Occultism in Sweden

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Sweden is often perceived as one of the most secularised Western societies, and yet the country has a plethora of magic orders and occult groups. The present article is divided into sections dealing with early occultism, groups influenced by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, neopagan magic, Thelema, black and dark magic orders, and online occultism.

Early Occultism

Sweden has a long history of occultist approaches to esotericism. Emanuel Swedenborg’s (1688–1772) notions of the spiritual worlds are regarded by many scholars as an example of proto-occultism (see the chapter on Swedenborgianism in Scandinavia). Occultism proper in Sweden saw the light of day with the founding of the first Spiritualist organisation in 1878 (see the chapter on Spiritualism in Sweden), and the establishing of a Swedish section of the Theosophical Society in 1889 (see the chapter on Theosophy in Sweden). Occultist magic was also practised in Sweden in the late nineteenth century. The short-lived (1884–1885) but influential occult order Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor had a small number of members in Sweden (Bogdan 2008: 320). The Brotherhood recruited members among Theosophists disillusioned with the Society’s focus on the Orient and advocated practical magical work primarily based on the sexual magic teachings of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875) (Deveney 1997: 7; Deveney 2005).

The Martinist Order was another practice-focused order active in Sweden in the late nineteenth century (Bogdan 2008: 320; see Introvigne 2005: 780–783 for general information on Martinism). The order was founded in 1891 by French occultists Gérard Encausse (1865–1916, also known as Papus) and Augustin Chaboseau (1868–1946), based on the teachings of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), Martinès de Pasqually (1727?–1774), and Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730–1824). After the death of Papus, schisms occurred within the movement, and consequently several different Martinist orders exist today. The webpage of the Martinist Order of the Netherlands provides information on a group established in Sweden. However, the website does not appear to
have been updated since the early 2000s. The Martinist order Ordre Reaux Croix was formed in 2002 and is active in Norway and Sweden. Ordre Reaux Croix seeks to ‘mend the wounds that Man brought upon himself after falling from grace’, and works with Christian and kabbalistic symbolism. The two separate branches, Voie Cardiaque and Elus Cohens have different initiatory structures and practice.

The Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), founded by H. Spencer Lewis in 1915, is possibly the largest and most influential order to arise out of the Martinist movement, and has a number of members in Sweden.

The Golden Dawn Tradition

There exist several orders claiming to be the legitimate successors of the original Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, many of which are in conflict with each other. The Golden Dawn is active in Sweden as the Rosicrucian Order of Alpha+Omega, which regards itself as the inner order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The first temple of the order, the Isis-Nut Temple, was founded in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1994, by David Griffin (b. 1955). Griffin’s European-based Golden Dawn was for many years in conflict with Chic Cicero’s primarily North American based Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, inc., and Griffin claims ownership of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn trademark in the European Union, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn International trademark in Canada since 2007. In addition to physical temples, the order also provides the Harparkrat Cyber-Temple (opened in 2002) for members who do not have a regular temple in their immediate vicinity. It is possible for a member to do the work for the grades at distance, but the initiations will have to take place in a physical temple (e-mail message to author 31 January 2007). The order maintains an online discussion forum with almost 6,000 subscribers. As this is a public forum, one cannot assume that the number or subscribers to the forum corresponds to any actual membership.

The Rosicrucian Order of Alpha+Omega functions as part of a confederation of independent Golden Dawn temples, that professes to be a genuine successor to the original nineteenth-century Golden Dawn. In the proclamation “Reformatio Fraternitatis of 1999” the order states that all of the published rituals and practices of the Golden Dawn will be performed in the outer order,