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## **Kabbalah in Sweden**

**D**uring the late autumn 1613 Gustav II Adolf and Johannes Bureus were travelling through Sweden to organize the new printing of the Bible. When, on December 5, they found themselves in Tuna in Dalarna, Bureus was overwhelmed by what he has described as ‘a moment of excitement’. The time was 6.22 in the morning and Bureus heard a voice singing ‘RIVos IaM CLaVDe pVer sat prata blberVnt’, ‘Close up the streams young boy, because the meadows have drunk themselves full’. In these words the Roman numerals for 1673 are hidden, and Bureus interpreted this to mean that the world was to end that year.

What took place in 1613 would forever influence Bureus, and after the experience in Dalarna he was to take on the role as one initiated into the mysteries, a prophet in the midst of a world of the blind.

At this stage in his career, Bureus was inclined to have mystical experiences; for several years he had studied esoteric teachings such as astrology, magic and Kabbalah. From his diary entries we find out that he ‘began to enjoy the Kabbalah’ in 1591 when he was reading the magical text *Arbatel*. During his life, Bureus developed his own esoteric system centred on the runes, but based on the structure of the Kabbalah. He referred to this system as a Nordic Kabbalah.

### **Johannes Bureus and the Nordic Kabbalah**

Johan Bure (1568–1652) or Johannes Bureus, the name under which he is mainly known, is the most important non-Jewish Swedish Kabbalist. In Bureus’s work older Gothicism along with runic and linguistic research blended with his strong interest in all forms of esotericism: astrology, magic, alchemy and above all the Kabbalah. Bureus would re-interpret the Gothic myths so that they would not merely accentuate the history of Sweden, but also be an individual path of illumination. The work of Johannes Bureus was pivotal for the birth of Swedish grammar, but he was also a great pioneer in runology and he was the one who re-created

the idea of the Gothic according to a very personal philosophy. Bureus believed that Christianity and the Latin language had been too dominant and thus made the runes seem insignificant; he therefore wanted to attempt to reinstate them and create a general awareness of them. He published a runic ABC book, but one of his most important accomplishments was his extensive mapping of rune stones. He charted 663 rune stones, which is about a fourth of all the rune stones known today. Johannes Bureus developed a runology that was rooted in linguistics, but that also incorporated deep esoteric speculations. Bureus, who lived in Uppsala, was inspired by, among others, Agrippa, Paracelsus, Reuchlin and other great names of occultism. Through a comparison with the Kabbalah, he was convinced that the runes had different dimensions; they were signs for writing, but also esoteric and magical symbols. He created a Gothic Kabbalah that he referred to as 'Kabala Upsalica'. The secret dimension of the runes he called *Adul* runes or 'Adel' runes. Additionally, he constructed a symbol that he named *Adulruna* and which contained the fifteen *Adul* runes. This symbol has certain similarities to the *Monas Hieroglyphica* of John Dee, which contains all the symbols for the planets. Bureus's *Adulruna* is a map of the universe and the progression of mankind through various layers of existence. The *Adulruna* acts as both a symbol of man and of the universe; it describes both the microcosmos and the macro-cosmos. Bureus's most important esoteric text is also called *Adulruna Rediviva*: the *Adulruna* resurrected.

Two symbols constitute the foundation of Bureus's esoteric universe: the first is the *Adulruna*, the second is the rune cross. The vertical rune row of the cross is one of the most important parts of Bureus's system; these runes illustrate a seven-step initiatory process that can move upward (*ascensus*) and downward (*descensus*). Bureus explains that the Son of God descends and is born as a man following this path, but that he also ascends to heaven through the very same path. The task of the *Adul* runic disciple is to advance from the first rune, Byrghal, to the highest level symbolised by the Thors rune. The mediator in this process is Christ (who is equated with Odin). In the *Cabbalistica* this sevenfold path of initiation recurs in several versions. It is, for example, associated with the alchemical process with its seven stages to the elixir.

In his *Antiquitates Scanziana*, Bureus reveals how the seven runes describe the steps taken by Christ as a saviour, from conception to resurrection and his ascent up to God. Bureus illustrates how the goal of the disciple is to reunite Byrghal and Thors, man and God. This is not a complete melding into God though, since man retains his individual characteristics as is evident in the shape of Byrghal, but rather causes his

characteristics to reach a higher level. The symbol of Byrghal and Thors united appears in several different variations, but in *Adulruna Rediviva* Bureus draws a special version that 'reveals the immeasurable force that those can reach, those who are united with God'.

Pivotal to Bureus's mysticism is the *Adul* Rune symbol from which the fifteen runes originate, a symbol that he named the treasure chamber of the *Adul* Rune in which 'the holiest names of the Creator are revealed'. It has the form of a solar cross with three concentric rings. The two outer rings are geometrical circles, while the inner ring has the shape of a heart. The heart consists of a half circle below and a split circle above with its halves on top of the outer half circle in the shape of a B lying on its side. From the other ring and inwards there is a cross which creates the pivotal Haghhal rune. Hence the *Adul* rune symbol consists of a cross, an x and three rings that correspond to three levels of existence. As Dr Susanna Åkerman has shown, Bureus was also influenced by the *Monas Hieroglyphica* by John Dee, which in the same way is a universal symbol, which in itself contains other symbols, such as the planetary signs (Åkerman 2000). All fifteen runes can be found in the *Adulruna*, and Bureus has a meticulous system for how to go about this procedure. The first group of five runes, the birth *Femt* (fifth), is mainly found in the outer parts of the *Adulruna* and the outermost ring. The birth *Femt* corresponds to God, the Father, the Creator and the one who gives birth. These runes, after having been extracted from the *Adulruna*, are the five largest in size as compared to the other ten runes. The next group, the birth *Femt*, corresponds to the mediator. These runes are found within the outer circle and inside the middle circle and these are smaller than the first five runes. The last group, the embryo *Femt*, are found within the middle circle and inside the heart. These last five runes are the smallest of all. Among these runes is the rune of matter and duality, Byrghal, and this last *Femt* corresponds to the plane of matter and the physical body.

At the birth of Gothic Runology during the period of the Swedish Great Epoch, something of a revival of the runes took place. They were used among many Swedish officers during the Thirty Years War to encode messages. What is singular about the Gothic Runology of Bureus is that the runes are not merely ancient signs of writing, and proof of the literary qualities of the ancient Norsemen, but above all symbols of an individual path of initiation and illumination, in which the follower obtains contact with God. The esoteric runic research of Bureus also became famous outside Sweden and he was visited by several guests from distant countries who wished to study the secrets of the *Adul*-runes. On his deathbed, Bureus explained that it was his research in mysticism

that he was most proud of, even if he had also made great contributions within linguistic research.

The great influence of Johannes Bureus on his contemporary age and the intellectual climate of Sweden during the Epoch of Great Power make it possible, or even probable, that he paved the way for a Swedish initiatory esotericism at a later date. In those cases in which we can identify distinctive Swedish features within Swedish Freemasonry during the eighteenth century, it is most likely that we can trace some of these features back to Johannes Bureus.

### The Swedish Kabbalah after Bureus

Even if very few Swedes studied and wrote about the Kabbalah in as dedicated and personal a way as Bureus did, there was still significant interest in Kabbalistic ideas. During the eighteenth century mysticism flourished alongside ideas of the Enlightenment and scientific progress. Freemasonry and Swedenborgianism grew and attracted well-established and erudite individuals in society who viewed their occult experiments as scientific. Spiritism, Animal Magnetism and Divination fascinated the bourgeois, nobility and even kings (Ojas 2000: 280). The Count and man of state Gustaf Adolf Reuterholm (1756–1813) was a significant character in esoteric circles in Sweden during this time. He exerted a vital influence on Swedish politics during the time when Gustaf IV Adolf was declared incapacitated 1792–6, and has been described as something of a charlatan (Bogdan 2005: 1). Reuterholm's political power was strengthened due to the fact that he was a close ally to Duke Karl. Additionally, they were both Freemasons. They also shared an extensive occult interest and the library of Reuterholm contains several Kabbalistic texts. The collection is now part of the Swedish Library of the Freemasonic Order in Stockholm. Among these texts we can find *Cabbalisternas stora och Hemliga Problem*, which describes the numerological aspects of Creation, *Konung Salmonos Semiphoras och Schemhamphoras*, which conveys the holy and secret names of God and *De Cabala Sancta* (About the Sacred Kabbalah), which describes the ten Sephiroth. The text *Reflexioner om Cabbalen och Inledning* tells of the mythical origin of the Kabbalah and the significance of Hebrew in Kabbalah:

The Cabalists believe that everything has its true name, through the interconnection and pronunciation of which they can achieve great things. . . . This is something that reveals the pre-eminence of the

Hebrew language. The effects are more significant, since the words that they employ, express either the name of God, or its perfection and emanations.

A Captain of the Navy, Henrik Gustaf Ulfvenclou, was a reputed spirit conjurer in the 1780s. He was part of the most intimate esoteric circle of Duke Karl, and the Duke reveals in a letter to the King that in Ulfvenclou had he encountered '... a man rather enlightened in the higher sciences and secrets', and that he had contributed to the Duke's experience '... that the light is stronger than any power of man can endure', and that he had now seen spirits (Forsstrand 1913: 113). Ulfvenclou was well informed in the occult arts such as astrology, chiromancy and geomancy and he was very interested in the Kabbalah. During his stay with the Duke, Ulfvenclou persuaded him that he was in contact with all kinds of spirits and that he had forced the spirit of the Widow Queen into a bottle, which he had 'sealed with the wondrous seal of Solomon' (Forsstrand 1913: 116). In a letter to his friend Carl Göran Bonde, Ulfvenclou includes two magical pentacles and describes how his friend shall be able to communicate with the holy guardian angel. He signed the letter Chæremon, a name he had received on February 11, 1796 at 10 in the evening, when he 'all of a sudden gained his first ordination from the Lord's angels and was given the keys of nature, mercy and all power in the presence of the witnesses Gabriel, Uriel, Razil and others' (Forsstrand 1913: 134).

At this time there also existed an order bearing the Kabbalistic name Metatron. This name has been the subject of numerous speculations among the Kabbalists. It is often the name of an angel that is associated with either the lowest or the highest Sefirah on the Tree of Life. According to one tradition, God took the patriarch Enoch from earth and turned him into the angel Metatron. Metatron is also linked to the heavenly writer who holds God's archive (Scholem 1996: 132). Through a newspaper advertisement in the spring of 1781, the previously unknown order proclaimed its existence and declared that it wished to make public 'the high purpose and history of the society' (Häll 1995: 121). They claimed that the society had been in existence for forty years, and that they, among other things, had engaged in charity. There was no use applying for membership, since they chose their members through physiognomy, a method that analysed man by the appearance of his face. The order claimed to keep their eyes out all over Sweden, but especially in Stockholm, to identify proper candidates. The Grand Master of Metatron has left behind several valuable manuscripts; one, entitled *Blick der unbekanten gloria*, was the foundation of the order.

Besides the advertisement, Reuterholm's essay titled 'Maçonique Händelser' from 1784 is the most important source to this mysterious society. Reuterholm describes the society as 'cosmopolitan and magical' (Häll 1995: 124). At first, Metatron did not approach the experienced mystic Reuterholm, which seems to have angered him, something that was corrected the following year when he speaks about the order as 'a known and highly estimated society' (Lundin & Strindberg 1882: 436).

The cause for the most astounding reputation pertaining to Metatron was that the order, according to Reuterholm, owned Urim and Thummim, which he describes as a mirror in which one can see the true nature of the human spirit. Urim and Thummim are first mentioned in the Book of Exodus 28:30 where Aaron is to carry them when he is to meet with God. There have been speculations as to whether Urim and Thummim were a pair of stones used in old Israeli divination.

Magic, mysticism, Freemasonry and the Kabbalah were nothing uncommon at this time. August Strindberg and Claes Lundin describe the spirit of the age in their book *Gamla Stockholm: Anteckningar ur tryckta och otryckta källor från 1882*:

The secret and wonderful order reached its zenith when Reuterholm and his followers were active in Stockholm. 'This was the time of mysticism . . . The entire town seemed to wish to start orders to find out about the supernatural and lived only for magical convictions.' (Lundin & Strindberg 1882: 436.)

Although individuals such as Duke Karl, Reuterholm and Ulfvenclou moved in such circles that could have let them come into contact with the Kabbalah of Bureus, they seem to have taken no inspiration from his innovative Kabbalistic speculations, but chose to devote themselves to a more traditional Kabbalah.

## Kabbalistic Literature

The Swedish Hebrew scholar Knut Stenring published an English translation of the text *Sepher Yetzirah* in 1923. He wished to re-ignite interest in the Kabbalah with this publication and writes in his foreword:

It is hoped that the elucidations provided in the notes will not only reawaken interest in the text itself but in Kabbalistic philosophy at large and lead to a much-needed renaissance of occultism (Stenring 1923: 17).

In his commentary to the *Sepher Yetzirah* Stenring shows how the twenty-two Major Arcana cards of the Tarot correspond to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The thought that the Tarot corresponds to the Hebrew letters was introduced by the Frenchman Eliphas Levi in his book *Dogme de la Haute Magie*, and thereafter became something of a firm fact in the occult circles. Stenring, however, makes a different set of correspondences than Levi, and explains:

The meaning which “Sepher Yetzirah” assigns to each letter has enabled us to place the Tarot-cards in their original and proper order (Stenring 1923: 38).

The Kabbalah has had a major influence on art and literature and through these channels it has reached many Swedes. The novel *Foucault's Pendulum* (in Italian: *Il Pendolo di Foucault*) by Umberto Eco is one example of fictional reference to the Kabbalah. There is hardly any Kabbalistic literature written in Sweden, but there are a number of translations, especially in the New Age genre. An example of this is *Tarot och Kabbala* by Samuel Aun Weor, translated and published in 1997 by AGEAC (Gnostic Association of Anthropological, Cultural and Scientific Studies), which follows a common pattern in modern Kabbalistic literature wherein the Kabbalah and Indian mysticism are compared and blended. Another example is *Lyfta av Slöjan: praktisk kabbala och kundaliniyoga* by Joseph Michael Levry (published in Swedish in 2002), which is based on the teachings of the Indian guru Yogi Bhajan (1929–2004). The book explains that the Kabbalah is for the western world what Kundalini Yoga is for the East. The wisdom of the Kabbalah can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Yoga sutras and several other holy books (Levry 2002: 5).

*Kabbala: Om Livets träd som hjälpmedel för andlig och personlig utveckling* by Will Parfitt, which was translated from English and published in Swedish in 1997, mixes Kabbalah with yoga and Jungian psychology. In the 1980s the Kabbalistically coloured so-called *Black Bible* (Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses), gained some significance in both the Swedish occult world and in youth cultures. It was translated from English and contains various forms of spirit conjurations, magical seals and names of spirits and demons.

The Jewish Museum in Stockholm had an exhibition about Kabbalah in 2002 and published a catalogue with contributions from both Swedish and foreign writers. Among the contributors we can find names such as the Head Rabbi Morton H. Naro, Professor Anton Geels and the Kabbalah scholar Moshe Idel. Books about Kabbalah in Swedish include

Staffan Danell's short text of eight pages *Kabbala: introduktion* of 1998, which contains short aphorisms regarding the being of God, the salvation of the world and the Sephiroth. *Kabbala, kliffot och den goetiska magin* (2004) and *Adulrunan och den götiska kabbalan* (2005) by Thomas Karlsson have occasionally been on the bestseller lists in New Age bookstores; they have also been translated into English, German and Italian. The first book is an example of practical use of the Kabbalistic theories and the second is a historical and scholarly description of the teachings of Johannes Bureus.

### **Kabbalah in Sweden Today**

The eclectic Hermetic Kabbalah that was developed in England during the nineteenth century in orders such as the Golden Dawn has ever since had a decisive influence on the modern Kabbalah. Today, there are a number of groups in Sweden practising a Kabbalah that can be entirely or partly traced back to the Golden Dawn. Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), who was a member of the Golden Dawn, is one of the most famous magicians and he governed the English section of the German order *Ordo Templi Orientis*, commonly referred to as the O.T.O. Through Crowley, the O.T.O became one of the occult orders that attracted the most attention. Within the O.T.O the Kabbalah is practised according to the interpretation of Aleister Crowley, and the O.T.O is represented in Sweden. In the early 1990s the order *Dragon Rouge* was founded in Sweden and they practise a form of Kabbalah that focuses on its dark side, called the *Qliphoth* or the *Kelippot*, which are believed to give knowledge about the hidden aspects of man. *Dragon Rouge* also shows an interest in the Kabbalistic theories of Johannes Bureus. The Golden Dawn is also represented in Sweden, but was split into a number of smaller fractions, which thereafter developed into independent orders. *Sodalitas Rosæ Crucis* (S.R.C) is one of these, and it mixes the rituals of the Golden Dawn with Gnostic traditions and rites of Freemasonry. The other is *Ordo Primæ Lucis* (O.P.L), which studies Christian Theosophy, Alchemy, Theurgy and Kabbalah. There are also Swedish sections of the Martinist order *Ordre Reux Croix* (O.R.C) and the esoteric organisation *Builders of the Adytum* (B.O.T.A) in which the Kabbalah is an important pillar. The Swedish Satanic group *Misantropiska Lucifer Orden* (M.L.O) has also been inspired by the Kabbalah and its descriptions of the dark side.



When the musical artist Madonna declared her interest in the Kabbalah, this gained a lot of response from the New Age circles. The form of Kabbalah that Madonna practises is not traditional but a special interpretation that has been developed in the successful American Kabbalah Center, led by Philip and Karen Berg and their two sons Yehuda and Michael. Notwithstanding all the attention in Swedish media, this movement seems not to have really established itself in Sweden.

## Final Words

As early as the Renaissance a non-Jewish Kabbalah, which maintained that the teachings of the Kabbalah belonged to Christianity instead of Judaism, was developed. Florence became the centre for the growth of the Christian Kabbalah and the Hermetic Pico della Mirandola has been called the father of the Christian Kabbalah. Pico claimed that in the Kabbalah he could find not so much the Mosaic as the Christian religion.

When the Kabbalah reached Sweden it was mainly the non-Jewish Kabbalah that gained influence, even if its Jewish roots were acknowledged. Johannes Bureus unites, in a similar fashion as do the Christian Kabbalists in continental Europe, Christian motifs with the symbolic world of the Kabbalah. Bureus, however, adds runes, ancient Norse gods and Gothic ideas in his own unique manner. The Kabbalah invites speculation and the search for correspondences which has caused the Kabbalah in Sweden to be united with a number of other traditions. Bureus combined the Kabbalah with runes and Gothicism; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we can find the Kabbalah in Freemasonry and Esoteric societies, while the Kabbalah in the twentieth century and onwards has been associated with New Age, Parapsychology and Indian Mysticism. Apart from Bureus, most Kabbalists in Sweden have followed the trends that flourished in the rest of the world. Bureus was the first to create a specifically Swedish interpretation of the Kabbalah.

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