



New York College
Societas Rosicruciana
In Civitatibus Foederatis
Spring 2023



From the Chief Adept
RW R. Curtiss Montgomery, IX° et Philologus Zelator

Fratres, ego salutant vos,

Summer is drawing to a close, and I hope each of you have enjoyed the opportunities it offers to the fullest. Looking forward, our fall convocation is scheduled for Saturday, September 30th. More details and reminders will arrive in your inbox as we get closer to the date but mark your calendars now! Looking back, kudos to all fratres who attended or took part in the conferred of the Zelator grade at our summer convocation on July 29th. Welcome to our four new fratres, who are now full members of our College. It will be a pleasure for all of us as we confer, and they advance through the remaining six grades in the months to come.

Over the years we seem to have arrived at the optimal format for our convocations, one which is respectful of fratres time and delivers an interesting and varied program. Typically, we have, in no particular order, a practicum, a paper or presentation, and a grade conferral, punctuated by the usual fraternal luncheon, and all in a four-hour time window. All fratres of the College are welcome and encouraged to take an active part in any of these segments.

I look forward to seeing you in September.

LVX,

Curt



Northeast Regional Conference Rescheduled for April 27, 2024

For several years, The Southeast and West have held regional SRICF conference. This year one is planned for the Northeastern states.

This will be a one-day session, tentatively scheduled for **Saturday April 27th, 2024, in Albany, NY at the Desmond Hotel**

Planned activities include an intensive look at the Zelator Grade, including commentary on each part of the ritual, and guidance on furnishings and floorwork.

In the afternoon there will be four practicums/workshops, followed by a banquet and guest speaker.

Mark your calendars! Watch for more details coming soon!

From the Celebrant RW Richard Powell VIII° et Philologus Theoricus

Cari Fratres,

On July 29th, the New York College conferred the First Grade of Zelator on several new Fratres. We decided to mix things up a bit with Fr. Walter Cook IV, VIII° taking on the role of Celebrant for the Grade. We would like to do more of this with future conferrals. If there is a part that you would like to take in a Grade, please let us know. We don't require memorization but you should be familiar with the script and know how to pronounce everything properly.

Speaking of future conferrals, our next Convocation will be on Saturday, September 30th when we will confer the Second Grade of Theoricus. Parts in this Grade include Celebrant, Herald, Exponent, Ancient of Air, Ancient of Fire, Ancient of Water, Ancient of Earth and Lecturer on Colors. Fr. Steve Joyce has already claimed the Lecture. Let me know if you would like to participate.

Next up this fall will be the High Council session in Louisville, KY on November 10-11. Information & registration link can be found at sricf.org. Everything happens at the Brown Hotel but it fills up fast. Several of us often stay at the Hilton Garden Inn -Downtown Louisville as well. It's only a couple of blocks away and is a very nice hotel. Fr. Bob Bowles & I have already registered and will be driving from Syracuse. We may have room in the car for one or two more. Let me know if you would like to hitch a ride.

Our first Convocation of 2024 will likely be January 27th and it will be virtual. Fr. Myron & I are trying to get a special guest set up. We tried for last January but he had a conflict. Fingers crossed as he would be excellent. Other dates are being worked on.

If you can't get to Louisville or don't like to travel that far, we have a closer alternative for you. On April 26-27, 2024 there will be a Northeast Regional Convocation for the SRICF in Albany, NY! The schedule for this looks very interesting & we will have more information forthcoming. Block off your calendar for this weekend next April.

There is a lot going on! We are always looking for esoteric presentations for the College so if you have an idea, give me a shout and we can see about setting you up for one of our future convocations.

See you in September!

Sapere Aude...

Rick



From the Secretary

RW Myron J. Deputat, VIII^o et Philologus Adeptus Exemptus

Care Fratres,

I hope this message finds you well.

As we navigate through another exciting and productive period for New York College – SRICF, I wanted to take a moment to update you on our recent developments and upcoming plans.

First and foremost, I want to congratulate our four new fratres: Joel Martin, Richard Christian, Jamie Kaim & Matthew Bruno. Your ideas, insights, and willingness to participate in our various programs will help shape the path we take.

Looking ahead, we will be having our next grade conferred on Saturday, September 30th. Anyone interested in taking a part in the conferral should contact our celebrant Richard J. Powell directly. As always, your assistance is appreciated!

Communication is key to our success, so please keep an eye on your inbox and our communication channels for updates, announcements, and opportunities to get involved. If you have any questions or need assistance, feel free to reach out to me directly. I'm here to support you in any way I can.

Thank you for being an essential part of our college, and I look forward to our continued journey together.

LVX,

Myron



Websites of Interest

The High Council SRICF: www.sricf.org

There is lots of great information here, but particularly check out the Portal. Passcode is “chemweb” Here you will find lots of information on subjects related to the the Rosicrucian tradition.

Websites mentioned in Frater Cook’s presentation:

- SRIA: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Societas_Rosicruciana_in_Anglia
- Golden Dawn: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermetic_Order_of_the_Golden_Dawn
- Liber 777 Aleister Cowley: <https://archive.org/details/Liber777Revised/page/n29/mode/2up>

From the Editor

RW W. Bruce Renner, IX°, KGC, PJDSM et Philologus Adeptus Exemptus

Cari Fratres,

I have always maintained that Freemasonry is the outer most order of my spiritual path. While Freemasonry incorporates within its tradition a certain esoteric outlook, one that encourages brothers to look a little deeper and strive to know a little more, it is its curious blend of Judeo-Christian virtues and Stoic philosophy that provides a foundation for advancement on our quest for the Summum Bonum. It reminds us constantly that character determines destiny. For us to remain true to ourselves, to know is not enough. We must learn to separate the subtle from the gross, as the alchemist say.

In our newsletters we strive to bring you sources for reflection, but also methods to prudently evaluate. We are fully aware that everything won't resonate with you, because we are all unique. We are, however, committed to exposing you to as much as possible, as has been the case of Rosicrucian groups for centuries. We hope you will be an engaged student, and on occasion, a worthy teacher, as your title *Worth Frater* implies!

Our series on world religions is one such effort. Have you noticed that many of the same principles are found in all religions, albeit with some reframing? Have you found though something unique in each one that expands your Christian outlook, providing a different way of looking at some question that has always nagged you? Buddhism, the subject of this newsletter's overview, is at first glance, a direct challenge to Christianity. Yet many Christians have found inspiration in its teachings. Perhaps you will, as well.

Stay your Path!

Scire! Velle! Audere,! Tacere!
To Know, To Will, To Dare, To Remain Silent

LVX,

Bruce



I've been a fan of the *Art of Manliness* website and podcasts for many years. I regular receive messages from them. Some go right to my trash as they are more concerned with the pursuits of younger men, but many are of universal interest. A recent message (<https://artofmanliness.us10.list-manage.com/track/click?u=de21c7d1d490ef67077051042&id=adffbc994c&e=e336c390a9>) contained an interesting article, "7 Japanese concepts that can improve your life." They are *Kazen* (seeking continuous improvement), *Ikigai* (finding your purpose), *Oubaitori* (avoid comparison to others), *Wabi-Sabi* (embracing imperfection), *Hara Hachi Bu* (eating until you're 80% full), *Shikata Ga Nai* (accepting what you cannot change), *Shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing).

Want to know a bit more? Follow the above link!



College Happenings

At our Summer Convocation on Saturday, July 29th, we were delighted to find our attendance levels approach those of pre-pandemic times. Those who attended were given a jammed packed four hours of activities. It was also delightful to see many new faces in the officer line up.

First up was the conferral of the Zelator Grade on four aspirants with RW Frater Walter E. Cook, VIII° et Philologus Adeptus Major sitting as Celebrant. A practicum followed by our Secretary, RW Frater Myron J. Deputat, VIII° et Philologus Adeptus Exemptus using his singing bowls (a good fit for our current newsletter's look at Buddhism!).

Our usual pizza/salad/cookie lunch and fellowship hour was followed by an excellent paper by Frater Cook on "The Esoteric Use of Crystals."

You won't want to miss our next convocation on Saturday, September 30th.



Frater Cook as Celebrant addresses our four aspirants (l-r on front bench Richard Christian, Joel Martin, Matthew Bruno, Jaime Kaim)



Ancients and Aspirants



Frater Cook presents



Frater Deputat leading practicum



A closer look at sing bowls

Frater Cook becomes a Adeptus Major of the Societas Philologi

During our Summer Convocation, RW Frater Walter E. Cook, VIII° et Philologus Adeptus Minor reached the Adeptus Major level in the Societas Philologi. He is picture here receiving his certificate and the purple tassel of Adeptus Major from our Celebrant and Secretary. Congratulations to RW Frater Walter E. Cook, VIII° et Philologus Adeptus Major

Become more active in the College by writing a paper, giving a presentation, contributing to our infrastructure, or submitting an essay or book report for the newsletter. The Societas Philologi await you!



Buddhism

Part 2

In part 1 of this essay found in the last Newsletter, we introduced some of the ideas associated with Mahayana Buddhism. It represents a significant evolution in the basic teachings of the Buddha. One of these was the idea of celestial bodhisattvas and celestial Buddhas.

There is little reference to deities in the Buddha's teaching, and he rejected the idea of a creator God. We have observed, however, Buddhism was very syncretic i.e., combined and incorporated many ideas of other religions in addition to its own theology. The idea of celestial beings of some sort undoubtedly led to the idea of celestial bodhisattvas and Buddhas, perhaps borrowed from the pantheon of Hindu deities, and thus making Buddhism more acceptable in the predominately Hinduist culture of India.



The Dainichi, Todai-ji, Japan, Wikipedia

Just what are celestial bodhisattvas and celestial Buddhas. Advance practitioners of the Bodhisattva path (in the ninth and tenth stages) achieve extraordinary, superhuman powers. They are referred to as celestial Buddhas and bodhisattvas since these powers allow them to reside in the heavens. You may recall that bodhisattvas choose to stay on the wheel of life rather than advance to nirvana in order to help others. This compassion is rewarded by the devotion of their followers, and they are, indeed, the focus of devotion throughout the Mahayana world. This devotion is often expressed by the chanting of mantras such as *om manipadme hum* (sometimes translated as *Ah, the jewel of the lotus*) used particularly with the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. The power of the words in mantras has less to do with the meaning of the overall phrase and more to do with the power of the syllables. For example, *om* is a sacred syllable of the *Vedas* and *hum* is a sound that conveys that power. Another form of devotion is to make a meditative ascent to see a deity face-to-face.

The *Pure Land* tradition (see sidebar) associated with devotion to the Buddha Amitabha is highly popular in the overall Buddhist faith and is the largest Buddhist group in Japan today. It is a variation of salvation by faith and seems at odds with a tradition that places so much emphasis on self-reliance. In the Mahayana tradition, however, it is important not only to act with compassion, but to receive compassion from others. Bodhisattvas return many times over the course of many lifetimes to help others. The emphasis is one of helping a person get started on the way to awakening. Developing the faith to begin the path is more important than perfect wisdom which will come later. The importance of receiving compassion gratefully is also important as it makes possible a radical new view of salvation.

Another evolutionary step in Mahayana Buddhism concerns the idea of no-self. It should be recalled that the Buddha taught that attachment to self was the cause of suffering. In addition, the entire concept we have of self is false. In reality, we are transient and are different from moment to moment. The example often used is a drop of water in a river.

Mahayana Buddhist, however, went a step further by denying not only the idea of a permanent self, but also the reality of the momentary phenomena that make up the flow of personality. In this sense everything is “empty” (*shunya*) of identity (*svabhava* or *atman*). It will take little convincing that this idea of emptiness is a very paradoxical!

If everything is empty of real identity, there can be no real difference between any two things i.e., non-duality. There is then no difference between samara (wandering to find nirvana) and nirvana, and no difference between us and the Buddha. Understanding this means that nirvana is right here all the time if we can only understand it, and, therefore, we are already Buddhas! In this sense bodhisattvas don't turn away from nirvana for purely altruistic reasons, as there is no nirvana apart from samara. The difficulty for Mahayana Buddhists is to balance two different perspectives or truths: the ultimate reality of all things are empty, and nothing is real, and the perception of reality in everyday life. The doctrine of Emptiness became the focus of the Indian monastic tradition.

Tantric Buddhism

The Tantric tradition originated in India and can be found in elements of Hinduism, as well as Buddhism. In Buddhism, it is known as *Vajrayana* (Diamond Vehicle) and *Mantrayana* (Vehicle of Powerful Words). Tantric is variously translated as thread, loom or warp. It is best thought of as an extension of Mahayana Buddhism, although some think it is a parallel path or not really Buddhist at all!

The Tantric tradition takes the idea of Emptiness and its implied non-duality to the limit. If non-dualism means that everything is contained in everything then we must deal with the entire spectrum of being. There is not just the peaceful and serene Buddha, for example, but also a wrathful Buddha. Further we all have Buddha-hood, although we may not recognize it in life on the material plane.

Important Celestial Bodhisattvas and Buddhas

Avalokiteshvara (Lord Who Looks Down) is considered to be the great bodhisattva of compassion. In the Lotus Sutra, Avalokiteshvara is a protean deity who takes any form that is appropriate to save the person calling his name. In Tibet,

Avalokiteshvara is known as *Chenrezig* and takes the form of a monkey who was the progenitor of the Tibetan people. In Tibet and India, he is associated with Tara (the Protectress) who is a female manifestation of his compassion. He is also manifested in the succession of Dalai Lama. In China, Avalokiteshvara is known as *Kuan-yin* (one who hears sounds) and was associated with a female deity associated with granting children.

Maitreya is thought to be the Buddha of the future throughout the Buddhist world (including Theravada countries) who dwells in a Buddhist heaven known as *Tushita* (Pleasurable). One popular image of Maitreya is *Hotei*, the fat, laughing Buddha.

Ma-jushri (charming splendor) is the bodhisattva of wisdom and the patron deity of scholars.

The Buddha *Amitabha* (Infinite Light) is a particularly influential example of a celestial Buddha. He vowed when still a bodhisattva that when he became a Buddha, he would create a pure land known as *Sukhavati* (Pleasurable). Anyone who recollected his name, especially at the moment of death, would be reborn in this land.

Controlling negative emotions then starts with first acknowledging and then embracing/balancing both parts.

Another aspect of the tradition concerns sexuality. Is sexuality an illusion of our dualistic world, and like everything else are we really both males and female, or does male and female even have meaning in what might be termed the greater reality? Although much is made of tantric sexual practices such as the use of yab-yum images (male and female, father and mother) by Westerners unfamiliar with the tradition, such practices are but one small aspect of the broader traditional practice.

Tantric Buddhism has a strong monastic tradition to contemplate just such questions as above. The Tantric tradition is very practice oriented, so adherents practice various forms of meditation, *using mantras* to reduce the distractions of the material world, *mudra* or ritualized sacred hand gestures and yoga.



Buddhist monk creating a sand mandala, Wikipedia

One form of meditation involves the construction and meditation of a sacred circle *or mandala*. One classic form contains the images of four Buddhas in the cardinal directions with a fifth in the center representing ultimate reality. Another, involves a visualization of a bodhisattva or Buddha, and then imagining that the meditator becomes the deity.

Tantric Buddhism had enormous impact on Buddhists in India Japan, and China, but not in *Southeast Asia*, which we shall examine next.



12th century Japanese scroll showing different mudra gestures. Wikipedia

Buddhism in Southeast Asia

While Buddhism's genesis and initial evolution after the Buddha's death centered in India, its history there was brought to end by Islamic invaders around the year 1200. By then, however, Buddhism has spread to several other places. In the concluding part of this essay, we will briefly explore how Buddhism was realized in Tibet, China, Japan, and, in this section, Southeast Asia.

The Buddha's death led to disputes that created a number of sectarian movements known as *nikayas*. Only one is still active, the *Theravada* (Doctrine of Elders) which is the prominent form found in Southeast Asia. Prior to the arrival of Buddhism, Southeast Asia was dominated by pagan religions concerning spirits and ghosts. In Buddhism's syncretic fashion, it was able to integrate with these to such an extent that it was difficult to separate the two. Theravada Buddhism also developed a strong monastic tradition. The systemizing of Theravada Buddhism was accomplished by a great commentator of the period named *Buddhaghosa*.

Its survival can be attributed in large measure to its successful involvement in politics. Buddhism had developed a social model that involved having both religious leaders and societal leaders subscribe to the Buddhist worldview. The latter were termed *dhamma-raja* (righteous king). The prototype for this personage traditionally starts with King Asoka who reigned from 296 to 238 B.C.E. Early in his reign, he waged a particularly bloody war to conquer a small kingdom known as Kalinga. As the story goes, he was so appalled by the carnage that he converted to Buddhism and proclaimed himself a righteous king, protector of the Dharma, and advocated a policy of conquest by Dharma (*dhamma-vijaya*) rather than force of arms. It should be noted, however, that all this occurred *after* the conquest of Kalinga was complete! His son, to carry the story a bit further, is said to be the first Buddhist missionary to Sri Lanka. In fact, Asoka was said to have sent many missionaries out to spread the Buddha's teaching.

How much of the tale of King Asoka is true notwithstanding, it became a template in the Buddhist world of the relationship between kings and monks, each supporting the other. Kings help to ensure that monks and nuns didn't cause schism in the *Samgha* (Buddhist community) or become involved in or interfere with the affairs of state. It wasn't unknown for one to begin one's career

as a monk and later become a statesman. One example of this is King Mongkut of Thailand (R. 1851-1868), who was a monk for 25 years, and then, as king, instituted a reform movement to modernize Thai monastic life. Interestingly, part of his efforts involved the purging of superstitious practice and a return to a pristine model of the Pali canon, a reversal of prior efforts of syncretism. His son took this a bit further, extending it throughout the Thai Samgha and giving it the status of an official orthodoxy and national religion. This close alliance between church and state in Thailand continues today where Buddhist symbols, for example, are also symbols of the Thai nation.

There are other examples of this type of alliance throughout Southeast Asia, and one positive effect is making Buddhism of the common people and not just monks and nuns in monastic settings. On the negative side, however, are situations where Buddhism comes into conflict with another religion. Such was case in modern Sri Lanka where conflict began with British rule during the European colonial period. Here Buddhist identity was used to mobilize resistance to foreign rule. All well and good. When the British were expelled, the *samgha* wanted to established itself as the national religion but were resisted by Hindu minority communities. This led to years of bloody conflict to the detriment of both religions avowed moral principles.

Buddhism in Tibet

In India from about 600 to 1200 C.E there was a golden age of Buddhism. Its monasteries had large libraries, colorful rituals, and an elaborate monastic curriculum that not only covered Buddhism, but also topics such as astronomy and medicine. All of this was destroyed by Islamic raiders from present day Afghanistan. Although Buddhism was reduced to a very minor religion in India after that, it had been steadily sending missionaries out to other lands. The “First Diffusion” of the Dharma, as these missionary efforts were called, began in the 7th century. At this time, a line of kings in central Tibet united the various Tibetan tribes and began extending their military influence beyond Tibet, where they found lively Buddhist cultures in India, China, Nepal, and Central Asia.



King Asoka on his chariot Wikipedia

According to Buddhist tradition, King Songtsen Gampo (c. 609-49) invited one of his two Buddhist wives to help introduce the cult of the Buddha to Tibet. Initial attempts failed, and, so the story goes, the king had a dream that the body of a great demoness lay over all of Tibet which was preventing the Buddha from entering. In response, the King built several Temples that pinned down the demon. The greatest of these, the *Jokhang* was pinned to her heart in Lhasa, the capital. By subduing the demoness in this fashion, the King had created a mandala of Temples.

In the 8th century, during the reign of King Thrisong Detsen, the first Buddhist temple was built at Samye with the help of a Tantric saint Padmasambhava (known as, Guru Rinpoche – Precious Teacher). He was called upon to use his magic power to subdue demon opposition. After the construction was complete, the King called upon an Indian Scholar named Shantarakshita to establish the curriculum for his new monastery.

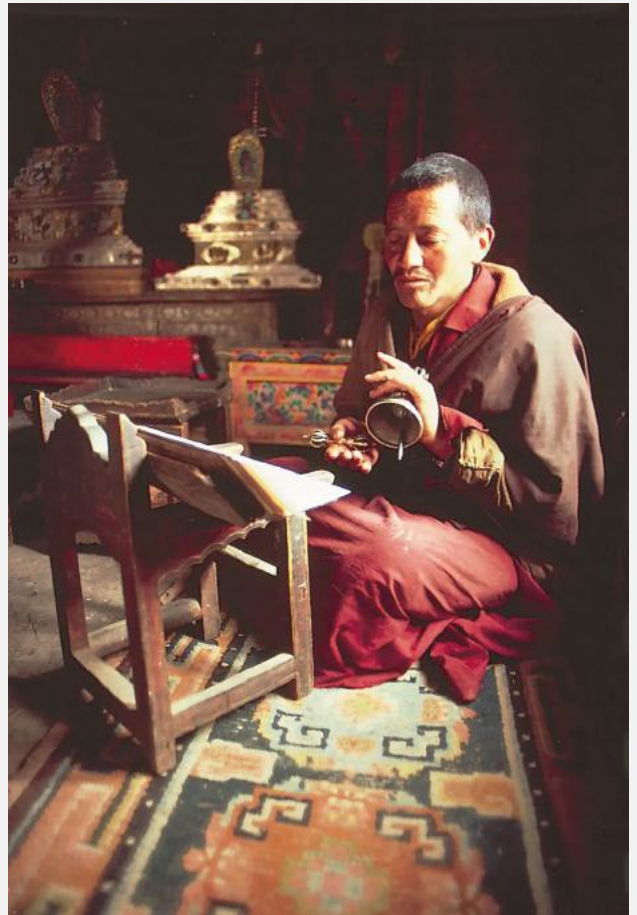
Tradition also informs us that Thrisong Detsen sponsored a debate between a Mahayana meditation master who advocated the practice of sudden awakening and an Indian master who advocated the practice of gradual awakening. The King decided in favor of the Indian side, and from then on oriented Tibet toward India.

The first Diffusion ended around 836 when a King named Langdarma attempted to suppress Buddhism. He was assassinated, and the line of Tibetan Kings was broken.

A period called the “Later Diffusion” took place in the 11th century, when monastic learning was reintroduced from Eastern India. These survive to the present day. A listing of the most prominent are found in the sidebar.



The current Dali Lama Wikipedia



A Tibetan Monk Wikipedia

Tibetan Traditions after the “Later Diffusion”

- The *Nyingma* School (“Old” School) tracing its origins back to the First Diffusion
- The *Kagyü* School (Teaching Lineage) having its origin to the Lama (guru) Marpa. Marpa’s disciple Milarepa (1040-1123) became one of Tibet’s most beloved saints.
- The *Sakya* School emerged in the 11th century under the leadership of Drogmi (992-1074)
- *The Geluk* School (Virtuous Way) also known as the yellow hats in reference to their unusual headdress, emerged in the 14th century under the leadership of the scholar Tsongkhapa.

Most familiar to non-Buddhists as a representative of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism is the Dali Lama. The present Dali Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the 14th Dali Lama in a tradition that goes back to the 14th century. The title “Dalai Lama” was given to the 3rd member of the lineage, Sonam Gyatso (1543-1589), by a Mongol leader named Altan Khan. The “Great Fifth” Dalai Lama (1617-1683) made the Dalai Lamas the spiritual, as well as, temporal or political, leaders of Tibet – thus bringing the ideal of the righteous king and the charismatic monk together in the same person. The 13th Dalai Lama (1876-1935) was the first to become enmeshed in international politics, which has become an increasingly burdensome responsibility for the current, 14th Dalai Lama. For his efforts of peaceful resistance to Chinese rule in Tibet he won the Nobel Prize in 1989. He remains in exile in India.



Frater Renner at the Yellow Crane Tower, Wuhan, China, 2006

Buddhism in China

Buddhist monks entered China toward the end of the Han Dynasty (approximately 220 C.E.) via the Silk Road, some 500 years before Tibet. The Han Dynasty was a golden period in Chinese history and was closely tied to an ideological synthesis known as Han Confucianism, based on the teachings of Confucius (c. 500 B.C.E). We haven't considered Confucianism yet in these essays, but it had in broad brush a very organized way of looking at the divine and mundane aspects of life. The societal focus was on family, society viewed as a harmonious whole, respect for elders, and the proper performance of ritual, which addressed both the significant and many of the less significant aspects of life.

By the middle of the 2nd century, the Han synthesis began to fall apart, providing an opportunity to introduce new ideas. Nevertheless, there remained significant barriers, but ones which Buddhists overcame by their usual willingness to adapt. Sanskrit and Chinese were radically different languages and expressed radically different systems of thought. One way that Buddhist monks address this was to carefully map Sanskrit to Chinese to make it easier to express ideas of Buddhism and Indian culture in a context familiar to Chinese audiences. For example, the Sanskrit word *dharma* (teachings) was matched to the Chinese word *tao* (way). Offensive concepts were often omitted, while others that played to Chinese tastes were emphasized. For example, Chinese social values emphasized the family, while Buddhism stressed the rejection of family as part of the path to awakening. Buddhists, therefore, related the story of the bodhisattva Vimalakirti, who maintain loyalty to the family while pursuing the path of the Buddha.

Although Buddhism and Confucianism were an uneasy fit, the Taoist tradition was far more compatible. Taoism was already an established religion in China, but unlike Confucian emphasis on public virtue and activity, Taoism was based on inactivity and contemplation in one's religious life. Furthermore, like Buddhism, Taoism had a difficult to grasp intuitively theology that was, at times, inexpressible in words, and the Buddhist reverence for simplicity, renunciation, and emptiness made it highly compatible with Taoism. There was a bit of collaboration at work, as Buddhism provided some missing pieces for the Taoist, such as a deeper understanding of the self, while Taoism idea made Buddhism more pragmatic, gave it a new perspective on the importance of nature, and made it more amenable to the possibility of sudden enlightenment.

By the time of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907) Buddhism had become the dominate religious tradition in China. Several important Buddhist schools developed in this period including the meditation tradition of *Ch'an* (*Zen* in Japan). The Ch'an tradition's distrust of words, love of paradox, and emphasis on direct person-to-person transmission of insight had much in common with Taoism.

Mahayana devotional traditions also had great influence during the T'ang Dynasty. It offered an alternative to the austere practices of Ch'an for the elite intelligentsia, and a promise of salvation in Amitabha's land for peasants and villagers. For many people, the concept of bodhisattva offered not just an answer to the question of salvation and rebirth, but also offered assistance with the concerns of this life, such as childbirth or prosperity in a family, similar to the concerns of Confucianism.



Buddhist monastics and laypeople chanting sutras in the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, Singapore
Wikipedia

Buddhism has had a broad influence on Chinese literature and arts. China is also responsible for the spread of Buddhism to Vietnam where a lively tradition of Ch'an took root, as well as a reverence for Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Buddhism in Japan

Buddhism entered Japan in the 6th century C.E. from Korea, under similar circumstances that it had found in China a few hundred years earlier. Like China, this presented opportunity and obstacles. The Japanese actually turned to China for some ideas, but they also had different orientations and different needs.

The indigenous religion of Japan was *Shintoism* that embraced a nature and spirit worship. The deities in Shinto are called *kami*. The primary kami was the sun

goddess *Amaterasu*. The rising sun symbol associated with Japan is tied to this deity, who is understood to be present in the lineage of the emperors. Shinto presented a definite challenge to Buddhism, but Buddhism inherent syncretism eventually won out, and the two were seen as complementary. Most religious Japanese today embrace both Shintoism and Buddhism.

The first significant figure in Japanese Buddhism was Prince Shotoku (573-621). He was responsible for a process of political reorganization, much of which was based on Confucian models. However, he was also a devout Buddhist, and thought it was a vehicle to unify the nation and promote the welfare of the people. He expressed these beliefs in a manifesto called the *Seventeen-Article Constitution*.



Tōdai-ji Kon-dō, Nara, Japan Wikipedia



Ryoan Ji, Kyoto Zen garden, Wikipedia



Japanese Buddhist monk from the Sotō, Wikipedia

During the Nara period (710-784, named after the city that served as the imperial capital) Buddhism effectively became the state religion. Emperor Shomu (r. 724-49) sponsored a series of building projects that gave special prominence to Buddhism as an instrument of national policy. He constructed the *Todai-ji* (Great Eastern Temple) thought to be the largest wooden building in the world, built to house a colossal bronze statue of the Buddha, known as *Dainichi* (Great Illumination). This is the Japanese version of the Buddha, *Vairochana* (Buddha of the Sun). There is agreement between Buddhists and Shintoists that the sun goddess Amaterasu is identical to the Sun Buddha.

At the end of the Nara period, the capital was moved to Kyoto, and Japan entered the *Heian* period (794-1185), a time of peace, prosperity, and courtly sophistication. Two important Buddhist schools were founded during this period. Kukai or Kobo Daoshi (774-835) established the *Shingon* (True Word) School. It is based on the *Chen-yen*, a Chinese version of the *Mantrayana* (Vehicle of Powerful Words). Shingon is a Japanese translation of Mantrayana and features popular rituals that were both elaborate and colorful.

Saicho or Dengyo Daishi (762-822) founded the *Tendai* School. It stressed the importance of the Lotus Sutra and used the teaching of “one vehicle” as a unifying principle, both political and religious.

The Kamakura period (1192-1333) saw three new schools that changed the face of Japanese Buddhism. This was a turbulent period and once again brought challenges and opportunities. One challenge was the embracing of *mappo*, and ancient Buddhist idea that preached that it was no longer possible to hope for salvation in a traditional way.

In response Honen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1173-1262) who were *Pure Land* reformers, preached a radical reliance on the grace of Amitabha Buddha. For his part, Honen believed that it was no longer possible to rely on one’s own efforts to achieve salvation. The only way was simply to trust in the grace of Amida Buddha. Shinran took this idea to a radical extreme.

A third reformer, Nichiren (1222-1281), felt that the Lotus Sutra was the key to the Buddha’s teaching, and he preached that Japan could only be saved by a reliance on the Lotus Sutra.



A Japanese meditation hall, Wikipedia

The last movement of this period is *Zen* which is derived from the *Ch'an* Buddhism in China. It is probably the best known to Westerners. It took shape under the influence of two reformers. The first, Eisai (1145-1215) developed a tradition known as *Rinzai Zen*, which uses the discipline of *koan* practice to achieve sudden awakening. A koan is a puzzle meant to stop the mind in its tracks, with such questions as “what is the sound of one hand clapping?”

Dogen (1200-1253) thought the koan practice put too much stress on achieving awakening, as if it were different from ordinary experience. He emphasized the practice of *zazen* (sitting meditation) instead. He taught one to concentrate on the experience of the moment. If reality exists anywhere, it exists in the infinitesimal moment of the present. If someone wants to be awakened, he or she must find that awakening in the present moment of experience.

Final thoughts and epiphanies

The Buddha was part of Indian culture. Although I have tried to stay away from comparative religion in these essays, instead letting each religion speak for itself, it must be understood that Buddhism emerged in a country that already had a dominant religion, Hinduism, for a few thousand years. It would have been impossible for the Buddha not to be inspired in part by some of the precepts of Hinduism. We have also seen that Buddhism's success was due in part to its syncretism, adopting many insights and practices of already established religions into its own practices. Furthermore, this adoption wasn't simply bolting on a new practice or changing a few names here and there to force a conformance. Rather it was a deep philosophical and theological integration, and this process is certainly part of Buddhism's secret sauce.

It is clear from our explorations of religions so far, that people look to religion to provide insight into two subjects: suffering and salvation, and beyond insight, resolution. The Buddha went so far as to say that the world was basically one of suffering. Furthermore, he adopted the Hindu precept that we will repeat our lives through reincarnation until we reach a perfected state of nirvana. This process is seen as a burden. To escape it, the Buddha defined a virtuous life through the Noble Eightfold Path. However, key to understanding and escaping reincarnation into this world was to realize that our attachment to self was the primary cause of suffering. Giving up the egotism of self was key to reaching nirvana.



Tablets of the Tripitaka Koreana, an early edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon, in Haeinsa Temple, South Korea Wikipedia

The self was considered an illusion by the Buddha, but later Buddhists carried this much further by developing the concept of emptiness. According to this precept, all things, ideas and events are empty because they do not cause or define themselves but arise and cease due to conditions. Thus, the perception we have of reality is an illusion as well. We see ourselves as a persistent “me” where in reality we change from moment to moment. This is a difficult idea to convey, and it is recommended for those interested to study various sages, until one finds an expression of the idea that resonates with them.

The Buddha’s thinking didn’t embrace the idea of a creator god and considered the universe as having always existing and eternal. There is no consideration of reward or punishment in the afterlife or of a heaven and a hell. Rather there is a sense of levels of being, and there are beings at a higher and a lower level of being, all of which are subject to change. Buddhist, for this reason, hold all life sacred, as all life has an opportunity to transcend their current existence. Among the higher beings are Buddhas and bodhisattvas which are venerated. Overall, Buddhist are very concern not with the future or past, but the present. The focus is on one’s current situation, not an imagined afterlife.

Two other core ideas of Buddhism are worth remembering as epiphanies in this series. The first is that we all have within us a Buddha nature. It is not so much acquired as discovered through a process of awakening, perhaps gradual, perhaps sudden, on the wheel of life. Second, the Buddha very much recognized the nature of our dualistic world, advocating a familiar idea of a Middle Way. Later, the concept of emptiness held dualism to be an illusion.

Finally, Buddhist methodologies such as meditation and the use of koans have received a great deal of interest from spiritual seekers regardless of religious affiliation. Buddhist meditation is focused on clearing the conscious mind or disengaging it entirely through the use of the paradoxical koans. In this, it differs from contemplative practices found in other religions.

Further Study

Without proof, I suggest that it is unlikely that any religion, except for Christianity, and possibly, Judaism, has more English texts devoted to it than Buddhism. There are many books available from the *Buddhism for Dummies* variety, to the 8-volume study, *Classics of Buddhism and Zen* translated by Thomas Cleary and published by Shambhala.

This essay, like several others in this series, is based on a 6-hour course offered by Wondrium (wondriumcircle.com) *Great World Religions: Buddhism* taught by Professor Malcolm David Eckel of Boston University. It includes an 85-page study guide. Consider this essay my course notes. If you want to go deeper, I recommend starting here. Wondrium offers a number of other courses on Buddhism and related subjects. You can buy courses individually, but if you are a committed adult learner, consider a low-price subscription that provides access to all offered courses (well over 1000).



In bibliothecam

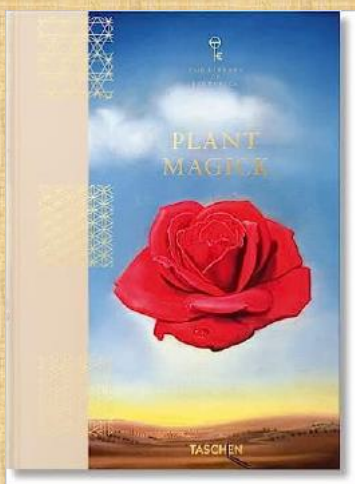
I came upon the *Library of Esoterica* published by Taschen America LLC quite by accident as is often the case while wandering Barnes and Noble. I'm going to review two of the four books so far in the Library, *Plant Magick* and *Astrology* (the other two are *Tarot* and *Witchcraft*). First, however, I want to address the series in general.

I was initially attracted to these books because they reinforced a conclusion I have reached over the years: that my interest in the esoteric is rooted in my childhood exposure to art and literature where all things imagined are possible. These books run about 500 pages each and are largely made up of works of art supportive of the topic discussed. This makes them what the publishing industry refers to as coffee table books, and indeed one can lightly browse them in off moments. I, however, have read them cover to cover, and note, *there is* a fair amount of text both as essays and captioning for the art.

The books aren't for those seeking to be practitioners of the various disciplines discussed. It is rather for those interested in an overview of the subject through the lens of artistic experience. The level of detail and focus varies from volume to volume, however, where some are more historical and some focused more on symbols and meaning.

The books are currently available only in nicely bound hardcover editions. The paper is also of a heavy quality, so much so that I often found myself checking the page number because I thought I had turned two pages instead of one.

One hopes that Taschen will add more volumes to the *Library of Esoterica* as time goes by.



Plant Magick

By

Jessica Hundley (author)

and Pam Montgomery (forward)

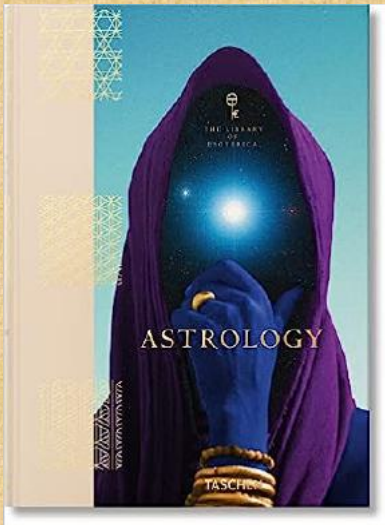
Of the four books in the series, this is the subject I know the least about. Yes, plants do play an important part in practical esoteric work, whether in the country magic of the witch, shaman, or druid or the city magic of spagyrics, the biological branch of alchemy concerned with the creation of elixirs. It's just not something I was drawn to, at least to be a practitioner.

I found, though, that the title is a bit misleading. Of the four books, this is one that addresses a subject that has significance in many other aspects of our lives beyond the esoteric. The study and use of plants was one of the earliest pursuits of science and medicine, and they have played heavily in the mundane rituals of everyday life. They are intrinsic to our survival as we eat of their bounty and breathe what they exhale – and vice versa. Our decorative use of plants bring a joy to our aesthetics, and in gardens, forests, and glens we find solace. All of these things are brought out in limited detail in five chapters:

- Roots of Connection – People and Plants
- The Seeds Are Sown - Sacred Symbolism in Nature
- Germination and Growth – Plants in Healing & Ceremony
- The Blossom Opens – Plants and High States
- Pollinating Consciousness – Plants and Culture

The problem is that there is too broad a net cast here, and the book never finds a true footing in the Magick part of the title. There is virtually no direct mention of either country or city magic's use of plants, so for that one must look elsewhere. This doesn't mean, of course, that this book might not be of interest, just that it ultimately doesn't fulfill the promise of its title.

Understanding the scope and limitations involved, cautiously recommended.



Astrology

by

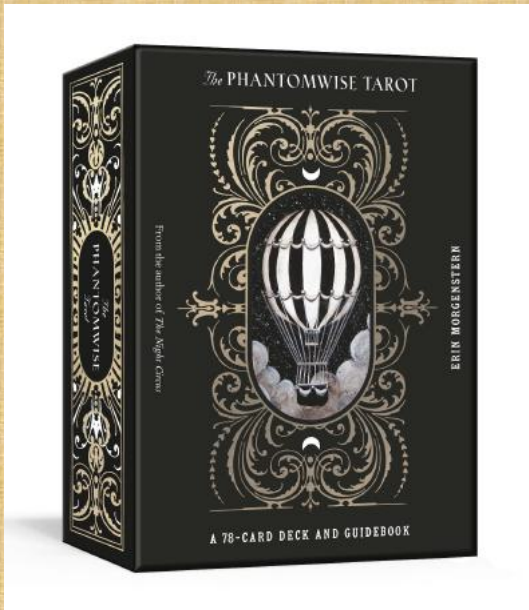
Andrea Richs (author) and
Thunderwing (contributor)

Astrology never had much appeal to me, but it is hard to avoid in esoteric studies. This book is really a quite interesting overview of the subject, and effectively uses art to bring the subject matter to life in a different way. While Tarot is the poster child for the esoteric expressed through art, astrology also lends itself to this medium. While this isn't meant to be a practitioner's book, it actually does a pretty fair job of explaining the fundamentals, particularly in the interpretation of the planets, the zodiac and charts. There are four chapters:

- As Above, So Below – an Astrological Evolution
- The Language of the Heavens – The Cosmos Speaks (an overview of the planets)
- The Wisdom of the Wheel – Exploring the Zodiac
- Meaning in Motion – Interpreting Celestial Messages

Artistic treatment for each of the planets and zodiac figures is well illustrated by art new and old. There is a short essay, and, most helpfully, a listing of correspondences for each.

Like all the books in this series there is an extensive bibliography, which should provide a next step of study for those so inclined. I think this would serve as an excellent introduction to someone unfamiliar with the subject, but the artwork and unique approach would likely interest the more knowledgeable. **RECOMMENDED**



The Phantomwise Tarot Deck
By
Erin Morgenstern

You may have noticed that our book reviews have stayed away from reviewing modern fictional literature that incorporate esoteric themes. There is certainly an abundance of titles available, many of which are cracking good stories. Mostly though, they don't add much to your esoteric knowledge as such, although it can be fun evaluating how much the author puts into research. There are exceptions though. I have come to a conclusion in my own work that both literature and art, where after all what can be imagined can be expressed, really gives us that sense of wonder as a child, and if we are diligent, we can preserve it in some measure throughout our lives. Some authors do, in fact, take us to a new place, one that is not just a transplanted western or mystery novel, but to a world that looks a bit different.

I can't say that you will acquire a lot of new esoteric knowledge in a curriculum sense, but such is the power of Ms. Morgenstern's writing that it will take you, momentarily at least, elsewhere, and a quite different elsewhere at that. I found the experience of reading *Night Circus*, her first book to be a delight. (She has a second novel *The Starless Sea*, on my intend to read list!)

Another way to access her otherworldly mind is through her Phantomwise Tarot deck. It is not unusual for Tarot practitioners to create their own decks. Not all of them publish their decks, of course. Some decks are also created by artists who may not have an interest in actually using the deck but find the idea of creating 78 pieces of archetypal art too much to resist. Ms. Morgenstern seems to be a little of each as according to *The Blog of Awesome Women*, she is a Tarot and Astrology practitioner, and she certainly is an artist.

This deck is average priced as decks go but is produced on good paper stock and well packaged. The art is rendered in black/white/gray, and is less complex than many decks, but the images clearly illustrate their intent, and reflect the kind of imagination present in *Night Circus*.

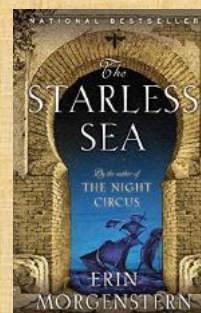
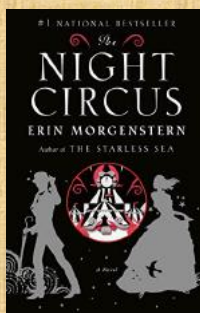
Ms. Morgenstern claims that you can use the standard attributions of the Waite-Coleman-Rider deck, but the accompanying booklet has some delightful and whimsical thoughts about each card as well. Although not my first choice for readings, there are some interesting suggested spreads, and this just might be the deck to use for some readings. Beyond that, the cards are interesting as a meditative focus.



For my own part, I particularly like the uncluttered look of these cards. So many decks try to get every single idea they ever had onto one card. The color scheme, or lack thereof, also provides an interesting variation from the majority of decks, with a certain simplicity, that makes meditative use more focused. The cards are certainly easier to visualize.

If you have an interest in tarot, want something new in your meditative work, or just like art, this deck is a rewarding investment. For those folks **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**.

Books by Erin Morgenstern



Have you read an esoteric book lately? Why not write a book review?

We are always looking for material for the Newsletters. Most of the time, the same few people contribute. New voices mean new insights and equally important contribute to the Newsletter's and College's long-term continuity.

**Philologi Societas
(in order of initial induction)**

VW Frater Joseph F. Oelgoetz, VII° et Philologus
Theoricus**

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Theoricus **

RW Frater Gerald T. Coleman, VIII° et Philologus
Theoricus

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Philologus Adeptus Exemptus

VW Frater Marlon Gayadeen, VII° et Philologus
Zelator

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et Philologus Zelator *

VW Frater Charles Hancock, VII°
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RW Frater Walter E. Cook, VIII° et Philologus
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VW Steven J. Joyce VII° et Philologus Zelator

IN WAITING

RW Frater Walter E. Cook, VIII° et Philologus
Adeptus Major (for Adeptus Exemptus)

VW Frater Josh Newman, VII° (for Zelator)

* Deceased

** Not now a member

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Saturday, September 30, 2023

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September 30th**