



65. OCCULTISM IN THE BOURGEOIS AGE

With the French Revolution the period of Renaissance and Enlightenment occultism came to an end. The Protestant Jacobin Fabre d'Olivet¹, the Catholic revolutionary Louis-Claude de Saint Martin² and the Catholic Bonapartist Willermoz³ all three had developed a Qabbalistic interpretation of the confessions they belonged to. The restoration of the *status quo* after the fall of Napoleon interrupted, for approximately fifteen years, the proliferation of those esotericisms that had arisen hiding behind the Goddess Reason⁴. Occultism reappeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the wake of Romantic gothic literature⁵. This tendency would have remained a mere aesthetic morbidity if it had not been supported by the practice of spiritism⁶. A further 'methodical' component was inherited from the French libertine circles and the British *Hellfire Clubs*⁷ of the previous century, whose members tried to self induce paranormal experiences in secret meetings, through the use of sex and drugs⁸. From the confluence of these three currents emerged the occultism of the bourgeois age.



1. Hellfire Club

The most representative figure was Alphonse Louis Constant (1810-1875), better known by his nom de plume Éliphas Lévi, a pseudo-Hebrew translation of his baptismal name. Born into a poor family, he was sent to a seminary to complete his education, but the week before his ordination as a priest he left the cloth. He had a life of hardship, he worked as draughtsman and painter and also gave private lessons. During this period, while in Paris, he associated with socialist⁹ and proto-feminist circles, characterised by pretended mystical tendencies. It was during this period that he published *La Bible de la liberté*, a

¹ André Tanner (éd.), "Fabre d'Olivet", *Gnostiques de la révolution*, tome II, Egloff, Paris, 1946.

² Nicole Chaquin, "Le citoyen Louis-Claude de Saint Martin, théosophe révolutionnaire", *Dix-huitième siècle*, numéro thématique *Lumières et Révolution*, 1974, n° 6, pp. 209-222.

³ Alice Joly, *Un mystique lyonnais et les secrets de la franc-maçonnerie: Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730-1824)*, Macon, Protat Frères. 1938, pp. 209-211.

⁴ One exception was the Carboneria, a branch of the Compagnonnage, which had spread rapidly from Franche-Comté to central and southern Italy. In the first third of the 19th century, the Carboneria was mainly a cover and the gathering place for a revolutionary political activity in liberal or socialist key, but it had no influence or claim over the esoteric thought.

⁵ We refer above all to the revival of the Ossianic literature of Byron, Polidori and Mary Shelley in their Swiss Hellfire cenacle.

⁶ We remind the reader that this practice of simplified necromancy began with the evocations of the Fox sisters at Hydesville in 1848. On this subject see *L'Erreur Spirite*, Paris, Rivière, 1923, a largely reliable book by René Guénon.

⁷ Evelyn Lord, *The Hell-Fire Clubs: Sex, Satanism and Secret Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

⁸ Didier Foucault, *Histoire du libertinage: Des goliards au marquis de Sade*, Paris, Perrin, 2007; Beatriz Álvarez, *El néctar divino de la "amapola". El láudano y su relación con el "Círculo Diodati" y los prerrafaelitas*, C2, Ciencia y Cultura, January 2017.

⁹ Especially groups inspired by the idealistic socialism of Saint-Simon and Fourier. After the revolution of 1848, which established the second republic, Constant directed the journal *Le Tribun du Peuple*, where he got closer to the Marxist ideas.



book considered blasphemous and subversive even by Louis-Philippe's liberal regime, which cost him eleven months in prison. It was not until he was in his forties that Constant began to take an interest in Hermeticism and the Qabalah. In 1854 he travelled to London where a medium urged him to summon the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana. He prepared complex rituals, evidently concocted from disparate books, and, on the agreed date, he performed a ceremony for twelve hours straight. At the end, a grey spectre appeared and touched his arm. Éliphas Lévi fainted from the pain and woke up with his arm frozen and swollen for several hours. From then on, he carefully avoided any practical experience, sticking to simply reading texts and writing. He also discouraged his followers from practising séances or necromancy¹.



2. Éliphas Lévi

In 1855 he wrote his most famous book, *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*. It is a text that puts together quotations from Plotinus, the *Qabalah*, Renaissance hermeticists and alchemists such as Knorr von Rosenroth, Agrippa, Jakob Böhme, and Enlightenment occultists such as Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, Emanuel Swedenborg, Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, Chaho and Goeres, but ultimately appears to be a simple guide to ceremonial magic². On the other hand, he did not consider himself a master *strictu sensu*, nor did he claim to be an initiate. His admission into Freemasonry in 1861, in fact, was late and had little significance to him³. However, that book and the other ones that followed, gave him enough fame and sufficient income to live on and to rent a decent flat. He met and frequented Jean-Marie Ragon, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the diabolical Abbot Vintras, Dr. Fernand Rozier⁴, Count Alexandre Branicki⁵, the "baron" Nicola Giuseppe Spedalieri⁶ and the spiritualist Victor Hugo. As it can be seen, Éliphas Lévi had become well established in the good bourgeois society, where he propagated his ceremonial magic disguised as *Qabalah*, even charging for 'lessons in High Magic'⁷.

¹ A. E. Waite, *The Mysteries Of Magic*. London, George Redway, 1886.

² Ceremonials are those rituals learned and put into practice by reading books and they are not transmitted through the practical experience of a magician.

³ He attended his lodge only for a few months. Due to some disagreements, Constant left and never set foot in any lodge again.

⁴ The latter represented the *trait-d'union* between Lévi and Papus.

⁵ With him Constant also attempted the 'Great Work', the transmutation of base metals into gold. Through his close friendship with the Balzac family (he lived in the castle of Beauregard, owned by Honoré de Balzac's widow), the count was also in close relations with Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre.

⁶ The 'baron' put also in contact Constant and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

⁷ Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, Albany, Suny Press, 2011.



Many pseudo-esoteric circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew on the magic of Éliphas Lévi. Among these were the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, the *Golden Dawn*, the *Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*¹, the *Cosmic Movement*, the *Abbey of Thelema* and many others.



3. Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre

We find necessary to dwell on Alexandre Saint-Yves, another figure comparable to Constant, whose influence on occultist circles was, however, far more serious. Born into a middle-class family in 1842, Alexandre Saint-Yves quickly became a military doctor. He soon gave up a career in arms because of his physical condition and moved to the small Norman island of Jersey where he met Victor Hugo. The famous man of letters was in exile there due to his opposition to Napoleon III's regime; he spent his evenings practicing "table dancing", a passion he shared with Saint-Yves. The latter later found a clerical job at the Ministry of the Interior. In 1877, he met and married Marie Riznich who was divorced from Count Eduard von Keller², a relative of Honoré de Balzac³. She was a very wealthy woman due to her family's business in Odessa and the bank it owned in Vienna. Thanks to his wife's fortune, Saint-Yves was able to pay for publishing his books and to acquire the title of Marquis from the Republic of San Marino in 1880. Later, after buying an estate in Alveydre, he added the name of the estate to his surname as if it were his fiefdom⁴.

Like Éliphas Lévi, also Saint-Yves d'Alveydre did not refer to a regular chain of masters, preferring to spread among his admirers the legend of an exceptional birth and a spontaneous self-initiation. Nor does he appear to have joined any of the pseudo-initiatic organisations that, at the time, were swarming throughout Europe. Nonetheless, his claims of innate wisdom were assumed as true by his many admirers.

¹ This pseudo-initiatic group, which some had the audacity to consider as the only 'serious' milieu in the West, will soon be subject of analysis in our *Narakam* column.

² Justus Perthes, *Genealogisches Taschenbuch der deutschen Gräflichen Häuser*, Gotha, Perthes-Verlag, 1871. Of illustrious Jewish origin, the family was ennobled and titled counts by the King of Prussia. Count Eduard von Keller became chamberlain, private councillor to the Czar and senator of the Russian Empire.

³ Honoré de Balzac's father, of humble origins, had changed his surname Balssa to pretend to be a descendant of the extinct Marquis de Balzac d'Entragues. Whereas the Riznicks were a Jewish family of Dalmatian origin. See "In an interview with Kira Victorova", archived at the *Wayback Machine*, 7 May 2013.

⁴ Saint-Yves, like most of the members of the occult milieu, was a snob in the technical sense of the term, being in fact by birth, despite the high opinion he had of himself, *sine nobilitate* (*s.nob.*): finally with a modest donation to an institution that took care of foundlings, he was able to appear as an aristocrat.



Like almost all the occultists of the second half of the 19th century, he had come close to the revolutionary theories of socialism¹. In fact, his first important work was the *Mission des Souverains*, immediately followed in the same year, 1882, by a *Mission des Ouvriers* in which he supported the legalisation of workers' unions. Partially distancing himself from contemporary socialism, in these two works he proposed as solution to all the political and social problems of the century, the freedom offered by a combined reinterpretation of Christianity² and the French Revolution, all unoriginally viewed in the light of Science. In these two works the author laid the first foundations for his theory of Synarchy³.



4. Hardjji Scharipf in an unlikely Turkish 'prince' costume

Another important book by Saint-Yves was the *Mission des Juifs*, an actual plagiarism of Fabre d'Olivet's *Histoire Philosophique du Genre Humain*⁴. In this work he described the process of degeneration of human history, which reached its lowest point with the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans and the consequent diaspora of the Jewish people⁵.

In the meantime, from 1885 onwards, he had come into contact with a bird seller from Le Havre, a certain Hardjji Sharipf (Hajji Sharif), obviously an Indian 'prince' in exile. Despite his clearly Islamic name, Hajji proclaimed himself "*Brahma Guru Paṇḍita* of the Great Agarthic School". From him Saint-Yves took private lessons of Sanskrit, mixing data from the Indian sacred language with Arabic and

¹ On the other hand, Saint-Yves was pathologically rebellious since his childhood, so much that his own parents (his father was a neurologist) had him locked up in the Mettray Correctional Home.

² An unrecognisable interpretation of Christianity, similar, although specularly opposite, to that of his contemporary, Baron Alexis de Sarachaga. In fact, while Baron Alexis de Sarachaga fantasised about a Jewish conspiracy going back to antediluvian times, Saint-Yves (although fiercely opposed to the Rotschild family, seen as the cause of all political, economic and social imbalance on the planet) took a firm stand in favour of Judaism.

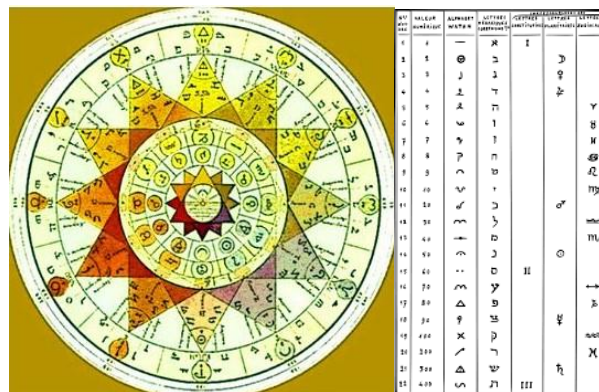
³ A political utopia promoting a supranational and interclass government, whose hierarchy is guaranteed by the degree of scientific and spiritual wisdom attained by the rulers. Public affairs are to be administered by a legislative, an economic and a religious council, all three coordinated by a 'metaphysical' council. The head of this government on the earth, as Saint-Yves would later reveal in his book *Mission de l'Inde*, must be approved and granted by the Pontiff of the underground kingdom of Agarttha.

⁴ It contains all of Fabre d'Olivet's nonsenses, such as considering Rāma to be the leader of the Celts!

⁵ In 1887 in the *Mission des Français*, Saint-Yves described the passing of the mandate to preserve the spiritual tradition from the Jews to the Catholic Church, which ruled the West until the Middle Ages. With the decline of the papacy, this mandate would then pass to France, specifically with the convocation in 1302 of the States General by Philip IV the Fair. Certainly, the choice of the latter as the champion of tradition shows how confused his ideas were.



Hebrew. Finally the ‘Guru Paṇḍita’ revealed to him the alphabet and the ‘Vattanian’ language in use in the underworld of Agarttha¹ which was, according to him, well known among the *brāhmaṇas* of India². In order to uphold his alleged self-initiation, Saint-Yves did not treat Hajji Sharif as a *guru* and, like the good rebel he was, he decided to visit Agarttha uninvited. He had, in fact, practised a discipline to separate the “astral body” from the gross one. As he himself explains in the introduction to his last book *Mission de l’Inde en Europe*, in doing so he had invisibly introduced himself into the underground kingdom, and admired its universities, the technology for light up the caves and the dense railway network of Agarttha. This daring intrusion would have brought him the reprobation and threats of the *brāhmaṇas* who guarded such precious spiritual secrets.



1. The Archeometer device and the Vattan alphabet

In imitation of humanists such as Lull and his prosecutors, Saint-Yves also invented a rotating mechanism based on numbers and various alphabets, including the Vattan, which answered any question on any subject. He called this mechanism the Archeometer³. The book that he was preparing on this utopian instrument appeared posthumously and incompletely in 1913 edited by the *Amis de Saint-Yves d’Alveydre*, i.e. Papus and his circle⁴.

¹ This word, undoubtedly non-existent in Sanskrit, seems to be the deformation of Asgaard (Æsir-gard, enclosure of the Gods) mentioned by Ernest Renan (*Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1876), who took inspiration from Norwegian sagas that placed that kingdom in Asia (interpreted as the land of the Gods, Æsir). The same source was used by Louis Jacolliot (*Les fils de Dieu*, Paris, Lacroix, 1875), who deformed the name of that mysterious kingdom into Asgartha, adding some details (the *Brahmātmā*, the Himalayan underground location, the secret knowledge about Asgartha of the *brāhmaṇa* of India), that later was adopted and expanded by Saint-Yves.

² Needless to add that such fantasies are completely unknown in India. And yet, there are those who still have the gullibility to claim that this information is highly confidential and that for this reason *paṇḍitas*, *gurus*, *saṃnyāsins* would not reveal it to their disciples even under torture. This is where the devout faith of fanatics leads to!

³ “La Genèse de l’Archéomètre : Documents inédits de Saint-Yves d’Alveydre rassemblés et introduits par Joscelyn Godwin,” *L’Initiation*, 2 & 4, 1988, pp. 61-71; 153-166.

⁴ However, a series of laudatory articles published in the journal of the Gnostic Church, *La Gnose*, directed by René Guénon, and also entitled *L’Archéomètre*, already provided a foretaste of the text. It consisted of a long and fragmented review written by various pens-alternating between imprecise considerations on the cosmic cycles of Hinduism, the theory of theosophic races and sub-races, pseudo-Qabbalistic considerations, with a bit of judicial astrology, and the ever-present Vattanian alphabet. At the prelude, all of them paid tribute to the memory of Saint-Yves as ‘Notre Maître’. No “traditional” person then asked: “Maître of what?” (*La Gnose. La Revue intégrale*, Paris, Ethos, 2020)





The death of his wife in 1895 was a severe blow to Saint-Yves. He dedicated to her a room in his palace in Versailles, and transformed it into a spiritist temple, where he had long conversations with the ghost of his beloved Marie Riznich¹.



5. Marie Riznich Marquise Saint-Yves d'Alveydre

He died in 1909 surrounded by the admiration and respect of his 'disciples'. Among them there were Dr. Gérard Encausse (Papus), René Guénon, "Maître Philippe", René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz², Georges-Albert Puyou de Pouvourville (Matgioi)³, Josefín Péladan, Paul Sédir, Albert Faucheux (François-Charles Barlet), John Gustaf Agelii⁴ and the Marquis Stanislas de Guaita, to name only the best known. This group of admirers was also 'initiated' into the use of opium by Matgioi⁵. After the death of Saint-Yves, the irreconcilable separation between the different currents of European occultism and esotericism began. Thus ended the occultist adventure of the bourgeois age.

Gian Giuseppe Filippi

¹ Their marriage is said to have been very happy, but Marie suffered much from ill health in her last years, and died on June 7, 1895. Towards the end of 1895, Saint-Yves installed an oratory in his apartment on the ground floor of 9 Rue Colbert, just opposite the Palace of Versailles, and had it consecrated with the correct Catholic method. On June 6, 1896, on the eve of the anniversary of Marie's death, he had a mass celebrated there, after which he had an ecstatic experience. He recorded it on a blank page of the Hermetic notebook which he had neglected for nine or ten years. This seems to have been the first reappearance of Marie, who appeared to him again on July 21, 1896 "in a blinding light," as he told Alfred Erny on August 16. This initiated a new period of researches, which would fill out this notebook and several others. Saint-Yves writes: "My wife demonstrated to me a definition of life and inspired me to find it in this grouping of the sacred letters." [It follows a series of letters from the Hebrew alphabet used by Saint-Yves to communicate with his wife's spirit]. "La Genèse de l'Archéomètre", *cit.*

² He took this second surname in honour of the Lithuanian diplomat Oscar Vladislav de Lubicz Miłosz. In this way, also Schwaller pretended to have been ennobled. Louis Charbonneau did the same, adding Lassay as his second surname after the village his family came from.

³ Although they were a noble family, the Pouvourvilles never held any comital title. (Jean-Pierre Laurant, *Matgioi, un aventurier taoïste*, Paris, Éd. Dervy, 1982). Matgioi was also recognised as "notre Maître". Thus, from the very beginning the "traditional" occultist current was equipped with supposed western masters from the exotic esoteric world.

⁴ Better known as 'Abd al-Hādī al-'Aqīlī, an opium addicted painter, anarchist, feminist and proto-animalist, he worked in Egypt for the Ottoman and Italian secret services. He claimed to be *muqaddam* of the *shaykh* 'Abd ar-Rahman Elish al-Kebir. (Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 59-69).

⁵ Matgioi also wrote *Le Livre de l'opium*, signed under the pseudonym Nguyen Te Duc, reissued by Guy Tredaniel, Paris, 2002. Stanislas de Guaita died of a drug overdose. V. Noële Maurice Denis-Boulet, "L'ésotériste René Guénon", *La Pensée Catholique*, 1962, n°. 78-79, p. 22.