can be found and where their presence needs to be justified or explained. For example, De Castro reports (6) that: “towards the end of the 17th century, a kind of talisman was discovered in Germany, in the tomb of a Templar who died before the dispersion of the order, on which were traced Gnostic symbols, the square and compass, the celestial sphere, the so-called Pythagorean pentagon (five-pointed star) and eight stars of the Gnostic ogdoad.” Similarly, in the alchemical figures of Basilio Valentino, the compass and square are placed in the hands of the two male and female halves of the hermetic androgyne or Rebis, as noted by Guénon (7). The same happens in the hermetic work *Basilica Philosophica* by Daniele Mylius, printed in 1610, and in an Italian alchemical booklet printed on lead plates, which we have reproduced and commented on in the magazine *Ur*, where the compass and square are placed in the hands of Tubalcaino, a character who is both Masonic and hermetic. The presence of these eminently Masonic symbols among the Templars and in Hermeticism is very significant and probably attests to the fact that there have been relations between the Masonic guild, the Templars, and Hermeticism since ancient times. However, Guénon also reports that in China, the compass and square are placed in the hands of Fo-hi and his sister Niu-kus, respectively, and there is no reason to think that there was a transfer from the East to the West or vice versa. However, leaving aside such questions, even if these Masonic symbols have a symbolic meaning outside Freemasonry, it is clear and natural that they are particularly suited to fulfilling this function in the Masonic symbolism of the craft guild, as attested by all ancient and modern Masonic manuals.

Finally, it should be noted, in relation to the effectiveness of the method of symbolic initiation, that according to Masonic customs, as in other brotherhoods, each apprentice had to be entrusted to and assisted by a brother who acted as his master, so that each apprentice or disciple had his own master to help him in his gradual symbolic initiation. Mrs. David-Neel, speaking of contemporary Tibetan initiations, says that there are three kinds of masters: those who teach by

1. G. De Castro - *Secret Brotherhoods* - p. 107; Athena editions, Milan.
2. See René Guénon - *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* - Paris, 1945, p. 138.

through words, those who do not speak but make gestures, and those whose teaching she calls telepathic, that is, those who exercise their influence over the disciple directly without any external means of communication. Kremmerz seems to refer to a distinction of this kind when he says that it is very rare to meet a talkative master; and, taking into account the fact that Masonic language is traditionally said to be universal and therefore does not consist of any particular human language, one can glimpse that symbolic Masonic initiation is carried out or should usually be carried out through

support and meditation on Masonic symbols directed and encouraged by the inner guidance of the specially appointed master.

This mental or spiritual communication between master and disciple presupposes that there is harmony and agreement between them, which is why Freemasonry is a brotherhood cemented by *brotherly love* reminiscent of the proverbial friendship of the Pythagoreans. As sympathy and harmony increase and the rough stone is refined, it becomes more sensitive, more ready and confident in grasping the ideas suggested to it, in intuiting inspirations, and thus the work proceeds and is accomplished. Since the support of the inner symbolic language is that of Masonic symbols, it is essential that the apprentice become familiar with Masonic symbols, and therefore it is necessary that the apprentice attend lodge meetings and that these be conducted according to the rituals.

The existence of Masonic symbolism and ceremony is undoubtedly an anachronism, because it is a remnant of ancient times, but only those who believe in universal progress can think that for this reason we should or must free ourselves from such formalities and customs whose purpose they neither see nor suspect. In practice, the desired reform is unlikely to be implemented because symbolism serves to maintain unity among the lodges scattered across the surface of the earth; but in addition to this negative reason for preserving symbolism, there are positive reasons, and the consideration that the application of ceremonies and symbolism imprints in the mind those notions and that support which make possible the symbolic initiation of the apprentice who truly and seriously aspires to his spiritual perfection. apprentice who truly and seriously aspires to spiritual perfection.

Considerable help can also be provided by the refilali and the catechism, provided, of course, that they have not been altered through misunderstanding or deliberate intent with the pious intention of directing the apprentice towards other goals and destinations. In such cases, instead of helping, the rituals end up becoming a serious additional obstacle, which is why the study of Masonic rituals is so important. For now, we will focus solely on the ritual of the first degree, that is, the ritual of the free mason apprentice, bearing in mind the relevance of this study at a time when, for the renewal of Italian Freemasonry, the apprentice ritual is being handed over to a large number of new members of the old Masonic brotherhood.

Before examining the ritual of the free mason apprentice, it is necessary to make a few more historical observations.

As is well known, in the last two centuries, high degrees and different rites have arisen in Freemasonry. Some of these rites have arisen and disappeared, and some of the high degrees have not been and are not actually practiced. In Italy today, the rites are reduced to three: the symbolic rite, which has only three degrees, those of apprentice, fellow, and master; the ancient and accepted Scottish rite, which has thirty degrees in addition to the three mentioned above, although in practice these are reduced to far fewer; and the Memphis and Misraim rite, which has 95 degrees, also reduced to far fewer, and which also actually practices the first three degrees. The first three degrees are common to all rites; the higher degrees come later and are not the same for all rites. Historically, Freemasonry existed before the rites professing the higher degrees arose; the Scottish Rite in 33 degrees derives from a pre-existing "rite of perfection" dating back to around 1760, and the Memphis and Misraim Rite is even more recent.

All high degree rites, in Italy and abroad, whether extinct or still alive today, are based on the common foundation of the first three degrees of apprentice, fellow, and master, which are more or less the same for all rites and are the only ones common to all, so that ritually, Freemasonry, which existed when there were no

these three degrees, is summarized by these three degrees, which still ensure its unity and universality above all subsequent differentiations.

At the base of every Masonic organization are the lodges, which work only in the first three degrees and depend in various countries on their respective Grand Lodges. In ancient times, that is, before 1720, each lodge was autonomous and depended solely on the authority of its Venerable Master; the first Grand Lodge to be established by the union of four pre-existing lodges was the Grand Lodge of London, founded in 1717, and those lodges existing on the face of the earth that trace their origins directly or indirectly to the Grand Lodge of England or to lodges that in ancient times adhered to and reconnected with this Grand Lodge are called regular lodges. We do not intend to examine here whether and to what extent this criterion of the regularity of a lodge is justified, necessary, and sufficient. Consequently, all lodges accept or should accept, in fact and in law, the Constitutions and Statutes of Anderson's Masonry (1723), and should work according to rituals that are the same or in accordance with the ritual used by the ancient lodges under the obedience of this Grand Lodge, rituals which in turn were composed using ritualistic material prior to the formation of the Grand Lodge of England. The grand lodges that subsequently worked and continue to work in various countries according to their own rules have had to bear in mind the need to conform to this norm for the sake of their regularity, and this explains why the rituals of the first three degrees used in the last two centuries in various countries are basically quite similar to each other; they originate from a single ancient ritual, the elements of which they have handed down, taking care not to omit any, both out of traditional respect for the ancient brothers and to avoid accusations of irregularity. Freemasonry can be summarized in the first three degrees, and from the traditional point of view of initiatory symbolism, the rituals of the first three degrees are of incomparably greater interest than those of all the higher degrees of the various rites; this does not mean that the latter are always without value. However, in order to understand Freemasonry, ritually and traditionally speaking, it is unnecessary to consider the rituals of the higher degrees; the first three Masonic degrees of today are sufficient.

We have spoken of the rituals of the first three degrees. It should also be borne in mind that this distinction is relatively recent. Before 1730, there was no third degree ritual and no third degree; Pritchard's "Masonry Dissected," printed in 1730, ignores the third degree, whose ritual was established by an unknown brother around 1730, using ancient material, some of which was Masonic and some of which was not strictly Masonic. Before then, it seems that the ritual was the same for the degrees of apprentice and mason and that it was split into two separate rituals for the apprentice and the fellow craft when the third degree was created; the ritual printed in 1724 is the same for lodge work and contains elements of the two subsequently separate degrees. This ancient and unique ritual of the order is also anonymous; indeed, unlike that of the third degree, it is not possible to determine its antiquity, just as it is not possible to determine the antiquity of Freemasonry, but only to find historical traces of its existence in the Middle Ages and the Middle Ages.

These ancient rituals were revealed starting in 1724 by renegade or repentant brothers who believed they were revealing Masonic mysteries by making available to the public certain material secrets concerning meetings, work, secret words, signs of recognition, etc., not knowing or suspecting that the Masonic mystery, by its very nature, is absolutely incommunicable to the profane, and their illusion of revealing it proves that they had not even begun to grasp it.

From 1740 onwards, these publications became increasingly frequent in various languages and did not merely reveal and report the rituals, but commented on them, either by ridiculing them (as in the publications of Leo Taxil) or by explaining their alleged immorality or their alleged subversive and anti-religious character. The truth is that Freemasonry as it was established and appears in England, that is, in a Protestant country, is not Protestant, it is not sectarian, but tolerant, non-denominational, and freely and fraternally open to Catholics; and it was precisely this anti-sectarian character that aroused the mistrust and apprehension of sectarian Catholicism.

The Bull of Clement XII, prohibiting Catholics from joining Freemasonry, was bound to have repercussions on the character of Freemasonry in Catholic countries, and from a purely historical point of view

historical point of view, it is not true that the Church opposed Freemasonry because it was anti-Catholic, anti-Christian, anti-religious, or anti-spiritual, but it is true that the hostility of the Church had the effect of determining, by contrast, the character of Freemasonry in some countries, which was forced to defend itself by transforming itself into a secret association. However, it never became sectarian, and the rituals always remained in keeping with the spirit of tolerance, super-confessionalism, and independence of the ancient rituals.

It is not surprising to note that, with the passage of time and the transition from one language to another and from one Masonic organization to another, the rituals have undergone alterations and now present variations and additions compared to the older ones. It was believed that it was right to add and interpret, and therefore modern rituals contain elements that are heterogeneous in origin, character, and value. In general, however, the reformers have done, we repeat, as the ancient copyists of manuscripts did; that is, they have respected or at least intended to respect what they found in previous rituals, without daring to omit the traditional content, and have limited themselves to additions and interpretations in accordance with their culture, ideas, and beliefs.

These interpolations and alterations are easily recognizable, firstly because they appear in the rituals only from a given date and do not appear in previous rituals, secondly because they do not adhere to the characteristic symbolism of the old traditional elements and bear clearly visible signs of their heterogeneity, origin, and profanity, and thirdly because they unintentionally and sometimes deliberately depart from the tolerant, free, and universal position and character of Freemasonry as enshrined in the traditions of the order and the Statutes of 1717. and thirdly because they unintentionally and sometimes deliberately depart from the tolerant, free, and universal position of Freemasonry as enshrined in the traditions of the order and the Statutes of 1723. The work of cleaning up and restoring Masonic rituals therefore consists in recognizing and removing the sediment and encrustations, the unintentional misunderstandings and the tendentious interpretations. This work is particularly timely because many people are flocking to the doors of Masonic temples in today's revival

of the ancient brotherhood in Italy, and the ritual of the free mason apprentice has recently been reprinted by one of the most important Masonic bodies in Italy. Moreover, even readers who have any other edition of the ritual will easily be able to follow what we are about to say.

We can classify the elements of the ritual into elements that are strictly and indisputably Masonic, such as the elements of the craft and everything related to them; secondly, elements of an architectural, geometric, and numerical nature; and thirdly, elements of other kinds, such as linguistic, religious, historical, moral, philosophical, and political.

There can be no doubt or difficulty whatsoever regarding the origin and attribution of symbols strictly related to the craft; to use a phrase from Masonic jargon, there is no rain on them. They are a sure part of the symbolic heritage characteristic of the Order, both in fact and in law, and it is only a matter of recognizing and determining the genuine symbolic meaning of these symbols, which may also be multiple. These tools are: the hammer or mallet (from the French *maillet*) and the chisel, which are used to rough-hewn the raw stone; the lever, the ruler or the straight edge; the plumb line or perpendicular and the level or spirit level, which are used to draw vertical and horizontal lines; the mallet and the trowel; the square and compass, symbols of rectitude and measurement, between which the free mason must always stand; the apron worn by masons; and finally, the board or table for tracing or drawing, known in Old English as the tiercel board and in French as the *planche à tracer*, which is used for drawings and calculations and for the plan of the building to be constructed, for drawing the architectural piece or work to be carried out by the workers.

In ancient times, before beginning work on the lodge, a brother was charged with tracing the mystical picture of the lodge on the floor, which was then erased. This mystical picture of the lodge represented the temple where the work of the lodge was carried out, and the tools we have listed were drawn in this mystical picture of the lodge, but it also contained other elements. First of all, this lodge diagram has a rectangular shape, which is precisely the shape that a lodge, or rather its temple, must have. This rectangle is barbarically called 'quadrilong' in certain rituals, a literal translation of the French 'carré long', and is erroneously called a parallelogram in other rituals. The temple is carefully separated from the profane world and is accessed through a door by knocking ritually. This door is depicted in the lodge painting.

The etymology of the word temple refers to the way Etruscan priests set aside a portion of space separate from the rest and intended for religious and divinatory functions.

The Masonic temple is always oriented, at least symbolically, as were the ancient Christian temples and as is the Great Pyramid. The door of the temple is located to the west, facing the East, where the seat of the Venerable, who is the head of the workshop, is located. The word 'loggia' is an ancient Tuscan architectural term and refers in Florence to those parts of buildings that are open at the sides and are generally located at a height, such as the loggione (gallery) in theaters today. However, some loggias were also on the ground floor, such as the Loggia dei Lanzi, the Loggia del Grano, and the Loggia di Or San Michele.

This is not to say that the English word 'lodge' derives from Italian or vice versa. We simply wish to point out that this name is very appropriate for the Masonic temple because, according to the ritual, the

Masonic temple, which is based on a rectangle with the shorter sides facing east and west and the longer sides facing south and north, has open side walls and is bounded by twelve columns connected to each other by a waving ribbon (*houpe dentelée*) or chain of union or love, and is open at the top, that is, it is covered by the sky, that is, it is made in such a way as to be able to receive without hindrance the higher, spiritual or celestial influences, a feature that is also easy to find in various ancient Greek and Roman temples.

The temple is arranged according to three orthogonal axes determined by the direction of the local meridian, by that of the tangent to the parallel, i.e., from east to west, and by the vertical (from the *nadir* to the *zenith*).

From the center of the lodge, which is located at a point on the earth's surface, three axes extend, perpendicular to each other, and above each of them there is a polarity, and therefore the six directions of space (perpendicular to the six faces of the cubic stone).

The lodge, and therefore also the Mason, standing in the center, is located between heaven and earth, between east and west, and between south and north. The four sides of the temple correspond to the four cardinal points, as in the foundation of ancient cities, where two perpendicular lines drawn through the *cardo* or *cardine* divided the city into four quarters. Symbolically, the two poles of the vertical axis correspond to the pairs of high and low, upper and lower, celestial and terrestrial, spiritual and material; the east-west axis corresponds to the duality of light and darkness, since light comes from the east; and the axis directed according to the meridian from south to north corresponds to the duality of heat and cold because, for the inhabitants of the northern hemisphere, the sun rises in the east, i.e., in the east, and moves to the south at noon, and the countries located in the south, i.e., the southern countries, are the hot countries, while those located in the north are the cold countries. At midday, the sun is at noon for us and rotates in an apparent direction from east to south and then to west, rising in the east and setting or sinking in the west or west; therefore, the east-west pair corresponds to light-darkness, day-night, life-death.

In our hemisphere, the shortest days, i.e., the longest nights, occur during the winter solstice (while for us the solar day is then the longest); in the annual motion of the sun, the sun rises, for us in the northern hemisphere, during the winter solstice; this is the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, which differs by four days from the Christian Christmas. The other solstice is the summer solstice, and between the two are the equinoxes; these are the *four seasons* of the initiatory tradition, the four annual solemnities, the four St. Johns of the Masonic tradition. Thus, we have the two pairs of summer and winter and spring and autumn. The four cardinal points of the diurnal movement of the sun correspond to the four moments of the annual movement, so that the north corresponds to the winter solstice, the east to the spring equinox, i.e., the first point of Aries, the summer solstice to noon, and the autumn equinox to the west. And the temple is surrounded by twelve columns, just as the annual orbit of the sun is marked by the twelve signs of the zodiac.

In Masonic symbolism, the concept of duality is presented in the pairing of certain symbols. The Mason stands between the square and the compass, like the lodge between earth and sky; the celestial sphere is circumscribed by the

temple, and its flat section, i.e., the circumference traced by the compass, is circumscribed by the plan or base of the temple, i.e., the rectangle whose sides are drawn at right angles by the square. The pair of vertical and horizontal lines, which has special importance in Masonic art, appears in the picture of the lodge represented by the two instruments of the plumb line and the level. Duality is also represented by the sun and the moon (crescent or half moon). The sun and the moon, which in all languages (except German) are always masculine and feminine respectively, correspond to day (*diurnus*) and night, to Janus (*Dianus*) and Diana, the father and mother (Jupiter and Demeter, the mother goddess or mother earth, the ancient mother), Osiris and Isis, Mars and Venus, active and passive. Good comes from the east, evil from the west. For the Romans, who turned towards the south in their augural rites, auspices that appeared in the east, i.e. to the left of the observer, were considered good omens and those in the west were considered bad omens; for the Greeks, who instead turned towards the (northern) pole in their religious rites, the east was on the right, and therefore the signs that appeared on the left were considered bad omens. The Greek meaning was then adopted by the Romans and has remained in our languages; therefore, something on the left is considered bad luck. This gives us the dualism of right and left, based on the priestly conception of a civilization that arose in our northern hemisphere and on a primordial polar tradition, i.e., facing the pole (North). A point on the earth's surface, for example the equator, moves towards the east as a result of the Earth's rotation. This sense of the Earth's rotation to the right is probably connected with the law of right-handedness in animal life (shells have a right-handed spiral) and with the difference between the common right-handedness of humans and the *gauche-rie* of left-handed people (*gauches*), whose dexterity lies in the left hand. Left-handed and ambidextrous people can also be geniuses (Leonardo), but the rule is that of the right hand, and Lombroso saw left-handedness as a character trait or indication of criminality, of a tendency to strike from the left.

Since the Masonic temple is open at the sides and at the top, the sun, moon, and stars are visible from inside the temple, and for this and other reasons they are represented in the lodge painting. The serrated ribbon also appears in the lodge painting, while of the twelve columns surrounding the temple, only two are represented, one white and one black, located to the west near the temple door.

The theme of duality, to which the symbol of the two columns at the entrance to the temple clearly refers, and which also appears in the symbolism of the square and compass, the sun and moon, etc., is taken up again in the floor of the lodge, which is depicted in the lodge painting. This floor is called a mosaic floor, not because of any particular veneration for the prophet Moses, but because it is a mosaic or musaic floor, so called in ancient times in honor of the Muses, and, since it is divided into black and white squares, it is also called the checkerboard and by some even the chessboard.

In addition to the sun, moon, and stars, there are other lights in the temple that are also depicted in the loggia painting. These are the luminous, transparent or sparkling Delta, which is a geometric symbol in the shape of an equilateral triangle with its apex at the top, and the flaming star or pentagram, which has the shape of the Pythagorean pentalpha, i.e., the five-pointed star (the Italian *stellone*). The loggia painting of the companion shows this pentalpha with one of the five points at the top. These two geometric symbols have appeared in Freemasonry since ancient times; and, since Freemasonry, or architecture, is traditionally identified with geometry, and since geometry was created from scratch by the Pythagorean school, any reference to geometry and the properties of numbers is undoubtedly a

reference to Pythagoreanism. In this particular case, these are none other than the two most important symbols of Pythagoreanism; the first is called by Freemasons by its Greek term Delta because its equilateral triangle shape is that of the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet, and coincides with the Pythagorean symbol of the tetractis, to which members of the Pythagorean order swore allegiance and in which some important mysteries of the Pythagoreans were gathered and expressed. As for the pentalfa, or flaming star, it is actually the symbol of the Masonic order, as it was of the Pythagorean brotherhood. These two symbols are purely geometric in nature, as they stand; and only by altering them with additions is it possible to see in the first nothing more than the Christian delta, i.e., the symbol of the Trinity instead of that of the quaternary or tetractis, and in the second the symbol of the star which, according to

one of the four Gospels, specifically the non-synoptic one, appeared to the three wise men and led them to the manger of Jesus. In this way, in order to support particular beliefs, the universality and symbolic homogeneity of the ritual is altered, distorting purely geometric elements and introducing elements belonging to a specific belief, a specific period, or a specific character, with the aim of showing one's brother the holy religion to which Freemasonry has no other task than to bring him back or even convert him if he has never been a Christian. It is Christianity, which denies the principles of freedom, tolerance, and Masonic independence, which, having been thrown out the door, comes back in through the window. And since few people know about the Pythagorean *tetractis* and everyone knows about the delta of Christianity, the belief that identifies the Masonic delta with the Christian one is accepted without question and opens the door to another Christianization, that of the flaming star. With such erroneous notions in their heads, the brothers become *disoriented* and symbolic Masonic initiation becomes almost impossible; and one wonders whether this is not precisely the aim *desired* by the creators of Masonic symbolism and tradition.

III.

To complete the list of symbols that appear in the lodge picture, we mention the seven steps that must be climbed to reach the east where the Venerable sits, and finally the sword and the three windows that appear in the companion's lodge picture. These last two symbols are not very Masonic, while the number seven has a Pythagorean character and is part of the Masonic symbolism of sacred numbers. The rituals give a consistent explanation, saying that they are nothing more than the seven liberal arts (of the free Mason and of good morals) of the Pythagorean trivium and quadrivium, first mentioned by Boethius.

Masonic rituals, Masonic traditions, and old Masonic manuscripts dating from before 1700 explicitly mention Pythagoras, assert that Pythagoras was initiated into Masonic mysteries, that he founded a Masonic lodge in Crotona, Italy, and identified Freemasonry with geometry, the Pythagorean science par excellence. In relation to this traditional identification, there is the equally traditional claim by free masons that they alone have knowledge of the 'sacred numbers'. These are the Pythagorean numbers, that is, whole numbers understood in the traditional sacred initiatory sense and not in the profane sense of ordinary arithmetic, a distinction insisted upon by Plato, and which constitute the anagogical arithmetic called "formal" by Pico della Mirandola. The other numbers of the Pythagorean decade also appear in the lodge frame: the duality in the two columns to the west, in the black and white checkerboard, in the sun and moon, in the square and compass; the three in the triangular shape of the

luminous Delta and in that of the trowel, the four in the shape of the faces of the cubic stone and in the fundamental symbol of the tetractis, which is none other than the fourth triangular number composed of the sum of the first four numbers and for this reason identified with the decade; the number five in the shape of the flaming star and in the pentagonal shape of the knots of the serrated ribbon; the number six in the number of faces of the cubic stone and the six rays perpendicular to them, as well as in the six directions west and east, north and south, low and high; the number seven in the number of steps that must be climbed to reach the East East; eight in the number of the vertices of the cubic stone; nine in the number of the squares into which the board to be traced or *tiercel board* is divided by the two strips formed by two pairs of parallel lines perpendicular to each other drawn on it; and ten in the symbol of the tetractis or Pythagorean delta.

The elements of the ritual we have considered so far are closely connected with each other; in particular, geometry and architecture are traditionally identified with each other, and this is not a claim made only by free masons; Guénon observes (*Le Règne de la Quantité*, p. 34) that in Arabic the word *hindesah*, whose primary meaning is 'measure', is used to designate both geometry and architecture, the latter being, in short, an application of the former. Geometry is the science that introduces the concept of measure, and the compass is the instrument used in both geometry and architecture

or Freemasonry for measurement. In symbolic geometry and symbolic architecture, the compass is, as the ritual says, the symbol of measurement. On these considerations, says Guénon, "all conceptions assimilating divine activity, as the producer and organizer of worlds, to *geometry*, and also, consequently, to *architecture*, which is inseparable from it, are essentially based; and it is known that these conceptions have been preserved and transmitted, uninterruptedly, from Pythagoreanism (which was itself an 'adaptation' and not a true 'origin') to what still remains of Western initiatory organizations, however little conscious they may be of this at present." "This is particularly referred to, Guénon continues, in Plato's words 'God is always geometrising', words which correspond to the inscription that he is said to have placed above the door of his school: Let no one enter who does not know geometry."

We have noted that in these ancient elements of Masonic ritual, only the tools of the trade or art, of technique, geometric symbols, and numbers appear. There are no human elements, no traces of place or time; the absence of any linguistic, historical, national, religious, moral, philosophical, or political element or reference is absolute, with the exception of the word delta to indicate the triangle, which contains a reference to the Greek language. This implies the universality of Freemasonry in time and space and its independence from all human differentiation and limitation.

The lodge is rectangular in shape, but the rules do not specify the ratio between the length and width of this rectangle. If we apply Plato's criterion in the *Timaeus* for decomposing flat polygons into their triangular elements, the rectangle is decomposed by one of the diagonals into two equal right-angled triangles. According to Plato, among right-angled triangles, the most beautiful is the one in which the hypotenuse is twice the length of the shorter side, i.e., the right-angled triangle that is half of an equilateral triangle. In this case, if the shorter side of the rectangle measures one unit, the rectangle is inscribed in a circle with a radius of one unit centered at the center of the rectangle, i.e., the temple, and the other side of the rectangle is equal to the side of the equilateral triangle inscribed in the circle and to the height of the equilateral triangle whose side is the diameter of the circle. The shorter side would

therefore be equal to the side of the inscribed hexagon and the longer side equal to the side of the inscribed triangle; their measurements with respect to the radius of the circumference would be respectively one and the square root of three. This assumption is confirmed by the actual measurements of the lodge squares reported in books printed in 1740 and also reproduced recently (see Wirth - *Manuel du Compagnon*, p. 128). It should also be noted that the hinge of the compass drawn in the lodge square is located precisely in the center of the figure, i.e., at the point where the two diagonals meet. However, we cannot rely on this verification, nor can we exclude that, depending on the various cases, the ratio between the two sides of the lodge rectangle could have taken on different values.

After having seen and examined the elements of the ritual that are eminently or predominantly Masonic in character, namely the symbols of the craft and the architectural symbols, the geometric figures and the numbers, we now turn to examine other elements of the ritual and Masonic tradition that are of a different character and bear traces of their origin in a specific time, language, and belief. We can distinguish these elements as Jewish, Christian, and finally modern.

The main pagan elements are the chalice of oblivion, used during the ceremonial initiation, the three statues of Hercules, Minerva, and Venus that must decorate the lodge, the table to be traced, which according to some rituals is the symbol of memory (Mnemosyne), and the trials of the four elements to be overcome during initiation.

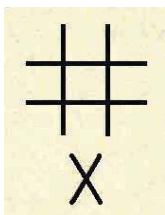
In fact (see G. De Castro - *Il mondo segreto*, IV, 160), in the General Statutes of Scottish Freemasonry, Orient of Naples, 1820, it is written that "the statues of Minerva, Hercules and Venus, representing wisdom, strength and beauty, must be seen in the Masonic temple": and the *Recueil de la Maçonnerie Adonhiramite*, p. 93 says that the lodge of a master rests on three large triangular pillars called wisdom, strength, and beauty. These three qualities, says De Castro, must be found in every piece of architecture, that is, in every mystical writing, and were personified in the three goddesses Juno (power), Minerva (wisdom), and Venus (beauty). The usual and preferable triad is the first because it is more precise and clear in its personification, and the substitution of Hercules with Juno seems to have no other purpose than to obtain a triad composed entirely of female deities. These are undoubtedly three pagan deities that adorn the temple of the free masons, but the paganism of these elements is only apparent; they are clearly nothing more than the personification of Dante's 'divine power, supreme wisdom and first Love'. Dante belonged to the "faithful of Love," invoked Apollo, the supreme Jupiter, sailed under the inspiration of Minerva and the guidance of the nine Muses, and yet he was never called a pagan. One might think that the presence of the three statues in question in the Masonic temple is due to an affinity between Freemasons and the faithful of love, especially since these three qualities reappear later in the names Campanella gives to the three assistants of the high priest in The City of the Sun. It should also be noted that it is perhaps not purely by chance that these three qualities are also found today in the designations of the head of a lodge, called Venerable, the head of the Rosicrucian Chapter, called Most Wise, and the head of the Areopagus, called Most Powerful. Only classical statuary could provide a way of representing these three qualities in a plastic form through the statues of the three deities who personify them, and the presence in the temple of these three statues of pagan deities or of the pillars dedicated to them does not attest to the pagan polytheism of Freemasonry or even to religious syncretism.

The chalice of oblivion, sometimes replaced by two cups, contains pure water on one side and a bitter drink on the other. During the initiation ceremony, the recipient must first drink the pure water, which then turns into the bitter drink. The commentary on this test, which the ritual places in the mouth of the Venerable, is purely moralistic and not overly profound; nor can it be, because the order in which the drinks are tasted has been reversed. However, the traditional designation of the cup of oblivion is significant and immediately and unambiguously refers to the Orphic and Pythagorean myth of the two sources of Hades, the source of Lethe and the fresh spring of memory or Mnemosyne, which are found in Virgil and Dante (Purg. XXVIII and XXXIII). The water of Lethe is *lethal* and brings oblivion and forgetfulness to those who drink it, while the fresh water of the other spring, which Dante calls Eunoè, refreshes those who drink it and “revives their faint virtue.” And just as the recipient in Freemasonry tastes the two drinks from the cup of oblivion before obtaining his initiation, so Dante places Lethe and Eunoè at the very end of Purgatory, and returns from the “most holy wave, renewed, like new plants renewed with new foliage, pure and ready to ascend to the stars.”

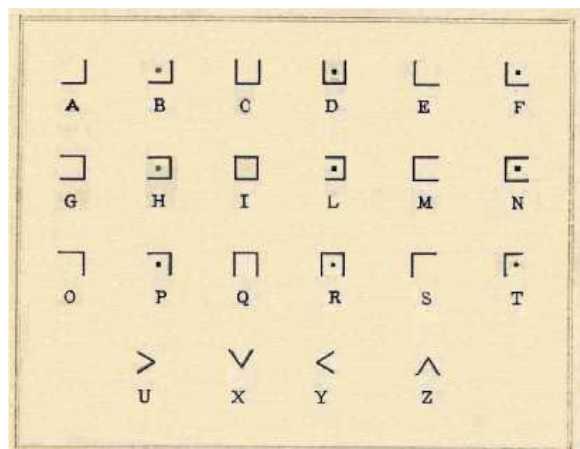
The myth of the two sources is undoubtedly pagan. In Neoplatonism, it has an eschatological character; the water of Mnemosyne confers salvation or health (in Dante's double sense of the word), the health that the Pythagoreans sought in life through catharsis and which they connected with the symbol of the pentalpha, writing around it the word health (ygieia), the health that the Latin augurs by saying *salve* as a greeting, and which could not be translated into English and German. The chalice of oblivion is the form in which the Orphic rite of the two sources of Hades is handed down in Freemasonry. The Orphic, drinking from the pure spring of Mnemosyne, escaped the waters of Lethe and became immortal, “no longer the son of the earth alone but of starry Uranus,” as the Orphic tablets used to serve the deceased as viaticum say. Thus, by ending his life, he is born into a new life under the starry sky of the Masonic temple and becomes a Mason, who stands, as the ritual says, between the square and the compass, that is, between the earth and the sky.

Let us move on to the important symbol of the table to be traced. The ritual of the free mason apprentice to which we refer, that is, the recently published Italian ritual, says that the table to be traced is the symbol of memory but does not justify this statement in any way; and this omission is somewhat regrettable because it would seem at first glance that the table to be traced should rather be seen as a substitute for memory, a kind of knot in a handkerchief, for use by those who have poor memory and need to rely on writing. To understand this, we need to briefly outline the history of the subject.

The board to be traced appears in the lodge frame and contains the so-called Masonic alphabet, represented simply by straight lines. The form most commonly used in the 18th century is as follows:



The Masonic alphabet in code is obtained simply by drawing the sides that delimit a box and, for some letters, inserting a dot in the middle. You must go from left to right and from top to bottom as in our writing, and in this way you have the alphabetical signs:



The signs for K and V are missing; the sign for L is still used today to indicate the word Lodge. This is how the table appears in the *Thuileur de l'Ecosisme - Nouvelle edition*, Paris 1821 and in the *Manuel Maqonnique par un veterain de la Maqonnerie*, 1820 by Vuilliaume. However, in

older books, such as in the work: *L'Ordre des Franc-Macons trahi*, which dates from 1742, the table to be traced does not contain the cipher alphabet and only contains architectural drawings. On the other hand, this cipher alphabet is clearly derived from the cipher alphabets given by Giovanni Battista Della Porta in his work *De furtivis literarum notis vulgo de fiferis*, Naples 1563, and by the Kabbalist Blaise de Vigenère - *Traité de chiffres ou secréto manière d'ecrire*, Paris, 1567. These writers have, with a certain degree of arbitrariness, adapted an ancient cabalistic cipher script, reported by Agrippa in his "*Occult Philosophy*" of 1533, to modern languages.

This Kabbalistic script is based on a tripartite table with three columns and three rows, and the boxes, or rather the sides of the individual boxes, in which one, two, or three dots are inserted, serve to represent the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the five final letters, establishing a correspondence between the three worlds: intellectual, celestial and elemental, and the three enneads of boxes, letters and numbers. This Kabbalistic alphabet of 27 signs is itself nothing more than a Jewish adaptation of the Greek written numbering system using the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet and three added signs or episemi. The number of signs, almost certainly inspired by Pythagorean considerations, was therefore 27, while the oldest Greek written numbering system in use at the time of Pythagoras used the initial letters of words, for example, the letter tt to write the number five and the letter A, the initial of decade, to write the number ten. Thus, the neo-Pythagorean Theon of Smyrna, in his "Exposition of Mathematical Things Useful in Reading Plato," which dates from the first century AD, dealing with the first nine integers that alone interested him, gives the following table:

$\alpha \delta \zeta$		1 4 7
$\beta \varepsilon \eta$	ossia	2 5 8
$\gamma \varsigma \theta$		3 6 9

where the first nine numbers are divided into three rows and three columns.

On the other hand, although the table to be drawn only bears drawings in the rituals of 1742, its ancient English name is “tiercel board” or tripartite table, as for example in Pritchard's “Masonry dissected” from 1730; and this name can only be explained by supposing that the table to be drawn was tripartite. The Freemasons, who introduced into Freemasonry the cipher alphabet in imitation of the cipher alphabets of Agrippa, Della Porta, and Vigenère, found the tripartite board to be a beautiful and ready-made case for their purposes, but because the number of letters in modern European alphabets is not a multiple of nine, they could not limit themselves to the nine signs of the tripartite board and had to resort to two straight lines and four additional signs.

This brief analysis leads us to identify the table to be drawn with the tripartite table obtained from Theon's table when the nine Greek letters are removed, which represent the numbers and only the first nine numbers. These were the numbers contained within the Pythagorean decade, and they were the only ones that interested the Pythagoreans because all other numbers could be reduced to them by replacing them with their base or *pimene*, i.e., the remainder of the division by nine or the number itself when it was a multiple of nine.

The table to be drawn, or tripartite table or tiercel board, is absolutely identical to the Pythagorean tripartite table of Theon of Smyrna; and the sacred numbers of the free masons are none other than the nine numbers of the Pythagorean decade. It indicates to the Freemason that architectural works, both material and spiritual, must be drawn and executed on the basis of the properties of ordinary and symbolic arithmetic. In this symbol, too, only lines appear, which serve to indicate numbers, so it does not refer to a particular language and is universal in character, although it takes us back to the neo-Pythagorean Theon. We can say that it is a Pythagorean and Masonic symbol that has a universal character because it has a geometric shape and indicates only numbers and their arithmetic and symbolic properties.

Having made this observation, we can also understand why some rituals may or prefer to affirm that the table to be traced is the symbol of memory. The table to be traced with its nine squares

, sums up in a symbol, in the etymological sense of the word, the chorus of the nine Muses, daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne, and is therefore also the symbol of their common mother, i.e., memory. It should also be borne in mind that, according to Plato and the Pythagoreans, the recognition of truth consists in anamnesis, i.e., in a reminiscence, in a recollection by the human cerebral consciousness of what the higher human consciousness has come to perceive and intuit through meditation and inspiration; and this must be placed above all in relation to the fact that, while for the layman ideas usually come and arrive from nowhere and in no way, in the case of the Freemason who proceeds systematically and tirelessly in his symbolic initiation, the the flow of ideas becomes coordinated thanks to the contemplation of Masonic, architectural, geometric, and numerical symbols that function as instruments and supports, and the inspiration of ideas becomes methodical, supported, and guided

ritually. The traditional secret art of spiritual edification intervenes validly in the very process of reminiscence or anamnesis, facilitating the inspiration of ideas and their *souvenir*. Finally, if we also bear in mind the life-giving function of memory symbolized by the source of Mnemosyne, which we have mentioned, we see that the interpretation of the table to be traced as a symbol of memory according to certain rituals loses its arbitrariness and becomes a simple and important consequence of the Pythagorean character of the symbol, which is at the same time the character of the Ennead, the sacred numbers, and the nine muses.

The Jewish elements in the apprentice's ritual are few. The names given to the two columns at the entrance to the temple are Jewish, and the sacred word of the degree is Jewish. Moreover, the brother who is asked to pronounce it during the tegolatura abstains from doing so because he "can neither read nor write," both because his age does not allow him to do so and because it does not belong to Masonic language but to a particular language. In fact, the presence of this Jewish element is not in keeping with the universal character of Freemasonry. The refile printed in 1724 (the oldest known) does not mention a sacred word but only the word of Jerusalem, and it cannot be said with certainty that the two designations refer to the same word.

And since Jerusalem is a sacred city both for the Jewish religion and for the two religions that derived from it, namely Christianity and Islam, it could be that the word of Jerusalem did not have a Jewish character. In any case, the choice and adoption of the two Hebrew words to designate the two pillars was not contrary to the universality of the order in the eyes of the ancient Freemasons, because it was widely believed at the time that Hebrew was a language superior to all others, the sacred language spoken by God in the Garden of Eden. In any case, we can always trace it back to a specific period, to the period when this mistaken belief in the universal character of the Hebrew language prevailed. On the other hand, the legend of Hiram and the construction of Solomon's temple by Hiram certainly belongs to the traditional baggage of the Order, and it may be that the adoption of the sacred Hebrew words took place simultaneously with the establishment of the third degree ritual with elements taken from the Masonic legend of Hiram.

A less obvious and much more uncertain Jewish character can be attributed to the ritual's requirement that the recipient, before undergoing the trials of the four elements, must be stripped of all metal objects he is wearing. Crafts and arts belong to sedentary agricultural and building peoples and not to nomadic peoples such as the Jews; Jewish tradition specifies that the use of stones was permitted in the construction of an altar, but that the stones used had to be whole and untouched by iron, and this prohibition also existed at the time of the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, since the stones "were brought to the site as they were, so that during construction no hammer, axe, or any iron tool was heard." The ritual requirement to remove metal could be a reflection of this ancient Jewish prohibition; however, if we take into account the fact that the recipient is preparing to undergo the trials of the four elements and to expose himself in the temple to celestial or spiritual influences, and that metals can actually harm the transmission of these spiritual influences, we obtain a more reliable (and non-Jewish) explanation for this prohibition. This is the explanation given by Guénon (*Le Règne de la Quantité*, p. 155); this same reason justifies the ritual requirement that the recipient must be "neither naked nor clothed."

Obvious modern interpolations are those that appear in rituals when they speak of progress, science (Western, modern, profane), morality, and even the homeland and humanity. Let us be clear: we see no reason to share the attitude of those who, in order to show themselves superior to nationalistic sentiments, are always ready to sacrifice their homeland on the altar of internationalism for the benefit of others; let us only say that these arguments have nothing to do with the goal of Freemasonry, which is the perfection of the individual; invoking internationalism for the benefit of others; let us just say that these arguments have nothing to do with the aim of Freemasonry, which is the perfection of the individual; invoking patriotic or humanitarian reasons to prove a theorem of geometry is absurd, as is mixing these arguments with the technical problem of spiritual edification.

According to the instructions given to the visiting brother of a lodge by the ritual, when asked, "What is done in the Lodge of St. John?", he must reply, "We build luminous temples to virtue and dig dark prisons for vice." This is the old traditional answer.

And at the opening of the proceedings, it is repeated by the first overseer, who declares that free masons gather to build temples to virtue, dig deep and dark prisons for vice, and work for the good and progress of the Fatherland and Humanity. This, with the two capital letters, is an addition, good or bad, but it is an addition.

This naive belief in progress and *evolution*, which reappears in other passages of the ritual, has belonged to the modern Western secular world for about a century and is therefore out of place in Masonic ritual. Today, faith in this optimistic dogma is no longer so unshaken, because the events of the last forty years and the dark clouds on the horizon are dispelling certain illusions; but other messianic illusions about the future of society have arisen to replace them, while the facts show those who wish to see that never before has brute force wreaked such havoc on justice, law, and humanity.

Moreover, in homage to historical truth, it must be acknowledged that even the famous Masonic trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity does not date back to English Freemasonry in 1720 but is a French innovation that came many decades later. These are three fine words that have made their way into the Marseillaise, but as for the practical advent of these aspirations, we are still at the *sicut erat*, their advent is neither visible nor foreseeable. We had to live for twenty years under fascism and Nazism, and today the honorable United Nations reaffirms the monopoly of the *beati possidentes* and leaves, for example, to Italy, the beautiful sky, compulsory freedom, and the outlet of grumbling.

Another modern religion, fanatically and intolerantly dominant and accepted by almost everyone, although not codified in a defined creed, is the religion of morality, moralism, the myth of virtue as Pareto calls it, moralizing as Nietzsche calls it. And it has also penetrated Freemasonry. In certain rituals there is a kind of moralistic obsession; and during initiation the candidate is subjected to a string of questions that would put the interrogation of a philosophy exam to shame.

"What is ignorance? Why are the ignorant stubborn, irascible, and dangerous? What is error? What are prejudices?

What is a lie? What are passions? What are customs? What is morality? What is morality? What is law and natural law? What is virtue? What is honor? What is barbarism? What is vice? etc...". The layman naturally gets by as best he can; the Venerable who answers him gets by better, because he does nothing

but read the ritual, spouting a long-winded string of tedious and syrupy digressions that contain nothing important or traditional and sometimes work the miracle of transforming active and unrewarded brothers into dormant brothers.

The primary source of these dissertations is found in the ritual of J. M. Ragon; other rituals have patched them up and condensed them; thus, from the Scottish ritual of 1921, we learn that for Freemasonry, morality is a science based on human reason, which does not prevent it from also being the universal and eternal natural law that governs all intelligent and free beings (and the others?), and furthermore, morality is

scientifically explained conscience... Clear as daylight! Morality is a conscience, a natural law, a science based on reason... and navigates on the waves of fantasy and sentiment.

All nonsense that in practice forms a hypocritical screen for base and cowardly selfishness that justifies every arbitrary act committed in defense of morality, without being able to prevent intelligent and free scoundrels from doing as they please, mocking the gullibility of decent people.

Another undeniably modern interpolation is that when speaking of the stars visible in the sky, he defines them as globes that are held in equilibrium by mutual attraction; there is nothing wrong with this, but the concept is based on Newton's theory of universal attraction and clearly cannot appear in the writings of Freemasonry, which predates the great English physicist.

IN CONCLUSION

Arturo Reghini was in the midst of resuming his activities as a writer and scholar of art and had prepared the two articles collected here when his earthly life came to an end. Taking up some themes already mentioned in Masonic magazines that are now almost impossible to find, he sought to clarify in these articles some particular aspects of the ritual of the free mason apprentice, which are either too neglected or completely ignored by those who frequent the lodges, at a time when the Italian Masonic family (and I use the singular deliberately) is still in a period of adjustment. Most likely, if Fate had allowed it, these would have been followed by others on a subject that is, by its very nature, practically inexhaustible. But we cannot know in detail what Arturo Reghini had in mind; we do know, however, his fundamental thinking and the principle that guided his actions for forty years: to set Freemasonry on the path to researching, recognizing, and reaffirming the original purity of its symbols, which are the heritage of our Italic, Pythagorean, and pagan tradition, separating them from all those elements that not only the centuries but above all the arrogant ignorance and fraud cloaked in wisdom have superimposed on them, so that their light was obscured and could no longer illuminate those who yearn for it.

It is impossible to write a conclusion to Arturo Reghini's masterful articles, because each of them has a clear and precise content; because the only possible conclusion cannot be written or spoken; because it is only knowledge, and it is the *knowledge of the apprentice's word*. What we can do, and what we intend to do, if the gods allow us, is to continue the work of Arturo Reghini, to whom we are bound by a bond that goes beyond blood and time; in this particular case, we hope to be able to continue to illustrate the ritual of the apprentice, in the unaltered spirit of our tradition.

A few days ago, we read in a pamphlet that claimed to encapsulate the essence of Scottish Freemasonry that “Christianity is undoubtedly the initiatory school that, better than any other, has been able to give the concept of regeneration a form suitable for the intelligence of the Western masses.” The writer—and too many like him—clearly ignores something that is an essential condition for anyone who wants to embark on initiation, even Masonic initiation, namely a concept that Arturo Reghini has repeated many times and that we still repeat: initiation is knowledge; and like the result of an arithmetic operation, it does not depend on personal tastes, on the “undoubted” , from being Christian or Buddhist, from a political opinion, from professing this or that morality, from place or time, from hyper- or hypofunctionality of the endocrine system, so initiation has absolutely nothing to do with all these and many other trifles, precisely because it is only knowledge. And anyone who demands initiatory knowledge adapted to their tastes, beliefs, or moods is either acting in good faith and is deluded, or is acting in bad faith; in any case, they are not, nor can they be, an initiate.

“And this shall be the seal that every man shall break.”

G. P.

PIETRO NEGRI [Arturo Reghini]

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SYMBOL ¹

According to Dante (*Convivio* II, 1), “writings can be understood and must be interpreted in four senses”: the *literal* sense, the *allegorical* sense, which, according to Dante, is “a truth hidden beneath a beautiful lie,” the *moral* sense, and the *anagogical* sense. This anagogical sense is “when a writing is placed spiritually, which, even in its literal sense, even for the things signified, signifies supernal things of eternal glory”; that is, it is the hidden meaning of a writing which, even in its literal sense, deals with subjects of a spiritual nature; and it must be clearly distinguished from the allegorical and moral senses which, in comparison, have, at least from a spiritual point of view, are of far secondary importance. Let us say in passing that the anagogical interpretation of the “*Commedia*” is still to be done.

Dante calls this anagogical sense *sovra senso*. The ἀν-αγωγή is in fact to lead or bring up, elevation; and as a technical nautical term it designates the act of raising the anchor and setting sail. Metaphorically, when referring to spiritual matters, anagogia therefore indicates spiritual elevation, rising high above the *earth*; and, in the symbolism of “sailors,” it indicates setting sail from that “earth” to which men are tenaciously anchored, from the *firm ground*, as it seems to them, in order to raise their sails and sail into better waters, setting the ship for “the high seas.”

Dante was referring to the writings of “poets”; but the distinction between the four senses can undoubtedly also be applied to sacred and initiatory writings and to any other means of expression and representation of spiritual facts and doctrines. The supreme meaning, the “superior meaning” in every kind of symbolism, according to this distinction, will therefore be the anagogical meaning; the full understanding of symbols will consist in the perception of the anagogical meaning contained in them; and, when understood and used anagogically, they can also contribute to spiritual elevation. In this sense, symbols are endowed with an anagogical “virtue.”

Of course, not all symbols are endowed with this virtue. By extension, in fact, the name ‘symbols’ is sometimes given to simple signs or characters that have only, or almost only, a representational value. Thus, the symbols of mathematics and chemistry do not possess, at least as such, a similar anagogical virtue; and it is possible, in these fields, to attribute the same meaning to very different symbols; for example, the operation of algebraic multiplication can be indicated indifferently by the usual symbol of the cross and by that of the dot. But the word symbol, taken in its most proper sense, has a much more precise and complex meaning, as can easily be seen from its etymological analysis.

In Greek, the word συμ-βολή designates the act of joining, putting together, and the related word σύμβολον indicates agreement and therefore the *sign*, the mark. Both these words consist of two elements: the first, the prefix σύν (Latin *cum*) simply indicates conjunction, while the second designates and specifies the nature of this conjunction. Βολή and βόλος indicate throwing or hurling; they are words related to the verb βάλλω, which indicates the action of throwing, striking, or launching. The verb συμ-βάλλω (I bring together) and therefore also the perfectly analogous word σύμβολον (symbol) thus designate *the act* of bringing together, while synthesis (σύν-θεσις, Latin *compositio*) indicates the *result* of this action, the accomplished fact. The dynamic character of the symbol is contrasted with the static,

immanent character of synthesis. As for the effect of the action, the verb συμ-βάλλω (I bring together) contrasts with the verb δια-βάλλω (I separate, I cross, I oppose); correspondingly, σύμ-βολον is the opposite of 'devil' (διά-βολος, transverse, adversary); and the attribution of dynamic and magical virtues to symbols in order to overcome diabolical opposition and adversity appears philologically spontaneous. And just as the symbol leads to synthesis, its opposite, the “devil,” leads to the opposite of synthesis, namely analysis; Γάνάλυσις, in fact, is dissolution, solution, disintegration, death.

The dynamic virtue of symbols is therefore opposed in a certain sense to all analysis, and is an instrument and means of arriving at synthesis. And just as in discursive knowledge we arrive at the thesis, *conceptually*, by logical means, starting from the hypothesis, so in initiatory *endogenesis* we can arrive at synthesis, making use of the dynamic virtue of symbols, by magical means, starting from the initial human condition. These simple etymological considerations, therefore, already allow us to glimpse how, in higher knowledge, symbols have a function corresponding to that held by concepts in discursive knowledge. The correspondence between symbols (σύμβολοι) on the one hand, and concepts (con-ceptus, con-cipio) and syllogisms (συν-λογίζοναι, com-puto) on the other on the other, is perfect; syllogism, in logic, brings together the word (λόγος) and thought (from *pondus* = weight, to think = to weigh), and leads discursively to weighing, to measurement (*mensura*, from *mens*, the mind, linked to *mensis*, the month, and therefore to the *moon*, which does not give its own light, but reflected light, *reflection*); the symbol in magical science or the pure and purifying science of the Magi (Persian *majidan*, purifying, by means of *fire*) operates with βολή, irradiation, projection, dazzling. The *word* of logic corresponds to the operation, *dazione*, of magic; to philosophical *discourse*, *Vopera*, the “Great Work” of the Hermetic and Masonic tradition.

* * *

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

The emblem (from εν-βάλλω, to throw in) and the sign have a representative rather than a cognitive and spiritual character; and the parable, the metaphor, and the allegory possess only in part the character of the symbol. In allegory, one thing is said to be something else (αλλο-αγορεύω, I speak of another), instead of what is really meant; the literal meaning is the 'beautiful lie', the true meaning is another, perhaps in contrast to the literal one. In the symbol, there is no contrast or real difference between what appears at first glance and what is meant; between the symbol and its meaning or meanings, there is usually a relationship of harmony, analogy, and correspondence, and it is not a question, as in allegory, of perceiving the true meaning without being deceived by the apparent meaning, which is unimportant. but (as far as simple understanding is concerned) of tracing the obvious meaning back to the hidden ones, so as to grasp the *full* meaning of the symbol, completing (and not overcoming) the initial meaning. Furthermore, and properly speaking, allegory is always verbal, whereas this limitation does not apply to symbols, since, in addition to verbal symbols, there are symbols of all kinds.

Even the parable does not have the value of a symbol. It (παραβολή, παρα-βάλλω = I place one beside the other) is nothing more than a simple comparison, a contrast, a similarity. Parables cannot lead us beyond the term of comparison; and the success achieved by Menenio Agrippa and Jesus in using them

shows that they are well suited to the plebs and the profane masses. As for metaphor and trope, both terms more properly used in rhetoric, we will note that they also refer to verbal expressions, and indicate that the meaning of words or phrases used metaphorically must usually be transferred from the concrete to the abstract. Metaphor (Latin *trans- latum*, the transferred) is nothing more than taking away (μετα-φέρω, Latin *trans-fero*), transferring elsewhere.

Allegory, parable, and metaphor are therefore not strictly symbols; they are ways of speaking that can deal with, and often do deal with, symbols, and in this case the characteristics of the subject, i.e., the symbol, are found, at least in part, in the verbal expression in question. In this case, on the basis of a symbol or a complex of symbols or special symbolism, a whole allegorical language is formed and sometimes even a secret and conventional jargon or phrase book develops.

We have had occasion to say that symbols are of many different kinds. Indeed, anything can form the basis of a symbol, but there are, of course, criteria for selection or determination. Thus, we have numerical symbolism, where whole numbers (an abstraction in themselves) constitute symbols, and their powers (δυνάμεις), their residues or roots (πυθμήν), their simple relationships and properties symbolically constitute their anagogical virtues, a symbolism especially used by the Pythagoreans and later by the Kabbalists and Freemasons; we have the symbolism of the letters of the alphabet, connected, of course, to the numerical symbolism, which is at the basis of the Kabbalistic tradition. These symbolisms, and especially the first, are linked to the geometric symbolism of the Platonists and Neoplatonists; and the numerical and geometric symbolism is connected to the symbolism of all those sacred sciences and arts in which relationships, proportions, rhythm, and harmony come into play, such as architecture, singing, music, dance, poetry, painting (together with the symbolism of colors and others), and to which heraldry and emblematics are in turn linked as emanations, derivations, and applications in the social and political fields. Physical phenomena are the basis of polar, solar, and meteorological symbolism and the hermetic symbolism of transmutation; biological phenomena are the basis of the symbolism of fermentation, putrefaction and germination of plant seeds, sexual symbolism, the symbolism of metamorphosis and resurrection, and the symbolism of spiritual nourishment and drinks and immortality (Hindu soma, Mazdean haoma, Hindu amrita, Greek nectar and ambrosia, the archaic Latin *arma peremna*, the “bread” and “wine” of the). From the various forms of human weakness, royal symbolism (the royal palace of Philalethes, the royal or regalia art of Neoplatonism and Masonry, the royal road, the royal water, the royal wedding of the Hermes-Phorus), the symbolism of war, especially the “holy war” (*Bhagavad-gita*), the symbolism of shepherding (in the *Pimander* and in the Gospel), the symbolism of the cultivation of the “earth” or ge-organic, of “navigation” (Homer, Virgil, Dante), the symbolism of the foundation of temples and cities and in general of “building” (hence the title of Pontiff for the high priest of the Romans) and of “construction,” which is the foundation of traditional Masonic symbolism and is naturally linked to architecture (hence the Great Architect of the Universe); the symbolism of the custody and defense of objects, temples, and sacred lands (Knights of the Grail and Templars). Finally, the very facts of history and legend, both individual and collective, can serve as a basis and have symbolic value (the Trojan War, the labors of Hercules, the expedition of the Argonauts, the life of Jesus). Myths (μῦθος = speech, *tra-ditio*) and fables (*fabula*, to speak) are nothing more than stories; mythology is the narration of the history of gods and heroes. Myths are not symbols, but they can have a symbolic character and serve as a basis for symbolism; thus, pagan mythology has provided numerous symbols to ennetists (Michele Meier, Pemety). This is a

summary and incomplete list, but it will suffice to give an idea of the vastness and variety of symbolism.

* * *

For the reasons seen above, verbal expression, even in its various figurative forms, cannot compete with the vital conciseness of symbols. The symbol transcends the word, and even if we consider it solely as a means of expressing and communicating facts and doctrines, it still has

another advantage over language: words vary with time and place, are subject to wear and tear and variations in both form and meaning, and cannot achieve the stability and universality of symbols.

Nevertheless, words and symbols have at least one fundamental characteristic in common, and that is the metaphorical nature that links their concrete value to their abstract meaning. Both presuppose the recognition of unity, correspondence, and universal analogy, and therefore also implicitly admit human “similarity.” We say similarity and not identity or equality; that is, we admit as a postulate that beings, and in particular human beings, are similar to each other from an inner point of view to about the same extent and in the same way as from an outer point of view, that the senses and internal organs of various individuals are similar and equivalent to each other to about the same extent and in the same way as the physical senses and organs. This being admitted, our inner experience has a character that transcends individuality and can be expressed in words and symbols understandable to those who have had similar experiences, and can help to provoke it in those who have not yet experienced it. This is what happens with ordinary language for common human experiences; when we speak of light, sound, color, we presuppose, in fact, not only that the sound of our words is perceived by those who listen to us in the same way that we are able to perceive the sounds that strike our ears, but also that our experience, expressed by our words, is understood by those who hear it thanks to comparison with a similar experience known and possessed by those who listen to us.

Universal analogy, therefore, is at the basis of symbolism, as it is at the basis of metaphorical language, and it is therefore predictable that symbolism conforms to certain rules, just as the transition from the concrete to the abstract meaning of words obeys the rules of semantics. The “*Emerald Tablet*”, which Hermetic tradition attributes to Hermes ζ¹), begins precisely with the solemn affirmation of this universal connection and analogy: “*Veruni sine mendacio, certum et verissimum: quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius; et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius, ad perpetrando miracula rei unius*” (Latin translation by Khunrath).

Analogy between the physical and the metaphysical, between exteriority and interiority; and analogy between man and the universe. For this reason, man is potentially God and the microcosm is potentially a macrocosm. God, says the Bible, created man in his own image and likeness. The analogical relationship that links one thing to another makes everything a natural symbol of the things corresponding to it; hence the concept and use in magic of the “*signaturae rerum*.” The similarity between the thing and its symbol, between the object and its image, can be direct or inverse. In the first case, the relationship is similar to that between a note and its octaves: one ascends from the symbol to the thing signified by way of anagogical transposition; in the second case, the relationship is similar to that between an object and its reflected image, and one ascends from the symbol to the thing represented by way of reflection and inversion. This fact must be taken into account when interpreting

symbols. The two similarities, moreover, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thus, sunlight, refracting and reflecting in water droplets, gives rise to the phenomenon of two concentric rainbows, in which the colors of the rainbow appear arranged in reverse order; Descartes' theory explains the formation of the inner rainbow by a simple reflection of the light ray, that of the

the external concentric rainbow with a double reflection; similarly, a double inversion, or repeated an even number of times, brings the second type of symbols back to the type of simple transposition; and one could vice versa think that in symbols in which the correspondence occurs by transposition, the inversion of the symbol is not perceived simply because it is repeated an even number of times. The meteorological phenomenon of the rainbow, due to the dispersion of the "sunbeam" in the "waters," therefore has the value of a natural symbol of the very process of universal analogy; and as in pagan mythology Iris was the messenger of the gods, the special minister of Jupiter and Juno, because the rainbow was the symbol of the union between heaven and earth, so the similarity between the process of analogical inversion and that of inversion in optical reflection shows us in analogy the link that unites heaven and earth, spirit and matter, interiority and exteriority, the divine and the human.

* * *

The analogical character inherent in symbols gives them a polysemy and an indeterminacy of meaning which, while on the one hand constituting their richness and fertility in contrast to the precision and determination of words, on the other hand makes them much less easy to understand and use. Even in words, awareness of the etymological meaning and links with related words allows us to grasp their hidden meaning and opens the way to greater knowledge, but the analogous process has a much greater latitude and depth in the case of symbols. Understanding a meaning is the first step towards conquering further meanings in related and higher fields, and even in this case, one is not forced to give up in the continuous overcoming of the mystery of the ultimate roots of language, which inevitably lies at the basis of all etymological analysis.

Through constant meditation, the symbol ends up imprinting itself on the mind, and with its continuous presence it is always ready to inspire it, to suggest the analogical relationships it has with whatever is the object of thought at any given moment. Even independently of references to various ideas, the symbol, on the basis of the analogical relationships contained within it and due to its intrinsic syncretism, provides the mind with the elements it needs to work with, it fertilizes it, so to speak, giving it creative power. In this sense, symbols constitute modes of motion and action, factors of endogenesis, which push, guide, and lead to conditions of consciousness not yet experienced, and therefore to effective, direct, *distinguished* knowledge. From the meaning shadowed and enclosed in signs, one thus ascends to conscious possession, and *Vin-segna-mento* (signification) achieved through signs is also in-segna-mento (teaching) in fact. Indeed, it is not without historical and philological interest to note how language uses a word constituted in this way to denote teaching.

This fertile, magical action of the symbol on the mind corresponds perfectly to the similar action of symbols in politics and religion, an action that everyone can observe. Think of the waves of enthusiasm and heroic determination that a flag, an anthem, a national or party symbol can arouse in individuals and masses, think of the ardor and fanaticism that a religious symbol can provoke, and you will understand how, even in magic, the symbol can have a similar energetic virtue, a similar power of

stimulation and virtue of spiritual elevation. There is one essential difference, however: while in politics and religion the symbol appeals to love of country, partisan passion, faith, and religious prejudice, that is, solely to sentiment, which it provokes and manifests, in esotericism the symbol never appeals to sentiment, but rather to the higher capacities of understanding and creation of the mind and spirit. Feelings, beliefs, theories, the very meaning of any framework and subordination to the masses are human elements, and it is a mistake to rely on them or in any way side with them when one wants to rise above the level of mortals and transcend the human to the divine.

Magic, and with it all initiatory traditions, is perfectly consistent in replacing the dogmatism of religious and philosophical beliefs, the mere verbalism of certain sciences, with symbolic teaching, that is, the process of symbolization. is perfectly consistent in replacing the dogmatism of religious and philosophical beliefs, the mere verbalism of representation and relation of certain sciences, with symbolic teaching, that is, the spiritual process which, with the aid of symbols, brings about the explanation of experiences and inner conditions through the perception and direct notion of the transcendent.

* * *

This magical use of symbols is traditional in Hermeticism and in the rituals of certain organizations that have been partially influenced by it. It is grafted onto the practice of the *rite* that leads to the implementation of *the Work*.

Hermetic tradition says that to accomplish the Work from beginning to end, only one *vessel* is sufficient, or at most two (as seems to have been the case with Flamel). This vessel, *Vathanor* of the "Philosophers," must be hermetically sealed, that is, according to the Hermetic ritual (the term "hermetic sealing" has remained to designate the corresponding chemical operation), so that it is possible to operate within it, after isolating it from the outside. A well-known Hermetic maxim says in this regard: *Visita interiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultimi lapidem* (*Aurelia occulta philosophorum* by Basilio Valentino - *Theatr. Chemic.*, second edition, 1613; but it is also found earlier in a slightly different form). The vessel, the *grasale*, the Holy Grail, is in fact made of 'earth'; but 'earth', with an archaic symbolism of which there are abundant remnants in various languages, is the human body; humans (from *humus*, *teiTa*) are the earth, the earthlings; their body is shaped from the mud of the earth (see the etymology of Adam), it is their dwelling place (German *Boden* = earth; English *body* and *abode*). Visiting the interior of this vessel, and *rectifying* (another technical term that has remained in chemistry to designate the corresponding operation), one finds the *philosopher's stone*.

Cardinal Nicolò di Cusa (1401-1464) says (Opera, Basel, 1563, p. 632) that the master descends from Jerusalem to the rugged mountains of the desert to form and cut the stones, and to bring them and place them in the holy building (the place for the vision of the Gods), and that the soul, chosen as bride for the son of God who dwells in immortality, adapts itself to transformation, *sicut lapides poliuntur*, as the stones are smoothed that are to be transported to the building of the temple of Jerusalem where the vision of God is. This *edifying* symbolism of Cusano corresponds precisely to the later Masonic symbolism, according to which the workers (the *fellows*) work on polishing the stone, squaring it and forming the *cubic stone* or perfect stone in the "*inner chamber*," the "*middle chamber*" in the corresponding Italian terminology. And Dante, at the beginning of the "*Vita Nuova*," states: "I say *truly*

that the spirit of life dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart.” If the vase and the hermetic earth are nothing more than the human organism, the entrails of the earth, the “heart” of the organism, can be nothing other than the heart. It is the sanctuary, the *crypt* of the temple, depicted precisely *underground* in the crypt of ancient temples. And we understand why an ancient French alchemist, whose name we do not know, explained the name of the Holy Grail with the incorrect but significant etymology of *sang reai*, royal blood. This connection between the vessel and the heart dates back to ancient Egypt, since the ideogram for the heart is a vessel with *orecchiette* (the *ears* of the heart); this similarity between the heart and the *athanor* is not without interest when we remember the Egyptian origin of the Hermetic tradition.

* * *

We have spoken of *descent* into the bowels of the earth. The symbol we have used is so widespread that it goes unnoticed. We know well that consciousness is not an object found *inside* the body, we know well that there is no up or down and that it is absurd to *pray to God*, stretching our necks toward a hypothetical “sky” and twisting our faces with the supplicant and pitiful determination of a dog waiting for its master’s leftovers (not without a vague fear of being kicked). Even the sensation of consciousness sinking into its innermost recesses cannot be expressed in human language except by resorting to analogous sensations of human material life. The origin of many ancient and important symbols (if we can speak of origin), and therefore their interpretation, must be sought in the *need* to express inner sensations by means of analogy (an analogy that *exists*, and which the human mind recognizes and uses) between these sensations and the sensations of everyday life. All the symbolism of the “descent into hell” is connected with this. Thus, in Egypt, the *underworld*, the *neter khert*, the abode of the dead, is called Amenti, from the word *Amen*, which means invisible, occult; thus, the Greek Hades is likewise αἰδῆς, invisible. It is necessary to descend into this invisible underworld, illuminated by the occult sun, *Amen-Ra*, the “Midnight Sun” of the Isiac initiation; and this descent must be made without losing consciousness, without drinking or feeling the *lethal* effects of the water of Lethe, but drinking instead from the fresh spring of *Mnemosyne*, giver of immortality in Orphism, from the water of Dante’s Eunoë. Mnemosyne, memory, remembrance (*corda*), which contrasts with Lethe and defeats it, is the mother of the Muses; correspondingly, truth is in Greek *Va-leteia*, and to understand is nothing more, platonically, than an *an-amnesia*, a remembrance.

Even the symbolism of the *stone*, *Yoccultum lapidem*, which is found by rectifying the entrails (or *inferiora*, as it is said, and now we understand why in some later variants of Basilio Valentino’s maxim) originates (not chronologically) from an inner sensation; this, at least, seems very plausible to us. However, while an initial and uncertain sensation of sinking into the inner depths of consciousness is easily accessible, in order to achieve the sensation of “petrification” a long period of assiduous practice of the ritual is generally required. An Italian document from around 1600, entitled: *La prattica dell’estasi filosofica* (*The Practice of Philosophical Ecstasy*), possibly by Campanella, and published by D’Ancona together with writings by Campanella (Turin, 1854, Vol. I, p. CCXXIII), says precisely that at a certain stage of practice one becomes “immobile as if one were a plant or a natural stone”; and it confirms how spontaneous and accurate it is to assimilate the attainment of such a condition to the discovery of the stone. According to the Rosicrucian Michele Maier, the philosopher’s stone is none other than the stone that Cybele made Saturn swallow in order to save her son Jupiter from his father’s

voracity; thus Jupiter was able to escape time and become king of Olympus. The “black stone,” symbol of Cybele, was brought to Rome and kept on the Palatine Hill by the Romans themselves, who for centuries had possessed and venerated another “lapis niger” in the forum, at the beginning of the “sacred way.” This stone had fallen from the sky and was called *abadir* by the Romans and *betilo* by the Greeks. According to René Guénon (*The King of the World*, p. 69, Italian edition, Milan, Fidi, 1927) the word “bethel” is nothing more than the Hebrew “Beth-el” = house of God; Beth-el was the name given by Jacob to the “stone” that served as his pillow when, in his famous dream, he saw the house of God and the gate of heaven; and it was also the name given by Jacob to the city near the place where he had his dream. It is interesting to note that Genesis specifies that the original name of this city was Luz; now luz is the Hebrew name for an indestructible bone to which the soul remains attached after death until the resurrection; and it is also the name of the almond tree; near the city of Luz there was an almond tree, at the base of which was a hole through which one could enter an underground passage which led to the city of Luz, also completely hidden. We thus return to the symbol of the underground, a symbol associated with the symbol of the stone. All the symbolism of “spiritual edification” used in the Gospel, and characteristic of Freemasonry, and the symbolism of the “philosophers' stone” are deviations

of this fundamental symbol, which cannot be understood (or taught) until the “hidden stone” has been found.

* * *

We have seen that this is a *lapis niger*; and there are observations and comparisons to be made about the importance of *black stones* in ancient Rome, in the Muslim tradition and in the tradition of *Agartha*, the underground world dealt with by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre in *Mission de binde*, Ossendowski in his famous *Bêtes, hommes et Dieux*, and Guénon in his *Roi du Monde*. That this occult stone, found by descending into the underworld, in the “dark realms” below and within “earth,” must be black may seem a simple consequence of consistency in the development of symbolism; but while not forgetting how much it may be linked to the luxuriant efflorescence and fruition of symbolism, it seems to us that this symbol also has a precise reference to the sensation of the “blackest black” of the Hermetic tradition. Let us not forget that the “hidden stone” is the Philosopher's Stone and not the philosopher's stone, that is, it is the matter of the work and not the matter of the perfect work; and when the stone is found, the sensation of “petrification” is combined with that of complete blackness.

Once this condition is reached, the symbol becomes understandable, and the meaning of the further symbolism is illuminated, which can thus suggest what needs to be done next and lead to a further stage of the work. The identification of references and the determination of the symbol are not left to the mind's eye. As one proceeds, the inner voice (the “voice of the heart”) and the inner ear (the “ears of the heart”) come into play. Thus, the transmission of symbolism is carried out hermetically and precisely. Sometimes this voice responds to a question that the mind asks itself about a particular stage or sensation, at other times it intervenes directly at the right moment and concisely reveals a mystery. Let us be clear: this is not the “voice of conscience,” the “categorical imperative,” or similar manifestations of what Nietzsche calls “moralina,” nor is it mediumistic voices or phenomena; it is those inner senses to which people usually pay no attention because they are deafened by external noise and unable to perceive and distinguish subtle inner impressions. Truly, *oculos habent et non vident*,

aures habent et non audiunt. This inner voice and hearing can function as much in the waking state as in sleep and in the various states of consciousness that are reached in the practice of the *rite*. Simultaneously with their coming into action, there are sometimes real, materially tangible phenomena, sufficient to dispel any possible skepticism. Such phenomena often have a manifest symbolic character and sometimes possess incomparable beauty and nobility. We could recount some of them, but we have only touched on this subject to mention facts that cannot be confused with *ideas* or hallucinations, as one might be tempted to believe in the case of inner voices and perceptions, and to hint at the extent of the symbolic character of these manifestations. Symbolism is also grafted onto them, so that they rise to a kind of universal language, an initiatory language, which finds its correspondence and expression in the initiatory language through signs, gestures, and “universal words” used by some organizations more or less connected with the initiatory tradition.

(*) The text of the “Emerald Tablet” was first given by Jdbir ibn Fayyàn (Geber), who says he drew it from a work by the Pythagorean Apollonius of Tyana (see the article by E. J. Holmyard, “Chemistry in Islam” in “Scientia,” 1, XI, 1926). According to the Hermetic tradition, reported by Albertus Magnus (De Alchemia), the Tabula Za-radi was found by Alexander the Great in the tomb of Hermes; and Hermes, in turn, according to this tradition, had found after the “flood” the tablets that the ancient sages and Enoch had carved before and in anticipation of the flood to perpetuate the tradition. Masonic tradition attributes the discovery of these tablets to Hermes and Pythagoras.

1 Published in the magazine “UR,” 1927; republished in GRUPPO DI UR (ed.). *Introduzione alla Magia*, Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, 1971, vol. I, pp. 98-113.

Arturo Reghini

On Initiatory Fasting

From "Ignis," I, No. 11-12, November-December 1925, pp. 379-395 - Electronic text prepared by the website

lamelagrana.net - adapted by **IniziazioneAntica**

In previous issues of this magazine, and especially in the April-May 1925 and June-July 1925 issues, there was a lengthy discussion of Cagliostro's spiritual quarantines, periods of forty days of fasting during which, with the help of hermetic practices and secrets, according to the ritual of Cagliostro's Egyptian Freemasonry, first "moral perfection" and then "physical perfection."

From the passages of this ritual, reported in the previous issue of 'Ignis' (p. 307), it appears that Cagliostro, in determining the duration of the two spiritual quarantines as forty days, was merely inspired by or adhering to the precedent of Moses' fasts, and we have already noted with various examples the continuity and frequency with which this number appears in the Mediterranean esoteric tradition (Jewish, Christian, pagan, and Hermetic) in relation to the great work of initiatory regeneration. But the subject deserves more careful and special examination, and we will deal with it here.

Pietro Bongo, in his voluminous work *Sojtra i misteri dei numeri* (The Mysteries of Numbers), devotes a dozen pages to the number forty; he says that, after seven, 40 is the number that occurs most frequently in sacred scripture. In Talmudic literature, Casanowicz states, "forty appears in many cases to be used in all appearances as a round figure or as a concrete and definite expression instead of the abstract and indefinite 'many' and 'some', and thus becomes a symbolic number." On the other hand, it is well known that Pythagoras had marked four distinct ages, each of twenty years, in human life as a whole; and from this Pythagorean division into four parts, already prepared by popular culture and Italian-Greek social institutions, probably derives the biographical use of setting forty as the peak of human life.

The Jews and other peoples also seem to have shared with the Greeks this notion that the fortieth year was the peak of human life, and Nöldeke argues that forty years came to represent a generation from this fact.

fortieth year was the peak of human life, and Nöldeke argues that forty years came to represent a generation from this fact. Bongo, after reporting that Isaac and Esau were forty years old when they married Rebecca and Judith respectively, clearly follows this concept, calling this age appropriate because, according to Aristotle, the seed completes its first transformation in the woman's womb in forty days.

Forty is a number associated with every kind of generation and regeneration. Forty days was the prescribed period of purification after the birth of a male (*Lev. XII. 2, 4*) and twice that after the birth of a female (*ibid. 5*); the Holy Fathers say that Jesus was carried for forty days in Mary's womb; and the belief that full-term birth occurs after nine months and ten days, i.e. after 270 days plus ten (forty weeks make 280 days) is still widespread. Bongo, quoting a passage from St. Augustine, says that when

the snake, while remaining alive, wants to shed its old skin and return to youth, it fasts for forty days and then comes out through a narrow hole, adding that this is why Jesus advises us to be as cunning as serpents and as innocent as doves.

The first fasts mentioned in the Holy Scriptures are those practiced by Moses and Elijah. Moses fasted on Mount Sinai, and Elijah walked through the desert for forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking until he reached Mount Horeb, which, if not the same as Sinai, is part of it.

However, Elijah's fast was not complete, because God used a raven to feed him. According to the Hebrew text and the Vulgate, the raven brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and evening, while the Septuagint says that the raven brought bread in the morning and meat in the evening; and "it would be difficult 7 thing," writes Thomassin authoritatively, 'to guess where this difference between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint comes from.' This difference does not greatly disturb our conscience. Instead, we will make some interesting observations in this regard: in Hebrew, 'horeb' means to become dark, to grow dark, 'hereb' means evening, and also raven, evidently because it is black like... a raven. On the other hand, ha-raba means uncultivated countryside, barren plain, desert, solitude. These four words all begin with the guttural ajin (16th letter of the Hebrew alphabet), while Horeb, Mount Horeb, begins with the guttural heth (8th letter of the Hebrew alphabet). In this passage, there is only a reinforcement of the aspiration, but these various words are so similar phonetically and semantically that Horeb, the very name of the mountain, written with the letter *heth*, means scorching heat, drought, desolation, and the word *haraba*, which we have transcribed above, is also written with the letter *heth* as its initial letter, always retaining the meaning of destruction, deserted places. Therefore, raven, desert, Mount Horeb, represent and recall the same thing, the same condition of darkness and spiritual crisis, which must be traversed in order to reach the opposite condition. They are the external and profane darkness, opposed to and preceding the inner and initiatory light, the night that precedes the dawn represented by the dove.

On Mount Horeb, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of a burning bush. Elijah traveled through the desert fasting, going toward Mount Horeb, and was fed by a raven; he too had a manifestation of fire there and attained initiatory immortality, for he did not die but ascended to heaven in a whirlwind. And if the Bible recounts the death of Moses, it adds that he was buried by God, and that no man ever knew his burial place.

In imitation of Moses and Elijah, Jesus, led by the devil into the wilderness, fasted there for forty days and forty nights before being tempted by the devil; and it is clear and well known that the Christian Lenten fast, the *quadragesima* or Lent, which is an apostolic tradition, was instituted in memory and imitation of the fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus; St. Augustine explicitly says that the 40-day fast is authorized by these three fasts.

In the life of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels, the symbolic number forty also occurs in other circumstances. He remained in his mother's womb for forty weeks, preached publicly for forty months, remained in his tomb for forty hours, including the hour of his death and the last hour of the night on Sunday when he rose again; forty days later, he appeared to the Apostles. This insistence on setting the duration of these various periods at forty days, weeks, and hours must certainly have a cause, a reason, a purpose; and since it always concerns generation and regeneration (resurrection), one might think that

this period was set by taking as a reference point the forty weeks of human generation; the fact that, according to ancient observation and tradition, the phenomena of vegetation and generation are connected to the phases of the moon, and therefore to the week and the month as units of measurement, it might at first seem plausible that this period was determined on the basis of the forty weeks of human generation.

But this explanation is contradicted by what we have already seen, namely that the number forty appears in the Bible and outside the Bible as a round figure indicating a period that is not well defined but concludes a cycle.

This number, observes St. Augustine, is very frequent in Scripture “to insinuate the mystery of perfection in the four-part world,” and many examples could be given: the 40 days required for the embalming of Jacob, the 40 years that Israel stayed in the desert, the forty years of Moses when he became the liberator of his people, the 40 days needed to explore the land of Canaan, the 40 days granted to Nineveh to repent, the 40 days during which Ezekiel had to lie on his right side, the forty days during which Goliath challenged the army of Israel, etc. A more or less direct and clear reference to regeneration can be found in the examples of Adam being placed by God in paradise 40 days after his creation, of Seth, who was forty years old when the angels took him away from the eyes of men to instruct him secretly and mysteriously about the crime of the eggregores, the future flood, and the future advent of the Savior, of the forty years of construction of the Tower of Babel, and also in a particularly cosmogonic sense from the various ways in which the number forty appears in connection with Noah's flood: God, in fact, gave the world forty years to repent before dispersing mankind through the flood, the rain of the flood lasted for 40 days, and 40 days interceded between the first appearance of the 19

mountains and the opening of the windows of the ark. First the black raven was sent, and then, after forty days, the white dove. And the dove, it is said in Genesis, returned bearing in its beak a sprig of olive tree, with green leaves. St. Chrysostom (*Hom. XX in Geni*) says that, since the olive tree is *semper virens*, it is likely that when the waters receded, this tree still had its foliage. La Peyrière (*Praeadamitae* - 1645 - IV, 225) argues that the dove had to fly to the mountains of Armenia to bring back the “tessera della pace, with which God, in Noah, reconciled himself with the Jewish people”; certain rabbis and certain scholars argue instead that the olive branch was taken from Paradise, or from the Mount of Olives (cf. Olavi Celsi *Hierobotanicum* - 1745 - 47; II, 331). The olive tree, evergreen, is a symbol of immortality. In the Psalms (Psalm 8) it is an emblem of prosperity and peace (Psalm 52, 8; 128, 3). In paganism it was a symbol of wisdom and sacred to Pallas, like myrtle (also evergreen) to Venus, and laurel (the “verdeggianti allor” of Zanella) to Apollo. For both pagans and Jews, it was a symbol of peace, and even today the expression “olive branch” is used with this meaning. We will see later how these concepts and characteristics are found in the supreme initiation; but, ending this digression, let us return to our subject.

In Arab tradition, God forms man from mud and dries him for 40 days; and even in the Isiac mysteries, as we have observed elsewhere, this number appears, specifically in the 40 days of fasting by Lucius before the initiation of Osiris, as narrated in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. This concordance in the purpose and duration of the fasts of Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Lucius in Apuleius, not to mention those of Campanella and Cagliostro, and the reappearance of this number in the Hermetic tradition as the duration of transmutation and in the mystical Hermeticism of 21

Boehme, suggest that Egypt is the common source or the oldest manifestation known to us of the determination of the period of Lent and its possible connection with the duration of the initiatory fast in the great work of regeneration: and they tend to show how, by adhering to this Mediterranean initiatory tradition even in this particular aspect of symbolism, one is simply following a truly universal “religion,” evidently followed also by Jesus, a religion which, for obvious chronological reasons, could not be Christianity, of which it is at most a derivation.

When, in the early centuries of the Christian era, the practice of fasting at Easter spread, there was great uncertainty as to its duration. St. Irenaeus says that some fasted for 40 days, others for 40 nights, others for 40 days and 40 nights, and others for 40 days and 40 nights.

When, in the early centuries of the common era, the practice of Easter fasting spread, there was great uncertainty as to its duration; St. Irenaeus says that some fasted one day, others more, others forty, etc., and Montanus went so far as to propose three Lenten fasts per year. In some countries, people fasted for two weeks at Easter, in others for three, in others for six, and in Constantinople, neighboring provinces, and in Phoenicia, for seven weeks. St. Ambrose was one of the most zealous in opposing these excesses and in defending the forty-day fast (St. Ambrose - *De Virginibus*, Lib. Ili, cap. IV - *Patrol. Migne XVI*, 223); and finally the Council of Laodicea ordered (Canon 50) that Lent should be fasted in its entirety (without skipping certain days of the week as was customary in some regions), and that “*this sacred number and mystery should not be violated by breaking the fast on Holy Thursday.*” St. Augustine seems to have been well aware of the character and meaning of this mysterious number, for in his explanation of Psalm 94 he wrote: “These forty years signify what is always. For the number forty indicates the completeness (integritas) of the centuries, as if the centuries were completed (perficiantur) by this number.”

In Hebrew, indeed, forty is *arbaim*, while the obviously related word *arbe* means multitude, and also indicates a kind of locust, just as the ancient Egyptians used the hieroglyph of the tadpole or the lizard to represent the same concept.

concept. And, as in Greek, Latin, and related languages, the word for forty is philologically and phonetically related to the word for four, so too the Hebrew *arbaim*, forty, is clearly linked to and derived from *arbh*, which means four. On the other hand, *arbe*, multitude, has the same origin as *rabb*, which means much, and also great, powerful, leader (hence Rabbi, the Lord, the rabbi). From the number forty, we are thus brought back to the number four, which we find associated with the concept of multitude, greatness, and completeness.

What is the reason for this?

Perhaps the following: philology and history agree in showing us that the lunar month was formerly taken as a unit of time, both by peoples speaking Indo-European languages and by peoples speaking Semitic languages. In Latin, the word *mensura*, measure, is connected to the word *mensis*, month, and the same root appears in Greek in *mén* = month and *méne*, moon. In modern English, similar words, moon and month, are used to refer to the moon and the month respectively. Similarly, in Hebrew, the word *iareah* means moon and *ierah* means month, and the same association is found in ancient Egyptian, where *ab* means moon and *ab* or *abt* (in Coptic *abof*) means month. Now, the lunar period has four phases, which lend themselves easily to being taken as units of measurement; and in this case,

taking the week as the unit of measurement of time, after four weeks the cycle of the lunar phases is completed, and therefore the number four that closes the cycle constitutes a new unit of a higher order, the month, and therefore has a character of completeness, of a period in itself. The likelihood of such a connection between the word designating the number four and the four phases of the moon seems to be proven by the fact that in ancient Egyptian, four is written *aft*, a word clearly related to the word *abt* (month), however little we may know about the phonetics of ancient Egyptian. Additional proof is provided by Egyptian measures of capacity: The unit of measurement was called *hen*, whose multiples or higher units were *Vapt* or *ap* (*aipi* in Coptic and *epha* in Hebrew), a kind of bushel containing 40 *hen*, and the *tena* containing four *hen*. As can be seen, here too the higher units are formed on the basis of four and forty, and it should also be noted that the word *apt*, which designates forty *hen*, is phonetically similar and intermediate between *abt*, month, and *aft*, four.

Other interesting data can be found by examining the Egyptian calendar: as is well known, the Egyptian year consisted of exactly 360 days, with the five epagomenal or complementary days being counted separately. The year was divided into three seasons of 120 days each, each in turn subdivided and composed of four months of thirty days each; this division of the year is undoubtedly more rational than that currently in use in civilized countries. Therefore, the Egyptian season was called tetramenia by the Greeks, because it was composed of four months, similar to the lunar month, which in turn is composed of four weeks.

The number that completes a cycle, which constitutes a new unit of measurement, naturally varies depending on whether the week, month, tetramenia, or year is taken as the fundamental unit. If the season is taken as the basis, then the number three will close the cycle, since after three Egyptian seasons have passed, we return to the same point in the terrestrial year, and therefore the number three (*Chemef*) is the sum, the total (*chemef*), of the three seasons; if the week and the month are taken as the basis, the cycle closes after four Egyptian weeks and four Egyptian months, and then it is the number four that corresponds to the end of a period; if the month is taken in relation to the year, the cycle closes with twelve months and it is then the number 12, the dozen, that closes and constitutes the period. Finally, if we take the fingers of the hands as a unit of measurement, which is equivalent to adopting the decimal number system, it is ten that constitutes the higher unit of order. It follows that the numbers used to designate multitude, completeness, and a period can be 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, and the various combinations obtained by multiplying two or more of them together. For example, the product of three and ten gives us the thirty days of the Egyptian month, the product of four and ten gives us our forty, etc.

We may ask ourselves why, among all these possible numbers that complete the cycle, forty has taken on, especially in relation to regeneration, the prevalence and symbolic meaning that we have found. We do not think it is out of place to refer, in this regard, to the Pythagorean tradition, whose concordance and connection with the Egyptian and Kabbalistic traditions are far from being excluded. We need not recall the importance and meaning that the Pythagoreans attached to the quaternary, the sacred *tetractis*, and the decade. What is interesting, however, is to investigate the mysterious link between four and ten, because it justifies and validates in a certain way the mysterious excellence of the number forty, which is their product. In the geometric genesis of Pythagorean arithmetic, in which the point corresponds to unity, the aggregation of several points arranged in the same direction gave rise to segments composed

of two, three... points, that is, it gave rise to the series of integers; the superimposition, on a plane, of the point on segments of two, three... points gave rise to triangles composed of three, six, ten... points, i.e. the series of so-called triangular numbers (the 'triangular number' is therefore equal to the sum of the first n integers); the superimposition, in space, of the point on triangles of three, six, ten... points gave rise to tetrahedrons or pyramids with a triangular base, consisting of four, ten, twenty... points, i.e. the pyramid numbers (the pyramid number being equal to the sum of the first triangular numbers). The analytical process can then be continued in a similar way with the pyramid numbers, but geometrically, i.e. Pythagoreanly, we must stop, because human intuition of space cannot conceive how tetrahedrons can be superimposed in successive spatial layers. Therefore, four points are sufficient to form a polyhedron and to exhaust the dimensions of space conceived by human intuition. With the point (unity), the segment (two), the triangle (three), and the tetrahedron (four), the geometric manifestation of unity is complete.

Now, the sum of these four fundamental numbers is ten; ten is the *fourth* number in the series of triangular numbers: 1, 3, 6, 10..., just as four is the *fourth* number in the series of numbers and ten is the smallest number that belongs both to the series of whole numbers and to those of triangular and pyramidal numbers. To these arithmetic relationships between 4 and 10 must be added, as confirmation and further indication of the importance of ten and its connection with four, various facts that could not fail to be observed and evaluated by the ancients: The fact that there are ten fingers on the hands, that the initial letter of the word 'decade' is the fourth in the Greek alphabet, and that it is written using an equilateral triangle (10 is a triangular number), etc. In conclusion, four and ten have many characteristics in common, and therefore their product, the quaternary of decades or decade of quaternaries, in a certain way sums up and intensifies all these characteristics in a single number. Cabalistically, similar relationships exist between the *iod* (tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet), the *aleph* (first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) formed, as is well known, by four *iods*, and the *tetragrammaton*.

However, the essential fact is that forty expresses the totality of a period, the integrity of the centuries, as St. Augustine says. This period could also have been symbolically expressed by other numbers; and, if in the special case of Lent or initiatory fasting, forty was chosen or affirmed everywhere in the Isiac mysteries and in the Jewish, Arab, Christian, and Hermetic traditions, in addition to the Pythagorean and Kabbalistic reasons for which 40 excels, this is perhaps due to the common Egyptian origin of the wisdom of Moses and the Isiac mysteries reported by Apuleius, and in any case to the deep bond that links (above fanatical misunderstandings and fierce hatreds) the various currents and manifestations of the Mediterranean initiatory tradition, from which the historical religions of the Mediterranean basin, the Egyptian, Orphic, Pythagorean, Eleusinian, Bacchic mysteries, etc., the orders of chivalry, Hermeticism, and Freemasonry derive more or less precisely and consciously.

We can therefore agree with what Lacuria writes about the number forty-seven

: "The only constant is that the number characterizes a complete and sufficient period to accomplish a work. *St. Augustine thinks that the number forty represents the duration of our pilgrimage on earth, which is in fact a complete period that ends the work of our destiny. Forty must emanate from the number four, which is also a complete number; a number that sums up God and his work; a sum that contains the enumeration of all existing and possible species of beings.*"

It seems clear to us that initiatory regeneration constitutes a period, a span of time with a beginning and an end, like any other case of generation, and is therefore expressible and symbolically compatible with a number such as forty. And since the completion of one period necessarily leads to the beginning of another period of time, and every end is at the same time a beginning, every death a birth, it is natural that the concepts of end, perfection (*per-ficere*), completion, death, beginning, and initiation are closely associated with each other, and that initiatory palingenesis consists intrinsically and is ceremonially represented by that death and resurrection which, in the Christian tradition, has Jesus as its protagonist; whose death and resurrection, therefore and above all, is a symbolic expression of the traditional initiatory spiritual transmutation, whether or not it has reference to a particular historical or legendary event.

We will conclude these notes by dwelling somewhat on the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *mem*, which corresponds to and denotes the number forty.

Maim is the Hebrew name for waters, always designated in the plural (or rather in the dual, indicating the upper and lower waters), which corresponds to the Egyptian *mu*, and the Arabic *ma*, water. We have already seen that waters are related to the number forty in the case of the flood, which marks the end of one humanity and the beginning of another. First, as soon as the 40-day flood ended and the waters receded for 40 days so as to dry up, the raven came out of the ark, never to be seen again; and then it was followed by the dove and the appearance of the sun, that is, the colors of the rainbow. In Hermeticism, the great work has phases that are expressed with identical and similar terminology; even Hermetic transmutation is accomplished by dissolving and drying, and passing from black (the raven of the alchemists) to white (the doves of Diana); and also in Hermeticism there appears the *peacock's tail*, and the period necessary for the completion of the work is sometimes calculated in forty years or months.

The letter *mem*, which corresponds to the 13th card in the tarot, depicting death, is preceded by the letter *lamed*, which has a numerical value of thirty and corresponds to the 12th card in the tarot, depicting the “hanged man”; and is followed by *nun*, whose numerical value is fifty, and which corresponds to the 14th card in the tarot depicting *temperance*.

Lamed in Hebrew means to learn, and this concept, associated with that depicted by the corresponding card in the tarot, is found in the dual meaning of the words discipline and docility (from the Latin *docere*), and in the Sanskrit yoga (*ht. Jugum*). The letter *lamed* therefore refers to the apprentice, the disciple, who must submit to the discipline of the initiatory Order, perform the twelve labors of Hercules, and walk the twelve stations of the *via crucis*, of the passion, before being able to attempt the great work, which is accomplished through death and initiatory resurrection. From this point of view, the numbers 12, 30, their common pitmen 3, and the letter *lamed* are the symbol of the preliminary human phase 28 of initiation, they are the symbol of the apprentice.

This letter is followed by *mem*, dissolution, death on the four arms of the cross; and therefore *mem*, 13, 40, and their common pitmen 4, are the symbol of death and initiatory resurrection, of crucifixion, and are the symbol of the initiate or companion.

The fourteenth card of the Tarot, corresponding to *nun* and 50, represents a woman pouring liquid from one vessel into another, and is therefore a sign of transmutation and palingenesis. According to the spiritual law corresponding to the physical law of communicating vessels, palingenesis leads to equilibrium, and therefore to tranquility, deep peace, and stability immune to change. It is the rest of which Cagliostro speaks in his ritual; and the Egyptian Mason, says Cagliostro, after completing the two forties and achieving spiritual and physical immortality, aspires only to this rest and to be able to say of himself: *ego sum qui sum*. It is the eternal rest of the Catholic liturgy, understood in its esoteric meaning. The letter *nun*, therefore, and the numbers 14, 50 and their common pitmen 5, are the symbol of complete palingenesis, the symbol of the Master.

The sum of the three numbers 30, 40 and 50 gives 120, the number of days of the Egyptian tetramenia, and the years lived by Moses. The sum of their pitmen, 3, 4, and 5, gives 12, the cyclical number of the year, the zodiacal number. These three numbers (and their proportionals, 30, 40, and 50) are also the measurements of the cathetus and hypotenuse of the so-called Egyptian triangle, held sacred by the ancients (see Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*), constantly used in ancient religious architecture for its symbolic and mysterious character, and still in use today as a Masonic symbol. Taking twelve consecutive segments of equal length on a string, holding the points corresponding to the end of the third and seventh segments fixed, and joining the two ends, we obtain this Egyptian triangle, which, as is well known, is a right triangle; indeed, of all right triangles, it is the one for which the measurements of the sides offer the simplest numerical ratios. In this way, you can construct a *square*, a right angle, that is, divide the circumference into *four* parts. The famous theorem of Pythagoras, which also applies to this triangle, states that the sum of the squares constructed on the cathetus is equal to the square constructed on the hypotenuse; that is, that by adding together what is contained in *power* (square) in three and four, we obtain what is contained in *power* in five, the Pythagorean pentalpha. This is true both geometrically and esoterically.

Just as *mem* comes immediately after the first twelve letters of the Hebrew alphabet and has a numerical value of 40, so Easter comes after the twelve stations of the *Way of the Cross* and takes place during the forty hours between death and resurrection. Coming after the end of the twelfth cycle, it is natural that its recurrence should take place just after the end of the year, at the beginning of spring. (*first true, spring*). Now, the first equinox corresponds (if we do not take into account the precession of the equinoxes) to the first point of the zodiac sign of Aries, the Paschal Lamb. But Easter is determined not only after and based on the end of the solar year, or twelve-month cycle, but also after the end of the four-year lunar cycle; and its recurrence falls on the first Sunday (i.e., the first solar day) following the first full moon after the spring equinox. It is therefore subordinate to the end of the two solar and lunar cycles, i.e. based on the two periods that have the greatest influence and correspondence in all vegetation and generation.

It should also be noted that the zodiacal symbol of Aries is used by the alchemist Zosimus (3rd century AD) to represent sulfur, a substance which, according to the ancients, was eminently igneous and flammable, and that sulfur in Greek is expressed by the word *theon*, which also means divine.

Thus, the fiery and divine power of sulfur is connected with the zodiacal sign of Aries, and therefore with the Paschal Lamb, the *agnus qui tollit peccata*, the lamb that takes away the sins of the world. Thus, the fiery and divine power of sulfur is connected with the zodiac sign of Aries, and therefore with

the Paschal lamb, *the agnus qui tollit peccata mundi*. After the twelve letters of the alphabet, we find the *mem*, associated in various ways with the concept of water; after the cycle of twelve months, we now find the sign of Aries, associated in various ways with the concept of fire; and thus we find water and fire, the solution and coagulation of the great work.

Finally, coming to the nun, we observe that, in both the Jewish and Christian calendars, fifty days after Easter comes Pentecost, as the name itself says. According to the Acts of the Apostles, on the fiftieth day after Jesus' death, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. But this event is also an effect and not the starting point of the sanctification of Pentecost, that is, of the fifty-day period. In fact, the sanctification of the 50th day after Easter is prescribed in Leviticus with the following words: "And thou shalt sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; for it is a jubilee. *The man shall return to his possession, and everyone shall return to his ancient family.*"

After what we have said, the esoteric meaning of this passage is not difficult to grasp. Moreover, it can be traced back to the writers of the Church. St. Augustine, for example, believes that forty represents this laborious life and that fifty represents rest and delight; and the Venerable Bede bases himself on the passage from Leviticus quoted above and on that from the Acts of the Apostles on Pentecost to affirm that: "*it is clear that this number can rightly represent the grace of the Holy Spirit and the joy of future bliss, which is attained through the gift of this spirit, and in whose perception alone one truly rests and enjoys.*"

According to St. Jerome, forty is always associated with labor (*labore*), while fifty leads us to the interior of the Church (*intiora Ecclesiae*), because after the seven-week Sabbath, it breaks on the day of the resurrection.

intiora Ecclesiae, because after the seven weeks of the Sabbath, it breaks into the day of the resurrection. Thirty-five

St. Jerome cites Abraham's plea in Genesis to save Sodom if fifty righteous people could be found there, and the parable in the Gospel (Luke VII and XVI) about the two debtors, one owing 50 and the other 500 denarii, to prove that 50 is the number of penance and remission. St. Augustine says that 50 is the symbol of the future Church, where God is always praised, because $50 = 40 + 10$, where forty is the number of human life, and 10 (denarius) is the money or reward of the worker. Another even more amazing link between 40 and 50 was found, according to Bongo, by St. Jerome. In fact, says Bongo, the eternal joy of our jubilee is in a certain way latent in the present conflict, and this can be seen from St. Jerome's observation that the sum of all the divisors of 40 is equal to fifty. The divisors of forty are, in fact, 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 20, whose sum is exactly equal to fifty. This shows, according to St. Jerome, that forty potentially contains fifty, in the mystical symbolic sense that we have explained.

At the beginning of Lent there is the preliminary and ritual purification, Ash Wednesday, which corresponds to the catharsis of the pagan mysteries; then comes the forty-day period of work, trial, fasting and discipline, which ends with death and initiatory resurrection; it is Easter, corresponding in meaning and annual recurrence to the great Dionysian festivals (March 28-April 2) and the Roman

Liberalia (March 17); and finally, the fiftieth day of Pentecost, which ends with the descent of the “Holy Spirit.”

In setting the date of Easter based on the end of the solar and lunar cycles, i.e., at the end of the twelve months of the solar year and the four weeks of the month culminating in the first full moon after the end of the solar year, we took the spring equinox as the beginning of the solar year. In ancient times, in fact, this was what happened in Rome before the reform of Numa Pompilius, as evidenced by the names of some months: April (*aperire*), September, October, etc., which were precisely the seventh, eighth, etc. months of the year; but if we place the beginning of the year at the winter solstice, as is customary today and as seems certain to have been the case even more anciently, that is, at the moment when the sun, in the northern hemisphere, is at its lowest point on the horizon, at the moment when the day ends and the increase begins, it is possible to find, with an approximate shift of ninety days, significant analogies in annual festivals and religious traditions... There are exactly ninety days between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, as December and January have 31 days and February has 28 days in the Roman calendar. And just as Easter is subordinate to and follows the spring equinox, so shortly after the winter solstice (December 21) comes Christmas (December 25), St. John the Evangelist (December 27), New Year's Day, and Epiphany. Because the dates of birth and resurrection are subordinate to the solstice and equinox, some have seen in this nothing more than an allegory of the solar myth, whereas for us the astronomical references are only an appropriate symbol and analogical correspondence of inner initiatory regeneration.

For similar reasons, the period between two consecutive deaths and resurrections of the Phoenix in the midst of flames is sometimes calculated as 1,461 years, the Sothic year of the Egyptians, i.e., the period between two consecutive heliacal risings of Sirius, measured by a number of years equal to four times the exact number of days in the year, i.e. 4 times 365+one.

Usually, however, the death and rebirth of the phoenix is traditionally said to occur every 500 years, i.e. every fifty decades. Thus we find the number fifty again, since 50, according to Origen, is related to 500. Indeed, according to Origen, 500 is more impressive and perfect than 50, and this is proven by the passage from the Gospel about the two debtors that we mentioned above.

We do not believe that this study exhausts the investigation into the symbolic meaning of the number forty, its origin, reason, and history, a subject that is apparently modest and limited but which has led us to examine some very hidden aspects of the Mediterranean esoteric tradition and the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. We have seen that the numerical symbolism of 40 and 50 takes on a predominantly mystical aspect in the Christian tradition and of the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. We have seen that the numerical symbolism of 40 and 50 takes on a predominantly mystical and moralistic aspect in the Christian tradition, but that the esoteric meaning sometimes shines through in the writings of the Church in a relatively clear and faithful manner.

In this investigation of such a minute detail of symbolism, the connection between the various religions and initiatory schools of the West, from Egypt to Christianity, from Kabbalah to Hermeticism, has been revealed; and it is also clear from this investigation that only initiatory experience and the consequent possible esoteric understanding and interpretation of traditions are capable of rising intelligently and synthetically above the divisions of Churches and sects and of fully understanding those truths which,

entrusted to traditional allegory and the symbolic veil of texts, appear fragmentary, misunderstood, and distorted in the interpretations that profane writers of various churches and schools are accustomed to give of sacred things.

Notes

1 Petri Bongi Bergomatis *Numerorum Mysteria* - Bergomi 1599, postrema editio, p. 501.

2 See the article by I. M. Casanowicz under the heading *Forty* in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, V, 438.

3 See A. Rostagni - *Il Verbo di Pitagora*, 1924, pp. 83-84.

4 Nöldeke - *Untersuchungen zur kritik des Alte Testaments*, p. 188. For St. Augustine, too, 40 was the number of human life (see Vigouroux's *Diction. de la Bible*, under the entry *Nombres*, for this and for extensive information on mystical numbers), and Leopardi, in his dialogue between the physicist and the metaphysician, also places the peak of human life at the age of 40.

5 Aug. in *Civit. Dei*, Vili, 15.

6 *Kings*, XIX, 8.

7 Lodovico Thomassin - *Treatise on the Fasts of the Church*, trans. from French. Lucca 1742, p. 10.

8 Cf. Scerbo - *Hebrew-Chaldean Dictionary of the Old Testament* - Florence 1912, pp. 269-70.

9 Mail. IV, 1, 2. This connection between Jesus and Moses and Elijah is completed and confirmed by the transfiguration of Jesus, which, according to the sacred texts, took place between Moses and Elijah (cf. Matt. XVII, Marc. IX, and Aug. *Epistol.* LV, chap. XV).

10 August. *Epistol.* LV, chap. XV, in *Patrologia* del Migne, XXXIII, p. 217.

11 Aug. *De Trinit.*, IV, 6; *Patrol.* del Migne, LXII, 894-895.

12 Acts of the Apostles 1, 2; cf. also Aug. *loco supra citato*.

15 Aug. *De Trinit.* IV, 6.

16 According to St. Jerome (Comm. in Ezechiel. Lib IX, chap. XXIX, *Patrol.* Migne XXV, 387), because of this stay, 40 is the number of affliction and punishment, and that is why Moses, and then Elijah and Jesus, fasted for 40 days.

17 Cf. Georg. Syncellus - *Chronographia* - Bonnae, 1829 I, pp. 8 and 9, pp. 16-17?

18 *Gen.* VII, 4, 12, 17.

19 *Gen.* Vili, 6.

20 See "Ignis" - April-May issue, 1925, p. 105.

21 See Boehme - *Dell'impronta delle cose* - Milan 1925, p. 147.

22 Jesus compares himself to the true vine, but the farmer, the Georgos, precedes him as his father. Much could be said about the use of pastoral, agricultural, and edification symbolism in the Mediterranean tradition.

23 Aug. *Enarra fio in Psalmum XCIV*, 14, in *Patrologia* del Migne, XXXVII, 1226.

24 F. Rossi - *Grammatica Copto-geroglifica* - 1878; pp. 257, 260.

25 See the dissertation by G. G. Bredovio in the Bonn edition of the *Chronology* of Syncellus, II, p. 35.

26 See the *Vocabolario Geroglifico copto-ebraico* (Coptic-Hebrew Hieroglyphic Dictionary) by Simeone Castelli, Turin 1887; I, 48.

27 P. F. G. Lacuria - *Les Harmonies de l'Etre exprimées par les Nombres*. Edit. Nouv. 1889; t. II, p. 306.

28 II *pitmene* of a number is given by the remainder of its division by 9, or by 9 itself when the remainder is zero. We prefer to use this ancient Pythagorean term rather than the bizarre expression (theosophical reduction) used by L. C. de Saint Martin. The latter, on the subject of forty, says little and nothing conclusive (*Des Nombres* - Paris, 1861, p. 65; and *Tableau Naturel*, 1783; p. 836).

29 See Hoefer - *Histoire de la Chimie*. Paris 1866, I, p. 269.

30 *Levit XXV*, 5.

31 Aug. *Epist.* LV, chap. XV in *Patrol.* Migne, XXXIII, 218.

32 Venerabilis Bedae - *De Tabernaculis et vasis eiuv*, Lib. II, chap. II.

33 Hieron. *Comm. in Ezechielem*, Lib. XII, XLI; *Patrologia* del Migne, t. XXV, 396.

34 *Ibidem* - Lib. XII, chap. XV. *Patrologia* del Migne XXV, 383.

35 Hieron. - *Comm. in Isaiam proph.* Lib. II, chap. Ili; Migne XXIV, 60.

36 Aug. - *Sermo CCLII*, chap. XI - *Patr.* XXXVIII, 1178.

37 The Phoenix, so called because of its purple color (cf. flamingo), is an important hermetic symbol, also used in the higher degrees of "Scottish" Freemasonry.

38 Origenis in *Numeros Homilia*, V, 2 - *Patrol.* Greek by Migne XII, 604.

39 *Ibidem* - XXV, 4 - *Patrol.* gr. XII, 768.

40 To avoid misunderstandings, it should be added that when we speak of Mediterranean esoteric tradition, Western initiatory schools, etc., we do not mean to refer to any of the many pseudo-Templar, Rosicrucian, etc. organizations that claim to continue or possess this tradition. With a few exceptions, these are, in fact, completely unfounded claims. The matter is simply humorous on the part of certain "Martinist orders" which, in the West, could only have their headquarters on the island of Pantelleria. In this case, it is no longer a question of deviating from tradition, or even of going off the rails, but simply of... braying; and the head of the order, of course, is no longer Hermes Trismegistus, but Asinesio, three times asinesio, asinesio even in plagiarism.

Arturo Reghini

The esoteric allegory in Dante*

Underneath the literary meaning of the *Commedia*, that is, beneath Dante's journey through the three realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, there is undoubtedly an allegory. We do not need Dante's explicit statements on the matter to be certain of this. This allegory is not simple, but multifaceted, and commentators usually recognize two aspects: the moral and the political.

The moral, or philosophical-moral, interpretation sees allegorically depicted in the *Commedia* the path that man must follow to overcome sin and attain virtue in order to escape Hell and Purgatory and gain Paradise through moral perfection.

This allegory, like the literal meaning of the sacred poem, undeniably has a distinctly Christian aspect, even though it abounds in pagan elements; and, following Aristotle, St. Thomas, and scholasticism, it has been thoroughly penetrated by commentators.

The political allegory is based on the struggle between the empire and the papacy, and the persecution of the Templars by Philip the Fair and Clement V also features prominently. Naturally, there are passages that are open to moral interpretation alone, others that are clothed in political symbolism alone, and still others that have a double moral and political interpretation. The political allegory is almost always very transparent, and Dante often dispenses with any veil altogether, making his vision clear and leaving no stone unturned. The moral allegory has such a Christian appearance that it authorizes all Christians and all those in a hurry to conclude that Dante was a Catholic orthodox, while the political allegory reveals with certainty a Dante who is a partisan of the empire and a bitter enemy of the Church, an open defender of the Order of the Templars, condemned and fiercely persecuted for heresy by the Church, a Dante who exalts Caesar, the Roman Empire, and classical civilization, and who elects the Pythagorean and imperialist Virgil as his guide, teacher, and lord.

The reasons that led Dante to use allegory are therefore not political in nature, inherent in his position in the struggle between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, because in that case it would be natural to find a thicker veil in the passages dealing with politics, whereas the veil becomes thicker in the passages dealing with morality, philosophy, religion, and metaphysics; and sometimes, no matter how hard commentators strain their eyes, they cannot clarify the meaning, or each of them ends up understanding it differently from the others.

What, then, is the reason that led Dante to use allegory, even at the cost of not being easily understood? Poetic imagination? A passion for riddles? Certainly not, because we know that a doctrine is hidden beneath the veil of strange verses. And if the appearance is Christian, could the choice differ from the appearance? Could the doctrine so jealously hidden be heterodox, very heterodox? So that Dante would reek of heresy and be an enemy of the Church not only in the political sphere but also in the religious sphere? His repeated professions of Christian faith are not enough to eliminate the doubt. If he was in fact a heretic or a pagan and did not want to end up roasted, he was forced to profess himself a Christian. And especially wanting to indulge himself in extolling Virgil, Caesar, Rome, which the good world despised, the noble Latin blood, and the emperors who had a noble, that is, pagan appearance, he needed to somehow allay suspicions by also making an apology for Christianity. It should be

remembered that in those days Christian charity could indulge itself at will; the numerous followers of St. Dominic, who in the heretical thickets

Published in "Nuovo Patto," September-November 1921; reprinted in *Paganesimo, pitagorismo, massoneria* (Paganism, Pythagoreanism, Freemasonry) edited by the Pythagorean Association, Società Editrice Mantinea, Fumari (ME), 1986.

beating them with the most holy zeal to save souls (as well as the endangered Church) went about the marketplaces, and Dante himself had already seen human bodies burning. What was the point of ending up like Cecco d'Ascoli, when it was possible to devote one's life, and one's genius and wisdom, to a grandiose political and religious plan? Despite his professed Catholic faith, Dante had friends who sought to prove that God did not exist, and he happily placed heretics of Sigieri's ilk in paradise, while populating hell with popes. Dante himself was accused of heresy according to ancient documents and according to his first commentators. Dante's pagan heresy was supported by Foscolo, then by Rossetti with a huge amount of arguments, and finally by the Catholic priest Aroux. A Jesuit who wanted to criticize Rossetti's works received such an exhaustive reply from him that he never uttered another word.

No one considers that even in appearance Dante does not always follow St. Thomas slavishly; he differs openly on very important issues; for example, in eschatological doctrine (Purg. XXV 88-102), he adopts a theory of the shadows of the dead that is in perfect agreement with the pagan conception.

From the outset, he was inspired by Virgil, from whom he took only the beautiful style that brought him honor. His poem is nothing more than a comedy; and however the word is understood, in the modern or Dionysian sense, it always leads us far from the apparent Christian meaning. In broad terms, the Comedy is a development of the sixth canto of the Aeneid, and Dante repeats what Virgil has Aeneas do. Aeneas descends alive into Hades, finds the myrtle branch of the initiates in the forest, and learns *de visu* the truth of the Orphic-Pythagorean mysteries about man and conditional immortality. And Dante, still corruptible, follows the same path with the same purpose and using the same symbolism.

The fundamental purpose of the Orphic, Pythagorean, Eleusinian, and Isiac mysteries, as is now well known and proven, was to impart to the initiate true knowledge of the principles of life (Cicero, *De Lege* II, 14), bliss, and privileged immortality. This was achieved through initiation, which consisted of preliminary cathartic practices, symbolic ceremonies, and actual ecstasy, as Plutarch, Apuleius, and other ancient writers tell us, and as is now recognized by modern scholars (see, for example, Macchioro - Zagreus). In this way, man was regenerated and after death the Elysian Fields awaited him.

The subject of the Comedy is man, or rather the regeneration of man, his metamorphosis into an angelic butterfly, Apuleius' Psyche. And therefore the same subject as the mysteries. It is not only moral qualities that change; Dante purifies himself degree by degree, passing through various crises and states of consciousness, falling like a dead body, fainting, reviving, becoming enraptured, reviving in Eunoë, his mind leaving itself, becoming illusory, becoming india, becoming internal, becoming future, becoming impure, passing from the human to the divine, from time to eternity, and finally frees his soul from every cloud of mortality. This is not moral perfection, it is a true palingenesis of the whole being

that takes place in the symbolic journey. The veil hides not only moral disquisitions on sins and virtues, but also the exposition of inner changes in the pilgrim's consciousness.

The two rivers of the earthly paradise are clearly borrowed from the Orphic-Pythagorean mysteries.

Recent archaeological discoveries have unearthed the so-called golden plates of Turii, which were buried with the Orphic deceased to serve as viaticum when they arrived in Hades. There they encountered two springs, that of Lethe and that of Mnemosyne, i.e., that of oblivion and that of memory. Drinking the water of Lethe, the deceased lost all memory and ended up a miserable, unconscious larva in the mud. Drinking from the fresh spring of Mnemosyne, he was saved and went among the immortals in the Elysian Fields. The formula contained in the Orphic laminetta stated: "I am the son of the earth and the starry sky. Let me quench my thirst at the cool spring of Mnemosyne, so that I may be a divine god and no longer mortal." This is the meaning of the Orphic invocation formula; and this Orphic-Pythagorean conception is analogous to the eschatological conception of the Eleusinian mysteries, and is developed in the Platonic theory of souls and knowledge. Dante, to better affirm the pagan character of the catharsis of purgatory, from which he emerges pure and ready to ascend to the stars, introduces at the end of the canticale not only the Lethe, but the less familiar Eunoë (Purg. XXVIII,

131; XXXIII, 127-145), as he calls it, which "revives his stunned virtue," that is, gives those who have died resurrection, a second birth.

Dante would like to sing in part of the sweet good that would never have satisfied him, but he has no more space, all the pages of this second canto are full, and above all, the reins of art no longer allow him to continue. Addante, Pedro, with judgment: We are in the midst of pagan mystery.

And whoever considers who Dante's guide was understands that he had to lead him there. Dante, lost in the wild and harsh forest of Christian prejudice and ignorance, finally encounters Virgil, the personification of esoteric wisdom, this voice that for a long silence (ten centuries of the vulgar age) seemed faint; and Virgil immediately presents himself as an initiate who has transcended human nature: "I am not a man, I was a man"; and that is why Dante takes him as his guide, teacher, and lord, who initiates him and makes him immortal.

Now, the pagan conception did not grant human souls true survival; they led a life of unconscious larvae in Hades, and only the initiates, the heroes, and those whom Jupiter kidnapped from the highest council were immortal. And Christianity prevailed over the mysteries because it democratically placed salvation and immortality *à la portée de tout le monde*. It was enough to be baptized and believe that Jesus had risen to be saved. A real bonanza for all the poor in spirit and for all the criminals to whom the mysteries closed the door. Arnobius, for example, openly admits that he became a Christian because Christianity, unlike the mysteries, guaranteed immortality to all.

Dante, who takes Virgil as his guide and treats the whole question of palingenesis in a pagan manner, also believed that not all men could attain eternal life? That Christian beliefs were not sufficient for this purpose? That the mad sheep and proud Christians had no right to citizenship in the eternal city and had to end up among the lost people? It would seem so, given that it was not from priests but from Brunetto Latini that he learned "how man becomes eternal." Examining Dante's work without preconceptions or

prejudices, one comes to recognize in spiritual rebirth through the metamorphosis brought about by initiation the fundamental subject of the Comedy, the doctrine hidden beneath the veil of strange verses.

Dante's allegory therefore has a very important mystical, metaphysical, truly esoteric aspect. This aspect has not yet been recognized. It also escapes Rossetti and Aroux, who, while referring to classical mysteries for the interpretation of allegory, always refer to the ceremonial part of these mysteries. This is natural, because in order to perceive and understand conventional or allegorical allusions and references, it is necessary to know the object of the allusion or allegory; and in this case, it is necessary to know the mystical experiences through which the mystery and the epopta of true initiation pass.

For those who have some experience of this kind, there is no doubt about the existence in the *Commedia* and the *Aeneid* of a metaphysical-esoteric allegory that veils and exposes the successive stages through which the consciousness of the initiate passes in order to become immortal.

The symbolism most frequently used by Dante is that of navigation and pilgrimage. He is a pilgrim on the deserted shore, on the narrow pass, in the harsh desert; he takes water that has never flowed there; he is a navigator on the sea of being. In particular, the symbolism of the sea, the ship, and the sail is always used to deal with inner events. And this sail that he raises to sail better waters; and as he himself says, it is under this sail that doctrine is hidden. It is an archaic, Mediterranean, pagan symbolism, already used by Virgil and Ovid. It is also used by Christians who speak of ships and naves in their temples, referring to St. Peter's boat. But this little ship is the result of one of the many appropriations made by the followers of the Asian prophet; it is nothing more than the ship of Janus, a purely Roman god, husband of Venilia, the goddess of the sea and springs, and inventor of shipbuilding. We can see what Ulysses' undertaking becomes in the *Commedia*. Ulysses, the navigator par excellence, has such a burning desire to become an expert on the world, human vices, and valor that he is not overcome by the sweetness of his son, the pity of his old father, or his duty to Penelope; and

therefore he sets out on the high open sea; and after sailing so long that he becomes old and slow, he finally comes to that narrow mouth, where Hercules marked his limits so that no man might go further. But Ulysses and his companions do not turn back because of this; on the contrary, they remember that they were not made to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge; and therefore they venture with mad flight into the high pass to gain the experience of the world without people, behind the sun; that is, of that condition in which consciousness lives an entirely interior life, beyond and outside of any celebration due to the human senses, and in which there are neither people nor sun.

But this is very dangerous water, and not everyone can reach the shore and turn to look at the pass that has never let a living person pass, and which can only be crossed by those who die a mystical death. It is a mad passage (Parad. XXVII), a very difficult undertaking, not to be attempted in a small boat (Parad. XXIII), and there is a risk of being overwhelmed and submerged by the sea of being that closes in on the reckless. This is what Dante says, after having stated: (Inf. XXVI, 21) "my mind is more confused than usual."

But Dante does not go on an adventure like Ulysses; he is guided by Virgil, who is wiser than he realizes, and through a hidden path he manages to see the stars again. To sail better waters, he raises the sail of the ship of his intellect; and after the various practices and ceremonies he undergoes in

purgatory, he ritually purifies himself and, revived in the fountain of Eunoe, emerges renewed with new foliage, pure and ready to ascend to the stars (Purg. XXXI11). After that, it is appropriate to invoke the good Apollo for the last task (Parad. I). At the sight of Beatrice, one becomes like Glaucus when he tasted the grass that made him the consort of the other gods in the sea (*Parad.* 1,69-70), that is, one feels oneself dying and becoming immortal like Glaucus, the Glaucus who says of himself: *Ante tamen mortalis eram, sed scilicet altis deditus aequoribus* (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*). Dante cannot say anything else and apologizes by saying: “*Trasumanar significar per verba Non si poria; però l'esempio basti a cui esperienza grazia serba*” (Paradiso I, 70-72). It cannot be done with words, but it can be done with grass.

He no longer has the illusion of the material world, he has another sense of reality: “you are not on earth, as you believe,” but you sit in your own place; for, as he says in *Conv.* IV, 28: “the noble soul returns to God, as to the place from whence it departed when it entered the sea of this life.” What happens to souls that are not noble is not said.

And now that he hears of the distant mortal world (Par. II), he feels able to guide not only those who are in small boats, but also those few who raise their necks in time to the bread of the angels, the ambrosia that makes them immortal like the grass of Glaucus. It is true that the water he takes has never run, but he has all the pagan wisdom that assists him: “Minerva breathes, and Apollo leads me, and nine muses show me the Bears.” and Dante encourages these few sailors to calmly set sail, keeping their course in front of the water that returns unchanged; and he promises them wonders equal to those seen by the glorious Argonauts who followed that other daring navigator who conquered the Golden Fleece (*Parad.* II, 1-18). And indeed, having reached the end of his voyage, and having arrived at his destination with infinite courage (*Parad.* XXXIII), he sees that in its depths is bound with love in a volume that which is spread out throughout the universe. He believes he has seen the universal form of this knot; and he is as amazed as Neptune was when he saw the shadow of Argo, the first ship to sail the seas. The few who have followed his path to the end thus see that Dante keeps the promise he made to them in Canto II.

This explains one of the most obscure passages in the entire poem. But, let us be clear, a true explanation can only be given to those who go through similar experiences, for this is a mystery that “cannot be understood by those who have not experienced it,” and I can only repeat the words of Apuleius after his initiation:

Ecce tibi rettidi, quae, quamvis audita, ignores tamen necesse est (Apuleius - *Metam.* XI, 23).

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