Anna Korndorf[1]

Hermit vs Hermetism.[2] Hermits and the Hermetic Tradition in European Art of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

> *Hannah*: The hermitage of Sidley Park… was placed in the landscape exactly as one might place a pottery gnome. And there he lived out is life as a garden ornament.
> *Bernard*: Did he do anything?
> *Bernard*: Oh, he was very busy. When he died, the cottage was stacked solid with paper. Hundreds of pages. Thousands. Peacock says he was suspected of genius. It turned out, of course, he was off his head. He'd covered every sheet with cabalistic proofs that the world was coming to an end. It's perfect, isn't it? A perfect symbol, I mean.
>
> Tom Stoppard, Arcadia

Tradition has it that the origins of the widespread fashion for park hermitages in the second quarter of the eighteenth century lay above all in the cult of English landscape gardening and the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But the discovery of a whole series of earlier structures described as "hermitages" and the unquestionable commonality of their artistic programmes forces us to doubt the validity of this accepted view. They indicate the existence of another, perhaps less obvious, trend underlying how public interest in the phenomenon was shaped, and it is this trend that we will seek to discover.

  First, however, it must be recalled that the concept of a "retreat" which would allow the owner to withdraw (alone or with a narrow circle of friends) without utterly rejecting the pleasures of ordinary life, in order to devote themselves to philosophical meditations, learned or creative occupations,

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[1] The text is translated by Catherine Phillips.

[2] The preferred term, used in this book, is Hermeticism, but the alternative form given in this title only is also used and here specifically emphasises the link with the word "hermit".

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to "escape" the bustle of the city and become as one with nature, had existed long before the appearance of the first park hermitages. Roman villas, Renaissance villas and Baroque country estates were all essentially the embodiment of such ideas of retreat. At the same time, domestic churches and chapels in houses and parks had long provided sufficient space for solitary prayer and the satisfaction of personal religious needs. Hermitages seem to have emerged at the juncture of these interests, growing to become one of the most fashionable garden features of the Age of Enlightenment.

Their original function, I might dare suggest, had little to do with – or at least was not exclusively limited to – the ascetic religious experience of genuine Christian anchorites, or with the secular tradition of intellectual and aesthetic escapism. It is not that simple, however, to determine precisely what that function was. For eighteenth-century hermitages had little in common in either appearance or purpose. Some stood empty, awaiting the moment when their gentle-born owners or their guests would be overcome with melancholy and the desire for contemplative seclusion. Others sheltered hired hermits and monks who were always prepared to come out and show themselves to viewers, turning isolated existence into a performance of everyday austerity.[1] Yet another group contained wax, mechanical or sculptural figures of hermits that amazed viewers with all kinds of unexpected effects.

Perhaps the only thing that united all these natural and artificial caves, thatched huts or log cabins, temple-pavilions and even cosy little palaces, was the implicit figure of the hermit, whether he was the owner engaging in role-play, a real monk or a thematic sculptural composition.

In the hope of understanding the reasons why hermitages appeared in European parks and gardens, apparently as if from nowhere, this seems the place for a small digression from the subject of park architecture in order to take a closer look at the notional but obligatory inhabitant of these retreats.

"Rejected knowledge" and the Cult of Hermits

It might seem at first sight that the figure of the hermit in seventeenth-century art barely differed from examples in early Christian iconography. The range of hagiographical subjects from the life of hermit saints seen in the Early

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[1] This practice of hiring hermits was common in Protestant lands in the eighteenth century, particularly in Britain and the German principalities. "Decorative" hermits had to live in the hermitage and observe all the rules of the game: to wear rags, sleep on a bed of hay, remain celibate, eat a lean diet, engage in daily readings of sacred and philosophical texts and preach sermons to the owner's guests. Such employment was in general unusually well paid for the time and it was not particularly difficult to find those willing to assume the role of "hermit". In England, for instance, advertisements for the post of garden hermit appeared in newspapers from the 1730s to 1770s. But the practice all too often resulted in disillusionment on the part of both the hermitage's owner and its inhabitant and there are a notable number of recorded cases of the "hermit" being sacked for drunkenness and immoral behaviour.

Christian and medieval periods remained unchanged. In parallel, one consequence of the Reformation was an almost total disappearance of religious asceticism and cenobitic monasticism in Protestant lands,[1] while the Catholic response and religious wars in turn led to papal disapproval of hermitic practice outside the recognised monastic orders.

And yet… in place of the reduction in interest in hermitic retreat that one might have expected, we see its relevance growing over the course of the century, spreading to cover wide swathes of Europe: Florence and Naples, Britain, the German principalities, Bohemia and the neighbouring territories and the Scandinavian kingdoms.

Contacts between the different European centres of intellectual thought were extremely close in the early seventeenth century. There has been detailed study of the unceasing Italo-Anglo-German cross-influences of the ideas of Giordano Bruno, John Dee, Tommaso Campanella, Johannes Andreae, Robert Fludd, Michael Maier and their contemporaries and followers,[2] and there is no need to describe them again. Of far greater interest here is the heritage of Hermetic (in the broadest sense) philosophy in the middle of the century, when the polemical heat of Casaubon's critique of the *Hermetica* was cooling, when the mighty waves of witch

[1] Unlike Catholicism, in theory the Protestant faith does not allow for monks or clergy who see themselves as endowed with particular grace that enables them to mediate between God and believers. The few small Lutheran and Anglican monastic communities place greatest stress not on isolation but on selfless public works.

[2] Starting with the classic works by Eugenio Garin (Ermetismo del rinascimento, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1988) and Frances A. Yates (Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, London: Routledge, 1964; The Rosicrucian Enlightenment, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972; The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age, London–Boston: RKP, 1979), then in extensive studies by their followers and critics: Brian Vickers, Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984; Margaret J. Osler, Paul Lawrence Farber, eds, Religion Science and Worldview: Essays in Honor of Richard S. Westfall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Donald R. Dickson, The Tessera of Antilia: Utopian Brotherhoods & Secret Societies in the Early Seventeenth Century, Leiden: Brill, 1998; Antoine Faivre, Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000; Lisa Jardine, Jerry Brotton, Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East And West, London: Reaktion, 2000; Roelof van den Broek, Cis van Heertum, eds, From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition, Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2000; Hartmut Lehmann, Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds, Antike Weisheit und kulturelle Praxis: Hermetismus in der Frühen Neuzeit, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001; Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al, Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006; Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, ed., Aufklärung und Esoterik: Rezeption – Integration – Konfrontation (Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäischen Aufklärung, Band 37) Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008; Christopher McIntosh, The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment, Leiden–New York: Brill, 2012. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed, New York: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2013; etc.

hunts that marked the first decades of the seventeenth century abated and the long-awaited political and religious calm arrived in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia.[1]

It was hardly coincidence that the first wave of widespread interest in the subject of hermits and asceticism came at the time when the esoteric tradition finally lost its dominant position in European thinking. Weakened by the re-dating of the Hermetic texts, the collapse of any hope of a Protestant Union of German states and the emergence of followers of "rational learning', who were obstinate in their battle against the magical and animist aspects of Renaissance philosophy, it fell irrevocably from the heights it had occupied in the writings of the contemporaries of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

Those repressive measures of which the Holy Inquisition was still capable could annoy, but could no longer crush. Even the trial of Galileo in 1633 was relatively lenient, allowing him to keep his post as court mathematician and philosopher in Florence. Now the war was not between thought and dogma but between different scholarly methods, and the doctrine of Western esotericism was clearly being forced to cede territory. A view of the world that had once seemed largely to determine the direction of intellectual thought became the concern of secret societies and narrow circles. If there were a large number of various Christian sects and brotherhoods across Europe who continued with some form of the Renaissance Hermetic-cabalistic and alchemical tradition, closely bound up with religious ideas, by the end of the century, for all their influential status and mystic charm they too had gradually dropped away from the main path, a path which now led on to a new approach, to Cartesian mechanistic philosophy and non-magical means of dealing with natural forces.

Squeezed out by the new dominant trends, Renaissance Hermeticism (Hermetism) found itself "in the territory of occultism", dissipated amidst all kinds of alchemical and Christian mystical ideas.[2] The figure of the Renaissance magus blended with the image of the alchemist, the Rosicrucian and the hermit philosopher, giving themselves up to meditation and to learned occupations in secret seclusion and voluntary exile.

Passing over those impulses that sent the Hermetic tradition underground, into the world of esoteric societies, we shall concentrate on how that steady process was reflected in something like a cult of hermits in contemporary "learned" art.

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[1] When the Thirty Years" War came to an end it turned out that the endless wars over the previous century, first between sects and then between states, had wrought few changes in the religious map of Europe. The Church in Rome preserved its extensive territories which had seemed to have been lost in the middle of the previous century, and the only part of Europe to be Protestant was that which had been such in the lifetime of Luther himself.

[2] "sul terreno dell'occultismo." Eugenio Garin, La cultura filosófica del Rinascimento italiano. Ricerche e documenti, Florence: Sansoni, 1961: 144.

Saints, Magi, Natural Philosophers

By the second third of the seventeenth century a number of locally revered saints had joined the traditional list of renowned Christian anchorites, after which the image of the anonymous hermit became an established figure in both art and literature. There had, of course, already been chivalric romances filled with countless un-named hermits who met the heroes on their travels, giving them shelter and offering wisdom at moments of spiritual crisis, inspiring them in their campaigns against unbelievers, healing their wounds, giving advice, teaching them the knightly code of honour or foretelling the glory awaiting them and their descendants. And the image of the anonymous hermit was well known in traditional Christian iconography. According to the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine, for instance, as he carried the Infant Cross on his shoulders through a rushing stream St Christopher was always accompanied by an unknown hermit holding a lamp to light his path. Not surprisingly, therefore, no one saw anything unusual in the dozens of anonymous hermits who featured in the canvases of Jusepe de Ribera, Salvator Rosa, Alessandro Magnasco, Francisco de Zurburán and others in the second half of the seventeenth century. All the more telling, therefore, is the increasing similarity between images of Christian hermit saints and Ancient philosophers, such as St Jerome and Pythagoras in the works of Ribera, or *The Hermit* and *Democritus Meditating*, or an even

Matteo Pérez de Alesio. Saint Christopher. 1584 Cathedral of Seville
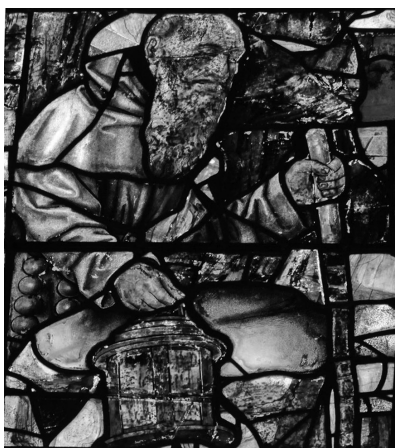
Peter Paul Rubens Saint Christopher 1612. Alte Pinakothek, Munic

Fragment of stained glass with St. Christopher The Hermit with the Lantern and Stick. Circa 1550. Angers Cathedral

**Jusepe de Ribera
Democritus.** 1630
Oil on canvas. Prado
Museum, Madrid
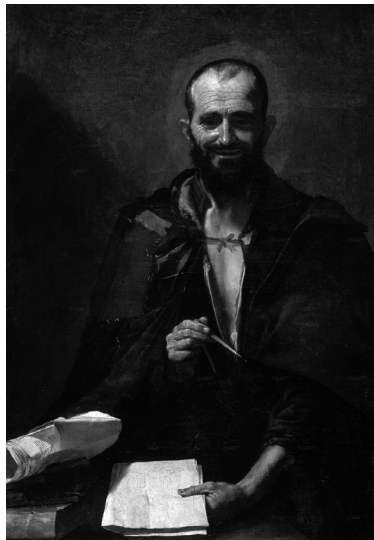
**Jusepe de Ribera
Pythagoras.** Circa 1630
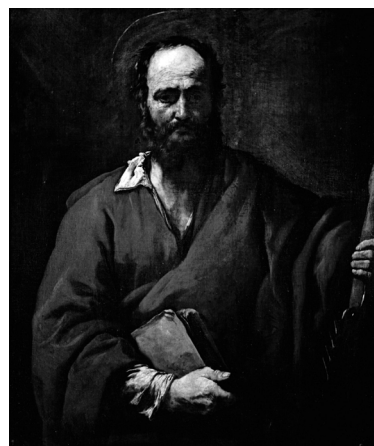Oil on canvas. Museum
of Fine Arts of Valencia
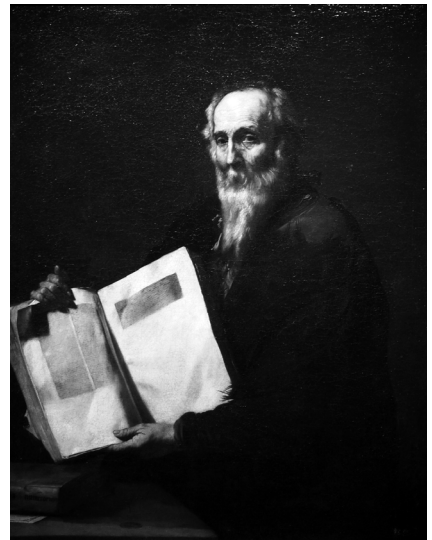
more mysterious character engaged in some unidentified magical proce-
dure in the work of Rosa. This last image is particularly notable: known by
an old title given it by a former owner, *The Witch*, it is traditionally linked
with a cycle of works dealing with Sabbath scenes and devil-worship. In
recent times, however, scholars have been less accepting of this histori-
cal assessment of the content, hypothesising that the picture may instead
show a follower of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition, a hermit natural
philosopher, magus and cabbalist.[1]

Indeed, the study of the intellectual context in which these works were
created gives many reasons for such increasing identification/similarity.

[1] Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, "Una strega", in: Salvator Rosa.Tra mito e magia, exh. cat., Museo
di Capodimonte, Naples, 2008: 178

**Jusepe de Ribera
St. Simon.** 1630
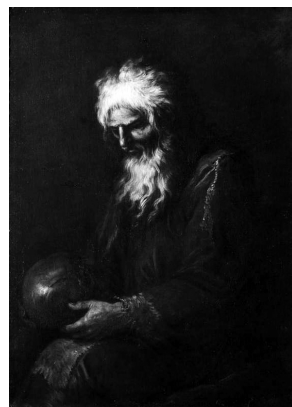Oil on canvas. Prado
Museum, Madrid

**Jusepe de Ribera
Saint Jerome.** 1630
Oil on canvas
National Museum
of Capodimonte,
Naples
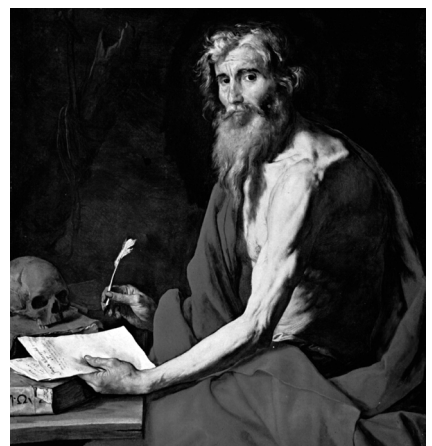
In the first half of the seventeenth century Naples, where Ribera was working, was still a centre of the old Renaissance culture, while the artist himself, who worked on numerous commissions for the Viceroy, was closely associated with Nicola Antonio Stigliola, a philosopher, geographer and physician and an ardent supporter of the ideas of Copernicus and of Pythagorean cosmology, natural magic and Hermetic ideas. As a recent study has shown,[1] the artist was well aware of the latest trends in Neapolitan learning as represented by Giambattista della Porta, Tommaso Campanella and Ferrante Imperato and their writings, and even developed his own epistemological system based on ideas about the flawed nature of sensory and visual perception.

Salvator Rosa's unfading interest in philosophical questions and scientific studies also largely shaped his circle of friends. Those Florentine (and later – Roman) learned men with whom the artist, his friends and clients mixed provided a consistent guide, determining his intellectual preferences, from a youthful taste for the ideas of the Cynics and Stoics to a later admiration for the Pre-Socratics, natural philosophers and magicians "engaged in an intrepid quest for the secrets of nature".[2]

When he arrived in Florence as court artist to Cardinal Giancarlo de" Medici, Rosa came into contact with the latter's witty and frivolous literary academies, the "learned" programmes of court commissions and palace wall-paintings that were still very much tied up with the heritage of the previous century's Neo-Platonism. Giancarlo's uncle, Cardinal Carlo de" Medici, had been a passionate alchemist who enjoyed fame as a "magus"[3] and lived above his famous laboratory / study in the Casino di

Salvator Rosa
A Hermit Contemplating
a Skull. Circa 1640–1649
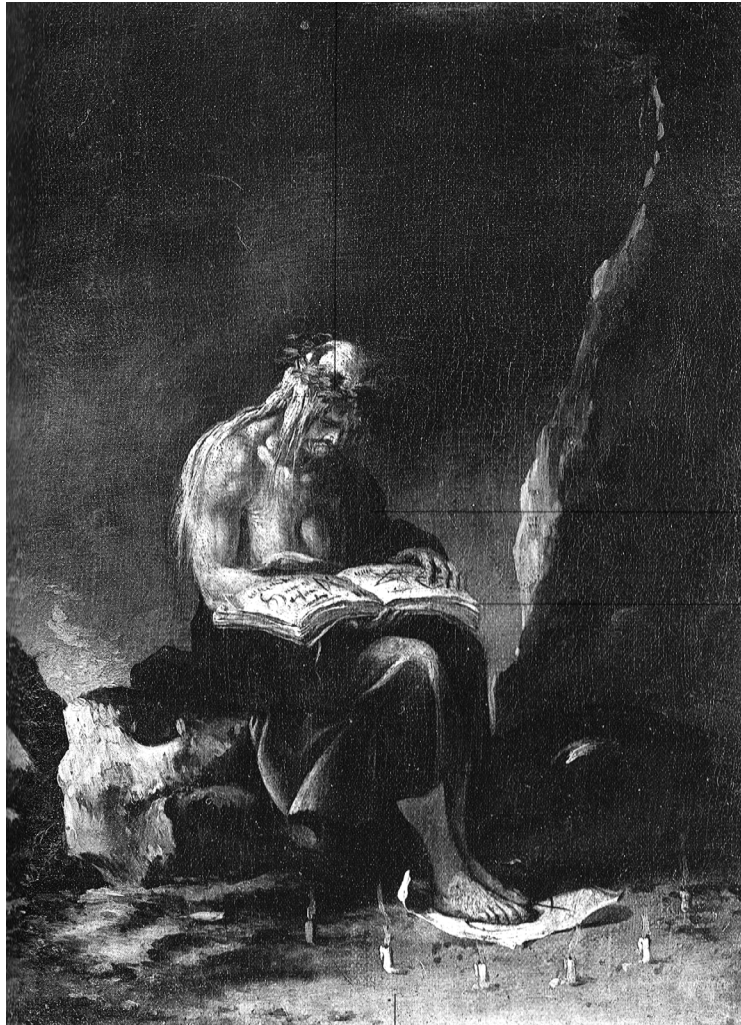Oil on canvas. Christ
Church Picture Gallery,
Oxford

Salvator Rosa
Democritus
in Meditation. 1662
Etching

[1] Itay Sapir, "Ribera and the Neapolitan Doubt", The Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting Program and Abstract Book, New York: Renaissance Society of America, 2014: 689.

[2] Helen Langdon, "The Representation of Philosophers in the Art of Salvator Rosa", *kunsttexte.de* 2, 2011: 12.

[3] Marco Chiarini. "La fucina dell'alchimista", in: Salvator Rosa. Tra mito e magia, Op. cit.: 256.

Salvator Rosa
A Witch. 1646
Oil on canvas
Capitoline Museums,
Rome

San Marco,[1] while his library made available to those in his circle the full corpus of the latest German alchemical and Rosicrucian publications. We know that the nephew – and perhaps all the Medici court artists responsible for developing complex allegorical programmes for festivities for the Duke and the cardinals – was acquainted at least with some of them.

Whatever the case, it becomes clear that the key virtues of the hermit life – isolation, concentration and contemplative peace – were in keeping with the new outlook and, enhanced by the idea of possessing secret

[1] On the Medici dukes" interest in alchemy and the laboratory at the Casino see: Marco Beretta, "Material and Temporal Powers at the Casino di San Marco (1574–1621)", in: Sven Dupré, ed., Laboratories of Art. Alchemy and Art Technology from Antiquity to the 18th Century, Cham: Springer, 2014: 150–156.

knowledge, helped make the old authorities of the Hermetic tradition into the heroes of a new cult. This was true above all of Agrippa, who spoke of the need for an isolated, calm life as part of the religious experience (his example being God's revelation to Moses in the wilderness) and of the solitary approach to contemplation of the comprehensible essence. And of Ramon Llull, whom Bruno called "the omniscient and almost divine hermit doctor".[1] Lastly, of Paracelsus, whose life of retreat – its fame largely his own creation – was tied up with the place of his birth, the small Swiss town of Einsiedeln (German *Einsiedelei* – hermitage or wilderness), which grew up around the retreat of St Meinrad to become a powerful Benedictine abbey.

At the same time, however, Cynics and Stoics – above all Diogenes of Sinope – entered the pantheon of hermits. Rosa found a rich source of iconographical subjects and motifs in the works of the Jesuit Daniello Bartoli and the moral philosopher Paganino Gaudenzi, who studied the life of Diogenes and his follower Crates of Thebes.[2] Their discussions were built around a central question: can a wise man and philosopher live in comfort at court while retaining his independence and engaging

Caesar van Everdingen
Diogenes Seeks
a True Man. 1652
Oil on canvas
Mauritshuis, The Hague

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[1] J. Lewis McIntyre, Giordano Bruno, New York: Macmillan, 1903: 54.

[2] Langdon, Op. cit.: 2.

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Carlo Dolci. Diogenes
Mid-17th century
Oil on canvas. Palatine
Gallery, Florence

in unbiased intellectual thought or must he, as the Cynics and Stoics insisted, develop wisdom in total ascetic isolation? And thus, can one see Diogenes and Crates" decisive gesture of rejecting all earthly benefits as an example of long lost heroism in a "Golden Age" or was it merely an eccentric but ultimately pointless ploy?

Under the influence of such conversations and writings – Bartoli even dedicated one of his publications to Rosa[1] – the artist produced a diptych[2] capturing the critical moment in the life of each philosopher. Diogenes tosses away his cup, the last superfluous object of possession, and gestures to summon his companions to follow the example of the youth drinking water directly from the stream. Having turned all his worldly goods into gold coins Crates – one of Diogenes" most important pupils and followers, a philosopher of Thebes who preached the virtue of poverty, self-sufficiency and solitary oneness with nature – stands on the shore throwing them into the sea, thereby ridding himself of possessions, power and success in one go, opening up his path towards virtue and freedom.

Not satisfied with the purely pictorial effect of his paintings, Rosa composed his own satirical dialogue in the style of Lucian, *Dialogue on Contempt*

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[1] This is the Florence edition of Bartoli's Uomo di Lettere, published in 1645 with a dedication to Salvator Rosa. We know that the treatise circulated widely in Europe and Queen Christina of Sweden (founder and head of a female secret society) ordered a copy for her library. See: Langdon, Op. cit.: 2.

[2] Crates throwing his Riches into the Sea (priv. coll., Broughton Hall, Skipton, Yorkshire) was commissioned from Rosa in 1640–1641 by Marchese Carlo Gerini and was conceived as a pair to The Forest of Philosophers (Palazzo Pitti, Florence).

Jacob Jordaens.
Diogenes Searching
for an Honest Man
1641–1642
Oil on canvas
Gemäldegalerie Alte
Meister, Dresden
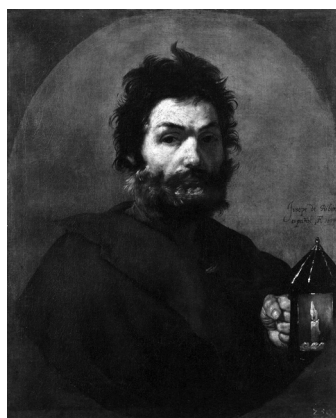
for Riches,[1] in which he defended Crates against the accusation of stupidity, citing many benefits of the simple life and independence from earthly wealth and fame.

  Even more popular in art of the 1740s was the image of Diogenes hiding away from the vanity of existence in a barrel or searching for a "true" (sometimes translated as "honest") man with a lamp. Over the course of just two decades, Rosa, Ribera and artists of the Neapolitan and Florentine schools – but also Bellotti, Poussin, Jordaens, Everdingen, the artists around Rubens and many other contemporaries – created a vast gallery of portraits of the philosopher holding a lamp in his hand.

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[1] According to Caterina Volpi, Rosa's Dialogo del disprezzo delle ricchezze, intended for declamation, is today in the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, Palazzo Venezia, Rome; Caterina Volpi, Salvator Rosa (1615–1673) "pittore famoso", Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editorie, 2014: 435. It was published in: Leandro Ozzola, Vita e opera di Salvator Rosa, pittore, incisore, con poesie e documenti inediti, Strasbourg: J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1908: 232.

Jusepe de Ribera Diogenes. 1630s Oil on canvas. Private collection, Europe
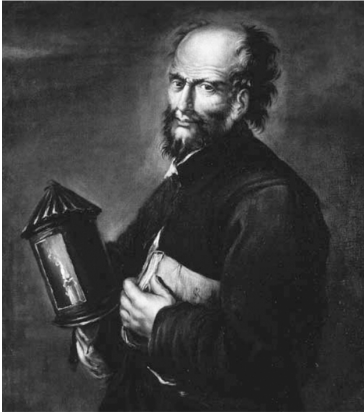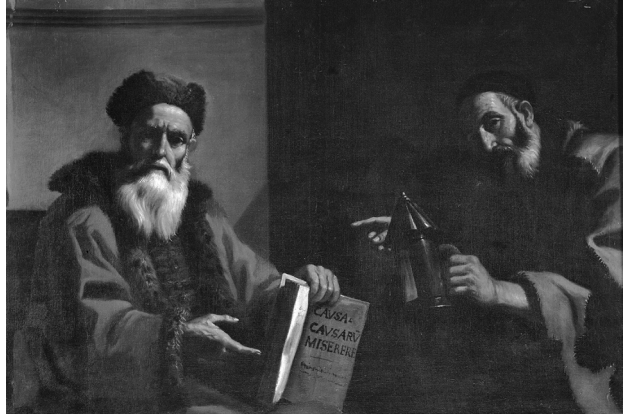
Pietro Bellotti Diogenes with the Lantern. Mid-17th century. Oil on canvas Private collection, Europe

Jusepe de Ribera Diogenes. 1637 Oil on canvas Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden

School of Peter Paul Rubens. Diogenes Seeking a True Man. 1740s. Oil on canvas. Städelsches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main

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Circle of Salvador Rosa. Diogenes
17th century
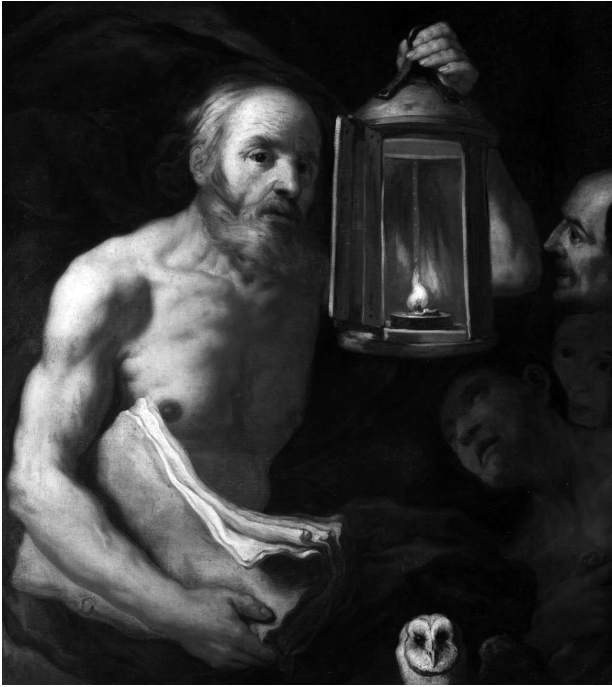Oil on canvas. Private collection, Europe

Mattia Preti. Diogenes and Plato. 1649
Oil on canvas
Capitoline Museums, Rome

That choice of Diogenes wandering with a lamp from among all the many striking incidents in which the philosopher's life was so rich, was surely no accident. For a start, it could readily be linked to the existing iconography of a hermit lighting the way for St Christopher. Secondly, it allowed for depiction of the Cynic of Sinope in the spirit of the esoteric tradition. Many depictions of Diogenes searching for a true man, lamp in hand, seem to be a quite literal paraphrase of one of the most famous emblems in Michael Maier's book *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). Print XLII shows the philosopher holding his lamp, carefully studying the traces left by Nature, the image accompanied by a philosophical commentary: as he follows the path of Nature "he that is employed in Chemistry shall have Nature, Reason, Experience and Reading as his Guide, Staff, Spectacles and Lamp".[1]

[1] This scene echoes the foreword to De specierum scrutinio by Giordano Bruno, written in 1588 when the philosopher visited Prague, with a dedication to Rudolf II. In the foreword Bruno turns to his favourite theme, calling on the reader to study "the prints made by Nature's feet", to avoid religious discord and instead to hark unto Nature, "which cries out everywhere – those with ears shall hear".

Emblem 42 from Atalanta Fugiens (Fleeing Atalanta) by Michael Maier. 1617
(Michael Maier. Atalanta Fugiens, hoc est, Emblemata Nova de Secretis Naturae Chymica, Accommodata partim oculis et intellectui, figuris cupro incisis, adjectisquesententiis, Epigrammatis et notis, partim auribus… 1617)

Antonio Zanchi
**Diogenes with
the Lantern and Owl**
Second half
of the 17th century
Oil on canvas. Private
collection, Europe
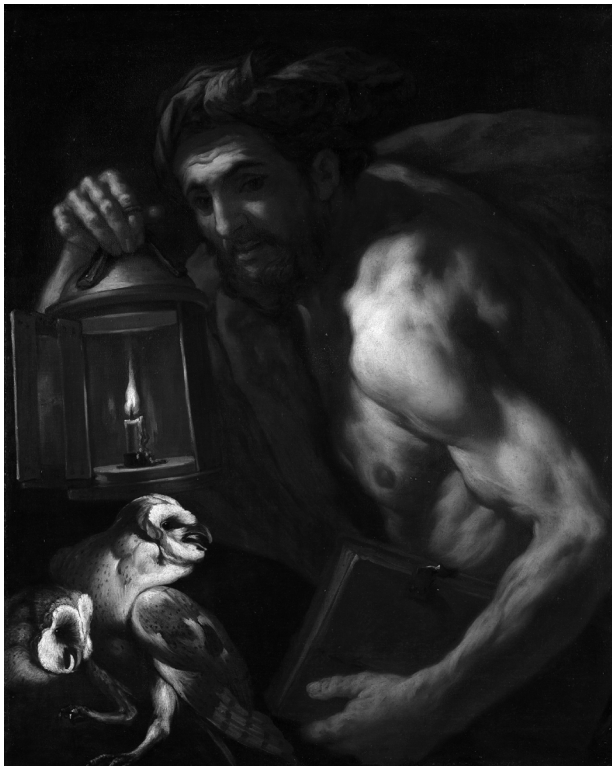
Johann Karl Loth
**Diogenes with
the Lantern.** 17th century
Oil on canvas. Minneapolis
Institute of Arts

Gerrit Bleker. Diogenes with the Lantern and Staff. 1637
Oil on canvas. Royal Łazienki Museum, Warsaw

If we look at depictions of Diogenes as continuing Maier's interpretation of the image of the philosopher, then paintings by Johann Carl Loth and Antonio Zanchi, who presented the myth at night, take on a new interest. Their Diogenes, surrounded by owls and clasping a book in his hands, has much more in common with the character wandering in the dark in *Atalanta Fugiens* than with the Ancient philosopher proclaiming on busy town squares his famous phrase "I am seeking a true Man" by the light of day.

Another curious moment in this context is the transformation of Aristotle into a hermit with a lamp in the fifth book of Rabelais" *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published after the author's death (in 1553) with additional chapters.[1] These later chapters, reworked in editions issued in the first third of the seventeenth century, include the tale of the Kingdom of Quintessence, where, according to most commentators, the anonymous author depicts "alchemists, astrologers and empiricists… mocking Aristotle's view of "Entelechy" and many other empty and transparent sciences."[2] Leaving Queen Whims, Pantagruel's squadron arrives in the Country of Tapestry, "land of false perceptions", where the first person our heroes meet is "Aristotle holding a lantern in the posture in which the hermit uses to be drawn near St Christopher".[3] The philosopher is occupied in close observation, "watching, prying, thinking, and setting everything down".

The "Hermit" of the Magic Cards

Another subject relevant to our subject here is no less worthy of note: the metamorphosis that takes place in the seventeenth century in the symbolism of the Ninth Card of the Major Arcana of the Tarot.

Setting aside disputes regarding the origins of the Tarot cards[4] and wheth-

[1] See further: Mirelle Huchon, "Rabelais grammairien. De l'histoire du texte aux problèmes d'authenticité", PhD dissertation, Université de Paris IV – Sorbonne; published as vol. XVI in the series Études Rabelaisiennes, Geneva, 1981.

[2] Anna Engelgard, in: Франсуа Рабле. Гаргантюа и панталгюэль. Первый русский перевод [François Rabelais. Gargantua and Pantagruel. The First Russian Translation], tr. and comments by Anna Engelgard, with illustrations by Gustave Doré, St Petersburg: Novyy zhurnal Inostrannoy literatury, 1901: 13.

[3] François Rabelais, Gargantua and his Son Pantagruel, Book 5, Chapter XXXI.

[4] Two of these versions seem to offer the most likely explanations. The first presupposes a common source for all Early Renaissance cards in triumphal parades inspired by Petrarch's poem Triumphs (I trionphi), and thus sees the principle determining the order of the emblematical personifications as each successive character's "triumph" over the previous one. The second hypothesis links the Tarot images with the Hermetic art of memory and the fifteenth-century fashion at the courts of Ferrara and Milan for cards bearing mythological and allegorical designs that were part of the game but were at the same time suffused with the deep Hermetic symbolism used in the magical art of memorisation.

er or not their original purpose lay in the magical art of memory or in occult rituals, we turn to the aspect most important to us, the iconography.

All the known Tarot cards of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – from those of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan onwards – depicted one of the most important images in the Major Arcana as an allegory of time, sometimes as Saturn / Cronos, sometimes as the Old Man / Hunchback (*El Gobbo*, *Il Vecchio*) holding an hourglass In the seventeenth century, however, this character increasingly and consistently takes on iconographical features associated with the hermit type described above. He walks a path with a staff and a lamp and, starting with the Paris Pack of the first half of the seventeenth century, we find a cartouche at the bottom with the caption *L'Ermite*. It was thus that the card was henceforth to be known.
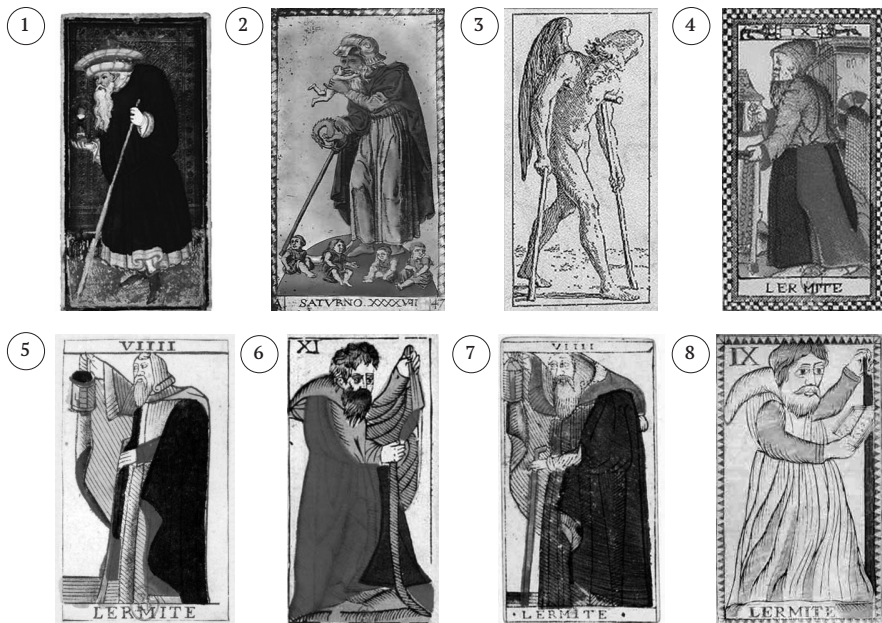
These examples seem to my mind to be sufficient to establish that by the eighteenth century a range of recognisable hermit attributes had become a commonplace in the iconography of the philosopher – whether Diogenes, John Dee or some philosophically-inclined British aristocrat.

It is interesting to compare the structure of Mantegna's cards with Camillo's "theory of memory" (described by Giuseppe Barbieri in "At the Theatre of Memory: Uncertainty as a Research Canon" in: Memory as the Subject and Instrument of Art Studies, Moscow: State Institute of Art History, 2016: 74–79), which reveals their incredible similarities. Both set out a symbolic perception of the Hermetic universe and serve as a magical instrument that can be used to run the world with the aid of the occult art of memorisation.

Petrarch himself may have had the idea of using triumphal parades as a technique for memorisation, with later artists simply taking it up in the early Tarot cards. See further: Kenneth Clark, "The Angelo Parrasio Hypothesis", The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs LXII/360, March 1933: 142–143.

Tarot cards:

1) Time. The Visconti-Sforza tarot deck. Circa 1440

2) Saturno. Tarocchi Cards of Mantegna. Circa 1480

3) The Old Man. Giuseppe Mitelli's Tarocchino Bolognese. Bologna. 1665

4) The Hermit. The Tarot de Paris deck. Early 17th century

5) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jean Noblet. Circa 1650

6) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jacques Vieville. 1650

7) The Hermit. The Tarot of Jean Dodal. 1701

8) The Hermit. Tarot cards of Nicolas Bodet. Early 18th century

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The Philosopher's Study

Inevitably, the cult of the hermit as bearer of the Hermetic tradition and the revival by seventeenth-century secret societies of the myth of the Pythagoreans as a close brotherhood guided by principles of discipleship and initiation, were followed by a wave of built hermitages, which could then be used to realise these practices. Initially, this realisation was intellectual. In the letters of Elias Ashmole, for instance, the celebrated English alchemist, supporter of the Rosicrucian brotherhood and Freemason, we find a reference in 1648 that he had at last found a "pleasant Hermitage"[1] on the estate of his fiancée Mary, Lady Mainwaring at Bradfield, where he could give himself up to his favourite occupation, natural magic. In that same decade, the poet in John Milton's poem *Il Penseroso* dreamed "And may at last my weary age / Find out the peaceful hermitage"[2]

> "The spirit of Plato, to unfold
> What worlds, or what vast regions hold
> The immortal mind that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshly nook:
> And of those demons that are found
> In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
> Whose power hath a true consent
> With planet, or with element."

It is noteworthy that two sources provided the models for the first hermitage structures: the caves of ancient anchorites, which remained a place of pilgrimage, and numerous prints showing the hideaways of alchemists and the Hermetic garden conceits of the Renaissance.

Modern scholars have traditionally seen Ashmole's "pleasant Hermitage" exclusively as a literary metaphor for the learned man's retreat.[3] In fact, behind that poetic phrase lies a very specific toponymic truth. Just five miles from Bradfield, where the English natural philosopher and naturalist found refuge, was a village called Hermitage,[4] which surely served as Ashmole's inspiration.

But the first hermitage to be erected in the seventeenth century specially for the owner to pursue learned pursuits was the Italian garden of the renowned

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[1] Tobias Churton, The Magus of Freemasonry: The Mysterious Life of Elias Ashmole–Scientist, Alchemist, and Founder of the Royal Society, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006, Chapter 6: 147.

[2] We might point out that Russian translations of Milton's poem do not use the Russian word "ermitazh" but a more literal translation, "skete" or "monastery".

[3] Churton, Op. cit.: 147.

[4] First mention of the village of Hermitage dates from 1641, when the extensive lands of the county of Berkshire included "some land at the Heath, Hermitage". There is no agreement as to the origins of the village's name but local legends all link it to a medieval hermit who enjoyed a reputation as a healer and magician.

Hungarian philosopher, alchemist and public figure György Lippay, Archbishop of Esztergom. Created in the 1650s, the garden itself was rebuilt a century later in the English landscape fashion and no longer survives. But five detailed images engraved by Mauritz Lang in 1663, and a description of all the garden buildings published immediately work was completed,[1] give us a good idea of the arrangement and function of the archbishop's so-called Ermitorium.

A surviving general plan of the archbishop's estate at Bratislava[2] makes clear that the prototype was the garden of the Villa Medici at Pratolino, which Lippay had visited during a stay in Tuscany. Like Francesco I, Grand Duke of Tuscany and owner of the villa at Pratolino, the Archbishop of Esztergom was a great admirer of alchemy and was proud of his collection of natural "rarities" and strange plants. He liked to spend time alone in his gardens and grottoes. After all, did Lippay not write three treatises in Hungarian on gardening in addition to his most famous *opus magnum*, an extensive text on applied and philosophical alchemy entitled *Mons Magnesiae Ex Quo Obscurum sed Verum Subjectum Philosophorum effonditur et Expresse denominatur*?[3] And behind all his works lay a single alchemical principle: the most important thing in transmutation is substance, "which contains the Four Elements: earth, water, air

The Kabbalistic Alchemist. Engraving from Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae
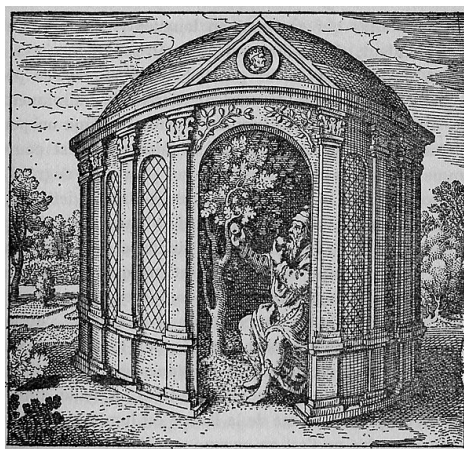
The Alchemist in a Cave Engraving from Speculum Sophicum Rhodostauroticum (The Mirror of the Wisdom of the Rosy Cross») by Theophilus Schweighardt. 1618

Emblem 9 Atalanta Fugiens (Fleeing Atalanta) by Michael Maier. 1617

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[1] Johann Jakob (Joachim) Müller (1658), cited in: Gergely Hajdu Nagy, Rusztikus Épípmények a Magyar Kertművészetben. Romok, Grották, Remeteségek, Budapest: Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, 2011: 142.

[2] Mauritz Lang, The Archbishop's Palace at Esztergom. Line engraving. 1663.
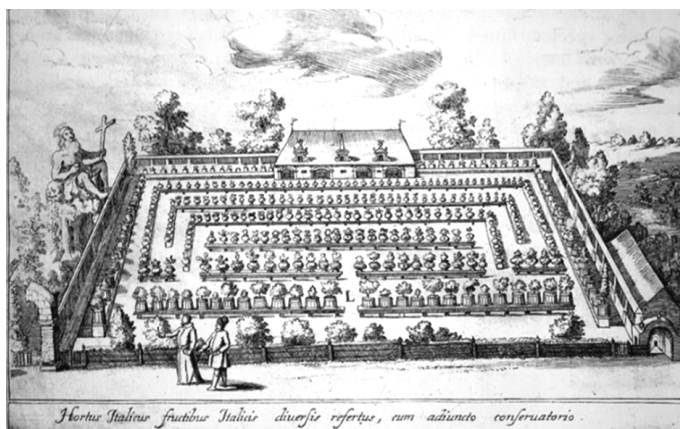
[3] Hajdu Nagy, Op. cit.: 142–144.

and fire; three elements: salt, sulphur and mercury, the male and female united as one… and, lastly, material of the sun."[1]

Following this principle of consistent "transmutation of the original chaos of primal material", the archbishop's park differed from its Tuscan prototype in having an overtly regular plan, subordinated to a considered system of special effects. The dominant motifs in this natural "theatre" were artificial hills, grottoes, nymphaea, aviaries and water features, everything needed to symbolise the nature of the Four Elements.

One such symbolic garden *Kunststück* was to be the Ermitorium or Italian Garden, which appears in the lower left corner of the plan. Here, following the Tuscan duke's example, Lippay erected a colossal sculpture. But in place of Giambologna's "chthonic" figure of Appennino, the archbishop preferred to set a gigantic statue of St Jerome as a hermit seated on a rock holding the crucifix. Ranged around him were artificial caves, moss-covered grottoes, and four smaller statues of hermits: St Anthony, St Paul, St Albert and St Andrew Zorad, as well as a figure of Emperor Leopold I as Solomon in prayer, with a skull beside his golden crown. Notably, it was to Leopold, with his passionate interest in the alchemical transmutation of base metals into gold, that Lippay dedicated his alchemical treatise.

In their variety and meaningful iconography, the sculptural compositions in the grottoes were intended to glorify the virtue of mystical Christian retreat, part of the natural flowing of life, predetermined by divine will and manifested through the arrangement of the planets. The garden iconography was dominated by mythological and allegorical motifs, personifications of the natural elements and cycles drawn from alchemical, astrological and magical concepts. According to a guide published in 1658, lighting effects meant that everyone who entered the dark vaults of the Ermitorium grotto saw the statues of saints "as if alive", "coming to life", and thus giving visual form to their creator's direct succession to the Hermetic tradition, above all to that part

Mauritz Lang
Hortus Italicus
("Italian Garden")
in the palace
of the Archbishop
of Esztergom. 1663
Engraving

Hortus Italicus fructibus Italiæ diversis refertus, cum adiuncto conservatorio.

[1] Hajdu Nagy, Op. cit.: 142–144.
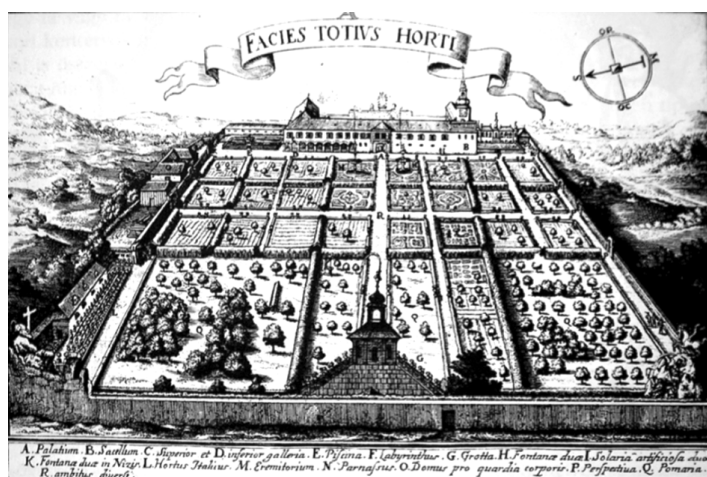
of it linked with – using Campanella's classification – "magia artificiale reale" or true artificial magic.[1] Meanwhile the grotto structures of the Italian garden referred back to the "Saturnine" temperament, so important to Mannerism and the Baroque, which characterises the genius made wise by learning, experience and intuition. Tellingly, it was in the Ermitorium that Lippay had his own study, filled with the latest innovations in technical instrumentation, where he engaged not only in scientific research but also in esoteric ritual practices and in preparing a conspiracy against the emperor.[2]

The next two hermitages of which we know also emerged in the Holy Roman Empire, though only after Lippay's death. Their construction commenced 1695–1697 on the Bohemian estates of Count František Antonín Špork, newly returned home from the Netherlands. Špork was an honorary member of the secret Christian brotherhood known as the Amici crucis or Friends of the Cross, which was made up of White Mountain Czech émigrés.[3]

Mauritz Lang
**The palace
of the Archbishop
of Esztergom.** 1663
Engraving

[1] "La magia artificiale reale produce effetti reali. Cosi Architetta fabbrico una colomba volante da legno, e recentemente a Norimberga, secondo il Botero, furono fabbricate un'aquila e una mosca. Dedalo fabbrico statue che si muovevano per l'azione di pesi o del mercurio… L'arte non può produrre effetti stupefacenti, se non per mezzo di moti meccanici, pesi, e tranzioni, o impiegando il vuoto, come si fa negli apparecchi penumatici ed idraulici, o applicando le forze alle materie." Cited by: Frances Yates, "Magia e scienza nel rinascimento", in: Magia e scienza nella civiltà umanistica, ed. Cesare Vasoli, Bologna, 1976: 215–37.

[2] After the conclusion of the Peace of Warsaw in 1664 the Bishop of Esztergom, unhappy with the pro-Turkish policies of the ruling powers, joined Count Ferenc Wesselényi, Palatine of Hungary, in a conspiracy against the emperor. He died before the conspiracy was discovered.

[3] The consequences of the Battle of White Mountain and the fall of Frederick V of the Palatine (head of the Protestant Union and the Bohemian "Winter King", with whom the period of "Rosicrucian enlightenment" is associated) proved catastrophic for Czech culture. The battle laid the basis for the Thirty Years War and was the last element in the Bohemian Revolt, marking the start of the "Dark Age", as the period from 1620 to the 1770s became known. The Hapsburg

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A remarkable individual, Špork was a passionate gambler, a lover of the theatre and opera, member of a Christian secret brotherhood, Jansenist, philosopher, esoteric, philanthropist and freedom-loving grandee. His biography reveals him to be one of the most notable figures in Central European cultural and intellectual life at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historians often describe him as the founder of the lodge known as "The House of the Three Stars", although any connection with the Bohemian branch of the Freemasons is mere legend. Yet Špork's activities were extremely varied and largely quite genuinely aimed at spreading faith and enlightenment and giving aid to those in need. Living the life of a "Freemason without an apron", Špork did not restrict himself to the observation of strict spiritual vows, but zealously studied geomancy and nature's own streams of energy and took pleasure in compiling cryptograms and symbols. He signed his letters Fagus, an anagram composed of the first letters of the German form of his full name, Franz Anton Graf von Sporck, and also the name for the god of the beech, sacred tree of the Celts, of wise men and druids, symbol of wisdom.

Inheriting considerable wealth and estates on the death of his father, Špork decided first to build a single-storey Belvedere chapel at his Malešov estate on a hill in the village of Vysoká. According to František Grimm, construction came to end in 1697 and the following year the chapel was dedicated to John the Baptist.[1] The architect was almost certainly the Italian Giovanni Battista Alliprandi, then working on other commissions for Špork.[2] We cannot be entirely clear today as to the specific purpose of the building, which seemed to unite the apparently contradictory functions of pleasure pavilion, chapel, hermitage and venue for Baroque festivities. We know only that the Belvedere was originally intended for three aged Augustinian monks who came specially from the abbey in the neighbouring town of Lysá nad Labem.[3] An alley of lime trees linked the Belvedere to the count's palace at Roztěž, from where there was a superb view over Vysoká and its buildings: a Lusthaus or pleasure pavilion, a pheasant pavilion and the "hermitage of John the Baptist". In 1699 the count sold his estate but monks continued to occupy the Hermitage right into the middle of the eighteenth century. A print commissioned by Špork in 1715 shows the Belvedere on the hill.

religious repressions that followed and the mass wave of noble emigration they led to, in turn gave rise to a huge interest in mystic trends and the appearance of all kinds of prophets. While the radical wing of Czech White Mountain émigrés – the Unity of the Brethren – looked to the intellectual heritage of the last bishop of the community, John Amos Comenius, the more moderate part of the movement concentrated its interests on spreading the theosophy of Jakob Böhme, developing the idea of millennialism and creating secret Christian brotherhoods.

[1] František Grimm, Vysoká, vrch a zřícenina u Kutné Hory [Vysoká, a Hill and Ruins near Kutná Hora], Kutná Hora: Prague: Státni tiskárna, 1937 (Offprint from the Magazine of the Society of Friends of the Antiquities of Czechoslovakia): 2.

[2] Markéta Flekalová, Lenka Kulišťáková, "Landscape of Franz Anton von Sporck in Roztěž Surroundings", Acta Universitatis Agriculturae et Silviculturae Mendelianae Brunensis 62/3, 2014: 453.

[3] Ibid.
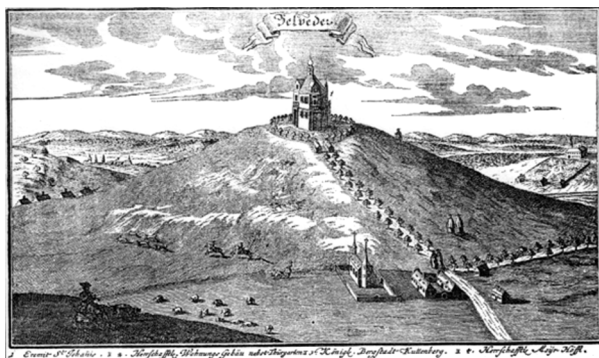
In parallel to the small hermitage at Vysoká the count developed a similar project on a far grander scale at his Kuks estate near Prague. The discovery of healing springs there prompted Špork to transform it into a spa, with his own castle on one bank of the Elba and a hospital for veteran soldiers on the other. Construction of both was completed in 1710, the dominant element of the hospital being the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity, designed by Alliprandi. Špork could then turn his thoughts to a symbolic programme that would determine the decorative elements in the park. From Matthias Braun he commissioned a cycle of religious compositions, including allegorical sculptures of twelve Virtues and twelve Vices, which were installed on the hospital terrace.

At the same time the count erected five small hermitages on the estate, dedicating each to a particular heavenly patron, the holy hermits Paul, Anthony, Francis, Giles and Bruno, and settling in each of them a real hermit, a member of his brotherhood, with whom he worked on his publishing programme. Depictions of these small retreats appear in Špork's biography, published in 1720,[1] so we know that they were modest wooden structures in the national style. With the aid of his "merciful brothers", over a number of years Špork illegally published Jansenist literature, as well as mystic and alchemical treatises banned by the papal censor. Michael Heinrich Rentz and Joseph de Montalegre, two of the best engravers in the kingdom, worked in his printshop and over ten years his little estate produced some 150 books on philosophical and religious subjects.[2]

Such activities did not endear the count to the Holy Inquisition. As a warning, in 1720 three of his hermits were accused of spreading heresy and summoned to an ecclesiastical court.[3] The others then at Kuks abandoned their patron. Špork, however, pretended not to take the hint. He replaced the living hermits with sculptural groups – with almost no damage done to the

Malešice. The Hermitage of Count Franz Anton von Sporck (František Antonin Špork). 1695–1697 Engraving from a 1715 description of the estate

[1] Gottwald Caesar Stillenau, Das Leben eines herrlichen Bildes, Amsterdam, 1720; cited in: Gordon Campbell, The Hermit in the Garden. From Imperial Rome to Ornamental Gnome, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013: 9–10.

[2] Christopher Thacker, The History of Gardens, Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985: 171–172.

[3] Campbell, Op. cit.: 9.

Figures of hermits in the Hermitage of Kuks. 1710s

overall symbolic concept – and continued working. This led to the creation of Bethlehem, Matthias Braun's most interesting work at Kuks, a cycle of reliefs and sculptural groups made of the local sandstone and painted with colour, which played out a Baroque "spectacle" from the life of hermits in the forest surrounding the estate.

The name Bethlehem in fact came into use only later, from the double relief in one cave showing the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi. Not far from Bethlehem were a sculptural group showing *St Hubert's Vision in the Forest*, a figure of Mary Magdalene, a gigantic statue of the anchorite the Venerable Onuphrius meditating with a skull in his hands, a depiction of John the Baptist in the wilderness and an expressive composition depicting *The Hermit Juan Garin leaves His Cave*. This "sculpture park" may well have been inspired by the series of prints by Jacques Callot dedicated to repentant sinners, hermits and anchorites and known under the broad title of *Penitents*. At any rate, the range of saints chosen by the count almost entirely coincides with the heroes of Callot's posthumously published prints,[1] the image of Juan Garin – a sinful hermit who was turned from the path of righteousness by

[1] Jacques Callot's late series Les pénitents et pénitentes consists of five figurative etchings engraved by Callot himself in 1632 plus a frontispiece by his pupil Abraham Bosse. Callot's prints show four Christian saints – Francis of Assisi, the infant John the Baptist, the repentant Mary Magdalene and St Jerome holding a skull – as well as Mary Magdalene on her deathbed. Scholars have often pointed out that the title is not entirely in keeping with the content and probably indicates that the series, published posthumously, was unfinished when Callot died. The most likely explanation is that the series was put together for publication by Callot's publisher Israël Henriet, responsible for printing Callot's works from 1630 onwards. In addition to images of sinners who repented and devoted themselves to God (e.g. Mary Magdalene and Francis of Assisi) the series could have been intended to include wholly righteous hermits and anchorites.

the temptations of the flesh – superbly complementing the series overall.

Having concluded the creation of a gallery of hermits lying in wait for those walking in his forest, Špork turned one of the now empty hermitages into his own "philosopher's house", where he stored the books he had published and "the most incredible objects, all kinds of works of art created by the most famous masters, amazing instruments and equipment, about which the most improbable rumours circulated."[1] Thus the purpose of the hermitage as a locus of mystical, Hermetic knowledge is brought to the fore. Yet Špork led a public life, often inviting imperial officials, court intellectuals, writers and musicians to Kuks, offering them noble pastimes such as hunting, theatrical productions performed by his own troupe, concerts and, lastly, "the art of the word, assembled in numerous books at guests" disposal, forcing them to meditate on important questions of human life".[2] In 1725 Špork even sent to Vienna to ask for approval for a proposal to organise a "way of the Cross" surrounded by sculptures of hermits, leading from the Jesuit residence in the neighbouring town of Žireč to his own forest hermitage, although his request was rejected. Several years later the count himself was accused of heresy. In 1729 the emperor sent a special military detachment to Kuks, which presented Špork with a decree confiscating all the books in the "philosopher's house" and placing him under house arrest. Our fashionable hermit was faced with possible confiscation of all his property, the burning of his library, a fine of 100,000 zloty and life imprisonment. His trial began only in 1733 and a few years later the count was pardoned, the sentence reduced to just 25,000 zloty and payment of court costs. But it marked the end of his activities as a "friend of the Cross" and of the history of the garden hermitages at Kuks.

It is at about this same time, at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that we see the appearance of Queen Caroline's famous hermitage in the grounds of Richmond Lodge and the hermitage palace of the Margrave of Bayreuth between the huts of court hermits in the park grove, where he held meetings and initiation ceremonies of his own secret order. At the Margrave's hermitage there were no paths and the individual spirit undergoing trial had to wander in the "gloomy forest", independently seeking the path to the light of truth. If the Margrave of Bayreuth preferred a moving mechanical statue of a hermit reading Paracelsus" treatise, the British queen's hermitage had traditional busts of natural philosophers and natural scientists – Newton, Boyle and Locke.
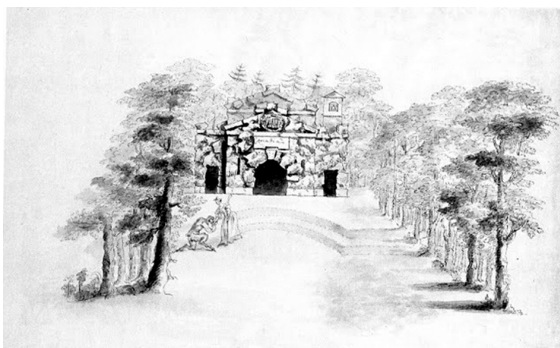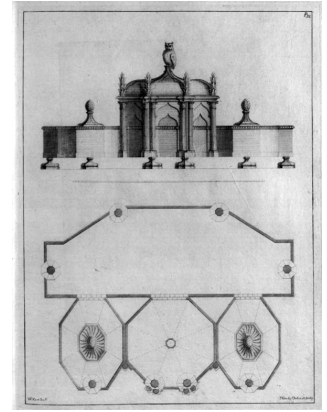

William Kent The Hermitage of Queen Caroline at Richmond. Pen and ink and watercolour on paper Soane Museum, London

[1] Tomáš Halík, Hrabě František Antonín Sporck a Kuks za jeho doby, Dvůr Králové nad Labem: Karel Trohoř, 1905: 9–10.

[2] Ibid.
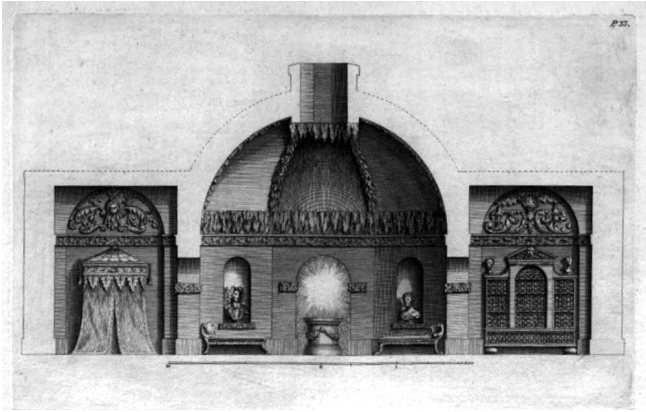
Plan and interior
of the Hermitage
by William Kent
from Some designs
of Mr. Inigo Jones
and Mr. Wm. Kent
Published by John
Vardy, 1744

The Hermitage interior
from Some designs
of Mr. Inigo Jones
and Mr. Wm. Kent
Published by John
Vardy, 1744

Thereafter the number of hermitages in parks and gardens was to in-
crease each year throughout the eighteenth century. This is not the place
for a detailed discussion of them, but our hypothesis that these hermitages
and the first secular hermits were rooted in the Hermetic tradition allows
us to take a new and very different look at the process by which the real
hermit was transformed into a mechanical *Kunststück* or automaton, a pro-
cess which could hardly have been possible without magic and the Hermitic
tradition.