Occultism in Denmark

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The Birth of Danish Occultism: Ben Kadosh

The beginning of the Danish history of occultism is closely tied to a single person, namely Carl William Hansen (1872–1936), who was later to be known as Ben Kadosh, a self-proclaimed Luciferian, alchemist, and kabbalist. His occult career began as a member of the French Order of the Martinists into which he became initiated in 1898 by the Finnish Baron Carl Alphonse Walleen-Bornemann, who at that time was the Danish head of the order. In time, Hansen advanced to become head of the Martinist Order in Denmark, with the title of Suprême Délégué de l’Ordre. It seems that this advancement took place in 1906, at least he used this title on the cover of his publication Den ny morgens gry, Lucifer-Hiram, Verdensbygmesterens genkomst (The Dawn of the New Morning, Lucifer-Hiram, the Return of the Master Mason of the World) which appeared in 1906. The booklet promulgated esoteric Freemasonry and included a call for possible candidates to join a study group and maybe even to form a new esoteric order. Hansen termed himself a “Luciferian”, and his book is an evocation and appraisal of Lucifer in his many guises, most prominently as Pan. He is seen as the ideal of the gods, the God of gods, and is venerated as the primordial creative darkness. Furthermore, Lucifer is presented as the centre of all ancient mythologies and the foundation of life in all aspects.

The peak of Hansen’s occult activities took place in the 1920s. In 1921 Hansen received a variety of charters from Theodor Reuss, Eduardo Frosini, and Joanny Bricaud, and in the same year Reuss appointed Hansen to the X° of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). This made Hansen the Supreme and Holy King of the order in Denmark. However, it is doubtful that the OTO existed as an independent order in Denmark at this time. Rather, it probably served as an extension to the other Martinist and masonic lodges under Hansen’s control. In 1923 Hansen founded the Martinist order Sphinxen (The Sphinx) which, however, only lasted one year but was a part of Hansen’s project to introduce a system of graded orders by the name of Grand Orient de la Vraie et Haute Maçonnerie Esoterique et Gnostique du Danemark.
Soon Hansen founded another organisation, Den Danske Stor-Orient af gamle og antagne frie Murere (The Danish Grand Orient of Ancient and Accepted Free Masons), in which he installed his co-worker Grunddal Sjallung (1895–1976) as Magus Cancellarius. The lodge used Theodor Reuss’ constitution, but not all members were satisfied with this, and in 1929 the lodge adopted regular Freemasonry and changed its name to Frimurerlauget. They used a set of rituals written by Grunddal Sjallung, the Ritus Hauniensis. In 1930 Hansen was about to be expelled from the lodge, but he resigned before the expulsion took place.

Toward the end of his life, Hansen resigned from most of his masonic activities but remained active in an English Rosicrucian lodge, the German Ordo Aurea & Rosae Crucis, the French Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose Croix, and an undefined secret “fraterinitas” lodge. Both Hansen and Sjallung seem also to have inscribed themselves in the tradition of the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica, as both of them used the symbol Tau, associated with this organisation, when signing documents.

After Hansen’s death in 1936, much of his work was continued by Grunddal Sjallung who installed himself as the Rex Supremus of the OTO and rewrote the rituals. In the late 1930s he was in contact with Aleister Crowley, but Crowley seemed never to accept the way Sjallung had organised the order. In 1946 Sjallung and a number of members of the OTO left the group in order to focus on more regular masonic work.

During the following years, there appeared a couple of lodges that worked with ritual magic inspired by international magical orders such as The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Ordo Templi Orientis Antiqua (OTOA), and the OTO. In two of these lodges a certain Johannsen was active of whom hardly anything is known except that he might have been in contact with Marc Lully of the OTOA and Pelle Bull (pseudonym of Per Jørgensen), who was later to be the co-founder of the neo-pagan community Forn Siðr. None of these groups, however, seem to have been officially recognised by any of the international counterparts of the orders.

Contemporary Ritual Magical Groups

In 1989 the Gere and Freke Camp, a local body of the OTO, was founded by Bjarne Salling Pedersen, and in 1998 he established the Starcatherus Oasis together with Isabel Munksgaard Berg. He served as the head of the Danish order until 2002. Since then the Danish OTO has led a more or less dormant existence for a few years. During this time, the name of the local body was