

CLEMENCE ISAURE: THE ROSICRUCIAN GOLDEN ISIS

Grand Master Julie Scott, S.R.C.

Isis, in one of her many manifestations, was present at the transmission of the Rose+Croix Tradition from the Rosicrucians of Toulouse to H. Spencer Lewis and the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, in August 1909. Grand Master Julie Scott traces the fascinating story of this Golden Isis from the Middle Ages to the beginnings of this phase of Rosicrucian work.



Henri Martin, *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours* (detail). Reprinted with the permission of the Capitole, Toulouse, France.

In 1909 a young H. Spencer Lewis stood before this painting, *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure (the Golden Isis) to the Troubadours*, contemplating its mystical meaning, when the Grand Master of the Rosicrucians of Toulouse presented himself and directed H. Spencer Lewis to the next step in his initiation into the Rosicrucian tradition, which eventually led to the founding of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC.

Why in this place, the *Hall of the Illustrious* in Toulouse's Capitole (city hall), and before this painting, did the Grand Master choose to present himself

to the American mystic who would later re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America as the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis? The answer goes back to the ancient mystery traditions, perpetuated by our Order and so beautifully symbolized in this painting.

Who Was Clemence Isaure?

The name *Clemence* means clemency or mercy, and *Isaure* means Isis of gold, or Golden Isis. Several sources describe Clemence Isaure as an actual person, who lived in the Territory of Oc in the late 1400s and early 1500s, whose beauty and talent were rare and inspiring. Others say she was a fictional character created to perpetuate the feminine traditions of earlier times.

According to legend, following the death of her troubadour love, who praised her through his beautiful songs and whom she adored, Clemence Isaure took a vow of chastity and silence. Before doing so, however, she established an endowment for the city of Toulouse to re-establish the poetry contests of the *Gai Savoir*, a poetry society established in 1323, through a new group called the *Jeux Floraux*.

Antoine-Augustin Préault, statue of Clemence Isaure, marble, 1846. Part of the series of famous women in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. Photo © 2008 by Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons.





The Occitan Cross.

Clemence Isaure symbolized noble action, beauty, and wisdom inspired through poetry. Above all, she represented the perpetuation of the ancient mysteries, especially those associated with the feminine and particularly with the goddess, Isis.

The Mysterious Territory of Oc

In the Middle Ages, the southern half of what is now France, parts of Spain, and Monaco were called Occitania or the Territory of Oc. Today this region is referred to as the Languedoc (the language of Oc) or L'Occitanie. The vibrant Occitan culture allowed equal rights for women and men, encouraged understanding and dialogue between all faiths, provided excellent education for its citizens, and was very peaceful and prosperous.

Drawing heavily on older mystical traditions, the first versions of Kabbalah emerged from this area in the early twelfth century. The Cathars, a sect of Christian mystics whose beliefs most likely originated from the traditions of Old Europe and Manichaeism (Persian Gnosticism), also lived in the Languedoc and other parts of Europe beginning in the eleventh century.

The kings of northern France (a separate country at the time) and the Roman Catholic Church wanted the wealth, land, and converts of the Languedoc, especially of the Cathars, so these two powerful forces plotted against the people of Oc, resulting in their persecution and the near extinction of the Occitan traditions,

at least their public presence, in the 1200s. As many as 500,000 people of the Languedoc, including Christians, Jews, and other mystics, may have been murdered during the twenty-year Albigensian Crusade and the century-long Inquisition that followed.

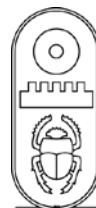
The troubadours, who sang in the language of Oc, found a veiled way to perpetuate the Occitan traditions and their source, the ancient mysteries, through poetic symbolism. While the troubadours appeared to be singing about the love of a man for a woman, they were really referring to the laws of spiritual love. They were expressing the bliss of union with the Divine and the peace that results from this communion. One of the symbols the troubadours used to represent the inner desire of the soul for this mystical union was the rose.

The *Gai Savoir* and *Jeux Floraux*

Following the intense persecution in the area, in 1323 seven individuals in Toulouse, known as the seven troubadours, founded a mystical society called the *Gai Savoir*, meaning “happy knowledge.” The exoteric mission of



The Troubadour Singing to His Love. The Hall of the Illustrious in Toulouse's Capitole displays a series of three murals depicting a troubadour singing to his Love—as a young man, as a middle-aged man (as illustrated here), and as an elderly man. The woman, representing the eternal tradition, remains forever young in the series. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.



this society was to make the world a happier and better place through poetry. Though veiled, the esoteric meaning of their poetry was clear for those with eyes to see.

The seven troubadours circulated a letter to all the poets in the Languedoc, inviting them to present their poetry at a contest the following May (1324). The panel of seven judges chose the winners, who were awarded a violet (its color symbolic of the highest mystical degree), a marigold (representing the philosophical gold), and the wild rose.

The *Gai Savoir* operated as an Order, with a philosophy and rules that they called “the laws of love.” They gathered together the ancient mystical traditions that had been scattered over the centuries, preserved and discreetly perpetuated them.

During the Wars of Religion in France during the 1500s (a century of horrible wars between the French Catholics and Protestant Huguenots), the *Gai Savoir* became dormant. The group later reappeared in the form of the *Jeux Floraux*, with the allegorical discovery of a tomb, similar to the way in which Christian Rosenkreuz’s tomb was found and opened.



The First Meeting of the Jeux Floraux, the Very Joyful Company of the Seven Troubadours, May 3, 1324, by Jean-Paul Laurens, 1912. Exhibited on the Grand Staircase leading up to the *Hall of the Illustrious* in the Capitole, Toulouse, France.¹

The tomb, which was discovered in Toulouse, was that of Clemence Isaure, the allegorical founder of the *Jeux Floraux*. Flowers were also found in this tomb, alluding to the floral prizes earlier awarded by the *Gai Savoir*. The basilica where the tomb is said to be located, called *La Dourade*, is on the site of the first Visigoth temple in Gaul, a previous temple to Minerva (Isis), and today is dedicated to “the black Madonna,” with a beautiful statue of her overlooking the main chapel.

The Rosicrucians Announce Their Presence in France

In 1623, following the publication of the three Rosicrucian manifestos in 1614, 1615, and 1616, the Rosicrucians announced their presence in France by plastering the walls of Paris with mysterious and intriguing posters.

We, the Deputies of the Higher College of the Rose-Croix, do make our stay, visibly and invisibly, in this city, by the grace of the Most High, to Whom turn the hearts of the Just....

He who takes it upon himself to see us merely out of curiosity will never make contact with us. But if his inclination seriously impels him to register in our fellowship, we, who are judges of intentions, will cause him to see the truth of our promises; to the extent that we shall not make known the place of our meeting in this city, since the thoughts attached to the real desire of the seeker will lead us to him and him to us.

Following this and the influence of the Enlightenment, Napoleon and Egyptosophy, Freemasonry, Martinism, Theosophy, Magnetism, and other traditions, the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a flowering of Rosicrucian orders in France. These included the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse (in the Languedoc) and the *Rose+Croix* of France.



Poster for the Rosicrucian Salons, 1892.

Clemence Isaure—the Painting

From 1892 to 1897 under the direction of Joséphin Péladan (who had strong ties to the *Jeux Floraux* and the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse), the *Rose+Croix* of France organized the Salons of the *Rose-Croix* in Paris. These salons, which hosted tens of thousands of guests each year, presented music and Rosicrucian ritual, as well as art. Well-known composer and Rosicrucian Erik Satie was named the musical director of the Order of the *Rose+Croix* in the early 1890s. Claude Debussy, Satie's friend and one of France's greatest composers, was also a Rosicrucian.

The Rosicrucian Salons exhibited the works of many painters of the Symbolist movement, including Henri Martin from Toulouse, whose paintings were exhibited in 1892. That same year Martin was commissioned to create a number of paintings for the *Hall of the Illustrious* in Toulouse's Capitole. He chose as his theme—the *Jeux Floraux*.

One of these paintings is *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours*. In it, Clemence Isaure shows the seven troubadours the charter of the *Jeux Floraux*, which includes the rose and the cross. She is accompanied by three Muses and by the goddess Minerva, the Egyptian Isis.

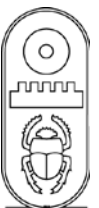
H. Spencer Lewis and *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours*

In 1908, twenty-four-year-old H. Spencer Lewis had a mystical experience in which he was directed to seek out the Rosicrucians in France. Not knowing exactly where to begin, he wrote to a Parisian bookseller who had recently sent him a catalog of mystical books, to ask if he might be able to help him in his quest. The bookseller suggested that H. Spencer Lewis come to Paris.

Following many synchronistic events, H. Spencer Lewis was able to travel to Paris a year and a half later. After meeting with the bookseller and passing many tests and trials, through many cities in France, H. Spencer Lewis was mysteriously handed a note directing him to go to the *Hall of the Illustrious* in the Capitole of Toulouse at a particular time. He was to speak of this to no one.



Henri Martin, *The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours*. Reprinted with the permission of the Capitole, Toulouse, France.



There he silently stood on that day, before this painting, contemplating its mystical meaning. A man in the gallery made a sign (a Rosicrucian sign) that he had seen at other points on his journey. H. Spencer Lewis said to him, “Pardon, Monsieur, but I believe I am addressing a gentleman who has some information for one who is seeking Light.”

The man replied “Yes” in French, and then asked him why he chose to study this painting in particular. H. Spencer Lewis replied, “Because, Monsieur, it seems so beautiful, so wonderful, and expresses what I believe. I see in it a very mysterious meaning, a symbol of—”

Satisfied with this answer the man then handed H. Spencer Lewis a note with instructions on how to proceed. This man was the Grand Master of the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse, who was probably Clovis Lassalle, a well-known photographer (of historic buildings and archival documents) and mystic of Toulouse. Through the *Rose-Croix* of Toulouse, the *Jeux Floraux*, and the Archaeological Society of Midi, Grand Master Lassalle was associated with those who had directed H. Spencer Lewis on his initiatory journey, including the Parisian bookseller and those who would later initiate H. Spencer Lewis into the Rosicrucian tradition.

At midnight on August 12, 1909, H. Spencer Lewis received his mystical initiation into the Rosicrucian tradition, in a Rosicrucian Lodge in an ancient chateau



H. Spencer Lewis, 1915.



Clovis Lassalle, Grand Master of the Rosicrucians of France, 1915.

outside of Toulouse. Here he also accepted the charter to re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America, thereby perpetuating the ancient mysteries that so significantly contributed to it, beautifully symbolized by the inspiring image of Clemence Isaure, the Rosicrucian Golden Isis.

ENDNOTE

¹www.jacobins.mairie-toulouse.fr/patrhist/edifices/textes/capitole/Escalier_JPL.htm.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Academie des Jeux Floraux* at <http://jeux.floroux.free.fr>.
 DuPont, Paul, M.D. *L'Initiation, Guide du Toulouse Mystique*, special publication for the one hundredth anniversary of H. Spencer Lewis's initiation into the Rosicrucian Tradition. French Grand Lodge of AMORC, 2009.
 “The Languedoc” at www.midi-france.info/02_intro.htm.
 Lewis, H. Spencer. “A Pilgrim's Journey to the East.” *American Rosae Crucis* 1:5 (May 1916): 12-27.
 The Louvre Museum at www.louvre.fr
Positio Fratemitatis Rosae Crucis. San Jose: Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, 2001.
 Rebisse, Christian. *Rosicrucian History and Mysteries*. San Jose: Rosicrucian Order, AMORC, 2005.