UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

# The 'Baphomet' of Eliphas Lévi

*Its Meaning and Historical Context*

Strube, J.

**Publication date**
2017
**Document Version**
Final published version
**Published in**
Correspondences
**License**
CC BY-NC

Link to publication

**Citation for published version (APA):**
Strube, J. (2017). The 'Baphomet' of Eliphas Lévi: Its Meaning and Historical Context. *Correspondences*, *4*, 37-79. http://correspondencesjournal.com/ojs/ojs/index.php/home/article/download/39/39

**General rights**
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

*UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)*

Download date:10 Oct 2026

*Correspondences* 4 (2016) 37–79 ISSN: 2053-7158 (Online)
correspondencesjournal.com

# The "Baphomet" of Eliphas Lévi:
## Its Meaning and Historical Context

**Julian Strube**

E-mail: julian.strube@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de

**Abstract**
Although the Baphomet drawn by Eliphas Lévi (i.e., Alphonse-Louis Constant, 1810–1875) is one of the most famous esoteric images worldwide, very little is known about its context of emergence. It is well established that it has to be seen as a symbolic representation of Lévi's magnetistic-magical concept of the Astral Light, but the historical background of this meaning remains largely obscure. This article demonstrates that a historical contextualization of the Baphomet leads to an understanding of its meaning that is significantly different from prevalent interpretations. It will firstly be shown that the formation of Lévi's historical narrative can only be comprehended in the light of his radical socialist writings from the 1840s. It will then be discussed which sources he used to elaborate and re-signify this narrative. Secondly, it will be investigated how Lévi developed his magical theory in the 1850s by focusing on the contexts of "spiritualistic magnetism," Spiritism, and Catholicism. This analysis will show that the Baphomet should be seen as more than a symbolization of Lévi's magical theory. It is the embodiment of a politically connoted tradition of "true religion" which would realize a synthesis of religion, science, and politics.

**Keywords**
Eliphas Lévi; Baphomet; occultism; socialism; Catholicism; magnetism

© 2016 Julian Strube
This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

(Figure 1)

## 1. Introduction

Eliphas Lévi's androgynous, goat-headed "Baphomet" is one of the most widely spread images with esoteric background. The drawing was originally published in the first *livraisons* of Lévi's famous *Dogme de la haute magie*, published by Guiraudet et Jouaust in 1854, and featured as the frontispiece for the two-volume edition of *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, published by Germer Baillière in 1855–1856, and for the extended second edition of 1861 (figure 1). Today, the image and its countless variations are highly popular in new religious movements and subcultures, most notably the various metal or gothic scenes. It is frequently used in decidedly provocative counter-cultural contexts. In 2015, the so-called Satanic Temple unveiled a massive monument inspired by the Baphomet drawing. The statue was intended as a tongue-in-cheek protest against what was perceived as an improperly close relationship between religion and the state. The organizers, who successfully attracted enormous media interest, could draw on a close association between the Baphomet, devil worship, and Satanism that had been established at least since the 1960s but reaches back to the end of the nineteenth century.[1] In this context, the Baphomet is

[1] Cf. Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*, 2nd ed. (London: Rider, 1975), 206–18 and Ruben van Luijk, "Satan Rehabilitated? A Study Into Satanism During the Nineteenth Century" (Dissertation, Universiteit van Tilburg, 2013), 241–323.

often—and erroneously—identified with an inverted pentagram superimposed on a goat's head, a symbol that was first indicated by Eliphas Lévi himself and later visualized by occultists such as Stanislas de Guaïta (1861–1897), in his *Clef de la magie noire* from 1897.[2] This variant was perhaps most prominently used by Anton Szandor LaVey (1930–1997) in his *Satanic Bible* (1969), where it is explicitly identified as "Baphomet." It does not come as a surprise, then, that the Baphomet is often associated with Satanism and anti-Christian attitudes.

At the same time, it is well known that Eliphas Lévi hardly qualifies as a Satanist, and that the meaning of the drawing, as ghastly as it may appear to the beholder, is neither satanic nor anti-Christian. There is a wealth of academic and non-academic literature that points out Lévi's intention: a symbolization of the equilibrium of opposites. The magnetistic connotation of this concept was made very explicit by the author, and both early esoteric recipients such as Helena Blavatsky, in 1877, and later scholars such as Christopher McIntosh, in 1975, emphasized this.[3] While it is very easy to learn about the notion of the "Astral Light" that formed the foundation of Lévi's magnetistic theory, almost no attention has been paid to the actual historical context in which he developed his understanding of the Baphomet.[4] Although it is obvious that Lévi related it to the Knights Templar, the actual sources he used to develop the historical narrative in which he located the Templars has not been investigated. This is mainly due to the fact that most observers more or less implicitly accept the idea that Lévi was the continuator of an esoteric tradition, a *rénovateur de l'occultisme*, who was less dependent on the historical context of the 1840s and 1850s than on ancient esoteric doctrines.[5]

---

2 Cf. Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (Paris/London/New York: Germer Baillière, 1861), 93–94, 98, and Stanislas de Guaïta, *Essais de sciences maudites, vol. 2: Le Serpent de la Genèse, seconde septaine: La clef de la magie noire* (Paris: Henri Durville, 1920), 417.

3 Cf. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York/London: J. W. Bouton/Bernard Quaritch, 1877), 137–38; *The Secret Doctrine. The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 3rd ed., 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1893), 273–74 and McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi*, 150.

4 With the notable exception of Karl Baier, *Meditation und Moderne. Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 265–77.

5 This was established by Paul Chacornac, *Eliphas Lévi. Rénovateur de l'Occultisme en France (1810–1875)* (Paris: Chacornac Frères, 1989), who reproduced narratives that were developed by French occultists such as Papus or Stanislas de Guaïta. See Julian Strube, *Sozialismus, Katholizisimus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 590–618.

In what follows, it will be shown that Lévi's Baphomet appears in a different light if it is historically contextualized. When developing his historical narrative, Lévi was informed by scholarly debates about the emergence and early development of Christianity, which often revolved around the question of "true" religion and its role in contemporary society. The meaning and intention of this narrative can only be comprehended if one takes into consideration the ideas that he had propagated in the 1840s under his civil name Alphonse-Louis Constant, when he was known as one of the most notorious socialist radicals.[6] At that time, he claimed to be the representative of a "true" Catholicism which he opposed to the corrupted Christianity of the Churches, and which he vehemently identified with "true" socialism. He regarded himself as the latest representative of a long tradition of revolutionary heretics who struggled for the realization of a universal religious *association*. In the 1850s, he re-signified and elaborated this narrative, now identifying "occultism" with "true Catholicism" and, at times more or less explicitly, with "true socialism."[7] His Baphomet has to be seen as an iconic representation of this "true" doctrine, as the Knights Templar were considered to be the successors of the very same heretical revolutionary tradition that reached back to the "Gnostics" of the late ancient School of Alexandria, the environment where the momentous separation between "true" and "false" religion supposedly took place. In this light, the Baphomet is not only a magnetistic symbol representing Lévi's theory of magic, but first and foremost an embodiment of the one and only true tradition whose ultimate goal is the establishment of a perfect social order.

## 2. Lévi's Depiction of the Baphomet

It is relatively easy to trace the visual inspirations of Lévi's notorious drawing. Obviously, the Baphomet is depicted by Lévi primarily as a goat-like figure, which is further emphasized by its identification with the "Goat of Mendes" or the "sabbatical goat." Depictions of a horned, goat-like demonic creature, or the devil himself, were widespread. When Lévi wrote his books, the topos of a goat being present at witches' sabbaths had been commonplace for centuries. Having

6 As this article focuses on the period when Constant wrote under his new pseudonym, he will only be referred to as Eliphas Lévi. His publications, however, will be listed using the name under which they were published.

7 Julian Strube, "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to Socialism and Secularization in 19th-Century France," *Religion* 46, no. 3 (2016): 371–79.

received an ecclesiastical education, Lévi did repeatedly mention several "classics" of demonology, such as Jean Bodin's famous *De la demonomanie des sorciers* (1580), but he only referred to or cited more recent works, such as Augustin Calmet's *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires* (1758) and Jean Baptiste Thiers' *Traité des superstitions qui regardent les sacrements* (1697), where the sabbatical goat is discussed.[8] On a graphical level, most readers will be familiar with prints such as those of the *Compendium maleficarum* (1608) that show a goat-headed, winged Devil who bears much resemblance to Lévi's Baphomet (figure 2). Due to the omnipresence of similar depictions, it is both impossible and needless to determine a limited set of sources for this motif. But there is little doubt that the most direct inspiration for the Baphomet drawing was the Tarot card "Le Diable" from the Marseille deck (figure 3), which was regarded by Lévi as the finest surviving version.[9] Some other influences are more or less explicitly mentioned, namely the famous alchemical androgyne in Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* sapientiae aeternae (1595, figure 4), as well as a print from 1639 which joins Clovis Hesteau de Nuysement's *Traittez de l'harmonie et constitution generalle du vray sel, secret des philosophes, et de l'esprit universel du monde* together with other alchemical tracts (figure 5).[10] In the beginning of his *Dogme*, Lévi provided a fairly detailed description of how he understood the symbolism of each element of his eclectically assembled figure.[11]

---

8 Among those, the numerous references to Calmet in Alphonse-Louis Constant, *Dictionnaire de littérature chrétienne*, ed. Abbé Migne (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1851), e.g. 249; Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 286–88 and to Thiers in Constant, *Dictionnaire*, 384; Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 308. Cf. the original passages in Augustin Calmet, *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires*, vol. 1 (Senones: Joseph Pariset, 1769), 119–20 and Jean Baptiste Thiers, *Traité des superstitions qui regardent les sacrements*, vol. 2 (Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1697), 365–68.

9 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 172. Lévi mentioned the "Italian Tarot," which at the time signified the Tarot of Marseille, as well as the Tarot of Besançon, which was based on the Marseille deck. For further information on Lévi and the Tarot, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 442–45, 78–79, 500–01, 61–463 and Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The origins of the Occult Tarot* (London: Duckworth, 1996), esp. 166–93.

10 See Clovis Hesteau de Nuysement, *Traittez de l'harmonie et constitution généralle du vray sel, secret des philosophes, et de l'esprit universelle du monde, suivant le troisiesme principe du Cosmopolite* (La Haye: Theodore Maire, 1639), between the preface and the dedication, cf. Eliphas Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 236 and ibid., 2: 208, 22–23 For more about Hesteau de Nuysement, see Kathleen P. Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot/ Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 137–62. About the engravings in Khunrath, see Peter J. Forshaw, "'Alchemy in the Amphitheatre'. Some Consideration of the Alchemical Content of the Engravings in Heinrich Khunrath's 'Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom'," in *Art and Alchemy*, ed. Jacob Wamberg (Kopenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006).

11 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 1, VI–VII. Cf. Ibid., 2: 211–12 and *La clef des grands mystères* (Paris:

(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

(Figure 4)

(Figure 5)

Apart from these visual aspects, the magnetistic context of the Baphomet was expressed repeatedly by Lévi, his publishers, and his critics. In 1854, Guiraudet et Jouaust advertised for *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* with an extract from the first volume, which at that time was still a work in progress.[12] The selected passage, which has been abbreviated for the advertisement, is still among the most quoted from Lévi's oeuvre:

> There exists in nature a force which is much more powerful than steam. ... This force was known to the ancients: it consists of a universal agent whose supreme law is equilibrium, and whose direction is concerned immediately with the great arcanum of transcendental magic. ... This agent, which barely manifests itself under the trial and error of the disciples of Mesmer, is exactly what the adepts of the Middle Ages called the first matter of the great work. The Gnostics represented it as the fiery body of the Holy Spirit, and it was the object of adoration in the secret rites of the Sabbath or the Temple, under the hieroglyphic figure of Baphomet or the Androgynous Goat of Mendes.[13]

This passages makes perfectly clear that *Dogme et rituel* was presented and understood as a magnetistic work, which wanted to distance itself from Mesmerist publications. It is remarkable that Lévi did not attempt to challenge other magnetists on the grounds of practical experiments; instead his argument was a thoroughly *historical* one. Claiming to possess the key to a tradition of superior secret, ancient knowledge, he dismissed the "Mesmerists" as amateurish dabblers who could only guess what powers they are dealing with. The protagonists of Lévi's tradition are openly named: the medieval "adepts" who were the successors of the ancient Gnostics, most prominent among them the Templars who worshipped the Baphomet. Lévi did not claim to depict the exact idol that was supposedly the object of adoration of medieval adepts, but he did claim to present an allegorical drawing of the ideas that were represented by it. First and foremost, he described the Baphomet as a "pantheistic and magical figure of the absolute" and identified it with Pan.[14] It

---

Baillière, 1861), 234.

12 A note informed the readers in the future tense that "this work will be limited to 500" copies and "will be composed of 20 livraisons," in addition to the present one. Subscribers "before October 15th, 1854" would receive a discount, and if "it should need more than 20 livraisons to complete this work" the additional numbers would be free. This allows for a dating *ante quem* and shows that the eventual size of the volume was as yet unclear.

13 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 83–84. The translations in this article do not rely on Waite's translations of Lévi's works.

14 Ibid., VI.

was much more than an imaginative symbol for a magnetistic theory. It stood for a specific secret tradition that formed the key to the understanding of the true form of religion. The narrative that forms this "traditional" background of the Baphomet has, until recently, not been historically contextualized. It will be shown that the Baphomet is more than a bricolage of older esoteric traditions. Its meaning can only be understood in the context of the 1840s and 1850s.

## 3. Lévi's Historical Narrative and its Sources

The fundamental idea behind Lévi's writings was the existence of a single, true tradition that resulted from a primitive revelation.[15] Due to a series of degenerations and misinterpretations destroying this pristine unity, the religious traditions of humanity had multiplied, but they all carried traces of the universal divine dogma. Explaining the meaning of the pentagram that adorns the Baphomet's head, Lévi declared that "every new cult is just a new route to lead humanity to the one religion, that of the sacred and the radiant pentagram, the sole eternal *Catholicism*."[16] It has already been indicated that Lévi had identified as the representative of "true" Catholicism since his radical writings of the 1840s, a self-understanding that he constantly articulated in his occultist writings. The major influence on his Catholic identity was the famous priest Félicité de Lamennais (1782–1854), the founder of a so-called "Neo-Catholic" movement that sought to establish a progressive form of Catholicism that was marked by a rationalistic and scientific stance. After spectacularly breaking with Rome, Lamennais turned to a Christian socialism in 1834 that inspired a whole generation of young socialists, including Lévi, who was perceived by contemporaries as one of his most radical disciples.[17] A key concept of Lamennais and other Neo-Catholic authors was the *révélation primitive*, a theory that sought to prove the eternal and exclusive truth of Catholicism on the basis of "historical evidence" gathered from all religious traditions.[18] Lévi's approach to history decisively relied on this theory, as becomes most obvious in the light of his

15 See, e.g., *Histoire de la magie* (Paris: Baillière, 1860), 256.

16 *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 98.

17 Strube, "Socialist Religion," 372; "Ein neues Christentum. Frühsozialismus, Neo-Katholizismus und die Einheit von Religion und Wissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 66, no. 2 (2014): 154–60.

18 For more details, see *Sozialismus*, 190–96; "Socialist Religion," 377 and Arthur McCalla, "The Mennaisian 'Catholic Science of Religion': Epistemology and History in Early Nineteenth-Century French Study," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21, no. 3 (2009).

constant emphasis on the true tradition being nothing else but "Catholicism."[19] Similar to Neo-Catholic writers, he certainly did not seek to abolish the Church but to reform it and establish its true character, which would eventually lead to a universal—that is literally "Catholic"—religion of humanity. However, his attitude towards the *status quo* of the Church was much more radical in that it was marked by an aggressive anti-clericalism, directed not against the office of the priest but against the corrupted holders of this office.[20]

This concerns one of the aspects that can be most confusing for the readers of Lévi's works. His occultist narrative is marked by an ambiguousness that often appears incoherent and self-contradictory. He constantly emphasizes the need for the "authority and hierarchy" of the Church while denouncing it as corrupted in the most aggressive terms.[21] In a similar vein, he frequently attacked the supposed holders of pristine knowledge—such as the Gnostics, the Templars, or the Freemasons—as corrupted and ignorant, while at the same time depicting them as the heirs of the one and only secret tradition. Although it can hardly be denied that there are numerous inconsistencies in Lévi's narrative, especially when one compares the volumes of *Dogme et rituel* with his later works, it gains a lot of clarity when one realizes that he understood the succession of "adepts" as a history of repeated corruptions. From early on, the wise bearers of the one true dogma saw the need to conceal it from the "masses," but at some point they lost the key to its understanding, which required another generation of initiates to take up the noble task of handing it down.[22]

Lévi made his ideas known to a broader readership for the first time in a series of articles published between 1855 and 1857 in a socialist journal,

---

19 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 404–05, 93–501.

20 Ibid., 505. Unlike his fellows, Lamennais turned his back on Roman Catholicism after his break with the Holy See and proclaimed a "religion of humanity." This is a notable contrast to Constant, who never renounced his Catholic identity.

21 Lévi, *Clef*, 40–41: "Aussi regardez les prêtres indignes, contemplez ces prétendus serviteurs de l'autel. Que disent à votre cœur ces hommes gras ou cadavéreux, aux yeux sans regards, aux lèvres pincées ou béantes ? … Ils prient comme ils dorment et ils sacrifient comme ils mangent. Ce sont des machines à pain, à viande, à vin, et à paroles vides de sens." Cf. Ibid., 6: "… dans l'Eglise hiérarchique et divinement autorisée, il n'y a jamais eu et il n'y aura jamais ni mauvais papes ni mauvais prêtres. Mauvais et prêtre sont deux mots qui ne s'accordent pas." *Nota bene* that Lévi talks about the "true" form of the Church here.

22 This is further complicated by the fact that Lévi had adopted the notion of *palingénésie* from the writings of Pierre-Simon Ballanche, which implied that the history of humanity was marked by a succession of stages where one essentially true and eternal dogma went through a progressive transformation. Strube, *Sozialismus*, 131, 98, 357, 80, 449, 99, 507; cf. "Socialist Religion," 367.

the *Revue philosophique et religieuses*—notably using his civil name.[23] In "The Kabbalistic Origins of Christianity" he declared that the Kabbalah (or what he understood under this term) was the core of true Christianity and thus the carrier of the "universal tradition" that he opposed to the corrupted doctrine of the established Churches. This separation was initiated by the burning of the works of Hermes and Pythagoras by Saint Paul—the moment when "Christianity emancipated itself" by "lighting the fire of the stake of his mother." This negation of the old tradition was necessary to create a new synthesis "in the name of the original and traditional dogma against the despotic and ignorant interpretations of the degenerated priesthood." With his actions, Paul followed the "pacifistic revolutionary" Jesus Christ, a successor of Osiris, Orpheus, Moses "and all great men of enlightenment."[24] However, this chain of initiates was first interrupted when a schism took place between Paul and John. Lévi clearly took the side of the latter, who was initiated by Jesus and wrote his Apocalypse in the "hieroglyphic language" handed down to him. The meaning of this language had been lost by "the official Roman Church," while the goal of the "Platonic" and "Kabbalistic" doctrine of John, as of all "true Kabbalists" and "high initiates," was "the realization of the divine ideal in humanity."[25] At the same time, Paul, a "free-thinker" eagerly seeking the emancipation of Christianity, "re-veiled" the dogma and unintentionally paved the way for "Catholic absolutism."[26] The consequences were disastrous, as the followers of the Church were now misled: "From the burning of books they came to the burning of their authors."

> In the meanwhile, the true Christianity, the Kabbalistic Christianity of Saint John, has always existed and it has always protested; but it was attacked with the most hateful calumny and confused by the official asceticism, under the name of Gnosticism, with all the delirium of depraved minds: so the Christians of Saint John concealed themselves and adopted a series of signs taken from the Kabbalah to recognize each other. So began the occult initiations which attracted the whole Order of the Temple to the light, by revealing to it its veritable destination.[27]

---

23 The articles were later used in *La clef des grands mystères* (1861).

24 Alphonse-Louis Constant, "Des origines cabalistiques du christianisme," in *La revue philosophique et religieuse* (Paris: Bureaux de la Revue, 1855), 35, 40–41. Here, the concept of Palingenesis is essential for an understanding of the narrative.

25 Ibid., 35–39.

26 Ibid., 41–42. In French, Lévi made a pun playing with the words *révélateur* (revelator) and *révoilateur* ("re-veilator").

27 Ibid., 42.

Thus the Templars became the torchbearers of the secret tradition of true Christianity, the "champions of humanity" who strived for the establishment of the *association universelle*—a prominent socialist concept that had been essential for Lévi's radical writings since 1841.[28] In another article about "The Classics of the Kabbalah," he emphasized that the true meaning of the Temple was "a social utopia and a symbol for the perfect government, based on an egalitarian hierarchy of intelligence and merit."[29] The adversaries of this revolutionary project were "the so-called orthodox sectarians who obstinately deny progress" and "claim authorities that they do not understand": "The ecclesiastical hierarchy is only temporary and must end when the time of the virility of humanity has come, the age of force and reason" which will bring "the second coming of Christ," the explanation of all symbolical figures, and the erection of the Temple.[30] Then the universal religion will finally be realized:

> But this purified religion will not be invented, it exists and it has always existed in humanity; but it had to be concealed by the sages, because the vulgar have been incapable of comprehending it. It is the tradition of all the great sanctuaries of antiquity, it is the philosophy of nature, it is God living in humanity and in the world, it is being demonstrated by being, it is reason proven by harmony, it is the analogy of the contraries, it is faith based on science and science elevated by faith.[31]

The reformist tenor of this rhetoric illustrates that Lévi had not at all abandoned his socialist thought. Given the fact that he had been imprisoned for political reasons in 1855 for the third time in his life, and that he had faced the harsh anti-socialist restrictions of the new government since the Coup of 1851, he exercised much caution in *Dogme et rituel* and the *Histoire de la magie* but apparently felt safe enough to employ a more radical language in the socialist *Revue*.[32] Despite the lack of open calls for the revolutionary establishment of a socialist utopia, the narrative in the monographs was more or less the same: The "great Kabbalist John" had been initiated into the secret doctrine by his master Jesus and communicated it in his Apocalypse, "the key to Christian

---

28 Ibid., 42–43. Cf. Strube, "Socialist Religion," 366–67.

29 Alphonse-Louis Constant, "Les classiques de la Kabbale. Second article. Les Talmudistes et le Talmud," in *La revue philosophique et religieuse* (Paris: Bureaux de la Revue, 1856), 393. This is a typical Saint-Simonian notion.

30 "Origines," 43–44; "Classiques," 393.

31 "Origines," 45.

32 After a general amnesty, Lévi resumed to frank radicalism, beginning in *La clef des grands mystères* (1861). See Strube, "Socialist Religion," 378–79; cf. *Sozialismus*, 565–77.

Kabbalah."[33] Lévi put an even stronger emphasis on the Kabbalah as the essence of the primitive revelation. He also elaborated his narrative about the consequences of the "emancipation" of Christianity and the founding of an *ésotérisme chrétien*:[34] "The ones to be initiated did not find initiators anymore, and in the long run the directors of consciences became as ignorant as the vulgar…: the path to light was lost."[35] As a consequence, the "profane" could "erect altar against altar" and cause countless schisms.[36] Within the Church, the last remnants of the Kabbalistic traditions were lost until the ninth century.[37]

Against this background, it is highly significant that Lévi presented the Templars as the advocates of *johannisme*.[38] But he was far from hailing them as the infallible guardians of true Christianity. He maintained that "the *johannisme* of the adepts was the Kabbalah of the Gnostics, which soon degenerated into a mystical pantheism amounting to the idolatry of nature and the hatred of all revealed dogma." Having lost the true meaning of the dogma and deceived by hubris, some of them even came to acknowledge "the pantheistic symbolism" of black magic and worshiped the "monstrous idol of Baphomet."[39] Once more, the chain of initiates had been interrupted because of human error, but Lévi suggested that their teachings lived on in the *maçonnerie occulte*, while the Templars themselves, or their remnants, turned into "anarchistic" assassins.[40] The central idea behind this complex and ambivalent tangle of groups, currents, and individuals is relatively simple: by declaring that literally everybody had, at some point, lost the key to an understanding of the true tradition, Lévi could position himself as the one who had rediscovered it. He was the one who could sort out all the "truths and errors" that had resulted from the upheavals in late antiquity.[41]

## Freemasonry

In order to understand the construction of Lévi's tradition, it must first be

---

33 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 145, 98, cf. Ibid., 2: 67; *Histoire*, 105.

34 *Histoire*, 212, 126–27.

35 *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 114; cf. *Histoire*, 5.

36 *Histoire*, 152.

37 Ibid., 222. Earlier, Lévi stressed that the "war against magic" had been necessary to battle "the false Gnostics"—keeping in mind that "the true science of the mages is essentially Catholic" (ibid., 33).

38 Ibid., 277, with the following differentiation: "Les templiers avaient deux doctrines, une cachée et réservée aux maîtres, c'était celle du *johannisme*; l'autre publique, c'était la doctrine *catholique-romaine*."

39 Ibid., 278.

40 Ibid., 280; cf. *Clef*, 219–20.

41 *Histoire*, 207.

investigated which sources he used. To begin with, any contemporary learning about the Knights Templar inevitably would have consulted literature about Freemasonry. The controversial rise and great success of neo-Templarism in the eighteenth century sparked a myriad of writings discussing the relationship between Freemasonry and the historical Templars, often in a highly polemical way.[42] The literature about Freemasons, Templars, conspiracy theories, and related topics is so vast in the first half of the nineteenth century that, again, it would be futile to determine a fixed set of sources. However, the grouping of certain names and the presentation of certain genealogies clearly show that Lévi relied on recent debates about the (Neo-)Templars and their historical origins. In 1818, the Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) had published a Latin piece in the *Mines de l'Orient*, called "Mysterium Baphometis revelatum, seu fratres militiae templi, qua Gnostici et quidem Ophiani apostasiae, idoloduliae et impuritatis convicti per ipsa eorum monumenta." Therein he maintained that the Templars were Gnostics and that they worshipped the Gnostic idol of the Baphomet, thus following a doctrine that he also related to the "Cabala."[43] The study received some attention in France, where it was reviewed in the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* in 1832,[44] a journal with Neo-Catholic background.[45] Hammer-Purgstall's accusation that

---

[42] The most extensive study of this is still René Le Forestier, *La franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Paris/Louvain: Aubier-Montaigne/Editions Nauwelaerts, 1970); cf. Pierre Mollier, "Freemasonry and Templarism," in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, ed. Henrik Bogdan and Jan A. M. Snoek (London/Boston: Brill, 2014). For a discussion of the contexts that are most relevant for the present argument, see Julian Strube, "Revolution, Illuminismus und Theosophie. Eine Genealogie der 'häretischen' Historiographie des frühen französischen Sozialismus und Kommunismus," *Historische Zeitschrift* (forthcoming).

[43] Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, "Mysterium baphometis revelatum, seu fratres militiae templi, qua Gnostici et quidem Ophiani apostasiae, idoloduliae et impuritatis convicti per ipsa eorum monumenta," in *Mines de l'Orient* (Vienna: Antoine Schmid, 1818), 2. He was convinced that the name Baphomet came from βαφη μητεος, which he translated as "*tinctura* (seu baptisma) *Metis*," i.e. "Baptism of Knowledge." Referring to inscriptions that served as his archaeological evidence, he concluded: "Huic *baptismati spirituali* et *tincturae igneae* inserviebant crateres ad pedes idolorum nostrorum exsculpti, et igne repleti, ita ut palam fiat, quomodo ritus ille mysticus administraretur." See ibid., 16–17. It should be noted that βαφη (washing) was not the term usually applied to denote baptism. However, it was used in alchemical contexts, where the meaning was often symbolically conflated with the act of baptizing. This is why, quite correctly, Hammer-Purgstall chose the translation *tinctura*. Many thanks for this information are due to Dylan Burns.

[44] *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, (Paris: Au Bureau des Annales de la Philosophie Chrétienne, 1835), 317–319.

[45] Lévi certainly knew the journal and referred to it in Constant, *Dictionnaire*, 899. References

the historical Knights Templar were worshipping a pagan "idol" in the form of a head had been described by various sources throughout the centuries, but the explosive nature of the notion of the Baphomet can only be understood in light of the more recent quarrels about Neo-Templarism.

The old accusations gained fresh interest when Masonic Neo-Templarism was established in the eighteenth century and, due to its outstanding success, caused much controversy. The Masonic Templar legend was most famously outlined in a writing published in Strasbourg in 1760, which claimed that the prosecuted Templars had fled to Scotland and founded the "Scottish Rite."[46] This legend was taken up by Karl Gotthelf von Hund (1722–1776) for his Rectified Scottish Rite and, after 1764, his Rite of Strict Observance.[47] In what followed, multiple Masonic systems focusing on the Templar legend emerged, especially in Germany, including Johann August von Starck's (1741–1816) Templar Clerics who like other Neo-Templars claimed to represent a chain of initiates that reached back to late antiquity.[48] In France, this genealogy was controversially discussed in the 1770s, most notably by the Martinist Ordre des Elus Coëns whose lodge in Lyon, under Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730–1824), joined the Strict Observance. However, Willermoz soon turned his back to the Strict Observance and prepared, during the "Convent des Gaules" in 1778, the foundation of his Régime Ecossais Rectifié.[49] One of the outcomes of those efforts was the foundation of the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte, which soon became a major voice in Masonic circles.[50] The Templar legend would be an ongoing subject of Masonic quarrels in the early 1780s.[51] Apart from these disputes, the "mystically" oriented lodges clashed with their skeptical counterparts at the important Convent of Wilhelmsbad in 1782. The success of the "mystics" spawned a whole genre of literature denouncing the historical accuracy of the Templar legend and attacking the Neo-Templars in

---

to Hammer-Purgstall were so widespread that he most likely encountered them elsewhere.

46 Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 68–70, cf. Gustav Adolf Schiffmann, *Die Entstehung der Rittergrade in der Freimaureri um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Bruno Zechel, 1882), 178–90 and Pierre Mollier, *La chevalerie maçonnique. Franc-maçonnerie, imaginaire chevaleresque et légende templière au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Editions Dervy, 2005), 59–120.

47 Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 103–221.

48 Ibid., 152–97.

49 Ibid., 476–97; Alice Joly, *Un mystique lyonnais et les secrets de la Franc-Maçonnerie, 1730–1824* (Mâcon: Protat Frères, 1938), 105–20.

50 Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 498–531. The Chevaliers joined the Grand Orient de France but maintained an affiliation with the Strict Observance, which was now led by Ferdinand von Braunschweig (1721–1792) and Karl von Hessen (1744–1836).

51 Mollier, *Chevalerie*, 126.

the name of rationality and Enlightenment.[52] One of the most vocal critics was the publisher and writer Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), who questioned the authenticity of the Templar legend and the role of the historical Knights Templar.[53] In his *Versuch über die Beschuldigungen welche dem Tempelherrenorden gemacht worden, und über dessen Geheimniß* of 1782, which was used by Hammer-Purgstall as a reference,[54] Nicolai argued against the identification of the mysterious *baffometus* or Baphomet and "Mahomet," which implied that the Knights Templar had secretly been converted to Islam and were worshipping a kind of "Muslim idol."[55] Instead, he was convinced of the "Gnostic" beliefs of the Knights Templar.[56] Speaking of a "kabbalistisch-gnostische Philosophie," he explained that Gnosticism had emerged from Kabbalah and represented an erroneous heretical strand that was taken up by the Templars.[57] In France, these polemics were adopted in several conspiracy theories, most prominently by the anti-Masonic Jesuit Augustin Barruel (1741–1820) in his *Mémoires pour servir a l'histoire du jacobinisme*, from 1797. Barruel maintained that the French Revolution had been the outcome of a Masonic complot, whose ideology he traced back to the "Kabbalistic Freemasons," the Templars, the Cathars, the Gnostics, and eventually the Manicheans.[58]

This is only a glimpse into a highly diverse and complex genre of literature, which serves to illustrate how certain historical narratives and chains of equivalences sedimented at the end of the eighteenth century. In early nineteenth-century France, they stimulated a wave of Masonic literature that tried to discuss the history of Freemasonry in a positive, self-referential light. These works include Marcello Reghellini's *La Maçonnerie considérée comme*

---

52 Ludwig Hammermayer, *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent von 1782. Ein Höhe- und Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der deutschen und europäischen Geheimgesellschaften* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1980), esp. 37–43; Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 533–706; Joly, *Mystique*, 147–214.

53 Ludwig Hammermayer, "Illuminaten in Bayern. Zur Geschichte, Fortwirken und Legende des Geheimbundes. Entstehung, System, Wirkung (1776/1785/87)," in *Der Illuminatenorden (1776–1785/87)*, ed. Helmut Reinalter (Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1997), 24–28. This resulted in a controversy with Herder which unfolded between March and June 1782 in the *Teutschen Merkur*.

54 Hammer-Purgstall, "Mysterium," 16.

55 Friedrich Nicolai, *Versuch über die Beschuldigungen welche dem Tempelherrenorden gemacht worden, und über dessen Geheimniß* (Berlin/Stettin 1782), esp. 57–90.

56 Ibid., esp. 89–90: "… daß Übereinstimmung der gnostischen Gebräuche mit den Gebräuchen der Tempelherren unwidersprechlich ist …"

57 Ibid., 91, cf. 117–125.

58 Augustin Barruel, *Mémoires pour servir a l'histoire du jacobinisme*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (London et al.: L'Imprimerie Françoise et al., 1797), 396–419.

*le résultat des religions égyptienne, juive et chrétienne* from 1828, where one can read that "the Baphomet of the Gnostics became the one of the Templars."[59] Or François-Timoléon Bègue Clavel's *Histoire pittoresque de la franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes anciennes et moderne* from 1843, which referred to Hammer-Purgstall's discussion of the Baphomet.[60]

With the exception of Barruel's,[61] none of these works were explicitly cited by Lévi, but it can be assumed that he was familiar with them either directly or indirectly. There is hard evidence for his fascination with the topic in a review of Ragon's *Orthodoxie maçonnique, suivie de la maçonnerie occulte et de l'initiation hermétique* (1853), which he wrote for the *Revue progressive* in 1853. Jean-Marie Ragon de Bettignies (1781–1862) was a highly influential Freemason with revolutionary and reformist tendencies.[62] It will be recalled that Lévi had referred to the *maçonnerie occulte* as the heiress of the Templar doctrine, and it is highly remarkable that Ragon employed the term *occultisme* in his work, a year before Lévi was writing his *Dogme*—identifying no one else but Charles Fourier, one of the "fathers" of socialism whose ideas exerted a decisive influence on Lévi in the 1840s, as a representative of *occultisme*.[63] It is quite possible that Lévi became aware of the Baphomet from reading Ragon's *Orthodoxie maçonnique*, although his review contains harsh criticism that reveals

---

59 Marcello Reghellini, *La Maçonnerie considérée comme le résultat des religions égyptienne, juive et chrétienne*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Bruxelles: H. Tarlier, 1829), 289–90, cf. 444–46.

60 François-Timoléon Bègue Clavel, *Histoire pittoresque de la franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes anciennes et modernes*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Pagnerre, 1843), 355.

61 Alphonse-Louis Constant, "Orthodoxie maçonnique, suivie de la maçonnerie occulte et de l'initiation hermétique, par J.-M. Ragon," in *Revue progressive* (Paris/London/Brüssel: Au Bureau de la Revue/Barthés et Lowell/M. Périchon, 1853), 131.

62 A comprehensive study of this remarkable personality remains to be written. See, however, Claude Rétat, "Jean-Marie Ragon. Ou: Qu'est-ce qu'un Maçon Instruit?," *Renaissance Traditionnelle* 143/144 (2005); André Combes, *Histoire de la franc-maçonnerie au XIX^e siècle*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1998), 121–22; Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L'ésotérisme chrétien en France au XIXe siècle* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992), 101; Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 964–65 and Strube, *Sozialismus*, esp. 445–46. Ragon's "Trinosophes" became a gathering point for Freemasons who adhered to the ideals of the French Revolution, including Nicolas Desétanges, who had participated in the Storming of the Bastille, and Jean-Baptiste Chemin-Dupontès, the old "pope" of Théophilanthropie. For a while, Ragon was a member of Fabré-Palaprat's Ordre du Temple and "Vicaire primatial" of the Eglise catholique française of the Abbé Châtel.

63 Jean-Marie Ragon, *Maçonnerie occulte suivie de l'initiation hermétique* (Paris: Dentu, 1853), 170. In the second half of the 1840s, Lévi openly identified as a Fourierist, wrote for the leading Fourierist newspaper, *La démocratie pacifique*, and published his book in the Librairie phalanstérienne, the main Fourierist publisher.

that he had already developed some opinions of his own.[64] It is no surprise that Lévi criticized Ragon's anti-Christian attitude and his "materialism," but at the same time he lauded the *Orthodoxie maçonnique* as a "great project" that attempted to give Freemasonry a coherent dogma in the form of an "occult philosophy." However, Lévi regarded the "protestant" Freemasons with outspoken suspicion and even disdain. He rejected their "puerile rites" and declared that the "establishment of a new world" would not be achieved "by simple workers, and certainly not by masons"—a strikingly condescending remark.[65] It is curious that Lévi expressed disappointment that he was not able to learn more from Ragon about "the ancient initiations and the gatherings of the middle ages," as well as about "the traditional goat of the Sabbath, the Bophomet [sic] of the Templars" and the "philosophical and divine meaning of these monstrous allegories."[66] This criticism was not entirely fair, as Ragon did, as a matter of fact, identify the "matter of the alchemists" with, among others, the Goat of Mendes, Pan, Kabbalistic doctrines, and—perhaps most notably—with "magnétisme spécifique."[67] This equation is practically identical to Lévi's description of the Baphomet, and it is very likely that this is no coincidence. That being said, it must be noted that Ragon was himself only reproducing tropes that were omnipresent in Masonic and anti-Masonic writings, as well as the vast literature they had inspired since the second half of the eighteenth century.

Works about the occult sciences and magic

Lévi frequently referred to contemporary compendia of the fashionable *sciences occultes*, a catch-all phrase for topics such as magic, alchemy, astrology, and so on.[68] Interestingly, Lévi's initial remarks about the *sciences occultes* were highly polemical. In 1853, he published a scathing article about "Les prétendues sciences occultes, ou la folie artificielle et les manœuvres qui la produisent" in the *Revue*

---

64 Constant, "Orthodoxie," 132–34. Lévi mentioned some works and names that indicate his reading at the time. He also criticized Ragon, rather vaguely, for knowing nothing about the Tarot. For a more detailed analysis, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 445–50.

65 Constant, "Orthodoxie," 137. For Lévi's later relationship with Freemasonry, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 581–82, cf. 482–88.

66 Constant, "Orthodoxie," 134–35.

67 Ragon, *Maçonnerie*, 220, 154–55, 95. In another text from 1841, Ragon had written: "Le maillet est aussi devenu la croix tronquée gnostique ou baphométique." See *Cours philosophique et interprétatif des initiations anciennes et modernes* (Paris: Berlandier, 1841), 175.

68 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 230–39.

*progressive*. Therein he decried them as "intellectual aristocracy, without hierarchy and reason," as "charlatanism," and as "scientific atheism."[69] However, it becomes clear that he directed his rant against the vogue of the *tables tournantes*, which he strongly opposed, as well as against the "street sibyls," implying that he believed he had discovered a superior form of magical knowledge that was contained in the Tarot.[70] This suggests that Lévi had started to learn about magic and the Tarot at that time, a process that cannot be investigated in more detail at this point.[71] But the sources to which he referred enable us to learn more about his development of the Baphomet motif.

His first discussion of the *sciences occultes* can be found in the somewhat puzzling *Dictionnaire de littérature chrétienne* from 1851, where he made extensive use of Ferdinand Denis' *Tableau historique, analytique et critique des sciences occultes* (1830).[72] From this popular work he could learn that the Templars, influenced by Gnostic ideas, were practicing the *sciences occultes* and handed down the doctrines related to them.[73] In a similar work, Jacques-Albin-Simon Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire infernal* (1844), which was reprinted as *Dictionnaire des sciences occultes* (1846) in the same series that contained Lévi's *Dictionnaire*, the entry "Goat" (*bouc*) discusses its identification in Egypt with Pan, as well as with Azazel and the Sabbatical Goat.[74] Another "classic" that Lévi worked with was Jules Garinet's *Histoire de la magie en France* (1818), which contains a passage about the trial of the Templars.[75] It appears that Lévi used those compendia from 1851 onwards to gather knowledge about these topics, which would surface in his articles for the *Revue philosophique et religieuses* and eventually in his monographs about magic.

## Gnosticism

It has become clear by now that the Templars were commonly regarded as the successors of the ancient Gnostics. In this light, Lévi's genealogy of "esoteric

---

69 Alphonse-Louis Constant, "Les prétendues sciences occultes, ou la folie artificielle et les manœuvres qui la produisent," in *Revue progressive* (Paris/London/Brüssel: Au Bureau de la Revue/Barthés et Lowell/M. Périchon, 1853), 235–37.

70 Ibid., 240–42.

71 See Strube, *Sozialismus*.

72 For a detailed analysis, see ibid., 394–416.

73 Ferdinand Denis, *Tableau historique, analytique et critique des sciences occultes* (Paris: Bureau de l'Encyclopédie portative/Bachelier, 1830), 11, 181–82.

74 Jacques Albin Simon Collin de Plancy, *Dictionnaire infernal*, 3rd ed. (Paris/Lyon: Paul Mellier/Guyot, 1844), 97–98. Lévi refers to this work in *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 232.

75 Jules Garinet, *Histoire de la magie en France* (Paris: Foulon et Compagnie, 1818), 77–80. This work is also a source for later occultists, e.g. Guaïta, *Clef*, 282–85.

Christianity" appears a lot less inventive than it might have at the beginning of this section. An initial occupation with the history of the Gnostics is tangible in the *Dictionnaire* of 1851, where Lévi discussed the environment of the late antique School of Alexandria. He maintained that the early Christians had been forced by their pagan adversaries to adopt "a kind of Christian esotericism" (*ésotérisme chrétien*). At this point, he already laid a strong emphasis on the Apocalypse of John, to which he referred as "the book of initiation of the true Gnostics."[76] In his later monographs, he reiterated his conviction that the Gnostics had been "Christian Kabbalists" following John, but he explained that early on a current of "false Gnostics" emerged, which was responsible for the loss of the Kabbalistic keys.[77] This corrupted Gnosticism resulted, like Arianism and Manicheism, from a "misunderstood Kabbalah" and was based on "materialistic and pantheistic" errors.[78] It is significant that Lévi referred to the *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* (1847) by the respected scholar Adolphe Franck (1810–1893) for his identification of Gnosticism and Kabbalah.[79] The respective entry "Kabbale" was Lévi's first evident source for the topic of Kabbalah.[80] This is especially interesting because Franck emphasized the translation of *Kabbale* as *tradition*—a tradition that included Gnosticism, the School of Alexandria, "Indian mysticism," and the theosophy of Jakob Böhme.

Yet, more importantly, Lévi's *Dictionnaire* referred to the authority on the history of Gnosticism, Jacques Matter (1791–1864).[81] It is well-known that Matter appears to have been the first author to have used the word *ésotérisme* in the French language,[82] and indeed Lévi employed it in the context of his work. The Alsatian scholar had published a widely acknowledged *Essai historique sur l'école d'Alexandrie* in 1820, which was succeeded in 1828 by a *Histoire critique du gnosticisme*. In the second volume of this work, Matter used the term *ésotérisme* to characterize the doctrines of the Pythagoreans and the Gnostics.[83] In 1840,

---

76 Constant, *Dictionnaire*, 83, cf. 635.

77 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 148; *Histoire*, 217.

78 *Histoire*, 222; cf. 68–70, where the errors of the Gnostics are attributed to the influence of "the false Kabbalah of India."

79 Constant, *Dictionnaire*, 126.

80 Adolphe Franck, *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques*, vol. 3 (Paris: L. Hachette, 1847), 382–92. Lévi referred to a passage on p. 384. Cf. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah. Adolphe Franck and Eliphas Lévi," in *Kabbalah and Modernity. Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, ed. Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 118: Hanegraaff suspected that Lévi might have been familiar with Franck's scholarship.

81 Constant, *Dictionnaire*, 878–95.

82 Laurant, *Esotérisme*, 7–13.

83 Jacques Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence sur les sectes religieuses et*

a revised and considerably expanded version of the *Essai* appeared as *Histoire de l'école d'Alexandrie*. It contains the thesis that the merging of Christian and pagan doctrines lay at the root of the new Gnostic school, which propagated an emanationist doctrine of creation in the Jewish-Platonic tradition of Philo that was opposed to the Christian *creatio ex nihilo*—two rival traditions whose struggle has continued well into the present day.[84] Matter was deeply fascinated by this "mystical" religious tradition. He had evident contacts to the High Degree Masonry in Strasbourg and sustained contacts with leading Martinists.[85] He was married to the daughter of Friedrich Rudolf Salzmann (1749–1821, also Saltzmann), a friend of Willermoz and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin.[86] Over the years, he published several works about Saint-Martin, Swedenborg and the history of mysticism. This shows that his interest in the School of Alexandria was not motivated by mere scholarly curiosity but a determination to unveil the history of an authentic religious tradition that would provide the path to the final religion of the future.[87] This idea mirrored contemporary discourses about the nature of a "true" religion, which would resurface in the writings of Eliphas Lévi.

Matter often emphasized the "analogy between the Kabbalah and Gnosticism." Remarkably, he also did so with regard to the emblems, diagrams and figures of the Kabbalistic and Gnostic traditions, for which he provided a separate volume of plates.[88] He based these analogies especially on the *Kabbala Denudata*, the *Sefer Jezirah*, and the *Zohar*—which would soon function as main sources for Lévi.[89] In his *Histoire critique du gnosticisme* he also expounded

*philosophiques des six premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: F.-G. Levrault, 1828), 83, 489. He maintained that the early Christians had been opposed to the pagan differentiation between an *ésotérique* and an *exotérique* religion, see ibid., 1: 13–14.

84 *Histoire*, 1, preface and introduction, esp. 29–32, 291–94, 305–11, 52–53. For more details, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 118–21, 398–400 and "Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France," *History of Religions* (forthcoming).

85 Joly, *Mystique*, 105. Saint-Martin introduced him to the works of Böhme: see Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 73. It has been argued that his understanding of emanation was based on Martines des Pasqually: Hanegraaff, *Esotericism*, 335–36.

86 Laurant, *Esotérisme*, 42; cf. Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie*, 419f., 516–19, 94f., 651–56, 803–10, 909–12 and Jules Keller, *Le théosophe alsacien Frédéric-Rodolphe Saltzmann et les milieux spirituels de son temps. Contribution à l'étude de l'illuminisme et du mysticisme à la fin du XVIIIe et au début du XIXe siècle*, 2 vols., Europäische Hochschulschriften (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1985).

87 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 120–21.

88 Jacques Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme: Planches* (Paris: F.-G. Levrault, 1828), 7.

89 *Histoire*, 1, 104. In the same footnote, those traditions are also linked to India, because "Tout est lié dans l'antique Asie…"

analogies between the god of Mendes, its emblem of a goat, and the god Pan.[90] It is tantalizing to imagine Lévi scanning through the volume of plates provided by Matter and comparing "Gnostic" and "Kabbalistic" iconographies. What is for sure is that he was familiar with contemporary debates about the origins of Christianity and a supposed schism between an "esoteric," "Gnostic" Christian current and the established doctrine of the Church.

Socialism

The political character of Lévi's genealogy has already been discussed at the outset. It should be recalled that Lévi did not only have a radical socialist past, but that his ideas from the 1840s formed the basis for the development of his "occultism" from the 1850s forward. From today's perspective, it might appear strange that Lévi's socialist background should be essential for his occultist narrative, but a brief look at the historiographies of July Monarchy socialism will support this point. Literally every French study of socialism that appeared between the 1830s and early 1850s depicted the socialists as the heirs of a heretical tradition that included the theosophists of the eighteenth century, medieval groups such as the Templars and the Cathars, and eventually the very same protagonists of the School of Alexandria, most notably the Gnostics, that were discussed above. These studies included Louis Reybaud's pioneering *Etudes sur les réformateurs contemporains ou socialistes modernes* (1840),[91] Alfred Sudre's *Histoire du communisme ou Réfutation historique des utopies socialistes* (1848), Adolphe Franck's *Le communisme jugé par l'histoire* (1848), and Jean Joseph Thonissen's *Le socialisme depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à la constitution française du 14 janvier 1852* (1852). Unfortunately, the scope of this paper does not allow for a discussion of the reasons for these depictions.[92] But it must be noted that these studies, as well as the (self-)perceptions of socialists, were inherently intertwined with the questions of the authenticity of "true" religion and the origins of Christianity. In those debates, the School of Alexandria came to be a focal point, to the degree that Thonissen's study, for example, almost identically copied the "*ésotérique* vs. *exotérique*" passage from Matter's *Histoire critique du gnosticisme* in order to define the origins of socialism.[93] This conflation

90 Ibid., 2: 12.

91 Esp. Louis Reybaud, *Etudes sur les réformateurs contemporains ou socialistes modernes* (Paris: Guillaumin et Compagnie, 1840), 132–33; cf. "Des idées et des sectes communistes," in *Revue des deux mondes* (Paris: Au Bureau de la Revue des deux mondes, 1842), esp. 12–18.

92 See Strube, "Socialism and Esotericism," and *Sozialismus*, 97–147.

93 Compare Jean Joseph Thonissen, *Le socialisme depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à la constitution française du 14 janvier 1852*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Louvain/Paris: Vanlinthout et Compagnie/Sagnier et Bray, 1852), 151, and Matter, *Histoire*, 1, 13–14.

of revolutionary currents, socialism, Gnosticism, Kabbalah, magic, the *sciences occultes*, and related topoi reaches back to the genre of eighteenth-century historiographies by authors such as Barruel and Nicolai.[94]

As he was deeply involved in socialist as well as in Romantic circles, where such narratives were picked up with great enthusiasm, Lévi was certainly familiar with these historiographies. While some of the sources discussed previously are more relevant for an understanding of the general context of certain motifs regarding the Templars, the Baphomet, and their supposed Gnostic origins, these narratives about the history of socialism can be situated in Lévi's immediate proximity. This becomes particularly evident from the fact that his best friend and closest political comrade, Alphonse Esquiros (1812–1876), published one of the most fascinating versions of a "heretical historiography" of socialism, the *Histoire des Montagnards* from 1847.[95] At this time, Constant and Esquiros lived through their most radical phases. They founded, in the revolutionary year of 1848, one of the most notorious revolutionary clubs, the Club de la Montagne.[96] Adhering "au socialisme le plus radical," as they proudly proclaimed,[97] they represented the Montagnard faction, which received their name from their upper ranks in the National Assembly and would today be referred to as the Extreme Left. Thus, when Esquiros wrote his *Histoire*, he attempted to establish the genealogy of his own ideology and that of his political comrades. According to Esquiros, the superior "science" that was at the root of political radicalism originated with Jesus Christ (the first revolutionary) and was handed down in the form of the *sciences occultes*: "astrology, alchemy, magic," which "concealed the opposition of the human spirit during the centuries of darkness: especially the religious opposition, followed by the opposition against monarchy."[98] The book of the Kabbalists, Esquiros went on, had to be written in an encrypted language to avoid prosecution by the authorities. Although the medieval magicians were not usually reformers in the modern sense, they were dissidents whose practices betrayed a hatred of the established powers.[99] The French Revolution was an "explosion" of those

94 Strube, "Revolution, Illuminismus und Theosophie."

95 *Sozialismus*, 408–11. For more details about Esquiros, see Jacques P. van den Linden, *Alphonse Esquiros. De la bohème romantique à la république sociale* (Heerlen/Paris: Winants/Nizet, 1948) and Anthony Zielonka, *Alphonse Esquiros (1812–1876): A Study of his Works* (Paris/Genève: Champion/Slatkine, 1985).

96 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 370–75.

97 *Le Tribun du Peuple*, no. 3, March 23, 1848.

98 Alphonse Esquiros, *Histoire des Montagnards* (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1847), 26–27.

99 Ibid., 28–29.

tendencies, which had passed on from the Kabbalah to the Freemasons, and from there to the revolutionary clubs.[100] This fascinating genealogy is the one which was closest to Lévi, but it was just one among a number of others.

These genealogies could also be found in the Socialist-Romantic literature that Lévi had been highly enthusiastic about since the late 1830s, most prominently George Sand's *Spiridion* (1839), whose reading he described in 1841 as a life-altering experience.[101] It is no wonder then, that his notorious *Bible de la liberté* from 1841, which earned him a prison sentence and a hefty fine, did reflect "traditionalist" ideas that are almost identical to his later occultist narrative. For example, he described a tradition reaching from Moses, Enoch, Hermes, Orpheus, Socrates, Pythagoras, and Plato, among others, to Jesus Christ and finally to the revolutionary heretics who succeeded him.[102] He expounded the thesis of a primitive and universal revelation that proved the identity of the Abrahamic, Greco-Roman, and Indian religions, which would soon be joined in universal unity.[103] In his *Doctrines religieuses et sociales* from 1841, he stressed that the Bible was written in "figures," "symbols," and "images." It could only be decrypted with the key of the Apocalypse of John, which contained the "eternal revelation" and "the gospel in all its purity."[104] Written at a time when Christianity had been outlawed, it could only be understood by *élus*, chosen ones.[105] Using a socialist, Saint-Simonian terminology, Lévi maintained that *hommes d'élite*—inspired or holy men; prophets—had communicated divine truths to generations of seekers who wrote them down in books "which are venerated by the vulgar without comprehending them," especially

[100] Ibid., 37–39. It may be noted that a later edition of the *Histoire*, from 1875, did not contain any relativizing and critical remarks about magicians, Freemasons, etc., but depicted them in a very enthusiastic light. Also, the Kabbalah receives significantly more attention. At one point, it is even referred to as a "Counter-Church": "Elle [la science] se fit société secrète et prit le nom de cabale. La cabale était une contre-Eglise" (*Histoire des Montagnards*, Œuvres d'Alphonse Esquiros (Paris: Librairie de la Renaissance, 1875), 18).

[101] Alphonse-Louis Constant, *L'Assomption de la femme ou Le livre de l'amour* (Paris: La Gallois, 1841), XIX. In this passage, Lévi also referred to his reading of "the ancient Gnostics." For Lévi's reception of the *Spiridion* and its content, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 223–27. For a similar account by Gérard de Nerval, a fellow *romantique* from Lévi's milieu, see ibid., 411–14.

[102] Alphonse-Louis Constant, *La Bible de la Liberté* (Paris: Le Gallois, 1841), 88.

[103] Ibid., 93. The passage contains several names that would be central to the later occultist writings, such as the Indian "Trimourti."

[104] *Doctrines religieuses et sociales* (Paris: Le Gallois, 1841), 65–66.

[105] Ibid., 60. In contemporary times it was particularly the poet who could decipher it, as Jesus had been a poet himself, and the Apocalypse a poem: ibid., 66; cf. *Bible*, 77–81.

the Apocalypse of John.[106] This demonstrates that Lévi had articulated his idea of a tradition of true divine knowledge that was only understandable for "initiates" as early as his very first radical writings. After further developing this idea during the 1840s, most notably in his *Livre des larmes* of 1845 and his *Testament de la liberté* of 1848, it was only a relatively small step to the occultist narrative outlined in the beginning of this section.

In contrast to his friends, in the 1840s Lévi's writings do not reveal any concern for the occult sciences, magic, or Kabbalah. Lévi only took active interest in those matters after 1848. However, his radical socialist writings do contain a number of ideas that would later resurface in his occultist oeuvre, most specifically in the concept of the Baphomet. Perhaps most fundamental among these were his concept of "universal harmony"—a socialist *association universelle*—and the notion of a *science universelle* that he believed to have found in the teachings of Lamennais, Swedenborg, and Fourier.[107] This *science universelle* preconfigured much of his later concept of "magic." His Fourierist understanding of "harmony" and the equilibrium necessary to establish it would be of central importance to his Baphomet. The language of harmony, analogies, and correspondences was commonplace not only in Fourierist parlance, but also in the socialism-infused Romanticism of Lévi's fellow *petits romantiques*.[108]

Other topics essential to the radical socialist writings were the figure of Lucifer and the notion of the redemption of Satan, which were widely popular in Romantic circles during the 1830s and 1840s.[109] Artists such as Balzac, Hugo, Lamartine, Michelet, Alexandre Soumet, and George Sand wrote about Lucifer and Satan as revolutionary and tragic figures, symbolizing the human quest for freedom and redemption.[110] Lévi was personally acquainted with some of these

---

[106] *Doctrines*, 10–11. See also *La mère de Dieu. Epopée religieuse et humanitaire* (Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1844), esp. 190–91 and *Le Livre des Larmes ou Le Christ Consolateur. Essai de conciliation entre l'Église catholique et la philosophie moderne* (Paris: Paulier, 1845), 193–94: "Dès mon adolescence je lisais l'Apocalypse avec une avidité presque fébrile."

[107] Strube, *Sozialismus*, 316–51.

[108] Lévi's role as a *petit romantique* was especially highlighted by Frank Paul Bowman, *Eliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 5–60.

[109] Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2014), 113–60; Luijk, "Satan," 83–173.

[110] Max Milner, *Le diable dans la littérature française, de Cozotte à Baudelaire, 1772–1861*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: J. Corti, 1960), 164–72, 516–622; ibid., 2: 117–56, 358–422; Léon Cellier, *L'épopée romantique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 221–45; Ursula Müller, "Die Gestalt Lucifers in der Dichtung vom Barock bis zur Romantik" (Dissertation, Universität Gießen, 1940), 53–69; Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987), 266; Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*, 137–38; Luijk, "Satan," 140–42.

authors, including other *romantiques* such as Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval, who were friends and collaborators of Esquiros.[111] It does not come as a surprise, then, that he was highly enthusiastic about their works and deeply influenced by them.[112] In his *Bible de la liberté*, he described Lucifer as the "angel of liberty" who stood for the emancipation of human "intelligence." Only "centuries of ignorance" had falsely turned him into the "prince of demons." Far from being an evil entity, he would eventually be rehabilitated and unified with God through his revolutionary striving for freedom and science.[113] This understanding of Lucifer appears almost identically in Lévi's occultist writings, where he quoted extensively from his publications from the 1840s, most notably the *Bible* and the *Testament*. As will be seen in section 4, this was not only decisive for the creation of his Baphomet, but it would also be central to his polemics against Catholic writers.

It will be recalled that Lévi's attitude towards "pantheism" was very negative. His description of the Baphomet as a "pantheistic figure" and a "Panthée" calls for clarification. In his first socialist writings, Lévi openly identified as a "pantheist."[114] This does not come as a surprise, as "pantheism" was a term widely used to decry recent philosophical and religious tendencies, including the contemporary socialist currents to which Lévi adhered. Henry Maret (1837–1881), for example, a former disciple of Lamennais and one of the most distinguished Catholic apologists, saw the socialist school of the Saint-Simonians as the successors of a tradition that had originated in India before spreading to Egypt and Chaldea and then manifesting in the Greek Mysteries, the doctrine of Pythagoras, and the School of Alexandria with its Gnostic and Neoplatonist protagonists. From there, it started a tradition of erroneous "mysticism" that had recently manifested in eighteenth-century philosophy, most importantly German Idealism, and finally in contemporary socialist currents.[115] In light of Lévi's later writings, it is also noteworthy that the Kabbalah featured as an example of "pantheism" in contemporary debates, which Lévi was certainly aware of.[116] Apart from this (Neo-)Catholic context,

---

[111] For Gautier's treatment of Satan, see Milner, *Diable*, 2, 173–77; cf. Ibid., 1: 522–31. For Nerval, see ibid., 2: 274–309; cf. Ibid., 1: 583–94.

[112] Strube, *Sozialismus*, 236–39; cf. Luijk, "Satan," 154.

[113] Constant, *Bible*, 17–19. Cf. Milner, *Diable*, 2, 249–51, where the parallels to Lamennais and Sand are highlighted. Also see the striking passage in Constant, *Mère*, 265.

[114] E.g., *Assomption*, XI.

[115] Henry Maret, *Essai sur le panthéisme dans les sociétés modernes* (Paris: Sapia, 1840), 97–111.

[116] This is especially the controversy between Paul Drach (1791–1865) and Adolphe Franck. See François Laplanche, *La Bible en France entre mythe et critique, XVIe–XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin

the publications of Lévi most notably reflected the Romantic tendencies of July Monarchy socialism, which led critics to identify the socialist reformers as "modern pantheists." Indeed, one of his most impressive works from this period, *La Mère de Dieu* (1844), is profoundly marked by a mystical pantheism.[117] In his *Livre des larmes* of 1845, however, Lévi had turned to a Catholic traditionalism and rationalism propagated by Joseph de Maistre.[118] He came to denounce pantheism as erroneous and emphasized the need for Catholic authority and hierarchy.[119] This stance would harden in the following years. Most likely very aware of his "pantheistic" past, he did not merely abandon his old beliefs. As in so many other respects, he was convinced that he had come to understand their "true" meaning, regarding himself as superior to others, be they rival socialists or Catholics, in his quest to establish "true" socialism and "true" Catholicism. This explains the ambiguousness of his language about "pantheism." It has to be seen within the changing dialectic between "true" and "false" doctrines that determined his historical narrative from the 1840s on.

One of the most striking aspects of the Baphomet is its androgynous form. Indeed, androgyny is one of the most central themes in Lévi's writings from the 1840s. In his *Bible*, as well as another publication from 1841 entitled *L'assomption de la femme*, Lévi envisioned the redemption of humankind and establishment of the *association universelle* after the second coming of Christ, the rehabilitation of Lucifer, and the emancipation of woman. He regarded the emancipation of woman as a prerequisite for the progress of society—a widespread notion in socialist circles—but she was also the one who, in the personification of Mary, redeemed humanity by her Christ-like suffering and would eventually rehabilitate Lucifer, heralding the final universal synthesis.[120]

---

Michel, 1994), 124–25, and Strube, *Sozialismus*, 404–05. Gougenot des Mousseaux, who was known for his notoriously anti-Semitic stance, leveled similar accusations against the Kabbalah.

[117] See esp. Constant, *Mère*, 273, 360. Cf. Paul Bénichou, *Romantismes français*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 865–66. Léon Cellier viewed this work as one of the most remarkable products of the period, see his *Epopée romantique*, 209–20.

[118] Strube, *Sozialismus*, 308–15.

[119] This was no renunciation of his socialist ideas, as the reception of de Maistre, including his notion of hierarchy and authority, had been central to the development of French socialism, especially Saint-Simonism and later Fourierist variants. See "Socialist Religion," 367–68; "Neues Christentum," 148–49.

[120] Lévi equaled the suffering of suppressed women to that of Christ, a notion that he probably adopted from his friend Esquiros. For a study of July Monarchy socialist feminism, including the "Abbé Constant" as an example, see Naomi Judith Andrews, *Socialism's Muse: Gender in the Intellectual Landscape of French Romantic Socialism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006) and "'La Mère Humanité': Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L.

Quite remarkably, this synthesis would bring forth a union not only of humanity and God but also of man and woman: "The two sexes will be one, according to the word of Christ; the great androgyne will be created, humanity will be woman and man."[121] In *Mère*, Lévi described a "new Earth" in the form of the "universal Church": "This is the palace of the husband and the wife; here lives pure and celestial love; here exists no distinction between the ranks and the sexes anymore: God alone is all in all."[122] Although androgyny used to be a typical motif in Romantic literature, and although some of the ideas expressed by Lévi can be traced back directly to his friend and mentor Simon Ganneau—an eccentric socialist known as the "Mapah"[123]—the eclectic vision formulated in his 1840s writings stands out as one of the most remarkable products of Romantic socialism. Given the prominence of androgyny in this vision, it is no surprise that the Baphomet, whom Lévi referred to as "the great androgyne," represents a fusion of the sexes. It has to be seen as a symbol of the realization of the final universal synthesis, which had been Lévi's ultimate goal since he began to publish his radical ideas as the notorious Abbé Constant.

The political dimension of these ideas can hardly be overestimated. It did not disappear in Lévi's occultist writings. More prominently than ever before, he began to propagate his idea of an élite of initiates that was supposed to lead humanity to emancipation. He had already intensified this notion in his *Testament de la liberté*, but the disastrous aftermath of the February Revolution of 1848, which brought forth the irreversible demise of July Monarchy socialism, robbed him of his belief in the ability of "the masses" to emancipate themselves.[124] However, he did not break with his former beliefs but modified them. Echoing his earlier writings, Lévi wrote in *La clef des grands mystères* that the *hommes d'élite* would be responsible for the administration of "the interests and goods of the universal family. Then, according to the promise of the Gospel, there will only be one flock and one shepherd [i.e., God]."[125] He repeatedly differentiated between the "chosen ones" and the "masses," but emphasized that it was the destiny of man to "create oneself" and gain freedom from enslavement.[126] It was the task of the people to "initiate themselves," and as soon as their leaders would become wise, "the paths to emancipation will be open for everyone, to personal, successive,

Constant," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (2002).

121 Constant, *Assomption*, 78–79.

122 *Mère*, 279.

123 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 256–68.

124 Socialist Religion," 369–70, 78; cf. *Sozialismus*, 512–22.

125 Lévi, *Clef*, 64.

126 *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 140f., *Histoire*, 47f., *Clef*, 20, 290.

progressive emancipation, by which all those following their vocation will be able, through their efforts, to achieve the rank of the chosen ones."[127] This is the fundamental idea behind Lévi's occultism. Its core elements are represented by the Baphomet. This is nowhere more obvious than in the last lines of the chapter "Le Baphomet" in the posthumous *Livre des splendeurs*. In a dramatic conclusion, Lévi heralded the establishment of the final universal religion on Earth in an enthusiastic socialist tenor: "The association of all interests, / The federation of all people, / The alliance of all cults, / And universal solidarity."[128]

## 4. Polemics against Catholics and Spiritists

The historical narrative underlying Lévi's Baphomet has now been discussed, and it has been shown which main sources he used to develop it. A comprehensive understanding of its meaning, however, requires a closer look at the 1850s, when Lévi engaged in polemics with different opponents in order to defend his magical doctrine and distance himself from others. It has already been indicated that he was part of a generation of disillusioned socialists who were excited by the vogue of the *tables tournantes* in 1853, which eventually led to the emergence of the French Spiritist movement.[129] Unlike many other socialists, he took a decidedly hostile stance towards the new phenomena, as his condescending article about the "folly" of the "prétendues sciences occultes" has illustrated. His sense of superiority can be understood against two backgrounds: first, he had gathered his knowledge about the workings of magic in a specific context which can be referred to as "spiritualistic magnetism"; second, as a "true" Catholic he was much less concerned about his magnetistic or Spiritist opponents than about prominent Catholic writers who occupied themselves with spirit phenomena.

### Magnetism and Spiritism

Lévi's notion of the Astral Light (*lumière astrale*) is perhaps the best-known aspect of his magical theory. Early recipients, such as Blavatsky, were mainly interested in this concept, and, as noted above, the Baphomet is in several ways an embodiment of the Astral Light. Contrary to occultist perspectives on the Astral Light, and contrary to recent scholarship, it must be stressed that

---

127 *Histoire*, 558.

128 *Le livre des splendeurs, contenant le soleil judaïque, la gloire chrétienne et l'étoile flamboyante, études sur les origines de la cabale, avec des recherches sur les mystères de la francmaçonnerie, suivies de la profession de foi et des éléments de cabale* (Paris: Chamuel, 1894), 113.

129 Strube, "Socialist Religion," 373–74.

Lévi did not rely on ancient, medieval, or even early modern sources when he developed this theory.[130] He pointed out himself that he had borrowed the notion from "the school of Pasqualis Martinez," i.e. Martinism.[131] However, his actual sources came not from the late eighteenth century but from the 1850s. Most likely, he discovered the notion in a publication from 1852, *La magie devoilée* by Jean Du Potet de Sennevoy (1796–1881), which Lévi explicitly named as a source.[132] He agreed with Du Potet's conviction that the Astral Light denoted an *agent magique* that had been known to the Kabbalists, the Chaldean mages, the alchemists, and the Gnostics.[133] As a *médiateur plastique*, it was the force behind magnetism and consequently the ultimate cause of magical operations.[134] Lévi took great pains to distinguish this theory from other magnetistic approaches, and especially from somnambulism—hence his ongoing polemics against "dabblers." In his view, the true practitioner of magic needed two fundamental qualifications: first, a natural disposition and individual training of the "will," and second, an "initiation."

Although the Astral Light was a "blind mechanism" that worked "mathematically" and followed immutable laws,[135] it was the will (*volonté*) of the magician that was needed to control it, and the exercise of this will required

---

130 See Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie. Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 520–21, where the Astral Light is traced from Agrippa and Paracelsus to Ficino; cf. "A (Catholic) 'Magician' Historicizes 'Magic': Eliphas Lévi's Histoire de la Magie," in *History and Religion: Writing a Religious Past*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau, and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin: De Gruyter), 436.

131 Lévi, *Clef*, 217.

132 *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 75. The work contained a passage from the *Philosophie divine* by the Martinist Jean-Philippe Dutoit-Membrini (1721–1792), which was copied by Lévi and put in the very same context. Cf. Jules Du Potet de Sevennoy, *La magie dévoilée ou principes de science occulte* (Paris: Pommeret et Moreau, 1852), 137 and Jean-Philippe Dutoit-Membrini, *La philosophie divine appliquée aux lumières naturelle, magique, astrale, surnaturelle, céleste et divine*, vol. 1 (n.p., 1793), 35–36: "Cet esprit astral, ou feu ou lumière astrale, qui est le plus haut degré de la lumière des esprits, est supérieur toutefois à ce qu'on appelle l'esprit de la nature; et il en fait la force, les vertus et les rapports." For more about Dutoit-Membrini, see Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme, Théosophie 1770–1820*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Champion, 1928), 116–19. Also see Baier, *Meditation*, 1, 267–70, who recognized Du Potet's importance to Lévi's magical theory.

133 Lévi, *Clef*, 217–18; *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 205. Cf. Ibid., 2: 48: "Scientifiquement on peut apprécier les diverses manifestations du mouvement universel par les phénomènes électriques ou magnétiques. Que les physiciens cherchent et découvrent : les cabalistes expliqueront les découvertes de la science."

134 *Clef*, 113–14.

135 *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 185; *Histoire*, 18–19.

intensive schooling.[136] This had been a common notion in magnetistic theories since the pioneering works of Puységur, and it is no surprise that Lévi came to adopt it. It is noteworthy, however, that he had already come into contact with it in the 1840s and maybe even the 1830s. Discussions of magnetism were omnipresent in the Romantic literature that he had devoured, for example in the works of Lamartine, Gautier, Nerval, Sand or Hugo. In his *Rituel*, he explicitly referred to Sand's *Spiridion* in the context of magnetism.[137] A look into the works of Balzac, to which Lévi referred enthusiastically throughout his lifetime, is very illuminating.[138] In the so-called *Livre mystique*, which combined Balzac's *Séraphîta*, *Louis Lambert*, and *Les proscrits*, and which was held by Lévi in the highest regard, one finds a "Traité de la volonté."[139] This *Traité* contains a number of ideas that would be central to Lévi's occultism, such as the importance of the "imagination,"[140] the notion of a tradition of *magisme* (also mentioned by Ragon),[141] and an identification with the doctrine of Swedenborg, which Lévi critically discussed repeatedly.[142] It will be recalled that Lévi had incorporated the ideas of Fourier and Swedenborg in his *science universelle*, and that he had become acquainted with magnetistic and "Swedenborgian" theories (or theories that were perceived as such) in a socialist and Romantic context.[143]

In any case, Constant only revealed an interest in magnetism in his publications after 1853. His most immediate sources, including Du Potet, were those by the "spiritualistic magnetists."[144] Soon he "officially" joined their ranks, as his own books were printed by Germer Baillière, a medical publisher that housed the leading

---

136 *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 106; *Clef*, 287.

137 *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 183, 206–07. Cf. George Sand, "Spiridion," in Œuvres complètes (Genf: Slatkine, 1980), 414–16.

138 E.g., he compared himself and Esquiros with Balzac's Louis Lambert: Lévi, *Histoire*, 522–23. A comprehensive discussion of the role of esotericism for the writings of Balzac can be found in Anne-Marie Baron, *Balzac occulte. Alchimie, magnétisme, sociétés secrètes* (Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2013).

139 See Honoré de Balzac, *Le livre mystique*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Werdet, 1835), 181–203. For a detailed discussion, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 342–49. Cf. Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1968), 150–59, and Lynn R. Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), esp. 163–64 and Baron, *Balzac*, 41–55.

140 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 158; *Histoire*, 220; *Clef*, 122, 96.

141 E.g., *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 8; *Histoire*, 55–56, 92, 177. Cf. Ragon, *Maçonnerie*, 79–93.

142 Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 1, 169; ibid., 2: 182f.; *Histoire*, 412.

143 See Strube, *Sozialismus*, 339–42, where the role of the eccentric Constant Chéneau is discussed in the context of the French reception of Swedenborg.

144 See ibid., 460–70, 524–34; cf. John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 64–94.

spiritualistic magnetists.[145] In contrast to theoreticians who perceived the magnetic force to be purely physical matter, these spiritualists were convinced of its profoundly religious and traditional implications. By arguing that the recent magnetistic approaches were only a rediscovery of ancient magical wisdom, they heralded a future synthesis of science and religion. Lévi had probably met some of them in the salons of an old friend and comrade, Charles Fauvety (1813–1894), who had argued that the doctrines of Swedenborg, Fourier, and Mesmer were essentially identical. He did so in a journal that he edited with Lévi in 1846, *La vérité sur toutes choses*.[146] These magnetists included Louis Goupy, whose *Quaere et invenies* (1853) was advertised together with Lévi's *Dogme et rituel*.[147] Remarkably often, the spiritualistic magnetists were socialist veterans who were pursuing their old dream of a synthesis of religion, science, and politics, seeking to establish a perfect social order. Du Potet, perhaps the most important source for Lévi's magnetistic-magical theory, had an openly revolutionary past and concealed his socialist tendencies only because of the unfavorable atmosphere of the 1850s.[148] Alphonse Esquiros, who corresponded with Du Potet during the revolutionary years about the implications of magnetism, had discussed "magic, magnetism, and occult medicine" as early as in his *Evangile du peuple* from 1840, a sort of partner publication of the *Bible de la liberté*.[149] In his *La vie future au point de vue socialiste*, which was written after the disastrous June Uprising of 1849 and contains an impressive depiction of Lévi's and Esquiros' despair, he maintained that knowledge about the universal force of magnetism and the "occult" laws of God would be the key to the emancipation of the people: "Until now, science has been the privilege of the rich."[150] For Esquiros, the popularization of magnetism equaled a democratization of science, which opened the paths for social progress.[151]

---

[145] E.g., Du Potet published his *Manuel de l'étudiant magnétiseur* in 1846. Other publications include Deleuzes' *Instruction pratique sur le magnétisme animal*, and works by Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet—especially his *Magie magnétique* (1854), which was repeatedly cited by Lévi—Louis Goupy, Alexandre Brierre de Boismont, Charles Lafontaine, and André-Saturnin Morin.

[146] Charles Fauvety and Alphonse-Louis Constant, *Le vérité sur toutes choses* (Paris: Auguste Le Gallois, 1846), 41.

[147] Strube, *Sozialismus*, 461.

[148] See, e.g., Du Potet de Sevennoy, *Magie*, 112: "… c'est ainsi que nous pouvons prévoir et annoncer les plus grands changements dans l'humanité. Dieu me garde pourtant de formuler ces changements; on me prendrait pour un socialiste tout rouge." Between 1846 and 1848, Du Potet had praised Mesmer as a great revolutionary and equaled his doctrine with those of Saint-Simon and Fourier in his *Journal du magnétisme*.

[149] Alphonse Esquiros, *L'Evangile du peuple*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Le Gallois, 1840), 93.

[150] *De la vie future au point de vue socialiste* (Paris: Comon, 1850), 143.

[151] Years later, his (then ex-)wife Adèle wrote: "Les communistes ont cru trouver l'égalité dans le partage des biens. Mais quand même les parts seraient égales, il y aurait toujours les

The parallels to Lévi's political dimension of occultism are even more striking in the writings of another friend, Henri Delaage (1825–1882), a longtime collaborator of both Du Potet and Esquiros.[152] After he had heralded the regeneration of woman and the "resurrection of the crucified people" in the atmosphere of 1848, he published a remarkable book entitled *Le monde occulte* in 1851. Denouncing contemporary "materialism," he demanded the study of "occult forces" which had been mastered by the ancients.[153] Delaage expressed a decidedly "Catholic" identity and emphasized the need for "initiation," which was inspired by Esquiros and in turn exerted a notable influence on Ragon.[154] He also was visibly influenced by the doctrines of Fourier. Similar to Lévi, he had distanced himself from the "wrong" kinds of socialism after 1851, which he, again like Lévi, saw as especially represented by the "materialist" and "atheist" school of Proudhon. The key to the realization of a perfect social order was, in his eyes, the somnambulism taught by the ancient "initiations," though this could only be understood in the light of the gospel: "Somnambulism without Kabbalistic initiation is nothing but a meteor that passes over our heads." This true knowledge was about to be rediscovered, and Delaage viewed himself in the ranks of the "glorious battalion of artists and literates" that would, "despite the jealous attacks of the bourgeoisie," march towards an "immortal future." As soon as this true somnambulism was adopted by "the priests," the synthesis of science and religion and the unity of "social and religious institutions" would be realized, thus achieving true socialism and the "paradise on Earth."[155] Initiation and Catholicism were for Delaage, as they were for Lévi, obligatory prerequisites for understanding the key to truth.[156]

These striking parallels prove that Lévi developed his magnetistic-magical theory in the context of spiritualistic magnetism. This milieu was quite distinct from the emergent French Spiritist movement, although Allan

différences individuelles. … Le secret de l'égalité ne serait-il pas dans le magnétisme, dans cette vie qu'on se passe les uns aux autres?" See Adèle Esquiros, "Banquet de la Pentecôte," in *Petite encyclopédie magnétique pour tous. Recueil complémentaire du "Magnétiseur universel"*, ed. Fauvelle Le Gallois (Paris: E. Voitelain et Compagnie, 1868), 26.

152 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 464–67.

153 Delaage, *Monde*, 21–25.

154 Cf. Delaage, *Initiation* and Delaage, *Doctrines*. For Ragon's acknowledgement, see his *Maçonnerie*, 97.

155 Henri Delaage, *Le monde occulte, ou Mystères du magnétisme dévoilés par le somnambulisme* (Paris: P. Lesigne, 1851), 21–25.

156 This also becomes evident in the criticism of Esquiros in *Les ressuscités au ciel et dans l'enfer* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1855), 188–89.

Kardec (1804–1869) and his followers, the *spirites*, had also been decisively influenced by socialist, especially Fourierist theories.[157] Lévi's attacks on the *tables tournantes* were exacerbated by his antipathy towards public spectacles. In July 1857, he published a scathing series of articles in the newspaper *L'Estafette*, denouncing the performances of the popular medium Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–1886), who came to be one of his favorite targets.[158] With a typical absence of modesty, Lévi challenged the spectacles by comparing them to his superior "haute magie," a behavior that was ridiculed by the magnetist Louis-Constant Cahagnet as an "advertisement" for his own books.[159] Lévi made no secret of his contempt for somnambulists and mediums, who he regarded as "sick, eccentric, and unbalanced beings."[160] He insisted that "the American doctrine" posed serious risks because it was detached from "priestly authority" and "control by hierarchy."[161] When the Spiritist movement became a recognizable force in public discourse, Lévi launched several attacks on it.[162] Yet, his engagement with the actual *spirite* doctrine was strikingly cursory and superficial, even in his *Science des esprits* of 1865.[163]

## Modern Catholic Demonology

Lévi paid relatively little attention to the Spiritists and simply referred to them as puerile amateurs. He usually did so by stressing the need for initiation into the Kabbalistic secrets of "true" Catholicism. This strategy, however, did not work so easily against another class of opponents, Catholic authors who started to denounce the new phenomena and the theories they entailed, most especially Jules-Eudes de Mirville (1802–1873) and Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux (1805–1876), who interpreted the magnetistic and spirit phenomena as the

---

157 For the central role of Fourierism in Spiritism (and Spiritualism in the USA), see the references in Strube, "Socialist Religion," 373–74.

158 Lévi, *Histoire*, 172, 88, 456.

159 Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, *Encyclopédie magnétique spiritualiste, traitant sécialement de faits psycologique, magie magnétique, swedenborgianisme, nécromancie, magie céleste, etc.*, vol. 3 (Paris: Chez l'Auteur/Germer Baillière, 1858), 202. Cahagnet repeatedly criticized Lévi and his friends, especially because of their self-identification as Catholics.

160 Lévi, *Histoire*, 172, 494; *Clef*, 140–44, 93.

161 *Histoire*, 297.

162 *Clef*, 167. Cf. his earlier treatment of disciples of Kardec, the Comte d'Ourches and the Baron de Goldenstubbé in *Histoire*, 500–07.

163 Interestingly, Kardec was simply dismissed as a "pantheist" and a poor imitation of the Saint-Simonians, Swedenborgians, and Mormons: *La science des esprits. Révélation du dogme secret des kabbalistes, esprit occulte des évangiles, appréciation des doctrines et des phénomènes spirites* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865), 122, 364–65.

workings of the devil and his demons. While they welcomed the new interest in spirituality and the overdue criticism of materialism, they warned of diabolical forces behind the phenomena and urged people to adhere to the Catholic faith in order to avoid being misled by them.[164] Their works have to be counted among the most important sources for Lévi, especially de Mirville's *Pneumatologie: Des esprits et de leurs manifestations fluidiques*, which appeared between 1851 and 1864 in five volumes and was critically reviewed by Lévi's wife Marie-Noémi in the *Revue progressive* (1853). Gougenot des Mousseaux's *Mœurs et pratiques des démons ou des esprits visiteurs* (1854) and his study of *La magie au dix-neuvième siècle* (1860) were less central to Lévi, but still functioned as an important point of reference. Both authors reacted not only to the vogue of magnetism, somnambulism, and Spiritism, but also to the countless cases of possession and other "supernatural" events that had occurred *en masse* since the beginning of the century.[165]

Within the Church, the attitude towards magnetism was anything but monolithic. Famously, Henri Lacordaire (1802–1861), one of the most prolific former disciples of Lamennais, had adopted magnetistic theories as early as the late 1840s for his spiritualist apology of Catholicism. In his enormously successful *Conférences* in Notre-Dame, which attracted an audience amounting to tens of thousands,[166] he had even attributed the miracles of Jesus Christ to his mastery of "occult forces."[167] As a matter of fact, Lacordaire, who had taken a seat among the Left in the National Assembly of 1848, was a friend of Delaage's and wrote a preface to *Le monde occulte*.[168] Such exchanges were possible because it took the Church several decades to agree upon an official position towards these matters.[169] It has to be kept in mind that the nineteenth century saw a surge in miracles and apparitions of saints and the Holy Virgin, such as the one in Salette (1846). Church authorities faced the difficult task of

---

[164] Strube, *Sozialismus*, 537–38; cf. Laurant, *Esotérisme*, 89–92; Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France* (Paris: Michel, 1995), 165–68; Yves Vadé, *L'enchantement littéraire. Ecriture et magie de Chateaubriand à Rimbaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 272; Frank Paul Bowman, "Une lecture politique de la folie religieuse ou théomanie," *Romantisme* 24 (1979): 85–86; Monroe, *Laboratories*, 30–36.

[165] For a comprehensive overview, see the seminal study by Bertrand Méheust, *Somnambulisme et médiumnité (1784 – 1930)*, 2 vols. (Le Plessis Robinson: Synthélabo, 1999).

[166] Julien Favre, "Lacordaire orateur. Sa formation et la chronologie de ses oeuvres" (Dissertation, Universität Fribourg, 1906), and Renée Zeller, *Lacordaire et ses amis* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1930).

[167] Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, *Conférences de Notre-Dame de Paris*, vol. 3 (Paris: Poussielgue Frères, 1872), 59–60.

[168] Delaage, *Monde*, 5–10.

[169] Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, *Esotérisme et christianisme. Histoire et enjeux théologiques d'une expatriation* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2009), 196–203.

differentiating between legitimate and reprehensible supernatural phenomena. Lacordaire can be seen as one of those Catholics who interpreted magnetism as a natural "occult force," while de Mirville and Gougenot des Mousseaux represented those who warned of the infernal forces behind it.[170]

Authors such as Du Potet and Lévi, who explicitly referred to a tradition of magical wisdom, naturally came into the firing line of the new Catholic demonologists. Lévi was not outright decried as a necromancer by these vocal adversaries, but they argued that he, just like so many magicians before him, was unwittingly dealing with demons which he was fatally mistaking for a neutral natural agent. An obvious point of attack was the Baphomet and the heretical tradition it represented. De Mirville regarded Lévi as one of the "faux alexandrins modernes," referring to the Baphomet of the Templars and citing Matter's study.[171] This reminds us once more how prominently the School of Alexandria and the theory of the two opposing traditions emerging from it featured in nineteenth-century debates about religious legitimacy. De Mirville devoted a long passage in the third volume of his *Pneumatologie* to a crushing criticism of Lévi's works, which supposedly represented a "false spiritualism" rooted in the mystical-pantheistic errors of Alexandria. The Baphomet served him as an easy target, as Lévi himself had presented it as a "pantheistic and magical figure."[172] Similarly, Gougenot des Mousseaux warned of the dangers of the Astral Light theory symbolized by the Baphomet. Quite correctly, he described Lévi as one of the contemporary *magnétistes transcendants*, alongside Du Potet and Goupy, and warned of his confusion of demonic and natural forces.[173]

Lévi's defense against such accusations was radical. He simply denied the existence of the devil altogether: "Satan, as a superior personality and as force, does not exist. Satan is the personification of all errors, all perversities, and consequently also of all weaknesses."[174] That which is referred to "in a vulgar manner" as the devil is nothing but the malicious intentions of misled persons: "The devil, in black magic, is the great magical agent employed for evil by a per-

---

[170] In 1863, both were invited as referents on an important Catholic congress in Malines where such matters were discussed. See Nicole Edelman, "Somnambulisme, médiumnité et socialisme," *Politica Hermetica* 9 (1995): 167.

[171] Jules-Eudes de Mirville, *Pneumatologie, Des Esprits et de leur manifestations fluidiques*, 5 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: H. Vrayet et Surcy, 1863), 143.

[172] Ibid., 3: 399–414, cf. 240, 75.

[173] Roger Gougenot des Mousseaux, *La magie au dix-neuvième siècle. Ses agents, ses vérités, ses mensonges* (Paris: H. Plon, 1860), 45, 360–61, 37, 227–28, 45; cf. *Moeurs et pratiques des démons ou des esprits visiteurs du spiritisme ancien et moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1865), xxiv–xxv.

[174] Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 213.

verted will."[175] In his earliest writings, Lévi had adopted a kind of Augustinian doctrine of privation, which interpreted the devil as nothing but the negation of good. In his *Assomption*, he declared that his reading of mystics like Madame Guyon had taught him to "crush the leaden figure of Satan under my feet" and reject the notion of evil and damnation.[176] Also he vehemently protested against the identification of Lucifer with Satan.[177] He developed this further in his theory of the Astral Light and in the broader context of magnetism.[178] Lévi regarded belief in Satan and his machinations as nothing but "superstition."[179] However, in his occultist writings Lucifer and Satan came to symbolize two opposing tendencies in human nature, which did not exist as independent forces but as positive or negative instrumentations of the Astral Light.[180] This metaphor was applied in religious, philosophical, and political ways, as Lucifer was depicted as the force of liberty and progress, while Satan stood for perversion and anarchy—this is the main reason why it is mistaken to identify the Baphomet with the inverted pentagram described in *Rituel*.[181] Lévi's notion of equilibrium, as represented by the Baphomet, has to be seen against this background. This becomes especially clear in the following passage:

> Let us say now, for the edification of the vulgar, for the satisfaction of Monsieur le Comte de Mirville, for the justification of Bodin the demonomaniac, for the greatest glory of the Church, which has persecuted the Templars, burnt the magicians, excommunicated the Freemasons, etc., etc.; let us boldly and frankly say that all initiates of the occult sciences (I am talking about inferior initiates and profaners of the great arcanum) have adored, still adore, and will always adore that which is signified by this dreadful symbol.
>
> Yes, in our profound conviction, the grand masters of the Order of the Temple have adored the Baphomet and they have made their initiates adore him…; but the adorers of this sign do not think like us that it is the representation of the devil, but rather that of the god Pan, the god of our schools of modern philosophy, the

175 Ibid., 1: 289; cf. Ibid., 226, 107; ibid., 2: 102.
176 Constant, *Assomption*, xx.
177 For a detailed discussion of the sometimes ambiguous relationship between Lucifer and Satan in Lévi's works, see Strube, *Sozialismus*, 541–43 and "Eliphas Lévi. Lucifer as Revolutionary and Redeemer," in *Satanism: A Reader*, eds. Per Faxneld and Johan Nilsson (New York et al.: Oxford University Press). Cf. Luijk, "Satan," esp. 155–67.
178 Lévi, *Clef*, 219, 50.
179 *Histoire*, 291–97, 417.
180 Ibid., 12–16, 192–201.
181 *Dogme et rituel*, 2, 98.

> god of the theurgists of the School of Alexandria and of the Neoplatonic mystics of our days: the god of Lamartine and of Monsieur Hugo, the god of Spinoza and Plato, the god of the primitive Gnostic schools; even the Christ of the dissident priesthood; and this last qualification, ascribed to the goat of black magic, will not astonish those who study the religious antiquities and who are acquainted with the phases of the diverse transformations of the symbolism and dogma, be it in India, be it in Egypt, be it in Judea.[182]

This is one of the most quoted passages referring to the Baphomet, but oddly enough it has never been put in the context that was made very explicit by Lévi himself: his polemics against Mirville and other Catholic authors. Obviously, his statement about the Baphomet and the tradition behind it is marked by a curious ambiguousness, which might appear puzzling if taken out of context. Lévi was implicitly confirming that the Baphomet was the object of Devil worship, witches' sabbaths and other abominable practices, while at the same time presenting it as an embodiment of the tradition that he regarded as the bearer of the one and only eternal truth. This equivocalness has hopefully become more comprehensible for the reader in light of the dialectical narrative discussed in the previous section, and in light of the various contexts in which Lévi positioned himself as the provider of the universal key to occult wisdom.

## 5. Conclusion

It has been shown that the notion of synthesis and harmony that underlies Lévi's Baphomet can only be comprehended against the background of the socialist doctrines he articulated in his writings of the 1840s. This political character of his occultism, which became most obvious in his articles for the *Revue philosophique et religieuses*, and then in his writings from *La clef des grands mystères* forwards, is expressed by its final aim to create a perfect social order. Lévi wanted to realize this project by creating an élite of initiates, a kind of occultist *Avantgarde*, who were to take up the secret tradition represented by the Baphomet. The first step towards this was "to create oneself," a task that should follow the emancipatory Luciferian aspiration towards liberty and knowledge. Lévi wrote quite explicitly that he wanted to open up the path to emancipation for everyone, until there would only be "one family" equal before God. Until then, however, the barrier of "initiation" would ensure that only

[182] Ibid., 209–10. The reference to "symbolism" reflects the countless plates that can be found in works such as Matter's and the numerous contemporary studies about the origins of religion.

the worthy would lead the flock towards the light. In developing his notion of initiation he was clearly inspired by Freemasonry, as represented in works such as Ragon's. In the 1850s, Freemasonry had become a gathering point for the opposition, and the salons of Fauvety turned into an important platform for this process.[183] However, Lévi had been highly skeptical of Freemasonry from the beginning, and only became a Freemason for a short period before polemically distancing himself from the movement and denouncing it sharply. Once more, he had turned his back on those who he regarded as "false" representatives of a tradition which they failed to understand.

The superior "science" that Lévi propagated was supposed to lead to the final synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy. This required the formation of the *science universelle* that Lévi first described in the 1840s and later developed into his magical theory. The reader will have noted the absence of Medieval and Early Modern sources in this article. Lévi did consult the works of authors from those periods, most notably Guillaume Postel, Paracelsus, Franciscus Patricius or Heinrich Khunrath, but his treatment was cursory and remarkably superficial.[184] Instead, it has been demonstrated that his magical theory was developed in the context of spiritualistic magnetism and his polemics against Catholic writers. His concept of the Astral Light, which was so central to his drawing of the Baphomet, can only be understood against the background of the 1850s.

At the center of Lévi's writings stood his identity as a "true Catholic," an identity that he shared with authors such as Delaage. This question of "true" religion was the subject of literally all the discourses that have been discussed in the present article. It is curious that the School of Alexandria became the focal point not only of debates about the history of Freemasonry, but also about the origins of Christianity, the history of Gnosticism, and the development of socialism, which supposedly ranked among the most recent heirs of either the tradition of error or that of truth. This shows the preoccupation of contemporaries with the origin and the future of religion, which often manifested as a belief in the primitive unity of all religions and its restoration in a future synthesis. Lévi's historical narrative appears against this background, not as the result of an ancient esoteric tradition, but as the outcome of prominent discourses about the meaning and place of religion in modern society.

---

183 Strube, *Sozialismus*, 482–84.

184 Ibid., 544–63. Cf. the early criticism by Arthur Edward Waite in Eliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: Redway, 1896), xi–xiii. Waite developed his own highly speculative narrative of initiation to explain the ambiguous doctrine of Lévi.

As one of many socialists who had been disillusioned by the failed revolution of 1848, he developed his occultism in distinct opposition to "false" socialism and "false" Catholicism, the two constant points of reference in his writings, which consequently functioned as his main identity markers. The monstrous figure of the Baphomet is an embodiment of all those aspects: the final synthesis of science, religion, philosophy, and politics, which would be realized through the progressive decryption of the tradition of "true" religion and the creation of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

## Bibliography


Andrews, Naomi Judith. "'La Mère Humanité': Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L. Constant." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (2002): 697–716.

———. *Socialism's Muse: Gender in the Intellectual Landscape of French Romantic Socialism*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.

Baier, Karl. *Meditation und Moderne. Zur Genese eines Kernbereichs moderner Spiritualität in der Wechselwirkung zwischen Westeuropa, Nordamerika und Asien*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009.

Balzac, Honoré de. *Le livre mystique*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: Werdet, 1835.

Baron, Anne-Marie. *Balzac occulte. Alchimie, magnétisme, sociétés secrètes*. Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2013.

Barruel, Augustin. *Mémoires pour servir a l'histoire du jacobinisme*. 4 vols. Vol. 2, London et al.: L'Imprimerie Françoise et al., 1797.

Bénichou, Paul. *Romantismes français*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 2004. 1973.

Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna. *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, New York/London: J. W. Bouton/Bernard Quaritch, 1877.

———. *The Secret Doctrine. The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*. 3rd ed. 3 vols. Vol. 1, London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1893. 1888.

Bowman, Frank Paul. *Eliphas Lévi, visionnaire romantique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969.

———. *Le Christ des barricades*. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987.

———. "Une lecture politique de la folie religieuse ou théomanie." *Romantisme* 24 (1979): 75–87.

Cahagnet, Louis-Alphonse. *Encyclopédie magnétique spiritualiste, traitant sécialement de faits psycologique, magie magnétique, swedenborgianisme, nécromancie, magie céleste, etc.* Vol. 3, Paris: Chez l'Auteur/Germer Baillière, 1858.

Calmet, Augustin. *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits et sur les vampires*. Vol. 1, Senones: Joseph Pariset, 1769.

Cellier, Léon. *L'épopée romantique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

Chacornac, Paul. *Eliphas Lévi. Rénovateur de l'Occultisme en France (1810–1875)*. Paris: Chacornac Frères, 1989. 1926.

Clavel, François-Timoléon Bègue. *Histoire pittoresque de la franc-maçonnerie et des sociétés secrètes anciennes et modernes*. 2nd ed. Paris: Pagnerre, 1843.

Collin de Plancy, Jacques Albin Simon. *Dictionnaire infernal*. 3rd ed. Paris/Lyon: Paul Mellier/Guyot, 1844.

Combes, André. *Histoire de la franc-maçonnerie au XIX^e siècle*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1998.

Constant, Alphonse-Louis. "Des origines cabalistiques du christianisme." In *La revue philosophique et religieuse*, 29–46. Paris: Bureaux de la Revue, 1855.

———. *Dictionnaire de littérature chrétienne*. Edited by Abbé Migne Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1851.

———. *Doctrines religieuses et sociales*. Paris: Le Gallois, 1841.

———. *L'Assomption de la femme ou Le livre de l'amour*. Paris: La Gallois, 1841.

———. *La Bible de la Liberté*. Paris: Le Gallois, 1841.

———. *La mère de Dieu. Epopée religieuse et humanitaire*. Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1844.

———. *Le Livre des Larmes ou Le Christ Consolateur. Essai de conciliation entre l'Église catholique et la philosophie moderne*. Paris: Paulier, 1845.

———. "Les classiques de la Kabbale. Second article. Les Talmudistes et le Talmud." *La revue philosophique et religieuse*, 385–93. Paris: Bureaux de la Revue, 1856.

———. "Les prétendues sciences occultes, ou la folie artificielle et les manœuvres qui la produisent." In *Revue progressive*, 234–43. Paris/London/Brüssel: Au Bureau de la Revue/ Barthés et Lowell/M. Périchon, 1853.

———. "Orthodoxie maçonnique, suivie de la maçonnerie occulte et de l'initiation hermétique, par J.-M. Ragon." In *Revue progressive*, 131–37. Paris/London/Brüssel: Au Bureau de la Revue/Barthés et Lowell/M. Périchon, 1853.

Darnton, Robert. *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Decker, Ronald, Thierry Depaulis, and Michael Dummett. *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The origins of the Occult Tarot*. London: Duckworth, 1996.

Delaage, Henri. *Le monde occulte, ou Mystères du magnétisme dévoilés par le somnambulisme*. Paris: P. Lesigne, 1851.

———. *Les ressuscités au ciel et dans l'enfer*. Paris: E. Dentu, 1855.

Denis, Ferdinand. *Tableau historique, analytique et critique des sciences occultes*. Paris: Bureau de l'Encyclopédie portative/Bachelier, 1830.

Du Potet de Sevennoy, Jules. *La magie dévoilée ou principes de science occulte*. Paris: Pommeret et Moreau, 1852.

Dutoit-Membrini, Jean-Philippe. *La philosophie divine appliquée aux lumières naturelle, magique, astrale, surnaturelle, céleste et divine*. Vol. 1, n.p., 1793.

Edelman, Nicole. "Somnambulisme, médiumnité et socialisme." *Politica Hermetica* 9 (1995): 108–17.

———. *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France*. Paris: Michel, 1995.

Esquiros, Adèle. "Banquet de la Pentecôte." In *Petite encyclopédie magnétique pour tous. Recueil complémentaire du "Magnétiseur universel*," edited by Fauvelle Le Gallois, 23–26. Paris: E. Voitelain et Compagnie, 1868.

Esquiros, Alphonse. *De la vie future au point de vue socialiste*. Paris: Comon, 1850.

———. *Histoire des Montagnards*. Paris: Victor Lecou, 1847.

———. *Histoire des Montagnards*. Œuvres d'Alphonse Esquiros. Paris: Librairie de la Renaissance, 1875. 1847.

———. *L'Evangile du peuple*. 2nd ed. Paris: Le Gallois, 1840.

Faivre, Antoine. *Access to Western Esotericism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Fauvety, Charles, and Alphonse-Louis Constant. *Le vérité sur toutes choses*. Paris: Auguste Le Gallois, 1846.

Favre, Julien. "Lacordaire orateur. Sa formation et la chronologie de ses oeuvres." Dissertation, Universität Fribourg, 1906.

Faxneld, Per. *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture*. Stockholm: Molin & Sorgenfrei, 2014.

Forshaw, Peter J. "'Alchemy in the Amphitheatre'. Some Consideration of the Alchemical Content of the Engravings in Heinrich Khunrath's 'Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom'." In *Art and Alchemy*, edited by Jacob Wamberg, 154–76. Kopenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006.

Franck, Adolphe. *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques*. Vol. 3, Paris: L. Hachette, 1847.

Garinet, Jules. *Histoire de la magie en France*. Paris: Foulon et Compagnie, 1818.

Gougenot des Mousseaux, Roger. *La magie au dix-neuvième siècle. Ses agents, ses vérités, ses mensonges*. Paris: H. Plon, 1860.

———. *Moeurs et pratiques des démons ou des esprits visiteurs du spiritisme ancien et moderne*. 2nd ed. Paris: Henri Plon, 1865. 1854.

Guaïta, Stanislas de. *Essais de sciences maudites, vol. 2: Le Serpent de la Genèse, seconde septaine: La clef de la magie noire*. Paris: Henri Durville, 1920. 1897.

Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph von. "Mysterium baphometis revelatum, seu fratres militiae templi, qua Gnostici et quidem Ophiani apostasiae, idoloduliae et impuritatis convicti per ipsa eorum monumenta." In *Mines de l'Orient*, 1–120. Vienna: Antoine Schmid, 1818.

Hammermayer, Ludwig. *Der Wilhelmsbader Freimaurer-Konvent von 1782. Ein Höhe- und Wendepunkt in der Geschichte der deutschen und europäischen Geheimgesellschaften*. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1980.

———. "Illuminaten in Bayern. Zur Geschichte, Fortwirken und Legende des Geheimbundes. Entstehung, System, Wirkung (1776/1785/87)." In *Der Illuminatenorden (1776–1785/87)*, edited by Helmut Reinalter, 24, 21–77. Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang, 1997.

Hanegraaff, Wouter. "The Beginnings of Occultist Kabbalah. Adolphe Franck and Eliphas Lévi." In *Kabbalah and Modernity. Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, edited by Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi and Kocku von Stuckrad, 107–28. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

———. *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Hesteau de Nuysement, Clovis. *Traittez de l'harmonie et constitution généralle du vray sel, secret des philosophes, et de l'esprit universelle du monde, suivant le troisiesme principe du Cosmopolite*. La Haye: Theodore Maire, 1639.

Joly, Alice. *Un mystique lyonnais et les secrets de la Franc-Maçonnerie, 1730–1824*. Mâcon: Protat Frères, 1938.

Keller, Jules. *Le théosophe alsacien Frédéric-Rodolphe Saltzmann et les milieux spirituels de son temps. Contribution à l'étude de l'illuminisme et du mysticisme à la fin du XVIIIe et au début du XIXe siècle*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. 2 vols. Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1985.

Lacordaire, Henri-Dominique. *Conférences de Notre-Dame de Paris*. Vol. 3, Paris: Poussielgue Frères, 1872.

Laplanche, François. *La Bible en France entre mythe et critique, XVIe-XIXe siècle*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1994.

Laurant, Jean-Pierre. *L'ésotérisme chrétien en France au XIXe siècle*. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992.

Le Forestier, René. *La franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*. Paris/Louvain: Aubier-Montaigne/Editions Nauwelaerts, 1970.

Lévi, Eliphas. *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris/London/New York: Germer Baillière, 1861. 1856.

———. *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Vol. 2, Paris/London/New York: Germer Baillière, 1861. 1856.

———. *Histoire de la magie*. Paris: Baillière, 1860.
———. *La clef des grands mystères*. Paris: Baillière, 1861.
———. *La science des esprits. Révélation du dogme secret des kabbalistes, esprit occulte des évangiles, appréciation des doctrines et des phénomènes spirites*. Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865.
———. *Le livre des splendeurs, contenant le soleil judaïque, la gloire chrétienne et l'étoile flamboyante, études sur les origines de la cabale, avec des recherches sur les mystères de la francmaçonnerie, suivies de la profession de foi et des éléments de cabale*. Paris: Chamuel, 1894.
———. *Transcendental Magic. Its Doctrine and Ritual*. Translated by Arthur Edward Waite. London: Redway, 1896.
Linden, Jacques P. van den. *Alphonse Esquiros. De la bohème romantique à la république sociale*. Heerlen/Paris: Winants/Nizet, 1948.
Long, Kathleen P. *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*. Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2006.
Luijk, Ruben van. "Satan Rehabilitated? A Study into Satanism During the Nineteenth Century." Dissertation, Universiteit van Tilburg, 2013.
Maret, Henry. *Essai sur le panthéisme dans les sociétés modernes*. Paris: Sapia, 1840.
Matter, Jacques. *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence sur les sectes religieuses et philosophiques des six premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne*. 2 vols. Vol. 2, Paris: F.-G. Levrault, 1828.
———. *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence sur les sectes religieuses et philosophiques des six premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: F.-G. Levrault, 1828.
———. *Histoire critique du gnosticisme: Planches*. Paris: F.-G. Levrault, 1828.
McCalla, Arthur. "The Mennaisian 'Catholic Science of Religion': Epistemology and History in Early Nineteenth-Century French Study." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 21, no. 3 (2009): 285–309.
McIntosh, Christopher. *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival*. 2nd ed. London: Rider, 1975.
Méheust, Bertrand. *Somnambulisme et médiumnité (1784 – 1930)*. 2 vols. Le Plessis Robinson: Synthélabo, 1999.
Milner, Max. *Le diable dans la littérature française, de Cozotte à Baudelaire, 1772–1861*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: J. Corti, 1960.
———. *Le diable dans la littérature française, de Cozotte à Baudelaire, 1772–1861*. 2 vols. Vol. 2, Paris: J. Corti, 1960.
Mirville, Jules-Eudes de. *Pneumatologie, Des Esprits et de leur manifestations fluidiques*. 5 vols. Vol. 2, Paris: H. Vrayet et Surcy, 1863.
———. *Pneumatologie, Des Esprits et de leur manifestations fluidiques*. 5 vols. Vol. 3, Paris: H. Vrayet et Surcy, 1863.
Mollier, Pierre. "Freemasonry and Templarism." In *Handbook of Freemasonry*, edited by Henrik Bogdan and Jan A. M. Snoek, 82–99. London/Boston: Brill, 2014.
———. *La chevalerie maçonnique. Franc-maçonnerie, imaginaire chevaleresque et légende templière au siècle des Lumières*. Paris: Editions Dervy, 2005.
Monroe, John Warne. *Laboratories of Faith. Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
Müller, Ursula. "Die Gestalt Lucifers in der Dichtung vom Barock bis zur Romantik." Dissertation, Universität Gießen, 1940.
Nicolai, Friedrich. *Versuch über die Beschuldigungen welche dem Tempelherrenorden gemacht worden, und über dessen Geheimniß*. Berlin/Stettin, 1782.
Otto, Bernd-Christian. "A (Catholic) 'Magician' Historicizes 'Magic': Eliphas Lévi's Histoire de la Magie." In *History and Religion: Writing a Religious Past*, edited by Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke, 419–43. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

———. *Magie. Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.

Ragon, Jean-Marie. *Cours philosophique et interprétatif des initiations anciennes et modernes*. Paris: Berlandier, 1841.

———. *Maçonnerie occulte suivie de l'initiation hermétique*. Paris: Dentu, 1853.

Reghellini, Marcello. *La Maçonnerie considérée comme le résultat des religions égyptienne, juive et chrétienne*. 4 vols. Vol. 1, Bruxelles: H. Tarlier, 1829.

Rétat, Claude. "Jean-Marie Ragon. Ou: Qu'est-ce qu'un Maçon Instruit?". *Renaissance Traditionnelle* 143/144 (2005): 175–202.

Reybaud, Louis. "Des idées et des sectes communistes." In *Revue des deux mondes*, 5-47. Paris: Au Bureau de la Revue des deux mondes, 1842.

———. *Etudes sur les réformateurs contemporains ou socialistes modernes*. Paris: Guillaumin et Compagnie, 1840.

Rousse-Lacordaire, Jérôme. *Esotérisme et christianisme. Histoire et enjeux théologiques d'une expatriation*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2009. 2007.

Sand, George. "Spiridion." In *Œuvres complètes*. Genf: Slatkine, 1980.

Schiffmann, Gustav Adolf. *Die Entstehung der Rittergrade in der Freimaureri um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Leipzig: Bruno Zechel, 1882.

Strube, Julian. "Ein neues Christentum. Frühsozialismus, Neo-Katholizismus und die Einheit von Religion und Wissenschaft." *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 66, no. 2 (2014): 140–62.

———. "Eliphas Lévi: Lucifer as Revolutionary and Redeemer." In *Satanism. A Reader*, edited by Per Faxneld and Johan Nilsson. New York et al.: Oxford University Press (forthcoming).

———. "Revolution, Illuminismus und Theosophie. Eine Genealogie der 'häretischen' Historiographie des frühen französischen Sozialismus und Kommunismus." *Historische Zeitschrift* (forthcoming).

———. "Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France." *History of Religions* (forthcoming).

———. "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism: A Genealogical Approach to Socialism and Secularization in 19th-Century France." *Religion* 46, no. 3 (2016): 359–88.

———. *Sozialismus, Katholizisimus und Okkultismus im Frankreich des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Genealogie der Schriften von Eliphas Lévi*. Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016.

Thiers, Jean Baptiste. *Traité des superstitions qui regardent les sacrements* Vol. 2, Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1697.

Thonissen, Jean Joseph. *Le socialisme depuis l'antiquité jusqu'*à la constitution française du 14 janvier 1852. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Louvain/Paris: Vanlinthout et Compagnie/Sagnier et Bray, 1852.

Vadé, Yves. *L'enchantement littéraire. Ecriture et magie de Chateaubriand à Rimbaud*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

Viatte, Auguste. *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme, Théosophie 1770–1820*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Paris: Champion, 1928.

Wilkinson, Lynn R. *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

Zeller, Renée. *Lacordaire et ses amis*. Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1930.

Zielonka, Anthony. *Alphonse Esquiros (1812–1876): A Study of his Works*. Paris/Genève: Champion/Slatkine, 1985.