

Martinist Orders and Freemasonry in France since the time of Papus

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By the end of the 19th century, French Freemasonry had become something like a political party. But French freemasons had not really decided to take such a path; they had, in effect, had no choice. Although the fact is often unrecognised or misinterpreted, French lodges, which had been established in France in the 1720's by English and Irish masons, had retained the tenets of their founders, as expressed in the *Book of Constitutions of 1723*, as is clear from the earliest official French masonic text, *Devoirs enjoints aux Maçons Libres (Duties enjoined to Free Masons)*, written in 1735 after their existence had become publicly known. This is a rather free but yet faithful translation of the *Charges of a Free-Mason* compiled by Anderson or, more precisely, a diplomatic adaptation. For example, where the English text has 'tis now considered more expedient to oblige them to that Religion in which all men agree', the French translation of 1735 reads 'cette religion dont tout Chrétien convient' ('that religion upon which every Christian agrees'). That makes a real difference, for France was very different from the United Kingdom. France, at that time, was an absolute monarchy under the young Louis XVth, and Roman Catholicism was not only the religion of the State but the sole permitted one since 1685, when Louis XIVth had revoked the Edict of Nantes that had given Protestants freedom of worship for almost a century.

Throughout the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, French Masonry lived in a state of continual ambiguity. Firstly, ambiguity as to its official status. The Grand Master from 1743 to 1771, the Count of Clermont, was a prominent member of the royal family, and his successor was the Duke of Orleans, who was officially the "First Prince of the Royal Blood", but during all that time, Freemasonry had no legal right to exist, and never received any official recognition from the authorities. Moreover, it had been condemned and forbidden by the Pope, first in 1738 and again in 1751¹. It is true to say that the papal bulls never had the force of law in France because the King – supported by the French Church – jealously retained his absolute power although he was, nevertheless, officially the "Very Christian King" and fidelity of the throne to the Catholic Church was a major part of its legitimacy. Thus, after the French Revolution of 1789 and the fall of the First Empire in 1815, when the Bourbon monarchy was restored, Freemasonry was gradually regarded by the authorities and especially by the right-wing of French society, as a den of radicals – or at

least of dangerous progressive men – in politics as well as in religion. During the course of the 19th century, if one attached great value to the ideals of tolerance, liberty of conscience and universal fraternity, Freemasonry was the only institution in France in which one could put these tenets into practice. By the end of the century, simply doing this was to be actively involved in politics. Had the old French monarchy taken the way of the English monarchy of the 18th century, and French Freemasonry would have probably developed in a different manner. Of course, we cannot be sure and it is better like that: an historian is not a novelist...

On the other hand, French Freemasonry was also ambiguous as to its spirit and practices. The 18th century was the Age of Enlightenment, of course, but also the Age of the Illuminati. In the French lodges of that time one found not only men like Montesquieu, Condorcet and, later Benjamin Franklin and even Voltaire, but also men looking for spiritual, hermetic or mystical secrets. One after another, the early high degrees, the so-called “degrés écossais” (“Scots degrees”), held in such high esteem by French Brethren, promised to reveal to the candidate the “most interesting and last secret”. But within a matter of weeks or months, Brethren were advised that a new degree had made its appearance on the masonic stage: it was a never-ending story with very different kinds of actors. Most of them were honest and genuine, a few were outright swindlers and others fell somewhere between the two.

In the city of Lyon, the ancient, traditional capital of Gaul, a very catholic town and one of the major crossroads of trade in France, three men, three masons, played an important role in masonic life during the last decades of the 18th century. They were also the ancestors of Martinism.

The first of them was a mysterious man, or more precisely, a curious, a strange man. We do not know exactly when he was born, at some date between 1710 and 1725, and we are not sure where, probably in Grenoble. Although we know when and where he died, in 1774 in Santo Domingo, the reasons why he had left France, two years before, remain unclear. It was officially to receive a legacy, but was it the only reason for his departure?

Even his name is uncertain. Most of the time he was known as Martinès de Pasqually, but sometimes as Pasquallis de la Tour or Jacques de la Tour de la Case: nobody knows which is the right name. I have read many of his letters and they are written in an odd language, something between French and Spanish. He was reputed to be a Roman Catholic, but it is obvious that his family was originally Jewish. In his writings he often refers, with a curious neologism of his own, to the “quatriple essence divine” (“the quatriple divine nature”). “Quatriple”, a combination of “quadruple” – for the four letters of the Divine Name in the Jewish Tradition – and “triple” – for the Three Persons of the Christian Trinity ! I leave the reader to judge the extent of his ecumenism.

This man was an enigma and his life something of a puzzle. However, for several years he was considered as a Master by a number of intelligent, sensible

and even very educated men. They called themselves his “Emules”, because they wanted to “emulate” their Master. For them, he was the “Grand Sovereign” because, thanks to him, they were – or they could hope to become – the Elect, les “Elus Coens”, “Priests Elect” according to the “Primitive Worship” of which Martinès was the modern Prophet ⁱⁱ.

Martinès was a Freemason but, inevitably, we do not know where and when he had been admitted to the Craft. In the 1750’s he was nevertheless the founder of lodges and, after some years of little success, he set up his own Order. It was apparently masonic, with degrees such as Apprentice, Fellow, Master, and even Master Elect or Knight of the East. But this was only a façade. The core-business of the Order, so to speak, was not Masonry, but something more frightening and also more fascinating: it was theurgy: Magical ceremonies designed with the intention of making spiritual beings, angels of high rank – or even the Lord himself ! – appear.

For about six years, before his final departure to Santo Domingo, his disciples, few in number but very dedicated, worked with in him in their Temples. During the impressive ceremonies of the Order, some of them received tangible signs of the divine presence : lightning in the darkness or dull sounds, while others neither saw nor heard anything at all.

And lastly there was the *magnum opus* of the Master: a treatise he began to dictate to his private secretaries about 1770 and never completed. It was a commentary on the Bible, especially on the Book of Genesis, setting out an unknown sacred history of humanity. But behind the story there was a doctrine. The doctrine of “Reintegration”, “reinstatement”, “readmission” of man to his divine and primitive nature and also final resorption or absorption of the entire world in the divine mystery. It was the aim of the Order and the mission of the Elect.

In 1774, Martinès died at the other side of the world and his disciples remained alone. The Great Evening of the world had been delayed. Within months, two years at the latest, the temples were disbanded. But some of the Elect who began to be known as “Martinists”, in remembrance of Martinès, tried to find their own way without their Master.

One of them, the second ancestor of Martinism, lived in Lyon where Martinès had established a Temple of his Order in 1767. This man was Jean-Baptiste Willermoz ⁱⁱⁱ. He had been a prominent Mason for about twenty years and was one of the leading figures of Masonry in Lyon. For years, he had been working the rituals of Martinès’ Order, but had never succeeded in seeing or hearing anything from the spiritual world. After Martinès’ departure from France and later from life, Willermoz decided to merge two quite different things: Masonry and Martinès’ doctrine of “Reintegration”. Magical ceremonies were abandoned, and Willermoz created the Scottish Rectified Rite. There are many problematic aspects in this masonic system, especially the Templar legend, which is the basis of its Inner Order, the Order of the Knights

Beneficent of the Holy City; but it is not the subject of this paper and would be a digression. The other problem is the place of Martinès' doctrine in the Masonic rituals written by Willermoz. It is a strange place, for this doctrine is understood to be present but is never clearly expressed in these rituals. The Scottish Rectified Rite is masonic, purely masonic, and there is no place in it for magic. But for one who knows Martinès' works, some details are suggestive. For example, in the third degree, the candles of the lodge are arranged so as to evoke – in the full sense of the word “evoke” – the final dissolution of inanimate matter before resorption of the world in the Divine Substance. But of course all of this is only suggested and one can appreciate and even enjoy the Scottish Rectified Rite without knowing anything about these esoteric keys of the rituals^{iv}. It was Willermoz's choice: retaining Martinès' doctrine without theurgy, and making use of masonic rituals to illustrate with discretion his view of human destiny.

And there was a third man. He was one of the closest disciples of Martinès. The one to whom Martinès had dictated his treatise. And his name was curiously like an echo of his master's name: he was Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, the third and final ancestor of Martinism^v.

He came from a noble but poor family and began his adult life in the army. But he was not made for military life. He was a very kind person, peaceful and dreamy, a devout Christian and inclined to mysticism. Nevertheless this highly intelligent, well educated man, became one the more enthusiastic disciples of Martinès – although I am not sure that the word “enthusiastic” is appropriate for him. He also became a freemason and a close friend of Willermoz. After Martinès' death, he came to Lyon in order to work with Willermoz and to try to pass on the torch of his doctrine to the younger followers of their Master, but after some years, he became discouraged. He had never been very enthusiastic about magical ceremonies, nor about Freemasonry. In 1775, he started a new career: he became an author. His first book *Des erreurs et de la vérité (Of Error and Truth)* was an enigmatic book. Voltaire said that he had never read anything so foolish. In fact, the wording of the book seems allusive and vague, but it is like a coded message containing the major creeds of Martinès. It was in effect an exposé of his doctrine. That is probably why Saint-Martin decided to publish this book under a pseudonym. All his books appeared under the name of *Le Philosophe Inconnu*, (The Unknown Philosopher). But, year after year, Saint-Martin became better known and some years after the Revolution, in the literary circles of Paris, he was the “Best known Philosopher”. Nevertheless, Saint-Martin remained a modest and simple man. Until the end of his life – he died in 1803, at fifty years of age – he had never denied his Master, but had chosen for himself another way. He called it the “Way of the heart”: no magic, no rituals, but only meditation and prayers. It could be said that he practised not “operative” but “symbolic or speculative” theurgy.

It was the beginning of the 19th century. A new century but also a new world in France. The old society was dead. Martinès was far away, and the Scottish Rectified Rite had disappeared in France when Willermoz died in 1824 at 94, without a successor. It was, apparently, the end of the story.

And now we can go back to the beginning of this paper, where I told you that, at the end of the 19th century, French Freemasonry had become almost a sort of political party. I am sorry, but all this has been only the foreword.

The second half of the 19th century was not only an Age of Reason, as was the preceding century, but also and above all an Age of Science. Positivism was the current philosophy and, in France, it was the official doctrine of progressive political leaders. When Emile Littré a famous philologist and lexicographer, and the spiritual son of Auguste Comte, founder of positivism, was admitted in the lodge La Clémentine Amitié, Grand Orient of France, in Paris, it was like a national event with people arriving by the hundred, most of them non masons, and waiting for the exit of Littré outside the building.

Curiously but in the same way that the 18th century had been at the same time rationalist and mystical, a new school of thought appeared in the middle of the 19th century in France - and also in England - it was named "Occultism".

Two men played an important part in defining the doctrine of this intellectual movement: Eliphas Levi^{vi} and Stanislas de Guaita^{vii}. The first was, briefly, a freemason and came to England where he met other masons, some of whom were later involved in the foundation of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. Stanislas de Guaita was never a freemason but he was, in 1888, the first Grand Master of the "Kabbalistic Order of the Rosy-Cross", an esoteric circle devoted to "occult studies". At the same time, one of his friends, a member of the *Chambre de direction* (Chamber of Instruction) of the Kabbalistic Order, Gérard Encausse, set up a new initiatory Order, called *l'Ordre Martiniste* (Martinist Order) and became its first Grand Master and President of its Supreme Council^{viii}.

But who was Gerard Encausse, this very young Grand Master of twenty-three years of age ? He was born in 1865 in Spain and brought up in France, where his family had moved after his birth, and educated at the College Rollin in Paris – as I was a century later, but I never met his ghost in the dark corridors of his old college.

He became a physician, a general practitioner, and was a great success with his patients. But very early in his career, he was disappointed by the official positivism of the College of Medicine. It was a time when science was making strange discoveries: for example, electro-magnetism or, more fascinating, X-rays ! Encausse thought that nothing was "super-natural". He created a review called *L'Initiation*, which had for its motto this curious sentence: "The Supernatural does not exist". Nevertheless, Encausse was sure that magic was a reality, not a fiction, and that science was showing why and how it was possible to move things at a distance, for example. He believed in astrology because

magnetism was not confined to our planet. In his mind there was no contradiction between science and magic, no discontinuity between matter and spirit. He was less than twenty-five years old when he published in 1891 a book of almost 1,000 pages entitled *Traité méthodique de Science occulte* (Methodical Treatise of Occult Science). It was a heterogeneous book with references not only to Platonism, Pythagoreanism, the mysteries of Ancient Egypt, magic and Christian Kabbalah of the Renaissance, but also to electricity and modern alchemy. Encausse told his readers that modern sciences were already known in the past and taught in Memphis or Athens in secret circles. This ancient science was “Initiation”.

To reveal all these old secrets, he had taken a mystical name, Papus, and to promote his doctrine he looked for a secret society, and tried, without success to join Freemasonry. At that time, the study of magic and initiation was not considered to be a typical masonic concern in France, so lodges of the Grand Orient as well as lodges of the Grand Lodge refused to admit him as a mason - which is why he decided to create something like a “super-Masonry”, calling it *l'Ordre Martiniste*.

Papus was not really aware of the doctrine of Martinès and he had a very superficial knowledge of the works of Saint-Martin. His approach was rather confusing and did not really differentiate between the “Elus Coens”, the Scottish Rectified Rite and even the “Way of the heart” taken by Saint Martin. For Papus, Martinès, Willermoz and Saint Martin had something in common: their interest in spiritual matters. Martinès' Treatise was too complex, the Scottish Rectified Rite had disappeared – except in Switzerland, which was another world to him – but it was still possible to read books written by Saint Martin and they seemed easy to understand.

Papus created his Order from nothing and he was aware that Saint Martin, in the last years of his life, had refused to remain a mason. Moreover, there was a clear incompatibility between the spiritual doctrine of the Unknown Philosopher and a ritual initiation. Nevertheless, Papus, about 1890, wrote the first ritual of the Martinist Order with three degrees: “Associate”, “Initiate” and “Superieur Inconnu”, the highest degree. Martinist groups were called “lodges” but the Master of a Martinist lodge was a “Philosophe Inconnu”^{ix}. The work was very interesting because Papus introduced new symbols, especially the “Mask of the Initiate” and the “Cloak of the Wise”.

Within a few years, five or six lodges were created in Paris and in all of them there were freemasons but, of course, the Order never received any recognition from masonic bodies and it remained very small. About 1895, an American branch was founded and its leader, Edward Blitz, wrote a new ritual of the Order.^x This new version was greatly influenced by masonic rituals and was translated in 1913 by a prominent member of the French Order, Charles Detré, who was a professional translator in London.

But World War broke out in 1914 and Papus died in 1916. After the war, Charles Detré held the rank of Grand Master but his legitimacy was questioned. A new Martinist Order was established in 1920 by Victor Blanchard, the Martinist and Synarchic Order. Later, in 1931, another branch was created by Jean Chaboseau, member of the first Supreme Council of the Order : this third Order was called Traditional Martinist Order. Since that time, more than ten other Orders – often very, very small – have been created, but I have no intention, in this talk, of telling the complete and rather uninteresting story of these bodies.

Since 1930, there have been Martinist groups in Belgium, Switzerland, England, Canada, the USA, and in some rather more exotic countries. In France, where the Martinist Order was created a little more than one century ago, it never became a large organisation. To conclude, I would like to suggest that Martinism, in the modern sense of the word, was created in France only because at that time French Freemasonry had forgotten the spiritual side of masonic ritual. For French Freemasons, in the 1880's, Masonry taught a republican ethic, described as “*une haute morale laïque*” (a high secular moral code), because at the same time they had to fight against the power of a Church that had, since 1738, never accepted the very existence of Freemasonry. Papus himself was not a Roman Catholic – although he married and was buried according to the Catholic Rite – but he claimed to be a “free Christian”, and he was politically progressive. He also thought that nature was mysterious and intelligible, and he believed that the Age of Science was the Age of a new Revelation. For him the time was coming for a reconciliation of science and religion, philosophy and mysticism, rationality and spirituality. That is why I think that Martinism, according to Papus's view of it, was a precursor of the New Age.

One century later, there are few Martinists in France, many of them are also freemasons, and for them Martinism is like a para-masonic Order devoted to esoteric or mystical studies. But today most French freemasons would probably agree with the principal ideas of Papus that their predecessors some decades before had looked on with disdain.

That is also why the history of Martinism is so paradoxical. In the 18th century, the “first” Martinism, covering many different things, came to an end in the Age of Reason. In the 19th century, the second Martinism, without any real relationship with the first one, appeared and developed in the Age of Science. And nowadays, it remains, for most of the time, like “an unidentified initiatory object”: full of contradiction, of poetry, of audacious hypotheses and generous but sometimes foolish ideas. Let me say, in a word : so French...

ⁱ Alec Mellor, ‘The Roman Catholic Church and the Craft’, *AQC* 89 (1976), pp. 60-69.

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- ⁱⁱ Michelle Nahon, 'Elus Coen', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 332-334. See also Jean-François Var, 'Martinism: First Period', *id.*, pp. 770-779.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jean-François Var, 'Willermoz, Jean-Baptiste', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 1170-1174. On his life and doctrine, the major source remains: Alice Joly, *Un mystique lyonnais et les secrets de la franc-maçonnerie, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1750-1824)* (Mâcon, 1938).
- ^{iv} Roger Dachez, 'La parathéurgie chez Jean-Baptiste Willermoz et dans la maçonnerie rectifiée : approche d'un concept', *Esotérisme, Gnose et Imaginaire symbolique* (Leuven, 2001), pp. 363-372.
- ^v Arthur Mc Calla, 'Saint-Martin, Louis-Claude', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 1024-1031.
- ^{vi} Jean-Pierre Laurant, 'Eliphas Lévi (ps. of Alphonse Louis Constant)', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 689-692.
- ^{vii} William Quinn, 'Guaita Stanislas, Marsquis de', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 441-445.
- ^{viii} Jean-Pierre Laurant, 'Papus (ps. of Gérard Anacleto Vincent Encausse)', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 913-915. See also Marie-Sophie André & Christophe Beaufiles, *Papus, biographie* (Paris, 1995).
- ^{ix} Marco Pasi, 'Martinism: Second Period', *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, 2005), pp. 780-785.
- ^x *Ritual and Monitor of the Martinist Order*, 1896