

Rosicrucianism

Rosicrucianism was born from three works, known as the Manifestos, which appeared in Germany between 1614 and 1616. Their main author was the German Lutheran theologian Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586-1654), and they told the story of a brotherhood of initiates that had supposedly existed in the Middle Ages around one Christian Rosenkreutz. The works were symbolic and fictional, but nature imitated art and several Rosicrucian orders were created in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. None of them survived the French Revolution, but in the meantime they had exerted an influence on Freemasonry, where Rosicrucian degrees were created at the end of the eighteenth century and continue to exist today.

Among Scottish and English Freemasons, independent societies devoted to explore Rosicrucian mysteries were created in the nineteenth century. A dispute exists on whether these societies were first born in Scotland or in England, and about the exact date of creation of the Societas Rosicruciana in Scotia and its connection with pre-existing Scottish Rosicrucian orders. It still exists, with branches in other countries such as Australia, Hong Kong, and Finland.

The Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA) was established in London in 1865-1866 by Robert Wentworth Little (1840-1878), an officer within Freemasonry's Grand Lodge of England. Although now reduced to a handful of lodges in England and Australia, SRIA was important for the history of Western esotericism, because in 1888 three of its members founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, one of the most influential modern occult orders. Unlike SRIA, the Golden Dawn would admit as members non-Freemasons, non-Christians, and women.

In 1878, SRIA chartered a Societas Rosicruciana in America (SRIAm), whose leader was journalist Sylvester Clark Gould (1840-1909). In 1909, the charismatic but controversial George Winslow Plummer (1876-1944) became Imperator and Supreme Magus of this organisation. In 1916, he started admitting women to the Society, with the result that SRIA in

England revoked its charter. Plummer continued to lead the SRIAm as an independent body, opening it to non-Freemasons as well. The Society remains active with a few collegiate members, who attend regular meetings, and a larger circle of associate members, who purchase and study lessons, divided in ten levels.

In 1880, the Societas Rosicruciana in Scotia chartered in turn in the US a rival Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatis (SRICF), which has been in continuous existence since then and maintains a few hundred members. A Societas Rosicruciana in Canada (SRIC) was established in 1876, with an English charter, and lasted for some 15 years. In 1936, it was reconstituted with a charter from SRICF, and in 1997 declared itself independent from any other jurisdiction. It remains active in three Canadian provinces: Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. In 2011, a small group in Ontario seceded from SRIC and placed itself under the jurisdiction of the English SRIA. All these societies, and parallel small groups that exist in France, Portugal, and Romania, have a system of initiations in nine degrees. Except the SRIAm, they admit only Freemasons, and only men.

Quite independently of SRIA, playwright George Alexander Sullivan (1890-1942) founded in Liverpool around 1924 the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship, named after the city in Italy (Crotone) where Pythagoras (ca. 570-495 BCE) had his school. The group, now defunct, was never large but was historically important because of the attention it attracted through its Rosicrucian Theatre, opened near Christchurch, England, in 1938. Among frequent participants to the activities of the Rosicrucian Theatre were Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), who played a crucial role in the modern revival of witchcraft known as Wicca; Peter Caddy (1917-1994), who would go on to become a co-founder in 1962 of the Scottish community of Findhorn, one of the first centers for the New Age movement; and several close associates of independent Theosophist Alice Bailey (1880-1949). The daughter of the Theosophical leader Annie Besant (1847-1933), Mabel Besant-Scott (1870-1952), joined the Rosicrucian Order Crotona Fellowship in 1934, became a very active member, and took with her into Sullivan's organisation a number of members of Co-Masonry, the Masonic association connected with the Theosophical Society, of which she had been the British leader for a short time.

Indeed, a number of Rosicrucian societies were founded by former Theosophists and maintain Theosophical elements in their doctrines. Two such societies are the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Lectorium Rosicrucianum.

The Rosicrucian Fellowship was created by Carl Louis von Grasshoff (1865-1919), born in Denmark into a German aristocratic family, who moved first to New York and then, in 1903, to Los Angeles. In the meantime, he had joined the Theosophical Society. Grasshoff later claimed to have met in Europe a mysterious "Elder Brother of the Rose Cross", who took him to a secret temple on the border between Germany and Bohemia. After his return to California, Grasshoff published in 1909 his magnum opus, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, under the pseudonym of Max Heindel; and in 1910 he married a well-known astrologer, Augusta Foss (1865-1949). He launched a Rosicrucian Fellowship in 1909, which was officially incorporated in 1911. He also supervised the construction of the Fellowship's international headquarters in Oceanside (California), including a temple and beautiful gardens. After Heindel's death in 1919, his wife Augusta continued the Fellowship's expansion into several foreign countries, with a membership of several thousands.

The Lectorium Rosicrucianum, or the International School of the Golden Rosy Cross, was founded by Jan Leene (1896-1968) and his brother Zwier Wilhelm Leene (1892-1938), both leaders of the Rosicrucian Fellowship in the Netherlands. Although the events leading to the Lectorium's foundation date back to August 24, 1924, it was not until 1935 that the Leenes and Ms. Henny Stok-Huyser (1902-1990), who had joined them in 1930, formally declared their independence from the Fellowship and established a Rosicrucian Society of their own (Roze kruisers Genootschap). After Z.W. Leene's death in 1938, Jan Leene and Ms. Stok-Huyser, under the respective pen names of Jan van Rijckenborgh and Catharose de Petri, started writing several books about their teachings, which took the shape of a kind of Christian Gnosticism influenced by Medieval Cathars, seventeenth century Rosicrucianism, and Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). After the Nazi persecution drove it underground, the movement resurfaced in 1945 under the name of Lectorium Rosicrucianum. It has some 15,000 members. Jan Leene's son, Henk Leene (1924-2014), left the Lectorium in 1969 and founded a small schismatic group, later known as the Esoteric Society Sivas.

Both the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Lectorium Rosicrucianum exhibit some clearly religious features, and in some countries have sought legal recognition as religions. In contrast, the largest international Rosicrucian organisation, AMORC, the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, insists that it is not a religion, and that it includes members ("students") from several different religious backgrounds. AMORC was founded in 1915 by Harvey Spencer

Lewis (1883-1939), a New York commercial artist who had been among the founders of the New York Society for Psychical Research. In 1909, Lewis visited France, and reported that he had been initiated into the Rosy Cross in an "old tower" in Toulouse. The first national AMORC conference was held in Pittsburgh in 1917; the Order later moved to San Francisco, Tampa (Florida), and (in 1927) to San Jose, California, where its world headquarters, including a temple, museum, library, and planetarium, became one of the city's main tourist attractions. After AMORC's success in the United States, several more or less independent AMORCs were established in Europe. Some of them later went their separate ways (such as AAORRAC, the *Antiquus Arcanus Ordo Rosae Rubae Aureae Crucis*, led by Eduard Munninger, 1901-1965), but Lewis, working jointly with Jeanne Guesdon (1884-1955), was able to keep the large French-speaking branch within the main fold. AMORC remains, by far, the largest international Rosicrucian organisation, with an estimated 120,000 members, although most of them do not attend any meeting and receive the weekly instalments of the lengthy AMORC courses by correspondence.

In the U.S., the main rival of AMORC was the *Fraternitas Rosae Crucis*, led by Reuben Swinburne Clymer (1878-1966). In the first decade of the twentieth century, he claimed to have revived an organisation allegedly founded by American Spiritualist and occultist Pascal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875) in 1868, although evidence of this foundation remains elusive. Clymer's organisation is still active today, but is reduced to a few lodges.

The history of Rosicrucianism in non-English-speaking countries followed a somewhat different course and originated in France. There, small Rosicrucian bodies were active in Toulouse from the first decades of the nineteenth century, gathering around Viscount Louis-Charles-Edouard de Lapasse (1792-1867). A larger and particularly significant organisation was the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose Cross, founded in Paris in 1887 by Stanislas de Guaita (1861-1897), Papus (Gérard Encausse, 1865-1916), and Joséphin Péladan (1858-1918). The latter, an eccentric poet and very independent Roman Catholic, broke with the Kabbalistic Order in 1890 to create the rival Catholic Order of the Rosy Cross of Temple and Grail. The two Orders fought bitterly, and an amused press dubbed the controversy the "war of the two roses". Péladan's organisation never had many members, but it did exert considerable influence on French literature, art, and music through its *Salons de la Rose-Croix*.

More significant for the first modern Rosicrucian generation was the Kabbalistic Order, although it is difficult to distinguish it from several other occult organisations – Masonic, Martinist, and neo-Gnostic – also headed by Papus. After Papus's death in 1916, his divided heirs paid more attention to Martinist and to Gnostic Churches, but kept alive Rosicrucian organisations, mostly trying to prevent their rivals from hijacking the name of the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose Cross. There are still small Rosicrucian orders claiming the heritage of Papus in France, but none of them can really prove an unbroken lineage from Papus' times. The most significant seems to be the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose Cross headed by Jean-Louis de Biasi.

While in France Rosicrucianism was reduced to a small movement after the death of Papus, several thousand Latin Americans joined the different branches of the *Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua* (FRA), created by the German medical doctor Arnold Krumm-Heller (1876-1949), who was initiated by Papus in France in 1908 and moved to Mexico in 1910, where he held important political positions. Krumm-Heller was also an associate of Theodor Reuss (1855-1923) and Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), and combined Papus' Rosicrucianism with teachings on sexual magic coming from the *Ordo Templi Orientis*. From Mexico, FRA spread to almost all countries of Central and South America, where it was also plagued by a never-ending series of schisms, which were not prevented by Krumm-Heller's alliance with Clymer. Several dozen Rosicrucian organisations claiming the heritage of Krumm-Heller still operate in Latin America. In addition, the different branches of the Gnostic Movement, founded in the 1950s in Mexico by Samael Aun Weor (Victor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez, 1917-1977), a Colombian FRA member and a direct pupil of Krumm-Heller, also maintain several references to the teachings of the FRA.

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