



## 57. THE *LUDIBRIA ROSICRUCIANA*

What was John Dee doing in Bohemia from 1583 to 1589 during his secret mission? It is generally said that, together with his companion, the necromancer and magician Edward Kelley, he visited Rudolf II of Habsburg (1552-1612) in Prague. At court, the two allegedly involved the Emperor in evocations of angels and in rituals of possession, during which Kelley played the role of medium<sup>1</sup>. There were also rumours, which were never confirmed, that on the same trip Dee also met *Rabbi* Judah Loew, a Qabbalist known for his messianic mysticism and magic practices<sup>2</sup>.



### 1. The Prague Golem

In reality, John Dee spent most of his stay in Trebon as a guest of the powerful Prince Villem von Rosenberg (1535-1592)<sup>3</sup>. There he founded a “circle” of friends, although it would be preferable to call it secret society due to its secretive nature. The younger brother of his host, Peter Vok von Rosemberg (1539-1611), who abandoned Catholicism in favour of Calvinism, his friend Christian von Anhalt (1568-1630) and the hermetic Paracelsian Qabbalist Oswald Croll (1563-1609) were certainly members of that circle.

The underground political action carried out by John Dee in Bohemia in 1588, temporally coincides with the suspect presence of Giordano Bruno at the court of Rudolf II. Also in this case, the Emperor quickly got rid of the spy at the service of England, by dismissing him with a simple donation of money. Bruno, as well, during his stops along his trip in Germany and Bohemia, founded secret ‘Jordanist’ societies which used magical rituals of “Egyptian” inspiration<sup>4</sup>.

At the time, those two secret missions failed. However, as we will see below, they sowed the seeds of a broad scale subversion that would ultimately lead to the disasters of the Thirty Years’ War. But what were the goals of these spies of the fledgling British “Intelligence”? The aim was to obstruct the Catholic Counter-Reformation which was slowly regaining large areas of Germany. But above all they were trying to undermine the true Catholic power represented by the Holy Roman Empire. Elizabethan England,

<sup>1</sup> A contemporary witness, quoted by Evans, states that the Emperor welcomed the two magicians with interest; the sovereign, although attracted by all that was occult, remained sincerely Catholic; therefore, he soon became suspicious of the ends pursued by Dee and Kelley, and drew them away from the court (Robert John Weston Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History, 1576-1612*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 218-228).

<sup>2</sup> The practice of magic by this *rabbi* seems, instead, to be a legend invented in romantic times. Moshe Idel, while validating Loew the mystical-ecstatic deviance of the qabbalah and his millenarianism, convincingly rejects any of his inclinations towards magic and, in particular, denies that he had ever built a golem (*Golem. Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions On the Artificial Antropoid*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990, pp. 251-258).

<sup>3</sup> Peter French, *cit.* pp. 224-228. Benjamin Woolley, *The Queen’s Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Advisor to Queen Elizabeth I*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964, pp. 312-313.



despite its excessive imperialist ambitions, was still a third-rate power<sup>1</sup>. During the mission in continental Europe, John Dee, an ultranationalist Anglican, softened the tones of his faith in the “Church of England” and preached among the different Protestant sects in order to overcome their rivalries in the name of a fictitious universalist esotericism rooted in the humus of the hermetic-qabbalistic occultism<sup>2</sup>. The aim was to secretly infiltrate the Protestant sects and the continental powers in order to make the English crown the great invisible maneuverer of the destinies of the West. Also Giordano Bruno, namely the English spy Henry Fagot, conspired in this sense. Totally agnostic, he considered the various Protestant currents useful tools for the destruction of Catholicism and the Holy Empire<sup>3</sup>. His interest was focused on the explicit preaching of “Egyptian” magic as an instrument for reforming the mentality.



## 2. Emperor Rudolf II and Giordano Bruno

Apparently, the purpose of these magicians at the service of the English “Intelligence” was to deceive the Emperor Rudolf, who was also king of Bohemia, in order to gain control of the Holy Roman Empire<sup>4</sup>. Prague, where Rudolph had moved the capital of the Empire, was an important strategic hub, as the king of Bohemia was one of the seven imperial electors. Basically, attempts were made in order to gain control of Christianity after the setback of 1519, when neither Francis of France nor Henry VIII Tudor had managed to be elected Emperor.

Rudolph II, as it often happens to those fascinated by the occult, was not a very balanced person. In a period of serious tensions caused on one hand by the Protestant division of Christianity and, on the other by the wars unleashed by the different princes, particularly German and Dutch, who took advantage of this unrest to carve out an independent state, Rudolph II was a real problem. Instead of taking charge of the situation, he preferred to lock himself up in his Prague castle, devoting himself to ceremonial magic and to collecting grimoires and automata, the occultists’ toys. Sincerely Catholic and an advocate of the Counter-Reformation, he gave little thought to the threat to peace of the Protestant aggression. He was

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 16th century the Holy Empire, the Kingdom of Spain and the Kingdom of France were the only first-rate European powers. After them came the Republic of Venice, the Kingdoms of Poland, of Sweden and of Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> Universalistic, but-yet it excluded the church of Rome. In the same period, it was fabricated a caricatural magical-hermetic-qabbalistic initiatic chain, that started with Llull, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and continued with Reuchlin, Zorzi, Agrippa, Paracelsus, Bruno and Dee, although many of these actually had never met in person.

<sup>3</sup> Giordano Bruno managed to be declared a heretic not only by the Catholic Church, which gave him a well-deserved end, but also by Calvinists and Lutherans.

<sup>4</sup> It is remarkable the modernity of all these ignoble political manoeuvres cloaked in “universalism”, “liberation from the obscurantist past” and “love of neighbour”.



not even concerned about the propaganda of Hussite heretics in the same Prague<sup>1</sup>. At the end in 1608 a family council dismissed him from all his duties<sup>2</sup>.



### 3. Magic objects used by John Dee

Once back in England, because of the failure of his European mission, John Dee lost the good grace of the Crown, and he was forced into a life of hardship and oblivion<sup>3</sup>.

At the death of Elizabeth I, James VI Stuart, king of Scotland, succeeded to the throne. James I of England was a very peculiar sovereign who represented a discontinuity from the imperialist dreams of the Tudors. He was a fervent Catholic<sup>4</sup>, but he claimed wide autonomy from the Roman Pontiff, in line with the absolute monarchy idea that was prevailing everywhere in Europe. He was against the theories and practices of magic<sup>5</sup> and hostile to Protestantism, particularly to Puritanism<sup>6</sup>. However, his power was partially hindered by the Elizabethan Parliament from which Catholics were excluded<sup>7</sup>. The Parliament actually heavily influenced the Protestant choices of the King's offspring.

Meanwhile, the poisonous seeds scattered by Dee and Bruno in the Protestant circles in Germany had begun to germinate. In 1604 a curious book appeared the *Naometria* by Simon Studion, who was a late Paracelsian humanist. The book is a classic example of "prophetic" literature, and it was written with the sole purpose of influencing the course of events towards a precise direction. It predicted an alliance between James I of England, Henry IV, King of Navarre and later of France, and the Duke Frederick of

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<sup>1</sup> The Prague Diet was in fact monopolised by the Hussites. In fact, in 1419 the Catholic representatives had been defenestrated (i.e. thrown out of the window) by Hussite parliamentarians and massacred in the square by an angry crowd of heretics. This started the Hussite revolt. Since then, and for a couple of centuries, Catholics were no longer accepted in the Diet.

<sup>2</sup> His reaction was weak: he tried with a Charter of Majesty to attract the support of the Protestants by granting them freedom of worship. But by then he had been ousted from all power, except from the imperial title alone, and this last manoeuvre had no consequence.

<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting to know more about the estrangement of the brothers Francis and Antony Bacon (both ennobled by Elizabeth) from John Dee and his spreading of the hermetic-qabbalistic occultism. The Bacons were both founders of the English Secret Service, and after the failure of the Dee-Kelley mission, turned their backs on occultism, now suspected to be related to black magic, to preach instead the advancements of science and mechanics in its place. This new trend culminated in 1605 with the publication of Francis Bacon's *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human*, the first document of what in the following century would take the form of a 'secular religion' based on faith in unlimited progress; a faith that is still unshakable today among the masses.

<sup>4</sup> He had the Bible translated under his constant supervision. The *Bible of King James* today still appears to be the best in a vulgar language.

<sup>5</sup> He was the author of the interesting study entitled *Dæmonologie* in which he sharply stresses the subtle relations between witchcraft and Protestant Reformation.

<sup>6</sup> The name of the extreme form of Calvinism in England. Obviously F. A. Yates describes this cultured and refined sovereign as a bigoted fool with mental problems; the preference of the Warburg Institute researcher was instinctively in favour of the bestial Henry VIII (*The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1972, ch.II).

<sup>7</sup> This exclusion continued until the Emancipation Act of 1829.



Württemberg<sup>1</sup>. According to the book these three princes would swiftly succeed in overthrowing the power of the Antichrist, i.e. the Catholic Church, and also in defeating Islam, and these events would lead to the return of the Christ and to the beginning of the millennium of Protestant peace. Obviously, this did not happen at all. *Naometria* could therefore be forgotten but for one single detail: on one page is reproduced the seal of Luther, in a context that is clearly rosicrucian<sup>2</sup>.



#### 4. The Rose Cross as it appears in *Naometria*

In 1613 it was celebrated the marriage between Elizabeth, daughter of King James and, the Palatine Count Frederick V, an Imperial Elector. Frances A. Yates enthusiastically described in detail the festivities, the scenography, the farces and theatrical comedies<sup>3</sup> and the pompous processions that were prepared for the occasion. Her enthusiasm partakes the same hopes of all the anti-Catholic heretics sects of the time. It is quite clear that all the artificially allegorical surrounding of the princely wedding is the historical fact that inspired Andreae for his *Chemical Wedding by Christian Rosencreutz*. In fact, Heidelberg Castle, the seat of the Palatine Elector, with its “symbolic” gardens, its collections of books on magic, witchcraft and alchemy, its museum of wonders and automata, was also the model for the romantic castle in which Rosencreutz was “initiated” to the seven degrees of the Order of the Golden Stone<sup>4</sup>.

The princely couple, object of true worship by all the Protestant sects, was actually young and with a weak personality and entirely at the mercy of those manoeuvring it. The puppeteer behind them was Christian von Anhalt, whom we-already know to belong to Dee’s circle in Trebon Castle. He was the mastermind of the entire pantomime of the Palatine wedding and its final ruin. In 1617 the Bohemian Diet recognised the Catholic Ferdinand of Habsburg as King of Bohemia. This succession was not

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<sup>1</sup> Of the three, the Duke of Württemberg was the only truly Lutheran. Henry IV of Navarre had abjured Calvinism in order to become King of France (*Paris vaut bien une messe*). However, the Protestants rightly doubted the sincerity of his conversion; moreover, the French court was strongly influenced by the party of ‘politiques’ Catholics, ambiguously friendly towards the Huguenots. The third member of the alliance, James Stuart, was sincerely Catholic, even though his foreign policy was often conditioned by a parliament composed exclusively of Anglicans and Puritans. Studion’s prophecy was therefore more based on the Protestants’ hopes than on real data.

<sup>2</sup> A.E. Waite, *Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, London, William Rider & Son Ltd., 1924, pp. 36, 639 ff. Waite rightly points out that the publication of *Naometria* was concomitant with the first edition of J.V. Andreae’s *Chemical Wedding*. The concomitance, in these circumstances, is by no means random, but precisely calculated to launch sectarian messages.

<sup>3</sup> All Rosicrucian activities were accompanied by shows of propaganda staged by companies of English comedians. Even Inigo Jones, according to Yates (*The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, cit., I ch.), reached Heidelberg as set and costume designer for the great carnival wedding. The love for scenography, processions, parades and any other empty ceremonial formalities are still today characteristic of the British mentality.

<sup>4</sup> A fictional Order that clearly alludes to the philosopher’s stone. It is no coincidence that in the pamphlets of the Protestant propaganda the wedding of Elisabeth and Frederick of the Palatinate were full of insignia of the orders of the Golden Fleece and of the Garter, bourgeois substitutes of the ancient and authentic monastic-knightly orders.



appreciated by the Hussites, and the following year they defenestrated the royal legates<sup>1</sup> and rose up against the crown. The Hussites, under pressure of the Prince of Anhalt and his Calvinist acolytes, elected the Palatine Elector Frederick V as anti-King. The political manoeuvre was shamelessly evident: the Emperor's Electors were seven, three clergymen and four laymen<sup>2</sup>. Three of the lay electors were Protestants, whereas the King of Bohemia, a Habsburg, was Catholic.



### 5. The seven Imperial Electors

With the coup d'état in favour of the Palatine Elector, Frederick would have disposed of two votes, thus reversing the majority in favour of the heretics. In this way, the Holy Empire could be disrupted into a confederation of Protestant and anti-Catholic states. The adventure lasted less than a year: the commander-in-chief of the rebels, Prince Christian von Anhalt proved to be a bad strategist and the Lutheran-Calvinist-Hussite army was massacred in the Battle of White Mountain on the 8th of November 1620<sup>3</sup>. The news of the reversal reached the two young usurpers of the crown of Bohemia while they were having lunch in the Castle of Prague. They disorderly fled, abandoning in place all their belongings. In this manner Frederick V and Elizabeth not only lost the crown of Bohemia, but also the electoral county of the Palatinate, strengthening thus the catholicity of the Empire. They lived in exile at the expense of some Dutch and German feudal lords, who were still bound to their unfortunate cause, and with some help from the English Parliament<sup>4</sup>.



### 6. The Battle of the White Mountain

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<sup>1</sup> That time there were only wounded. It seems that defenestration is an inveterate habit of the Bohemian subversives: the last one was that of Minister Masaryk who, in 1948, started the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia. Also in 1483 the Prague burgomaster and his advisors were defenestrated by Hussite rebels.

<sup>2</sup> Respectively, the Bishops of Cologne, Trier and Mainz and the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg and the Count of the Rhine Palatinate.

<sup>3</sup> Between 1619 and 1620 Jacob Böhme visited Prague several times. It is doubtful that the hermetic Protestant and Qabbalist mystic chose that period for the sole purpose of selling shoes to the rebels.

<sup>4</sup> James of England took the blame for not having helped his daughter in that wretched enterprise. In reality the Stuart was openly opposed to the manoeuvres of the Protestants. In fact, he had tried to counterbalance as much as possible his daughter's marriage to a Calvinist prince of little importance by marrying his son to a Spanish Infanta.

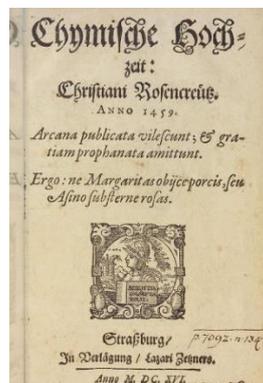


That was the first of a number of imperial victories; if the King of Sweden had not intervened later in support of the Protestants, the reform would have been wiped out completely. But let's leave the field of simple politics and go back to examining the pseudo-initiatic implications of those events. It is clear that the three rosicrucian documents, on the wake of Bruno's and Dee's subversive missions, wanted to inspire an occult reform of Europe; they were the prophetic continuation of Studion's *Naometria*, that aimed to secretly influence the mentality of the time in order to accept as providential the socio-political changes that they were pursuing. However, something went wrong.



### 7. Frederick V and Elizabeth Stuart

It is curious that even Andreae himself, author of the *Chemical Wedding*, even before the White Mountain<sup>1</sup> disaster, stood back from the rosicrucian movement. In his later works he defined the *Fama*, the *Confessio* and the *Chymische Hochzeit* with the Latin word *Ludibria*.



### 8. First edition of the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*

The immediate meaning of *ludibrium* is that of mockery, -joke, teasing but in the language of drama it defines the farce, which stresses a lack of seriousness of the play. In his *Mythologiae Christianae Libri Tres* of 1619, still using the theatrical language, Andreae stated: "I have absolutely nothing to do with it [the R+C fraternity]. Not long ago, it happened that some writers were preparing a performance of certain intellectual circles, I approached them to observe them, since the current fashion is to eagerly seek out

<sup>1</sup> Although Descartes had previously tried in vain to get in touch with the Rosicrucians, in the end he chose the Catholic field and took part in the battle of the White Mountain among the ranks of the Imperials.





he greatly admired, had earlier begun. He later claimed that he unsuccessfully had tried to get in touch with the authors of the *Fama* and the *Confessio Fraternitatis*. Especially after the failure of the “rosicrucian Reform” movement in Europe, but he insisted that he had never been able to have contact with the true Rosicrucians. In this way he distanced himself from that venture, while at the same time he discretely renewed his sympathy for the original ideas of the movement. Like Andreae and Maier, he also testified, to some degree, about an extraneous intrusion that had led to a deviation from the ideals of the origins, which was the main cause of the failure of the Bohemian adventure.

Despite the confusion, often willingly created, about the Rose Croix and the Rosicrucians, it is necessary to draw the right conclusions from the data we have presented in our investigation of the period that goes from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the Modern Age.



### 10. Allegory of Michael Maier

1. In the Catholic tradition, i.e. in the European area coinciding with the Western Empire (Holy Roman Empire), after the withdrawal of the monastic-sacerdotal initiation, the destruction of the Order of the Temple marked the end of the knightly initiatic paths<sup>1</sup>. Only The initiatic organisations such as the trade guilds remained alive.
2. The void left by the disappearance of priestly knowledge was filled up by a surfacing mysticism, a phenomenon that was not initiatic and, in some way, ‘spontaneous’.
3. The ‘Christian’ hermeticism was a libresque reconstruction carried out by some Renaissance occultist intellectuals, without any real transmission from Alexandrian or Arab hermeticism.
4. Those who could not overlook the problem of a lack of initiatic transmission turned to the Jewish *qabalah*. But also in this case no transmission took place. First of all, because the Renaissance hermetists turned to the mystical, magical and apocalyptic deviation of the *qabalah*; secondly, because they did not

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<sup>1</sup> Just as it happened for the monastic initiation that declined and disappeared in a few generations after the reform of monasticism that begun at the end of the 10th century, in the same way the destruction of the Order of the Temple marked the beginning of the disappearance of knightly initiations. However, for about a century there were still some survivors. The last sign of continuity emerged in the middle of the 15th century with Sir Thomas Malory’s *Mort d’Arthur*, although we do not know who—this author really was. It is certainly one of the most beautiful examples of Templar initiatic novels, scarcely contaminated by Hermeticism.



convert to Judaism, but instead they invented a Christian *qabbalah* which would have the opposite purpose, that of converting the Jews. The intellectuals of the Renaissance, lacking of any notion about the initiatic transmission, superimposed the qabbalistic magic on the hermetic “Christian” magic in such a dubious way that its irregularity was blatant even in their eyes.

5. The new thinking was created to destroy all that remained of the medieval tradition: the still existing initiatic organizations of the guilds, the ecclesial structure with its theology and the Holy Empire ideal.

6. The simultaneously spreading of “Christian”, Hussite, Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican heresies, prompted to consider a starting point for a new era and a new ‘secular religion’ that could better adapt to the new times. The magicians of the Renaissance, convinced to represent an intellectual elite, carefully persevered to implant their Qabbalist-hermetic occultism as a new pseudo-esotericism within and above the new pseudo religion. But it remained the problem of how to compact the various heretical sects into a ‘universal religion’

7. In front of the effective anti-protestant and anti-Renaissance reaction of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the different sects began to overcome their differences. This situation benefited the Elizabethan England.

8. Similarly, the different occult currents found common ground in the rosicrucian legend.

Unquestionably until the appearance of the rosicrucian manifestos it was completely unheard of such a fraternity: apart from the *Fama*, the *Confessio* and the *Chemical Wedding*, there is no other document attributable to the Rosicrucians attesting their existence. The other writings that were published in the same period and that mention the Rosicrucians are, at least officially, just supporting literature. Their authors, in fact, declare themselves admirers of the “Invisible Collegium”, but confessed that they were not part of it<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, research and study this subject, there are only those three sources. The fact that the word ‘rosicrucian’ defines a degree of achievement corresponding to the perfection of the human state, and not to a specific organisation, it is a pure inference in complete contradiction with the three above-mentioned documents. In fact, in those writings the Rosicrucians appear to be those who are associated with the same *Fraternitas* or ‘Invisible Collegium’<sup>2</sup>.



## 10. Allegory of extraneous infiltration

<sup>1</sup> As we have already seen, not even the rosicrucian symbol had ever been known or used before, at least not until its first graphic appearance in Simon Studion’s *Naometria*, modelled on Martin Luther’s seal.

<sup>2</sup> The Collegium was initially composed of four members and only later of eight: never of twelve.



Nor can it be argued that the Rosicrucians were Catholic initiates who survived the destruction of the Order of the Temple and who reorganised themselves together with some initiates of Islamic esotericism to sustain a sort of initiatic continuity with the past. Firstly, because from 1314 to 1616 the name Rosicrucians<sup>1</sup> was never mentioned and, secondly, because the three documents exude hatred for both Catholicism and Islam. On the contrary, for the Rosicrucians the only source of knowledge mentioned was the *qabbalah*.

Neither is it acceptable that the Rosicrucians were initiates of such a high level of realization that they escaped any historical investigation: would they have been so far above Lao Tze, Chuang Tze, Lie Tze, Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara, Sūreśvara, Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Ibn ‘Arabi, Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, Origen, Eckhart, Dante, who left clear traces of their earthly existence along with their famous works? The assertion that it is impossible to find traces of such important figures for human destiny, brings back to mind the similarly unreachable theosophist *mahātmās* or Himalayan *bābājīs* of the Indian *new age*. In other words, these are naïve believes of those who blindly have faith in people exposing theses devoid of any basis and foundation. This occultist legacy is demonstrated by the fact that it is assumed as certain that the “true Rosicrucians” would have left Europe and went to Asia<sup>2</sup> around 1648, the date of the Peace of Westphalia. In fact, the occultist Saint-Yves d’Alveydre is mentioned as one of the sources. Clearly occultists have access to secret historical information that is denied even to initiates<sup>3</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> And, indeed, this name was completely unknown even before the destruction of the Templar Order.

<sup>2</sup> One wonders whether the Asian rosicrucian haven should not be identified with the mysterious Damcar. The “true Rosicrucians”, in this way, would have retreated to that place to lick their wounds after the of Bohemian failure and then try again to infiltrate Europe a few decades later.

<sup>3</sup> A quick reading of the special issue of *Le Voile d’Isis* (August-September 1927) dedicated to the rosicrucians is enough to realise these aberrant fantasies.