

# THE PLACE OF KABBALAH IN THE DOCTRINE OF RUSSIAN FREEMASONS\*

KONSTANTIN BURMISTROV

MARIA ENDEL

Masonic lodges first made their appearance in Russia in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and, by the end of that century, probably involved several thousand people<sup>1</sup>. Members of lodges were for the most part statesmen, aristocrats and intellectuals: dignitaries, career soldiers, officials, writers and scientists, churchmen, etc. Masonic views are known to have had a considerable influence on the ideology of that time but, although the history of Russian masonry has been well studied<sup>2</sup>, masonic ideology has until now received little scholarly attention. There is a long tradition in Russian science of scepticism concerning the main constituents of masonic tradition: mysticism, alchemy and Kabbalah. During the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early twentieth centuries, Russian scholars paid little attention to this topic, mainly because of their extreme positivistic views. In the Soviet period, the topic was taboo.

Moreover, there are a number of objective difficulties in studying masonic teachings. Most masonic texts have not yet been published. Significant parts of masonic documents were destroyed by the masons themselves, or were lost as a result of government persecution. In addition, the masons themselves often masked their involvement in Kabbalah and alchemy<sup>3</sup>. Thus the available materials are scarce and often encrypted. There are many rough copies of masonic texts without any consistent description of the topic. All this has im-

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<sup>1</sup> At present, more than 3100 eighteenth-century Russian masons have been identified. It is suggested that the ca. 150 masonic lodges of the Catherinian age contained no less than 8000 members (A. I. Serkov, personal communication). For detailed biographical data on Russian masons see A. Serkov's *Lexicon Russian Masonry*. See also Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 124–26, 375.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 44–70, 94–98; Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*; Longinov, *Novikov and the Moscow Martinists*; Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*; Melgunov and Sidorov (eds.), *Masonry in its past and present*. See also Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, materials of the Novikov case (1792): Longinov, *Novikov and Moscow Martinists*, 478–518, esp. 517.

peded study, so that some researchers insist that Russian masons were not concerned with Kabbalah and alchemy at all.

In a thorough investigation of manuscripts in Moscow archives<sup>4</sup> we discovered dozens of texts related to Kabbalah, including both translations from different languages (probably including Hebrew) and original compositions. This paper is an analysis of the kabbalistic constituent of masonic teaching. Special attention is paid here to individuals interested in Jewish mysticism; we describe some Russian masons who have read, translated and used in their practical life not only the texts of the Christian kabbalists but also original Jewish writings. In addition, we attempted to find possible intermediaries who participated in transmission of this knowledge to their Russian masonic brothers.

In our view, the question of the role of Kabbalah in masonic tradition is extremely important<sup>5</sup>. Below we try to describe the kabbalistic concepts which were especially interesting to Russian masons and contributed greatly to their social and political thinking.

### *Historical introduction*

Three main periods are normally discerned in the history of Russian freemasonry during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first, from the 1740s to the enthronement of Catherine the Great in 1762, freemasonry was ‘merely a fashionable thing borrowed from the West without any criticism’. In the second period, which lasted up to the early 1780s, freemasonry was ‘the first moral philosophy in Russia; three first degrees of “St. Jones”, or “symbolic” freemasonry prevailed’<sup>6</sup>. The third period, when the “higher degrees”, especially the Rosicrucians, dominated in Russia, covers the 1780s<sup>7</sup>. The government per-

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<sup>4</sup> We refer mostly to the MS documents which are contained in the Division of Manuscripts (DMS) of the Russian State Library (RSL), in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RSAAA), and in the Russian State Historical Archive of Moscow (RSHAM). For further details, see: Burmistrov and Endel, ‘Kabbalah in Russian Masonry’; Burmistrov, ‘Kabbalistic Exegetics and Christian Dogmatics’.

<sup>5</sup> By “Masonic tradition” we have in mind a complex system of theological, philosophical and mystical ideas which penetrated masonic teaching, propagated among the masons according to their rules and traditions, and was used in practice when carrying out masonic works. Thus this notion includes not only a set of concepts but also a specific system of their treating, learning and interpretation. For a review of the Russian mason’s practices, see Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 30-52.

<sup>6</sup> That is these lodges comprised only three Masonic degrees, accepted in the Craft from the very beginning: Pupil, Apprentice and Master.

<sup>7</sup> See Semeka, ‘Russian Masonry in the Eighteenth Century’, 125.

secutions in the early 1790s put an end to the expansion of freemasonry. The masons began to recover gradually their activity only after the death of Catherine II and the enthronement of Paul I. This process continued at the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to 1822 when Alexander I prohibited every freemasonic activity in Russian.

Two principal trends may be identified in Russian freemasonry of the late 18<sup>th</sup>–early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: rationalistic (deistic) and mystical. The trends were strongly interrelated. Rationalistic freemasonry reached its acme in the 1760s–70s. In their outlook, literary preferences, social and political views, these masons were almost identical with Russian Voltairians<sup>8</sup>, zealous supporters of the ideas of Enlightenment, natural law and physiocracy. Encouraged by the “enlightened” Empress Catherine II, Russian Voltairians sought to elaborate a new morality based on reason but not on Christian ethics<sup>9</sup>. To create this new morality, it was necessary, however, to establish a tightly-knit secret organization for, in Voltaire’s view, to allow common people to reason tended to result in destroying the whole job. In the 1770s the centres of the novel “religion of reason” became lodges of the first Russian masonic union in St. Petersburg, headed by Ivan P. Elagin (1725–1793)<sup>10</sup>. These lodges were characterized by weak discipline and liberalism. It is obvious that any interest in mystical matters in such a milieu was next to impossible. Curiously, the leader of the masonic union, Elagin, studied kabbalistic teachings and used them in his own writings. At first, he was also a Voltaire enthusiast but later, having “recovered” from Voltairianism, he broke away from rationalistic freemasonry<sup>11</sup>.

The second trend in Russian freemasonry of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the “mystical” masons, involved stronger discipline in the lodges and unconditional submis-

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<sup>8</sup> Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 500, noted that properly speaking ‘Masonic lodges of the 1770s were Voltairian institutions’.

<sup>9</sup> On the Russian Voltairian movement, see Mikhailov and Stroiev (eds.), *Voltaire and Russia*; Karp, *French Enlighteners and Russia*.

<sup>10</sup> On the relationship between Russian Masons and Voltairians, see also Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 140–56 (Ch. 2, Pt. 2: ‘Masonry and Voltairianism’); Semeka, ‘Russian Masonry in the Eighteenth century’, 132–49.

<sup>11</sup> Elagin wrote later: ‘I was attracted by godless writers who converted Christian faith into blasphemy and Holy Scriptures into mockery, scoffs, and sneer [...] I became acquainted with atheists and deists [...] Boulanger [...] Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvetius [...] This reading corrupted my soul [...] and misled me [...] But the Actual Grace did not want my complete perdition; it did allow neither to Voltaire’s writings nor to those of other so-called new philosophers and encyclopaedists to convert my soul entirely [to their faith]’. See Novikov, *Freemasonry and Russian Culture*, 228–29. A similarly critical attitude to Voltairianism was evinced by the head of Moscow “mystical” masons, Professor Johann Schwarz, and masonic activists such as Ivan Lopukhin and Aleksey Kutuzov. See Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 158, 263 et al.

sion to their chiefs. Two great masonic systems are discernible within this trend. The first was the so-called “Knighthood”, a masonic union of the Swedish system with “Capitulum Phoenix” at the head, founded in the late 1770s<sup>12</sup>. Splendid rituals were typical of this freemasonry; its members belonged mostly to the high life. The Grand Prefect of the Capitulum and the Grand Master of the Great National Lodge (Swedish system) was Prince G.P. Gagarin (1745–1808), and their Grand Secretary was one of the most authoritative Russian masons I.V. Beber (1746–1820)<sup>13</sup>. The Swedish lodges in Russia consisted mostly of noblemen who were strongly involved in political intrigues and had only little interest in mystical matters. Their leadership, “Capitulum Phoenix”, comprised, however, devoted mystics and theosophers. They studied Kabbalah, magic and alchemy, founded secret “theoretical” lodges, and dreamed of being members of an “invisible universal Capitulum” which, as they believed, governed all the world<sup>14</sup>. Working in the deepest secrecy (most of its members were unknown to the government and even to the ordinary masons), “Capitulum Phoenix” strongly affected almost all masonic activity in Russia in the late 18<sup>th</sup>–early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

At the same time, in the 1780s, the teaching of the Order of Gold and Rosy Cross came to Russia from Germany and became the second movement of Russian “mystical” freemasonry. Let us briefly consider the history of this Order. The Order of Gold and Rosy Cross emerged in Germany in the mid-1750s. There are several versions of its appearance. The Rosicrucians themselves believed that the Order had been a successor of the ancient Rosicrucian tradition which arose in the fourteenth century and was manifested openly in the early seventeenth century (in turn, they claimed that this tradition descended from the Primordial doctrine, granted to Adam)<sup>15</sup>. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared some writings on the teaching and main structural principles of a Rosicrucian Order. In 1710 Samuel Richter, a Silesian minister, published a

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<sup>12</sup> See Sokolovskaia, *Capitulum Phoenix*.

<sup>13</sup> Born in Weimar, Beber was a Lutheran; he taught physics and mathematics in the higher schools at St. Petersburg, and was a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Beber had a passion for numerology, Kabbalah, and Swedenborg’s teaching. He possessed a rich collection of books and manuscripts on the secret sciences. See Sokolovskaia, *Capitulum Phoenix*, 49–50.

<sup>14</sup> See Sokolovskaia, *Capitulum Phoenix*, 53, 58, 75–77.

<sup>15</sup> On the history of the Rosicrucian tradition, see Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*; Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*; McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, 23–37. See also Schick, *Das aeltere Rosenkreuzertum*; Arnold, *Histoire des Rose-Croix*, Paris, 1955; id., *La Rose-Croix et ses Rapports avec la Franc-Maçonnerie*.

treatise entitled *Theo-Philosophia Theoretico-Practica*<sup>16</sup>, which contained a strictly elaborated plan of a secret Rosy and Cross Order.

Under the influence of freemasonry in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, an explosion of Rosicrucian groups and circles in Germany and Austria occurred. Numerous Rosicrucian centres were scattered throughout southern Germany, Austria, Hungary and northern Italy. In Germany, “new” Rosicrucians “debuted” first in Sulzbach, in 1755-56; then the centre of their activity moved to Berlin<sup>17</sup>. Among the leaders of the movement were Bernhard J. Schleiss von Löwenfeld, Johann G. Schrepfer, Friedrich J. W. Schröder and Johann Ch. von Wöllner. These were the real creators of the famous secret organization known as the Order of the Gold- and Rosy Cross.

The Order was founded by Bernhard Joseph Schleiss von Löwenfeld (1731-1800), a physician to the ducal house at Sulzbach who later received an earlship and became a councilor of the duke<sup>18</sup>. He took an obvious interest in Kabbalah as if following the traditions of the Sulzbach Christian Kabbalah of the late seventeenth century. Curiously, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Sulzbach had become a centre of Christian kabbalistic studies. Under the aegis of Prince Christian-August (1622-1702), the Duke of Sulzbach, lived and worked Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-89), known for his translations of kabbalistic texts and the compiler of the anthology *Kabbala Denudata*<sup>19</sup>.

It is no wonder that several decades later Schleiss reproduced the ideas of Knorr, Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-98), and other Christian kabbalists of that group, and taught in his own writings how to regain a true spiritual teaching, the “authentic Kabbalah”, from the alphabet of Nature. The most important concepts of the Order had their source in Kabbalah: the idea on the

<sup>16</sup> Sincerus Renatus [S. Richter], *Theo-Philosophia Theoretico-Practica*, 30-36.

<sup>17</sup> On the history of the Order, see *Der Signatstern oder die enthüllten sieben Grade der mystischen Freimaurerei*, Bd. V, S. 329-335; Schuster, *Secret Societies, Unions and Orders*, Vol. 2, 63-78; Le Forestier, *La franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*; Grassl, *Aufbruch zur Romantik*; McIntosh, *The Rosy Cross Unveiled* (ch. 7, 8). For the most detailed analysis of the history and ideology of the order, see McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*.

<sup>18</sup> See his Rosicrucian works: Schleiss von Löwenfeld, B.J. (Phoebron), *Geoffenbarter Einfluss in das allgemeine Wohl der Staaten* (Russian printed translation: Moscow, 1816); id., *Der im Lichte der Wahrheit strahlende Rosenkreuzer* (Russian MS translation: DMS RSL, F 147, N181). See also McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, 96-100.

<sup>19</sup> See Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, 100-52; Kilcher, ‘Lexikographische Konstruktion der Kabbala’, 67-126; id., ‘Hebräische Sprachmetaphysik und lateinische Kabbalistik’, 63-108; id., ‘Synopsis zu Knorr von Rosenroths *Kabbala Denudata*’, 201-20; Burmistrov, ‘*Kabbala Denudata* Rediscovered’, 25-75; id., ‘Die hebräischen Quellen der *Kabbala Denudata*’, 341-376.

Tree of ten *Sefirot*<sup>20</sup>, doctrines of mystical numbers and *Adam Kadmon*<sup>21</sup>, the teaching on the “Primordial Language”<sup>22</sup> and a prophetic interpretation of the Scriptures, and many others<sup>23</sup>. Jewish elements played an important role in Rosicrucian rituals<sup>24</sup>. It is noteworthy that all the abovementioned kabbalistic ideas adopted by this Order were later incorporated by the Russian masons<sup>25</sup>. The ultimate goal of the Order is described as follows: ‘To awake hidden forces of nature, to liberate the natural light which was deeply buried under the dross after the damnation, and to kindle in every brother a burning torch that would help him to see easy the concealed God [...] and thus to join more closely to the primeval Source of Light’<sup>26</sup>.

The history of the Order was described in detail in the book *The Compass of Wisemen*, which was extremely popular in the masonic milieu<sup>27</sup>. The book

<sup>20</sup> *Sefirah* (Heb., pl. *Sefirot*) – literally “number”. The concept of Sefirot has the central place in the theosophy of Jewish Kabbalah. Sefirot are conceived as ten stages of emanation from *Ein-Sof*, the Infinite, God Himself. Each Sefirah denotes a certain aspect of God as a Creator. The ten Sefirot together form the Tree of Sefirot, the universal structure of the whole creation. This Tree is considered a dynamic unity where the Divine manifestation is unfolded. At the same time, they are ten attributes of the Creator: 1. *Keter* (“Crown”); 2. *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”); 3. *Binah* (“Intelligence”); 4. *Gedullah* (“Greatness”), or *Hesed* (“Love”, “Charity”); 5. *Geburah* (“Power”), or *Din* (“Judgement”); 6. *Tiferet* (“Beauty”); 7. *Nezah* (“Victory”, or “Eternity”); 8. *Hod* (“Majesty”); 9. *Yesod* (“Foundation”); 10. *Malkhut* (“Kingdom”). See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 96–116; Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 121-166. For example, the instructions for the Fifth Grade of the Order contain a description of the Tree of Sefirot, corresponding them to ten stages of the alchemical process. See Beyer, *Das Lehrsystem der Gold- und Rosenkreuzer*, 210.

<sup>21</sup> *Adam Kadmon* (the Primordial Man) – the first emanation of the Divine light as well as the ensemble of worlds of light, developed on the first stage of emanation. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 137-142, etc.

<sup>22</sup> On this concept see Coudert (ed.), *The Language of Adam. Die Sprache Adams*; Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma*; id. ‘Hebräische Sprachmetaphysik und lateinische Kabbalistik’.

<sup>23</sup> For further details see McIntosh, *The Rosy Cross Unveiled*, 82-94.

<sup>24</sup> Schuster, *Secret Societies, Unions and Orders*, Vol. 2, 75.

<sup>25</sup> See the main documents of the Order: *Tabula mystica* (1777), a statutory act for the members of the Order, and *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert* (1785-88), the main theoretical manual for Western and Russian Rosicrucians (see its Russian translations: DMS RSL, F. 14, N 180, 181, 182, 190, F. 237, N 65). A number of hermeneutic and numerological practices borrowed from the Christian Kabbalah mentioned and used in these texts. See also Longinov, *Novikov and Moscow Martinists*, 82-85; Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*, 194-231.

<sup>26</sup> See ‘Eingang zur ersten Classe des preiswürdigsten Ordens vom Goldenen Rosen Creutze nach der letzten Haupt- und Reformations-Convention’, in: Bode, J.J. (ed.), *Starke Erweise aus den eigenen Schriften des hochheiligen Ordens Gold- und Rosencreutzer*, Russian translation: *Vkhod v perviy klass Dostokhval'neishego Ordena Zlato-Rosovogo Kresta*, DMS RSL, F. 147, N 294, f. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ketmia Vere (pseud.), *Der Compass der Weisen*. The doctrine and rites of the Order are also considered in Magister Pianco (Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen), *Freimäurische*

contains many variously transformed kabbalistic concepts and references to some kabbalistic sources. The author was apparently Johann Christoph von Wöllner (1732-1800)<sup>28</sup>, one of the greatest German masons and an ideologist of the Order. A set of right-wing political and religious thinkers belonging to the German intellectual establishment gathered around Wöllner, who was known for his ultra-conservative religious views.

In the 1780s the Rosicrucians gained considerable influence at the Prussian court. One of their leaders, Johann Rudolph von Bischofswerder (1741-1803), convinced Prince Friedrich-Wilhelm (1744-1797), the Prussian heir apparent, to join the Order and in 1781 Friedrich-Wilhelm became a member (his Order name was Ormesus Magnus). Following his enthronement, the Rosicrucians began to make internal and external policy in Prussia; Wöllner and Bischofswerder were appointed to ministerial posts and became intimate advisors of Friedrich-Wilhelm. Wöllner, the head of the Department of religious affairs, established a religious censorship, "Immediat-Examinations-Kommission", a kind of Lutheran inquisition (1791), and persecutions of the enlighteners began. The political power of the Order in Prussia came to end in 1797, following the death of Friedrich-Wilhelm II.

In the south too, the Order was suppressed. After interdiction of alchemy in Austria (1785), it continued to work illegally. In 1790 it again rose to the surface for a while, under Leopold II (1747-1792), the Holy Roman Emperor from 1790 to 1792. He was one of the most capable of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century reformist rulers known as the "enlightened despots" and took a deep interest in alchemy and Kabbalah. Following his death in 1792 the new emperor, Francis II (1768-1835), banned the Order once again<sup>29</sup>.

Wöllner, as well as Johann Ch. A. Theden (1714-1797), and their envoy in Moscow, Baron Heinrich-Jacob Schröder (1757-c.1797)<sup>30</sup>, were the chiefs of the Moscow Brothers and the main source of masonic information and mystical literature. Russian masons had already known about the Rosicrucians in the mid-1770s<sup>31</sup>; the Order began to act in Russia, however, only after Johann

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*Versammlungsreden der Gold- und Rosenkreutzer des alten Systems* (Russian translations was published in the secret Masonic typography, Moscow, 1784).

<sup>28</sup> See Schuster, *Secret Societies, Unions and Orders*, Vol. 2, 64. According to another version, its author was Schleiss von Löwenfeld.

<sup>29</sup> See McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, 113-131 (ch. 7: 'A Rosicrucian on the Prussian Throne').

<sup>30</sup> See about him: Barskov, *Correspondence of the Russian Masons of the 18th Century*, 215-234 (excerpts from Schröder's diary); Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 905; Serkov and Reizin (eds.), *Letters of N.I. Novikov*, 295.

<sup>31</sup> On the penetration of Rosicrucian ideas to Russia see Gilly, 'Rosicrucians in Russia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', 54-64.

Georg Schwarz (1751-1784), one of the most prominent Russian masons, met in 1782 Wöllner and Theden during a visit to Germany. He received from them an appointment as ‘the only Supreme Director’ of the Rosicrucian Order in the Russian Empire, acts of the “Theoretic Degree”<sup>32</sup> and permission to begin the work in Moscow<sup>33</sup>. The influence of the Order was so great that after 1780s two parallel and almost independent trends existed in Russian freemasonry: the traditional masons and the Rosicrucians<sup>34</sup>. The strongest interest in Jewish Kabbalah was manifested among the Russian Rosicrucians. The centre of their activity was the Moscow circle of Johann Schwarz and Nikolay I. Novikov (1744-1818). Having revised the ideas of ancient and medieval Christian mystics, alchemists, Christian kabbalists as well as European mystics of the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, they elaborated their own doctrine. Their social and political views were imbued with conservatism and religious enthusiasm. Inspired by the ideas of Louis-Claude de Saint Martin (1743-1803)<sup>35</sup> and German Rosicrucians, they considered religion and the masonic movement instruments to preserve the political system and social stability. They pondered over an ideal masonic state ruled by a mystical Order, under the sovereignty of the “Holy King”. The Rosicrucians approached the conservative party of Counts Nikita I. Panin (1718-1783) and Peter I. Panin (1721-1789) seeking contacts with Crown Prince Paul (in their view, the putative future “Holy King”)<sup>36</sup>. This activity resulted in persecution of Russian masons, who fell into disgrace with the government in the late 1780s-early 1790s.

Below we concentrate only on masonic circles whose members were deeply involved in studying theoretical facets of European mysticism, alchemy and Kabbalah and who sought to embody their knowledge in their own compositions, in their practices of God-knowing, mystical contemplation and praying. It is noteworthy that we mean a rather small group of individuals

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<sup>32</sup> One of the higher masonic degree, the so-called “Theoretic Degree of Solomon Sciences”, introduced by the German Rosicrucians.

<sup>33</sup> See Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 102-104; Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, 209-210.

<sup>34</sup> Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 37. See also Fajonato, ‘Novikov’s Rosicrucian circle: promulgation of a new ethic ideal and lifestyle’, 38–50; Kwaadgrass, ‘Freemasonry and Its Relationship with the Rosicrucian Doctrine’, 51-62; Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, 198-232; Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 107-111.

<sup>35</sup> On Saint-Martin and his doctrine, see: Matter, *Saint-Martin, Le philosophe inconnu*; Jaques-Chaquin, ‘La Philosophie de la Nature chez Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin’, 314–332. On kabbalistic elements in the views of Saint-Martin and his teacher, Martines de Pasqually, see Scholem, ‘Ein verschollener jüdischer Mystiker der Aufklärungszeit, E. J. Hirschfeld’, 254-259.

<sup>36</sup> On them and their masonic activity see: Ransel, *The Politics of Catherinian Russia*; Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 24-26.



(mostly Rosicrucians and the members of the Theoretical Degree) different to a great extent from both the most Russian and European Brothers who considered freemasonry something like an affinity group, or a political institution, or a salon for amusements. They were a minority in Russian masonry (about 2-3%) but had a great authority and influence. There is almost no evidence concerning any interest for Kabbalah in the main masonic Rites working in Russia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> - early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries: Ecosais Rectifeé, Strikt- and Laxe-Observanz, the Templers, etc. The structure of masonry in Russia was rather flexible: some lodges and unions could fiercely fight with each other but after a while they united together (as it happened in the 1770s with Elagin's English union and Reuchel's Swedish-Berlin lodges). Besides, the same masons are known to have belonged to several Rites simultaneously and even to have held there the leading offices. The doctrines of Western masonry were perceived by the Russian Brothers with great criticism. Therefore it is difficult to define the things they truly believed when analyzing official documents of this or that masonic system they belonged to. In our opinion, the interest in Kabbalah and other secret sciences in Russian masonry was characteristic not for certain Rites, Orders and Degrees, but for the individual spiritual and intellectual quest of some Russian mystics. For example, among the main enthusiasts of Kabbalah was Ivan Elagin, the chief of the first masonic English union in Russia (see below), but his lodges did not deal with Kabbalah and other occult teachings at all. It is also important to emphasize the strong influence exerted to the mystical strivings of the Russian masons by Russian Orthodoxy. Most of the Russian Rosicrucians and "theoretic" masons were true Orthodox Christians well-read in patristic literature. The Byzantine and Russian Orthodox spiritual traditions (St. (Pseudo)-Dionysius Areopagita, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Simeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory Palamas) which were extremely important for them, define to a great extent the originality of their masonic views.

It is necessary also to discriminate masonic documents such as statutes, theoretic manuals, catechisms, etc. from manifold writings which comprised the "circle of reading" of the Russian masons (a great bulk of translated and original texts including patristic literature, books of Catholic and Protestant mystics, pietists, theosophers, alchemists, and some treatises on historiosophy and theology written by the Russian Brothers). In masonic documents as such, it is hardly possible to find any references to Kabbalah; even if this term is used there it has only a "metaphorical" sense.<sup>37</sup> On the contrary, the "circle of

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<sup>37</sup> See on this "metaphorical" Kabbalah Kilcher's *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma*.

masonic reading” contains dozens of texts relating to Christian and Jewish Kabbalah (see below).

Thus we can treat the kabbalistic interests of some Russian masons not as a peculiar “intramasonic” phenomenon caused by their European mentors but as an original trend in the history of Russian thought that emerged due to a number of different factors.

### *The spiritual image of Russian masons*

First, we try to present a brief description of the spiritual image of those who felt themselves to be members of the Rosicrucian Order. Their Weltanschauung is commonly considered as a reaction to Voltairianism, and as a Russian phenomenon of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called “freethinking”<sup>38</sup>. In a broader context, however, their views may be regarded as an attempt to overcome the deep religious and intellectual crisis suffered by Russian society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As was noted by G. Florovsky, the Russian theologian, ‘All the historic importance of the Russian freemasonry resided in the fact that it represented psychological ascesis and reintegration of the [Russian] soul. In freemasonry, the Russian soul goes back to itself after a long period of dissipation [...] This was spiritual awakening from a dead faint’<sup>39</sup>.

In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a specific “mystical” sub-culture, with a definite set of stereotypes and symbols and an inevitable taint of mystery and feeling of selectivity, was developing. An extremely intensive spiritual life focused on a continuous search for the true path, with all its doubts and disappointments, was typical of those who belonged to this subculture<sup>40</sup>. Russian masons were eclectic in what they read and in their religious exercises; it is difficult to imagine how they could combine Orthodox piety with alchemic works and kabbalistic practice. In all their doings, we feel an enormous and astonishingly forceful longing for a faith-cure of the world and for the transfiguration of man.

This should explain the highly active social position of many masons during the age of Catherine the Great. For example, a great role in Russian enlightenment was played by a publishing house established by the best-known Russian mason of the age, N. I. Novikov. Due to his work, in addition to special masonic editions, hundreds of books were translated and published. They included writings by Oriental and European Christian mystics as well as com-

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Semeka, ‘Russian Masonry in the Eighteenth century’, 134.

<sup>39</sup> Florovsky, *Paths of Russian Theology*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> See Serkov and Reizin (eds.), *Letters of N.I. Novikov*.

positions in the fields of history, ethics, philosophy and fiction. Very typical of Russian masons was charity work, such as free distribution of bread in meagre years, establishment of a number of free homes and public schools throughout Russia, rendering assistance to poor brothers, etc. Furthermore, Moscow masons were seriously occupied with pedagogical activity. Thus they played an important role in the establishment of Moscow University and a number of scientific and student organizations. The development of Russian theatre, of the pharmacy in Russia etc. also are linked to the names of outstanding masons. Many of them held high positions in state and military services. It is noteworthy that they were concerned not only with the best organization of society and nature as a whole but also with their own farming and agronomy; thus they nursed their estates, and their mystical experience correlated well with their economic activity.

Moscow Rosicrucians were also deeply involved in political activities; the well-known official persecutions of Russian masons in the 1790s were caused by suspicions that they had plotted a take-over. Behind this social activity was a fundamental concept of the world and the human race, reflecting a masonic version, rooted in gnosticism, of the biblical myth of the fall of man. Masons collected ideas and concepts coherent with this basic view within various philosophic and religious systems. An important element of their search was Kabbalah. The main sources of knowledge in the field were original kabbalistic texts and those of Christian kabbalists. Some works of Protestant mystics and pietists of the seventeenth century also served as important sources. In turn, Protestant mystical concepts of universal salvation and readjustment of the world can be traced back to the doctrine of *Tikkun ha-olam* in the Lurianic Kabbalah<sup>41</sup>. In addition, a number of transformed kabbalistic ideas were borrowed from European mystics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century such as E. Swedenborg, F. Oetinger, L.-C. de Saint-Martin; some Russian masons were known to be acquainted with them personally.

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<sup>41</sup> This kabbalistic school was established by Isaak Luria (Ha-Ari) in Safed in the 1570s. On the influence of Lurianic doctrine on European mysticism see: Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, esp. 120-132; Burmistrov, 'Kabbala Denudata Rediscovered'; id. 'Kabbalah in European Culture'. *Tikkun ha-olam* (Heb., "Improvement of the Universe") – in Lurianic Kabbalah, the process of universal restoration and reintegration of the primeval harmony, destroyed by the general cataclasm of the "breaking of vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*). A special task in *tikkun* is entrusted to man who is to make the improvement of the lowest regions of the universe and to liberate the sparks of light imprisoned there by means of his personal illumination and cleaving to the Holy One. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 140-144.

### *Masonic tradition and Kabbalah*

Kabbalah underlies masonic theosophy, cosmogony and hermeneutics and follows the initiate at all three stages of his ascent to the Truth. At the first stage, it teaches him to possess the light of the perennial, supernal Being, *Adam Kadmon*, and he should strive toward His perfection. At the second stage, it offers him the integrated image of the kabbalistic world of ten *Sefirot* and four *Olamot*<sup>42</sup>. This is especially important at the third stage when Kabbalah becomes necessary for understanding the “spiritual language” of the Scriptures and this by use of Kabbalistic hermeneutics. It is not strange that precisely the rules and methods of kabbalistic hermeneutics were so important for Russian masons; we can find their description in almost all masonic manuscripts devoted to kabbalistic matters.

Notwithstanding all the differences and the diversity of the masonic systems, one may discern some basic concepts, or models, of comprehension underlying the masonic Weltanschauung, or, more strictly, of masonic epistemology which determines, to a great extent, the masonic outlook. The attitude was formulated in brief by N. I. Novikov in his ‘Notice to readers’ in the masonic magazine *Vecherniaia zaria* (1782). Speaking about the aims of his new magazine, he writes:

When the wise Creator of the universe made the visible world, to give light upon it, He fastened on the firmament countless number of glittering lights. Within the small world, i.e. man, for enlightening his ways, He fired the light of mind which was so great at the beginning that there was no secret so deep that he could not penetrate it. But not for long could man use this light; he appropriated it, and reflected back the Divine beams, and became gloomy. Darkness covered his previous enlightenment<sup>43</sup>.

In fact, the concept of the perennial man, Adam Kadmon, his Fall and his Return, is the very heart of the masonic system. It is precisely this idea which underlies their doctrine of the primordial unity of mankind which has been destroyed and is to be repaired. The mason himself is likened here to Adam, that is to one who has possessed, from the very beginning, numerous virtues and true knowledge. This symbol is very important for masonic myth. It is highly syncretic: it includes elements drawn from biblical, apocryphal, hermetic, Gnostic, Christian and kabbalistic texts. The teaching about two Adams plays a special role here. The first Adam has the features of *Adam before the Fall*, with the universalism of Adam Kadmon, the perennial supernal being in

<sup>42</sup> On these kabbalistic concepts see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 96-116.

<sup>43</sup> (Anon.), ‘To the readers’, *Vechernyaya Zarya (Evening Glow)* 1 (1782), 2.

whose image man and the world were created and whose soul contained souls of all people, and of *perennial Jesus-Messiah*. The second Adam, or Jesus incarnated, is considered a manifestation, or Hieroglyph, of the first Adam<sup>44</sup>.

The writings of Russian masons belong to a Christian (probably heterodox) tradition, but Adam Kadmon is interpreted here in accordance with kabbalistic views. Thus in discussing the problem of the manifest and non-manifest God, an author notes:

In order to make these emanations and images of Divine features and powers, the infinite Primitive Cause, infinite Spirit or infinite Light emanated [from itself] the fundamental First Principle through which come further emanations. It is *Adam Kadmon*, i.e. archetypal perennial Man (*Urmensch*). This first-begotten Lord's [Son] was revealed in ten kinds of emanation, or in ten images, and produced outwardly the same number of sources of lights: they are called *Sefirot*, *Sefirs*, primordial figures, figures of things (*Urzahlen*)<sup>45</sup>.

For masonic myth, the concept of the Fall which was identical with the loss of wisdom, perennial Knowledge, and Light by Adam, is of extreme importance. All masonic activity is aimed at restoring this lost wisdom. Like Christian kabbalists of the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, the Russian masons often considered Kabbalah the perennial knowledge granted to Adam in Eden. For example, in the same masonic text one may read:

The kabbalists say that God declared this secret knowledge to Adam, but Adam, because of his fall, tore away from the Kingdom of God and the Lord's Anointed, and because of this he lost this wisdom, realized the importance of his loss, again returned to the source of felicity, and passed this truth on to his posterity. There is nothing here that we could not accept. But in Kabbalah (excluding many additions filled with lies), this is expressed in the language of images. Kingdom (*Königreich* = *Malchut*) here is the most inferior *Sefirot* [i.e. *Sefirah*] in which is concentrated the light of all the *Sefirot* emanated from the infinite Source of Light through Archetypal Man (*Urmensch* = *Adam Kadmon* = Son of God). By its Almighty Power, It [i.e. Light] leads man and all the creatures out to their Beatitude. Inasmuch as Adam had a desire to be his own lord for himself, or to be equal to God, he tore away this *Sefirot* [i.e. *Sefirah*], i.e. the Kingdom of God, and together with it tore away the Leaf, or the Twig from the Tree of *Sefirot* (tore away Nature from the influence of the Heavenly Light), and after that he was covered with shame by the sensation of the death that he attracted to himself by his tearing away from the Tree of Life and from the Light which is the Heavenly Man<sup>46</sup>.

It is suggested that one may attain great wisdom due to the process of self-knowledge; this is considered to be the cognition of both Nature and the Crea-

<sup>44</sup> See Saint Martin, *On Errors and Truth*, 35, 70.

<sup>45</sup> DMS RSL, F. 14, N 992 ('A Short Notion on Kabbalah', the early 19th century), f. 14-14r.

<sup>46</sup> DMS RSL, F. 14, N 992, f. 3r-4.

tor, because of the isomorphism of the macrocosm (“the universe”) and microcosm (“the small world”, “man”). As it is said in a masonic song, ‘While trying Nature in myself, / the Creation and the Creator shall I comprehend; / striving to penetrate into myself, / I can know Him by my soul’<sup>47</sup>.

Florovsky notes reasonably that ‘dogmatically freemasonry was, in essence, a revival of Neoplatonic and Gnostic doctrines, renewed since the Renaissance. The most important thing was the idea of the Fall, “a spark of light” captured by the darkness. Not so much a strong feeling of sin as a sensation of impurity was typical of the masons. And it is resolved not so much by penance as by abstinence’<sup>48</sup>.

It is interesting that self-knowledge, at least in its first stage, presupposes that the man involved is frightened by his sins and chooses the way of improvement. Masonic mystical knowledge, mystical illumination, up to the union with the Godhead, is possible only for ‘bearers of spirit’ who, by way of moral self-correction, ‘developed in themselves abilities that, after their full revelation, raise him up to the lower regions of the realm of angels’<sup>49</sup>. Preaching about personal self-perfection and mysticism are tightly connected here with each other, ‘for the truth is a mystery that may be revealed not by mental efforts but by moral great deeds of the will [...] one can know everything only by overcoming the sinfulness of human nature’<sup>50</sup> and with the attainment of the knowledge and light that were lost by the first man, Adam. As mentioned above, Adam is an archetype for the mason, who is sinful, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, has the opportunity to return to the previous sinless and perfect condition. This condition can be attained after numerous trials whose first preparatory stage is moral self-correction.

Also we are not deprived of this light, it is present within us, but it is obscured and suppressed by our wicked deeds. It shines also in Nature but as it does not shine within ourselves we could not see it outside. And so the true sages of the ancient and modern times declare self-knowledge the first exercise of the man [...] Self-knowledge ought to begin with perception and improvement of our moral acts, and after that we can learn the intrinsic mysteries of human nature’<sup>51</sup>.

In fact, at the next stage, ‘when our spirit is prepared in such a way, and the light within us is unveiled, then we can put our attention to the external things or the nature, and to recognize the great perfection, skills, and the greatness of

<sup>47</sup> Published in: *Magazin svobodno-kamenshchicheskiy (Free-Masonic Magazine)* 1:1, 142.

<sup>48</sup> Florovsky, *Paths of Russian Theology*, 119.

<sup>49</sup> Kiesewetter, ‘Moscow Rosicrucians of the Eighteenth Century’, 116.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>51</sup> (Anon.), ‘To the readers’, 3.

its Architect in its marvelous construction. Finally, who desires to see the great wisdom in its full brightness, let him start to read Holy Writ ardently and zealously; he will find there all the mysteries of the Divine and Natural explained by the spiritual language'<sup>52</sup>.

Therefore the masonic theory of knowledge requires the initiate to pass through three stages. In the first stage, he is occupied with moral self-correction and knowing the mysteries intrinsic to man. In the second stage, he must come to know Nature. In the third stage, the mysteries of Nature and God are understood at a higher level using the "spiritual language" of the Scriptures<sup>53</sup>. This three-stage path is considered the return to that time when 'the book of nature was opened for human understanding, and man could comprehend all its mysteries by his mind'<sup>54</sup>. This return is possible, however, due to mastering the knowledge Adam possessed in Paradise. The masons believe that after his fall he

kept everything in his memory [...] and through his memory, he taught his descendants the sciences that he had known in Eden about nature and its Ruler. Afterwards, some of them kept these teachings of wisdom and transmitted them by word of mouth to the next generation [...] One may claim with great confidence that the teachings of our forefathers were transmitted to posterity with great accuracy [...] However because of the multiplication of the human race over the surface of the Earth, and their dissemination throughout the world, the precepts about knowledge and truth taken from the First Man *were* transformed into fallacies [...] that is why they have been kept in all their previous power and perfection in but a few people<sup>55</sup>.

Thus, an ancient and authentic tradition was necessary to save this knowledge. When Russian masons travelled throughout Europe, studying the works of Western mystics, alchemists and Christian kabbalists, masonic and Rosicrucian documents, they sought just this tradition. In this way, they had the greatest respect for Kabbalah.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>53</sup> Similar reasoning can be found in several MSs for example in *Besedi iz Teoreticheskogo Gradusa Solomonskih vedeniy (Conversations from the Theoretic Degree of Solomon Cognizances, DMS RSL, F. 14, N 250, f. 93-93r)* we read: 'You are sufficiently learned that God teaches us in three ways: (1) He points us at the Nature as the manifested Wisdom Divine; (2) He gives to us the rule for Improvement of our Manners; (3) through all this, He guides us to True Innermost Theology, or to living cognition of the Divine Word. And this threefold teaching we must transform thoroughly in our activity, in order that it came, day by day, in our life, and our inner man was fed on this, grew and strengthened in God'.

<sup>54</sup> From (Anon.), 'The Condition of Man Before the Fall', 235.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 238.

### *The true Kabbalah*

Russian masons considered the “true Kabbalah”<sup>56</sup> an essential part of the primordial Wisdom, which is required for the fallen man to return to “Eden”. ‘When people began to forfeit these gifts [those of primordial Wisdom], they were forced to transmit their knowledge about the nature and God Himself to their offspring by means of “inscriptions” or hieroglyphs’<sup>57</sup>. And it is just the Kabbalah which contains those hieroglyphs, that ‘represent attributes of things in the world’<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, up to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Kabbalah was the only source of the primeval Light and primordial Wisdom Adam had taken out of Paradise.

Similar views are expressed in the works of Ivan Elagin, one of the most outstanding Russian masons of the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

Kabbalah is a symbolic or formative doctrine of Divine mysteries received and accepted from God, which is essential and useful for the holy God-seeing. Therefore, this teaching is considered the true knowledge of allegories, symbols, and hieroglyphs of the Divine words [...] [Solomon] bade to extract sense and understanding from the law of Holy Scripture on grounds of kabbalistic doctrine. Thus the main essence of Kabbalah is to leave the external and literal sense of Holy Scripture and word of God, and to penetrate the interior thoughts of the Holy Ghost<sup>59</sup>.

In the opinion of J. Schwarz, the leader of Moscow Rosicrucians in the early 1780s, masonry was a secret science whose first adepts were Jewish sectarians. The principle underlying the doctrine of Rosicrucians is the concept of a “spark of light” transferred from one wise man to another through the chain of Tradition. “Thus this mystery [i.e. the primordial doctrine, received by Rosicrucians] passed to the religious Jewish sects of Essenes and Therapeutes which existed in the days of Christ and were renowned for their virtuousness [...] Just from these Essenes was derived a glorious Order of Rosicrucians who received the “spark of light”, together with the virtue of

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<sup>56</sup> A conditional term denoting a special masonic version of Jewish Kabbalah based on its interpretation by Christian kabbalists of the fifteenth–seventeenth centuries. As a rule, the “true Kabbalah” was identified with the “theoretic” Kabbalah (*Kabbalah iyyunit*), which was contrasted with the “practical” Kabbalah (*Kabbalah ma’asit*, or “Jewish magic”). See DMS RSL, F 14, N 1116, f. 2, 5r; N 992, f. 1-2r; *Onomatologia curiosa artificiosa et magica, or the Dictionary of Natural Magic*, Vol. 1, 376-377. See also Burmistrov and Endel, ‘Kabbalah in Russian Masonry’, 33-36.

<sup>57</sup> (Anon.), ‘The Condition of Man Before the Fall’, 238.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore the words “hieroglyphic” and “kabbalistic” are sometimes considered synonyms.

<sup>59</sup> RSAAA, F. 8, N 216, Pt. 6, f. 54-54r.



their ancestors'<sup>60</sup>. In such a way, according to Russian masons, was the fundamental masonic tradition established<sup>61</sup>.

*Tikkun ha-olam: the aims of masonic activity and Kabbalah*

Masonic activity was not reduced however to self-knowledge, knowledge of Nature, and God. Its underlying principle was a kabbalistic and alchemical impulse for the improvement and salvation of the world fallen with Adam. The process of universal improvement (*tikkun*) is described in some masonic texts. The clearest exposition is contained in the treatise "An Oration of the Man of *Eziless*"<sup>62</sup>. The necessity of *tikkun* is caused by a disruption in the process of creation that resulted in serious structural alterations in the world. Like medieval kabbalists, masonic authors, however, were sure that this disruption was an inevitable stage on the way of transformation, or "softening" of the Divine attribute of Judgment (Sefirah *Din*), which is intrinsic to the very nature of God. Indeed, 'as God is omniscient, He could not help knowing what happened with His creation; and as He is omnipotent, He could have built in such a way that no corruption would happen afterwards'<sup>63</sup>. However, the art of Creation is similar to the work of a goldsmith, in whose arms 'gold [...] is transformed in different ways, needless parts are detached and gathered again, they are purified and become better than they have been before'<sup>64</sup>. The amendment and improvement of the creation, i.e. the transformation of the force of Judgment into the force of Charity, is likened also to the alchemical transmutation of Copper (=Judgment, Sefirah *Din*) to Silver (Charity, Sefirah *Hesed*)<sup>65</sup>. Anyway, it is man who must purify and amend the spheres of the Universe accessible to him; special groups of elected initiates, i.e. masons, played a pivotal role in the process.

<sup>60</sup> Semeka, 'Russian Rosicrucians and the works by Catherine II against Masonry', 350.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.*, 358. It is noteworthy that one of the masonic pseudoepigrapha, *Letter of the Rabbi of Lisbon to the Rabbi of Brest* (1817; originally written in Polish), states that the Craft (or "Hafshim Goderim" Society) has been established by the biblical characters; masonry itself is considered there a secret Jewish order whose members, inter alia, acknowledge Christianity. See DMS RSL, F. 147, N 287, f. 29-33r.; *List Rabina Lizbonskiego do Rabina Brzeskiego z dyalektu rabinsko-talmudycznego przetłumaczony*. P. 1-8.

<sup>62</sup> DMS RSL, F 14, N 1655. P. 487-523. This text is a paraphrase of a part of "Ma'amar 'Adam de-'Azilut", an anonymous kabbalistic work of the seventeenth century, where 'the basic tenets of Lurianic Kabbalah are systematically and originally presented' (Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 143). *Eziless* is a distorted spelling of *Azilut*, the highest of the four worlds-*olamot* of kabbalistic cosmology. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 137.

<sup>63</sup> DMS RSL, F 14, N 1655. P. 506.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 510.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

For the mason, personal salvation is possible only in the course of overall harmonization and salvation of nature and man, of universal *tikkun*, and every mason ought to participate actively in this process. Just this impulse induced the masons to work for charitable causes, in the field of public education and amendment of manners, and at the same time to carry out alchemical experiments aimed at the “improvement” and “salvation” of gross metals and their transmutation into gold.

### *Kabbalistic hermeneutics*

Biblical hermeneutics and kabbalistic methods of interpretation played an essential role in the masonic system. Masons believed that by unveiling the hidden meaning of the Scriptures they would be able to comprehend the depth of the universe, to establish an intercourse with the spiritual world and to discover the ways for emendation of the fallen world including human society and human nature. With this end in view, some of them studied Hebrew and tried to read and interpret the Hebrew Bible while turning to kabbalistic symbols and methods (*gematria*, *notarikon*, *temurah*). We cite below an excerpt taken from a private letter where an active Rosicrucian, prince Nikolay N. Trubetskoi (1744-1821)<sup>66</sup>, explains to a mason of a higher initiation, Aleksey A. Rzhovski (1737-1804)<sup>67</sup>, the importance of Kabbalah for masonic work. This text is especially significant for our discourse for it reflects the real interests and everyday problems of Russian masons. In the beginning, its author writes about ‘the importance and necessity of Hebrew’ for masonic art<sup>68</sup>. Then he argues that you should not study kabbalistic interpretations of the Scriptures (i.e. “spiritual matters”) until you have comprehended the science of nature (i.e. “material matters”).

I guess that the mysterious sense of Mosaic writings is conceivable not by calculation, or creation of a new word from each letter; for the words as Moses has written them are not the same now as they were at his time [...] The direct way to the achievement of truth is that of Abraham who, at the beginning, had known a slave and engendered with her Ishmael, and afterwards he got Isaac from Sarah. For this science [i.e. Kabbalah] not only unveils spiritual things but we may say that it is spiritual by itself; but how can a mortal know about the spiritual matters until he has known about the material ones [...] Those who practise this science

<sup>66</sup> He was one of the most active and devoted Rosicrucians, a member of the Friendly Learned Society and masonic “Typographic Company”. See Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 811.

<sup>67</sup> A. A. Rzhovski – a member of the Rosicrucian Order, writer and translator. See Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 696; Serkov, A.I. and Reizin, M.V. (eds.), *Letters of N.I. Novikov*, 283; Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, Index.

<sup>68</sup> Barskov (ed.), *Correspondence of the Russian Masons of the 18th century*, 235.

expect correctly that ‘all the lower things represent the higher ones, and what occurs in lower things that also occurs in higher ones’. Therefore, Moses himself could not attain spiritual matters when he was completely unfamiliar with the material ones. This is why I conclude that the meaning of [what Moses has said] is going from mouth to mouth up to our times, and that this mysterious meaning is contained not in letters but in the words themselves. For example, in the first chapter of Genesis, the word “et” (“eth”, in Hebrew) indicates the clearest essence; but also it is the conjunction “and”, therefore it was translated as “and the earth”; it is still possible to translate as “essence of the earth”. However if somebody had previously an experience in studying the material matters in nature and has some knowledge of Hebrew, then he is able easily, without calculation, to recognize the true meaning of Moses’ [words...] And one who knows the true sense of the [word] *Elohim*, the acting person in the first chapter of Genesis, will understand easily that the material matters should be conceived before the spiritual ones... I hope however for your modesty, venerable Brother, that after reading you will tear this letter into pieces, and will not discuss its content with anybody...<sup>69</sup>.

Referring to the masonic tradition as a whole, we can conclude that Russian masons used Kabbalah, firstly, as a basis for their cosmogonic system, explaining the hierarchical construction of the heavenly world, and for communication with this world. Secondly, Kabbalah provided the keys for interpreting the Scriptures and discovering the deepest and secret layers of the biblical text. It is possible to discern, moreover, behind the masonic soteriology some adapted kabbalistic concepts, and first and foremost – the concept of *Tikkun ha-olam*<sup>70</sup>. For the masons, Kabbalah contains the true knowledge about God, the world, and man and not only facilitates the process of universal amendment but also determines its paths and ways.

### *Kabbalistic texts in the literature of Russian masons*

As we have also mentioned above, we managed to discover in Moscow State archives a significant number of masonic MSs which indicate a deep interest in and a good acquaintance of Russian Brothers with Jewish Mysticism. We have divided these texts into three main groups<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 236-237. This letter is dated from the mid-1780s.

<sup>70</sup> This kabbalistic concept was adopted and expressed distinctly in the doctrine of the mystical school, established by Martines de Pasqually and his pupil L.C. de Saint-Martin. Their writings and ideas enjoyed great popularity among Russian Brothers. See Van Rijnberk, *Un Thaumaturge au XVIIIe siècle*; Le Forestier, *La franc-maçonnerie occultiste au XVIIIe siècle & l'ordre des Elus Coens*; Waite, *The Life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, the Unknown Philosopher*.

<sup>71</sup> We discuss this issue in detail in Burmistrov and Endel, ‘Kabbalah in Russian Masonry’, 23-33.

*The first group* comprises translations of real kabbalistic texts or their fragments. It should be stressed that masonic translations are hardly similar to translations in the strict meaning of the word. They are rather mixtures of translations and commentaries, loose translations and expositions, with additions made by the translator or interpolations from other texts. Therefore, it is very difficult to identify the different layers in these texts and comprehend all the transformations made from the original texts.

Russian masons of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century were familiar with one of the basic texts of Jewish mysticism, *Sefer Yezirah* (*The Book of Creation*, 3–6 centuries C.E.), a short cosmogonic treatise about the creation of the universe and man by means of Hebrew letters and numbers<sup>72</sup>. At least two Russian translations of this text are kept now in MSs collections<sup>73</sup>. Also in several writings one can meet long quotations from *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendour*, 13<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>74</sup> which appears to have been the most important and well known kabbalistic text for Russian masons<sup>75</sup>.

We also found a very interesting translation of the famous treatise *Shaare Orah* (*The Gates of Light*) by Joseph Gikatilla (the 13<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>76</sup>, with numerous quotations from the classic commentary to this text written by Mattityahu Delacrut, a Polish kabbalist of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the same MS codex there is an abridged version of *Ma'amar 'Adam de-'Azilut*, an anonymous text belonging to Lurianic Kabbalah<sup>77</sup>. These texts seem to be a direct translation from Hebrew, but they contain so many interpolations that it is reasonable to conclude their translator was a true Christian kabbalist<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> This text is very popular in the Jewish tradition; many Jewish mystics and philosophers have commented it. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 23-30. This work was also very important for the Christian kabbalists who translated it to the Latin and other European languages. See re-edition of the Latin translation made by G. Postel (1552): *Sefer Jezirah* (in the Introduction, the role of this text in the Christian Kabbalah is elucidated). See also Schmidt-Biggermann, 'Das Buch Jezirah in der christlichen Tradition'; Burmistrov and Endel, 'Sefer Yezirah in Jewish and Christian Traditions'.

<sup>73</sup> DMS RSL, F. 14, N 676. P. 46–52 (this translation is published in: Burmistrov and Endel, 'Sefer Yezirah in Jewish and Christian Traditions', 63-71); see also Gilly, 'Iter Gnostico-Russicum', 56. See also about the Russian translations of "Sefer Yezirah" made from the Latin edition (S. Rittangelus, Amsterdam 1642) – State Archive of Russian Federation, F. 1137, I, N. 118, Section X.

<sup>74</sup> On *Sefer ha-Zohar* see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 213-243; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*. See also about the interpretations of the book in Christian Kabbalah: Secret, *Le Zôhar chez les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, DMS RSL, F. 14, N 676. P. 3-34.

<sup>76</sup> On him and his treatise see Idel, 'Historical Introduction', in: *Sha'are Orah. Gates of Light*; Blickstein, *Between Philosophy and Mysticism*; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 409-411.

<sup>77</sup> See DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1655; F. 147, N 208.

<sup>78</sup> For further details see Burmistrov and Endel, 'Kabbalah in Russian Masonry', 26-29; Endel, 'On a kabbalistic manuscript in Russian Masonic literature'; id., 'Original Kabbalistic Concepts in the Masonic Codex "On the Sefirot" (Late 18th century)'.

Thus, despite our scarce knowledge of the intellectual world of the Russian masons, these texts point to their intended effort to organize an existing tradition of deep contact and exchange with kabbalistic texts and concepts. In our opinion, texts like these demonstrate their knowledge of Hebrew and quite possibly their acquaintance with Kabbalists who possessed an oral tradition.

*The second group* comprises translations into Russian of the works of European Christian kabbalists and researchers of Kabbalah. It is represented by translations made mostly from German and Latin. In this connection such works as *True and Right Kabbalah* by Wilhelm Kriegesmann, *A Short Version of the Kabbalistic Teaching* by Jacob Brucker, and *The Jewish Kabbalah* by Caspar Schott should be mentioned<sup>79</sup>. The authors of these writings based their knowledge of Kabbalah on the works of Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, Pietro di Galatino, Athanasius Kircher and other Christian kabbalists of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries; they used many quotations taken both from these works and from the kabbalistic texts, first of all, from *Sefer ha-Zohar*. In these texts, kabbalistic concepts are described in detail: for example, the teachings on the Sefirot, the Names of God, the mystical meaning of Hebrew letters, the kabbalistic exegetical methods (*gematria*, *notarikon*, *temurah*), and the so-called “astrological Kabbalah”.

In our opinion, the most interesting is *the third group* that contains original writings of Russian masons devoted to kabbalistic matters<sup>80</sup>. Only these texts allow us to reconstruct masonic views related to Kabbalah. It seems very important to find out who were the putative authors or translators of these texts.

As we mentioned above, the “kabbalistic” texts belong not to the “intra-masonic” writings but rather to the “circle of masonic reading”. This means that the Russian masons were not obliged to share the concepts contained in these texts. Besides, the number of the texts was relatively small – several dozens versus several thousands of extant masonic manuscripts<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> See DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1613, or F. 147, N 193 (original text: Kriegesmann, *Die wahre und richtige Cabalah*, Frankfurt, Leipzig 1774); DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1644, Pt.5. P. 19-26 (extraction from Brucker, J., *Historia critica philosophiae*, Vol. II, Leipzig, 1742); Caspar Schott – DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1646 (205 ff.), brief and more old version – F. 147, N 204; F. 14, N 987. It should be noted that in almost every manuscript, data about the author and source are lacking. Besides, they could also be influenced by “primary sources” of the Christian Kabbalah, e.g., the famous book *De Occulta Philosophia* by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (the first complete edition – Cologne, 1533): see DMS RSL, F. 14, N 705, N 1625-27.

<sup>80</sup> The principal concepts presented in these texts are reviewed in Burmistrov and Endel, ‘Kabbalah in Russian Masonry’, 33-43. Ibid. (P. 44-55) one of the most representative texts of the kind is published (with English translation).

<sup>81</sup> See e.g. unpublished A.N. Pypin’s “Masonic Bibliography” in the State Archive of Russian Federation, F. 1137, I, N 117-119 (Section X: “Mystics, Theosophy, Kabbalah”), or in the Catalogue of V. Arsenyev’s masonic collection: DMS RSL, F. 14 (comprising about 2,000 manuscripts).

### *Ivan Elagin and Kabbalah*

One of the most outstanding masons in the age of Catherine the Great was Ivan Elagin, senator, famous statesman, and writer. The head of the Palace chancellery, he played an important role in political life<sup>82</sup>. It is known that Catherine herself sometimes jokingly signed documents as “Chancellor of Mr. Elagin”. Joined to the Craft in 1750s, in 1770 he had been elected Grand Master of the Grand Provincial Lodge of Russia under the auspices of the Berlin Grand Lodge, “Royal York”. Thus he became the chief of the first masonic union in Russia. On February 26, 1772 he received from the Great Master of the United Great Lodge of England the certificate of the first Provincial Grand Master of the Empire of Russia in Russian history. In the middle of the 1770s, Elagin’s System included not less than 14 lodges and maintained contacts with many European lodges<sup>83</sup>. The new stage in his activity began in the late 1780s, when he established a renewed masonic association and became its Grand Master. In the closing stages of his life, he wrote a voluminous composition *A Treatise on Russia (Opit povestvovaniya o Rossii)*, an uncompleted work on Russian history, where his masonic views were presented<sup>84</sup>.

In the Introduction to one of his unpublished writings, Elagin described in detail his spiritual biography. He joined masonry in his youth but did not find anything attractive there and soon left the lodge. After a short period of enthusiasm for Voltaire and Helvetius he returned to masonic activity with much more serious intentions. He looked for the teachers who could initiate him into the mysteries of Divine knowledge, he was ready to learn and to teach this knowledge all his life. By his own words, it was his high position in masonry that impelled him continuously ‘to strive hard to solve [i.e. to understand] this mysterious and numinous teaching’<sup>85</sup>. For, as he writes in the same Introduction, ‘my sincerity did not allow me to lead my Brothers in the way unknown to myself. Therefore I began with all my thoroughness to spend vast sums of

<sup>82</sup> On Elagin and his masonic system see Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 44-70, 94-98; Semeka, ‘Russian Masonry in the Eighteenth Century’, 139-149; Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*, 96-137; Pekarski, *Supplements to the history of Masonry in Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, 50-55; Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 104-105. Biographical data see also in Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 323; Serkov and Reizin (eds.), *Letters of N.I. Novikov*, 289.

<sup>83</sup> For further details see Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 44-52.

<sup>84</sup> The first volume of the treatise was published in Moscow in 1803; other MS materials devoted, in particular, to some religious and philosophic problems are contained in the Manuscript Department of the Russian National Library (St. Petersburg). See Artemieva, *Russian Historiosophy of the Eighteenth Century*, 82-93.

<sup>85</sup> RSAAA, F. 8. N 216. Pt. 3. f. 6.

money trying to collect everything related to masonry'<sup>86</sup>. The result of these expenses was, however, an understanding that it is impossible to buy truth for money, and that 'for real [i.e. common] gold' you can receive but 'the search for imaginary gold'. Thus at the end of 1770s Elagin was disappointed in the English system of masonry which was taught in Russian lodges when he had been their Head. In despair, Elagin immersed himself in reading the Old and New Testaments and Fathers of the Church. Then he began to feel the necessity of studying Greek and Hebrew.

On this new path, the most important role was played by his acquaintance with Baron Johannes George von Reuchel (1729-1791)<sup>87</sup>. Baron von Reuchel was the Head of lodges that worked according to the Swedish-Berlin system of Johann Wilhelm Ellenberger (von Zinnendorf) (1731-1782), known as the "System of Relaxed Observation" ("Laxe Observanz")<sup>88</sup>. Von Reuchel's masonic union, established in St. Petersburg in 1771, was in fact an opponent to Elagin's masonry, and therefore rather complicated relations were established between them. At the same time, von Reuchel became Elagin's mentor on his spiritual path. In the words of Elagin, this 'respectable brother, initiated in the true masonry', explained to him 'an ancient mysterious knowledge called the Sacred Wisdom'<sup>89</sup>. There is some evidence that Reuchel also was interested in Kabbalah and Talmud<sup>90</sup>. It was Reuchel who provided Elagin with various mystical MSs and explained their secret and symbolic meaning. He gave him many masonic texts and for many years (at least, from 1777 up to 1786) he induced Elagin 'to read the books which he had earlier disdained as stupid'<sup>91</sup>. In Elagin's archive, one can find various MSs related to von Reuchel. In our opinion, von Reuchel facilitated Elagin's interest in "secret knowledge", including Kabbalah; but this interest developed to the full extent due to his acquaintance with another mentor.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> 'Reuchel was sent in Russia by the National Lodge of Berlin (working after Zinnendorf's System) "to break the absolutism of Englishmen". He headed in Russia the so-called "Reuchel's" masonic system. By the way in 1776 this system and "English lodges" headed by Elagin joined together'. – Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 65-70; see also Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 690; Serkov and Reizin (eds.), *Letters of N.I. Novikov*, 339.

<sup>88</sup> Ellenberg-Zinnendorf, a physician, since 1765 was appointed the head of the Prussian Medical Department. An active mason, he spread the rite of Swedish masonry in Germany and established the Grand Lodge of Germany. See Pertsev, 'German Freemasonry in the Eighteenth century', 86-91.

<sup>89</sup> Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 184.

<sup>90</sup> An anonymous German diary is contained among Elagin's MSs. His author mixed with Reuchel and disapproved of '[Reuchlin's] insane fabrications on Kabbalah and Talmud'. See Pekarski, *Supplements to the history of Masonry in Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, 80.

<sup>91</sup> Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 186.

### *Stanislaus Eli*

In the late 1770s Elagin became acquainted with a person who not only gave him invaluable help in learning Hebrew, but also involved him in serious study of Kabbalah. The gentleman spoken of is a certain Stanislaus Pines Eli (or Ely) who, in the words of Elagin, ‘was an expert in our science, in the art of healing, and in Hebrew and Kabbalah’. For many years, Eli taught him ‘everything what is necessary and needful for comprehension of mystical sense and outlandish sayings which are so plenty in the writings of Moses and other prophets’.<sup>92</sup> Considering the name of this man, and his knowledge of Hebrew and Kabbalah, we may suggest that he was a converted Jew. He was a native of Kolin (Bohemia) who received medical education at Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Oder. In 1778 (or 1776)<sup>93</sup> Eli arrived in St. Petersburg where he got a certificate for medical practice<sup>94</sup>. About that time he met Elagin and became his mentor. He also was able to cure his pupil from a fatal illness.

Elagin reported that Eli was the author of a masonic book *Fraternal Admonitions to Some Brethern Free Masons written by Br. Seddag (Bratskiye uveshchaniya k nektorim brat'yam svbdn kmnshchkm. Pisani bratom Seddagom)*<sup>95</sup>. In Pypin’s opinion, this book was ‘a typical example of Rosicrucian nonsense, with its false depth and theological and alchemical inventions’<sup>96</sup>. It was very popular among Moscow Rosicrucians. It is written in symbolic and rather abstruse language and contains some elements that may definitely relate to Jewish mysticism. Thus one finds there a lengthy discourse on the great mystical power of the Tetragrammaton, with its numerical interpretation. The author also teaches his Brothers how to study the Scriptures in a specific “kabbalistic” way:

Read, my brother, read the Holy Creation, read its gradual consequences, read it by the clear inner eye ‘of sages whose eye is in their head’ as overwise Solomon

<sup>92</sup> RSAAA, F. 8, N 216, Pt. 3, f. 8r. See also Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*, 132.

<sup>93</sup> See Barskov, *Correspondence of the Russian Masons of the 18th century*, 310.

<sup>94</sup> In 1778 he examined and described a sulpho-chalybeate fount which had been found by him in Schklov (Mogilev District), one of the most important Jewish centres in those days, and sent a sample of water to the Medical Board. See (Barskov, J.L.), ‘Ely S.’, 214; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 925. It should be noted that in the 1780s in Schklov a Russian masonic lodge was active. See Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 375.

<sup>95</sup> This treatise was written originally in German: *Brüderliche Vermahnungen an einige Brüder Freymaurer von dem Bruder Seddag*, Philadelphia (St. Petersburg?), 1781. It was translated into Russian by F.B. Obolduyev and published in Moscow in 1784. A copy of the German edition is known, which contains an interesting handwritten inscription: ‘The editor of the German original was ... D[octo]r Eli, a converted Polish [sic] Jew who lived in Petersburg’. See Guberti, *Materials for a Russian Bibliography*, Vol. 2, 142.

<sup>96</sup> See Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*, 132.



has said [...] read truly, and from the very beginning. If you wish to read the history of the Creation then read the first verse: 'Bereschith bara Elohim eth haschamajim weeth haaretz', and read it for several years, and only after that read further [...] When you have read this and that profoundly, then read there where nothing is written yet<sup>97</sup>.

Novikov mentions Eli among the members of Elagin's lodges<sup>98</sup>. In 1786 Eli was appointed (probably with a help of Elagin) to the position of head of the Economic Chancellery at the Medical Board; he was also a member of the Free Economic Society<sup>99</sup>.

This is almost all the information available about Dr. Eli who appears to be one of the most important figures relevant for our topic.

### *Kabbalistic studies of Elagin*

We can estimate the results of Elagin's kabbalistic studies by the content of his manuscript collection, and especially by two of his own works. He planned to write a large composition devoted to the history of masonry and mystical doctrines from ancient times up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: *Doctrine of ancient philosophy and divine knowledge, or knowledge of Free Masons and diverse makers, profane, ecclesiastic, and mystic, collected and presented in five parts by I.E., the Grand Master of the Russian provincial lodge*<sup>100</sup>. He began to write the book in 1786 but two years later, in 1788, he had finished only a part of what he planned<sup>101</sup>. Thus we must judge about his design taken in its entirety by an extant project. It is noteworthy that in the project (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> book) there were a chapter 3 titled *About Talmud and Targum*, chapter 5 *About kabbalistic Art. On Sefirot, on the Names of God*, and chapter 10 *About the 32 grades and the 50 gates for the great wisdom*<sup>102</sup>. In the course of work the project was, however, changed significantly. The 1<sup>st</sup> book contains *Histori-*

<sup>97</sup> Seddag, *Fraternal Admonitions to Some Brethern Free Masons*, 134.

<sup>98</sup> Popov, 'New Documents on the Novikov Case', 146.

<sup>99</sup> The title of his dissertation is *De opobalsamo et oleo-balamno* (1770); he wrote also the book *An exposition of the reliable and durable income of sheep farms* (St. Petersburg, 1796). See (Barskov, J.L.), 'Ely S.', 214-215.

<sup>100</sup> *Ucheniye drevnego lyubomudriya i bogomudriya, ili nauka svobodnih kamen'shchikov i raznih tvortsov svetskih, dukhovnih i misticheskikh, sobrannaya i v pyati chastyah predlozhennaya I.E., Velikim ross. provintsial'noy lozhi masterom.* – RSAAA, F. 216, N 8, Pt. 3, 26–29. A rough copy (an autograph) written by Elagin.

<sup>101</sup> As Douglas Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 215 notes, this work was meant 'to be read only to members of the secret governing body of his Second Elagin Union'.

<sup>102</sup> RSAAA, F. 216, N 8, Pt. 3, f. 2. See also P. Pekarski, *Supplements to the history of Masonry in Russia in the Eighteenth Century*, 96-97; Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 186.

*cal review of Masonry since Adam, Noah, and Abraham up to the Knight Orders of the Middle Ages and “systems” of recent times.* In the 2<sup>nd</sup> book, instead of Talmud, there is a description of the first two degrees of masonry. The 3<sup>rd</sup> book contains an explanation of two other degrees of masonry. The 4<sup>th</sup> book that was devoted to the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> degrees is missing, and only some sketches devoted to “the confirmation of the Existence of God and Incarnation” remain of the 5<sup>th</sup> book<sup>103</sup>. In the available MS, there are, in particular, twelve pages all devoted to the interpretation of Hebrew words. Thus the composition does not correspond to its earlier plan, and speculations on Kabbalah and Talmud are presented there only fragmentarily.

The second of Elagin’s compositions, named *Explanations of the mysterious meaning [of the text] about Creation of the Universe in Holy Scripture, which is a key for understanding of the Book of Truth and Errors* is mostly devoted to his kabbalistic studies (unfortunately only some parts of this composition are available)<sup>104</sup>. The text represents an extensive kabbalistic commentary to the main points of the masonic doctrine: God and Creation, elements and Divine names, etc. On the basis of Holy Scripture – using the kabbalistic concepts *Ein-Sof*, emanation of the *Sefirot*, *Adam Kadmon*, four worlds-*Olamot*, as well as the hermeneutic techniques of *gematria*, *notarikon*, and *temurah* – Elagin developed a kabbalistic version of the masonic cosmogony. This composition is especially interesting for another reason: one can see here a discerning and decoding of the kabbalistic subtext in the book *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité* (Lyon 1775) by Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin which is absolutely unclear for uninitiated readers. The kabbalistic and non-Christian interpretation of the New Testament in Elagin’s text appears to be especially strange. Thus Elagin treats Jesus Christ as the perennial man, Adam Kadmon, whilst he looks upon the historical Jesus from Nazareth as a mason and one of the “hieroglyphs”, or “effective images” of the Perennial Jesus.

Elagin is an outstanding phenomenon that shows to us how strong was the interest in Kabbalah among educated Russian people in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Though he was a prominent statesman and Orthodox Christian, he devoted most of his life to the study of a tradition that seemingly was very distant from the Russian life of that time. However, when we try to understand the reasons for this strange interest, and consider the influence Jewish thought had on the Weltanschauung of people similar to Elagin, we get a chance to better under-

<sup>103</sup> The Introduction to the work has been published twice. See Elagin, ‘Doctrine of ancient philosophy and divine knowledge’; Novikov, *Freemasonry and Russian Culture*, 223-235.

<sup>104</sup> *Obyasneniya tainstvennogo smisla v Bozhestvennom Pisanii o sotvorenii Selenniya, sluzhashcheye klyuchom k razobraniya Knigi istini i zabluzhdeniy.* – RSAAA, F. 216, N 8, Pt. 6, f. 41-70r.

stand their social activity and the peculiarities of their political, economic, and religious views.

### *The Moscow Order of Rosicrucians*

As mentioned above, Kabbalah also was very significant for the members of the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross<sup>105</sup>. The tradition of perception, interpretation, and transmission of kabbalistic texts established by these people existed for almost a century and a half, from the 1770s through the 1920s. They translated a truly great number of writings of European mystics, alchemists, natural philosophers, and Christian kabbalists: all in all, hundreds of volumes. In addition, they created many original mystical texts. When masonry was prohibited in Russia in 1822, masonic activity continued, but without the Lodges; and only after the communist revolution did it completely cease.

The great bulk of the texts were composed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> - early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the circle of Moscow “theorists” (or “theoretical masons”). The most prominent members of the group were Johann Schwarz, Nikolay Novikov, Semion Gamaleya (1743-1822), Nikolay Trubetskoi, and, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph A. Pozdeev (1746-1820), Ruf S. Stepanov (1745-1828) etc. These people were members of the Order of Gold and Rosy Cross and had higher masonic degrees known as the Theoretical Degree of the Solomon Sciences and Rosicrucian degrees. Most of the texts available now were kept in the collection of a masonic “dynasty” Arsenievs (DMS RSL, F 13-14 – V.S. Arseniev’s stock) which included a considerable part of the manuscripts belonging to the Moscow “theorists”<sup>106</sup>. It should be noted that the Arsenievs not only kept the old MSs: during the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century these texts were continuously studied and commented, and new translations and original works were added to this Library.

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<sup>105</sup> On this Order see also Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 102-120; Tukalevsky, ‘N. I. Novikov and J. G. Schwarz’, 213-218; Eshevsky, ‘Moscow Masons of the 1780s’, 524-531; Nezenenov, *Nikolay Ivanovitch Novikov, Editor*, 107-109; Kiesewetter, ‘Moscow Rosicrucians of the Eighteenth century’, 96-124; Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, 198-232, etc. See also numerous Russian translations of the principal Rosicrucian document “The Theoretic Degree of the Solomon Sciences”, for example DMS RSL, F. 14, N 221, N 227.

<sup>106</sup> The history of this collection can be traced to one of the spiritual successors of Novikov and Gamaleya – V. A. Levshin (1746-1826); it was finished in 1922 (100 years after the formal prohibition of masonry in Russia), when the last representative of the Arsenievs masonic dynasty, Ioann Arseniev (1859-1930), prior of the Church of Christ Redeemer in Moscow, was exiled. See Serkov, ‘A History of Masonic Collections in Russia’, 59-66. See also Craven, ‘The First Chamber of Novikov’s Masonic Library’, 401-410.

Among the members of the Order were prominent social activists and top-level officials such as the curator of Moscow University, the famous poet Mikhail M. Kheraskov (1733-1807), and senator Ivan V. Lopukhin (1756-1816) as well as people possessing an extraordinary spiritual authority (though they might have no special social status), such as Semion Gamaleya<sup>107</sup>. Their activity was concentrated around Moscow University, the biggest Moscow publishing houses and printers, and magazines. All these people differed from each other in many respects but were united due to the rite of Rosicrucian initiation.

The Rosicrucian hierarchy was divided into nine stages, or “degrees”. The first one, an introductory “Junior” degree, followed immediately the fourth degree of regular masonry (“Scottish Master”). Then came the “Theoreticus” (the “Theoretic degree of Solomon Sciences”), and everybody who attained this degree became a Rosicrucian. The next seven degrees were named the higher degrees<sup>108</sup>. It is known that in Russia only about two dozen people possessed these higher degrees. The most advanced among them were J. Schwarz, G. Schröder, N. Novikov and N. Trubetskoi<sup>109</sup>. Each degree implied study of certain secret sciences and some practical activity (in the field of magic, theurgy, alchemy, etc.). In the seventh degree, *Adeptus exemptus*, initiates got familiar with the stone of wisdom, Kabbalah, and natural magic; those who attained the ninth degree (*Magus*) ‘knew everything and mastered everything like Moses, Aaron, Hermes’<sup>110</sup>. The Order’s works were wrapped in deep mystery, so that lower-ranking Brothers not only were unfamiliar with the works carried out on more higher degrees, but also often did not know the superior Brothers and the names of their chiefs. Unfortunately, the documents available do not allow us to state with confidence that some Russian masons were initi-

<sup>107</sup> S. I. Gamaleya was one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the Moscow masons, the “Chief Supervisor” of the Theoretic Degree in Moscow. He translated some 200 mystical and alchemic writings. See *Register of MS books translated by S. I. Gamaleya from different languages*, DMS RSL, F. 14, N 549). See about him Dovnar-Zapol’ski, ‘Semion Ivanovich Gamaleya’, 27-37; Nezenenov, *Nikolay Ivanovitch Novikov, Editor*, 174-179; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 219.

<sup>108</sup> They were “Practicus”, “Philosophus”, “Minor”, “Major”, “Adeptus exemptus”, “Magister”, and “Magus”. See *Der Signatstern oder die enthüllten sieben Grade der mystischen Freimaurerei*, Bd. V, 334; Lenning, *Encyclopaedie der Freimaurerei*, Bd. 3, 246; Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, 199.

<sup>109</sup> Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 112. Since 1787 A. M. Kutuzov (1749/52-97) was the messenger of Moscow Rosicrucians in Berlin. He was to keep them informed of the Rosicrucians’ activity. He was an alchemist and might be initiated into the higher degrees. See Tarasov, ‘The Moscow Society of Rosicrucians’, 18-22; Vernadsky, *Op. cit.*, 111; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 451.

<sup>110</sup> Kieseewetter, ‘Moscow Rosicrucians of the Eighteenth century’, 113-114.

ated into the higher degrees which implied studying of Kabbalah<sup>111</sup>. They themselves might deny this for fear of being accused of conspiracy. Thus, the Head of the Order, Novikov, answered during examination that the Brothers did not have such a possibility; the archive materials available allow us however to be strongly suspicious of his words. The content of masonic archives, and translations of kabbalistic texts as well as original compositions of Russian masons devoted to Kabbalah which we discovered in the archives are indicative of their deep acquaintance with this tradition. It seems obvious that they tried to use their knowledge in practice, though they themselves tried to look like “pure” theorists. As a scholar noted, ‘the Brothers of Gold and Rose Cross were selected among the selected. The Rosicrucians strove to reach a super-natural state, to converse with God, to invoke spirits, to command them and having known all the secrets of the nature, to become the lords of their own destiny [...] Many Rosicrucians bore witness that it is impossible to describe the blissful and immortal state of body into which they sunk when striving to attain an ecstatic experience’<sup>112</sup>.

### *Johann Schwarz*

Let us consider in detail an outstanding figure, Johann G. Schwarz (1751-1784)<sup>113</sup> who was the founder of Moscow branch of the Order and the spiritual leader and preceptor of Russian masons. He was one of a few Brothers who

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<sup>111</sup> For example Semeka suggested that ‘Russian Rosicrucians did not carry out alchemic experiments because they did not go beyond the “Theoretic Degree of the Solomon Sciences”’. See Semeka, ‘Russian Rosicrucians and the works by Catherine II against Masonry’, 365-366. This sceptical view is based mainly on the confessions of masons themselves made during examinations. Thus the leader of Moscow “theorists” N. Novikov answered investigation officer S. I. Sheshkovsky: ‘Neither of us could practise Magic and Kabbalah, having attained only lower degrees, and I do not know anything about these sciences except their names’. Longinov, *Novikov and Moscow Martinists*, 517. See also a detailed description of the “Novikov case” in Popov, ‘New Documents on the Novikov Case’, and answers of N. Trubetskoi, I. Lopukhin, I. Turgeniev in the investigation – RSHAM, F. 16, N. 29, # 64. Meanwhile we can hardly rely on confessions obtained in prison.

<sup>112</sup> Sokolovskaia, ‘Brethern of the Gold and Rosy Cross’, 90. There is every reason to believe that some Moscow Rosicrucians were occupied with practical application of the masonic tripartite doctrine – “Magic-Alchemy-Kabbalah”. As Kiesewetter notes, ‘Lopukhin, Trubetskoi and Kutuzov were highly interested in the art of Rosicrucian Alchemy and dreamed that they would attain higher degrees. For this aim Kutuzov was sent to Berlin to practise alchemy near the very fount of Rosicrucian wisdom’. – Kiesewetter, ‘Moscow Rosicrucians of the Eighteenth Century’, 103-104. On Rosicrucian interest in alchemy, see McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, 74-90 (ch. 5: “The Alchemy of the Gold- and Rosenkreuz”).

<sup>113</sup> On Schwarz see Tukalevsky, ‘N. I. Novikov and J. G. Schwarz’, 191-220; idem, *The Quest of Russian Masons*, 32-37; Tikhonravov, ‘Professor J. G. Schwarz’, 60-81; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 888; Ryu, ‘Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order’, passim.

wrote original theoretical compositions on masonry<sup>114</sup>. He created his own, rather eclectic, system based on the works by Jacob Boehme and other European mystics.

According to N. Novikov, Schwarz was a native of Transylvania. He received a law degree at Jena University, and spent some time in Asia as official of the Dutch United East Indian Company. After his meeting with a Russian mason, Prince I.S. Gagarin (1752-1810)<sup>115</sup>, he arrived in Mogiliov (Russia) in 1776. He settled in Moscow by 1779 where he had various positions at Moscow University (in particular, he was appointed “professor in ordinary in philosophy”). He had great authority with the students of the University. In addition, he initiated the establishment of the Pedagogic and Translator seminaries, the first Russian student society, “Association of University Alumni”, and the “Friendly Learned Society”. These institutions became centers of the intellectual life of the time<sup>116</sup>. It is known that Schwarz gave lectures not only at the University but also at home, where he discussed the most “esoteric” themes<sup>117</sup>. Among his listeners were many masons who later became famous Rosicrucians, e.g. A.F. Labzin (1766-1825)<sup>118</sup> and M.I. Nevzorov (1762-1827)<sup>119</sup>.

In his writings, Schwarz refers to Kabbalah many times. Thus when discussing the problem of the creation of the world he says that ‘the first three chapters of Genesis are written “in a kabbalistic manner”’, and ‘to understand them, we should work incessantly and try to interpret them with God’s help’<sup>120</sup>. At the same time, repeated mention of the term “Kabbalah” must not lead us into error: often, there were typical examples of inversion, i.e. the term “Kabbalah” means here every knowledge of the Divine matters (e.g. this is

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<sup>114</sup> He was the author of a number of articles in masonic periodicals “Moscow Monthly Edition” and “Evening Glow”. Numerous copies of his writings are contained in MS collections. See, for example, DMS RSL, F. 14, N 685; F. 147, N 142.

<sup>115</sup> I. S. Gagarin (1752–1810) joined the Craft in 1785; a member of the Friendly Learned Society. See Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 213.

<sup>116</sup> See Krasnobaev, ‘Eine Gesellschaft Gelehrter Freunde am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts’, 257-70; Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, 83-84.

<sup>117</sup> See Kiesewetter, ‘The Moscow University (A historical sketch)’, 47-52.

<sup>118</sup> A. F. Labzin (1766–1826), one of the most outstanding Russian masons in the age of Alexander I. He was a pupil of Novikov and Schwarz and an active proponent of the Rosicrucian doctrine. He joined the Craft in 1783. He was the editor of some masonic periodicals, an active member of the Biblical Society, Vice-president of the Academy of Arts. See about him: Sokolovskaia, ‘The Revival of Masonry under Alexander I’, 153-155, 169-184; Serkov, ‘Novikov’s “Nephew” A. F. Labzin’, 20-33; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 454-455.

<sup>119</sup> See about him: Kuhlman, ‘Mikhail Ivanovich Nevzorov’, 203-25; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 580.

<sup>120</sup> Semeka, ‘Russian Rosicrucians and the works by Catherine II against Masonry’, 361.

true for his treatises on the “kabbalistic light of the soul”) but not that specific set of Jewish mystical ideas and practices whose description can be found in other masonic MSs. Nevertheless, the real Kabbalah pervades, without any doubt, all his teaching; but, akin to the works of Saint-Martin, Eli, etc., it is hidden there on the sub-text level, it is never mentioned directly, and needs to be deciphered.

### *Kabbalah in masonry in 1792-1822*

In 1792, the Russian government destroyed the circle of Moscow Rosicrucians; afterwards, many masonic lodges gave up their activity. The lodges remained and were reopened but existed secretly and were in fact illegal. The most interesting among them was “the Lodge of Neptune” opened in Moscow in 1798. Its members continued Rosicrucian activity, read and translated the works of European mystics, and collected a great library of mystical books<sup>121</sup>.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some small circles of “theorists” functioned in St. Petersburg (under the guidance of A.F. Labzin) and in Moscow (guided by I.A. Pozdeev)<sup>122</sup>. Even after the official legalization of masonic activity in 1803, they continued to work inconspicuously. Taking into consideration the extant part of Pozdeev’s library, the members of his lodge had interest in Kabbalah. In this collection, there are some kabbalistic books that belonged formerly to the voluminous library of a mason Ivan Filatyev.

An interesting mystical Illuminati society “The New Israel” (or “The People of God”) was founded in 1785 by a Polish nobleman Tadeusz (Thaddeus) Leszczyc-Grabianka (1740-1807) at Avignon and moved in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to St. Petersburg<sup>123</sup>. The first Russians were incorporated into this organi-

<sup>121</sup> Sokolovskaia, ‘The Revival of Masonry under Alexander I’, 155-158. On Rosicrucian activity in the age of Paul I, see Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 44-53.

<sup>122</sup> I. A. Pozdejev joined the Order in 1784 and afterwards became one of the leaders of “theoretical” masonry of the age of Alexander I. See Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 649-50.

<sup>123</sup> Grabianka was a member of the secret society *Academi des Vrais Maçons*, established in 1780s by the mystic and alchemist Benedictine abbé Dom A. Pernety (1716-1796). The *Academie* was especially active in Avignon, Lion and Montpellier. This body probably was a continuation of the *Académie des Sages* (dating back to the second half of the seventeenth century), which had branches in Avignon, Montpellier, Douai and Mohilev (Ukraine). See Bricaud, *Les Illuminés d’Avignon*; Meillassoux–Le Cerf, *Dom Pernety et les Illuminés d’Avignon*; Ligou, *Dictionnaire de la franc-maçonnerie*, 917-922. On Grabianka see Ujejski, *Krol Nowego Izraela*; Danilewicz, ‘“The King of the New Israel”: Thaddeus Grabianka (1740–1817)’, 49-73; Rolle, K., ‘T. Grabianka’; Longinov, ‘An Eighteenth-Century Magician’, 579-603; Vernadsky, *Russian Masonry in the Reign of Catherine the Great*, 120-124; Pypin, *Masonry in Russia*, 323-332; Sokolovskaia, ‘The Revival of Masonry under Alexander I’, 171-174; Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 59-62; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 266.

zation at the end of 1780s (e.g. Vice Admiral S.I. Pleshcheyev and Prince N.V. Repnin) but after his arrival in St. Petersburg (in August, 1805) Grabianka found numerous admirers among the aristocracy (meetings of the society took place in the Marble Palace, in the rooms of the crown-prince Konstantin Pavlovich). Among the members were almost all eminent Russian Rosicrucians; they predicted that ‘by God’s order, the Second and near Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His glorious reign on the earth’ would occur in 1835. A select part of the members of the society constituted a “Council of Prophets” and had “correspondence with heaven”<sup>124</sup>. The prophesies were accomplished in an ecstatic state, and the preparation to this experience required keeping the fast and solitude. Grabianka, the “King of the New Israel”, is known to have had a keen interest in Jewish mysticism; he was a pupil of the abbé Louis-Philibert de Morveau (Brumore) (?-1786), a famous mason, alchemist and kabbalist, ‘a wiseman “who had a voice [i.e. the gift of prophecy]” through the science of numbers, or Kabbalah’<sup>125</sup>. M. Longinov suggested that ‘Grabianka had to read the Bible very assiduously, and studying it he expected to attain an understanding of the higher magic that was promised to him due to kabbalistic computations’<sup>126</sup>. His prediction of the Second Advent was probably based on these “computations”<sup>127</sup>.

Another outstanding figure within masonry of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was Johann A. Fessler<sup>128</sup>, the well-known reformer of masonry who established his own “scientific system” (“sientificheskuyu sistemu”) in which central attention was concentrated on the moral principles of the masonic teaching. He came to Russia in 1809 in order to be the head of the Hebrew Chair at St. Petersburg Ecclesiastical Academy. Around him, a circle of scholars including authoritative masons was assembled. He probably taught the masons interested in Kabbalah the language of the Old Testament.

### *Kabbalah after the official prohibition of masonry (1822)*

It is clear from archive materials that after the official prohibition of masonry in 1822, masonic activity in the Theoretical Degree continued for about a cen-

<sup>124</sup> Sokolovskaya, ‘The Revival of Masonry under Alexander I’, 172.

<sup>125</sup> Longinov, ‘An Eighteenth-century Magician’, 581; Danilewicz, ‘The King of the New Israel’, 52.

<sup>126</sup> Longinov, ‘An Eighteenth-century Magician’, 582.

<sup>127</sup> In 1807 Grabianka was arrested and soon died in prison; his society decayed.

<sup>128</sup> J. A. Fessler (1756-1839), a native of Hungary, for many years lived in Russia. From 1807-1810 he was the Master of the Polar Star lodge in St Petersburg. See Sokolovskaia, ‘The Revival of Masonry under Alexander I’, 174-176; Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 70-76; id., *Russian Masonry*, 832.



ture. Ruf Stepanov, one of the most respected Russian masonic elders<sup>129</sup>, taught in secret masonic meetings, that though ‘external lodges have been closed [...] nobody can prohibit [us] to work in our internal lodges; and though Freemasonry may be exterminated, the Order’s goal can not be abolished’<sup>130</sup>. At the same time, the number of people who were involved in this activity was rather small, hardly exceeding 80 members<sup>131</sup>. In addition, some “theoretic” masons belonged to the “interior” Rosicrucian Order, whose meetings occurred four times a year<sup>132</sup>.

The meetings did not include any rites (except for initiation ceremonies); the Brothers were occupied with reading mystical works and commenting on them. All their activity was directed to self-correction and restoration of the primeval pure nature in the soul.

They continued to pay special attention to translations of various works on mysticism, alchemy and Kabbalah. In particular, in the MSs collection of Arseniev’s family there are several very important compositions written in the 40s–50s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘by the hand of A.A. Filosofov’<sup>133</sup>. In all probability, the author had a knowledge of Hebrew; his notes on Hebrew, and mystical meaning of Hebrew letters are indicative of his acquaintance with the language. Within his papers we find a relatively correct translation of *Sefer Yezirah*, some fragments of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, *Sefer ha-Temunah*, and other kabbalistic texts.

At the same time, “theoretical” masons continued their public activity and cherished plans of social and moral amendment in Russia. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, their main bases were Moscow University, Moscow governor general Chancellery, Moscow and Tula Clubs of the nobility, and Moscow departments of the Senate. Masonic influence on the Orthodox Church and ecclesiastical censorship was especially strong<sup>134</sup>. An additional center of masonic ac-

<sup>129</sup> A special category of the most authoritative spiritual mentors in Russian masonry, which has no analogues in Western masonry. The most eminent “elders” were S. Gamaleya, I. Pozdejev, R. Stepanov, Father S. Sokolov, etc. See, e.g., Arseniev, *From the family archive*.

<sup>130</sup> See Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 247.

<sup>131</sup> Most of them belonged earlier (before 1822) to the Moscow lodge of Seekers after Manna. Their meetings were frequent; e.g., in 1823–1834 there were 169 meetings. *Ibid.*, 265, 270.

<sup>132</sup> Its chiefs in the 1820s–1910s were V. A. L’ovshin, V. D. Kaminin, S. P. Fonvizin, V. A. Bibikov and V. S. Arseniev.

<sup>133</sup> Alexander A. Filosofov (1829–1900?) – mason, and member of the Theoretic Degree of Solomon Sciences.

<sup>134</sup> In the 1840s–1850s one of the spiritual leaders of the “theoretic” masons was Father Simeon I. Sokolov (1772–1860). He had influence on a “theorist” S. D. Nechayev, the attorney-general of the Holy Synod; on the famous philosopher, professor of the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy, Father F. A. Golubinsky; on a member of the Holy Synod V.I. Kutnevich, etc. A number of priests and abbots also were among the “theoretical” Brothers. The masons maintained close relations with St. Sergius Trinity Lavra and some Moscow monasteries. See Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 276–277; *id.*, *Russian Masonry*, 759–760.

tivity was in the Imperial Moscow society for Agriculture, where many “theorists” participated (a Rosicrucian S.P. Gagarin was its chairman, a mason S.P. Shipov its vice-chairman). The Society became a stronghold of Russian liberal noblemen, whose belief in social reforms was based on the masonic outlook. These people had a certain influence on the abolition of serfdom in 1861<sup>135</sup>. It is noteworthy that one of the main proponents of the reform was S.S. Lanskoj (1787-1862)<sup>136</sup>, one of the heads of Russian masonry and Minister of Interior, who had close relations with the Brothers, the members of this Society<sup>137</sup>.

The Secretary of the Society was S.A. Maslov (1793-1879), one of ideologists of the “theoretical” masonry and a Rosicrucian of higher initiation<sup>138</sup>. He also founded *The Agricultural Magazine (Zemlyedel'cheskiy Zhurnal)* where his ‘translations [of the articles] on agricultural problems’ were printed. At the same time, Maslov translated into Russian the fundamental work *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition (Philosophy of History, or On Tradition)* by Christian kabbalist F.J. Molitor (1779-1861). It is noteworthy that Molitor had a high masonic degree and was historiographer of the masonic Order of the Asiatic Brethren which was tightly connected with the Rosicrucian movement. The doctrine and rites of this Order are known to be deeply influenced by kabbalistic and Frankist ideology<sup>139</sup>. Molitor’s bulky work is devoted to a detailed analysis of Christianity and Judaism and a comparison between Jewish and Christian mysticism. In G. Scholem’s opinion, Molitor was the last Christian kabbalist who had a deep comprehension of the Jewish mystical tradition, ‘he revealed [...] an insight into the world of Kabbalah far superior to that of most Jewish scholars of his time’<sup>140</sup>. Molitor’s book also had an essential effect on the views of Scholem himself<sup>141</sup>. It is remarkable

<sup>135</sup> Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry in the 19th century*, 2760-2777, 279-280.

<sup>136</sup> Count Sergey S. Lanskoj, senator, member of the Council of State, joined the Craft in 1810s and occupied key positions in the Grand Provincial Lodge of Russia, Capitulum Phoenix and some other lodges. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century he was the head of a secret “theoretic” lodge in St. Petersburg. See Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 462.

<sup>137</sup> Lanskoj’s Stock in the Russian State Library (DMS RSL, F 147), as well as the above-mentioned Arseniev’s one, contains most of the kabbalistic Alexs.

<sup>138</sup> See about him: Krasnopevkov, *Memoirs on Stepan Alekseevitch Maslov*; Sovetov, *S.A. Maslov. In memoriam*; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 527-528.

<sup>139</sup> For a detailed description of the history and teaching of the Order of Asiatic Brethren, see Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723-1939*, 26–53. An analysis of kabbalistic elements in the teaching of the “Brethren” is in Scholem, ‘Ein verschollener jüdischer Mystiker der Aufklärungszeit, E. J. Hirschfeld’, 247-278. See also McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason, 161-177*; Burmistrov, ‘Kabbalah in the Teaching of the Order of Asiatic Brethren’, 42-52.

<sup>140</sup> Scholem, *Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart*, 19; id., *Kabbalah*, 201.

<sup>141</sup> See Schulte, “‘Die Buchstaben haben... ihre Wurzeln oben.’ Scholem und Molitor”, 143-164; Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 31-32, 75-76, 99, 121, 215-216; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 284.

therefore that this book was very popular in Russia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>142</sup>. A MS of this book translated into Russian in 1861 is in Arseniev's archive.

Gradually, activity of "theoretic" masons was fading away. Regular meetings continued up to the 1870s, and the last case of reception occurred in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when V.S. Arseniev (1829-1915), the Supreme leader of the Order and a preserver of masonic heritage, initiated into the Order his son and grandson<sup>143</sup>. It is worthy of note that the last representative of this tradition, Father Johann Arseniev, studied in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the same treatise by Samuel Richter *Die wahrhaffte und vollkommene Bereitung des philosophischen Steins der Brüderschafft aus dem Orden des Gülden und Rosen-Creutztes* (1710) from which, as a matter of fact, began the history of the "new Rosicrucians"<sup>144</sup>.

### Conclusions

It is obvious that the interest of Russian masons in Jewish mysticism was far from superficial, as might seem to be the case at first glance. They looked on Kabbalah as a tradition that preserved invaluable grains of ancient wisdom, true knowledge which had been granted to mankind through revelation. In addition, Kabbalah, *pari passu* with Magic and Alchemy, was an integral part of the masonic doctrine. It elucidated the structure of divine and terrestrial worlds and the relationship between them, and assisted in revealing the hidden sense of the Scriptures. Moreover, masonic enthusiasm for Kabbalah was aimed at rather practical purposes. Kabbalistic concepts of the universal man (*Adam Kadmon*) and global improvement (*tikkun ha-olam*) served as an ideological basis for the masonic program of radical reformation of social, political, moral and religious conditions in Russia.

It is known that the masonic teaching, in general, and its kabbalistic elements, in particular, played a significant role in Russian literature, and not only in the writings of "masonic" authors like M. Kheraskov and S. Bobrov but also in the work of V. Odoyevski, N. Gogol, A. Stepanov, D. Begichev, etc.<sup>145</sup>.

<sup>142</sup> Molitor's ideas were circulated not only in masonic circles; among his readers was, e.g., a Russian writer and Romanticist V. F. Odoyevski. See *Catalogue of V.F. Odoyevski's Library*, 368 (N 3101).

<sup>143</sup> See about Arseniev's masonic dynasty Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 69-71.

<sup>144</sup> A copy of this rare book with handwritten notes made by V.S. and I.V. Arsenievs is kept in the Russian State Library for Foreign Literature, Moscow.

<sup>145</sup> See first of all Michael Weiskopf's groundbreaking study of Masonic-Theosophic background of the Russian Romantic literature: Weiskopf, *Gogol's Subject: Mythology, Ideology, Context*. See also Baehr 'The Masonic Component in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature', 121-139; Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in 18th Century Russia*. In our opinion, L. Leighton's book

Even more important was the influence of masonic ideology on the Russian public conscience. Thus, social and politic concepts of mystical masonry became an ideological basis for 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian conservatism. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when rationalist masonry was expanded anew, the Rosicrucians typified the conservative ideals. Their religious and political views exerted a great influence on the development of Russian Romantic philosophy and social utopianism in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as of the Slavophile movement<sup>146</sup>. Obviously enough, these ideas remained very important in Russian religious philosophy of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (V. Soloviev, S. Bulgakov, P. Florenski, N. Berdyaev)<sup>147</sup>. Thus, as a component of masonic outlook, Kabbalah has become an important factor in Russian history and culture.

Konstantin Y. Burmistrov (1969) is Research Assistant in Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism at the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, and Lecturer in Jewish Mysticism at the Jewish University in Moscow.

Maria I. Endel (1974) is Lecturer in the History of Jewish Philosophy and Mysticism at the Jewish University in Moscow.

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*The Esoteric Tradition in Russian Romantic Literature* is mostly based on unreliable data about Jewish Kabbalah. When trying to reveal the elements of "masonic" Kabbalah (similar to A. Kilcher's "metaphoric" Kabbalah) in the writings of Russian Romantics of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leighton draws sometimes ill-founded conclusions.

<sup>146</sup> See Sakulin, *From the History of Russian Idealism: Prince V. F. Odoyevski*, Vol. 1:1; Kamenski, *The Moscow Circle of "Lyubomudrs"*; Fedorov, *European Mystical Tradition and Russian Philosophical Thought*; Pustarnakov, V. (ed.), *Schelling's Philosophy in Russia*; Kolyupanov, *The Biography of A. I. Koshelev*, Vol. 1.

<sup>147</sup> Burmistrov, 'Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah', 7-104; id. 'Kabbalah in Russian Philosophy', 37-70.

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*Die Stelle der Kabbala in der Lehre der russischen Freimaurer*

Die Aufgabe des Artikels ist eine "kabbalistische Schicht" in der Lehre und Literatur der russischen Freimaurer am Ende des 18.–Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts zu erforschen. Die Untersuchung ist auf die große Menge der Handschriften die sich in russischen Archiven befinden und auf die wenig bekannten Veröffentlichungen in russischen freimaurerischen Zeitschriften begründet. Die russische Freimaurerei war augenscheinlich die einflußreichste geistige, gesellschaftliche und politische Kraft am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts. Die synkretische freimaurerische Lehre kombinierte die Elemente von verschiedenen religiösen und esoterischen Traditionen, darunter waren die jüdische Kabbala und ihre christlichen Auslegungen. Der Artikel analysiert kabbalistische Äußerungen in der Lehre der freimaurerischen Logen und geheimen Orden. Die Entstehung der russischen Logen und ihrer Verbindungen mit den geheimen Gesellschaften in Europa betrachtend, versuchen die Autoren die wichtigsten esoterischen Strömungen am Endes des 18. Jahrhunderts, die die russischen Brüder (vor allem, Rosenkreuzer und Martinisten) zum Erlernen der Kabbala trieben, zu ermitteln. Die russischen Rosenkreuzer waren die hauptsächlichsten Anhänger der Kabbala. Sie haben den Hauptanteil der kabbalistischen Texte übersetzt. Und viele Werke, unter Verwendung jüdisch-mystischer Konzepte, geschrieben. Alle diese Texte sind unveröffentlicht und sind nur als Handschriften vorhanden.

Es wird argumentiert, daß das Interesse der russischen Freimaurer am jüdischen Mysticismus nicht oberflächlich war. Sie betrachteten die Kabbala als eine Tradition, die unschätzbare Samen der uralten Weisheit bewahrt hatte – Wissen das der Menschheit durch Offenbarung geschenkt worden war. Außerdem war die Kabbala, wie Magie und Alchemie, ein Bestandteil der freimaurerischen Lehre. Sie erklärte den Aufbau der göttlichen und irdischen Welten und ihrer Beziehungen, und sie half den verborgenen Sinn der heiligen Schrift zu enthüllen. Die freimaurerische Begeisterung für die Kabbala hatte auch eine praktische Richtung. Die kabbalistischen Konzeptionen der universellen Menschheit (Adam Kadmon) und der allgemeinen Verbesserung (tikkun ha-olam) waren ideologische Grundlagen des freimaurerischen Programms zur radikalen Reformation des gesellschaftlichen, politischen, moralischen und religiösen Lebens in Rußland.