



56. ROSICRUCIAN MANIFESTOS

In 1614, in Kassel, Wilhelm Wessel's printing house published a booklet in German, whose long title is known in its shorter version: *Fama Fraternitatis*¹. It tells the story of a Friar C. R., an impoverished nobleman and German monk, who travelled to the Holy Land, heading first to Damascus with the intention of reaching Jerusalem. He fell ill in Damascus where he became known for his ability in the medical art. He got in contact with local doctors, and after a while he lost interest in Jerusalem and begged them to take him (against payment) to the town of Damcar². There he was generously welcomed by the wise men and doctors. In the story of the *Fama*, Damcar appears to have a total autonomy from the surrounding Ottoman dominion, as if it were a republic of sages, a sort of utopia. However, it is not clear its location: most certainly it was situated on the road from Damascus to Jerusalem³. C. R. stayed there for three years, learning the wonders of the Book of Nature taught by the philosophers of Damcar.



1. The journey of frater C. R.

During his stay, he translated into German the mysterious *Liber M.* which later became the reference text for his followers. Once he was fully instructed, C. R. was sent to the city of Fez, in Morocco, to a circle of wise men closely connected with those of Damcar. About this second stage of instruction the *Fama* informs that in Fez C. R. refined his knowledge in “magic, *qabbalah*, medicine and philosophy”. C. R. confessed that his previous knowledge of the *qabbalah* was contaminated by his Christian religion. What he learned from the sages of Fez was “a superior *qabbalah*” which he adapted to the Christian religion in a form more appropriate to its origins. In this manner, he learned a science that allowed him to understand and harmonize all the fields of knowledge, and what did not fit within his view was considered the “Devil’s work”. After two years C. R. left for Spain. Here he exposed his knowledge to local scholars⁴, but they were irreparably “infected” by the Catholic prejudices still following the teachings of Porphyry, Aristotle and Galen. So, he left for Germany. There he found “true” intellectuals who enthusiastically embraced his teachings and the content of the mysterious *Liber M.* In the beginning three *Fratres* joined C. R., and they all travelled the

¹ It seems probable, however, that it had already been circulating as manuscript since 1610, as in 1612 a certain Haselmayer, a Lutheran, had published a book of enthusiastic adherence to what was the content of the *Fama*.

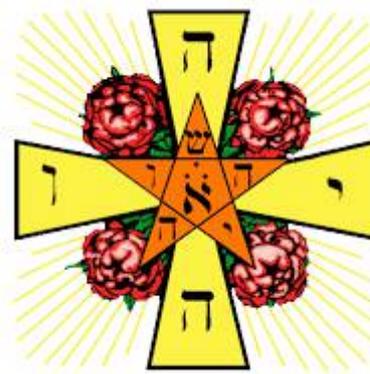
² In the English translation by the alchemist and natural magician Thomas Vaughan of 1652, Damcar always appears as Damascus. Many scholars of the events we are relating here, deliberately continue to keep this confusion between two different cities, as done for instance by Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972, *Appendix*.

³ In the map of the Arabian Peninsula drawn by Abraham Ortelius in 1570, there is a place called Damcar in Yemen, in the interior not far from Aden. It is, however, a misspelling committed by the Jewish cartographer of the real name of the village of Dhamar. It is not excluded, however, that the author of the *Fama* may have borrowed this name to conceal the real name of the place where C. R. stayed for three years, ignoring the great distance between Dhamar and the place called Damcar, located between Damascus and Jerusalem.

⁴ It seems that the text alludes especially to the monks who taught at the University of Salamanca. During the Renaissance and the Counter-Reformation that University graduated dialectically unbeatable theologians, for this reason it was the object of constant denigration and slander by Protestant circles.



streets of Germany bestowing the blessings of their knowledge. Their clothes did not distinguish them from the other Germans. They introduced themselves as doctors and they treated their patients free of charge.



2. Reconstructions of the Rose+Cross symbol

The *Fama* also mentions an alliance with Theophrastus (Paracelsus), who, although not a member of the Invisible College, shared the same ideals. In addition, the *Fama* tells that those first four *fratres* developed a magical written and spoken language in which they compiled a Dictionary of all wisdom. They used to gather in a building called *Sancti Spiritus*. After a few years, they doubled their number and later on the organization counted thirty-six members. Their aim was to increase scientific knowledge in order to improve the living conditions of the time and, by performing prodigies, to change the antiquated mentality still prevailing in Europe. They claimed: “We firmly believe that if our brothers and parents had lived in the same clear light that now illuminates us, they would have followed neither the Pope nor Mohammed nor the scribes, artists and sophists”. The Brotherhood, however, would not have remained hidden forever because, their main purpose was to help building the “Germanic nation”, so in the future they would have revealed themselves publicly¹. The first among the *fratres* to pass away was J. O. He was a very experienced doctor and very skilled in the *qabbalah*, he had also cured the Count of Norfolk from leprosy. After this first death, R. C.² took care to build for himself a tomb, in a secret place, full of allegorical meanings and filled with books and wonderful objects. R. C. predicted that for a hundred and twenty years his tomb would remain concealed. But after that period of time his successors should have started to interfere in European events revealing their presence as Invisible College. The *Fama* goes on with the miraculous discovery of the tomb of R. C. in 1604.

The description of the tomb is a lengthy allegory in which mathematical and geometrical symbols are associated to the presence of the library of the late founder, of the *Liber M*, and of prodigious automata that were somewhere in between magic and mechanics. The conclusion of the libellus includes a utopian plan of magic-scientific universal improvement, under the insignia of an anodyne, holistic and “tolerant” Jesus Christ, freed from all the abstruse interpretations of the medieval theology³. In a few words, a religion devoid of dogmas, rites, hierarchies, which was inclusive of pagan, qabbalistic and alchemical wisdom; obviously the alchemy in question had to be strictly Protestant.

¹ As you will see, in the other Rosicrucian Manifestos this would have happened once the Church of Rome was erased and the Holy Empire was reformed in Protestant terms.

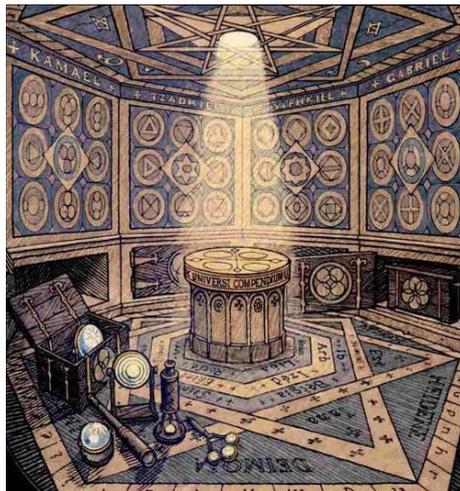
² From this point on, in the *Fama* the acronym of the founder of the Order is inverted: instead of C. R. it is mentioned as R. C. Towards the end there is also the version “*Friar* C. R. C.”.

³ It is the “tolerant” Jesus Christ described by the reformist imagination, which excludes any Catholic intrusion, but which advocates a universal brotherhood only between Hussites, Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans.



3. Allegory of the Invisible College of the R+C Fraternity

The following year, 1615, a second Manifesto, published by the same printing house, appeared this time written in Latin. This is known as *Confessio Fraternitatis*¹, and it was obviously addressed to the educated classes. It does not start from a narrative, like the *Fama*, to which it explicitly refers.



4. Tomb of Christian Rosencreutz

It consists of a series of statements of faith and descriptions of a “universal” plan of Reformation. A Reformation generically Protestant and, therefore, rooted mostly in the Old Testament. In fact, from the very beginning Jehovah is invoked, as Lord of the imminent Sabbath. However, this God called by his Hebrew name is intended as the guarantor of the becoming of nature, and through its phenomena he would manifest Himself to the “wise men” and through calamities He would punish the “wicked”, meaning all those who did not accept the Word revealed in these Manifestos.

¹ The long title of this Manifesto informs also on its preface: the writing *Brief consideration on the most secret Philosophy* of a Philippus a Gabella. Most scholars agree to link the origin of this surname to the word *qabbalah*.



5. Original edition of *Fama Fraternitatis*

Since the appearance of the *Fama Fraternitatis* had been received with understandable hostility by the orthodox circles, the *Confessio* had a cautious outset “So that no one may accuse us of the slightest heresy, nor of following evil principles, nor of plotting against temporal power, we condemn the East and the West - the Pope and Mohammed - who are blasphemers of our Lord Jesus Christ and we offer with good faith our prayers, our secrets and our great golden treasures to the supreme Head of the Roman Empire”. What is the meaning of the ambiguous formula “supreme Head of the Roman Empire” is to be verified. In fact, the document insists on proposing a major change in the structure of the Holy Empire¹. As it will be seen, the political action that these manifestos inspired will also be clearly subversive. The plan was not only to protestantize the Empire, but also to destroy Catholicism seen as the “religion of the Antichrist”.

But why the use of the formula “supreme Head of the Empire” instead of the more common title of Emperor? The answer to this question will be provided by examining the third and last Manifesto. The content of the *Confessio* also lists the ideals that the reform plan should have implemented: religious tolerance among the various Protestant sects, Judaism and the currents of free thought; “benign” use of magic, increase use of the sciences², especially mathematics and mechanics, support for the arts, particularly the allegorical and utopian ones³, economic and social development for the well-being of all. All these innovations and discoveries were intended above all to create a change of mentality in order to erase all memory of the medieval ecumenical Europe. But the ambitions of this occult movement, which was ahead of the globalisation of the 20th and 21st centuries⁴, did not stop to Europe: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to live in a place where the people living beyond the Ganges River in India would no longer hide anything, just as

¹ Later on, in fact, the *Confessio* states that many feathers of the imperial eagle “block our path and prevent us from achieving our goals”.

² In the *Confessio* there is already the profane idea that science derives from the rationalisation of alchemy. This is true in the case of the alchemy of Renaissance *souffleurs*, the other alchemists being only occultists.

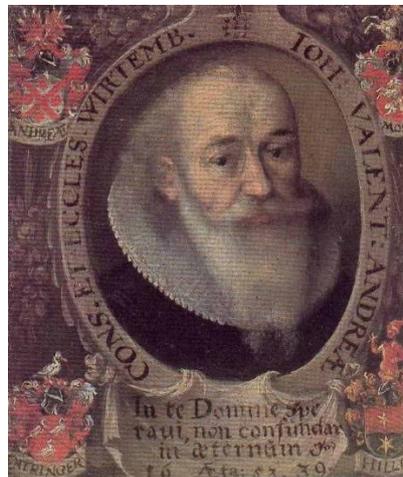
³ Urban planning, architecture, gardening, music and theatre, all expressing moral and philosophical allegories with utopian characteristics.

⁴ In the already mentioned book of F.A. Yates, the author often defines, perhaps unintentionally, the Rosicrucian occult movement as “liberal” and “progressive”, while she uses the terms “obscurantism” and “reactionary” for the Catholicism and the Empire. The failed attempt of coup d’état started with the “defenestration of Prague” is called “liberation of Bohemia”, and the imperial repression of the insurrection is treated as a “foreign occupation”. The rich data collected by the researcher of the Warburg Institute is interesting, even if she addresses her hopeful praise exclusively to the subversion of the remaining medieval order. For a correct reading of the *Enlightenment of the Rosicrucians*, it is sufficient to make a turn of 180° of the exposed point of view, always based on the same data.



those living in Peru would stop keeping their knowledge a secret instead of not letting anyone know about it?”

Although referring to the Arabic adventure of *frater C. R.*¹ in this second document it was also added: “It was necessary to publish the *Fama* in the mother tongue of all [in German!] so that those who – although they were not wise - were not excluded by God from the happiness of this Brotherhood, which somehow must be divided and separated in [hierarchical] degrees; exactly in the same manner of those who live in the city of Damcar in Arabia and who have a political and social order completely different from that of the other Arabs”. The document recommends the foundation of a free zone also in Europe, that should be governed only by wise men, namely by the very same brethren. In order to achieve this, it was necessary spreading the use of free individualistic examination of the Bible, and thus freeing its reading from any magisterium. Finally, the *Confessio* ends with a long appendix where Catholicism is furiously accused of all vileness, by using as leverage the German Protestant nationalism. These first two Manifestos explicitly invited all those who were interested in the magic-scientific reform of Europe, presented here as a new “universal” religion, to make contact with the *fratres*.



6. Johannes Valentinus Andreae

The third document, *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, appeared in Strasbourg in 1616, published anonymously like the two previous Manifestos. However, the author is certainly the Lutheran shepherd, magician and occultist Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586-1654), as already in 1604, he had published a first signed version entitled *Chymische Hochzeit*. In this manner the meaning of the different acronyms present in the previous Manifestos was for the first time revealed. The novel narrates of the marriage of two princes, which Christian Rosencreutz would be invited to, in their enchanted castle, a place full of magical wonders and animated mechanisms. The wedding ceremony lasted a week. Every day Rosencreutz had to go through various experiences lavishly described by mysterious allegories, obscure

¹ Actually, the acronyms C. R., R. C. and C. R. C., repeatedly used in the *Fama*, are never used in this Manifesto. However only a passage mentions the founder of *Fraternitas* by the name of Christian.



symbolisms, allusive theatrical performances¹. The intent was to represent the seven steps of some not well defined hermetic-qabbalistic initiation. We omit to describe the details of the “prodigious” events of that week, which can only interest those affected by “symbol-mania”. The week-long ceremonies ended with the ordination of Rosencreutz and the other guests as knights of the Golden Stone Order².



7. Rosicrucian *Imperatores*

Before describing the environment that enthusiastically welcomed the publication of these three documents and the resulting historical effects, it is necessary to make some considerations about their contents. The arcane atmosphere of the *Fama* and the *Confessio* was immediately successful in the late Renaissance occult circles of Protestant Europe. Many personalities of the secularistic Protestant culture tried to get in touch with the mysterious members of the *Fraternitas*. Since the Manifestos did not indicate any contact details, the publishing houses were stormed; first and foremost, the Wilhelm Wessel house, which had published the *Fama* and the *Confessio*. Subsequently, other publishing houses, such as Lazarus Zetzner in Strasbourg, de Bry in Frankfurt-Oppenheim, Godfrey Basson in Leiden³, which had published the works of Andreae and his fellows, such as Robert Fludd and Michael Maier, were also subject to urgent requests for contact. Since no one answered these demands, some of these seekers had the idea of publishing booklets by the very same printing houses with requests for admission to the *Fraternitas* or, at least, for an epistolary contact. But it was all in vain.

As often happens in pseudo-initiatic environments, the lack of answers was not considered a reason neither of disappointment nor of suspicion. Keepings their own origins mysterious, not revealing the name of the masters, concealing an overt doctrine behind abstruse symbolisms and allegories, invincibly attracts those who wish to be deceived. Everyone had referred to the enigmatic acronym C. R., until the book *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz* appeared, and finally revealed the name of the founder and the title of the *Fraternitas Rosicruciana*. It is certainly true that the rose and the cross were two symbols

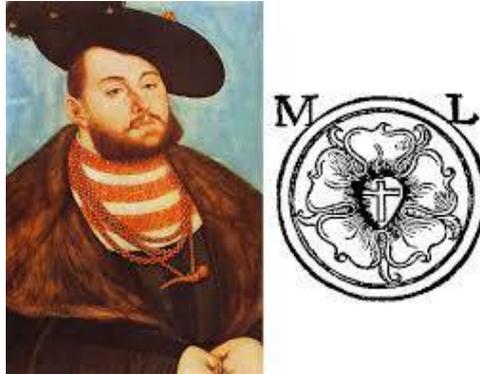
¹ We will not summarize the story of each single day of this uninteresting novel, with its wonders, visions and magic. It is only important to report that during the third day several *Imperatores* were weighed on a large scale. The heaviest and therefore the wisest among them was Christian Rosencreutz himself. It is worth of attention the presence in the tale of a multiplicity of *Imperatores*, when in reality the Catholic Emperor was always only one. At most, only his Orthodox counterpart, the *Basileus* of Constantinople, could be recognised with the same title, until the Eastern Empire managed to survive the Islamic invasions. Therefore, the title given to those characters will be interpreted in a transposed sense. Throughout the Middle Ages, *Imperator* indicated the function of the acknowledge head of initiatic organisations; therefore, these late Renaissance pseudo-initiatic secret societies misappropriated that title. Therefore Rosencreutz, in the *Chemical Wedding*, would be proclaimed head of all hermetic-qabbalistic *Imperatores*. Even later, several secret Rosicrucian societies used the title of *Imperator* to designate their leaders. Only the British secret societies preferred the title of *Rex (King)*, as the imperial title in their opinion had too many “papist” connotations.

² This is the first time that the Rosicrucian Brotherhood claimed to appear as a chivalric-alchemic order.

³ As it has already been pointed out, the publishers were exclusively Protestant or Jewish. In the Catholic Italy, the publishing houses were the disseminating centres of hermetic-Christian qabbalistic fantasies since the origin of Humanism. This happened above all in the territories of the Republic of Venice, which in the 16th and 17th centuries felt territorially surrounded by two powerful allies, the Empire to the north and the Church State to the south. In those two centuries Venice supported from the outside any movement that opposed those two powers.



universally known and previously used both in the external Catholic liturgy and in authentically initiatic symbolism. However, it is equally true that the unified symbol of rose and cross was a recent innovation. In fact, the first time that it appeared in Western history was in the glyph of Martin Luther's ring¹.



8. Glyph of Martin Luther's ring

After having recognized Christian Rosencreutz as *frater C. R.*, it will now be appropriate to give a more detached look at the *Fama Fraternitatis*. The main character went to the town of Damcar in Arabia, name that does not exist in that region, where he was expected as a predestined pupil. The wise men who lived there enjoyed a strong autonomy from the Ottoman administration. There he learned “magic, *qabbalah*, medicine and philosophy”. He then moved to Fez where another community of sages taught him “a superior *qabbalah*” which he later adapted to his Christian religion. The *Confessio*, for its part, confirms those data: “Those who live in the city of Damcar of Arabia, have a political and social order completely different from that of the other Arabs”, a kind of order that R. C. should have exported to Europe. The masters belonging to those communities in Islamic lands and their Rosicrucian Protestant disciples they both practiced the art of medicine. They wore the clothes of the countries they visited and not those that would have identified them as belonging to another community².

In the *Fama* the *qabbalah* is mentioned four times and twice in the *Confessio*, and both Manifestos spoke ill of the Pope and Muhammad calling them heretics and blasphemers, therefore it is quite evident that the Rosicrucians did not go to the East to receive teachings from the Sufis. It is unknown the meaning of the name Damcar. What is certain is that between Damascus and Jerusalem there is the city of Safed. In the 16th century the city was the seat of the Qabbalistic-Messianic school of Rabbi Isaac Luria. This current relates to the mystical deviation of the ancient Jewish initiation created by Abulafia and it is from this school that in the XVII century came the false messiah Shabbetāy Ševī. The town of Safed obtained wide autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. Even today that city on the Lake Tiberias is considered the capital of the messianic-apocalyptic *qabbalah*.

Gian Giuseppe Filippi

¹ More precisely, the engraving puts together three symbols: the rose, the cross and the heart. It seems that this symbol was later split into two: on one side the Protestant rose-cross, on the other the cross with the Jesuit Sacred Heart. It would be an interesting study the research of the historical development of these two “cults” and their historical application.

² Since the end of the Christian Middle Ages, the medical profession, because of its impurity due to contamination by blood, pus, necrosis and death, had been delegated to the Jews. In addition, special clothes were imposed on the members of the ghetto communities in order to be immediately recognised.