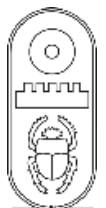


THE COLLEGE OF THE FRATERNITY

Peter Bindon, FRC

In this article Frater Peter Bindon explores some of the fascinating symbolism of Theophilus Schweighardt's intriguing image entitled "The College of the Fraternity."



Many of you have probably heard of the British illustrator named Heath Robinson who drew amazing contraptions of string, wheels, knobs, and levers that supposedly performed household and other tasks. Our illustration looks remarkably like something that Heath Robinson might have invented. Titled "The College of the Fraternity" it appeared in a publication with the name *Speculum Sophicum Rhodostauroticum* (The Mirror of the Wisdom of the Rosy Cross), by Daniel Mögling, alias Theophilus Schweighardt. It was drawn, if not published, around 1604, about ten years before the *Fama Fraternitatis*, usually considered the first book to announce the presence of the Rosicrucians to the world. This latter publication is also quoted as being the first unequivocal Rosicrucian publication, but obviously it did not arise from a void. There were solid foundations on which were based the sentiments found in this booklet. It is clear from Mögling's writings that he was a Rosicrucian in persuasion but could not have been an actual "member" because at that time there was no formal organization that one could belong to as a member.

Apart from in his writings, there are enough visual clues evident in our cover illustration to demonstrate its Rosicrucian links. Most obvious are the rose and the cross flanking the door of this movable castle. For those who are seeking the Rosicrucian way, Schweighardt advises that they should be patient and persistent like Noah's doves, seen flying from the ark in the background on the left, while placing their hope in their God and praying. As a beginning point, let us look at the symbolism of the castle before we look at some of the surrounding elements of the illustration.

Castles are almost universally seen as the symbol of humanity's inner refuge, a place where the soul communicates privately with God, the Absolute or, as Rosi-

crucians say, the Cosmic. Beside their pyramidal tombs, the Pharaohs built funerary temples which were called "castles of millions of years." Just like the Royal tombs, they were destined to stand forever linking the fate of human works with that of the deities. In them, the ancestors of the dead king would worship and commemorate the king's existence forever, making offerings and communing with all the necessary deities.

In the Psalms of the Bible, a castle or fortified city is used as a metaphor for the godhead itself. This carries the metaphor to another level. Instead of simply being a place where one can commune with the godhead, the castle actually becomes the person of the Divine. Meister Eckhart says in one of his Sermons, "There is within the soul a castle into which not even the gaze of the Triune God can penetrate." He goes on to explain that this is because it is the castle of pure Oneness.

It was not only in Jewish and Christian thought that the castle represented the central stillness of human nature. In the Taoist treatise, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, we find a recommendation to fortify and defend the Primeval Castle, which is the home of *hsing*, or Spirit.

Castles are usually strongly built and situated upon hilltops where they were best defended. Like houses they convey the feeling of protection and security at the highest level. Yet their location makes them isolated and remote, which, because of their inaccessibility renders them even more desirable. It seems that part of human nature is to desire that which is unreachable. In paintings, the Heavenly Jerusalem is depicted as a castle bristling with towers and turrets and set upon a mountain peak. Although it was difficult to reach, once having gained access, the pilgrim was secure and protected. Rosicrucianism, symbolized by the fraternal college, teaches us, among other things, ways

to enter into communion with Cosmic influences. That part of the inner self that we access during meditation and contemplation and which leads us to communion with the Cosmic is similarly remote and difficult of access. However, once reached, all external distractions vanish and we are protected in our Cosmic Union until we return to the situation from which we began our meditation.

In Schweighardt's illustration, we see that the castle has certain links with the Godhead. The Jewish "Yahweh" appears in the eastern sky above the castle as well as on the shields of the four defenders standing in the corner towers. Remarkably, these defenders are not armed with swords but with palm fronds reminding us that Christ's entry into Jerusalem was heralded with the same objects.

Symbolically we are meant to understand that our existence stems from the Cosmic and that this gift is as significant to us individuals as was the entry of Jesus into the Holy City for the Christian population. The Model City, a symbol of Utopian ideals, can be seen through the windows of the castle where a Frater searches the globe for the location of this ultimate human environment. An arm, protruding from a corner and holding a sword, indicates that all struggle for attainment does not end with entry into the castle. One still must be on guard against certain pitfalls even when following the path. Although these traps are not enumerated, it is clear that as the sword dominates the well of false opinions, there must be some connection. As it is most difficult to be true to oneself and to one's own ideals, this is probably what is suggested here.

Cosmic inspiration beams into a pilgrim on the lower right. His sword is laid aside, his hat on the ground beside his shoes and bundle of possessions. The Latin inscriptions tell us that he claims to be ignorant but prays to his Father for enlight-

enment. But why does he hold an anchor in his hands when there is no sign of a boat or a large expanse of water? The last hope of sailors in a stormy sea, the anchor became more or less symbolic of hope. Holding the ship fast, it indicates firmness and an unwavering faithfulness. It symbolizes the idea that an individual can put a stop to a life that is too stormy by anchoring oneself firmly to the source of life, the Cosmic. To hurry the process of living is a mistake demonstrated by the figure plunging from the cliff above our pilgrim. This seeker has incautiously rushed upwards on the path and has failed to see that it ends at the edge of a cliff. On the path to the summit we read the Latin *festina lente*, meaning "hasten slowly," a saying often illustrated by a dolphin entwined around an anchor. So the anchor can be considered as a double symbol, encouraging both hope and caution.

A strange crane-like affair draws a seeker from the "well of supposition" on the left. He is lifted from the enclosing darkness of the well into the light of day. Those already within the fortress, hidden from the viewer, are assisting his ascent and providing him with an opportunity to discover the truth within the castle. With the assistance of the College of the Fraternity, he will be able to discriminate between those things that are universally true and those that are false superstitions. This symbolizes the knowledge that he will gain from entering the College of the Fraternity and the understandings that will ensue. We are reminded that this enlightenment comes ultimately from the Cosmic because we see the hand of the Divine providing support for the castle from on high.

