1. Esoteric movements in post-revolutionary Russia: main characteristics

Esotericism in early Soviet Russia (1920s–1930s) constitutes an interesting chapter in the history of Russian thought that remains underappreciated and very little researched. The exuberant surge of interest in esoteric doctrines and practices of the first two decades of the 20th century did not abate during the years of the Revolution and the bloody Civil War (1917–1922), although these events triggered profound changes in all areas of life. During these few years the centuries-old traditional order of Russian life was almost completely destroyed and the social structure of society underwent fundamental changes. It is not surprising that these changes should have affected the esoteric organizations that were now forced to organize their activities under new and wholly different socio-political and ideological conditions. Particularly significant is the fact that in pre-revolutionary Russia, the majority of esoteric organizations (Masons, pseudo-masons, Martinists, spiritualists etc) had been either branches of respective Western European organizations or maintained close ties with them. However, the Revolution rendered these contacts impossible, and any attempts to establish ties with foreign organizations incurred suspicions of espionage. As a result, esoteric groups in Soviet Russia faced increasing isolation from Western European schools of esotericism, and their doctrines and rituals inevitably became more and more “self-sufficient”.

Another important factor that had a significant impact on Russian esotericism after the Revolution was the fact that a large proportion of Russian educated society (nobility, university professors, civil servants, army officers et al.) fled the country during these years. As a result, many members of esoteric groups found themselves in emigration and resumed their activity in their new countries (Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, the Baltic States, France, China et al.) as early as the 1920s. Those esotericists who remained in Soviet Russia now recruited members for their new or rehabilitated groups (groups that had lost members in huge numbers since the Revolution) mainly from the intelligentsia of non-noble background and the working classes, a fact that...
inevitably found reflection in the respective organization’s ideology. And while previously it had been the Orthodox Church that had exerted pressure on the Russian esoteric schools (although the Church’s ability to exert pressure was sharply curtailed by the abolition of ecclesiastical censorship in 1905), now, after the Revolution, any interest in mystical or occult questions attracted the suspicion of the new authorities, who were preaching a militant atheism.

On the other hand, the renewed interest in certain aspects of esoteric knowledge was often related to the new scientific or pseudo-scientific theories that were rapidly gaining popularity after the Revolution and were used by the communists in their attempts to create a surrogate for religion. The newly formed worldview was based on the concepts of technocracy, cosmism and a boundless faith in man and his ability to change and subdue nature.¹ These concepts included telepathy, telekinesis, the perfection of human nature, the prolongation of life and even the resurrection of the dead.² Consequently, the Soviet occultists concentrated on experimental methods, including magic, in their quest to learn, first and foremost, how to exert influence on nature and man, while the esotericists in tsarist Russia had been mostly preoccupied with personal spiritual growth, the study of the most subtle manifestations of the human psyche etc.

Esoteric groups in Soviet Russia differed in their attitude towards the Soviet regime, state politics and communist ideology. Some of them, especially at the beginning of the 1920s, tried to legalize their activities and convince the communists that their teachings were fully commensurate with communist doctrine and that they could be of great use to the new regime. However, the most serious occult groups were operating underground and avoided attracting attention, partly because they distrusted the Soviet regime, or harbored an openly negative attitude towards it, and partly because of their strongly hierarchical and traditional “initiatory” character, which did not foresee any proselytizing or even the disclosure of doctrines and practices.


Be that as it may, the majority of mystic and occult groups that operated in the 1920s and 1930s did not constitute successor institutions or branches of earlier esoteric groups, either Russian or foreign. Instead, they were created by the will of their founders and under the influence of literature. Their founders were often charismatic leaders and autodidacts who had independently (often following a paranormal experience) taken upon themselves the burden of “initiation”. Subsequently, their first preoccupation was the acquisition of an esoteric genealogy, legends and traditions for the organizations they had founded. Often they referred to this activity as reconstruction or revival of ancient traditions (e.g. Gnostic, Templar, Rosicrucian). While there certainly was some continuity of pre-revolutionary schools, these connections were artfully concealed, and we have little to no trustworthy information about them.

Noticeable materialist tendencies and attempts to classify esoteric theory and practice as a specific stage in the development of a scientific worldview that was wholly unrelated to religious issues notwithstanding, it would be erroneous to consider the participants in esoteric movement atheists. Some of them were sympathetic to Christian mysticism, others were hostile to Christianity as a whole, yet all of them were heavily influenced by Gnostic ideas. Gnostic texts, which were available in translation into European languages, were carefully studied in esoteric circles and sometimes became important sources for a given group’s legends, traditions and liturgical texts. One can even say that Gnosticism was regarded as the primary religion that had been destroyed by Christianity and needed to be restored as an original alternative to Christianity.

We must briefly comment on the sources providing information about the activities of esoteric groups in early Soviet Russia. Practically all surviving information can be found in the investigation files and documents compiled by the repressive organs, first and foremost in the archival investigation files of the OGPU-NKVD-MGB-KGB. Unfortunately, most of the archives pertaining

3 The principle material was deposited in the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of the Russian Federation, as well as in the archives of regional FSB sections. Some documents are in personal files held in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) and the State Literature Museum in Moscow. To the present moment the researcher who has made the biggest contribution to the collection and publication of documents relating to secret esoteric societies in Soviet Russia during the 1920s–1930s is Andrei Leonidovich Nikitin (1935–2005), a well-known historian, archaeologist, literary scholar, publicist and the author of numerous works of the archaeology, history, palaeography and historical ecology of Eastern Europe. Owing to the fact that his father, the artist Leonid Nikitin (1896–1942) was an active member of the Templar Order (as a result of which he suffered repressions twice and
to this organization remain closed to researchers to the present day. Moreover, while some documents relating to investigations, as well as information about sentences passed, were accessible in the 1990s, when the denunciation of political repression was at its height, and were subsequently published, the theoretical papers and literature of esoteric groups, which were confiscated by the intelligence services but had no relation to politics whatsoever, failed to attract attention and remain unstudied. As a result we know quite a lot about the history of certain groups (their membership profile, structure and practical activities), while knowing next to nothing about their doctrine. Self-censorship features prominently on the list of factors that complicate the reconstruction of the worldview of the Russian esotericists of this period: for obvious reasons there were many things they did not entrust to paper, and we must assume that the most significant aspects of their doctrines and practices (in particular everything to do with the use of ceremonial magic) did not find entry into the surviving documents.

It is significant that, as a rule, even those esotericists who survived the repressions told nothing about the organizations of which they had been members. Yet another problem is the question to which degree we can trust the statements of people who were under investigation by Stalin’s repressive organs—after all it is from confessions of this kind that we glean most of the information about our subject. It is glaringly obvious that those arrested under suspicion of having committed grave crimes against the communist authorities would adopt all kinds of strategies, ranging from attempts to express their views as fully as possible in order to convince the investigators of their innocence or pass on these views to posterity, to complete mystification, defamation etc.4

4 Until December 1934 (i.e. until the assassination of Sergei Kirov) investigators usually followed correct procedure (with the exception of the provincial borderlands) and the case materials contain valuable data on both the history and the teachings of esoteric groups. Between 1935 and 1940 the task of the repressive organs was to force those under investigation to denounce themselves, which then entailed the sentence of death by firing squad. The case files of this period contain very little information about esoteric movements, as the investigators were focussing on indictments on political grounds (terror, sabotage, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda). No more information is to be found in the archival investigation files compiled during the third wave of repression, which followed in 1948–1951, when those who had a previous sentence according to article 58 of the Penal Code were hunted down all over the

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It is also important to bear in mind that from the early 1920s on the publication of texts on esoteric issues became impossible, even in periodicals. Of course the rich literature on different aspects of occultism that had been published in Russia from the late 19th century onwards remained accessible. Moreover, the esoteric circles self-published large amounts of foreign articles and books in translation, original new texts and different kinds of technical literature (statutes, by-laws etc) that they circulated anonymously in manuscript or typescript (print run between 10 and 100 copies).5

2. Esotericism in Russia in the 1910s

There were some links, ideological as well as organizational, between esoteric groups in Soviet Russia and pre-revolutionary esoteric circles and those esoteric leaders who remained in Russia after the Revolution. The best-known and most influential among them was Grigorii Ottonovich Mebes [Miobes, Möbes] (1868–1934), a lecturer in mathematics, physics and French, as well as one of the most outstanding Russian theorists of occultism and a prominent figure in the esoteric movement.6 At the end of the 1910s he became Inspector General country and once again sent to concentration camps or “eternal exile”. These were purely formal trials and the case files contain no new information.

5 A good impression of the breadth of the topic of “occult samizdat” can be gleaned from Mikhail Artem’ev’s (real name Mikhail Brendsted) article, published in the 1930s in several issues of the newspaper Rassvet (Dawn) which appeared in Chicago; see Mikhail Artem’ev, “Podpol’naia literature v sovetskoi Rossi,” Rassvet (Chicago), 1930, nos. 233–235. For example: “…they all vie with each other, searching for the innermost, secret, internal, original, eternal, absolute, divine, true... in one word, a thicket of ‘philosophy’, ‘ontology’, ‘metaphysics’, ‘mysticism’ and other areas, which had previously triggered in the young political propagandists and agitators condescending disdain and arrogant pity for the ‘reactionary way of thought.’” One can also find an extremely important information on the underground occultists movements in the early Soviet Russia and their libraries in two papers by Aleksandr Aseev (1902–1993), editor-in-chief of the esoteric journal Okkul’tizm i ioga (Occultism and Yoga, Belgrade, Sofia, Asuncion, 1933–1977), published by Nikolai Bogomolov: Aleksandr Aseev, “Initiatory orders: Freemasonry, Martinism, and Rosicrucianism” (Posvietitel’nie ordena: masonstvo, martinizm i rozenkreitserstvo), “Occult movement in Soviet Russia” (Okkul’tnoe dvizhenie v sovetskoi Rossii), In: Nikolai Bogomolov, Russkaia literatura nachala XX veka i okkul’tizm (Moscow: NLO, 1990, 429–443.

of the St Petersburg branch of the French Martinist Order (Ordre Martiniste). At the same time he was giving his famous lecture course on the Arcana of the Tarot in which he, in many aspects following Papus, interpreted Martinist doctrine by combining concepts pertaining to the Martinist Kabbalah with the Tarot. Soon afterwards these lectures were published in mimeograph under the name *A Course in the Encyclopaedia of Occultism given by G.O.M. in the academic year 1911–1912 in St Petersburg* (*Kurs ėntsiklopedii okkul’tizma chitannyi G.O.M. v 1911–1912 akademicheskom godu v gorode Sankt-Peterburge, St. Petersburg, 1912*). In the same year Mebes declared the independence of the Russian Martinists after founding, in Petersburg, the “Autonomous Detachment of Martinism of the Russian Rite” (*Avtonomnyi razriad martinizma russkogo poslushania*), after 1916 called “Martinist Order of Eastern Rite” (*Orden martinistov Vostochnogo poslushania*), which maintained close ties to the most important Russian periodical on occultism, “Izida” (1909–1913) and the eponymous publishing house. The Martinist groups in pre-revolutionary Russia had in many respects the most defining influence on the esoteric groups of the 1920s, the majority of whose leaders and activists were linked to Mebes and his system in one way or another. The Order continued to be active throughout the Civil War and the first years of the Soviet regime.

Potentially the most interesting of these groups were the “Society for the Revival of Pure Knowledge” (*Obshchestvo vozrozhdeniia chistogo znaniia, 1916*) and the Martinezist Order (a branch of the Martinist Order), both founded by Mariia Nesterova (Erlanger, 1878–after 1932), Mebes’s wife and...
close associate. A special group for intensive theoretical and practical training, “The Promethean Group” (Gruppa Prometeia), which was closed to the uninitiated, was set up within the latter Order. During the Civil War years (1918–1922), Mebes and his colleagues gave a lecture course for their closest followers in the context of this group. The lectures concerned the doctrine of the Kabbalah (Mebes), the history of religion (Nesterova) and the history of Freemasonry (Boris Astromov); the leaders also held practical training sessions in telepathy and psychometrics, as well as collective meditations.

The lawyer Boris Astromov (Kirichenko, 1883–1941?), a disciple of Cesare Lombroso, who had joined a Masonic lodge in Italy in 1909, played an important and rather deplorable role in the history of occult circles in the 1920s. In 1919 Mebes appointed him Inspector General of the Martinist Order, but, Astromov left the Order after a conflict in 1921 to found the “Autonomous Russian Freemasons” (Russkoe avtonomnoe masonstvo), and then the “Grand Lodge Astreia” (Velikaia lozha Astreia). In 1925 he contacted the OGPU, offered his services as an informer and provided the officials with substantial information on various esoteric groups in Soviet Russia, including the Martinist Order. Thus he prepared the ground for the wave of repression that swept the scene in 1926 and led to the arrest of dozens of Russian esotericists, led by Mebes, in what became known as the Case of the Leningrad Freemasons (Delo Leningradskikh masonov).

There were several other esoteric organizations that had been active in the Russian capital in the years preceding the Revolution and remained operative for some time after the Revolution. Among them was Georgii Loboda’s society “Sphinx”, the “Order of the Knights of the Holy Grail” (Orden rytsarei svia-

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11 The chairman of the society, Georgii Osipovich Loboda (1876–?), subsequently participated in the work of a commission for the study of psychological phenomena at the Brain Institute (1923–1924). In 1926 he was arrested and exiled. The society “Sphinx”, created for the study of occultism, existed from 1916–1918. Among its active members were Semiganovskii and Barchenko, who will be mentioned below. In 1917 Loboda published a collection which constitutes a faithful representation of the interests entertained by the members of the society: Sphinx. A collection of articles on spiritism, occultism, theosophy, hypnosis et al. compiled by the chairman of the “Sphinx” society G. Loboda (Sfinks. Sbornik statei po spiritizmu, okkultizmu, teosofii, gipnotizmu i proch. Sost. pred. o-va “Sfinks” G.L., Petrograd, 1917).
Esotericism in Soviet Russia in the 1920s–1930s

togo Graalia), founded by Aleksei Gaucheron de la Fosse (1888 – after 1930)\(^\text{12}\), Antonin Semiganovskii’s circle “Inner Esoteric Church” (Vnutrenniaia èzotericheskaia tserkov)\(^\text{13}\), the circle “United Labor Brotherhood” (Edinoe trudovoe bratstvo), headed by the doctor, science-fiction writer and occultist Aleksandr Barchenko (1881–1938)\(^\text{14}\), the Russian branch of the French occult order of the “Philaletes”\(^\text{15}\) et al.

The abovementioned groups exerted a significant amount of influence on those esoteric organizations that emerged in the 1920s and were forced to operate in radically different conditions. The impossibility of pursuing their activities openly and publishing the results of their work, combined with political and ideological pressure, forced them deep underground. Below we will describe some of the groups that we consider to be the most distinctive and representative of this stage in the history of Russian esotericism.

3. The Order “Emesh Redivivus”

The order “Emesh Redivivus” was founded in 1926 in Moscow by the economist and “professional” occultist Evgenii Karlovich Teger (1890 – after 1940) and Vadim Karlovich Chekhovskii (1902-1929), a meteorologist and physicist who was especially interested in telepathy and parapsychology.\(^\text{16}\) According to

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\(^{12}\) The Order was founded in 1916 and destroyed by the OGPU in 1927. See Brachev, Okkul’tisty sovetskoï épokhi, 72–79.

\(^{13}\) Antonin (Antonii) Nikolaevich Semiganovskii-Dienti (1888–?), a graduate of Moscow University and the Moscow Archaeological Institute; member of the Martinist Order, since 1916 leader of the lodge “Zodiac”. In 1919 excluded from the Order by Mebes. Subsequently founded the “Christian Esoteric Order” (Khristsianskii èzotericheskii orden) (1920–1923). Since 1922 member of the Renovated (“Living”) Church, since 1923 a bishop in the Renovated Church in the Baikal region. Was a professor at the Moscow Theological Academy of the “Living” Church and there gave a lecture series on “The History of Religions”.

\(^{14}\) On Barchenko and his cooperation with the OGPU, see Brachev, Okkul’tisty sovetskoï épokhi, 199–226.


\(^{16}\) The main information about the structure, history and teachings of the Order can be found in the witness statements of Chekhovskii, who consciously tried to give a detailed explanation of his views to the OGPU and tried to convince his investigators that he was in the right and harmless, as well as in the statements of Vasilii Preobrazhenskii (1883 – after 1931), who gave very detailed information about the internal work of the Order, its magic practices and the hostile attitudes of its leaders towards the Soviet government. Teger gave practically no statements. See Andrei Nikitin, ed., Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoï Rossiï. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg. (Moscow: Minuvshee, 2004), 30–99.
one of the Order’s members, its name—“הָדְדָד רְדִינִיווּס”—denoted the reborn (renewed) unity of the three planes of being—mental, astral and physical,—symbolized by the three “letter-mothers” of the Jewish mystic treatise “Sefer Yetzirah” (the letters aleph, mem and shin, together making up the acronym Emesh).17

By origin, the organization was directly linked to the pre-revolutionary Martinist Order led by Czesław Czyński and Mebes. According to certain data, a secret group called “Emesh” had existed in Petersburg in the 1900s–1910s, and it was from this group that the Moscow Order received its initiation and the necessary literature in the 1920s. The members of the Order referred to themselves as Rosicrucians and to their organization as a “branch of the Russian branch of the Kabbalistic Order of the Rose and Cross with its center in France”, in Russia led by Mebes.18 The Order sought to “surpass all existing occult organizations, including Masonic ones, that is, apart from theory it set itself the aim ‘to realise theory in practice by attaining power that enables implementation’. This expression must be considered as the ‘endeavour to establish initiation to magic on a worldwide scale’”.19 According to Teger, the magicians leading the Order “must be higher than the spiritual and secular authorities” in the entire world.20

The Order’s ambitious goals aptly reflect the utopian mindset and atmosphere of intellectual recovery typical of post-revolutionary Russia: its members hoped to be able to combine the new achievements of contemporary science with the esoteric knowledge of the ancients, to create—or re-create—real and efficient magic that would allow them to exert influence not only on the material world, but also on all the planes of being in the entire universe. The “brain center” of the Order was the scholar and experimenter Chekhovskii, a specialist in the field of physics and chemistry, who spent years carrying out experiments establishing the influence of colored light on the human psyche and telepathy (he worked with the State Brain Institute, headed by Vladimir Bekhterev, and the Society for the Study of Psychology, Neurology and Hypnology

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19 Ibid., 91.
20 Ibid.
in Leningrad). Teger also played an important role; he was one of the most outstanding Russian specialists in the field of occultism and familiar with virtually all the existing esoteric schools and traditions. It is significant that the majority of the organization’s members were Germans or Poles by birth, graduates of the well-known Evangelical Reformed school of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Moscow, and that nationalist and anti-Semitic views were rife among them. Moreover, the leaders of the Order had a wide contact network in both the occult and the academic scenes.

This is not the place for a detailed history of the Order, but let us note that the organization was exposed in February 1928, entirely by chance, as the result of a misunderstanding, although the flat that served as headquarters was situated right next to the NKVD building on the Lubyanka. Be that as it may, the Order’s members were sentenced to prison terms and internal exile. Chekhovskii, who was sent to the labor camp on the Solovetskii islands, was executed soon afterwards for his active involvement in the preparation of a prisoner breakout, while Teger spent the remaining years of his life in exile and imprisonment (nothing is known of his fate after 1942).

There were different levels of initiation to the Order, as in any esoteric organization, so as a consequence the majority of its members were ignorant of the organization’s ultimate goals. As occult organizations were forbidden in the USSR, the leaders of the Order concealed their activities. The Order had been granted the legal status of a scientific laboratory for research into the subject of telepathy, closely collaborating with the Brain Institute of the Soviet Academy

21 Ibid, 25.
22 Teger was a disciple of Mebes, while his wife was a sister of Mikhail Sizov (1883–1956), a well-known biologist, chemist, anthroposophist, Rosicrucian and Templar. Chekhovskii collaborated with the famous Russian psychiatrist Vladimir Bekhterev and the biophysicist Aleksandr Chizhevskii. In 1922 Chekhovskii spent most part of the year in Germany, where he was in contact with anthroposophists, including Nikolai Belotsvetov (1892–1950). In Russia, Belotsvetov, a Russian officer, poet and mystic had been a member of an underground occult circle and lodge; in 1920 he had fled abroad and written the seven-volume documentary novel “Michael”, in which he talked about the complex relations between occultists and the Cheka after the revolution, the flirtation of the “magi” with the regime, and the Bolsheviks’ attempts to use occult forces to strengthen their power. The author destroyed his sensational and profoundly autobiographical novel at the request of his former “colleagues” (it is possible that one of the reasons was the fact that the authors made a link between the Bolsheviks’ occult interests and a Jewish group within the party and the Cheka). Only a few fragments were published in the book “The Proletarian Missionaries’ Commune” (Kommuna proletarskikh missionerov, Berlin, 1921), but even these fragments contain many facts not mentioned in any other source.
of Sciences.

Some of the participating scholars knew nothing about the occult and magical motifs underlying the group’s activity. The goal of the Order’s secret activity, on the other hand, was the mastery of occult methods for controlling the elemental spirits, the so-called “elementalia”. In the underground laboratory that was situated in the basement of a house on the Malaia Lubyanka, 16, they studied ways of calling upon and “coagulating” elementalia with the help of narcotics and strong hallucinogenic substances. In order to carry out these experiments the Order’s members searched for wild magical and medicinal herbs in the outskirts of Moscow and made plans for growing them in dedicated plantations. The place for the laboratory had been chosen deliberately: its close proximity of the cellars of the OGPU, in which people were being tortured and shot, was supposed to make it easier to trap the “elementalia” and “liarvy” (larvae) that had been attracted by the suffering and the blood of the victims. We know also that Chekhovskii used the laboratory to carry out experiments in envoltation, that is, a mental attack accomplishing by a ceremonial magic ritual, the result of which “could be... either death or complete mental depression, or illness.”

The theoretical sessions that were held on the same premises comprised lectures on practical magic, arcanology, cabbalistics, graphology, astrology and other occult disciplines, as well as organic and inorganic chemistry, botany and medicine. The main sources of instructions were handwritten brochures received from the Order’s leader Lev Martiushev (1880–1937) in Leningrad, a military chemical engineer and member of the pre-revolutionary occult Order “Emesh” (Order name “Aleph”). Mebes’s Course in the Encyclopaedia of Oc-

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24 Liarva (lat. larva—mask, guise)—harmful substances; the spirit of an evil person who has not found rest after death and is wandering about on earth. In occultism: an evil wish that has not been accomplished but has taken on astral form.

25 According to the former Orthodox priest V.V. Preobrazhenskii, Chekhovskii’s closest associate in the field of practical magic, the site of the laboratory had been chosen specifically for its situation next to “the cellars of the OGPU, where the blood of the executed is shed. As we know, the blood of the deceased is necessary for the feeding of liarvas, who are forming a reign of shadows and darkness, which must be destroyed by the currents of light from the magical operations carried out in the generator of the cellar...”, Nikitin, Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoii Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg., 92.


27 Ibid., 12, 93–94. Martiushev was also a lecturer at the Leningrad Institute of Civil Air Transport; he was shot in 1937. According to Chekhovskii, Martiushev only slowly and reluc-
cultism was also actively used, alongside various other handbooks on occultism (for example the lithographic edition of Sar Dinoil\(^{28}\), Karl Brandler-Pracht’s *Occultism* [St. Petersburg, 1910], the books of Swami Vivekananda et al.).

According to Chehovskii,

…there were four different levels in our organization. The first was… for individuals who did not know about the existence of the organization. The second was for… people who, while following the course, had begun to suspect the existence of an unknown occult organization with a magical bias. The third was for… people who knew about the existence of the organization and had formed some understanding about its aims, but did not know its name, structure or main positions. The fourth level comprised people (only men) who were familiar with the name and aims of the organization and had the right to acquaint themselves with all materials at the organization’s disposal. At the same time, members at this level did not have the right to have in their personal possession material and information relating to other similar organizations, if they had dealt with them beforehand.\(^{29}\)

Moreover, Chekhovskii identified nine levels or stages of promotion for the Order’s members:

1. the scientific study of metapsychical phenomena that find expression mostly in works on telepathy and clairvoyance; 2. a course on arcanology and the beginning of occult training; 3. occult magical practice; 4. the center “Emesh Redivivus”, which does not pretend to have attained the fullness of occult possibilities; 5. the same, after the creation of an appropriate base for serious occult and magical practice over a number of years; 6. the same, after the attainment of certain results and after the
tantly passed on the magic and occult manuscripts from the archive of the earlier order (ibid., 69).

\(^{28}\) Sar Dinoil, the pseudonym of Leonid von Fökersam (Leonid Leonidovich fon Fel’kersam), an occultist and astrologist and member of the French “Société magnétique”, the “Centre ésotérique de France” and other similar organizations. He was the author of several books on the practice of occultism and astrology, including *The Building of the Human Being. Our Hidden Abilities and how to Develop Them* (*Stroenie chelovecheskogo sushchestva. Nashi skrytye sposobnosti i ikh razvitie*, St. Petersburg, 1912), *What is Astrology. The Stars and the Human Life* (*Chto takoe astrologiia. Svetila i zhizn’ cheloveka*, Petrograd, 1916). In the early 1910s he gave a course on “how to develop hidden mental forces” in St. Petersburg and held consultations, during which he combined the methods of astrology with graphology, physiognomy, palmistry and magnetic, as well as preparing items for use in practical occultism (crystals, magnets, biometers, screens). He published his works in the journal *Izida*.

\(^{29}\) Nikitin, *Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg.*, 79.
beginning of the creation of a world centre for occult magic, either on
the territory of the USSR or abroad; 7. a world center for occult magic
that has full control of the astral plane; 8. the same, with full control of
the mental plane; 9. the same with full control of the divine plane. The
nine levels were divided into three groups, each consisting of three con-
secutive stages according to criteria: the first was concerned with the
periphery, the second with the centre (Emesh Redivivus) as a tool for
the creation of a world center for the occult that would have complete
mastery of all occult knowledge and the opportunity to put this knowl-
dge into practice; finally, the third group was concerned with the world
centre for occult magic that would command these opportunities and
use them to serve the cultural process and all humanity… 30

Thus the Order’s goals were hugely ambitious and extended to the attainment
of world supremacy. In the USSR it was not possible to attain anything beyond
the fourth stage, the creation of “Emesh Redivivus”. Later, the Order’s leaders
entertained serious plans to flee abroad and implement their activities in more
favorable conditions; however, their plans were foiled by the state security
organs at an early preparatory stage.31

Our knowledge of the Order’s doctrine is limited, mainly to the informa-
tion Chekhovskii himself gave the investigators, trying to convince them of the
usefulness of Rosicrucian ideas for the Soviet authorities. As we can easily see,
the Order’s cosmology and anthropology are re-workings and adaptations of
the ideas of Stanislas de Guaita, Papus and Mebes. The universe consists of five
layers or planes, which Chekhovskii characterized with the help of concepts
pertaining to different religious and esoteric traditions:

1. The divine plane is the finest, most immaterial, perfect plane of being;
the Olam ha-Aziluth of the Kabbalah (the World of Radiance), Ein sof
(the upper abyss)—God, the real pole of being. The Salamander—fire—
the radiant state. 2. The mental plane, the letter Aleph (=1), Olam
ha-Briah (The World of God’s Creation), the world of transcendental
reason, the world of primary causality. The ten sephirot of the Kab-
balah, the ten names of God; the Spirit of the Christian hermits. 3. The
astral plane. Mem (=40), Olam ha-Yetzirah (The World of Spiritual
Hierarchies), the world of transcendental emotional origins. The world
of secondary causalities, the Seven “planets” and 12 “signs of the zodiac”.

30 Ibid., 78–79; cf. also 68-69.
31 Only the leaders of the Order (Teger, Chekhovskii and Preobrazhenskii) reached the fourth
stage out of nine.
The “Soul” of the Christian hermits. Undines—water—the liquid state.
4. The physical or material plane, Shin (=300), Olam ha-Asiah (“The World of the Elements”), the material or physical world; the illusory world. The “Maya” of the Indians, the “body” of the Christian hermits. Gnomes—earth—the solid state. 5. the lower abyss.32

The eclecticism of this scheme is no accident. Pretending to universality and convinced that the Order would revive the ancient knowledge of the dwellers of Atlantis, Chekhovskii “categorically declared” that “this scheme encompasses all religions… and found entry into a number of philosophical currents and scientific classifications.”33

The aim of the experiments carried out within the Order was not just the perfection, but rather the radical transformation of the entire human being. By his nature and in his present state “man consists of three planes and carries within himself the individual eternal spark of the higher plane”, although he is not aware of this. “All occult-mystical currents are striving after the awareness and mastery of these planes”, however, the Order’s task was more radical yet—namely, the restoration of the state in which the dwellers of Atlantis existed. In Atlantis “man had a united four-plane consciousness and exercised divine power in the four worlds” and because of that, the Order teaches, “the task of contemporary man is reintegration,34 the restoration of unity, the mastery of lost perfection. This can be achieved by different paths. For example the mystical-passive one or the occult-[active] one, such as the path of the Templars, ‘who took heaven by storm’.”35 According to Chekhovskii, freedom, equality, joyful delight in life, boundless creativity and individual immortality would reign supreme in the occult-cabbalistic world of the future. This is what he tirelessly tried to explain to his jailers.

4. The Order of Orion-Khermorion (Order of the Moscow Rosicrucians and Manichaeists).

The occult “Order of Orion” was founded before the Revolution, in 1916. It received its new name, “The Order of Orion-Khermorion” in 1926, after a re-structuring. In 1933 the Order was exposed, rooted out, and destroyed by the
NKVD; however (and this was very uncharacteristic of that time), the NKVD failed to confiscate its large archive, which was preserved as part of a private collection.\textsuperscript{36} Some members of the Order continued their activities until the 1970s.\textsuperscript{37}

As a result, we possess a sizable amount of information on the doctrine and internal practices of this organization, unlike in the case of the majority of occult groups from this time, where all we know is taken from the investigation file. The members of this strictly clandestine Order (“Knights”) studied the theory of occultism and magic, as well as actively practicing ceremonial magic. In particular, they developed special methods for collective magical operations, work with the elements (using aromatic substances, herbs, stones, metals etc), and ways of achieving lasting contact with the astral plane (the so-called “twin-consciousness”).

The head of the order was the probably most charismatic and talented occultist of his time, the ‘Russian Saint Germain’, Vsevolod Viacheslavovich Beliustin (1899–1943?).\textsuperscript{38} The doctrine he developed was based not on the Martinist tradition in the version propagated by Mebes, but instead on an original occult doctrine created by Vladimir Alekseevich Shmakov (died 1929), one of the most enigmatic figures in the history of Russian occultism. Shmakov, the generally accepted spiritual leader of various Rosicrucian organizations in the early 1920s, was the son of Aleksei Semenovich Shmakov (1852–1916), a well-known lawyer, monarchist, member of the Black Hundreds and anti-Semite. A railway engineer by profession, Vladimir Shmakov gained fame as a theorist of occultism and expert in arcanology and kabbalistics even before the Revolution. He was also the author of the fundamental study \textit{The Sacred Book of Thoth. The Major Arcana of the Tarot. The Absolute Principles of the}

\textsuperscript{36} Among other things it contains notebooks with magic texts, prayers, incantations, descriptions of rituals, magic alphabets, esoteric astronomy etc.

\textsuperscript{37} Thus Mariia Vadimovna Dorogova (von Mengden; 1889–1981/82) held a prominent place both in the Order of Orion and in the Templar Order, held session in the knights’ study groups, translated large amounts of foreign literature and distributed “mystical Samizdat”. About her, see Nikitin, \textit{Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg.}, 313–315.

Synthetic Philosophy of Esotericism. (Sviashchennaia kniga Tota. Velikie arkany Taro. Absolutnye nachala sinteticheskoi filosofii ezoterizma, Moscow, 1916). In 1922 he managed to publish, at his own expense, a work that was even more significant for the Russian esoteric movement: The Foundations of Pneumatology. The Theoretical Mechanics of the Formation of the Spirit (The System of Esoteric Philosophy) (Osnovy pneumatologii. Teoreticheskaia mehanika stanovlenia dukha [Sistema ezotericheskoi filosofii], Moscow [Sergiev Posad], 1922). This was probably the last book on esoteric issues to appear in Soviet Russia.39

Although Shmakov is mentioned in the witness statements and memoirs of many contemporary occultists, we know about his fate during the post-revolutionary years mainly from the statements made by Beliustin during his final arrest in 1940–1941. Beliustin and Shmakov met in May 1923. In the early 1920s, a circle for the study of the occult sciences regularly met in Shmakov’s flat. Its members included Father Pavel Florenskii (1882–1937), the well-known art historian A.A. Sidorov (1891–1978), the already mentioned Bishop A.N. Semiganovskii, the anthroposophist M.I. Sizov, and others who were known in Russian esoteric circles.40 Some of those attending the study group were experienced occultists already and had been members of various esoteric organizations even before the Revolution, others were intellectuals and artists, groups in which the interest in the topic ran particularly high. In the last months of the circle’s existence it was Beliustin, considered Shmakov’s successor by the latter, who gave the lectures on the theory of the occult sciences. According to Beliustin, Shmakov left the USSR in summer 1924 (with the help of his friend Tomáš Masaryk, the President of Czechoslovakia), spent some time in Prague and then left for Buenos Aires, where he spent the last years of his life.41 Although the study group stopped meeting after he left, the Rosicrucian “Order of Orion-Khermorion”, founded by Beliustin in 1926, continued the group’s work in an original way.

This Order, relatively small in terms of membership (not more than 20 people), counted a few of those who had attended Shmakov’s study group among its members. All of them were “professional occultists” and belonged to various secret organizations: among them were Templars (Mariia Dorogova, 39 Already after the collapse of the Soviet Union yet another, probably more important work of Shmakov that had survived in Samizdat was published: The Law of Synarchy and the Teaching about the Dual Hierarchy of Monads and Multitudes (Zakon sinarkhii i uchenie o dvoistvennoi iarkhii monad i mnoghestv, Kiev: Sofiia, 1994).


41 Ibid., 216–219.
Konstantin Burmistrov, Freemasons (A.A. Sidorov), Anthroposophists (N.B. Vurgaft, M.I. Sizov) et al. This allowed Beliustin to receive all information about the esoteric underground and probably even to orchestrate this activity without giving himself away. The Order offered different stages of initiation. During the first stage, apprenticeship, the neophyte studied literature under the supervision of a mentor and wrote his own essays on occult topics. After that the new member of the Order was initiated to become a Squire (oruzhenoets), followed by two “Knight” stages—“Knight of the Outer Castle” and “Knight of the Inner Castle”. At the top of the hierarchy were the different stages of spiritual initiation held by the members of the Order’s Supreme Chapter. The Order’s ultimate goal was to prepare its members for the attainment of the magical abilities of the ancient Rosicrucians with the help of long training sessions, the re-structuring of consciousness in a certain direction, and the use of occult knowledge in conjunction with alchemy and astrology.

The idea of resurrecting a Rosicrucian order had occurred to Beliustin already at the time when he was in contact with Shmakov, i.e. in 1923–1924. At that time he discussed his idea with Teger and Fedor Verevin (1899 – after 1967), two experienced occultists mentioned above. However, when it came to practical questions, their opinions differed. Teger, an atheist who regarded magic as a variation of scientific knowledge, considered the goal behind the restoration of the ancient occult tradition to be the mastery of its practical aspects. Beliustin, on the other hand, was convinced that without the serious study of the theory of occult knowledge, learning to use its practical aspects would prove impossible. At the same time they evidently continued to appreciate each other. The annihilation of the Order “Emesh Redivivus”, the arrest of Teger and the multiple interrogations of Verevin in 1926 entailed no serious consequences for Beliustin: although he spent three months in custody, he was released in the end because the arrested never mentioned him.

As a result, Beliustin’s Order was able to operate underground for another seven years, until the spring of 1933. The Order’s members created a huge number of manuscripts that make up an entire archive, the remains of which were preserved by the youngest Rosicrucian, the artist Valentin Monin (1904–1972), who managed to avoid arrest.42 The documents detail the Order’s doc-
trine and history, describe the history of occultism in Russia, and record the Order’s legends. Some are dedicated to arcanology, symbolism and the special alphabets (the orionic, cabbalistic, magical) that were used for magical rituals; also preserved were the formulae for incantations and prayers written in these languages. As the basis of the Order’s arcanology, the “alphabet of esotericism”, the Kabbalah had a particularly high status in the Order’s teachings. The Kabbalah constituted the “United Knowledge of the Cosmos”, “Higher Mathematics of the Cosmos—the Science of Live Numbers in the endless combinations of current Stages and Paths of the Creativity of God, Man and the Universe”. Thus the widespread use of Hebrew in the Order’s literature and ritual texts, as well as the frequent references in these texts to various cabbalistic and occult-kabbalistic concepts, is no accident. As an example of the magic practiced by the Order’s member we cite below the surviving text of a collective rite called “The Great Mystery of the Elements”, that was intended to summon elemental ghosts and capture their powers. As we will see, it resembles in many ways the rituals that were practiced in the “Order of the Eastern Templars” (Ordo Templi Orientis, O.T.O.) and in other European initiatory organizations of the late 19th – early 20th century. The document gives a detailed description of the preparatory conditions needed for the ritual (magic objects, substances etc). The hymn cited below was written and pronounced in this special “orionic” language. The ceremony began with a general blessing for all those present by the High Priest (i.e. Beliustin), and also the “Great Incantation of the Most Reverend Thelema.” It was followed by the “collective singing of the sacred hymn, inherent to the Pentagram of the Great Elements”:

O Great Thelema, Spirit-Matter of the manifest Universe! Your element encompasses the boundless abysses of the Cosmos and dwells within me, for the Universe and I are one. Oh Great Fire, Principle of Life! You are burning in each atom of being and consciousness of the

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44 Ibid., 272.
45 It forms part of the manuscript “The Rituals of the Order of Khermorion. The Cycle of Great Operations-Mysteries Within the Terner (Ritualy ordena Khermoriona. Tsikl velikiikh operatsii misterii po terneru). Terner (ternary) is a principle of triplcity or triality representing the unity and mutual correspondence of the three principles—active, passive, and equilibratory.
46 In the original: “Éà Zaròl Orselèth Haathà-Màatrà Joralèt Orim. Hår Bròa iosirg Athiòrs Abidëks Oribaöm tizàrsä me eme utir Orim tie m sieth Orbaö…"
Existing and are ablaze within me as the inextinguishable spark of Life... Oh Great Air, Principle of Creation! You lock the Worlds into a circle of light-ideas and preserve them as an inmost Secret.... Oh Great Water, principle of Origin! You enter into the interior of all things and flow within me as a scarlet current... Oh Great Earth, principle of Death and Rebirth! You devour Matter in order to open to the Spirit the Gates of Freedom... We bless and glorify you, Unuttered Pentagram of Elements, dwelling within the Great Pentagram of Man and awakening its rays to the eternal Creation in God, Man and Universe!...

After the reciting of the hymn in the sacred language the “Great Call of the Lords of the pentagram of the Elements” was carried out. The manuscript reads further:

The room plunged into darkness. Those present bow their knees and sink into meditative contemplation of a silver disc. Fixation of possible visual perceptions. The room is lit. Those present rise, approach the throne and seal a magic circle around it. Presentation of the cult objects (cross, staff, sword, chalice, pentacle, magic mirrors—square, black frosted ones, censer). Great Incantation of the Lords of the pentagram of the Elements. Those present break the magic circle and, after bowing to the High Priest, return to their place. The room is once again plunged into darkness (personal ecstasy of those present, who bow). Possible mental images. The room is lit. The High Priest blesses those present with the cult objects. Those present rise and, beginning with the youngest and finishing with the eldest, bow, and, after bowing to the High Priest, return to their place. Sacred Prayer, inherent to the Pentagram of the Great Elements. Those present, beginning with the youngest and finishing with the eldest, approach the throne, holding the sword in their right, lowered hand. They fall on their knees before it, rise and, headed by the High Priest, one after the other walk around it and around the small thrones and then, after bowing to the High Priest, return to their place. This symbolises the mystical ritual of the betrothal of the present adepts to the Elements...⁴⁷

As will become evident from the manuscript tract on metahistory, “The First Transitional Circle of Reason of Hermes” (Pervyi perekhodnyi krug razuma Germesa), the Rosicrucian-Orionists considered the history of the Earth, the history of mankind and the history of Russia as a field of battle between the

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⁴⁷ Nikitin, Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg., 300–301.
forces of Light and Darkness. In particular, they used this standpoint for the interpretation of the history of Ancient Rus’ and Tsarist Russia, identifying an irreconcilable struggle between the infernal, Satanist forces of the Union of the Great Dark Fraternities and the forces of light, embodied in certain Russian saints and tsars. Thus the Rosicrucians shared the Gnostic and Manichean idea of the world as a field of battle between two principles, Good and Evil. At the same time they were aware that the higher forces with whom they tried to establish contact through magic (the Lords of the Astral Element and Lucifer himself, as the principle which is “eternally balanced and balancing… indifferent both to Good and Evil”\textsuperscript{48}), were in their essence neither good nor evil and that it was the decision of the adept whether he wanted to use these forces for evil purposes or in order to do good. For this reason the Order maintained that every Rosicrucian had to undergo two initiations—one “light” and one “dark” (the so-called White and Black initiations) in order to be able to direct the forces of the dark without falling under their spell. “In the astral realm the eternal, never-ending battle between light and dark forces is taking place, with each side gaining the upper hand from time to time. The present moment belongs to the reign of the dark forces, i.e. forces that interrupt our evolutionary progress by enslaving consciousness to matter. The liberation from the bonds of matter is achieved when we acknowledge the illusory nature of the physical plane and direct our conscience towards the world of ideas.”\textsuperscript{49} As was mentioned above, the profoundly clandestine nature of the Order meant that some of its members were able to avoid being arrested and thus preserve the Order’s archives, while other members were subject to some degree of repression yet persisted in their esoteric activities for a long time to come, albeit under radically new conditions. Thus the well-known occultist Fedor Verevin, Beliustin’s closest assistant and a “Knight of the Outer Castle”, who was arrested in April 1933, spent only two months under arrest before being released. We know that he preserved his entire archive and pursued occult activities until the second half of the 1960s. The fate of Mariia Dorogova is even more successful. She was simultaneously among the leading members of both the Orionist and the Templar Orders. Arrested in April 1933, she was released

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 280.

\textsuperscript{49} From the witness statement of Sergei Polisadov (1933) (Nikitin, \textit{Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg.}, 228). Cf. also: “We distinguish between the ‘current of the Light’ and the ‘current of the Darkness’. The white Initiation, based on the ‘current of Light’, furthers the evolutionary ascent into the area of the opening of consciousness and the achievement of perfection. The black Initiation, based on the ‘current of the Darkness’, pulls one into the area of matter and clouds consciousness, thus hindering evolution.” (ibid).
after two months; after a second arrest in 1935 and a sentence of three years of internal exile for “anti-Soviet activities” she was also released immediately and never subject to repression again. Dorogova continued her occult activities right up to her death (in 1981 or 1982); in the 1950s–1970s she hosted groups for the study of Theosophy.

5. The Order Lux Astralis

This neo-Rosicrucian organization was fundamentally different from the two groups described above. Its history depends entirely on one man, Boris Zubakin (1894–1938), a poet, sculptor, archaeologist and ethnographer who spent all his life trying to organize groups for the study of secret knowledge in order to attract like-minded people. Although Zubakin himself claimed that he had founded the Order “Lux Astralis” in 1911 and named Aleksandr Kordig as his teacher, one should treat his stories about the organization’s history before 1916 with a degree of suspicion. Throughout his life Zubakin proved that he was a skilled mystifier: he made up entire mystical brotherhoods, awarded himself the most astonishing titles and ranks and forged documents in his attempts to find spiritual allies and recruit comrades-in-arms for what he considered the chief purpose of his life—the resurrection of the spirit of ancient Rosicrucianism. Steeped in the humanities, Zubakin was a religious mystic but not a magician, and he had no interest in contemporary science. This radically distinguished him from the leaders of the Orders discussed above. It is no accident that most of Zubakin’s followers were representatives of the creative professions.

Zubakin himself confessed, after being arrested in 1922, that when he discovered as a child that among his ancestors “there were ‘spiritual knights’, ‘princes of the Kabbalah’ and ‘mystics and freemasons’”, he decided to dedicate his life to the study of the secret sciences. According to his own words, as early as 1911 he founded, together with some of his peers, the occult circle “Lux Astralis”. A decisive role in its development was played by the already mentioned Aleksandr Kordig (died 1916), a Rosicrucian and Martinist, who taught Zubakin the Kabbalah, hermetism and “mystical philosophy” in 1915–1916. Upon returning from the front, Zubakin began his indefatigable activity...

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50 On him, see ibid., 368–420; Aleksandr Nemirovskii, Viktoriia Ukolova, Svet zvezd, ili poslednii russkii rozenkreitsor (Moscow: Progress-kul’tura, 1994); Brachev, Okkul’tisty sovetskoi épokhi, 149–198.
51 Nikitin, Rozenkreitsery v Sovetskoi Rossii. Dokumenty 1922-1937 gg., 376.
towards the creation of “a community of like-minded people to share communal life, rituals, mysteries etc”. He would preach his ideas about brotherhood wherever he happened to be and created cells of his Order in Nevel, Minsk, Smolensk, Rzhev, Moscow and Petrograd. Zubakin established contact with the most diverse people (suffice it to mention the film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948), whom he accepted into the Order, and Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), with whom he corresponded), however, the composition of his groups kept changing, and by the end of the 1920s he was surrounded by only a few of his most devoted followers, including his closest associate, the writer Anastasiia Tsvetaeva (1894–1993), sister of the famous Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941). In 1929, Zubakin was exiled to Arkhangelsk, and throughout the 1930s his group operated exclusively underground, but nonetheless all its members were arrested in 1937 and Zubakin himself was shot.

Zubakin’s teachings are known from his own witness statements and the statements of members of his Order who were arrested at different times, as well as from memoirs that mention him. He himself composed prayers, hymns, rituals, legends, as well as creating sacred objects for ritual practice, thinking that he could thus resurrect the spirit of the Order of the ancient Rosicrucians. It is evident (and this constitutes the difference between him and other Russian esoteric leaders of his time), that he did not consider himself the historical successor of a more ancient organization—his initiation was “spiritual” rather than related to real historical time. This is precisely why he so often had recourse to mystifications and even provocations, which he concealed from his closest disciples. Because of this, his teachings were not “occult” or “esoteric” in the proper sense of the word—he preached his ideas openly, gave lectures and papers and prepared the ground for the foundation of his own occult brotherhood. With this brotherhood he envisioned retreating to a life of isolation somewhere deep in the provinces in order to fully devote himself to the practical aspects of restoring the Rosicrucian path. Unfavourable historical circumstances prevented him from doing so.

6. The Moscow Templar Order

The Templar movement, which in 1920 formed the Eastern Detachment of the Templar Order, had a much larger scope, and its activities were more strictly goal-oriented. Its founder was Apollon Karelin (1863–1926), an economist, lawyer and prominent theorist of anarchism, who returned to Russia in 1917 after more than ten years in emigration. Unlike the previous orders and societies with their propensity for occultism and magic, the Templar movement was
clearly oriented towards Gnosticism,\textsuperscript{52} which is evident from the surviving body of the Order’s legends and the memoirs of the participants in its many study groups.\textsuperscript{53}

The Templars had set themselves two main tasks, namely to work towards the perfection of the self as a way of serving man and society, and to pursue the combined mystic and scientific knowledge of the world, something they considered a constituent part of the universal struggle of the light of knowledge against the darkness of ignorance. The first task, they held, could be solved with the help of Christian ethics, the second by uniting the principles of ancient gnosis with the contemporary scientific cognition of the world. These tasks also defined the composition of the movement itself, whose members had to possess not only certain moral and ethical qualities, but also a rather wide general education and culture. The Templar doctrine was practically devoid of the occult and magical component that was so important to the Rosicrucians and Martinists. Moreover, they did not share in the exaggerated worship of experimental science and medicine, since the tasks that the Order set before its members were above all ethical and socio-political in nature and required work on one’s inner self, as well as spiritual self-perfection. According to one member of the Order, the mathematician Evgenii Smirnov (1891–1937), the Order’s aims were

\begin{quote}
…of purely ethical order: the moral self-perfection of the individual through the perception of the Christian basics and the fostering of knightly Christian virtues within the self. A Knight is an ethical concept that denotes a person who is carrying out moral deeds. Separating the Christian basics from dogmas that have accumulated over centuries and are clouding the face of Christ the knight, and in some cases also from the deception committed by the Church—these are the Order’s aspirations. The legends lift up the spirit and heart of the student and nourish him morally… In my case, the combination of the ethical and aesthetic moment has always ennobled my soul. The ritual aspect of the Order accompanied us on the way to self-perfection, although it was of secondary importance.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{52}{Cf. Evgenii Lazarev, “Gnosticheskaia obraznost’ v nasledii russkikh tamplierov XX veka,” In: Rossiia i gnozis. Materialy konferentsii (Moscow: VGBIL, 1996), 69–75.}
\footnotetext{53}{The history and teachings of the Templar Order are fully documented. See the three-volume edition of the investigation file, documents and works of the Templars, published by Andrei Nikitin, Orden rossiiskikh tamplierov. Vols. 1-3 (Moscow: Minuvshee, 2003). See also: idem, Tainye ordeny v Sovetskoi Rossii, 38–188; Brachev, Okkul’tisty sovetskoi epokhii, 283–314.}
\footnotetext{54}{Andrei Nikitin, ed., Orden rossiiskikh tamplierov, t. 2: Dokumenty 1930–1944 gg. (Moscow: Minuvshee, 2003), 131–132.}
\end{footnotes}
Compared to the Rosicrucian groups, the Templar Order pursued a much larger range of activities. The Templars founded a large number of study groups scattered over the entire country that actively recruited young people, a wide spectrum of intellectuals; they even used propaganda methods in the print media. The membership represented the cream of the contemporary intelligentsia working in the humanities. Suffice it to list the theatre actors and directors Iurii Zavadskii, Ruben Simonov, Valentin Smyshliaev, Arkadii Blagonravov, Mikhail Astangov (Ruzhnikov), the cinema actresses Vera Zavadskaiia and Iulia Bystritskaia, the writers Georgii Shtorm, Ivan Novikov, Pavel Arenskii, the literary scholars Vladimir Nilender and Nikolaii Kiselev, the art historians Dmitrii Nedovich and Aleksei Sidorov, the philosopher Diodor Debol’skii, the Orientalists Iurii Shchutskii and Fedor Rostopchin, the composer Sergei Kondrat’ev, the singer Viktor Sadovnikov and many others.

Karelin’s main associate and successor was Aleksei Aleksandrovich Solonovich (1887–1937), a poet, mathematician, philosopher and theorist of mystical anarchism. He had been studying the occult sciences since his youth, and written his first book, the mystical-symbolist tract “The Wanderings of the Spirit” (Skitaniia dukha), in 1914. In form and content it resembled the works of Saint-Yves d’Alveydre and was clearly composed under the influence of Andrei Belyi’s “Symphonies”. Subsequently Solonovich taught mathematics and mechanics at different grammar schools throughout Moscow, later at the Bauman Technical High School. After Karelin’s death he organized a number of anarcho-mystical circles and gave public lectures in the Kropotkin Museum, which became the center of the movement of Moscow anarchists in the 1920s. Solonovich was arrested in 1930, given a camp sentence and died in a labor camp in 1937.

Solonovich became the main theorist of mystical anarchism and the creator of a Gnostic meta-historical doctrine, which he expressed in his main work, the three-volume “Bakunin and the Cult of Yaldabaoth” (Bakunin i kul’t Ial’dobaofa) (unpublished; the manuscript was confiscated and has never been found) and a large number of lectures. The proto-archon (first ruler) and

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55 Naturally these were Russian editions published abroad. First and foremost we are talking about the newspaper Dawn (Rassvet) and the journal Awakening (Probuzhdienie), which was founded in the USA by Eugeny Dolinin (Moravsky, alias Robert Ermand, 1898-1938), the secretary of the All-Russian Federation of the Anarchist Communists, and published the writings of a number of Moscow Templars (A.A. Solonovich, A.S. Pastukhov, E. Moravskii, L.A. Nikitin et al.)

56 About him, see Nikitin, Orden rossiiskikh tamplierov, t. 2, 140–143.

57 Moscow: Sfinks, 1914.
demiurge Yaldabaoth, well known from Gnostic texts58, is presented by Solonovich as a rebel angel, the embodiment of Satan, one of the faces of the devil. In his view, the Bolsheviks who seized power were possessed by “the demons of power” and “the principle of power is ingrained in humanity like a disease such as syphilis.” “…larvae crawl in Yaldabaoth’s tracks and demonic filth soils the souls of people and their lives…Among the most strongest fanatics of power, for whom the end justifies the means, we find Ivan IV, Philipp II, Loyola, Torquemada, Lenin, Marx and others. All of them were directly led by the angels of Yaldabaoth in some form and to some degree”, Solonovich wrote. “Having suppressed the revolution … and trampled underfoot all elements of public initiative … they thus identified and isolated themselves to form a new brigade of foreign conquerors, merciless without precedent and profoundly reactionary.”

Solonovich provided a ruthless analysis of the processes defining his time and perceptively predicted the direction in which things were going. It is not surprising that this metaphysical rejection of the new powers (members of the communist party were not allowed to join the Order) entailed cruel repres- sions, not only against the author himself, but also against his audience and readers.

We can identify three main periods in the history of the Templar move- ment in Soviet Russia. The first is associated with the activities of Apollon Karelin, the commander of the Eastern Detachment of the Order. A man of commanding influence and authority who was a member of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, i.e. the government of the country at the time, he regularly gave lectures and headed public initiatives, and thus had the op- portunity to recruit new members for the Order. He attracted many prominent figures from the fields of theater, literature and science, who became the first “knights” and accepted initiation with the goal of subsequently heading their own groups (Aleksei Solonovich was one of them).

In his public speeches Karelin often told legends and parables about knights, the spirit world, boundless universes and the spiritual origin of man, whose physical body, according to the Templars’ teaching, is merely a means of existence enabling the development of the spiritual essence locked within it, an essence that actively participates in the evolution and the process of introducing order into the chaos of the Universe. Among these legends were the legends of Atlantis, of Ancient Egypt, the Gnostics and first Christians, whose

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... Many of these legends are known to us now thanks to the fact that they were written down and circulated in Templar circles. The surviving members of the movement began to collect and classify them as early as in the 1950s–1960s. To the present day more than one hundred legends have been published. Some of them are evidently translations of the French texts Karelin brought back from emigration, others were composed on the basis of various occult and Gnostic works by himself and his closest disciples.

These legends were widely used in the Order’s rituals, which resembled both Masonic rituals and medieval knighting ceremonies known from historical sources. Overall there were eight levels of initiation to the Order. A new member would listen to the three first fundamental legends about the Golden Ladder of the Cosmos, Atlantis and Ancient Egypt. The subsequent cycles of 10–12 legends each prepared him for the next level of initiation, which was accompanied by a special ritual. The legends are of crucial importance as a source of information about the teachings of the Templar Order. According to Andrei Nikitin, it is possible to divide the overall body of legends into three cycles. Firstly, there are the cosmological legends, evidently based on certain Gnostic legends (more specifically, on the interpretation of these legends in 19th-century European esotericism). The second cycle comprises historical (or quasi-historical) tales about the Order’s origins (beginning with Atlantis and leading through Ancient Egypt, the events of the New Testament, and from the Crusades to the 20th century). The third cycle, the properly mystical one, tells about the worlds of high spirits that correspond to the hierarchies of the Christian heavenly powers and hosts. The latter group of legends, which was in all likelihood composed after the Revolution, displays the influence of the new natural-scientific and technocratic ideas, as well as the social ideals of anarchism. The Templar legends of the “mystical” type constituted a very important tool for educating students in the spirit of the Order’s commandments, especially with regard to questions of both spiritual and everyday life. In many respects they resembled similar didactic writings of medieval European Chris-

60 Some of the possible sources could have been Theodor Merzdorf’s monograph on the Templars (Theodor Merzdorf, Die Geheimstatuten des Ordens der Tempelherren nach der Abschrift eines vorgeblich im Vatikanischen Archive befindlichen Manuskriptes [Halle: Schwetschke, 1877]) and Carl Schmidt’s translations into German of gnostic texts (Carl Schmidt, Koptisch-gnostische Schriften [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905]).
61 Andrei Nikitin, Tainye ordeny v Sovetskoi Rossi, 133–134.
tianity, while the historical and cosmological legends had the function of forming the Templar’s worldview. Thus the study of legends was supposed to foster the overall development of the adept’s personality.

The second period in the development of the Templar movement began in late 1923—the period of expansion: groups and “daughter organizations” sprang up all over the country, in particular the “Order of Light” (Orden sveta) and the “Temple of Art” (Khram iskusstv) in Moscow, the “Order of the Spirit” (Orden dukha) in Nizhnii Novgorod, student circles and divisions of the Order in Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, the Northern Caucasus, Tashkent and Batum.

Precisely at this time the Order began to actively distribute its “Samizdat”: collections of the lectures given in individual study groups as well as the Order’s legends and numerous translations and original articles, published in foreign anarchist periodicals. The Templars were especially active in the State Institute of the Word (Gosudarstvennyi institut slova), the Oriental Institute, the Institute of Living Oriental Languages, the Bauman Technical High School in Moscow, the Moscow Conservatory, the State Academy of Artistic Science, the 2nd Belorussian State Theater, the Evgenii Vakhtangov 2nd Moscow Art Theater, the P.A. Kropotkin Museum, the Tolstoy Society.

The Order had a clearly defined hierarchical structure. It consisted of separate study groups and “sub-Orders” at different levels (“Order of Light”, “Order of Spirit”, “Temple of the Arts” etc), which were governed by the four final stages of the Templar Order proper. Strict secrecy reigned in the higher echelons: as a rule, the group members knew only their immediate leaders, and met the other higher-ranking knights only during the next initiation, when passing from one study group to another or when changing their spiritual director. Alongside the training sessions that took place once or twice a week, the members of Templar study groups gathered in groups of eight to ten people for meetings to greet neophytes, initiations to the next stage or the Order’s feast days (Christmas, Resurrection [Easter], the Memorial Day for St. John the Baptist and the Feast of the Archangel Michael).

The central organization of the Templars in Soviet Russia was the “Order of Light”, founded in Moscow at the very end of 1923. The commander of the Order was Aleksei Solonovich. About this group we have detailed information at our disposal from the investigation file compiled in 1930. Its members were for the most part representatives of the creative intelligentsia—writers, actors, musicians, artists (artists and art historians made up a special subsection within the Order, the “Temple of the Arts”, whose members were called...
“priests” [zhretsyl]). They were active as teachers and educators in higher education institutions, studios, science institutes, and simultaneously in secret study groups within the Order. The Order was in contact with intellectuals from the arts and sciences in Moscow, Leningrad, Nizhnii Novgorod, the Northern Caucasus, Batum and Tashkent. The Order’s ideas also widely circulated among other esoteric organizations and mystical brotherhoods, in particular among Tolstoyans, Theosophists and Anthroposophists. The repressions against individual branches of the Order (the anarcho-mystical organization “Order of the Spirit” in Nizhnii Novgorod, the group “Order of the Templars and Rosicrucians” in the town of Sochi et al.) began at the end of 1929. In the autumn of 1930s the Moscow center was rooted out and destroyed.

The 1930s constitute the third and last period in the history of the Templars in Soviet Russia, of which we know comparatively little. During these years the ideas of the Templars circulated in closed study groups that were frequented almost exclusively by academics—orientalists, mathematicians, meteorologists, biologists. Almost all of them were physically annihilated during the Great Terror in 1937–1938. In the 1950s the surviving members of the “Order of the Light” (Georgii Gorinevskii, Boris Vlasenko, Viktor Pikunov) tried to restore the Order’s activities, however, in the new historical circumstances this proved impossible.

7. Conclusion

As we have seen, the history of esotericism during the first two decades after the 1917 Revolution and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks represents a special stage that is distinct from both the preceding 150-year period, during which the esoteric movement in tsarist Russia evolved, and the subsequent revival of interest in the occult sciences during the 1960s–1980s. The heterogeneous character of the different esoteric schools and currents notwithstanding (and this article fails to mention a number of Russian esoteric groups of the time, such as the Masonic lodge “Garmonia” and the Masonic section of the Russian National Union, Georgii Tiufiaev and Vladimir Labazin’s “Brotherhood of True Service” (Bratstvo istinnogo sluzheniia), as well as the Anthropo-
sophist and Theosophist groups operating underground\(^{66}\), we must note that most of them displayed a faith in science as a transformative (magical) force that was in many respects similar to the perception of science in Europe during the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries. Moreover, only in that period were all occult organizations in Russia preoccupied with the solution of socio-political tasks—from combating the Soviet regime with the help of magic to cooperating with it in the subjection of nature. Neither before nor afterwards has anything similar been seen. At the same time these groups remained faithful to the principles of esotericism even when engaging in public propaganda, preserving the strict hierarchy and, what was especially important in the conditions of the day, the secret character of their internal institutions. Moreover, this period saw radical changes in the attitude of the occultists towards religion: while previously they had been persecuted as heretics, now they were turning, in the eyes of the regime and society, into obscurantists and reactionaries (the name of the last investigation against the occultists in 1940–1941, which brought the history of esoteric movements in Stalin’s Russia to an end, was “The Case of the Obscurantists” \([\textit{Delo mrakobesov}]^{67}\). All this turns Russian esotericism of that time into an original and highly interesting phenomenon, which is doubtlessly in need of further, more detailed investigation that considers archival materials that are still inaccessible to researchers today.


\(^{67}\) The case materials are published in: Nikitin, \textit{Ýzotericheskoe masonstvo v Sovetskoi Rossii}, 292–503.