The Philosophers and the Rose-Croix

- René Descartes (1596–1650)
  - Philosopher and mathematician
  - Searched for the Rosicrucians in Germany, reportedly without success
  - Wanted to establish a new and universal science, one that answered all types of questions and went beyond simply mathematics
  - His return to Paris in 1623 coincided with the Rosicrucians making their presence known there
  - Rejected esotericism in favor of clear and distinct ideas
René Descartes (1596–1650)

- Refused all attempts to understand the purpose of Creation; his conception of Creation was mechanistic
- Befriended Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the Winter King and Queen—Frederick and Elizabeth
- Descartes’s approach to science helped humanity to move toward modern scientific knowledge, free from dangerous prejudices and superstitions
Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

- Petitioned first Queen Elizabeth and later King James I to support a project of reforming the sciences
- Wanted learning to be an instrument providing for the prosperity and happiness of humanity
- His book *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) suggested creating a fraternity assembling learned people from all countries with each member exchanging knowledge for the greatest benefit of all
- Devised an entertainment performed the day after the wedding of Frederick V and Elizabeth
- After his death, meetings took place that gave rise to the Royal Society; participants sometimes referred to themselves as the “Invisible College,” a term used at that time to refer to Rosicrucians as well
Jan Amos Komensky (1592–1670)

- Witnessed the coronation of Frederick V and Elizabeth; hoped for Frederick’s return to the throne following the Battle of White Mountain
- Became enthusiastic about the project of reform described in the Rosicrucian manifestos
- Believed that education was the best means for preparing oneself for eternal life, and that all human beings should have access to education
- Was part of the discussions in England which led to the founding of the Royal Society
- Proposed new world-wide organizations (College of Light, Ecumenical World Consistory, International Tribunal of Peace) – institutions which foreshadowed such great international structures as the United Nations and UNESCO
As we have observed, the Rosicrucian manifestos engaged the philosophers of the time and played a role in the development of European culture. However, following this period, esotericism, philosophy, and science were to go their separate ways, with the Enlightenment on one side and Illuminism on the other.

At this juncture we witness the birth of the first major groups that were to characterize Western esotericism for a long time to come. Until then the supporters of esotericism had formed loose groups rather than true organized movements, but now there appeared initiatic orders, such as those of the Rose-Croix and of Freemasonry, organized into lodges where initiations were transmitted.
With the onset of the Thirty Years’ War, Rosicrucians withdrew from the public eye.

In Germany they took refuge in the alchemical movement, which experienced significant growth at this time.

In England, Rosicrucians were involved in the beginnings of Freemasonry.

Rosicrucians would reappear in the middle of the eighteenth century, priding themselves on origins preceding those of Freemasonry and Christianity by claiming a filiation dating back to ancient Egypt.
A 1638 poem by Henry Adamson, “The Muses Threnody,” described the relationship between the two movements:

For we be brethren of the Rosie Cross;
We have the Mason’s Word and second sight,
Things for to come we can foretell aright.

In 1676 a London newspaper (the Poor Robin’s Intelligence), published a notice:

To give notice, that the Modern Green-ribbon’d Caball, together with the Ancient Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross; the Hermetick Adepti and the company of Accepted Masons all intend to dine together…

The notice advised people interested in going to wear spectacles, otherwise the Societies might make themselves invisible.
A 1730 article of the *Daily Journal* stated:

It must be confessed that there is a society abroad, from which the English Freemasons have copied a few ceremonies, and take pains to persuade the world, that they are derived from them. These are called Rosicrucians from their Prime Officers being distinguished on the High days by Red Crosses.

A letter from 1750 holds, “English Freemasons have copied some ceremonies from Rosicrucians and say they are derived from them and are the same with them.”

Such authors as Johann Gottlieb Buhle (in 1804) and Thomas De Quincey (in 1824) described Freemasonry as emanating from Rosicrucianism.
The two oldest references to Masonic initiations concern individuals in either direct or indirect contact with Rosicrucianism.

The first reference dates to May 20, 1641 and concerns Sir Robert Moray (1608 or 1609-1673), who was initiated into Masonry in a lodge in Edinburgh. Moray, a founding member of the Royal Society and an exponent of alchemy, was the benefactor of Thomas Vaughan (1622-1666), who created one of the first English translations of the Rosicrucian manifestos.

Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) recorded in his diary that he was admitted to a Masonic lodge at Warrington in Lancashire on October 16, 1646.
Elias Ashmole (1617–1692)
In 1652 Ashmole published *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, a volume composed of alchemical treatises; in the first few lines of this work Ashmole refers to the *Fama Fraternitatis*.

He recalls that the first Rosicrucian manifesto described the coming to England of “Brother I.O.,” one of the first four companions of Christian Rosenkreuz.

Ashmole also hand-copied his own translation of the Rosicrucian manifestos, and at one time he made a formal petition to be admitted to the Rosicrucian circle.

Over a century later, Nicholas de Bonneville (1760-1828) went so far as to say that Freemasonry had borrowed all its allegories, symbols, or words from the Rosicrucians.
Although it would be incorrect to say that Freemasonry originated with the Rosicrucians, we must note that the first Freemasons were members of the English Rosicrucian movement of the 18th century.
Masonic activities began in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, and the year 1717, when the Grand Lodge of London was formed, is the generally acknowledged foundation date.

In 1723, James Anderson published the \textit{Constitution}, presented as a reorganization and correction of “old Masonic archives”.

The materials used were the \textit{Old Charges}, texts belonging to the ancient guilds of stonemasons, the oldest dating from the fourteenth century.

But rather than directly descending from the old operative Masonic guilds, Freemasonry (or speculative masonry) was a society of thinkers who described themselves as part of a lineage going back to Adam, and claimed to have inherited the Liberal Arts, knowledge inscribed long ago on the two pillars that survived the Great Flood.
Apart from the legendary history of Freemasonry, Anderson’s *Constitution* provided the Order’s rules, as well as some songs meant to accompany lodge meetings.

Generally speaking, the *Constitution’s* plan was more social than spiritual.

In an era marked by divisions engendered by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Freemasonry was content to encourage its members to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves: that is, to be good men and true or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguished.
Freemasonry was originally only composed of two degrees, Apprentice and Companion (today known as Fellow Craft); the Master degree appeared around 1730.

Official references to this degree were first found in the second edition (1738) of Anderson’s *Constitution*.

In 1760, we first see the symbolism of the Hiram legend incorporated into the Third Degree.

Hiram Abif, not to be confused with King Hiram of Tyre, was the architect of the Temple of Solomon, and died shortly after the Temple was completed.

The legend of the discovery of Hiram’s tomb has parallels with the legend of Christian Rosenkreuz, and Antoine Faivre has suggested that Hiram can be perceived as the son of Christian Rosenkreuz.
Hiram Abif
At first, Freemasonry did not appear as a truly initiatic society; its ceremonies were called “rites of reception.”

The term “initiation” first appeared in print around 1728-1730, and only became official in France in 1826.

While Masonic rituals conferred a mysterious aspect to its meetings, the lodges were essentially places where philanthropy was practiced and the fine arts cultivated.

Only gradually did Freemasonry develop an initiatic and esoteric aspect.
Masonic 18th century engraving
By the seventeenth century, references to Egypt had all but disappeared, with a few exceptions

Gerhard Dorn (1530-1584), a disciple of Paracelsus, in casting a critical eye over the esotericism of his era, felt that the Primordial Revelation, confided to Adam and perfected by the Egyptians, was distorted by those who had transmitted it to us (the Greeks)

Athanasius Kircher (1610-1680), a Jesuit scholar and expert in archaeology, linguistics, and alchemy, spent decades trying to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs

He claimed that hieroglyphs concealed the remnants of knowledge confided to humanity before the Great Flood, thus Egypt was the cradle of all knowledge
Two popular novels testified to renewed interest in Egyptian esoterism: *Les voyages de Cyrus ou la nouvelle cryopédie* (1727, Andrew Michael Ramsay) and *Sethos, histoire ou vie tirée des monuments, anecdotes de l’ancienne Égypte* (The Life of Sethos, taken from private Memoirs of the ancient Egyptians) 1731, Abbé Jean Terrasson.

In *Sethos*, Terrasson describes the initiation of an Egyptian prince in the secret temples of Memphis.

The trials of purification by the four elements – earth, water, fire, and air – undergone by the heroes were repeated by Freemasonry in its ritual.

These books made Egypt fashionable again, as evidenced by Jean-Philippe Rameau’s opera-ballet *The Birth of Osiris* (1751), and later, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* (1789), an opera which blended Masonic initiation and Egyptian tradition.
The revival of interest in Egypt inspired Freemasons in the creation of new degrees

In 1736, the Scottish chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay delivered a speech at a Paris lodge which gave rise to the appearance of the “high degrees” or “side degrees”

He described Freemasonry as being the resurrection of the “Noachide religion,” a primordial, universal, and undogmatic religion

He added that this Holy Order was brought back to Europe by the Crusades but was basically forgotten except in the British Isles, and Scotland in particular

Freemasonry soon began to expand from Great Britain to the rest of Europe

The legends relating to the Templars, Chivalry, and Old Testament described by Ramsay would soon awaken the curiosity of the originators of the high degrees
Egyptian themes, as well as alchemy, Kabbalah, and magic were also included in these transformations.

Between 1740 and 1773, the high degrees proliferated remarkably; among them, the Rose-Croix reappeared in the form of a high degree.

Soon, the Rose-Croix degree came to be seen as the final grade of Freemasonry.

Certain systems of high degrees were constituted into independent orders in France and Germany in the 1750s.

Around this same time, Rosicrucianism again had the freedom to establish an autonomous order.
The Rose-Croix initially reappeared under the auspices of alchemy, which experienced considerable growth between 1700-1750 throughout Europe.

Most of the alchemists claimed to have drawn their inspiration from Rosicrucianism.

In 1710 Sincerus Renatus (Samuel Richter) published The True and Complete Preparation of the Philosopher’s Stone of the Brotherhood, from the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross, an alchemical treatise containing practical laboratory procedures and an appendix of rules governing the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross.

This work was inspired by works from Julius Sperber and Michael Maier, and also took rules from the Order of the Inseparables, an alchemical order founded in 1577.

In fact, the order described by Sincerus Renatus did not seem to have ever existed.
In his work, Sincerus Renatus also mentions the Golden Rosicrucians, a name which had previously been mentioned by Peter Mormius in a 1630 work.

Mormius was the author of a legend that claimed that in 1622 Frédéric Rose had founded a secret society of three members called the Golden Rosicrucians.

The phrase “Golden Rosicrucians” became relatively well-known and some of its rules were found much later in the Masonic-Rosicrucian degree of the Prince Knights of the Rose-Croix.
In the following years a Rosicrucian Order was to see the light of day.

In 1749, Hermann Fictuld published *Aureum Vellus*, in which he spoke of a society of Golden Rosicrucians which he described as being the heirs of the Golden Fleece founded in 1429 by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy.

Around 1757 Fictuld created a Masonic rite, the Societas Roseae et Aureae Crucis (Fraternity of the Golden Rosy Cross), composed of a series of Rosicrucian degrees.

This fraternity thrived in many towns but appeared to become extinct in 1764; in actuality it was reformed and gave rise to another Rosicrucian Masonic rite which appeared in the 1770s and fostered alchemy and theurgy.
In 1776 a new Rosicrucian Masonic rite was constituted—the Order of the Golden Rosy Cross of the Ancient System. A hierarchy of nine degrees was adopted—Zelator, Theoreticus, Practicus, Philosophus, Adeptus Minor, Adeptus Major, Adeptus Exemptus, Magister Templi, and Magus. The rituals and teachings of these degrees blended alchemy, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry. The movement produced the celebrated book Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the 16th and 17th Centuries, which is composed primarily of magnificently illustrated alchemical treatises, and is often presented as the most significant Rosicrucian book after the three manifestos.
The Masonic Order of the Golden Rosy Cross of the Ancient System of the eighteenth century claimed a lineage going back to Ormus (or Ormissus), an Egyptian priest baptized by St. Mark.

Ormus thus christianized the Egyptian mysteries and founded the Order of Ormusiens, giving it the symbol of a golden cross enamelled in red.

In 151 CE the Essenes were combined with them, and the order then took the name of the Guardians of the Secret of Moses, Solomon, and Hermes.

In the twelfth century the order admitted a few Templars, and when the Christians lost Palestine in 1118, the order’s members scattered throughout the world.

Three of them settled in Europe and founded the Order of the Builders of the Orient.
Despite its mythical lineage, the Masonic Order of the Golden Rosy Cross arose in Germany in the eighteenth century in the wake of the Strict Templar Observance, which was the most important Masonic rite at that time.

Until this period Rosicrucianism had only given rise to small groups whose rituals have remained undiscovered, whereas the Masonic Order of the Golden Rosy Cross has left numerous documents attesting to its activities.

It expanded widely throughout central Europe but was disbanded by its founders in 1787, after having given rise to the Initiated Knights and Brothers of Asia.

The enigmatic Comte de Saint-Germain was probably part of this movement.
The Rose-Croix Degree appeared within Freemasonry at basically the same time as the Order of the Golden Rosy Cross of the Ancient System.

The existence of this high degree was first confirmed in 1757, under the title of Rosicrucian Knight.

This degree was the seventh and final degree of the Rite Francais of 1786, and the eighteenth of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

However, the symbolism of the degree did not refer to themes found in seventeenth century Rosicrucianism, it was Christian in character, so certain Freemasons in the nineteenth century tried to dechristianize it by proposing a philosophical interpretation of its symbolism.
The Rose-Croix Degree

- The most ancient rituals of the Rose-Croix degree date to 1760 and 1761, just a few years after the appearance of the Societas Roseae et Aureae Crucis of Frankfurt.

- The degree of the Knight of the Eagle, Pelican, Knight of St. Andrew, or Mason of Heredom are other designations of the Rose-Croix degree.

- The discourse accompanying another version of this degree described the order’s origins by referring to the Sabaeans, Brahmins, Magi, Hierophants, and Druids which it describes as being the ancestors of the Rosicrucians.

- The Rosicrucians are portrayed as the heirs of an initiatic chain whose links comprise the Egyptians, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Moses, Solomon, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Essenes.
Henry Corbin observes in the myths connected with these orders some elements reflecting a spiritual filiation through a spiritual knighthood.

This Fraternity of Light has operated since the beginning of Creation itself for the elevation of humanity toward the Spiritual Temple—in other words, to the reconciliation of humanity and the Divine.

The filiations of the movements working for this purpose are not to be found in visible history, but in hierohistory or sacred history.

In this sense it is not incorrect to see a filiation in these different movements, provided that it is not taken literally.

However, it should be noted that in the era of which we are speaking, the Rose-Croix was often considered the jewel of this spiritual knighthood.