

THE MYSTERY OF BAPHOMET

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1307, the Knights Templar were summarily arrested, charged with heresy and imprisoned by the order of King Philip IV of France. During what has come to be known as the Templar Inquisition, they were tortured into confessions of heretical acts such as spitting or urinating on the cross, homosexuality and worshipping an idol referred to, by some confessors, as *Baphomet*. Over the centuries, the nature and identity of the idol has been disputed and conjectured upon. It has been adopted as a symbol of alchemical perfection and the union of opposites by occult and magical societies, and it has been demonized by fundamentalists and provocateurs who have utilized it as a means to further their respective agendas. As is often the case, there are many interesting tributaries and distributaries leading to and from this enigmatic object. It is the purpose of the present work to shed light on some of the existing notions and to perhaps unravel a little of the Mystery of Baphomet.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR, SUSPICION AND SUPPRESSION

The Knights Templar, or the *Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Salomonici*, was founded in 1119 by Hughes de Payens. The order, which was active from 1129 – 1312, was formed initially for the purpose escorting pilgrims to and from the Holy Land and the *Outremer* (literally ‘over seas’, but usually in reference to the Levant in general). The Holy Land itself was relatively secure, being recovered by Christendom during the First Crusade in 1099. The rest of Outremer, however, was treacherous terrain for pilgrims who were preyed upon and slaughtered, sometimes by the hundreds, by bandits and highway robbers. The Knights Templar’s monastic vows and service in Outremer and the Holy Land garnered them the support of wealthy European benefactors, whose chief charity they had quickly become. While being headquartered on Temple Mount in Jerusalem (hence the order’s colloquial name), commanderies were gradually erected throughout Christendom. Consequently, the order devised a way to employ this network of fortresses in an early form of banking which utilized the earliest known form of traveler’s checks. In order to deter highway robbers and the like, pilgrims were encouraged to deposit their holdings at one of the many Templar preceptories along the pilgrimage route. They were then given a check, written in cipher, which they were to produce in exchange for funds at another preceptory at, or nearer to, their destination. The Templars were also able to circumvent the Papacy’s prohibition on loan interest by charging ‘rent’ for funds borrowed, thus increasing their quickly escalating wealth.

The loss of the Holy Land and a few other decisive 12th and 13th century military defeats, such as those at Hattin (1187) and Acre (1291), had left the order in a position of vulnerability, particularly to those who coveted the Templars wealth and holdings, which were rumored to include an inestimable trove of reliquaries and mystical artifacts, perhaps even the fabled treasure of King Solomon. Murmurings of the Templars secret initiatory rites also began to sow distrust in the minds of the nobles and the church. Exacerbating matters, King Philip IV was indebted to the Templars for funds loaned to him for the dowry of his sister and debts incurred during an expensive Flemish military campaign. Conveniently, Philip was able to utilize the Templars’ unfortunate situation to his advantage and had the Knights arrested on

charges of heresy on October 13, 1307. Their preceptories were raided and their holdings were confiscated. They were then cruelly tortured into confessions. In the year 1312, which was during the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy (1309 – 1377) in Avignon, Pope Clement V, the King's 'Puppet Pope', officially disbanded the order.

THE ACCUSATIONS AND CHARGES

In addition to the primary Articles of Accusation collected by Philip's ministers, Guillaume de Nogaret and Enguerrand de Marigny, depositions were taken from Squin de Flexian and Noffo Dei, both of whom were former Templars put out of the order for heresy and other offenses. According to the depositions of the disgraced Templars, each Knight was sworn to further the order's interests whether right or wrong; the heads of the order were in a secret Saracenic alliance; initiates were made to desecrate the crucifix; and women pregnant by the Templars were taught to procure abortions. Also in these depositions, reference was made to the presence of many unlawful and profane statues of a nature contrary to Christianity, which each member was sworn to keep secret and inviolate under pain of death or perpetual confinement.

Despite the conspicuous absence of empirical evidence, the accusations were advanced as official charges and the Knights Templar were arrested and sequestered to await the arrival of the Court of the Inquisition, men who, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, literally made it their business to torture human beings into confessions. In all, the Articles of Accusation against the Knights Templar consisted of one-hundred-twenty-seven charges in nine sub categories. Accusation number five, which stated that the Templars venerated an idol or a head, is of particular interest as it pertains to our current subject, Baphomet.

TORTURE, CONFESSIONS AND THE TEMPLAR INQUISITION

Thirty-six of the total two-hundred-thirty-one Templars examined by the Inquisition expired under what was inaccurately referred to as 'the gentle method' of procuring confessions. In actuality, these confessions were extracted by means of the most unimaginably heinous and barbaric methods.

*Sometimes the patient was stripped naked, his hands were tied behind his back, heavy weights were fastened to his feet, and the cord which confined his hands passed over a pulley. At a given signal he was hoisted into the air, where he hung suspended by his arms, which were thus drawn out of their natural position: then suddenly the cord would be let run, but checked before the patient reached the ground, and thus a tremendous shock given to his frame [...] The teeth of the Templars were occasionally drawn, their feet roasted, weights suspended from all parts of their bodies; and thus they gave their testimony without constraint!*¹

Guilt was assumed *prima facie*; no defense was heard and affirmative answers to the accusations alone were recorded as testimony. One can only look back in awe at the almost superhuman resolve shown by those thirty-six Templars who, rather than knowingly confess under such conditions, chose to give up their ghosts. Conversely, we must also consider the possibility that the secrets they concealed under such horrific circumstances were indeed elements of their initiatory rituals secrets which the Templars were sworn to keep inviolate even upon pain of death, as was stated in the depositions taken from former Templars Squin de Flexian and Noffo Dei.

*[...] of 231 knights examined by the pope's Commissioners in Paris, only 12 admitted, under torture, to knowing anything about the icon, as against 183 who confessed that they renounced Christ and 180 who confessed to defiling the cross in various ways.*²

Knights Templar Jean de Chaumes confessed that, at his initiation, he was told, “You believe wrongly, because he [Christ] is indeed a false prophet. Believe only in God in heaven, and not in him.”³ This sentiment was echoed in several of the confessions, such as that of a Templar who was admonished, “Do not believe that the man Jesus whom the Jews crucified in Outremer is God and that he can save you.”⁴ Another was shown a crucifix by his initiator and told, “Set not much faith in this, for it is too young.”⁵ This particular heretical motif of Christ denial occurred so regularly and consistently in the confessions that one might easily get the impression that there had to be some truth in it. In fact, many of the confessions were similar in telling details which, perhaps *because* of their uncommon nature, hinted at a sort of verity. For a variety of reasons, these confessions could readily cause one to entertain the possibility of a Saracenic, Sufic, Gnostic or, at the very least, Johannine influence on the Templars while headquartered on Temple Mount.

Some historians⁶ believe that there was an amount of truth to the allegations against the Templars and their subsequent confessions. The Chinon Parchment, for example, suggests that spitting upon, or otherwise desecrating the crucifix formed a part of their initiation rituals and that the act was meant to strengthen the resolve of a captured Templar forced to do so by his Saracen captors. This training was apparently meant to teach him to commit heretical acts, “[...] with the mind only and not with the heart.”⁷ It has also been contended that there is ample reason to suspect that the worship of Baphomet was, in fact, an element of the Templar initiatory system.⁸ Although, it is unclear whether this worship was merely a simulation of pagan idolatry, a practice used to develop a callousness to such forced heretical acts in the unfortunate event of capture by the Saracens, or if it was an authentic devotional expression.

Of all the recorded confessions, however, none were quite as bizarre as those involving some form of supernatural head; sometimes a head with three faces (which brings to mind *Hecate*, the lunar crone goddess of the crossroads in Classical Greek mythology, who is often depicted with three faces), sometimes the head of a bearded man, or that of a woman, or a cat, and often somehow conflated with the worship of the enigmatic Baphomet.

*Item, that in each province they had idols, namely heads. Item, that they adored these idols. Item, that they said that the head could save them. Item, that it could make riches. Item, that it could make the trees flower. Item, that it made the land germinate. Item, that they surrounded or touched each head of the aforesaid idol with small cords, which they wore around themselves next to the shirt or the flesh.*⁹

The idol has been described as, “[...] a head with one face or two faces, sometimes bearded and sometimes not, made of silver or of wood, a picture of a man or of a woman, an embalmed head that glowed in the dark or a demon.”¹⁰ Provençal knight, Raymond Rubei described a wooden head upon which Baphomet was painted and said, “that he worshipped it by kissing its feet, and exclaiming, ‘Yalla.’” He went on to describe the word *Yalla*, which is of course quite similar to Allah, as being *verbum Saracenorum*, a word used by the Saracens, thus reinforcing the theory that the Knights Templar had absorbed elements of their supposed enemy's theological conception. An unnamed Florentine Templar confessed that there were secret chapters within the order wherein one knight was shown the idol and admonished to, “adore this head – this head is your god and your Mahomet.”¹¹

*I was alone in a chamber with the person who received me: he drew out of a box a head, or idol, which appeared to me to have three faces, and said, Thou shouldst adore it as thy Saviour and that of the order of the Temple. We then bent two knees, and I cried, Blessed be he who will save my soul, and I worshipped it.*¹²

Baphomet was mentioned several times, though descriptions were inconsistent. The only certainty is that, judging by the Templar's descriptions of the idol, it was a very grim relic indeed; and before it the Templars had apparently prostrated themselves in ritual adoration. Despite the frequency with which the Baphomet idol, or some head related to it, occurred in the confessions, not one specimen

was found in or around the Templar's preceptories, save one silver-gilt female head affixed with a label that read: *Capud LVIII m*. This *Head 58 m* will be addressed in further detail later in the present work.

THE WORD

Baphomet (*bæ ˌfomet*). [*a. F. Baphomet; cf. Pr. Bafomet, OSp. Mafomat.*] *a. A form of the name Mahomed used by mediæval writers. b. Alleged name of the idol which the Templars were accused of worshipping. (According to l'Abbé Constant, quoted by Littré, this word was cabalistically formed by writing backward tem. o. h. p. ab., abbreviation of templi omnium hominum pacis abbas, 'abbot' or 'father of the temple of peace of all men.')* Hence *Baphomet-ic a.* [...] *Baphomet is a secret word ascribed to the Templars. [...] The great stress [...] in the condemnation of the templars is laid on the worship of Baphomet. The talismans, bowls, symbols, are even called Baphometric. [...] My Spiritual New-birth, or Baphometric Fire-baptism.*¹³

The first recorded use of the word Baphomet was in a 1098 letter composed by French Crusader Anselm of Ribemont, who wrote that his Saracen enemies, "[...] called loudly upon Baphometh,"¹⁴ while he and his fellow soldiers prayed silently in their hearts, before attacking and forcing the Saracens outside of the city walls. Raymond of Aguilers, a chronicler of the First Crusade, had made mention of both *Bafumarias* and *Bafumariæ* in connection with the Saracens.¹⁵ The troubadours were also said to have employed the word *Baformaria* for mosque and *Bafomet* for Mohammed. The name *Bafometz* appeared in about 1195 in the Occitan poem, *Senhors, per los Nostres Peccatz*, written by the troubadour Gavaudan, shortly after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin. *Bafomet* is again referred to in a 1250 poem by Auvergnat troubador Austorc d'Aorlhac while lamenting the failure of the Seventh Crusade.¹⁶

Much later, Christoph Friedrich Nicolai (1733-1811), a Freemason and bookseller, claimed that the word Baphomet was derived from the Greek, βαφη μητ8ς (*baphe metous*), meaning 'baptism of wisdom.'¹⁷ He was also the first to propose that the Templars were Manichaean Gnostics and that their initiatory rites, which were structured in hierarchical grades, such as those of Mithraism or Freemasonry, were Saracenic in origin.¹⁸

*[Baphomet's] identification with Mahomet appears to be derived from its usage in Provence. This had been the centre of the Cathar Church in France, until the Albigensian Crusade of 1209-1229 killed its protectors and the nascent Inquisition killed or silenced any survivors.*¹⁹

Until recently, the common scholarly consensus was that Baphomet was a medieval French corruption of the name Mahomet (Muhammed), the prophet of Islam, the Saracen's faith. This theory poses a problem, however, because: if Baphomet were an idol, as was documented in the majority of confessions referencing the object, and idolatry was (and still is) strictly forbidden in Islam – an idol, or any representation, of the prophet Muhammed being particularly taboo – then Baphomet was likely not the name of an idol, just as an idol would never be called Mahomet. Such an explanation is contrary to a basic tenet of Islam.

*Probably relying on contemporary Eastern sources, Western scholars have recently supposed that 'Bafomet' has no connection with Mohammed, but could well be a corruption of the Arabic 'Abufihamat' (pronounced in the Moorish Spanish similar to bufihamat). The word means 'father of understanding'.*²⁰

Eliphaz Levi, whom we will discuss in further detail later in the present work, developed a theory that the word Baphomet, when reversed and slightly rearranged into TEM. O. H. P. AB., was

a qabalistically composed abbreviation for the Latin: *templi omnium hominum pacis abbas*. However, Levi's methodology here seems to be slightly more convoluted than necessary, as there would be no reason to go through such trouble to conceal such an innocuous epithet as 'father of the temple of peace of all men.'²¹

A more recent interpretation involves the use of the *Atbash* cipher, which is a Hebrew substitution-type cipher in which each letter is represented by another. The *Atbash* cipher was in use as early as the 4th century BCE by scribes writing the book of Jeremiah. While translating the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, Dr Hugh Schonfield employed the cipher to great effect and, later in his life, he became interested in the history Knights Templar. In his studies of the order, Schonfield became particularly interested in the etymology of the word Baphomet; and, likely due to his experiences at Qumran, he applied the *Atbash* cipher to the word. Rendered in Hebrew with the cipher applied, Baphomet (BPhVMT or תמופב) becomes *wisdom* (SVPhYA or אִיפּוּשׁ, a rendering of the Greek *Sophia* in Hebrew). Schonfield was certain that the Templars would have been familiar with the *Atbash* cipher and may have been using it to conceal aspects of their initiation rituals. Extrapolating on this line of reasoning, it is not a tremendous leap to suppose that this was the method by which they kept inviolate certain words used as 'passes' by the order. Furthermore, considering the word's association with both wisdom and the head, Baphomet may perhaps be a somewhat cryptic allusion to an enlightened state of consciousness, thus alluding to the theory that the Templars may have been exposed to either the esoteric doctrines and practices of the Sufis while in the Holy Land, the *Pistis Sophia* and other non-canonical gospels while headquartered on Temple Mount, or perhaps to the purported gnosis of the *Cathari* while in Languedoc, though these claims are unsupported by any extant data.

THE HEAD

*Generally speaking, the head symbolizes the driving force of the active principle, including the powers of government, legislation and enlightenment. It also symbolizes the manifestation of spirit, in contrast with the body which symbolizes the manifestation of matter. The spherical shape of the human head, according to Plato, likens it to a universe. The head is a microcosm. All these meanings converge in the symbolism of the One, of perfection, the Sun and the godhead.*²²

The Templars possessed a trove of reliquaries, one of which was a head, gilt in silver, and cryptically labelled *Capud LVIII*.²³ This particular reliquary head was confiscated from the Paris preceptory. The head was hinged at the crown of the skull and contained the bones of a particularly small woman, which were wrapped in white and red linen.²⁴ Apparently, at least one Templar confessor, no doubt under extreme duress, said that *Capud LVIII* was unrelated to the male, bearded head that was used in the Order's rituals.

*[...] the Templars also had in their possession an interesting relic in the form of a female silver head containing a couple of skull bones of a small woman. It also came with a label on which read the following; Capu[d] LVIIIM (Head 58). At first glance the message is just a random few numbers and a letter but when you add five with eight you get thirteen. The letter M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet and together with the other M we have a double hit. Could this female relic have been the bones of Mary Magdalene?*²⁵

While this is an intriguing hypothesis, it is problematic in that the letter *M* occupies the 12th position in the Latin alphabet, which had no letter *J*. In an effort to strengthen a Magdalenic lineage passing through that of the Templars, the author then stresses the connection between the Knights Templar and the *Cathari*. The *Cathari*, or Cathars, were a heretical Christian sect professing a somewhat gnostic and neo-Manichaean dualistic theology, who existed primarily in the South of France in the

12th and 13th centuries. It is then posited that the Templars had adopted aspects of the *Pistis Sophia* and other biblical apocrypha, either through direct commingling with the *Cathari* in Languedoc or from non-canonical gnostic gospels discovered in the Holy Land. While the Templar's exposure to esoteric doctrines from various sources is not particularly hard to swallow, their involvement in a project with the *Cathari* to guard and carry forward any sort of Magdalenic lineage is completely unsupported by mainstream historical research.

Over the centuries, the head's identity has been assigned to a number of prominent figures; St John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, St Euphemia and Hughes de Payens among them. It has also been theorized that the Baphomet head was in fact the Shroud of Turin – which could have fallen into the possession of the order during the sac of Constantinople (1204) – presumably folded into a sphere with the facial outline outward. Religious relics, most of rather dubious authenticity, circulated widely during the Crusades. There were, in fact, several heads of John the Baptist circulating at once. The head may have been somehow linked to that of St John the Baptist, as there has long been speculation regarding the possible Johannine leanings the Knights Templar. This would infer that the Templars regarded Jesus as a false prophet, believing John to be the one, true Messiah.²⁶

A ghoulish tale, with origins in the 12th century, recounts the rather bizarre story of a 'Lord of Sidon'²⁷ and a Maraclean woman who, in certain versions of the narrative, is referred to as 'Yse.'²⁸ By the time of the Templar Inquisition, this tale had circulated widely to the detriment of the Order and is mentioned in Inquisitory records. In this tale, one may discern the subtle hallmarks of an allegorized initiatory ritual, though there is no record to substantiate this interpretation.

*[a] great lady of Maraclea was loved by a Templar, a Lord of Sidon; but she died in her youth, and on the night of her burial, this wicked lover crept to the grave, dug up her body and violated it. Then a voice from the void bade him return in nine months time for he would find a son. He obeyed the injunction and at the appointed time opened the grave again and found a head on the leg bones of the skeleton (skull and crossbones). The same voice bade him, 'guard it well, for it would be the giver of all good things' and so he carried it away with him. It became his protecting genius, and he was able to defeat his enemies by merely showing them the magic head. In due course, it passed into possession of the Order.*²⁹

Sixteenth century occultist, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), made several mentions in his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1531) of both Baphomet and the mystical significance of heads, in general. He made particular mention of a certain oracular head, spoken of by Inquisitor William of Paris: "And so images that speak, and foretell things to come, are said to be made, as William of Paris relates of a brazen head made under the rising of Saturn, which they say spake with a man's voice."³⁰ By emphasizing the Saturnine quality of the head, Agrippa, who undoubtedly knew that the zodiacal house of Capricorn is ruled by Saturn, thereby foreshadowed and likely informed Levi's later melding of hircine imagery with the Baphomet and perhaps even influenced the attribution of Capricorn to the Devil XV tarot card.³¹

*[...] the name of Baphomet was in all probability a coded reference to an Ophite Gnostic-Templar initiatory ritual wherein was made use of a sacred grail of libation, the same having been fashioned from the skullcap of a severed head; that is, a kapala or skull-cap.*³²

Freemasons familiar with the initiatory rites of the Masonic Knights Templars will note the significance of the above passage; it is possible that the Baphomet head was the *kapala*, or skull cap, from which the Templars imbibed during their initiation rituals. It has also been suggested that this ritual may have involved the ingestion of an entheogenic sacrament^{33,34} – one which may have contained a preparation made from either a psychoactive fungus such as *amanita muscaria*; opium; a combination of

the DMT-containing *acacia senegal* or *acacia nilotica* and *paganum harmala* (MAOI); or perhaps a THC tincture procured from the *Hashashin*, with whom they would have had contact.

Idries Shah, a 20th century Sufi teacher and author, argued that the Baphomet head was actually that of martyred Persian poet, mystic and Sufic teacher named Mansur Al-Hallaj.³⁵ Revered in certain sects of Sufism, Hallaj was condemned to death in 922 for commotions within the Baghdad Muslim community caused by his unsettling and unorthodox interpretations of Islam. These were expressed in statements such as, “the important thing is to proceed seven times around the Kaaba of one’s heart”, “O Muslims, save me from God”, “God has made my blood lawful to you: kill me”, and what is probably his most famous declaration: “I am the Truth.”^{36,37} For these crimes, Mansur Al-Hallaj was first punched in the face, lashed until he lost consciousness, then decapitated. His body was doused with oil, burnt to ashes, and these scattered into the Tigris river.³⁸ Hallaj’s decapitated head was said to have been embalmed by the Caliph’s Queen Mother and later surfaced among a sect of Sufi masters who venerated the relic for its magical powers. In addition to maintaining that this was the true Baphomet head, Shah explicitly referred to Hallaj as being ‘the son of a widow’ and claimed that the martyred Sufi was also the source for the Masonic legend of Hiram Abiff, though he went on to develop other interpretations. In one such interpretation, he likens Baphomet to the heraldic ‘black head’, which he later equates with the alchemical *caput mortuum*.

*The Baphomet is none other than the symbol of the completed man. The black head, negro head, or the Turk's head which appears in heraldry and in English country-inn signs is a crusader substitute word for this kind of knowledge.*³⁹

ANTI-MASONRY AND THE APPROPRIATION OF BAPHOMET

In 1818, Viennese essayist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall wrote *Mysterium Baphometis revelatum, seu Fratres Militiae Templi, qua Gnostici et quidem Ophiani, Apostasiae, Idoloduliae et Impuritatis convicti, per ipsa eorum Monumenta* (Discovery of the Mystery of Baphomet, by which the Knights Templars, like the Gnostics and Ophites, are convicted of Apostasy, of Idolatry and of moral Impurity, by their own Monuments). In the essay, Hammer-Purgstall utilized pseudo-historical sources such as the Medieval Grail romances to further his agenda. In order to add validity to his more speculative claims, he directed attention to the stone idols, referred to as ‘Baphomets’, in the Imperial Cabinet of Vienna. These hermaphroditic stone figures, sometimes with two heads or two faces, are thought to be of either Egyptian or Ophite Gnostic origin. In the essay, he built a case supporting the Templar’s Gnosticism and their worship of these Baphomet idols. The tone of the piece was clearly meant to besmirch Masonic Templarism specifically, and Freemasonry in general. Hammer-Purgstall’s theory was later supported by Lewis Spence in his *An Encyclopedia of Occultism* (1920). This particular strain of anti-Masonic rhetoric is still sometimes resurrected to further various agendas.

*An interesting discovery was made public in 1818 dealing with the history of secret societies. There was found, among the antiquities of the imperial museum of Vienna, some of those idols named Heads of Baphomet, which the Templars adored. These heads represent the divinity of the gnostics, named 'Meté', or Wisdom. For long time there was preserved at Marseilles one of these gilded heads, seized in a retreat of the Templars when the latter were pursued by the law.*⁴⁰

Despite its apparent veneration by the Knights Templar, Baphomet has become synonymous with Satan. This may have something to do with Levi’s Baphomet’s use as the Devil card image on Waite’s tarot [*Rider-Waite Tarot*, U.S. Games Systems] as well as Léo Taxil’s use of the same on the cover of his lurid, Anti-Masonic exposé, *Les Mystères de la franc-maçonnerie dévoilés* (1897). Taxil also inadvertently conflated Baphomet with Lucifer in the public (Christian) mind when he paraphrased and

dubiously recontextualized a passage from Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (1871), often quoted by Freemasonry's detractors, wherein Pike states:

*Lucifer, the Light-Bearer! Strange and mysterious name to give to the Spirit of Darkness! Lucifer, the Son of the Morning! Is it he who bears the light, and with its splendors intolerable blinds feeble, sensual or selfish Souls? Doubt it not!*⁴¹

Although, Pike's meaning is much clearer elsewhere in the volume, wherein he dismisses the conflation:

*[...] this Force, which presides over the physical generation, under the mythological and horned form of the God Pan; thence came the he-goat of the Sabbat, brother of the Ancient Serpent, and the Light-bearer or Phosphor, of which the poets have made the false Lucifer of the legend.*⁴²

ELIPHAS LEVI, ALBERT PIKE AND THE 19TH CENTURY OCCULT REVIVAL

Alphonse Louis Constant, who produced his literary work under the name Eliphas Levi (the Hebrew transliteration of his given name) was a Freemason, hermetic qabalist and ceremonial magician active during the mid-19th century in Paris, France. Notably, he was also the first to apply the Hebrew alphabet to the cards in the Major Arcana of the Tarot. He also carried forward a synthesis of the work of occultists Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Heinrich Kunrath and Francis Barrett in a form which helped to spark the late-19th/early-20th century occult revival and the formation of groups like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. In his first treatise, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1856), Levi adopted the symbolism of Baphomet and expands on the idea to include several qabalistic, magical and alchemical concepts.

The Sabbatic Goat, an 1854 goat-headed dualistic hermaphrodite, is Levi's sphinxian hieroglyph for the Astral Light, or Universal Agent – a diaphanous substance he refers to as *Azoth*. The union of all binary opposites. The visual representation of Levi's Baphomet was patterned on the androgyne of Heinrich Kunrath, the Devil card (key XV) of the Tarot de Marseilles, Herodotus' account of the Goat of Mendes and elements of the aforementioned stone 'Baphomet' idols. The arms are situated in such a way as to convey the hermetic axiom: "That which is below is like that which is above & that which is above is like that which is below [...]."⁴³ Upon the raised, right arm is written the latin *solve* (to break apart), and *coagula* (to join together) upon the lowered left arm; these are meant convey alchemical processes. The caduceus of Hermes is also depicted in the vicinity of the phallus.

Levi's illustration of Baphomet was undoubtedly the primary influence on Arthur Edward Waite's Devil tarot card in the deck of his design, the Rider-Waite tarot, which is arguably the most iconic and universal deck of those in current use. A slightly altered version of the Sabbatic Goat is depicted on the card. As mentioned above, the Devil XV card corresponds to the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, the goat. Waite (1857-1942) was a Freemason, member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the best-known translator and commentator of the works of Eliphas Levi.

Levi's work, in general, was far-and-away the single most significant influence on that of, Masonic Knights Templar, Sir Knight Albert Pike KT (1809-1891), whose magnum opus, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (1871), is replete with lengthy, though sometimes uncredited, quotations from Levi. The book also contains three specific references to Baphomet.

*The Gnostics held that it composed the igneous body of the Holy Spirit; and it was adored in the secret rites of the Sabbat or the Temple, under the hieroglyphic figure of Baphomet or the hermaphroditic goat of Mendes. There is a Life-Principle of the world, a universal agent, wherein are two natures and a double current, of love and wrath.*⁴⁴

*Hieroglyphically to express this law of prudence, they gave their Mercury, personified in Egypt as Hermanubis, a dog's head; and to their Sulphur, represented by the Baphomet of the Temple, that goat's head which brought into such disrepute the occult Mediæval associations.*⁴⁵

*It is absurd to suppose that men of intellect adored a monstrous idol called Baphomet, or recognized Mahomet as an inspired prophet. Their symbolism, invented ages before, to conceal what it was dangerous to avow, was of course misunderstood by those who were not adepts, and to their enemies seemed to be pantheistic.*⁴⁶

In 1912, British occultist and ceremonial magician, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) took the name Baphomet as his *nomen mysticum*, or magical name, upon becoming the head of the British branch of the *Ordo Templi Orientis* (order of the Eastern temple). The O.T.O. was a German Masonic appendant body encompassing the Royal Arch; Templarism; various degrees associated with the Scottish Rite; and elements of both the Swedenborg and Memphis-Mizraim Rites. Crowley, like Levi, viewed Baphomet as the divine androgyne – the hermetic union of opposites – and he gave this figure a prominent role in the cosmology of his religio-philosophical system, *Thelema*. He also followed Hammer-Purgstall's lead by conflating the Baphomet with the Gnostic/Neoplatonic demiurgos, *Ialdabaoth*, who is generally depicted as a serpent with a lion's head surrounded by a solar nimbus. In the creed of the *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica* (the ecclesiastical arm of the *Ordo Templi Orientis*), Crowley wrote: “[...] I believe in the Serpent and the Lion, Mystery of Mysteries, in His name BAPHOMET”. Elsewhere, he said of Baphomet:

*The Devil is, historically, the God of any people that one personally dislikes... This serpent, SATAN, is not the enemy of Man, but He who made Gods of our race, knowing Good and Evil; He bade 'Know Thyself!' and taught Initiation. He is 'The Devil' of The Book of Thoth, and His emblem is BAPHOMET, the Androgyne who is the hieroglyph of arcane perfection... He is therefore Life, and Love. But moreover his letter is ayin, the Eye, so that he is Light; and his Zodiacal image is Capricornus, that leaping goat whose attribute is Liberty.*⁴⁷

THE ENDURING MYTHOS OF BAPHOMET

Just as the myths and romances of the Knights Templar continue to inspire modern narratives, the mysterious concept of the Baphomet has been cryptically woven into the fabric of occult culture for centuries. Through a steady stream of new interpretations and reconceptualizations, this enigmatic figure has found its way into popular forums since being reintroduced during the occult revival of the late-19th century and spurred further along by the neo-paganism of the mid-20th century through to the present day.

As the popular re-appropriation and reinterpretation of Baphomet continues, we find ourselves increasingly further from being able to appreciate the context in which the Knights Templar may have experienced this strange, oracular head. We are left asking ourselves: what was it about this arcane relic, and the rites surrounding it, that would inspire such an unflinching dedication to keeping the Mysteries of Baphomet inviolate, even under such heinous torture and duress – nay! even unto death?

ENDNOTES:

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24. Oursel, *Les Proces des Templiers*, 1955, p. 208, retrieved online
25. Peters, *Relics and Cathars*, midnightmagdalene.co.uk, retrieved online
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28. A possible variant of 'Isis'
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31. It is numerologically notable that each row and column in Agrippa's planetary Magic Square for Saturn totals to fifteen – the number of the Devil tarot card
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