

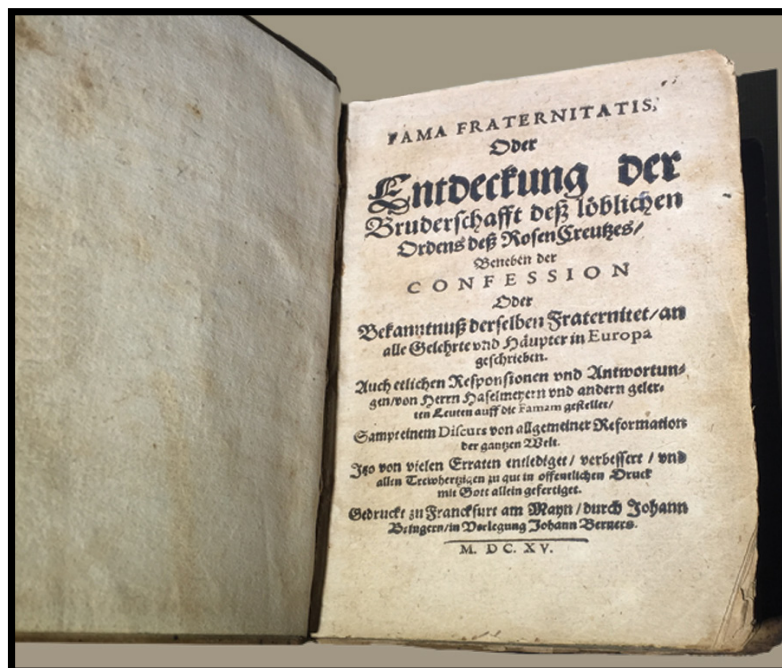
FAMA FRATERNITATIS OR A DISCOVERY OF THE FRATERNITY OF THE MOST LAUDABLE ORDER OF THE ROSE CROSS

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During the period leading up to the publication of the first Rosicrucian manifesto in 1614, Europe was in a moral crisis. New scientific discoveries and theories were challenging long-held beliefs and dogmas. The Roman Catholic Church's various Inquisitions responded with renewed intensity. The Roman Inquisition had just publicly burned at the stake the scientist and mystic Giordano Bruno, who adhered to the belief that the universe was infinite and that other solar systems exist. They began to scrutinize (and later placed under house arrest until his death) the brilliant Italian natural philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician Galileo Galilei (a committed Catholic) for his support of the Copernican theory. Protestants and Roman Catholics

had just waged eight atrocious Wars of Religion over thirty-six years. Henry IV of France, a progressive king who was religiously tolerant, was assassinated by a religious fanatic. Plague and drought added to the turmoil. Seeking scapegoats for these calamities, intolerance and superstition were rampant.

Many people hoped for a "new Reformation," but who would dare raise their voices or offer solutions under conditions like this? Who? – the Rosicrucians. It was in this climate that a group of students and teachers at Tübingen University in Germany anonymously published the first Rosicrucian manifesto, the *Fama Fraternitatis*, in 1614, sending an appeal to the leaders of Europe to restore



Fama Fraternitatis in the Rare Books Room in the Rosicrucian Research Library.



Thoth Judgment Scene, 1298 BCE, Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

harmony in society and proposing new means for doing so.

They offered that Europe could usher in a new era of peace and prosperity by embracing the knowledge of the Primordial Tradition, combining mysticism with scientific knowledge based on observations of nature. They proposed Hermetism (the ancient Egyptian wisdom passed on through the lineage of Hermes Trismegistus) as a solution for their societal crisis and advocated a program of reform based on esotericism.

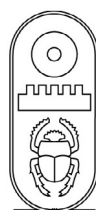
Hermes Trismegistus was a later manifestation of Thoth, the all-knowing sage and teacher of Initiates in ancient Egypt. Thoth was usually portrayed as an ibis holding a palette, reed, and papyrus, always ready to record the words of the Deity. He was the keeper of the mysteries and the Initiator. The Greeks later merged him with their deity Hermes, who over time became Hermes Trismegistus – the three times great Hermes.

Fama Fraternitatis

The *Fama* presents the allegorical initiatic journey of Brother C.R. (later called Christian Rosenkreuz), a mythical figure who is credited with founding the Rosicrucian Order. Rosenkreuz means “rose cross” in German.

C.R. was born in Germany in 1378 to a poor but noble family. At the age of five, he was orphaned. A brother from a nearby monastery looked after him and took responsibility for his education. Some years later they set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem together, however the brother died at their first stop – Cyprus. The young C.R. then continued alone, traveling to Damcar, Egypt, Fez, and Spain gathering knowledge and experiences along the way. He never went to Jerusalem.

Cyprus was the birthplace of the Greek goddess Aphrodite whose union with Hermes gave birth to Hermaphrodite, an androgynous child. Androgyny symbolizes the balance of the primordial masculine and feminine, harmonized wholeness of the spiritual and material, and freedom





Hermes Trismegistus in Siena Cathedral.

from the world's duality. In alchemy, androgyny is a form of spiritual alchemy in which a new being is created through the natural harmony of the feminine and masculine.

Damcar was a mystical city of secret Arabia, inhabited by a group of adepts. An important encyclopedia gathering together both scientific and esoteric knowledge was compiled there. Damcar was known to have safeguarded the *Corpus Hermeticum* – the core documents of the Hermetic tradition, perpetuating the wisdom of the Mystery Schools of ancient Egypt.

While in Damcar, C.R. met with the Ismaelian magi who passed on to him important knowledge in physics and mathematics (contributions from the Arab world) and gave him a secret book called the *Book M* (*Liber Mundi* - Book of the World) with the ideas of Paracelsus, which he translated into Latin.

Paracelsus, the German-Swiss physician and alchemist, had worked to synthesize many different branches of esoteric knowledge. He was a pioneer in several aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance, emphasizing the value of observation in combination with received wisdom and establishing the role of chemistry in medicine. He rejected the Galen medical approach and met with the most important alchemists of his time, not only to learn their efficacious medical treatments, but also to discover the latent forces of Nature and how to use them.

After three years of study in Damcar, C.R. spent a brief time in **Egypt** studying biology and zoology. He then traveled to Fez.

Fez was an important philosophical and intellectual center with magnificent libraries. It was also known for its alchemy schools. C.R. perfected his knowledge of historical cycles there and learned through nature that what is below is like that which is above. C.R. was introduced to the

“elementary inhabitants” (gnomes, fairies, nymphs, etc.) who revealed many of their secrets to him. These are the invisible, spiritual counterparts of visible Nature – the essences of earth, air, water, and fire. According to Paracelsus, they share the secrets of Nature with those who know how to contact them.

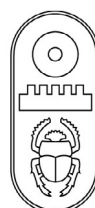
C.R. was most impressed with the trans-disciplinary collaboration among the scholars of Arabia and Africa who met each year to share their knowledge. They celebrated if they found better ideas or if experience showed the reasoning of their previous findings might not be correct. Every year their knowledge in mathematics, physics, and magic was amended.

Spain was C.R.’s last major stop before returning home. He longed to share what he had learned on his journey, but soon realized that the scholars of Spain were more interested in protecting what they already believed. They did not want their

knowledge questioned. The same thing happened in other nations.

Once back home in Germany, C.R. began to write down all the knowledge he had gained on his journey. After five years, he invited three trusted brothers from his old monastery to join him in his work. C.R.’s goal was to create a fraternity capable of providing council to the rulers of Europe (like the ancient oracles), who would become the guiding lights of society. This is the allegorical beginning of the Fraternity of the Rose Cross. Later four others joined them for a total of eight.

Once they felt that each of them was sufficiently instructed in the work and able to present it fluently, they separated themselves to live in several countries in order to disseminate the knowledge (which they believed would be more effective if done in secret) and to observe and learn from events from the perspective of that country, which they would report back to the others.



Before separating, they agreed to the following:

1. That none of them should profess any other thing, then [they would] cure the sick, and that *gratis*.
2. None of [them] should be constrained to wear one certain kind of habit, but therein to follow the custom of the country.
3. That every year upon the day C. they should meet together at the house S. *Spiritus*, or write the cause of his absence.
4. Every Brother should look about for a worthy person, who after his decease might succeed him.
5. The word C.R. should be their seal, mark, and character.
6. The Fraternity should remain secret one hundred years.

Brother C.R. went through transition in 1484 at the age of 106. Then, 120 years later, the tomb of C.R. was discovered by a new generation of Rosicrucians. This is reminiscent of the mythical account of Apollonius of Tyana, who centuries earlier had discovered the tomb of Hermes Trismegistus containing the Emerald Tablet with the esoteric secrets of Hermes and a book explaining the secrets of creation. C.R.'s tomb contained many treasures too, including previously unknown scientific objects and the manuscripts containing all the knowledge gathered by C.R.. The texts were primarily alchemical and Paracelsian in nature. The new Rosicrucians would perpetuate this knowledge to help restore peace and harmony in society.

The tomb also contained the pristine body of Brother C.R.

The *Fama* explains that just as these Rosicrucians had broken through a wall to discover this treasure trove of ancient knowledge, they hoped that Europe would

discover a new era by setting aside obsolete beliefs and embracing knowledge. This knowledge was not new; rather it was the wisdom passed on from antiquity.

The new Rosicrucians resealed the tomb. The *Fama* states that some few may join them to increase the number and respect of their Fraternity and to renew the beginnings of the philosophy laid out by Christian Rosenkreuz. They will have the privilege of not walking so blindly in the knowledge of the wonderful works of the Divine, thus making their lives less challenging.

The *Fama* ends with a direct request, again, to the learned of Europe to consider their offer to help restore harmony to society and to declare their agreement. These Rosicrucians make no mention of their names or meetings yet imply that they will connect with whoever is worthy of joining their cause.

With this, Hermes Trismegistus was replaced by a more human personality – Brother C.R./Christian Rosenkreuz – and through him, the Rosicrucians, the new perpetuators of the Ancient Mysteries, dedicated to restoring peace and harmony in the world through a philosophy based on science and mysticism.

So Mote It Be!

Resources:

Anonymous, *FAMA FRATERNITATIS or a DISCOVERY of the Fraternity of the Most Laudable Order of the Rose Cross*, Cassel, Germany, 1614.

Christian Rebisse, *Rosicrucian History and Mysteries* (San Jose: Grand Lodge of the English Language Jurisdiction, AMORC, 2005).