

The F.A.R.+C and the Modern Alchemical Revival in Europe

Robert Word, VII^o

A visitor to France in the mid 1970's would have been struck by the numerous limited editions of old alchemical works to be found in the various esoteric bookstores, such as the Librairie des Medicis. Many of these editions appeared under cover of different publishing houses, so that there were well over twelve publishers of alchemical works in Paris alone at that time. The simultaneous appearance of so many different editions by numerous distinct publishers suggests an active current of alchemical practice within the esoteric milieu of that era in France. Also, consulting the artistic journals of that era will show that publications reflecting the surrealistic stream of art often contained advertisements for the alchemical literature, suggesting the appeal which the arcane traditions of alchemy held for the surrealistic artists of that era. Less well known is the fascination which alchemy held for a number of physical scientists and chemists within the francophone culture, and who have studied these traditions.

Thus, it would seem, that much more so than in the Anglophone culture, the esoteric streams in francophone culture within recent times have emphasized the alchemical aspects, including the physical operations which have as their goal the manufacture of the "philosopher's stone."

The numerous editions of alchemical books and other manifestations of the alchemical tradition cannot have been due to the casual and isolated interests of individuals, for this would have been unable to sustain it. We are thus led to consider the influence of esoteric societies of the Rosicrucian type in promoting and extending alchemical study and activity. Such societies form the nucleus of the outward cultural manifestations which one sees on a larger scale.

The Italian scholar Dr. Massimo Introvigne has studied extensively the manifestations of the various esoteric movements, including some of the little known or underground Rosicrucian sects which have contributed to the alchemical revival. Of these we will consider here briefly the F.A.R.+C, and its affiliated Church, the Universal Church of the New Alliance. As source of information, we shall paraphrase via translation the French and Italian works of Dr. Introvigne.^{1,2}

The Elder Brethren of the Rosy-Cross (F.A.R.+C, the initials of *Freres Aines de la Rose Croix*) lays claim to an old Templar origin, which is sometimes treated seriously by modern scholars.³ The F.A.R.+C was said to have been founded in the fourteenth century by Guidon de Montanor and Gaston de la Pierre-Phoebus, among Templar refugees in Scotland after the dissolution of their Order. (The first, and expert in alchemy, rapidly instructed the second.) Returning secretly to France, they continued their work, thus transmitting alchemical knowledge to succeeding centuries, including our own.

Authority was transmitted in highest secrecy from one Chief of the Order (styled Imperator) to another: there were among them physicians, chemists and occultists – such as, in recent times, Bulwer-Lytton, Eliphas Levi, William W. Westcott and Rudolph Steiner -- but equally, catholic bishops, including a “V. Depaul” that was none other than Saint Vincent de Paul. (For proof, it is alleged that, in a letter sent from the prison where he was held by the Turks, the saint affirmed that he had been made a slave of a Moslem who was devoted to alchemy.)

Each of these Chiefs, whoever they may have been, would have guarded with the highest secrecy his or her role as Imperator of F.A.R.+C. This history seems difficult to prove, even though the current F.A.R.+C – it would have decided to manifest itself more openly than ever before because of the peculiar apocalyptic quality of the time in which we live -- has indeed published a series of interesting pieces and documents which attest at the least to the old bonds which exist between alchemy, Rosicrucian tradition, and freemasonry.

The study of relationships between alchemy, the Rosicrucians and Christianity (the various stages of the public life and ministry of Jesus are held to correspond to stages of the alchemical “Great Work”) constitutes the distinctive trait of the F.A.R.+C, known in esoteric milieus for the effectively operative character of the alchemy which they teach. Thus, for example, the first degree of F.A.R. + C allows one to learn how to manufacture the “secret agent of salt” (H) from quicklime and the ash resulting from the combustion of the putrified wood of oak trees. The two components are mixed in water and one boils the blend that results with a slow fire; a “detergent” forms that, by evaporation, gives rise to crystals of the salt H, an indispensable element for the more complex ulterior operations.

Finally, the imperator Roger Caro (“Pierre Phoebus”, 1911 – 1992) was considered as an authority in alchemical matters; and, while the college of F.A.R.+C would be restricted to thirty-three initiates and would practice mainly an “external” alchemy, there would exist also, according to some, another even more shadowy college of twelve adepts who themselves practice the “internal” way.

The Order of the F.A.R.+C would appear to have a limited and discreet activity. The Universal Church of the New Alliance, a “small church”, is more open. Its patriarch was the same Roger Caro, who “because of numerous intercommunications and sub conditione consecrations was holder of twenty lines of apostolic succession” and who, in turn, was consecrated an archbishop. A “Collegia Al-Kimia” has spread more widely, beyond the limited circle of the F.A.R.+C, some aspects of their alchemical doctrines.

In addition to the F.A.R.+C, a number of other alchemical schools appear to be active in France today, which we mention briefly in passing. The alchemical teacher Sola Zaref founded an alchemical circle, which is still active. The writer Eugene Conselliet, who represented the quasi-Fulcanelli (alleged to have written the book *Les Mysteres des Cathedrales*, and to have made the philosopher’s stone), has a circle of students. Also groups such as l’Ordre Qabalistique de la Rose Croix (at present headed by Robert

Amadou) deliver alchemical instruction to their students. The writer Jean du Buis founded a school *les Philosophes de la Nature* which teaches students in France and the U.S. Lastly the unrecognized Masonic Rite of Memphis and Mizraim, headed by Gerard Klopel, successor of Robert Ambelain, which has a following of some 5000 members in France, instructs its members in Alchemy through the degree structure of that Rite.

We thus see that the modern French alchemical revival is associated with and supported by a number of organized groups, societies, and Rites having as their central focus the teaching and practice of *alchemy*. It appears to represent a Tradition which has existed for at least several hundred years in Europe, which is still active in France today, and which historically influenced a number of Masonic Rites, including the *Scottish Rite* and the *Societas Rosicruciana*.

References

1. La Magie, Les Nouveaux Movements Magiques, Massimo Introvigne, Drogue et Ardent, Paris 1993
2. Il Cappello del Mago; I Nuovi Movimenti Magici Dallo Spiritismo al Satanismo, Massimo Introvigne, SugarCo, Milan, 1990.
3. Les Secrets Hermetiques de la Franc-Maconnerie et les Rites de Misraim & Memphis, Michel Monereau, Editions Axis Mundi, Paris, 1989.