Research Article *Correspondences* 14, no. 1 (2026): 37–76

Heretical Kabbalah and Contemporary Esotericism:
Frankism in the Order of the Asiatic Brethren

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Abstract

The Order of the Asiatic Brethren plays a unique role in the history of Freemasonry and the development of modern esotericism, yet the extent to which Frankism influenced the teachings of the order, as well as those of later occult groups, is not well understood or appreciated. While scholars of Judaism have researched these connections, the nature of esoteric transfers from Frankism to the Asiatic Brethren — whether they were alchemical, antinomian, or Kabbalistic — remains unclear. Scholars of modern esotericism seem especially unfamiliar with this history, although the Asiatic Brethren were an important source of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occultism (e.g., the Hermetic Order of the Dawn). Heretical Kabbalah and aspects of Frankism undoubtedly shaped the order's teachings, and there are important similarities between the Frankists' project to create a universal religion and the aims of Freemasonry and contemporary esotericism. By revisiting the history of Frankism and the Asiatic Brethren and demonstrating how this connection lives on in contemporary occult groups, this article contributes to scholarship on "constructed tradition" in esotericism and situates Frankism within the history of modern occultism.

Keywords: Frankism; Judaism; Freemasonry; Kabbalism; contemporary esotericism

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"The gods of the freemasons will have to do
what those two have done."
– Jacob Frank
Collection of the Words of the Lord (*Zbiór Słów Pańskich*),
Dictum 678[1]

Introduction

This article explores the influence of Jacob Joseph Frank (1726–1791) and his followers on Masonic circles via the Order of the Asiatic Brethren. It recontextualizes Frankism in light of the study of esotericism, demonstrating its importance for the construction of tradition in Masonic-inspired occultism, which accesses a form of Kabbalah outside of normative Judaism, referred to as "Hermetic Qabalah." Though underappreciated, the Frankist project to syncretize Jewish mysticism, Freemasonry, and what Gershom Scholem called "heretical Kabbalah" played an important role in the development of modern esotericism.[2] By tracing the heretical Kabbalah of Sabbateanism and the heterodoxy of Frankism through Freemasonry and the Asiatic Brethren to contemporary esotericism, we can see how tradition is constructed out of the rich context in which occult groups incubate.

This study details how certain historical esoteric groups (the Asiatic Brethren, the Frankists, the Freemasons in Frankfurt) were later enrolled in the constructed traditions of contemporary occultists, either consciously, for the sake of legitimacy, or unconsciously, due to structural similarities in occult

1. The word in the manuscript is "framassońscy"; however, as Jay Michaelson suggests, this is likely an error that crept in during the transcription process. The two scholars who worked on *The Collection of the Words of the Lord*, Jan Doktór and Harris Lenowitz, both agree that the word refers to Freemasons. Michaelson interprets the phrase "what those two have done" in this dictum as referring to Sabbatai Zevi and Baruchiah Russo. Frank is thus signaling a shift away from their movements toward the "gods of Freemasonry" to fulfill the mission of Sabbateanism. See Jay Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 174; Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 230; Harris Lenowitz, ed., *The Collection of the Words of the Lord [Jacob Frank]*, 198n933.

2. Capitalization practices for the word "Freemasonry" can vary, but for the sake of evenness and consistency I have chosen to capitalize it in this article. However, in Masonic studies Freemasonry is often written in lowercase to de-emphasize its use as an essentializing category by British regular Freemasonry. The plural "freemasonries" is used instead. See Andreas Önnerfors, *Freemasonry*, 1.

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beliefs and practices. This is interesting because even when concrete historical connections are absent — at least in terms of forensic evidence — structural similarities nevertheless persist. This is due to a variety of factors. For example, in contrast to the more clearly defined boundaries of traditional religions, the religiosity of Frankism, Freemasonry, and modern occultism is porous, an eclecticism that is the hallmark of esoteric movements.

Scholars of Frankism, such as Scholem and Jacob Katz, have described how Kabbalah and Frankism found their way into the Asiatic Brethren, and more recent studies by Pawel Maciejko and Jay Michaelson also devote several pages to this influence from the perspective of Jewish studies. Both Maciejko and Michaelson approach the question of esotericism, the former focusing on Frank's similarities to other well-known "charlatans," such as Casanova, while the latter offers a novel analysis of Frankism within the context of esotericism. Despite Michaelson's groundbreaking approach, his focus is not on esotericism as such, but rather on reinterpreting Frankism within Jewish theology. Following Michaelson, Frankism is here situated within the context of modern esotericism to analyze the parallel belief structures and constructed lineages of certain contemporary occult groups, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley's Thelema, and the magical order of the A.∴A.∴ (Argenteum Astrum or "Silver Star").[3]

Those Frankists who helped create the teachings of the Asiatic Brethren practiced a form of Kabbalah common to high-degree Freemasonry, yet they infused it with elements of Frankist esotericism. Crucially, no author writing on this subject has pointed out the similarities between Frankist-Asiatic Brethren Freemasonry and Golden Dawn-style Kabbalism, or how this lineage (Freemasonry — Frankism — Asiatic Brethren — Golden Dawn) has been reimagined in the contemporary occult scene.[4] This article therefore revisits the elements of Frankism found within the Asiatic Brethren, providing a brief review of how they got there and

3. Michaelson only briefly touches on these esoteric currents.

4. On the function of constructed traditions in the history of esotericism, see Andreas Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*.

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demonstrating how this convoluted nexus impacted modern esotericism, was reimagined, and later incorporated into constructed lineages of continuation.

Judaism and the Order of the Asiatic Brethren[5]

The Asiatic Brethren represent the first attempt to integrate Jews and Christians in a Masonic context in Central Europe.[6] According to Masonic historian Robert Freke Gould, following the creation of the *Asiatische Brüder* (Asiatic Brethren), or *Brüder Sankt Johannes des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa* (Brethren of Saint John the Evangelist from Asia in Europe)—and the schisms and fractures that precipitated the order's dissolution—the majority of Jewish brethren migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" (*Loge zur aufgehenden Morgenröthe*), chartered by the *Grand Orient de France* in Frankfurt in 1807 in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars.[7] While it is difficult to assess the concrete historical connections between this lodge and the Asiatic Brethren, it is certain that some Asiatic Brethren migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn," it being their only option.[8]

Furthermore, Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860) was a foundational figure in both organizations, and Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld (originally Hirschel,

5. Scholem and Katz originally uncovered this history for the study of esotericism, at a time when this field did not yet exist. This article thus makes use of the source materials they consulted while emphasizing specific doctrinal aspects such as alphanumeric esotericism (gematria), moderate dualism, and eroticism, as well as antinomianism and reversals. These sources include ritual instruction texts of the Asiatic Brethren held in the Masonic archive at The Hague, the extensive cache of Asiatic Brethren documents held in the Masonic archives of the Danish Order of Freemasons in Copenhagen, and the lodge records of the Frankfurt and Schleswig lodges, which help to sketch the history of Jews in German Masonic circles and the background of the Asiatic Brethren.

6. In London and Holland in the 1730s, '40s, and '50s, a limited number of Jews were admitted into Freemasonry.

7. The *Grand Orient de France* founded a number of such lodges in the German-speaking region between 1806 and 1813, which formally accepted Jewish members. This included *L'Étoile anséatique* (The Hanseatic Star) in Osnabrück (Lower Saxony), to which Heinrich Marx/Heschel Levi (father of Karl Marx) belonged. These lodges were closed once the French forces withdrew, and the Jewish Masons were again denied membership in regular lodges. See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 312–13n99. See also Nikolaus Sandmann, "Französische Freimaurerlogen in Osnabrück während der napoleonischen Annexion."

8. Earlier attempts to establish "tolerance" lodges were made in Hamburg and Berlin in the 1790s, but they were largely unsuccessful.

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1758–1820) contributed actively to both orders. Many prominent Jewish figures belonged to the Frankfurt lodge, including Salomon Mayer von Rothschild (1774–1855), Jacob Baruch (1763–1827), Amschel Wolf Schnapper (1764–1838), Bernhard Juda Sichel (1780–1862), and Dr. med. Jacob (Jakob) Emden (1796–1860), most of whom likely joined to expand their social networks and business connections.[9] When further quarreling caused the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" to split on Christian/Jewish lines, the Christian brethren organized themselves under the Masonic Rite of Strict Observance, while the Jewish brethren received another charter from London in 1817 to found the "Lodge of the Nascent Dawn, No. 684 (*Zur aufgehenden Morgenröthe*)."[10]

The edict of March 11, 1812 "emancipated" Jews living in the Prussian Empire, granting them certain mobility rights and tax freedoms, while continuing to restrict them in other ways.[11] The majority of German-speaking lodges had strict bylaws prohibiting Jews, and so-called tolerance lodges had been established (though not officially recognized) as an alternative based on the regular Masonic model. These carried a stigma, and they ultimately failed.[12] The "Jewish question" surfaced again in 1836 when *Die Loge zum goldenen Schwert* in Wesel submitted a request to the three mother lodges in Berlin to remove all restrictions against Jewish participation; this was rejected, causing further debates in grand lodges across Europe.[13] From the 1840s, full Masonic rights and privileges began to be granted to Jewish initiates in German-speaking lands, but it had been a long and complicated process, which was never fully realized during the nineteenth century.[14]

9. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F. 22, Nr. 18. See also Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939*, 60–61.

10. Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry*, Vol. VI, 269–70. *Zum Frankfurter Adler*, another Jewish lodge, was founded in Frankfurt in 1832.

11. Christopher Clark, "The Limits of the Confessional State."

12. Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 56.

13. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 96–97.

14. "In reality, even at the height of German liberalism, the Jews had never had truly free access to lodges." See Jean-Philippe Schreiber, "Jews and Freemasonry in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview of Current Knowledge," i–xx, vi; Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 59–60.

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The importance of the Asiatic Brethren in this context cannot be overstated. Despite its short-lived existence from 1781–1785, its reach was extensive. A "compendious library" on Freemasonry published in Göttingen at the end of the 18th century — which took a critical perspective — states that the Asiatic Brethren extended from Italy to Russia, organized itself in lodges named after Melchizedek, promulgated Kabbalah, accepted Jews, Turks, Persians, and Armenians into its ranks, and had been fruitful for Jews gaining a foothold in society.[15] According to Katz, a historian who worked on this subject from the perspective of Jewish history (as opposed to the history of esotericism), the Asiatic Brethren served as a means for Jews to enter non-Jewish society and secure a place, ultimately assisting in emancipation. At the same time, the Asiatic Brethren served as a way of introducing certain forms of heretical Kabbalah into modern esotericism via the convoluted infrastructure of Freemasonry.

The Frankists' project of establishing a universal religion put them at odds with traditional established religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity), and while on paper Freemasonry claims not to be a religion, rather a fraternity drawing on religious symbolism, its universalist and syncretistic tendencies clashed with institutional religions (for example, the 1738 papal bull issued by Pope Clement XII, which forbade Catholics from becoming Freemasons). The Frankists thus found themselves on the religious margins — whether intentionally or through ostracization — and this is the space many esoteric movements inhabit, including Freemasonry and its esoteric offshoots, a space that is both hidden and publicly known.

This helps to explain why Frank became involved in Freemasonry and alchemy, as esotericism offered a potential field of operations and a shared religious ethos. For example, one of Frank's leading followers, Moses Dobruschka (1753–1794) — alias Franz Thomas Edler von Schönfeld; alias Junius Frey — was involved

15. Christian Karl André, ed., *Der Freymaurer, oder Compendiöse Bibliothek alles Wissenswürdigen über geheime Gesellschaften. Heft IV und V*, 86–88.

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in covert arms running between the Habsburgs and French revolutionaries via his Masonic connections. Frank himself was a master of harnessing the outsider profile, flaunting his status as a Polish "baron" in foreign lands or masquerading as a Russian noble and garbing himself in Ottoman attire, taking up residence at the end of his life in a castle in Offenbach on loan to him from a Rosicrucian and Masonic friend, where he performed alchemical experiments and strange Masonic rites until his death.[16]

For Jews joining German-speaking Masonic lodges, a key issue was that of Jewish conversion and assimilation.[17] As Maciejko points out, this was a traumatic history for Jews, often marked by coercion, secrecy, and shame.[18] "Each soul that Judaism lost was mourned," Maciejko writes.[19] However, the Frankists were unique in that they reveal the active agency of mass conversions and their reappropriation — namely, through the syncretization of multiple doctrines and religious belief systems into universalist and quasi-secular forms of esotericism (not unlike certain currents of Freemasonry).

According to Maciejko, in contrast to usual feelings of sadness and betrayal associated with conversion, the Frankists' mass embrace of Catholicism in 1759 in Lwów was celebrated by many as a victory. Nor was this mass conversion (of potentially thousands) performed under coercion, but rather, it seemed, voluntarily. Only Israel Ben Eliezer, the founder of Hasidism known as the Baal Shem Tov or "Master of the Good Name" (the BeSchT, c. 1700–1760), decried

16. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 233.

17. Hoffmann notes that often the "conservative Christian" Masons of the time, as opposed to the "liberal humanitarian" Masons, were in fact more suspicious of *assimilated* Jews seeking membership, doubting their sincerity due to an ostensible lack of devotion toward their own religion. For example, according to a Masonic pamphlet from 1838 related to voting on the admission of Jews, one such conservative Christian Mason laments that any "Jew who approaches his faith with seriousness and zeal deserves our respect; having this faith, however, he will feel more disinclination than inclination for our lodges. It is rather those who have already cast off their Judaism like an old garment and therefore stand naked and bereft of all religion who, I fear, will be most likely to come knocking on our doors." Quoted in *The Politics of Sociability*, 57–58.

18. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 1.

19. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 1.

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it as an act of apostasy, blaming it on the shortcomings of the local rabbis, who were relieved to rid themselves of the Frankists and their antinomian beliefs and practices, seeing their presence as parasitic. To the Baal Shem Tov, on the other hand, all Jews were members of Israel, connected by the *Shekinah*, and once one was lost, he or she was lost forever, with no hope of rehabilitation.[20]

Frank's ideas presented an "in-between" problematic: they were attractive to some, but hostile to traditional Torah-following believers, that is, the Jewish establishment. Michaelson describes Frank's life as one of liminality, constant shapeshifting, a permanent state of in-betweenness.[21] This resembles Freemasonry, which, following the Protestant Reformation, and on the eve of the French and Industrial Revolutions, somehow filled the gap between the secularism of the future and the religiosity of Europe's Christian past. The Frankists — again, not unlike the Freemasons — were critical of traditional religions (even while claiming memberships), and they were both rational and mystical, spiritual and scientific, universal yet esoteric, secret and simultaneously visible.[22] In the Order of the Asiatic Brethren, Frankism and Freemasonry converged.

Heretical Kabbalah and the Asiatic Brethren

Gershom Scholem focused the majority of his scholarly work on establishing an academic interest in Kabbalah, which he interpreted as "Jewish mysticism."[23] These activities were supplemented by scholarship highlighting heretical figures in the history of Judaism, such as the Sabbateans and Frankists, including his investigations into the development of Jewish modernization and political

20. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 1–2. The Baal Shem Tov was said to have rescued the soul of Sabbatai Tzvi by diving down into the abyss to rescue it from the forces of evil. See Rabbi Dov Baer of Linits, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 86–87.

21. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 6, 14.

22. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 6.

23. Boaz Huss has argued that the term "Jewish mysticism" is not accurate for studying the history of Kabbalah, as it is connected to a host of historical and contextual assumptions that originate primarily with Scholem's earlier formulations. See Boaz Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 87, 158–59.

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radicalism.[24] Scholem linked these topics with his study of Kabbalah; for example, he refers to the Ottoman Jewish mystic, rabbi, and would-be Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676), as the "Kabbalistic Messiah." Indeed, the Sabbatean movement was largely a Kabbalistic religiosity in Scholem's eyes.[25] Similarly, he argued that Frankism, one of the main inheritors to Sabbateanism, represented a "dialectic of mysticism and Enlightenment" and was founded on esoteric Kabbalism and secular humanism.[26] In other words, Kabbalah, Sabbateanism, and Frankism were connected in a specific way; and, moreover, the appearance of these movements was linked to the spread of Kabbalah.

Nevertheless, Scholem was suspicious of the esotericists he studied, tending to privilege the position of the scholarly Kabbalist and the scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) study of Kabbalah. As Boaz Huss points out, Scholem "regarded the Western esotericists who were interested in Kabbalah as swindlers, charlatans, and pseudo-Kabbalists."[27] This is perhaps not the best position for today's scholars to take, given what the academic study of esotericism has shown: that esotericism, for the most part, has been characterized by its detractors as "deviant" rather than being in some sense essentially "deviant."[28] As Huss suggests, instead of privileging a philological and traditional approach to Kabbalah, the esotericists who were and are involved in this history represent "an innovative adaptation of the Kabbalah," which in fact remains relevant to the study of Kabbalah.[29]

Scholem took an interest in the Asiatic Brethren, highlighting the important figures connected both to this Masonic order and to Frankism, such as Moses

24. On Scholem's intellectual background, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah*; David Biale, "Gershom Scholem on Nihilism and Anarchism"; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*; Amir Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography*.

25. Gershom Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 9.

26. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 9–10.

27. Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 116.

28. For an overview of this topic, see Manon Hedenborg White and Tim Rudbøg, eds., *Esotericism and Deviance*.

29. Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 112, 159.

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Dobruschka/Schönfeld, Ephraim Hirschfeld, and Franz Molitor. Scholem believed that the Sabbateans and Frankists were in fact "a *specifically* Jewish phenomenon to the end," and that the "nihilism" and antinomian character that these movements arrived at was a dialectical response to the messianism of mainstream Judaism and helped usher in the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, as well as the reform movements of the nineteenth century.[30]

Within Masonic studies, the primary interest in Kabbalah among Masons is largely seen as developing in the nineteenth century and limited to a Kabbalah that was primarily Christian or Hermetic.[31] Christian Masonic occultists and esotericists, such as Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875), postulated that Freemasonry belonged to an ancient esoteric tradition that had Kabbalah at its root.[32] However, some Jewish Kabbalistic thinkers in the nineteenth century also took an interest in Freemasonry, such as the Italian Kabbalist Elijah Benamozegh (1823–1900), who declared in his *Israël et l'humanité* (Israel and Humanity) that "the theology of Freemasonry is quite similar to that of the Kabbalah," and furthermore, that "the Aggadah [essentially the corpus of non-legalistic content of rabbinic literature] was the popular form of a secret discipline whose initiation methods bore the most striking resemblances to Freemasonry."[33]

30. Gershom Scholem, "Redemption through Sin," 83–84.

31. See, for example, Jan A. M. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik, für Freimaurer*, 85–102. However, see also the work of Konstantin Burmistrov and Peter Lanchidi on Freemasons and Jewish Kabbalah for exceptions.

32. Lévi remained an "active" Freemason only briefly before moving on to more explicit forms of ceremonial magic. However, Lévi's two-volume *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854–1856) was translated into English by prominent Masonic writer Arthur Edward Waite as *Transcendental Magic, Its Doctrine and Ritual* (1896), and served as a major source for the Supreme Council, Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction, USA) "handbook" *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (1871), compiled by Sovereign Grand Commander Albert Pike (1809–1891). On connections between Freemasonry and the Kabbalah, see Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 3, 19ff.

33. Quoted in Robert Jan van Pelt, "Freemasonry and Judaism," 189. Van Pelt understandably spends the bulk of this chapter distancing Judaism from Freemasonry. Given the history of pernicious conspiracy theories associated with such a connection, this makes sense. However, this comes at the expense of certain contributions by Jews interested in the Kabbalah who were members of the order, as well as the influence of Kabbalistic ideas in general, especially in the so-called "higher" degrees of

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As Katz points out, the Jewish Freemasons belonging to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt believed that the tradition of Freemasonry was the original religion of humanity and the foundation of all religions — a form of perennial philosophy.[34] The lodge archives contain much on how Judaism is based on hope, in distinction to the rationalism of ancient Greek religion: a hope for restoring the Temple, with the Temple of Solomon serving as the *Vorbild,* or paragon, of the Masonic temple.[35] In a lodge speech on the (figurative) inscription above the entrance to their lodge, the lecturer states: "My brother, the great messianic day dwells still beyond the eastern mountains, the eternal light does not yet shine within our souls. But the Golden Dawn is our hope, our reassurance."[36] Elsewhere, in a lodge speech referencing a visit by Persian Freemason Mirza Abolhassan Khan Ilchi (1776–1845), it is declared: "this is the great secret of the Order, that it knows how to find the Higher Unity from the multitude; that it forms a bond around all meritorious individuals of every region, every people, every faith; that it breaks the dividing wall which alienates man from man, uniting in one brotherhood of purest humanity . . . "[37]

Cross-pollination between Jewish esotericism and Freemasonry did, therefore, occur to some extent. Of course, Christianized Kabbalah played a major role.

Freemasonry. In addition, van Pelt fails to mention the Asiatic Brethren or the Frankist connections in Offenbach and gives only a brief secondary reference to the important "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt. The chapter is therefore incomplete. Without diminishing the importance of van Pelt's contribution, the present article hopes to correct these omissions by foregrounding resonances and sympathetic interactions, as opposed to focusing on anti-Masonic texts and individuals who accused Freemasonry and Judaism of being part of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy.

34. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 82ff. See also Andrea Hopp, *Jüdisches Bürgertum in Frankfurt am Main im 19. Jahrhundert*, 123–34.

35. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 160.

36. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 153. In the context of this lecture, the Masonic secret behind the Golden Dawn symbol (*aufgehende Morgenröthe*) is interpreted as the light of the approaching messiah, for which they must wait and hope: "it is not the scribes of our Order, nor the Rabbis with their book learning who possess it; it [this masonic secret] is revealed in part through the pure simplicity of the believer's heart."

37. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 153.

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Masonic and religious studies scholar Jan Snoek highlights the importance of the Kabbalistic syncretizing efforts of Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), the emergence of Lurianic Kabbalah, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata* (published in the 17th century), and the premier scientific study of Kabbalah, *La kabbale, ou, La philosophie religieuse des Hébreux*, written by Adolphe Franck (1809–1893) and published in 1843.[38] A fascinating example is the Swedish Masonic system reworked by Charles XIII (1748–1818), himself a high-ranking Mason, alchemist, and magician. Snoek describes how Charles designed his own Kabbalistic tree of life to be used in the rites of Freemasonry and even wore personally designed Masonic attire displaying this Masonic tree of life.[39]

In addition to these connections, the influence of the Asiatic Brethren on high-degree Freemasonry represents a form of Kabbalism that is simultaneously Jewish, Christianized, and "heretical" (Sabbatean-Frankist). Scholem was not blind to this, as he himself was influenced by Franz Molitor in his approach to Kabbalah.[40] Molitor — a student of esoteric thinkers such as Franz von Baader and inspired by Jakob Böhme — was a leading member and supporter of the Asiatic Brethren, having written their official history. Molitor was an important member of the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt, as well, and was involved in merging this lodge with another, *Carl zur aufgehenden Sonne*, which was chartered by Karl von Hessen-Kassel (1744–1836), a prominent Freemason and member of the Asiatic Brethren, who worked the high-degree system of the Rectified Scottish Rite.[41] Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld, discussed below, served as an intermediary between Karl von Hessen-Kassel and Molitor to facilitate this charter. He remained in contact with the prince until his death, and, at one

38. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik*, 92–98.

39. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik*, 230–32.

40. Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 122.

41. The founding members met in Molitor's house to establish this lodge. See Freemason Wiki Editor, "Carl of the Rising Sun," *Freemason Wiki*, https://www.freimaurer-wiki.de/index.php?title=Carl_zur_aufgehenden_Sonne&oldid=89110, accessed on February 19, 2025. See also Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 64.

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point attempted to introduce the heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren into the "Lodge Nascent Dawn."[42]

Molitor was among the few thinkers who took Kabbalah seriously in the early nineteenth century and endeavored to dedicate a comprehensive book to the subject (unfortunately left unfinished). Molitor believed that the Kabbalah represented the inner, living soul of Judaism, and, like some Freemasons and esotericists, he believed Kabbalah was the primordial religion of Adam, which exoteric Judaism had moved away from. Molitor sought to restore Kabbalah for the sake of both Judaism and Christianity.[43] In a similar way, Scholem felt this way about modern Judaism and worked to reintegrate a study of Kabbalah, including its esoteric and heretical forms. Scholem expressed this in a letter dated 1937, in which he essentially agreed with Molitor that Kabbalah was the secret driving tradition of Judaism and hoped to restore it through his historical and philological studies.[44]

For these reasons, Scholem took an interest in the activities of those associated with the Asiatic Brethren, seeing them as a nexus of genuine Kabbalism and the Christian-inspired theosophic esotericism of the late seventeenth century, born "somewhere in the no man's land" between rationalism and mysticism.[45] The order promulgated Kabbalistic concepts in their rites, such as the role of Ein Sof and the four worlds of Kabbalistic cosmology.[46] The sefirot and the tree of life were applied to interpretations of Masonic symbolism — for example, the pillars of King Solomon's Temple and Masonic tracing boards (Masonic visual

42. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 67.

43. Interestingly, it was partly through Molitor's writings in connection with the Asiatic Brethren that Kabbalism entered into Russian currents of Freemasonry. See Konstantin Burmistrov and Maria Endel, "The Place of Kabbalah in the Doctrine of Russian Freemasons."

44. See Klaus S. Davidowicz, *Die Kabbala*,182–84. Davidowicz quotes directly from Gershom Scholem, *Briefe, Band 1, 1914–1947*, 471. See also Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 122–25; Katharina Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die jüdische Tradition*, 8; Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors*, 81–82, 110–13.

45. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28.

46. For a summary, see Konstantin Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 159.

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aids). Traditional biblical history was recast in an esoteric light with a look toward Egypt (similar to Frankism), and there was a revaluation of the figure of Lucifer, who, in the ritual instructions of the order, is referred to as the *Sohn der Morgenröte* (Son of the Golden Dawn).

Aspects of the Talmud and the Zohar found their way into the degrees, including entire Jewish prayers and blessings, the priestly benedictions of the kohanim, and so forth.[47] The "cabbalist work" of the first degree focuses on an introduction to the different sefirot and the four worlds, familiarizing members with concepts such as *Mocha Stima'ah* (concealed wisdom) and *Klipa* ("shells" created through evil deeds).[48] By the fifth degree of initiation, members are being fully immersed in the practice of gematria, ascribing numerical values to Hebrew letters and words to extract esoteric meanings. There are specific instructions in the practice of *kavana*, or Jewish devotional prayers, as well as guidance for protection against *kishuf,* or ill-intentioned magic (sorcery).[49] The Kabbalistic instructions for the different degrees include long and complex names and concepts from the Hebrew bible reduced to numerical values and aligned to the invocation of different angels, with Metatron as the highest; many of these numerical values are also applied to specific locations on a large tracing board in an elaborate alphanumeric esotericism.[50]

The Order of the Asiatic Brethren was therefore unique in the context of Freemasonry. To better understand its connection to Frankism and the heretical "qabalah" of contemporary occult groups, a brief historical account of this order is necessary. This will introduce it to a broader academic audience, particularly scholars of esotericism. At least two histories of the order are held

47. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 159–60.

48. FXXV, vol. 8a, 96–112 (Copenhagen).

49. 24622, 192 A 4, Kl.MS:XIV.B.10 (Vrijmetselarij Museum).

50. See, for example, 24571, 191 D 41, Kl.MS:XIV.B.4 (Vrijmetselarij Museum); cf. FVII. vols. 19 and 20 in the archives of the Danish Order of Freemasons, where the tracing board of King Solomon's Temple is also held. See also same folder as note 50.

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in Masonic archives, both written by Molitor in 1820 and 1829 (each slightly different).[51] For these histories, Molitor relied on the memories of another principal member of the order, the Jewish specialist in Kabbalah, Hirschfeld, who, in turn, related much of what he had received from Schönfeld.

The order was founded in Vienna by Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen (1750–1790) and his younger brother Hans Karl (1754–1809). Both were of Bavarian descent and active in European Freemasonry. Heinrich was a member of the *Orden des Gold und Rosenkreutz* (Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross), a high-degree system of Freemasonry specializing in alchemy and Christian theosophy, but he left the order under strained conditions, publishing a book denouncing the Rosicrucian Masons.[52] His subsequent creation began as the "Order of the Knights and Brothers of the Light" (*Orden der Ritter und Brüder des Lichts*), sometimes called the *Fratres Lucis*, which he and others founded in 1781 in Vienna. This first instantiation of the order — which plays an important role in contemporary esotericism, as we shall see — was reorganized as the Asiatic Brethren in 1782.

Schönfeld was a key member, who had become a regular Freemason in Austria, where he was initiated into a lodge affiliated with the *Grand Orient de France* along with other Frankists and Jewish nobles.[53] Between 1781 and 1783, he was a member of both the Knights of Light and the Asiatic Brethren and played a considerable part in the founding activities of both orders. Another founding member was a Capuchin monk named Bischoff, aka Ish Zadik in Hebrew or "Pater Justus," who reportedly spent years in the "Orient" learning secrets from Sabbatean Kabbalists.[54] The order included some of the most prominent Jews in Vienna, such as early adherents of Haskalah, but also Jewish bankers

51. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 30.

52. This was a pamphlet entitled *Der Rosenkreuzer in seiner Blöße* published in 1781. See Antoine Faivre, "Asiatic Brethren."

53. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28n3.

54. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28, 32.

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like Nathan Arnstein (1748–1838) and Bernhard Eskeles (1753–1839).[55] Jewish members of the order were not encouraged to convert, nor did they. Other members worth mentioning include the Hönig family (which had close ties to the Dobruschkas), Isaak Daniel Itzig (1750–1806), Baruch Schick of Shklov (1744–1808), and the abovementioned Karl von Hessen-Kassel, who became the Chacham Hackolel (Grand Master) of the order and a point of contact with Charles XIII of Sweden, suggesting a possible connection to the Swedish Rite.

According to the internal lore, Bischoff had returned with rare manuscripts obtained from an enigmatic Jew named "Azaria," who was associated with Sabbateans, and these became the source of the rites and rituals. Scholem confirms that the founding documents of the order were based on Kabbalah and parts of Jewish ritual prayers, yet the influence runs deeper. As Scholem explains:

> with the Knights, and even more so with the Asiatic Brethren, we find Kabbalistic elements, not pseudo-Kabbalistic as in other fraternities of this kind, but rather authentic formulas derived from the book of *Zohar*, reflections on the letters of the Tetragrammaton taken from the *Pardês-Rimmonim* by the Kabbalist Moses Cordovero, and even lengthy speculations on Creation, quoted parallel to the teachings of Christian theosophists.[56]

According to Scholem, although there were Jewish and Kabbalistic elements in the rituals of the Knights of Light, the more strictly Sabbatean elements did not appear until the revised versions, as the order metamorphosed into its second phase as the Asiatic Brethren.[57] Konstantin Burmistrov suggests that Hirschfeld (whose "Kabbalistic name" was Marcus ben Bina) was the creator of the order's "doctrine," and that "the constitution and the basic writings of the Order were compiled by Schönfeld … but [the] Order's instructional manuals and textbooks dealing with 'interpretation of symbols,' letter combinations and

55. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 226. Other Jewish banking families involved in the activities of the order include Guggenheim, Gatz in Hamburg, and several others. See Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 153.

56. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28.

57. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 33.

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meditations were written by Hirschfeld."[58] Burmistrov cites Scholem's 1962 article on Hirschfeld, and an anonymous booklet appearing in 1790 with the title *Der Asiate in seiner Blöße*, which linked the order's Kabbalism to Hirschfeld.[59]

This is contradicted by Scholem's later lectures of 1979 (published in French and untranslated), which intended to "summarize the conclusions of extensive research," especially in connection with Schönfeld.[60] Here, Scholem argues that Schönfeld was the architect of the Kabbalistic doctrines, owing to his Sabbatean background. Moreover, *Der Asiate in seiner Blöße* is a polemical text "warning" other Masons about the dangers of the Asiatic Brethren, and therefore it cannot be taken seriously (the "compendious library" takes a similar approach).[61] It is likely that Schönfeld's role was kept secret due to his Frankist and Sabbatean connections, even leading to the invention of the figure of Azaria in the order's history to obfuscate Schönfeld's influence. Scholem convincingly demonstrates that Schönfeld, with his direct Sabbatean and Frankist learning, was the main tributary of Kabbalistic teachings in the Asiatic Brethren, and that the story of "Azaria" functioned as a mythical double image.[62]

This does not diminish the importance of Hirschfeld, whose influence was great. Schönfeld personally initiated Hirschfeld into Freemasonry in Brünn, while Frank occupied the city as his main center, the degree of "Master Mason" being a prerequisite for joining the high-degree order of the Asiatic Brethren.[63] Thus, even if Hirschfeld became the main source of the later Kabbalistic

58. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 156, 158.

59. The "compendious library" on Freemasonry also posits Hirschfeld as the source of the Kabbalistic doctrines. See André, ed., *Der Freymaurer*, 95–96.

60. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 10.

61. Toward the end, as the order fell into decline, Hirschfeld was extirpated on the grounds that his activities were having the effect of overly "Judaizing" the order. This, along with the publication of his *Biblisches Organon* (1796), is another reason Hirschfeld is often cited as the lead Kabbalist.

62. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 29. Katz also came to this conclusion. See also Patrick Benjamin Koch, "Adventurer, (Pseudo?)-Kabbalist, and Theosophist," 27.

63. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 34. Schönfeld often took neophytes to "Frank's court" in Brünn to be initiated. See Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 226.

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interpretations, his background — in addition to the fact that his father was a cantor and Talmudist — was largely informed by Schönfeld. Indeed, Hirschfeld would later join Frank in Offenbach after the dissolution of the Asiatic Brethren.[64] These important connections, in which Schönfeld played a leading role, are the focus of the next section.

The Asiatic Brethren and Sabbatean Frankism

It is precisely due to its syncretizing and antinomian features that Scholem labeled Sabbatean-Frankist Kabbalah "heretical." In Scholem's reading, "Sabbatianism had its roots in an extravagant overstressing of certain aspects of Lurianism," extending some things while excluding others.[65] According to David Halperin, Sabbatai Zevi approached Kabbalah in an experimental manner: "He incorporated its fundamental myth, the erotic tension between the Blessed Holy One (male) and Shechinah (female), into his *personal mythology*."[66] Sabbateans practiced this "heretical Kabbalah" outside an established religious framework or lineage, like many esotericists — a partial democratization of the esoteric features of Judaism. "Heretical" thus seems an apt description, as the Sabbateans' engagement with Kabbalah resembles the way in which esotericists modify, reinterpret, and repurpose disparate religious elements — a practice the Frankists took to new heights and attempted to introduce into Freemasonry.

As baptized Catholics, Frankists could participate in the normally Christian-only lodges that had proliferated in Poland-Lithuania after the French Revolution.[67] Conditions were similar in Moravia; for example, in Brünn, a major center of Frankism, where the Masonic lodge "Zur auf gehende Sonne

64. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 226. Hirschfeld's father was Joseph ben Meir Zvi Darmstadt of Karlsruhe, of whom there is no known evidence that he was a Kabbalist. See Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 155.

65. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), 320.

66. Emphasis added. David Halperin, "Sabbatianism and Kabbalistic Heresy."

67. For example, the Polish Jewish colonel Berek Joselewicz, while not a Frankist, was a member of such a lodge. Abraham G. Duker, "Polish Frankism's Duration," 312.

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im Orient" was founded in 1782. This lodge counted among its members Maximilian Joseph von Lamberg and his brother Leopold, Carl Joseph von Salm-Reifferscheidt, a leader of the Moravian Rosicrucians, and members of the Mittrovsky family, who were patrons of the Dobruschkas (and supporters of Jews who converted to Christianity).[68] In the company of Lamberg, Giacomo Casanova — Masonic extraordinaire and dabbler in Kabbalism — visited Brünn and this Masonic lodge, and likely met Frank while in the city (Casanova maintained contact with Frank's daughter, Eva).[69]

An important figure in Brünn was, of course, Schönfeld, whose family belonged to the city as part of a continuous Sabbatean circle. Moses (Levi) Dobruschka, later Schönfeld, was born in Brünn in 1753. His father, Salomon Zalman (Levy) Dobruschka (1715–1774), was involved in the tobacco industry and was, in fact, the founder of the Jewish community in the city.[70] Salomon married Schöndl Hirschl, the daughter of Löbl Hirschl of Rzeszów and Güttel Jacobi of Prossnitz. Schöndl was the maternal cousin of Jacob Frank, which made Moses Frank's nephew. She was a wealthy woman and the leader of a prominent Sabbatean community in Moravia; Salomon and his business partners in the Hönig family belonged to this community.[71]

Schöndl was also close to Wolf Eybeschütz, another well-known Sabbatean prophet of the time, whose father was the prominent Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz. The famous controversy between Rabbi Emden and Jonathan Eybeschütz is relevant here: Emden's *Sefer Hitabbekut* (Book of Struggle) contains passages referring to

68. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 224. Michaelson may in fact misunderstand this lodge as being the Asiatic Brethren, which is not exactly correct; rather, it was a new lodge closely affiliated with both the Asiatic Brethren and Frankism.

69. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 222–25.

70. On the background of the Dobruschka family, see Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 11–19; Pawel Maciejko, "Dobruschka-Schönfeld Family," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

71. Moses's sister, Freidele (Franziska), was married to Wolf Hönig, who was also involved in and supported the Asiatic Brethren, and whose father was married to a member of the Wehle, the main Sabbatean Family in Prague. See Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 13n11.

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Schöndl as the "prostitute of Brünn." Indeed, Schöndl's presence in Brünn was the reason Frank settled there after his imprisonment in Częstochowa.

Moses received a thorough rabbinical household instruction, but at the same time he was initiated into the esotericism and privately circulated texts of the Sabbatean movement. This meant that his interpretation of traditional Jewish teachings would have been largely Sabbatean. The live-in rabbi responsible for his education would later convert to Christianity with a group of Frankists after Frank arrived in Brünn, and Dobruschka also converted to Christianity after Frank's arrival, taking the name Schönfeld.[72] Dobruschka kept all this secret later in life, as Scholem points out.[73]

Molitor, who authored the history of the order, erroneously claims that Schönfeld was the grandson of Jonathan Eybeschütz, which, while technically incorrect, is nevertheless symbolically important. Scholem suggests that Schönfeld was rather the "spiritual grandson" of Eybeschütz.[74] Molitor further states that Schönfeld was a Sabbatean (Scholem corrects this, showing that actually the Frankists are meant, although they were not known as such at the time), and that he inherited Kabbalistic texts from his grandfather (Eybeschütz), which he incorporated into the architecture of the Asiatic Brethren. Again, while not exactly correct, the symbolic content resonates in that the Sabbateans were deeply involved in the (secret) study of the Sabbatean book *Va-Avo ha-Yom el ha-Ayyin* (And I Came this Day unto the Fountain), which, after much debate, appears to have been secretly written by Eybeschütz — though proving conclusively that Eybeschütz was a Sabbatean remains complicated.[75]

72. Scholem suggests that Frank's arrival played a decisive role in the decision of the Dobruschka sons to convert to Christianity, and while this began a new phase in Schönfeld's life and literally career, he retained close ties to Frank and Frank's court, even being offered leadership of the movement following Frank's death. Schönfeld declined the offer and instead adopted the name Junius Frey and went to France to join the Jacobins and participate in the Revolution. He was later guillotined for being a potential spy for Joseph II.

73. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 14.

74. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 32.

75. For the original discussion of this subject, see Moshe Arie Perlmuter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz and his Attitude towards Sabbatianism*.

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Va-Avo is essentially a work of Sabbatean Kabbalah, but it is also more than this. As Halperin argues, it should be read as "a charter for the world religion of the future, rooted in Kabbalistic Judaism yet unlike any religion hitherto known."[76] Crucially, as Scholem demonstrated, it was this text — an unmistakably Sabbatean Kabbalistic text by Eybeschütz, which Schönfeld would have studied from an early age — that was incorporated into the foundations of the Asiatic Brethren, with entire passages translated and included (without citation).[77]

Hirschfeld, the other principal Kabbalist of the order, met Schönfeld in 1783 through Heinrich, and Scholem suggests that Schönfeld introduced him to Frank when he came to Brünn to be personally initiated. Hirschfeld's connection to Frankism began here and it would deepen over time, with Hirschfeld joining Frank in Offenbach after the Asiatic Brethren dissolved. He published his *Biblisches Organon* in Offenbach, a compendium of Kabbalistic interpretations of scripture, some of which influenced the Asiatic Brethren and incorporated Frankist stylings. Together, these two figures introduced Kabbalistic elements into the order, primarily in the form of a Frankist interpretation.

In the end, as the Asiatic Brethren became increasingly Christianized and thus more fractured until it eventually disintegrated, Hirschfeld was expelled, and a circular was issued accusing him (ironically) of relying too heavily on Kabbalah to interpret the order's teachings (and thus exerting too much Jewish influence). Hirschfeld replied to the circular by stating that anyone who studies Kabbalah, in fact, transcends their own religion and attains "the only, true, pure and universal religion,"[78] a reply that betrays not only the Frankist underpinnings but the influence of *Va-Avo*, that mysterious text which played an important role in the order. What is meant by this true "religion of the future" remains unclear,

76. David J. Halperin, "Some Themes in the Book *Va'avo*."

77. Such a practice of incorporating unreferenced esoteric texts into Masonic teachings intended for the order is not uncommented. For example, in the late nineteenth century, Albert Pike made extensive use of Éliphas Lévi's work in his handbook for the Scottish Rite in the United States. See Albert Pike and Arturo de Hoyos, *Albert Pike's Morals and Dogma*.

78. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 49.

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but it found its counterpart in the esoteric world of secret societies, which were concerned with creating a similar form of universal religion.

The presence of *Va-Avo* in the instructions of the Asiatic Brethren is worth stressing to demonstrate the Sabbatean-Frankist influence. Connections between the Frankists and the Sabbateans around Eybeschütz have been well documented, for example, by Maciejko, and indeed the "discovery" of the text is linked to Frank's family.[79] However, the text's incorporation into the instructions of the Asiatic Brethren, and how its use relates to the belief structures of some contemporary esoteric groups, has never been explored. *Va-Avo* surfaced in the early eighteenth century in the belongings of a traveling Polish-Lithuanian manuscripts dealer named Moses Meïr Kamanker, who specialized in Sabbatean Kabbalistic texts and whose connections to Sabbateans are well established — and who was the uncle of Jacob Frank.[80] Moses Meïr was detained in Frankfurt in 1725 for disseminating the teachings of the Sabbatean Kabbalists; his manuscripts were confiscated, and it was soon clear that Moses Meïr was an agent of a larger Sabbatean network sent to promulgate their teachings. In response, an anti-Sabbatean ban was issued.[81] Many works of Eybeschütz were confiscated via Moses Meïr, but the most relevant was *Va-Avo*, which created a scandal and initiated the famous controversy with Emden.[82]

What is in this text, and why was it considered so heretical? While much is too convoluted to be rehearsed here, in simplified form it presents a highly eroticized style of Kabbalistic esotericism that is incredibly vivid and pornographic. According to Emden, it contained "many curses and blasphemies against the word of the

79. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 199–203.

80. Paweł Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," i–lii, ii.

81. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," iii–iv.

82. The fact that Eybeschütz responded by issuing his own ban on the Sabbateans using coded language, as well as the discovery of the potentially Sabbatean amulets a few years later and the fact that Eybeschütz's son Wolf turned out to be a prominent Sabbatean, will not be discussed due to space constraints.

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Living God and it turned Kabbalistic mysteries upside down."[83] As Maciejko states, "[I]t is blatantly pornographic (in fact, it is possibly the only truly pornographic text ever written in the rabbinic idiom)."[84] The Sabbateans themselves were likewise captivated. One author wrote that *Va-Avo* included "things that no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard," and other Sabbateans praised the text as revealing mysteries that far surpassed the *Zohar* and Lurianic Kabbalah.[85]

There are important connections between Frank's *Words of the Lord* and certain ideas advanced in *Va-Avo*. For example, the idea that the Messiah must convert or pay homage to Christianity, whereas his followers must not, and the feminization of David and Sabbatai Zevi.[86] Incredibly, when portions of the rituals and instructions of the Asiatic Brethren were published in 1803, pages 265–276 contained paraphrases and direct translations of the first eight leaves of *Va-Avo*.[87] These sections draw out the gendered interpretations of the *Va-Avo*, quote Hermes Trismegistus directly, and make use of unique Sabbatean themes of light and darkness and of the gendered duality of cosmic principles.[88]

These translated and published sections of *Va-Avo* include important passages on the concept of Chaos, the abyss of primordial darkness out of which the primal light arises — a doctrine that played a key role for Frankists in *Words of the Lord*. Frank believed that Chaos and *Choshek* (darkness) ruled over this false world, and that Chaos reigned through the power and control of malevolent

83. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," ix.

84. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xix.

85. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xvii.

86. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xlii–xliii. The sefirah Malkuth is female in Lurianic Kabbalah and normally represented by the Shechinah. In *Va-Avo*, David (and consequently the Davidic Messiah) is identified with the female Shechinah. Halperin, "Some Themes in the Book *Va'avo*," 7.

87. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*. See Scholem, "Ein Frankist," 84n23: see also Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 31–32.

88. While the lower grades also included the Christian theosophy of figures such as Georg von Welling (1655–1727) and Martinez de Pasqually (ca. 1727–1774), the higher degrees instructed members in the explicit Sabbatean concepts. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 167.

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entities.[89] Michaelson suggests that Frank's theology might reflect the concept of the *memunim* (deputies or guardians) found in the *Zohar,* to denote specific angels.[90] It is also worth mentioning the use of the *memunim* in Jewish magical practice, for example in the *Sefer Raziel HaMalakh* grimoire text, in relation to invoking angels and protection.[91]

The *unpublished* instructional documents of the order further confirm this emphasis on Chaos and *Choshek* (or *Choschbech*) and the obsession with angelic magic, especially as the initiate climbs the levels to higher knowledge — beginning with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and the Four Worlds (emanation), and graduating to gematria and more advanced concepts such as *kavana* and *kishuf*.[92] According to Scholem, the nature of the Sabbatean work *Va-Avo* is such that only a true expert in Hebrew and Kabbalah could have translated and interpreted it — in other words, only someone of Schönfeld's caliber.[93]

The Sabbatean creation story related in the order's teachings concerns the point of Chaos within the Ein Sof, which emanates ten lights and then contracts: "In the process of self-contraction (*Zusammenziehung*) of Ein Sof, which is also described as the process of heating (*Erhitzung*), they get together again in a single point."[94] This act of self-contraction (*tzimtzum*) is described in Sabbatean/Frankist fashion through the language of sexual intercourse.[95] The concepts of the Light that Carries Thought (*she yesh bo mahshavah*) and the Thoughtless Light (*she ein bo mahshavah*) are introduced, both of which originally existed together in Ein Sof but have since split into those forces associated with the creative process

89. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 90.

90. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 90.

91. See for example, Robert Gamer, "Jewish Amulets," *Voices on Sefaria*, https://voices.sefaria.org/sheets/20004.14?lang=bi; Joshua Trachtenberg, "Chapter 6," *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 1939, https://sacred-texts.com/jud/jms/jms08.htm.

92. See, for example, F VII vol. 19 b 1-2 (Copenhagen); FXXV vol 8 a 96-112 (Copenhagen); 24622, 192 A 4, Kl.MS:XIV.B.10 (Vrijmetselarij Museum).

93. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 32.

94. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 167.

95. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*, 265–76.

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and those opposed to it, refusing to evolve. After *tzimtzum*, the Thoughtless Light and the Thought-Filled Light remained as part of Creation, though in mixed form. According to this view, the light-structures that emanated from Ein Sof are twofold: containing both that which evolves with the creative process and that which refuses and remains in the same state. As Burmistrov explains:

> the thoughtless light also creates its own structures — the demonic worlds of *klippot*. These forces, called the "snakes, living in the depths of the great abyss," are nothing but the other side of Ein Sof itself. Due to its opposition, the thoughtless light also takes part, even if indirectly, in the creation process. At the same time, the thoughtful light is actively using the negative energy of the thoughtless light for the construction of the Universe and its improvement (*tikkun*). . . . the Sabbateans created an original doctrine of the nature of Messiah, the improvement of the world and its salvation.[96]

Such ideas — introduced by Nathan of Gaza and taken further by Eybeschütz — form the basis of the theology developed in *Va-Avo* and direct the attention to the will of God in the created world as opposed to focusing on His attributes. This emphasis highlights the Manichean dualism of divine will, thus establishing a path to knowledge of the divine that begins from the lowest aspects of the created world.[97] That Freemasonry — a philosophical movement already obsessed with the symbolism of light — became a vehicle for such Sabbatean ideas is significant.

Further connections worth mentioning reveal direct resonances with Frankism, not only with Frank's Sabbatean heritage. For while Schönfeld was trained in Sabbatean theology, it was Frank to whom he owed allegiance, whose teachings he absorbed and embodied. As Scholem described him, Schönfeld "is a man wearing several masks all at once, and denying them all, depending on the circumstances, without it being possible to determine his actual position: it is the position of the true Frankist according to the concept advocated by Jacob Frank."[98]

96. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 169.
97. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xxii.
98. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 56–57.

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As already mentioned, Frank eventually settled in Offenbach in a castle rented to him by Wolfgang Ernst II of Isenburg and Büdingen (1735–1803), an enthusiastic Freemason and one of Frank's patrons (ostensibly in the name of religious tolerance). Wolfgang Ernst II's sons, Carl Friedrich Ludwig Moritz (1766–1820) and Wolfgang Ernst (1774–1837), were instrumental in establishing and leading the first Masonic lodge in Offenbach in 1812, *Carl & Charlotte zur Treue*.[99] Until the end of his life, Frank officiated in Isenburg Castle — which they called the "house of God" (*Gotteshaus*) — under the title of "Baron von Frank," and his daughter Eva reigned after him. The extent to which the Masonic and Frankist milieus overlapped in Offenbach is difficult to establish, although there was likely significant interaction, as suggested by the instrumental role Wolfgang Ernst II's sons played in establishing Freemasonry in Offenbach.

It was often controversial and unclear for Jews who sought nobility, for example, in the case of Wolf Eybeschütz and Benjamin Hönig, who acted as if they possessed such titles, when often it was not true.[100] Here the question of their secretly remaining Jewish, in spite of an alleged baptism and conversion, was always the issue, and, like Frank, Hönig and Eybeschütz had Sabbatean connections. It is therefore useful to cast Frank in a similar light, and even if his status of minor nobility seemed to go unchallenged — having been attained in Poland in exchange for converting to Catholicism — the question of spurious titles and charlatanism accompanied him throughout his life. Frank was even referred to as a "Jewish Cagliostro."[101]

Frank did not so much "fake" being a noble, for he was one in a certain respect; rather, he (and his followers) tended to over-extend and over-emphasize certain things, such as his status, fetishizing and taking it to dishonest lengths, and donning erroneous princely titles — for example, incessantly dressing in the garb of Polish nobles, constantly wearing sabers, while "Baron" or "Count" von

99. See membership list in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. O. 4, Nr. 3.

100. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 212.

101. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 219.

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Frank was conveyed about in a carriage pulled by six horses, a privilege meant only for the pope or the emperor.[102] They also, on other occasions, donned the Turkish costumes of the Donmeh, which went back to the conversion of Zevi.[103]

Another unexpected parallel with high-degree Freemasonry emerges here, as Masons were — and are — preoccupied (at least in their rites and public ceremonies) with ranks and jewels and regalia, in meetings and rituals assuming the ranks of bishops and cardinals and nobles and kings, though members typically did not hold these ranks in the profane world — although some members, of course, did, and many nobles and dukes did and do belong to Masonic orders. However, many members did not hold such status outside the Masonic framework, with titles such as Grand Master and Grand Standard Bearer, or even as a cardinal or a bishop in ritual dramas.

Possible Frankist influences in the Asiatic Brethren further include the use of the epithet "force of forces" in relation to the Kabbalistic deity, a term used by Frank that is also found in the teachings of the order.[104] The framework of Sabbateanism and Frankism involves secrecy and esoteric reading; that is, words, phrases, and images are used in a certain way that can only be recognized by the initiated. This is true for the way in which scholars can determine that *Va-Avo*, for example, is a Sabbatean text, and that a certain figure in the text is rather an esoteric stand-in for Sabbatai Zevi (Frankism operates in the same way). For this reason, certain terms and phrases used within the order of the Asiatic Brethren are telling. As Scholem points out, the idiosyncratic use of the word *Sie* in the order's texts in relation to the divine feminine, the Maiden — or *Panna* in Polish, regularly used in Frank's teachings — is another case of Frankist influence.[105]

102. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 212.

103. Scholem was convinced that Zevi had close ties with the Bektashi Sufi Order, an unorthodox Sufi group that also had ties to Freemasonry. See Seyed Amir Hossein Asghari, "The Bektashi Order, Sufism, and Shī'īsm," 54.

104. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 38.

105. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 41.

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Like other Masonic orders, the Asiatic Brethren had a regular festival calendar, although they celebrated Jewish and Christian holidays in which pork had to be consumed.[106] Furthermore, it does not seem to have occurred to Maciejko or Michaelson that Frank's "Big Brother" (*Wielki Brat*) — a title Frank often used for himself, but which also signified a type of higher spiritual self — might be related to Freemasonry. In Polish Freemasonry, *Brat* is a formal greeting for a fellow initiated brother, and *Wielki* is used to refer to the Grand Orient (*Wielki Wschód*), the Grand Lodge (*Wielka Loża*) or the Grand Master (*Wielki Mistrz*).

Finally, the understanding of Kabbalah within the order, especially as articulated by Hirschfeld, emphasizes the "one true religion" and the "one true God" of all humanity — the Great Architect of the Universe in Masonic terminology — which stands over and against the understanding of traditional religions and resembles Frank's concept of *Das*, or "gnosis," a knowledge that must be borne in secret.[107] In *Words of the Lord*, Frank describes *Das* as hidden, signifying special knowledge, and existing somehow outside the *sefirot*.[108] But what is *Das*? According to Michaelson:

> Scholars have debated whether this term refers to knowledge (*da'at* — *daas* in Ashkenazi pronunciation), or religion (*dat* — *das* in Ashkenazi pronunciation), or the quasi-*sefirah* of *Da'at*, or even to *das*, the German word for "this." My view is that Frank intended the term to be polysemous, and that it is a deliberate conflation of gnosis, the new religion into which Frank is to bring the Brethren, and the occulted *sefirah* of *da'at*. Above all, *das* means "gnosis," specifically the gnosis of Western esotericism: the secret knowledge that will enable the Brethren to proceed on their journey toward immortality.[109]

While *da'at* is usually understood as "knowledge" in general, it could also signify something like "consciousness" or "awareness," whereas *dat* signifies

106. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*, 38.
107. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 244n105; Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 31.
108. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 95.
109. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 95.

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something like "faith." Scholem also indicated "gnosis" in relation to *da'at*.[110] The theology of *Das* or *da'at* thus refers to the universal or gnostic esotericism, the religion above all religions so prevalent in esoteric circles. To illustrate how this heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren contributed to the development of esotericism, we now turn to the contemporary occult milieu.

Heretical Kabbalah and Contemporary Esotericism

By examining the syncretizing efforts of Frank and his followers within the Masonic context, we see how these activities introduced a form of heretical Kabbalah to the Asiatic Brethren. Though these efforts were short-lived, they played an important role in Masonic history and in contemporary occult groups inspired by Freemasonry. For example, Hereward Tilton has argued that the obsession with the Urim and Thummim in the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross, to which Heinrich and his brother Hans Karl belonged, was the source of this obsession in the Asiatic Brethren and was later carried on in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and, from there, within Aleister Crowley's Thelema.[111] Some occultists today regard the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as the successor of the Asiatic Brethren and its heretical Kabbalah — a unique "constructed tradition" that has received sparse attention.

In 1997, occultist and Rosicrucian scholar Jean-Pascal Ruggiu — Imperator of the Ahathöor Temple No. 7 in Paris, France, which belongs to the Alpha et Omega version of the Golden Dawn (a successor to the original Golden Dawn) — wrote an article in which he claimed that Sabbatean and Frankist influences are to be found in the Stella Matutina teachings and practices of the Golden Dawn.[112] He states that the origins of the Golden Dawn are connected to the first manifestation of the Asiatic Brethren, namely, the Knights and Brothers

110. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (2018), 124.

111. Hereward Tilton, "The Urim and Thummim," 40.

112. Online as part of the Felkin Collection (Robert William Felkin and the Whare Ra). Jean-Pascal Ruggiu, "Rosicrucian Alchemy and the Heretic Order of the Golden Dawn."

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of the Light (*Orden der Ritter und Brüder des Lichts* or *Fratres Lucis*). According to Ruggiu, the famous cipher manuscript that provided the structure and rituals of the Golden Dawn, transmitted to the order's founding members by Freemasons Kenneth Mackenzie (1833–1886) and Frederick Hockley (1809–1885) — who likely authored the mysteriously "found" manuscript[113] — was linked to the Knights and Brothers of the Light and the Asiatic Brethren, whose members migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt — *L'Aurore Naissante* in French — a "very ancient Rosicrucian Lodge."[114]

This claim represents an intriguing lineage, weaving a compelling narrative from the complex history outlined above. Tomas Stacewicz, another well-known occultist and former Imperator of the Alpha et Omega Golden Dawn temple in Sweden, followed up on Ruggiu's statements in an article focusing on the origins of *Qabala* (i.e., heretical Kabbalah) in the Golden Dawn. Stacewicz points out that the Hebrew name for the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt was *Chevrah Zerach Bequr Aur* (which, perhaps, means something like Order or Society of the Golden or Rising Dawn), and that this exact phrase in Hebrew is found on the first page of the Golden Dawn cipher manuscript — suggesting, for the author, "a true 'esoteric transmission' from the Frankist Qabalah into the Golden Dawn."[115] As Stacewicz explains, "on one hand we have a clear association between the Sabbatian-Frankist Qabalah and *L'Aurore Naissante*, through the Asiatic Brethren, and on the other a link between *L'Aurore Naissante* and the Golden Dawn through the mysterious Cypher Mss."[116]

113. For this background, see G. J. Wheeler, "The Finding of Hidden Texts in Esoteric and Other Religious Traditions," 342–44.

114. Ruggiu, "Rosicrucian Alchemy and the Heretic Order of the Golden Dawn," 6. The quote is attributed to William Wynn Westcott, a co-founder of the original Golden Dawn. The idea that *L'Aurore Naissante* in Frankfurt was "Rosicrucian" is partly based on the (likely fanciful) account that Edward Bulwer-Lytton, author of the occult novel *Zanoni* (1842), was initiated into the lodge there. On this background, see Julian Strube, *Vril*, 62–64.

115. Tomas Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition of the Golden Dawn," 8. This article is made available online by the Hermetiska Orden av Den Gryende Morgonrodnaden. See also Tomas Stacewicz, "The Sabbatian roots of the Golden Dawn."

116. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 8.

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Stacewicz actually bases this hypothesis on Scholem's remarks about the same words, which appear in Gustav Meyrink's novel *The Golem* when the protagonist experiences a Kabbalistic vision, and which Scholem suggested (to Meyrink) "must be simply a mystical name of a lodge retranslated into Hebrew, something like 'Lodge of Aurora's Seed.'"[117] As Scholem reflected:

> Not until fifty years later did I find out that [this exact phrase] was nothing but a retranslation of the title of the so-called Frankfurt Jewish lodge, famous in the history of freemasonry from the days of Napoleon, namely the "Loge Aurora zur aufgehenden Morgenröte" [Aurora Lodge of the Rising Dawn], as incorrectly transcribed by some ignoramus in an English book in Meyrink's library.[118]

Scholem has in mind the (English) writings of Golden Dawn initiates, Rosicrucian Freemasons, and the "pseudo-Kabbalah" of Theosophy.[119] From the perspective of the constructed occult tradition, however, the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" is heir to the esoteric lineage of the Asiatic Brethren. While this might seem a strange way to do history, for scholars of esotericism such stories of an invented lineage are normal. Andreas Kilcher has pointed out that esoteric groups in fact rely on such stories, that they "not only understand themselves in elaborate mytho-poetical narratives …[but] claim their knowledge to be of a particular origin …[that] has been transmitted by particular (esoteric) means, media and groups."[120]

But who was the link in this chain of transmission from Frankfurt to London (where the Golden Dawn was founded)? In Stacewicz's view, this was MacKenzie, who "received his claimed Rosicrucian esoteric transmission in Austria by the hand of the Hungarian Count Apponyi, in 1850."[121] Vienna was,

117. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133.

118. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133–34. See also Boaz Huss and Jonatan Meir, "'The Light is Burning Pretty Low'," 52–53.

119. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133.

120. Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*, ix.

121. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 8. This claim was originally put forward by Westcott. Who and which Apponyi this is remains unclear, as the dates are not clear, but it is likely Anton Apponyi (1782–1852). However, this episode does seem to have been substantiated in some way by Bruce Wilson in the article "The Origin of Our Rosicrucian Society."

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of course, the birthplace and headquarters of the Knights and Brothers of the Light and the Asiatic Brethren. According to another Golden Dawn researcher, Bruce Wilson, MacKenzie used this warrant after returning from Vienna to establish the first manifestation of the Golden Dawn as the "Brothers of Light," a reference to the Knights and Brothers of the Light, which become known as the *Fratres Lucis* or "Society of Eight."[122]

This constructed tradition is popular in contemporary esotericism within the context of a Neo-Sabbatian movement, within which the Asiatic Brethren were revived in 2009 as the "Knights and Companions of St. John the Evangelist of Asia in Europe" by Bro. Asariah, or Olen D. Rush, with lodges in several countries.[123] Through a charter granted by the "Greater Sanhedrin of the Knights and Companions of St. John the Evangelist of Asia in Europe," the lodge "Wittel Matuszewska, the Right Hand Lodge" was established in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2014 by the "Lodge Facilitator Rabbi Moysze." On the "About" page of the website for this lodge, we read from their mytho-poetic history that Bro. Rabbi Moysze is a "contemporary Sabbatian/Frankist Ma'aminim."[124]

It is worth asking what draws contemporary occultists to this particular mytho-poetic lineage. Are there structural similarities and resonances between the heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren and Frankism — what Bro. Asariah refers to as "syncretic Kabbalah" — and modern occultism? To offer a final example, the occulted sefirah *da'at*, in relation to *das* or gnosis, may offer a clue. This "occulted" sefirah played a significant role in the structure of the Golden Dawn grades and represented the center of the Rosicrucian cross and the Abyss, which the initiate must traverse to advance on the path to

122. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 9; Wheeler, "The Finding of Hidden Texts," 343.

123. See official lodge website at https://rabbimoysze.wordpress.com/2014/09/12/wittel-matuszewska-the-right-hand-lodge/; Olen D. Rush, "Prof. Dr. Paul Silva, Editor-in-Chief, JAMMO, Talks to Adjunct Prof. Olen D. Rush, on Resonance of Syncretic Kabbalah Today."

124. See the official lodge website at https://rabbimoysze.wordpress.com/2014/09/12/wittel-matuszewska-the-right-hand-lodge/.

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higher knowledge.[125] An emphasis on *da'at* and the "Crossing of the Abyss" was continued in Crowley's Thelema and A.·.A.·. after he broke from the Golden Dawn, where it came to represent the place where the initiate had to encounter malevolent beings taken from John Dee and Edward Kelley's famous magical channelings.[126] As Crowley himself noted, in this type of occult Kabbalah (which, as in Sabbateanism and Frankism, approaches the divine or Ein Sof from the bottom, that is, from the fallen realm), "not only is the Divine Unity destroyed but Daath, instead of being the Child of Chokmah and Binah, becomes the Abyss, and the Qliphoth arise."[127]

Conclusion

This article has revisited the efforts of certain Frankists within the Asiatic Brethren to suggest that the interaction between these groups is more significant for the history of esotericism than is generally recognized. Although scholars of Judaism are familiar with this history, situating it within the context of occultism provides opportunities to compare the structural similarities with esoteric belief systems, as opposed to confining the analysis to fluctuations of heterodoxy and orthodoxy in Judaism. Scholem, Burmistrov, Michaelson, and others have initiated this research program, yet their studies represent the tip of an iceberg.

The para-discipline of Masonic history, written by Masonic historians from the eighteenth century until today, contains countless references to the Asiatic Brethren and their connection to what is often referred to as Sabbateanism, though often Frankism is meant. Revisiting this history from the field of esotericism studies allows us to better determine the extent to which Frankism was connected not only to the Asiatic Brethren but to Freemasonry and modern occult groups, which sheds new light on this entangled history and identifies connections historians of Judaism might miss.

125. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 14.
126. Matt Lee, "To survive da'ath," November 12, 2014, by Actual Virtual Journal, YouTube, 23:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkxPCl398t8.
127. Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 121.

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As this article has endeavored to show, parallels between the belief structures of Sabbatean Frankism and some currents of modern esotericism exist independent of forensic evidence. Concrete historical connections might indeed exist, but it is important to recognize these doctrinal similarities to better understand the factors that led to such a convergence. One way this manifested was through the phenomenon of constructed tradition, which is so prevalent in the history of esotericism, where "concepts of origin and memory as well as techniques and practices of knowledge transmission are central."[128] The continuity from the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" to the Asiatic Brethren to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whether real or wholly imaginary, exerts a specific influence in the contemporary esoteric milieu; what is more, the construction of tradition is not arbitrary but points to possible connections that evade the normative methods of the academy. Certainly, a form of Christianized Kabbalah with roots in the European Renaissance was incorporated into Freemasonry and modern occultism, but the extent to which "Sabbatean Frankist" Kabbalism — what Scholem called "heretical Kabbalah" — also shaped "Hermetic Qabalah" remains an open question.

What is so intriguing about the associations presented in this article is that they suggest a connection between the legacy of the Asiatic Brethren and modern occultism that is still relevant today, with Sabbatean Frankism at the center. Jacob Frank has seen something of a popular resurgence of late, from acclaimed novels to conspiracy theories.[129] In recovering these difficult figures in the history of Judaism, Scholem scratched the surface of an understudied current of esotericism and its relationship to modernity. Scholars of esotericism are well-equipped to explore this relationship, and the present article represents one step in addressing this lacuna.

128. Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*, ix.

129. Nobel Prize winning author Wydawnictwo Literackie wrote an epic historical novel based on Frank in 2014, while political commentators and occasional conspiracy theorists such as Candace Owens and Jiang Xueqin have implicated Frankism in an ongoing evil ideology held by the elite.

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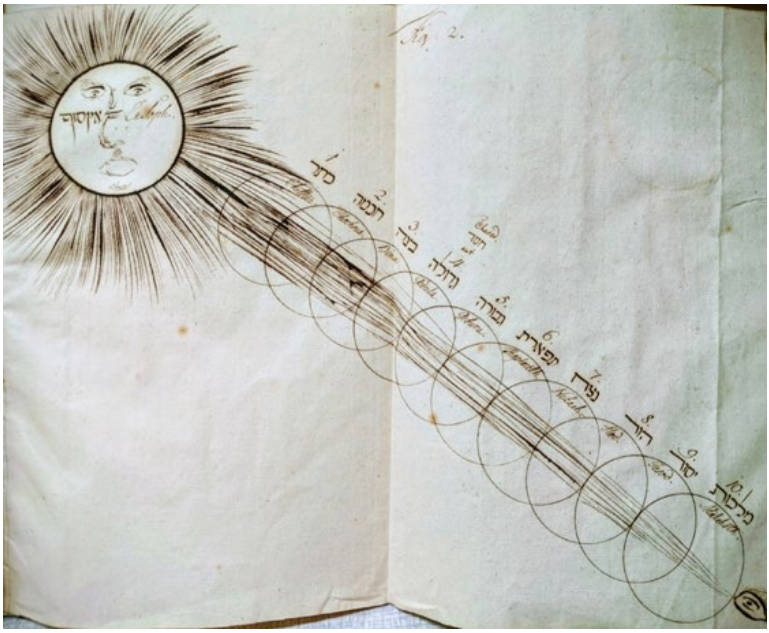

Figure 1. Figure from the first higher degree of the Asiatic Brethren, "The Introduction to the Principles of the Kabbalistic Work through the Sephiroth," which shows the path of ascent from the fallen realm to the realm of light. Author photo, FXXV vol. 8, a 96–112 (Copenhagen), permission granted by the Danish Order of Freemasons.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the generous support of the DFG, German Research Foundation, P.I. Prof. Dr. Agata Paluch, Project Number (401023278): "Patterns of Knowledge Circulation: The Transmission and Reception of Jewish Esotericism in Manuscripts and Print in Early Modern East-Central Europe." I am also indebted to the helpful archivists in Berlin, The Hague, and Copenhagen, and a special thank you to the Grand Archivist of the Danish Order of Freemasons for permission to publish the image.

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