

The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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Dear Friends:

In literature of Esoteric Buddhism mention is made of an illusive group of manuscripts generally called "The Scrolls of Sonoyosho". A number of versions of these mysterious books are known to exist, but most of them are hidden away in libraries and archives of temples of Esoteric Buddhism. It is generally assumed that the earliest examples in Japan belonged to the Kamakuri Period and were prepared in the late 12th or early 13th Century.

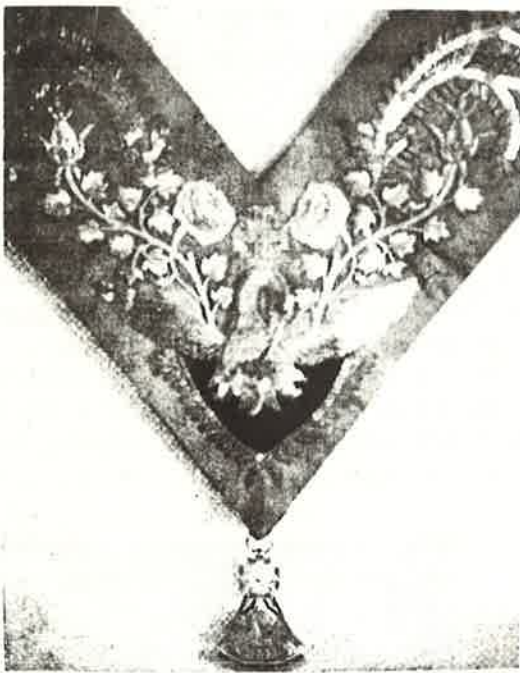
Through a very resourceful friend in Japan, I sought to assemble the set of ten scrolls. It is to be understood that these scrolls are actually books, written on long strips of paper attached together, and illustrated with numerous remarkable figures and diagrams. The search was not especially fruitful until a small group of such manuscripts appeared on the market under most obscure circumstances. It is reported that the Toji Temple in Kyoto, one of the principal sanctuaries of the Esoteric Sects, disposed some of its treasures to raise funds for practical and immediate needs. As a result, at least one set of the ten scrolls suddenly became available, but was quickly scattered among dealers and collectors. About two years ago I managed to assemble nine of these illusive manuscripts, and last fall my Japanese friend discovered the tenth one, so the set is now complete. My version was transcribed about the middle of the 17th Century from the older Kamakura scrolls, of which I have photostatic copies. The photostats are not really sufficient, however, because the coloring is extremely significant.

The symbolism set forth in the Sonoyosho Scrolls is based upon two Mandaras of meditation paintings, which were brought from China by Kobo Daishi in the early 9th Century. The text is usually carefully written by a priest, but the illustrations are prepared by trained artists and are therefore most charming. The ten scrolls give pictures and descriptions in Chinese of all the principal icons of Esoteric Buddhism. This includes the several metaphysical Buddhas and Bodhisattvas - the deities brought over from Hinduism - and many that are obviously derived from the Lamaism of Tibet.



In descriptions and pictorial representations, the better copies include the Sanskrit spell-letters or monograms, important in the ritualistic procedures - especially mantrams and invocations. The scrolls average from 20 to 30 feet in length and contain from ten to fifteen illustrations each. Nearly all books attempting to list the Buddhist images depend upon these scrolls, or copies thereof, as a source work. This includes the Butsuzo Zue, the traditional - if uncanonical - listing, dear to the hearts of most Buddhists. The illustrations are nearly all based upon old commentaries or the numerous scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. Actually, many of the mandaras are simply pictorial representations of the sacred books. The Esoteric Buddhists are transcendentalists and actually practice the esoteric arts and sciences, which have descended to them from China and more remotely from India.

The Mandara pictures provide a key to the arrangement of symbolical objects on the flat surface of an altar. Recently I received a collection of sketches made about 175 years ago by a Buddhist priest. Among these is a most interesting one showing an altar arranged according to the mandara rules, before which kneels a priest who is invoking a spiritual being. It looks as though the spirit is that of a Shinto Kami or nature deity. The information found in the Sonoyosho Scrolls includes the rites for causing rain or the protection of the nation from plagues, droughts and other natural disasters. The subject is a very fascinating one and many of the rituals are still in use. The Shingon Masters are as successful in causing rain as the Pueblo Indians in the American Southwest. The means employed are subject to many debates and disputes, but the ends attained are undeniable.



Among recent gifts to the Library is a very handsome Masonic Collar, probably one of European origin. It was purchased in Italy many years ago by the friend who donated it to our collection. European Masonry has always been inclined to rather ornate regalia, and several famous collars and aprons were embroidered by members of Ladies Masonic Auxiliaries. A famous example is the apron especially designed for George Washington by Madame Lafayette and presented to the General in 1784. It was also customary at that time for all the members of a Lodge, or belonging to one of the Scottish Rite Degrees, to have their own personal regalia. This has been largely discontinued in American Lodges.

The collar represented here bears the symbolism of the Rose Croix, the 18^o of the Scottish Rite. The background is a red grosgrain silk ribbon, and the collar is lined in black. Ornamentations are worked in gold braid and gold thread couched onto the silk, and the design is further heightened with small gold sequins. The principal theme is a mother pelican,

who has wounded her own breast with her beak, in order to provide food for her three young birdlings. The number of the small birds differs in various representations of the theme. In this case three are shown, but in the pendant suspended from the collar, five small birdlings are depicted. Rising in the background and twining up the sides of the collar are roses and sprigs of acacia. The pendant frames the pelican with the points of a partly opened compass.

The pelican is often replaced by a bird of uncertain species and it is now believed that a phoenix was intended. The Rose Croix symbol with the exception of the open compasses, is found on many Christian religious monuments and may occur on the vestments of the Clergy. There are several interpretations of the symbol. The bird nourishing its young with its own blood suggests the Messianic mystery, and the saving blood of Christ. The bird is also a sun symbol. The rays of the sun are its life blood, by which it protects and restores all living creatures upon the earth. When three small birds are so nourished, the salvation of the three worlds is implied, and also the redemption of the three parts of man - spirit, soul and body. The five birds can represent the five elements through which universal energy is distributed throughout the mundane creation. The five senses of man which must be redeemed by a divine grace are certainly associated with the design. Occasionally seven birdlings are shown. They represent planets which derive their life from the Eucharistic Mystery of the solar light. They are also the seven base elements of alchemy, which are transmuted in the preparation of the philosopher's stone and the universal medicine. In Hermetic philosophy the pelican is the name given to a curiously shaped glass vessel used in the distillation of the Hermetic elixir. How the symbolism passed into Freemasonry is somewhat obscure, but probably occurred in French or German Lodges.

The Rose Croix Degree suggests the Rosicrucians, the Mystic Chemists of the 17th Century. Their rose was the rose of Sharon, referred to in the Bible, and the design favored by the early Fraternity was at least partly inspired by the crest of Martin Luther. This is a splendid example of the elaborate insignia of the 18th and early 19th Century, and will be added to our collection of Masonic and Rosicrucian antiques.

During the month of May we had the privilege of presenting at Headquarters the widely acclaimed films of Mr. Lew Ayres. The series entitled "Altars of the East" is a sympathetic presentation of the religions of Asia, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Moslemism and Judaism. The series is divided into five sections, and in full-color motion pictures with sound track. As a special gesture of friendship, Mr. Ayres appeared personally with each of his films. It was a splendid opportunity for many persons to witness unusual religious rites and ceremonies, listen to the sacred music of many Nations, and visit the sanctuaries of Oriental Faiths. We feel that these films make a real contribution to East-West understanding, and we deeply appreciate Mr. Ayres generous assistance, which contributed so much to the success of the event.

We hope to have some very special news for you in our next letter, and in the meantime we invite those living in the Los Angeles area to take advantage of our activities, attend the Exhibits in our Library, make use of our reading facilities and watch our daily progress, which they have done so much to make possible. With your continued assistance, we can serve the spiritual needs of the community ever more effectively.

Always most sincerely,


Manly P. Hall

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FROM OUR BOOK DEPARTMENT

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