

Hermit VS Hermeticism

Hermits and the Hermetic Tradition in European Art of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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Abstract—The article focuses on the prehistory of garden “hermitages” and their direct connection with the cult of hermits and seventeenth-century hermeticist philosophers endowed with esoteric knowledge. By tracing the iconography of hermits in painting, literature and the Tarot cards and analyzing the reasons for their popularity, the author demonstrates the affinity, characteristic of the seventeenth century, between the image of a recluse and not so much Christian recluse philosophers as magi and natural philosophers who were privy to “secret knowledge”. It was their secluded abodes full of books and instruments to study nature, as well as alchemist laboratories, that served as a model for the early high-society “recluses” who built hermitages on their estates as the so-called “philosophical studies” that were indeed intended for secluded studies or merely symbolized that the owner embraced the hermeticist tradition.

Keywords—*garden hermitage; architecture; iconography; Hermetic Tradition; hermit; Ermitorium; Natural Philosophers; tarot cards; philosopher’s study; František Antonín Špork; Queen Caroline*

I. INTRODUCTION

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 programs 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, 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. 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.

II. ‘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 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, 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 centers 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, 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 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.

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 [1]. 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.

III. 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 more mysterious character engaged in some unidentified magical procedure 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 historical assessment of the content, hypothesizing that the picture may instead show a follower of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition, a hermit natural philosopher, magus and cabbalist [2].

Indeed, the study of the intellectual context in which these works were created gives many reasons for such increasing identification/similarity. 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 [3], 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' [4].

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' programs 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' [5] and lived above his famous laboratory / study in the Casino di San Marco [6], 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 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' [7]. 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 [8]. 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 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! — the artist produced a diptych 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 for Riches* [11], 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.

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'.

If we look at depictions of Diogenes as continuing Maier's interpretation of the image of the philosopher, then

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 [9].

² According to Caterina Volpi, Rosa's *Dialogo del disprezzodellericchezze*, intended for declamation, is today in the Biblioteca di Archeologia e Storiadell'Arte, Palazzo Venezia, Rome [10].

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 [12]. 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.' [13] 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' [14]. The philosopher is occupied in close observation, 'watching, prying, thinking, and setting everything down'.

IV. 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 and whether 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 recognizable hermit attributes had become a commonplace in the iconography of the philosopher – whether Diogenes, John Dee or some philosophically-inclined British aristocrat.

V. 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 realize these practices. Initially, this realization 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' [15] on the estate of his fiancée Mary, Lady Mainwaring at Bradfield, where he could give himself up to his favorite 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':

'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 [16]. 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, 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 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 [17], 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 [18] 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 effunditur et Expressed denominatur? [19] 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 and fire; three elements: salt, sulphur and mercury, the male and female united as one... and, lastly, material of the sun.' [20]

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 symbolize 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 of it linked with – using Campanella's classification — 'magia artificial reale' or true artificial magic [21]. Meanwhile the grotto structures of the Italian garden referred back to the 'Saturnine' temperament, so important to Mannerism and the Baroque, which characterizes 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.

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.

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 [22]. The architect was almost certainly the Italian Giovanni Battista Alliprandi, then working on other commissions for Špork [23]. 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 *Lysánad Labem* [24]. 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.

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 [25], 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 [26].

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 [27]. 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 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 color, 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, the image of Juan Garin — a sinful hermit who was turned from the path of righteousness by 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.' [28] 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' [29]. In 1725 Špork even sent to Vienna to ask for approval for a proposal to organize a 'way of the Cross' surrounded by sculptures of hermits, leading from the Jesuit residence in the neighbouring town of Zíreč 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.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thereafter the number of hermitages in parks and gardens was to increase 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 process which could hardly have been possible without magic and the Hermetic tradition.

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