

# A ROSICRUCIAN CHRISTMAS CARD

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**F**rater Paul Goodall has expanded and revised his study of Rosicrucian Hermeticism especially for this issue of the [Rosicrucian Digest](#). The original version of this text appeared in the *Rosicrucian Beacon* in December 2002. The recognition of the importance of Rosicrucian Hermeticism continues to grow in academic and popular circles even today.



Since the seminal work of Dame Frances Yates<sup>1</sup> and the subsequent work of scholars such as the more recent Carlos Gilly, academics have to accept the existence and importance of the Rosicrucian stream of Hermeticism that influenced philosophical, religious, and political ideas at the beginning of European early modern history. Rosicrucianism and other esoteric philosophies existed not just on the fringe of the cultural, social, and political arena, but often played a central role in motivating important personalities. It is clear now, for example, that events leading up to the Thirty Years War (1618–1648)<sup>2</sup> in Europe cannot

be understood without recognizing the influence of Rosicrucianism upon individuals placed high in contemporary society.

## The Manuscript

Bearing this in mind, we can consider with interest a document that came to light in early 1979. This was a manuscript on parchment discovered by the researcher Adam McLean (based in Glasgow) that had been designed and authored by none other than Michael Maier and named by the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh (now renamed the National Archives of Scotland) as “King James’s Christmas Card.”

The manuscript was originally presented to King James I (VI of Scotland) during the Christmas period of 1611. For copyright reasons it is not possible to include a digital scan of this artifact so we rely on a redrawn image, from the original manuscript, of the central figure of the rose by Adam McLean. Much of the crucial text in red that adorns the rose is almost invisible and can only be seen through the use of ultra-violet light. For this reason, we also rely on McLean’s investigations of the text.

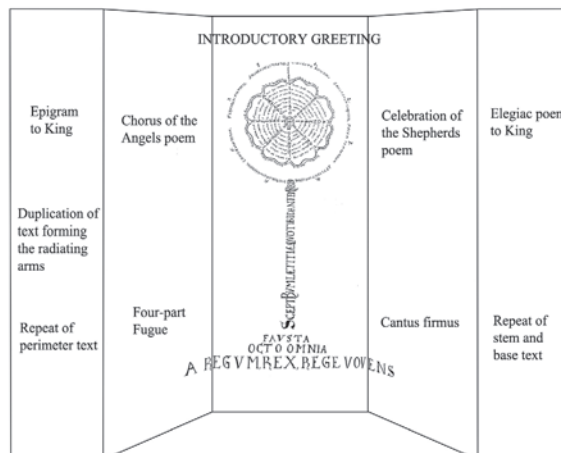
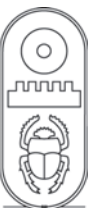


Diagram of the full manuscript.



Interestingly the manuscript predates the printing of the *Fama Fraternitatis* (1614), the first of the Rosicrucian Manifestos by two years and also Maier's own published works. The document itself is quite large and measures 83.82 centimeters by 60.96 centimeters (33 inches by 24 inches) and although it may have been originally rolled up like a scroll, it is quite clear from examining the document that at some point it was folded longitudinally four times to enclose its contents. These four fold lines, whether deliberate or not, conveniently delineate each of the five column components that comprise the manuscript. The two outside columns are not as broad as the three inner ones.

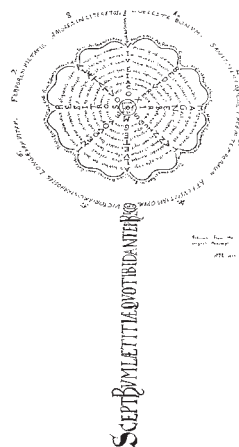
Once the two columns that flank either side of the center have been unfolded there is inscribed along the top of the manuscript and above the rose head a formal greeting to the king: <sup>3</sup>

A greeting on the birthday of the Sacred King, to the most worshipful and energetic lord and most eminent James, King of Great Britain and Ireland, and Defender of the true faith, with a gesture of joyful celebration of the Birthday of the Lord, in most joy and fortune, we enter into the new auspicious year 1612. Dedicated and consecrated with humble service and submission, from Michael Maier, German, Count Palatine, Doctor of Medicine and Philosophy, Knight and Poet Laureate.

Looking at the central illustration one can see that the body of the rose is supported by a stem attached to a base, both of which are modeled from Latin texts. The stem followed by the base read together:

SCEPTRUM LAETITIAE QUO  
TIBI DAN TE PRECO FAUSTA  
OCTO OMNIA A REGVM, REX  
REGE VOVENS.

The Scepter of joy, which I pray is given to you. Luck in all eight is



FAUSTA  
OCTO OMNIA  
A REGVM, REX, REGE VOVENS

Central figure on the Rosicrucian Christmas Card.

wished to the Kingdom, the King and the Court.

Arranged around the rose are eight inscriptions to which the above text refers:

1. COELESTE BONUM:  
The blessing of heaven.
2. SANITATEM CORPORIS:  
The health of the body.
3. PACEM TEMPORALEM:  
A time of peace.
4. AFFLUENTIAM OPUM:  
The rewards of work.
5. VICTORIAM CONTRAHOSTES:  
Victory against enemies.
6. LONGAEVUM VITAM:  
A long life.
7. FEARVOREM PIETATIS:  
Fervent piety.
8. AMOREM IN LITERATOS:  
Love of learning.

One cannot fail to admire the ingenuity of Maier when the relationship of the text within the petals and the radiating eight arms forming the divisions between the petals are examined. It can be seen that the letters making up each arm (in gold on the original) begins each line of text (in red) on the petal to the immediate right forming an acrostic. An example will suffice to demonstrate this; the bold type below indicates the arm

between the first and second petals. On the second petal then (under SANITATEM CORPORIS) the text reads:

Beatis omnibus  
Est et Conorum  
Divina merces  
In sanitate  
Vivere et  
Robustum  
Esse

With all happiness and enterprise,  
the Divine Reward is to live in health  
and be strong.

If one traces the path of the letters of the arms beginning at twelve o'clock and reading toward the center in each arm (then going clockwise), one gets:

VIVE IACOBE DIU REX  
MAGNE BRITANNICE SALVE  
TEGMINE QUO VERE SIT  
ROSA LAETA TUO:

Long live James, King of Great  
Britain, hail, may the Rose be joyful  
under thy protection.

In the center of the rose we find VIVAT REX ET REGNUM (Long live the king and his reign) which, from its positioning, suggests that Maier was making a deliberate link between James and the symbol of the Rose. Placed directly around the perimeter of the rose and along the line traced by the petals in red ink is a poem addressed to King James, which adds emphasis to this: <sup>4</sup>



The message of Christmas greetings set out in the shape of a rose and sent by Michael Maier to King James I in 1612.



Matthäus Merian, *Engraving of Michael Maier at age forty-eight*. From *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617).

Through the Divine, the King of Kings, may the King obtain all good fortune.

May England be guarded well by the angelic hand.

May twice-four blessings speed to his joyous scepter.

May the ROSE not be gnawed by the canker of the North Wind.

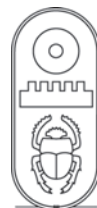
May the bounty of Almathea flourish with the fruit of the cornucopia.

May the gloomy Eris be banished from the Kingdom, and let Eros appear.

So that the Golden Age of the double-faced Janus may return.

May JESUS, who is both Divine and human, grant all this. Amen.

Flanking the Rose Cross emblem are two lengthy allegorical poems full of classical mythological overtones<sup>5</sup> even though they refer to the biblical Nativity. The one to the left, forming the second column, is entitled “The Chorus of the Angels Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Michael,” and the one to the right making up the fourth column, “Menaleas and Thirsis, the celebration of the Shepherds.” Beneath the Angels’ chorus is a four-part musical *fugue* singing praise to God while under the Shepherds’ chorus, and accompanying the *fugue*, is a repeating *cantus firmus*.<sup>6</sup> The red





*Frederick V and Elizabeth Stuart as King and Queen of Bavaria, with Four Lions (1619). Engraving created in Prague in honor of their coronation. Collection of the National Portrait Gallery.*

ink of the libretto is barely visible like that of the red text in the Rose figure.

The two outside columns, one and five, contain addresses to the king in the form of an epigram (*Epigramma ad Reg*) and an elegiac poem (*Elegia ad Reg*) respectively; humor on the one hand and lament on the other. Both are signed *Maier: Supplicans* which seems to reflect the nature of these personal appeals and strengthens the idea of the document as a propitiatory or conciliatory device. No doubt, this is in line with Maier's political motives. Beneath the epigram in the first column the text of the radiating arms of the rose figure and the text surrounding the rose head are both duplicated. Similarly, the text from the stem and base of the rose emblem is repeated under the elegiac poem in the fifth column.

### Background

It is interesting to note that a similar manuscript was later discovered in the early nineteen eighties at the British Library showing the same handwriting and style and addressed to James's son, Prince Henry. This manuscript was sent at the same time as the document we are considering, confirming the authenticity of "King James's Christmas

Card" and certainly demonstrating Maier's intent to promote the Order of the Rose Cross. Although it is not certain that Maier presented these manuscripts personally,<sup>7</sup> he was certainly in England by November of 1612 for on the sixth of that month he was attending the funeral of Prince Henry as a representative of Frederick V, the Elector Palatine (now Southern Germany).

Frederick had already visited England the previous month to court King James's daughter, Elizabeth. A political and religious alliance was being forged between the strongly Protestant Britain and the equally Protestant Palatinate. For Rosicrucians, their utopian aspirations could only be realized by living and working freely in a country where Protestantism flourished and so it was in their interest to promote this union.

Another event occurring in 1612 that seemed to thwart the plans of the Order was the death of Emperor Rudolf II, the ruler of the Habsburg Empire in Europe. This monarch was quite extraordinary, and from his Bohemian capital of Prague<sup>8</sup> had actively encouraged and promoted esoteric studies, particularly alchemy. The loss of this patron made the task of ensuring the success of

the marriage of Frederick V to the Princess Elizabeth crucial to the advancement of Rosicrucianism in seventeenth century European society.

### Conclusion

The manuscripts speak for themselves, of course, but Maier (who, incidentally, was employed by Rudolf II as physician and advisor before his death) certainly had an agenda in coming to England. He was preparing the ground for the political alliance and marriage mentioned above. He was also moving in the circles of high society and meeting many important figures including Robert Fludd. It is not to be forgotten that Francis Bacon was also a contemporary personality.

It is interesting to speculate how the king may have received his presentation of a Rosicrucian Christmas Card. Would the symbolism have been lost on him or did he have some knowledge of the import of the Rose and Cross combination that Maier knew would have an accord with him? At any rate, the royal event went ahead and the Elector Palatine, Frederick V, was married to Princess Elizabeth on February 14, 1613 in the royal chapel of Whitehall.

Unfortunately the joy was short lived. After having reigned in Heidelberg, Frederick

was offered the throne of Bohemia and reigned in Prague during the winter of 1619–1620. The two were known as the “Winter King and Queen of Bohemia.” However, the Catholic armies were moving against him, culminating in the Battle of the White Mountain outside Prague on November 8, 1620 in which Frederick’s forces were totally defeated. It was the end of any immediate plans of establishing the Rosicrucian dream of a utopian state.

### Postscript

Readers may be interested to know how they can see the subject of this article for themselves. The catalog number for the document is GD241/212 and is described as “MS Poems and music dedicated to King James VI by Michael Maier [the German alchemist and Rosicrucian], Count Palatine [sic] and doctor of medicine and philosophy, 1612.” It is not possible to view a digital image online and you have to arrange a visit to the search rooms in Edinburgh to view the subject. All the information you require can be gained at [www.nas.gov.uk/searchRooms/default.asp](http://www.nas.gov.uk/searchRooms/default.asp). If the reader wishes to enquire about the second manuscript to Prince Henry, the reference number is British Library Royal MS 14B XVI.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> In European history, a series of wars fought by various nations for various reasons, including religious, dynastic, territorial, and commercial rivalries. Its destructive campaigns and battles occurred over most of Europe, and, when it ended with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the map of Europe had been irrevocably changed. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Thirty Years War”).

<sup>3</sup> All Latin translations from Adam McLean.

<sup>4</sup> Adam McLean, “The Impact of the Rosicrucian Manifestos in Britain” in *Das Erbe des Christian Rosenkreutz*, ed. F. A. Janssen (Stuttgart: E. Hauswedell, 1988), 176.

<sup>5</sup> Adam McLean, “A Rosicrucian Manuscript of Michael Maier,” *The Hermetic Journal* 5 (Autumn 1979): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, “Michael Maier’s Christmas Greeting to King James I and VI (1611),” *Atalanta Fugiens* (Glasgow: Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks, 1987), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Ron Heisler, “Michael Maier and England,” *The Hermetic Journal* 43 (1989): 119.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf moved the imperial court of the Habsburgs from Vienna to Prague, which became a center for those interested in esoteric studies. He had a large library in his palace and entertained the most famous alchemists and astrologers of the time, among who were John Dee, Giordano Bruno, and Johannes Kepler.

