

The Masonic Roots of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

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THE HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN WAS FOUNDED IN LONDON as a secret school where esoterically inclined adults of the late Victorian era – largely middle-class individuals, including some well-educated professionals, artists, and Anglican clergy – learned and practiced ritual magic.¹ The question of the influences at work in forming the Golden Dawn is an important one, because the original order and its members have had a surprisingly high impact on 20th- and early 21st-century culture, especially in English-speaking countries (a point to which I return below). Although it has often been observed that the founders of the Golden Dawn were Freemasons, the full extent of Masonic influence on the development of this important magical order has rarely been noted. Indeed, it is my contention that every important characteristic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was anticipated in some Masonic group known to the founders. In turn, this finding has consequences for our understanding of the past, present, and potential future of Freemasonry.

I begin by describing the Golden Dawn, its impact on 20th and early 21st century culture, and its founders. I then outline several signature characteristics of the Golden Dawn, and explain how each of these characteristics has its root in Freemasonry. Then I presume to draw some lessons from this analysis, for the Freemasonry of our day.

THE GOLDEN DAWN & ITS CULTURAL IMPACT

The Golden Dawn was devoted to learning about and practicing ceremonial magic. Ritual or ceremonial magic involves the use of ritual with the intent of bringing about changes in the external and internal worlds.² These changes might involve healing, spiritual development or other forms of personal growth, divination, contact with spiritual beings, and so forth. As Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabatha Cicero, two leading esotericists, have described it:

Magic is the art and science of causing change to occur in conformity with will. This change can occur 1) in the outer, manifest world; 2) in the magician's consciousness; and 3) most often in both, for changing one often changes the other. Magical change occurs in a way that is not currently understood by modern science because it works through the Unmanifest – through subtle manipulations of the invisible, spiritual realms. However, the workings of magic are subject to natural law. The effects of magic are sometimes clearly visible in the physical world and other times they are only apparent on a personal, spiritual level. The workings of magic are not limited by the constraints of time and space. (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, pp. 70–71)

For an organization that lasted for only 15 years in its original form (about 1888 to 1903), the Golden Dawn has had a surprising degree of impact on 20th and early 21st century American culture. This impact may be seen in at least three areas: the lives and productions of figures in the arts and literature who were members of the original Golden Dawn; the influence of the Golden Dawn on the counterculture of the 1960s and the New Age movement that became prominent beginning in the 1980s; and, the influence of the original Golden Dawn on subsequent magical groups. I address each of these points below.

GOLDEN DAWN CULTURAL FIGURES

The original Golden Dawn exerted an indirect influence on society through the cultural activities of its members.³ These include noted figures connected with

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the English or Irish stage, including Florence Farr, Annie Horniman, and Maud Gonne. The most famous literary figure connected with the Golden Dawn was the poet, William Butler Yeats, who was long a member of the group. Other Golden Dawn literary figures included Arthur Machen (a writer of stories of occult horror) and, especially, Algernon Blackwood (who wrote many stories involving magic and the occult that were apparently influenced by his association with the Golden Dawn), as well as John William Brodie-Innes (who also wrote stories of occult horror).⁴ Several Golden Dawn figures associated with literature have in turn influenced many other writers.⁵

The Golden Dawn also made an unintended cultural contribution through a notorious scandal associated, not with a specific Golden Dawn figure, but with a pair of charlatans. In 1900, a couple calling themselves Mr. and Mrs. Horos presented themselves to the head of the Golden Dawn as if they were emissaries of the secret and unseen Chiefs of the magical order. They somehow obtained the Golden Dawn rituals and used them to establish their own group, which involved sex and extortion. This in turn led to charges of rape, and a court case that resulted in the public exposure of the existence of the Golden Dawn, as well as some of its rituals; this exposure was conducted in a particularly sensationalistic manner through the media of the day.⁶

Through the Madame Horos scandal, the Golden Dawn inadvertently introduced the meme – the cultural theme or mental ‘virus’ (S. Blackmore, 1999) – of a secret magical school into popular culture, particularly in England where the scandal occurred. It is not too much to wonder whether, if the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn had never existed – if there had been no “HOGD” – whether there ever would have been a *Hogwarts*. (The latter, of course, is the school of magic featured in the Harry Potter novels, e.g., Rowling, 1997/1999. This meme has appeared in other popular and literary novels, as well, e.g., Grossman, 2009.)

INFLUENCE ON THE COUNTERCULTURE AND THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT

The Golden Dawn broadly influenced two American social currents of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. These are the counterculture of the 1960s and the New Age movement.

The 1960s counterculture was a complex phenomenon.⁷ For many of its participants, an interest in magic and supernatural forms of power were a part of this multifaceted movement. For example, Carlos Castaneda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan* was published in 1968, as the first of several books by this author that

purported to reveal the teachings of a Yaqui Native American shaman who practiced magic; the book was extremely popular in its time, and is still in print over 40 years later. Various practices that became more popular during this period were, at least in part, expressions of a desire to explore the limits of human consciousness; these included such disparate practices as meditation; Asian, neopagan, and other unconventional religious observances; and the use of psychedelic drugs. In this context, accounts of the Golden Dawn's rituals were of interest within the counterculture. For example, the brief account of the Golden Dawn given in Richard Cavendish's luridly titled 1967 book *The Black Arts* (Cavendish, 1967, pp. 37–40) appears to have been read widely in the counterculture; tellingly, this book is still in print, over four decades after its initial publication.

The New Age movement also is a complex phenomenon, with roots stretching back through the 1960s counterculture to the French occult revival of the late 19th century, at the least. However, the New Age was first noted as a widespread American cultural phenomenon beginning in the 1980s. The magical system used within many Wiccan groups, which came to prominence in American culture with the New Age, owes a great deal to the Golden Dawn system (Kelly, 2007, p. 46).

It has been observed that the Golden Dawn's highly disciplined and structured approach to the esoteric was less favored in the United States, which preferred other approaches with mass appeal (Horowitz, 2009). However, it is noteworthy that several aspects of the Golden Dawn curriculum – Kabbalah, divination, magical ritual – gained visibility in American popular culture with the New Age movement; the recent increase in the number of popular books about alchemy is of relevance because this, too, was part of the Golden Dawn curriculum.⁸ Indeed, books about the Golden Dawn – as well as books about meditation, Kabbalah, alchemy, divination, ceremonial magic, and Wicca – now appear together in the “New Age” or “Metaphysics” sections of chain bookstores.⁹

That staple of New Age paraphernalia – decks of fully illustrated Tarot cards – largely descend from the first such deck to become popular, the so-called Rider-Waite deck. First published in 1910 (seven years after the demise of the original Golden Dawn) and then reissued in 1971 (*The Rider Tarot Deck: Instructions*, 1971), the Rider-Waite deck became a permanent fixture of the American counterculture and then the New Age movement. As it happens, this deck was illustrated by Pamela Coleman Smith, under the direction of Alfred Edward Waite, both of whom were members of the original Golden Dawn (Kaplan, 1972,

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p 62); the Golden Dawn had included work with Tarot cards and other forms of divination in its magical curriculum (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, pp. 167, 187–99).

INFLUENCE ON SUBSEQUENT MAGICAL GROUPS

It certainly appears that the Golden Dawn left a permanent stamp on the practice and study of magic as pursued within the Western world, in part through the several esoteric organizations that spun off from the original Golden Dawn after its demise in 1903.¹⁰ As the Ciceros have put it:

No organization has had a greater impact on Western Ceremonial Magic than that of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.... One would be hard-pressed to find a magical Order in the U.S. or Europe that has not borrowed heavily from the teachings of the Golden Dawn.... [N]early every portion of the Golden Dawn's curriculum of study has permeated and been absorbed into modern Western magic and esoteric belief. Standard Golden Dawn rituals and exercises, such as the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram and the Middle Pillar Exercise, have been virtually co-opted by numerous other magical fraternities, wiccan circles, and even New Age groups. (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, p. xv)

FOUNDERS OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

Much can be learned about an organization from the characteristics of those who established it. The three founders of the Golden Dawn in 1888 were William Robert Woodman, William Wynn Westcott, and Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers. We shall also consider here Kenneth Mackenzie, who seems to have had much to do in forming the rituals of another organization in which all four of these men held national office, the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA), that is, the Rosicrucian Society in England¹¹; Mackenzie, in turn, may have had input into the rituals of the Golden Dawn.

Because the SRIA was an important predecessor to the Golden Dawn, it is important to understand the SRIA's characteristics, as well. As described about two decades after its founding:

The "Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia" was constituted in its present form about the year 1865, and has become the parent of similar societies in Scotland, Ireland, Canada, and in the United States of America. It is not a masonic degree in any sense, although its members (*fratres*), are necessarily Master Masons, and a ritual of admission is made use of.... Its purpose is the scien-

tific and literary, historical and archaeological investigation of the occult wisdom of the ancients, the origin of the mysteries, of secret societies, and of the lost sciences and arts of alchemy, astrology, the Kabbalah, the hieroglyphic literature of Egypt, etc. Essays are read at the meetings, discussion is invited, and old and curious books, pictures, etc. are exhibited.

... Those most interested in the penetralia [i.e., the innermost or most private things], have certain curious secret esoteric doctrines and occult lore, which are retained as the prize to be won by aspirants, after a considerable period of probation. (Westcott, 1886–1888b, p. 54)

William Robert Woodman, M.D., was a medical practitioner in private practice and for the police (Westcott, 1892, 1900). Woodman was initiated a Freemason at St. George's Lodge No. 112, in Exeter, England, in 1852. A Past Provincial Grand Steward of Middlesex, he was appointed Grand Sword Bearer in 1875. He was admitted to the SRIA in 1867, essentially upon its creation, and in 1878 he became the society's head officer, the Supreme Magus, of which he was only the second in the society's history; he served in that office until his death in 1891. Woodman contributed several scholarly articles to the transactions of the SRIA's Metropolitan College (London), and to *The Rosicrucian*, the SRIA quarterly, which Woodman edited for eleven years.

William Wynn Westcott, M.D., was Coroner for North East London, and an author of several medical books ("In Memoriam," 1925; "Obituary," 1925). Born in 1848, he was initiated a Freemason at Parrett and Axe Lodge No. 814, Crewkerne, England, in 1871. He ultimately served as Provincial Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies (Somerset), and, in the Royal Arch, as the Grand Standard Bearer of England; he also attained the 30° in the Ancient and Accepted Rite (called in America the Scottish Rite). Westcott served as master of the premier Masonic lodge of research, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, in London, to whose transactions (the *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*) he contributed several scholarly papers, including his views on Freemasonry in relation to the Kabbalah, the Rosicrucians, the Essenes, and the cult of Mithras (Westcott, 1886–1888a, 1894, 1915, 1916). Following the death of Woodman, Westcott served as the third Supreme Magus of SRIA, from 1892 until his own death in 1925. Westcott authored both an official history of SRIA, and many scholarly papers for its publications (Westcott, 1900), as well as other books on esoteric topics.¹²

Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers (b. 1854, d. 1918) was initiated as a Freemason in 1877 at Hengist Lodge No. 195, in Bournemouth, England, where he was raised a Master Mason the following year ("Samuel Liddel Mac-

Gregor Mathers,” 2001; Westcott, 1900, p. 13). He was admitted to the SRIA in 1882, and although he demitted from Hengist Lodge that same year, he remained in the SRIA until 1902, eventually rising to the office of Junior Substitute Magus, the third-ranking officer in that society. MacGregor Mathers is remembered today especially for his translations of portions of the kabbalistic Zohar and several medieval magical grimoires (MacGregor Mathers, 1887/1991, 1889/2002, 1897/1974, 1904/1997, 1980/2001). Although all of these books were published after MacGregor Mathers’s involvement in the Golden Dawn, he evidently had a longstanding interest in the esoteric before that time; for example, he published a paper on “Rosicrucianism, the Deity, and the Hebrew Letters” in the 1886 transactions of the SRIA’s Metropolitan College (Westcott, 1900, p. 19).

Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie died in 1886, two years before the formal establishment of the Golden Dawn. However, he had a great deal of influence on the founding of the SRIA, and in that way may well have contributed to the rituals ultimately adopted in the Golden Dawn (the two organizations having several points of similarity, as we shall see). Westcott credited Mackenzie with having direct knowledge of an authentic Rosicrucian lineage and of somehow “assisting” in forming the SRIA:

Mackenzie was in Germany for some time in his early life and there met old Rosicrucian members who had obtained knowledge and authority from association with an earlier generation of initiated Adepts....

His assistance in forming the Soc. Ros. in Anglia was given in 1866–7, at which time he was not an English Freemason, but having been initiated in the Royal Oak Lodge at Freemason’s Hall on March 9, 1870, he became one October 17, 1872, an openly acknowledged Frater of the Metropolitan College [of the SRIA], in which he did such valuable work. (Westcott, 1900, p. 9)

Mackenzie went on to write the *Royal Masonic Cyclopædia* (Mackenzie, 1877), which contained information about several esoteric groups, including Rosicrucians of both the distant past and the author’s own day. Westcott wrote of Mackenzie’s book that it “contains more mystical and occult information from German and French sources than any other modern book” (Westcott, 1900, p. 9) – high praise from someone who was an accomplished esoteric scholar in his own right.

In the SRIA, Mackenzie served as Assistant Secretary General of the High Council, and contributed many papers to *The Rosicrucian* (listed in Westcott, 1900, pp. 17–19). As Westcott noted in Mackenzie’s obituary, “Mackenzie con-

tributed to the *Rosicrucian Magazine* more occult literary matter than any other Frater of the Society” (Westcott, 1900, p. 9).

What assistance did Mackenzie render in forming the SRIA? Earlier in the *History* quoted above, Westcott described the foundation of the SRIA as being based on the discovery of some obscure manuscripts:

The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia was founded in 1866 by Frater Robert Wentworth Little, an eminent Freemason. . . . His knowledge and authority emanated from two sources, and were supplemented by the learning and researches of several other prominent students of occult philosophy. Brother William Henry White the Grand Secretary of England, preserved certain Rosicrucian papers which had come into his possession on attaining office in 1810, at Freemason’s Hall, and of these he made no use; Brother Little found these papers and used them. At the same time, and with the object of re-constituting a Rosicrucian College at London, he availed himself of certain knowledge and authority which belonged to Brother Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, who had, during a stay in Germany in earlier life, been in communication with German Adepts who claimed a descent from previous generations of Rosicrucians. German Adepts had admitted him to some grades of their system, and had permitted him to attempt the formation of a group of Masonic students in England, who under the Rosicrucian name might form a partly esoteric society. With this license and with the manuscripts of ritual information . . . Frater R. W. Little formed our society. . . . (Westcott, 1900, p. 6)

It is significant that, later in Westcott’s *History* of SRIA, he described the rituals in the manuscript found by White as “being imperfect for ceremonial open use” (Westcott, 1900, p. 7). This certainly implies that someone built upon the manuscript materials to develop workable rituals for the SRIA. That someone could easily have been Mackenzie, whom, as we have seen, Westcott credited for providing “certain knowledge” to Little, knowledge that advanced the foundation of the SRIA. In this connection, it is important to note the speculation by some authors that Mackenzie himself wrote the famous Cipher Manuscript, the foundation for the Golden Dawn’s rituals, as I describe below (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, p. 49; A. E. Waite, cited in Howe, 1972/1978, pp. 3, 28).¹³

There are certainly those who, for good reasons, have disputed the story of “the manuscripts found” (e.g., Voorhis, 1983, p. 15 ff.). Regardless of one’s position on the SRIA’s founding myth, it appears that Mackenzie’s contributions to the SRIA included both the conferral of a supposedly Rosicrucian lineage of authority, and the development of ritual, both of which would be crucial to the formation of an authentically Rosicrucian society. Indeed, in his *History*, West-

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cott notes, under the date of February 1873, that “Kenneth Mackenzie [was] openly admitted to the Society which he previously by his learning assisted to constitute” (Westcott, 1900, p. 17).

* * *

The upshot of all this is to show that the typical statement one encounters in the literature about the founders of the Golden Dawn – namely, that they were Freemasons, and involved in the SRIA – does not tell half the story. Yes, these men (including, for the moment, Mackenzie) were Freemasons. However, two of the four were Provincial leaders of the Craft; one was a Provincial leader of one branch of the higher degrees of Masonry (the Royal Arch), and also a member of four chapters in another branch (the Ancient and Accepted Rite; Gilbert, 1987, p. 30). Yes, these men were all involved with the SRIA, but beyond that, three of the four were the top or among the top leaders of the organization. At least two of the four had played crucial roles in founding the SRIA, a nexus of esoteric research, at least among Freemasons. Finally, in addition to being Freemasons and members of SRIA, all four of these individuals were accomplished esoteric scholars. As we shall see, all of this experience would be relevant to the development of the Golden Dawn.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

There are six central characteristics of the original Golden Dawn:

1. Its so-called ‘androgynous,’ or gender-equal, nature.
2. Its hierarchical membership structure, wherein the organization was comprised of three Orders.
3. Its ‘grade’ (i.e., degree) structure, including the names, numbers, and sequence of the grades, and their distributions among the three Orders of the organization.
4. Its foundational myth, involving secret, hidden, or unknown superiors . . .
5. . . . and the discovery of its basic ritual texts.
6. Its concerns with Rosicrucianism, alchemy, Kabbalah, and ritual magic.

As we will see, each of these characteristics was present in a Masonic organization of some sort, known to the founders of the Golden Dawn.

Of course, in order to suggest that the existence of a Masonic group might have influenced the founders of the Golden Dawn, it is necessary to demonstrate, not only that the group existed, but that it was known to one or more of those three founders. Of course, any characteristic of the SRIA would have been known to Woodman and Mackenzie (each a Supreme Magus of SRIA) and to MacGregor Mathers (who, as Junior Substitute Magus, was the third-ranking officer of the SRIA). But what about Masonic or quasi-Masonic groups other than SRIA?

As it happens, a substantial mention of a Masonic group in Mackenzie's (1877) *Royal Masonic Cyclopædia* (hereafter *RMC*) is strongly suggestive that this group was known to one or more of the Golden Dawn's founders. Westcott (1900, p. 9), quoted above, wrote knowingly about *RMC*, suggesting that Westcott was familiar with the book. In addition, in his own preface to *RMC*, Mackenzie acknowledged the help of Woodman as one of those who "in various ways have contributed to ensure accuracy and perspicuity throughout the work" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. viii); it is no great leap to think that Woodman would have made himself familiar with a work concerning which he had been consulted.

1. GENDER EQUALITY

In the language of 19th century British Freemasonry, the Golden Dawn was "androgynous." That is, it admitted both men and women as equally privileged members of the organization. Today we would say that the Golden Dawn practiced "gender equality."

As it happens, there have been gender-equal groups functioning as lodges of Freemasons for centuries. The Rite of Adoption under the Grand Orient of France dates back at least to the 1770s (Coil, 1996, p. 10). Count Cagliostro's Egyptian Rite, a gender-equal Masonic group, dates to about the same time (Faulks & Cooper, 2008, pp. 13, 176). (The "Masonry of Adoption" that was described and supported by Albert Pike about a century later was a women's-only organization (Kinney, 2003.) Both the French Rite of Adoption and Cagliostro's Egyptian Rite are described in *RMC* (Mackenzie, 1877, pp. 21–23, 89–100, 185–88).

2. THE THREE-ORDER STRUCTURE

The original Golden Dawn was actually a group of three Orders. The First or Outer Order was the one that was properly known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; members of the First or Outer Order concerned themselves with learning the basics of esoteric theory. The Second or Inner Order was

known as the *Ordo Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis*, which, translated from the Latin, means “Order of the Ruby Rose and Golden Cross”; members of the Second or Inner Order concerned themselves with magical practice and teaching. The nature of the Third Order of the overall organization is today a matter of some dispute, but there is no doubt that the organization saw itself as being ruled in some fashion by those who occupied the Third Order.¹⁴

As it happens, the SRIA had (and has) a three-Order structure that was very similar to the original Golden Dawn’s. A pamphlet issued by a current Province of the SRIA describes its First Order as “Learners,” the Second Order as “Teachers,” and the Third Order as “Rulers of the Society” (*Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*, 2005).

3. THE DEGREE OR GRADE STRUCTURE

Like the *degrees* of Craft, (American) York Rite, and Scottish Rite Freemasonry, the *grades* of the original Golden Dawn each had a name and a specific place within an ordered sequence; like Craft and Scottish Rite Masonic degrees, the Golden Dawn grades also each had a numeric designation. The Golden Dawn grade system was modeled on the kabbalistic Tree of Life, and a brief consideration of that symbol will go a long way towards illuminating the intricacies of the Golden Dawn system.

Within kabbalistic tradition, the Tree of Life (Figure 1) represents the relationships among a variety of divine characteristics, each known as a *sefirah* (plural, *sefirot*).¹⁵ For example, the name of the first *sefirah*, called *Keter* in Hebrew, translates to “Crown” in English, and, in part, that *sefirah* is related to the overarching authority that the Divine has over all things.

A specific sequence of the *sefirot*, illustrated by the heavy line in Figure 1, is known in modern magical literature¹⁶ as “the Lightning Flash” (Fortune, 2000, p. 24; Parfitt, 1991/1999, pp. 24–25). This sequence, from the top down, is said to represent the sequence of the original Divine emanation at the creation of the universe. From the bottom up, the sequence is said to represent the path of the soul in its return to the Divine.

As shown in Table 1, with a few exceptions, the Golden Dawn grades each corresponded to some *sefirah* on the Tree of Life. The unusual numeration system of the Golden Dawn grades assigned *two* numbers to the grades: the first showing the sequence of the corresponding *sefirah* on the *upward* Lightning Flash, the second showing the sequence of that *sefirah* on the *downward* Lightning Flash. Thus, the grade of Philosophus corresponded to the *sefirah* named *Netzach*, “Victory.”

The number of the grade Philosophus was $4 = 7$, pronounced “four equals seven”¹⁷; this reflected the position of *Netzach* as the fourth *sefirah* on the upward Lightning Flash, and as the seventh *sefirah* on the downward. In ascending order of seniority, the first five numbered grades of the Golden Dawn (including Neophyte $0 = 0$) were assigned to the First or Outer Order (see preceding section), the next three to the Second or Inner Order, and the next three to the Third Order.

However, as several authors have noted, these grades were not unique to the Golden Dawn. The SRIA used the identical names and sequence for its grades, except for Neophyte and Ipsissimus, which grades did not exist in the SRIA. The SRIA grades were otherwise distributed among the three Orders in exactly the same way as were the original Golden Dawn grades, devised some years later.¹⁸

The unusual numeration of the Golden Dawn grades also was anticipated in a Masonic organization. Kenneth Mackenzie described “the degrees of the modern Rosicrucian system” in *RMC* (Mackenzie, 1877, pp. 616–17), which, he implied, was an umbrella term covering both the SRIA and another unnamed Rosicrucian body of which he had direct knowledge. In a table (*RMC*, p. 617) that Mackenzie said he prepared especially for *RMC* (but see below), Mackenzie designated each degree in “the modern Rosicrucian system” by a pair of numbers (see Table 1 herein). For example, the fourth degree in ascending seniority, Philosophus, he designated by the numbers “6, 4,” indicating that Philosophus is the sixth degree counting down from the senior end of the degree system, and the fourth degree counting up from the junior end. Mackenzie noted in his table that giving the numbers thus is “Forming the Kabbalistical highest number,” no doubt meaning that the sum of the numbers is 10, the total of the numbered *sefirot* on the Tree of Life. This is very similar to the Golden Dawn numerical grade designations, with the differences that (a) the “modern Rosicrucian system” degree numbers reflect the fact that this system had only 9 degrees, and (b) the ‘ascending’ numbers are put second in the pair, while the ‘descending’ numbers are put first, in the “modern Rosicrucian system” – just the opposite of the order used later in the Golden Dawn.

Mackenzie’s source for this information was a German volume published in Amsterdam in 1781, *Der Rosenkreuzer in Seiner Blösse* (“The Rosicrucian in His Nakedness” or “The Rosicrucian Exposed”), attributed to a “Magister Pianco,” the pseudonym of Baron Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen (the Elder). This book was an exposé of a late 18th century Masonic Rosicrucian order, the German *Gold- und Rosenkreuzer*, or Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross, from which von Ecker und Eckhoffen had been expelled (Tilton, 2003, p. 123). By

1767, this order had a system of nine grades, with the same names and in the same sequence used later in the SRIA (McIntosh, 1992, p. 52). Mackenzie's table appears to have been copied from a table on page 84 of this work; however, Mackenzie seems to have concealed the source of his material from Westcott (Gardner, 1903/2005, p. 25). Thus, the basic chain of transmission of the names, sequence, and numeration of these Rosicrucian grades is from the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross to the SRIA and thence to the Golden Dawn.

4. FOUNDING MYTH OF THE UNKNOWN SUPERIORS

Every Masonic organization has its founding mythos. Two aspects of the founding mythos of the Golden Dawn are controversial even today.

The first of these involves what we might call "the legend of the Unknown Superiors." When originally formed, the Golden Dawn was said to be directed by secret or hidden chiefs of the Order, who resided in continental Europe. (Today, even among different Golden Dawn groups, there are those who maintain this belief, and others who dispute it.) As the late Masonic scholar Ellic Howe summarized the official story:

In 1887 ... Westcott ... acquired an apparently ancient manuscript written in a cypher. He found the key and made a transcription. This revealed the fragmentary outlines ... of five mystical or pseudo-Masonic rituals. ...

Among the leaves of the Cypher MS. Westcott came across a sheet of paper on which were written the name and address of a certain Fräulein Sprengel, an eminent Rosicrucian Adept who lived in Germany. ... She authorised him to found an English branch of a German occult Order called 'Die Goldene Dämmerung', i.e. the Golden Dawn. (Howe, 1972/1978, p. 1)

It was the unnamed members of this German Order who supposedly comprised the Secret Chiefs of the Golden Dawn's Third Order (described earlier) – the authorities directing the entire organization.

This is not the place for a discussion of the veracity of the legend of the Unknown Superiors as it appears in the origin story of the original Golden Dawn. What is germane to our concerns is that this legend has a Masonic lineage. This lineage includes the SRIA itself, the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross, and an organization known as the Rite of Strict Observance.

The reader will recall that, in his *History* of the SRIA, Westcott mentioned that Mackenzie had been empowered by a group of German Rosicrucians to "attempt the formation of a group of Masonic students in England, who under the Rosicrucian name might form a partly esoteric society" (Westcott, 1900,

p. 6). This is quite parallel to the situation portrayed in the origin story of the Golden Dawn, where, again, a group of unidentified German adepts was said to have authorized the formation of an esoteric group in England.

We also meet the legend of the Hidden Superiors in the Gold and Rosy Cross, the German Masonic Rosicrucian group of the late 18th century that I described earlier. I have already mentioned that by 1767 the Gold and Rosy Cross had an initiatory system with grade names and sequence that were identical to those used in the later SRJA, and that were very similar to the Golden Dawn's system. By 1777, the Gold and Rosy Cross had, as a group of Superiors, three individuals whose identities actually *were* a tightly held secret (McIntosh, 1992, pp. 53–55). In this case, the legend was true! In the face of internal dissent and governmental persecution of secretive societies from without, it was evidently these truly unknown Superiors who declared the dissolution of the Gold- and Rosy Cross, in 1787 and again in 1792 (McIntosh, 1992, pp. 143–44).

A form of Masonry known as the Rite of Strict Observance flourished on continental Europe from about 1750 to 1782 (Bernheim & de Hoyos, 2006, pp. 56, 58). For some years, the Rite of Strict Observance was one of the dominant forms of Freemasonry in Germany. The name, "Strict Observance," was related to the practice of obligating the Rite's members to unquestioning obedience to the secret or hidden heads of the Order, the Unknown Superiors.¹⁹ As the Masonic historian Robert Freke Gould noted:

The oath of implicit obedience to Unknown Superiors was the leading characteristic of the Order, and on taking it new comers received a promise – the breach of which ultimately broke up the organization – that those Superiors would impart to them an occult Wisdom.... (Gould, 1920/2007, p. 240)

The collapse of the legend of the Unknown Superiors contributed to the downfall of the Rite of Strict Observance – an event with long-lasting consequences. As historian Christopher McIntosh tells the story:

[In 1776] leading German members of the Strict Observance gathered at Wiesbaden at the invitation of one Baron von Gugomos, who gave himself out as the "emissary of the true Superiors of the Order". He claimed that these Superiors had their headquarters at Nicosia in Cyprus and said that he was ready to go to Cyprus and obtain secret writings from them. Much excitement was caused by this. During or soon after the Wiesbaden congress, however, Gugomos was exposed as being a charlatan whose titles and charters were a fabrication. From that point on, ... confidence in the prevailing

high-degree masonic systems (that is, those based on the Templar legend) began to collapse, leaving the way open for the Gold- und Rosenkreuz and the Illuminati, the former representing the Christian and mystical path, the latter the radical and enlightened path. (McIntosh, 1992, p. 53)

As it emerged, there truly *were* no Unknown Superiors in the Strict Observance. As this became known, the Rite collapsed.²⁰ However, the Rite of Strict Observance has long been known to Masonic historians; Mackenzie discussed the Rite in detail in *RMC* (pp. 691–92, 699).²¹

5. FOUNDING MYTH OF THE DISCOVERED RITUALS

Another aspect of the founding mythos of the Golden Dawn was what we might call ‘the Legend of the Discovered Rituals.’ As the Ciceros tell the story: “According to Westcott, in 1887 the Reverend A. F. A. Woodford gave him some sixty pages of a manuscript written in cipher. Woodford was an elderly Mason who, it was claimed, received the manuscript from ‘a dealer in curios’” (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, p. 48). As it happens, the Legend of the Discovered Rituals has a Masonic heritage as well.

I mentioned above Cagliostro’s Egyptian Rite, a magical Masonic rite that flourished on the Continent in the 1780s (and was described in Mackenzie’s *RMC*). As Philip Faulks and Robert L. D. Cooper have explained:

According to the Inquisition, Cagliostro got the idea for his Egyptian Ritual from a booklet supposedly found in a London bookshop. This text was reputed to have been written by a man called George Coston, an obscure spiritist of whom no one has heard mention since (Faulks & Cooper, 2008, p. 174).

For that matter, the SRIA itself had a founding mythos that involved *both* a version of the Legend of the Discovered Rituals *and* a version of the Legend of the Unknown Superiors. This can be seen in Westcott’s *History* of SRIA, from which I quoted extensively earlier. The reader will recall the details: the Grand Secretary of England “preserved certain Rosicrucian papers which had come into his possession on attaining office . . . at Freemason’s Hall” (Westcott, 1900, p. 6)

I should mention that a member of SRIA, H. C. Bruce Wilson, reportedly demolished this account of the founding of SRIA in papers delivered in 1937 and 1947 (Voorhis, 1983, pp. 15–16). As the late Harold Van Buren Voorhis, formerly the Supreme Magus of the SRICF, or the Rosicrucian Society in the United States, put it, “So far as the legends are concerned, they are just that and it is time that they be relegated to the land of fables” (Voorhis, 1983, pp. 16).

6. CONCERNS WITH ROSICRUCIANISM, ALCHEMY, KABBALAH, & MAGIC

Of course, perhaps the most distinctive and defining characteristic of the Golden Dawn was its central concern with studying Rosicrucianism, alchemy, Kabbalah, and both studying and practicing ritual magic. Albert Pike (de Hoyos, 2008) and others (e.g., Hogan, 2009) have contended that Hermeticism influenced the formation of even the Masonic Craft degrees. As it happens, a number of Masonic degree systems of the 18th and 19th centuries concerned themselves explicitly with Rosicrucianism, ancient Hermeticism, alchemy, and/or Kabbalah. I have already mentioned the German Order of the Gold- and Rosy Cross, which was devoted to a form of Rosicrucianism. Cagliostro's Egyptian Rite was prominently concerned with Kabbalah, alchemy, and, it would appear, the practice of ritual magic (Faulks & Cooper, 2008). As shown in a ritual published by Oliver Kruse (2009), some form of a Gold and Rosy Cross group in the 18th century worked a ritual for the Theoricus grade that emphasized Rosicrucian values and alchemical symbolism. As David Lindez (2009) has shown, the founders of the Golden Dawn were influenced by another magically oriented order as well, an order that was and is still associated with Freemasons, the August Order of Light, based in England. Other bodies known to the founders of the Golden Dawn include the following:

- **THE ACADEMY OF TRUE MASONS.** "A French Chapter of the high degrees, having alchymistical [*sic*] tendencies. . . . In this the Hermetic Science was taught" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. 14). This group dates to 1770 (Coil, 1996, p. 527).
- **THE ASIATIC BRETHERN, OR KNIGHTS AND BROTHERS OF ASIA.** "Rosicrucian and Hermetic science occupied the attention of this body; . . . the philosopher's stone was one of the objects of research" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. 56). This group dates to 1780 (Coil, 1996, p. 542).
- **THE ACADEMY OF THE ILLUMINATI OF AVIGNON, OR HERMETIC RITE OF AVIGNON.** "An androgynous system, established 1785. The ritual combined ideas taken from the Hermetic Philosophy, with the doctrines of Swedenborg" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. 13).
- **THE RITE OF PHILALETHES.** "A rite founded at Paris in 1773, . . . based on the principles of Martinism. . . . the members made special study of the occult sciences" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. 561).
- **THE PHILOSOPHIC SCOTTISH RITE.** "Established in Paris, 1776, being founded on Pernetty's Rite of the Hermetic Sublime Masters of the Luminous Ring, in which alchymical ideas were promulgated. Boileau, a physi-

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cian, Pernetty's pupil, reformed the system, and gave it the name it still bears" (Mackenzie, 1877, p. 563).

Of course, the SRIA itself was concerned with the study (although not the practice) of all of these areas.

* * *

The pattern is clear. Each of the distinguishing characteristics of the Golden Dawn was anticipated in some Masonic organization, often obscure, but known to the founders of the Golden Dawn.²² Beyond establishing these points of history, what lessons can be drawn from these findings?

The fact that the original Golden Dawn was so thoroughly interconnected with different strands of Freemasonry has at least two consequences. First, it implies something about the true intent of the founders of the Golden Dawn. Second, it has implications for today's Freemasonry.

THE GOLDEN DAWN AS AN IDEAL FREEMASONRY FOR ITS FOUNDERS

It is my belief that the Golden Dawn was envisioned by its founders as a kind of ideal Freemasonry. In the Golden Dawn, the intent was to perform ritual unchained, as it were – ritual not only that had symbolic content, but also that was conducted to accomplish something in the real world, through magical means. In the Golden Dawn, one really *would* be learning the secrets of the ages: Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Enochian, Rosicrucianism, astrology, true ritual magic. The transformative process of initiation, which is a very real thing within mainstream Freemasonry, took on a new dimension within the Golden Dawn, with the explicit intent of fostering an enhanced awakening of one's spiritual self, leading to contact with divine forces. Overall, the Golden Dawn was intended to be esoteric Freemasonry developed to a high degree.

LESSONS FROM THE GOLDEN DAWN EXPERIENCE FOR FREEMASONRY TODAY

What does it mean to find that the Golden Dawn had its major roots deep within Freemasonry? What, if anything, does this tell us about Masonry itself? What implications does this have for how we consider Freemasonry, and for how Masons live their Masonry?

There is a well-known distinction between the so-called romantic school of Masonic history, and the so-called realistic school. We may describe the extreme expression of the romantic school in William L. Fox's phrase, as con-

cerning “Masonic researchers of a century or more ago who saw ‘evidence’ that was highly questionable, mistaking the truths of myth for the facts of history” (Fox, 1998, p. 4). However, the realistic school is not without its failings, as well. As Fox put it: “It now appears that much more recent Masonic history produced by Masons themselves, that is more strictly constructed on a foundation of dense footnotes, stands in danger of becoming an over-correction to an outgrown problem” (Fox, 1998, p. 4).

Parallel to this dichotomy, I would propose another one, regarding not approaches to Masonic history, but approaches to the interpretation and use of Masonic symbolism. Specifically, I posit that there exist two broad approaches to Masonic symbolism:

- The exoteric approach finds the roots of Masonic symbolism more or less solely in the tools of the medieval stonemason’s trade, and interprets those symbols in terms of interpersonal morality and very broad, nonspecific statements about the relationship between humanity and the Divine.
- The esoteric approach relates Masonic symbolism to various bodies of esoteric literature (e.g., Jewish Kabbalah, the original Rosicrucian manifestos, Greco-Egyptian Hermeticism, medieval alchemy), and interprets those symbols in terms of spiritual growth and the nature of reality.

There is no question but that the exoteric approach to Masonic symbolism has been dominant for many decades. It is evident in such statements as the following, from *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*:

There has been a tendency for two centuries among imaginative and sensational writers to corrupt Freemasonry by coating it with all sorts of mystical and occult veneers, of which Alchemy is but one. . . . There has never been any association between Freemasonry and mystical arts, especially alchemy, though, doubtless, the formulators of the numerous Hauts Grades and other higher degrees around the middle of the 18th century resorted to many such sources for interesting and impressive material. . . . (Coil, 1996, p. 25)

The Cabala [i.e., the Jewish Kabbalah] has no relation to Freemasonry, except that the originators of the Hauts Grades on the Continent of Europe resorted to it in search of ritualistic lore and the consequence will be observed in some of the mystical and philosophical degrees. (Coil, 1996, p. 115)

There is a deep contradiction in these statements. On the one hand the author states that neither alchemy nor Kabbalah have any relation to Freemasonry. On the other, he immediately reverses himself and allows as how these two bodies

of esoteric lore were used in high degree Masonry. One is forced to ask: What did the author consider within the bounds of the term “Freemasonry”?

The fact of the matter, as I have demonstrated in this essay, is that five of the six central and defining characteristics of the Golden Dawn could be found within some Masonic body of the 18th century, and sometimes in half a dozen or more such bodies. To simply define all of these bodies as “not really Masonic” is to play games with definition. It is to impose 20th- and early 21st-century notions of Masonic regularity on 18th-century organizations.²³

What the findings detailed in this essay demonstrate is that a large number of Masonic brethren, in the very first century of Grand Lodge-era Freemasonry, found it useful and meaningful to interpret Freemasonry and Masonic symbolism in light of the Kabbalah, Hermeticism, alchemy, and Rosicrucianism. None of this is to say that today’s Freemasons must accept these traditions as valid. However, it does suggest that there is a certain validity to the quest to understand Masonic symbolism through the lenses of these traditions. Certainly, many Masons who were two centuries closer to the beginnings of the Craft than we are today thought that this approach to interpreting Masonic symbolism was valid.

In light of these considerations, I have two proposals to make to interested Freemasons. First, I propose a revival, on a higher plan of sophistication, of the Esoteric School of Masonic Research.²⁴ Second, I propose that we see more of an esoteric approach incorporated within Masonic education at the level of the local unit (that is, the Particular Lodge, Chapter, Council, Commandery, and Valley). I describe each of these proposals below.

A NEO-ESOTERIC SCHOOL OF MASONIC RESEARCH

What I would call a neo-esoteric²⁵ school of Masonic research deserves a fuller exposition than I can give here. At this juncture, I shall only outline two principles of the neo-esoteric approach to Masonic research:

1. It is appropriate to consider interpretations of Masonic symbolism from any of a variety of esoteric perspectives (e.g., Kabbalah/Cabala/Qabalah, Hermeticism, alchemy, and Rosicrucianism, as well as the spiritual traditions of Southern and Eastern Asia, and other perspectives). In the interpretive effort, speculation may be very useful, so long as it is labeled as such. Interpretation based upon a similarity of symbols, terms, or practices across traditions may be useful, but such interpretations should be made tentatively, given the ambiguous nature of correlational data. Even

within the domain of interpretation, proper attention must be paid to the facts of history.

2. It is one thing to *interpret* symbolism in terms of a given esoteric tradition. It is another matter entirely to claim that some Masonic symbol *derives* from that esoteric tradition. The latter claim, if made at all, should be made on the basis of careful documentary or archaeological scholarship, where all evidence is critically evaluated and speculation is at a minimum.

Thus, in the service of interpreting Masonic symbolism, one might relate the three “great pillars” of Freemasonry – Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty – to the three pillars of the kabbalistic Tree of Life: Mercy, Severity, and Beauty.²⁶ In doing so, one would be free to draw some tentative conclusions about the nature of reality, the Divine, and the human. However, one would only be justified in making claims to the effect that the Masonic pillars *derived* from the Jewish Kabbalah on the basis of carefully evaluated documentary or archaeological evidence; otherwise, one might only make a speculation to that effect, clearly labeled as such.

A neo-esoteric school of Masonic research has the potential of revitalizing Masonic research and its literature. It also has the advantage of speaking to the interests of many in the Craft, a point to which I now turn.

AN ESOTERIC ELEMENT IN MASONIC EDUCATION

There is a need for a greater appreciation of the esoteric in Masonic education. It is clear that today’s Freemasonry has a complex attitude towards esoteric traditions, a stance that Jay Kinney has described as a love/hate relationship (Kinney, 2002). My guess would be that the typical Lodge at a typical Stated Communication does not address any of the more esoterically oriented interpretations of Masonic symbolism. However, my own anecdotal experience strongly suggests three things about Freemasons and Freemasonry: 1) first, there have always been Freemasons who have been interested in the esoteric, and whose attraction to Freemasonry is based, at least in part, on this interest; 2) second, there seems to be a larger proportion of men coming into mainstream Freemasonry today whose primary interest is in the esoteric; but, 3) mainstream Freemasonry seems ill-equipped to satisfy this hunger for the esoteric – in part, simply because many Masons do not know how to go about bringing up the esoteric appropriately within the lodge room.

Consider these remarks made by W. Wynn Westcott (1893) upon his installation as Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge, as he spoke about candidates for the degrees of Freemasonry, and his own stance in relation to the Craft:

It would be absurd to contend that our candidates are all seeking admission, because they have learned of the large sums we spend in benevolence, and are craving to belong to a society so honourable because so free handed and so benevolent.

Still more absurd would it be to content that candidates are influenced by a desire to take evening higher classes or post-graduate lessons in mediæval history.

To me it seems that outsiders come into our ranks either because our Order offers a vision of old world romance, a flavour of mysticism, a possibility of magic, or if from none of these reasons, then perhaps from the same reason that some men enter Parliament, because it is one of the best clubs. My excellent historical friends can have no grievance against me for this unveiling, because they have, as I contend, led the way. If I have any influence with this Lodge, . . . it will be then in the direction of drawing your attention to the mystical rather than material; to the allegorical rather than the historic aspect; and I claim that in so doing I shall be adhering closer to the spirit as well as letter of your ancient ritual than those eruditi [that is, the historians], whom I am indeed proud to own as teachers and associates, but from whom I feel some distinction of opinion.

If I felt convinced that the whole of Freemasonry arose about the 17th century, from a basis of Trade Societies, into the body of whose customs some half dozen rich and learned men pitchforked a resumé of hints at the learning of the ancients, with a flavour of Hebrew Kabalah and a bit of Neo Platonism, plus a chapter out of the Book of Kings, I confess that Freemasonry would be for me a thing to set aside, and I should cease to be a child playing with a toy.

But I am not so convinced, and my belief is that the masses of Freemasons would never be so convinced. . . .

My feelings then, brethren, only prompt me to encourage among you the tendency to greater study of symbolism and the analogies between each Masonic point and similar references to other Arcane societies and institutions. Let us also, if possible, spend some time in our definite instructions to investigate the hidden mysteries of nature and science. (Westcott, 1893, p. 204)

Westcott's remarks suggest that the hunger for esoteric knowledge in relation to Freemasonry goes back a long time. The Golden Dawn experience demonstrates that the resources are available within the broader history of Freemasonry to feed this hunger. Indeed, various Masonic authors have emphasized that mainstream Masonic symbolism itself is replete with potential connections to esoteric lore. (See, for example, de Hoyos, 2008; Hogan, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; MacNulty, 1991, 1998; Stavish, 2007; Tresner, 2008.) What is needed is that esoterically minded Masons take the initiative to train themselves in these connections, and present them as part of Masonic education within the Blue

Lodge itself (as well as the Chapter, Council, and so forth). Esoteric interpretations of symbolism should be offered tentatively, and explained at a level appropriate to the circumstances of the individual lodge – but they can and, I would say, should be offered. My personal experience, being in charge of Masonic education at a Blue Lodge for seven months, was that a judicious helping of esoteric material within each session of Masonic education was at least tolerated by the group as a whole, and was very welcome to a significant fraction of the lodge.

Feeding the hunger for esoteric understanding is one approach to the journey towards Masonic Light. This is well within the scope of mainstream Freemasonry. Given the interest in the esoteric that is evident in those curious about Freemasonry today, this may well be part of an approach to promoting the perpetuation of the Craft itself.

S U M M A R Y

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in its original form, was a school for magic that was active at the end of the Victorian Era (1888–1903). Golden Dawn members were active in the arts and literature, and the cultural contributions of these individuals still reverberate today. The Golden Dawn also influenced the development of the American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, and the New Age movement that emerged in the 1980s. The Golden Dawn has exerted a great degree of influence on subsequent magical groups.

Although it has long been known that the three central figures involved in founding the Golden Dawn were all Freemasons and members of the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (a Masonic esoteric research society), it has rarely been noted that the important characteristics of the Golden Dawn were anticipated in various Masonic or quasi-Masonic groups. In this article, I described how six important characteristics of the original Golden Dawn had Masonic antecedents: 1) its gender-equal membership; 2) its hierarchical membership structure, divided into three Orders; 3) its degree or grade structure, including the names and sequence of most of the grades of the Golden Dawn; its foundational myths involving 4) Hidden Superiors, and 5) the discovery of basic ritual texts; and 6) its concerns with Rosicrucianism, Hermeticism, alchemy, Kabbalah, and ritual magic.

In reflecting upon the implications of the Golden Dawn experience for Freemasonry today, I recommend the promotion of the neo-esoteric school

THE MASONIC ROOTS OF THE HERMETIC ORDER OF THE GOLDEN DAWN

of Masonic research, in which Masonic symbolism is interpreted from the perspective of various esoteric traditions. In addition, Masonry could benefit by deliberately seeking to respond to the hunger for the esoteric that is expressed by many new and older members of the Craft, through expressing an esoteric component to Masonic education. Freemasonry is replete with opportunities to explore the esoteric nature of its symbolism, and such exploration is well within the boundaries of mainstream Freemasonry.

	SRIA GRADES ^b		GOLDEN DAWN GRADES ^c		
RMC No. ^a	NUMBER	NAME	NAME	NUMBER	CORRESPONDING SEFIRAH
			Ipsissimus	10° = 1°	Keter / Crown
1, 9	IX°	Magus	Magus	9° = 2°	Chokmah / Wisdom
2, 8	VIII°	Magister	Magister Templi	8° = 3°	Binah / Understanding
3, 7	VII°	Adeptus Exemptus	Adeptus Exemptus	7° = 4°	Chesed / Mercy
4, 6	VI°	Adeptus Major	Adeptus Major	6° = 5°	Geburah / Strength
5, 5	V°	Adeptus Minor	Adeptus Minor	5° = 6°	Tiphareth / Beauty
6, 4	IV°	Philosophus	Philosophus	4° = 7°	Netzach / Victory
7, 3	III°	Practicus	Practicus	3° = 8°	Hod / Glory
8, 2	II°	Theoricus	Theoricus	2° = 9°	Yesod / Foundation
9, 1	I°	Zelator	Zelator	1° = 10°	Malkuth / Kingdom
			Neophyte	0° = 0°	

TABLE 1. Grades in the SRIA and the Golden Dawn

Note. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Orders (bottom to top) are separated by heavy horizontal lines.

a. Mackenzie, 1877, p. 617.

b. Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, 2005.

c. Cicero & Cicero, 2003, p. 99.

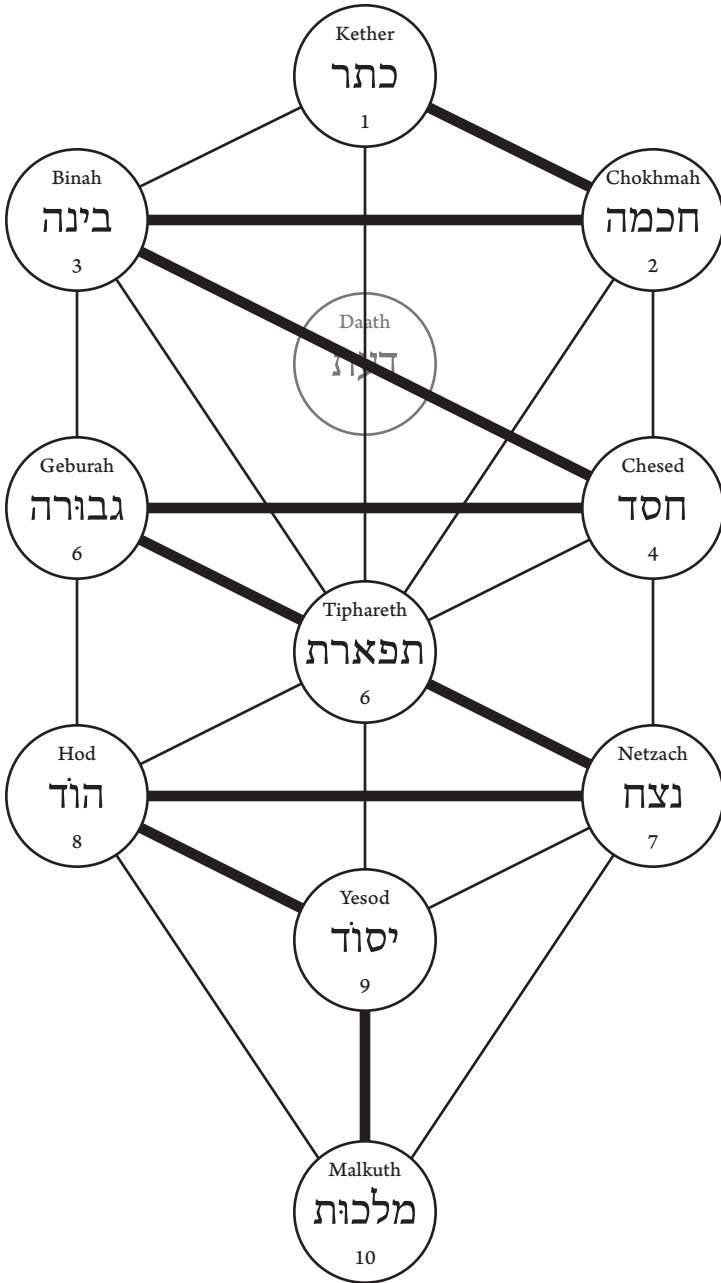


FIGURE 1. The kabbalistic Tree of Life, showing the “Lightning Flash.”²⁷

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NOTES

1. The history of the Golden Dawn is available in Howe (1972/1978), and is summarized in Cicero and Cicero (2003, pp. 33–66). The reader should be informed that these authors take very different, even opposed perspectives on the Golden Dawn and the validity of its work.

2. In making this statement, I am describing the intent of those who practice ritual magic. I take no position, here or elsewhere in this essay, on the ontological status – the reality, if you will – of magical operations.

3. Prominent members of the original Golden Dawn are described at length by Howe (1972/1978) and Greer (1995). Briefer descriptions are given by Cicero & Cicero (2003, pp. 44–48, 51–55).

4. The reader interested in learning more about writers associated with the original Golden Dawn – in reality or in rumor – are advised to consult the essay by L. Blackmore (1985/2001).

5. A particularly spectacular example is Howard Philips (“H. P.”) Lovecraft (b. 1890, d. 1937), whose stories frequently featured magic and occult horror. Lovecraft has been called “probably the most important and influential author of supernatural fiction in the twentieth century” (Jones & Carson, 1994/2004, p. 448). Among Lovecraft’s three most important literary influences was Golden Dawn member Arthur Machen (the others being Poe and Dunsany; Lévy, 1988, pp. 32–33). Writing in the 1930s, Lovecraft stated:

Of living creators of cosmic fear raised to its most artistic pitch, few if any can hope to equal the versatile Arthur Machen, author of some dozen tales long and short, in which the elements of hidden horror and brooding fright attain an almost incomparable substance and realistic acuteness. (Lovecraft, 1935/2004, p. 52)

Lovecraft also wrote admiringly of another HOGD member, “the inspired and prolific Algernon Blackwood, amidst whose . . . work may be found some of the finest spectral literature of this or any age” (Lovecraft, 1935/2004, p. 57).

In turn, Lovecraft had a seminal influence on the career of the author Stephen King, who wrote the following about his first encounter with Lovecraft’s work, at the age of 12 or 13, among some paperbacks abandoned in the attic by King’s absent father:

I was on my way. Lovecraft – courtesy of my father – opened the way for me, as he had done for others before me: Robert Bloch, Clark Ashton Smith, Frank Belnap Long, Fritz Leiber, and Ray Bradbury among them. . . . [T]he reader would do well to remember that it is his [i.e., Lovecraft’s] shadow, so long and gaunt, and his eyes, so dark and puritanical, which overlie almost all of the important horror fiction that has come since. (King, 1981/2010, pp. 101–2)

Of course, the influence of Stephen King on American popular literature has been enormous, from the mid-1970s to the present.

6. The Horos scandal is described by Cicero and Cicero (2003, p. 61), and Howe (1972/1978, Chapt. 14).

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7. “The counterculture” was primarily a phenomenon dating from about President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 until about the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the heyday of the movement being about 1967–1974. Two points of entry into the burgeoning literature on the 1960s counterculture include Charters (2003) and Kurlansky (2004).

8. The essential components of the Golden Dawn curriculum have been described by Cicero and Cicero (2003, pp. 167–226) as including “Qabalah, astrology, divination, spiritual alchemy, skrying and astral work, and Enochian magic” (p. 167). This is generally consistent with other accounts of the Golden Dawn curriculum (e.g., Griffin, 1999, pp. 21–33; Regardie, 1989, p. 43).

9. Of course, this is usually a good location to find books about Freemasonry itself.

10. Some of these spun-off or offshoot orders are described by Howe (1972/1978, pp. 252–84) and by Cicero and Cicero (2003, pp. 62–66). At present, the two dominant orders claiming descent from the original Golden Dawn are each named the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. These two orders are respectively associated with the names (in alphabetical order) of either Chic Cicero and Sandra Tabatha Cicero (2003; website: <http://www.hermeticgoldendawn.org/>), on the one hand, or David Griffin (1999; website: <http://www.goldendawn.com/>), on the other. Many other Golden Dawn groups may be found via the Internet.

11. The SRIA exists today as an esoteric research society whose membership is restricted to Master Masons (website: <http://sria.info/>). The SRIA has been described in two magazine articles by Jackson (2005a, b), and differing versions of its history are given by Westcott (1900) and Howe (1972/1978, Ch. 2). The SRIA is in amity with a sister society, the Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatis (SRICF), or Rosicrucian Society in the United States, whose membership also is restricted to Master Masons (website: <http://www.yorkrite.org/sricf/>).

12. Gilbert (1987) provides a summary (pp. 30–31) of Westcott’s Masonic offices (dates differing slightly from mine), and a bibliography of many of Westcott’s writings (pp. 31–32). Westcott’s publications in the *Transactions* of the SRIA’s Metropolitan College are omitted in Gilbert’s bibliography, but several of Westcott’s 48 articles there are listed by Westcott (1900, pp. 19–20).

13. Others have credited Westcott and/or Mathers with the composition of the Cipher Manuscript. It may well be that Westcott, Mathers, and Mackenzie each had a part to play, in developing the Cipher Manuscripts or the full rituals ultimately used in the Golden Dawn.

14. For the overall structure, see Cicero & Cicero, 2003, pp. 95–143, where the Third Order is described as “purely theoretical,” p. 143; this follows Regardie, 1989, who gives no rituals for the Third Order. Others write of the Third Order as a functional Order within the overall organization, e.g., Griffin, 1999, pp. 649–50.

15. There are three major divisions within the kabbalistic literature: the Jewish Kabbalah, the Christian Cabala, and the magical or Hermetic Qabalah. It should *not* be assumed that the three bodies of literature understand the same kabbalistic terms in the same way. For a discussion of the *sefirot* from a scholarly perspective based on the traditional Jewish Kabbalah, see Scholem (1974/1978, pp. 96–116). For a discussion from the perspective of magical Qabalah, see Fortune (2000).

16. I have not found the notion of “the Lightning Flash” in use in the literatures of either the Jewish Kabbalah or the Christian Cabala.

17. For this information, I thank a member of a current Golden Dawn organization who prefers to remain anonymous.

18. For tables of the grade structure of the Golden Dawn, see Howe (who provides the SRIA grades for comparison; 1972/1978, p. 16), Cicero & Cicero (2003, p. 99), and Griffin (who plots one version of a current Golden Dawn organization’s grades upon the Tree of Life; 1999, p. 649). I omit from consideration here the Golden Dawn’s two Portal grades, which mark the transitions between the Outer and Inner Orders, and the Inner and Third Orders, respectively; the Portal grades have no correspondence in the SRIA degree structure.

19. Indeed, one can find traces of these oaths to obey the Unknown Superiors even in the abbreviated form of the rituals of the Rite of Strict Observance published in *Heredom* (Bernheim & de Hoyos, 2006).

I have focused here on the matter of obedience to Unknown Superiors. One might also have focused on the matter of the committing oneself to *absolute* or *blind* obedience to those superiors, which was also apparently an aspect of the Golden Dawn. This too has its Masonic antecedents, as it was previously an aspect of the Rite of Strict Observance. In addition, the first degree of Cagliostro’s Egyptian Rite required the candidate to take the following oath: “I promise, I commit myself and I swear never to reveal the secrets which shall be communicated to me in this Temple *and blindly to obey my superiors*” (Faulks & Cooper, 2008, p. 206, emphasis added).

20. Authorities differ regarding the extent of the “collapse” of the Rite of Strict Observance. Several American Grand Lodges have or have had a Particular Lodge named “Strict Observance Lodge” within their jurisdictions. For example, Strict Observance Lodge, No. 94, existed within the Grand Lodge of New York, F.&A.M., for many years, until merging with the present St. John’s Lodge No. 1, Ancient York Masons, F.&A.M. (personal communication, Marco Henry, March 30, 2010, New York City). It is presently unclear to what extent any such Strict Observance Lodges owe their existence to the Rite of Strict Observance in 18th-century Europe. However, there is no question that even given what survivals may have existed or even continue to exist, the Rite’s influence in European Freemasonry fell off precipitously after the 1776 Wiesbaden conference.

21. Ellic Howe noted that the Rite of Strict Observance might have inspired Westcott in the invention of the Myth of the Unknown Superiors. However, as Howe wrote, he believed something different himself:

[I]t is far more likely that the source of his [i.e., Westcott’s] inspiration was Madame Blavatsky’s mysterious and invisible Mahatmas, the Masters Morya and Koot Hoomi, the messengers of a hidden Occult Brotherhood. . . . The impact made by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society and teaching during the late 1880s is now hardly remembered, but Westcott would have been very conscious of it. . . . [W]hen Madame Blavatsky settled permanently in London in May 1887 she was already well known, even notorious. (Howe, 1972/1978, p. 7)

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Although a Blavatskian inspiration for the myth is possible – and, alas, we shall never know for certain – I find it significant that not only the Rite of Strict Observance, but also the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross, and – most importantly – the SRIA itself, had versions of the Myth of the Unknown Superiors.

22. I have omitted above one minor but interesting characteristic shared by the Golden Dawn and the SRIA: a new candidate in either group selects a motto, often in Latin, by which the candidate is to be known. For the Golden Dawn practice, see Cicero & Cicero, (2003, pp. 119–20, 257–58). The SRIA practice parallels that of the later SRICF. For example, the SRICF’s New Jersey College’s original *Ordinances* stipulate that “Every Frater shall, on admission, choose a Latin Motto, to be . . . appended to his signature in all communications relating to the Society . . . and no two Fraters may adopt the same Motto” (New Jersey College, 1932, Ordinance XIX).

23. It is worth noting that the 18th century Ancients and Moderns lodges in England considered each other ‘irregular.’ For all practical purposes, even purely technical notions of Masonic regularity are extremely problematic, when applied to bodies existing before the Union of 1813. (The Union joined the Ancients and Moderns Grand Lodges into the United Grand Lodge of England, or UGLE, which continues today.)

24. I take my cue here from the title used by Gilbert (1987).

25. Why “neo”? Because the older expression of the esoteric school of Masonic research suffered from intolerable problems. As Westcott wrote of George Oliver, many an author of the older esoteric school “sometimes drew upon his imagination for his facts” (Westcott, 1893, p. 205).

26. This is an aspect of the ritual of the 4^o, Secret Master, of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, as conducted in the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States of America (Hutchens, 2006, pp. 19–20).

27. Modified from a Wikimedia image, *Tree_of_life_wk_o2.svg*, authored by “pofaure,” retrieved June 19, 2010 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tree_of_life_hebrew.svg

