

The Magus: the assassin

Written by Mephistopheles

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It is a recorded fact that many great adepts of the occult arts were employed by governments often it is assumed as Astrologers and Alchemists an example of this is the famous Dr. John Dee who served Queen Elizabeth the 1st as is Nostradamus of Catherine de Medici. But given the power of the Church and the fine line an occultist treads as to being able to predict the future or produce wealth by occult means these adepts must have had other skills to employ to keep them in the good graces of those for whom they worked? The answer is hinted in the age old link between the practices of the "black arts", poison and ritual sacrifice as well as in the role of codes and mathematics in the occult. John Dee and Nostradamus were known cryptographers and knowledge of the occult includes knowledge of herbs and so on that includes poison and things to heal as well as a whole host of skills such as lock picking and sleight of hand for entering locked tombs and for having access to an alibi for when the Church asked if one practiced Magick, one could answer yes: stage magic.

The skill set of an adept does have another expression that a government has need of and will protect said adept from the Church to have access to; those of an intelligence agent and/or an assassin. The infamous Count of Saint Germain was said to have been an agent for both Louis the 16th of France and Catherine the Great of Russia at different times, including being a go-between for Benjamin Franklin and his French allies during the American Revolution. All this is not meant to say that the occult is all a front for intelligence work if that were so the techniques of the esoteric disciplines would not be so consistent for many centuries from culture to culture nor would groups such as ourselves attain the results we do from our esoteric arts. As a final historical example the infamous so-called "Great Beast" Alester Crowley is named as an employee of the British Crown during the Second World War. Some writers have taken this all to mean that occultists secretly run the world however the author feels that all this shows people with skills making a living and perhaps being patriots.

In Asia it is not uncommon to find the esoteric and the ways of a spy linked a case in point are the Ninja of Japan. Since we in the west have a tradition similar to the Samurai that of course being knighthood complete with a code of conduct not unlike Bushido does it not make sense that the west would have a stealth martial tradition as well? "Where are the martial arts of the occult?" is a logical question. A look at the arsenal of any ceremonial magickian will reveal a number of blades a sword, two daggers one white handled and the other black, a lancet as well as staves of various sizes. These tools of magick are often called weapons of the art; do we see the thread of an idea? If the concept is sound how are these weapons used in a martial manner? The answer can be found in the link between the might of the pen and the sword.

In the occult we find sigils i.e. signatures of spirits which are related to astrological signs and planets which themselves are related to parts of the human body which the spirits are said to help or harm based on the will of the magickian. Using a dagger and attacking a target in an organ with the pattern based on the sigil of the spirit related to that organ reveals a combat form. The sigils usually come from the names of the spirits being placed in so-called magickal squares, lines are traced linking the letters from which a sigil is formed. In terms of unarmed combat the magickian is not without lore to draw from as the postures and gestures of ritual can be applied in much the same manner as that of the blade and the sigils. Again this is not to negate the occult power of these tools but rather to show that they have mundane yet equally important uses for the magickian.

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While the knight was great in the open field of battle his skills could not function well in the closed circles of courtly life. The magickian could however move fairly freely at court he could gather intelligence and deal poison if need be all in the guise of plying his trade of “court magickian” which was often viewed as a charlatan’s game at court. The manner in which most people avoided magickians allowed magickians to act as secret messengers and so on for their Earthly employers while at the same time having funds, protection and a cover to pursue their esoteric arts. Indeed many of the props of magick the robes, metals and so on imply the skills of disguise which may go to the legends of magickians changing shape and taking over the bodies of others. While the arts of knighthood faded with time occultists sometimes knowingly and others not preserved the hidden lore of the assassin in their various grimoires such as the Greater and Lesser Keys of Solomon the king or the Grimorium Verum. These works in addition to the arts of magick can be read to contain the arts of the spy and assassin if read in the light of our Order’s concept.

Whereas many modern Orders pursue yoga as a means of training the body of a magickian the OTA requires the practice of the martial sciences by initiates as a part of the lunar road of the path of the eclipse which the OTA expounds. The role of chess as a tool of teaching the art of war also lends credence to our concept as chess is also a requirement of many occult groups. As with the Asian martial arts knowledge to harm also implies the knowledge to heal which may be why many famous occultists were also doctors of medicine. While the five virtues of knighthood may have been plainly set as honesty, faith, virtue, fealty, and courage, those of the Magus of knowledge, daring, will, silence and endurance may have had a double meaning and does so for the OTA. This secret body of martial lore in the OTA is alluded to in a riddle which runs as follows: “The sword that was, a staff now is, yet the blade remains for all the sage’s finery, salvation and death in one dance hypocrisy get thee behind me.”