The Fra. Rosie Cross Cipher 287

The veracity of the cipher 287 of the Rosicrucian Fraternity that signs various books of the 16th and 17th centuries, including the Shakespeare works.

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When the literary works associated with the Rosy Cross Society (Fraternity) and Francis Bacon were published, including the Shakespeare works, they contained various forms of cipher, some numerical, some geometric, some textual, some allegorical, some pictorial and symbolic. Of these, the number 287 is a key cipher.

From what is known so far, the purpose of the ciphers is for them to variously act as signatures, convey messages, record history, illustrate various universal laws and pass on wisdom knowledge. Following John Dee’s example, some of the ciphers seem intended for the purposes of contacting, communicating with, getting to know and working with the higher intelligences of life, which Dee called “angels” and Bacon called “Forms”. Bacon hints at this in his explanation of his Abecedarium Naturae (‘The Alphabet of Nature’) cipher, a fragment of which was printed in Baconiana, edited and published in 1679 by T.T. (Thomas Tenison).

Moreover, Bacon refers to Mathematics as a metaphysical science, and defines two main metaphysical levels, formal and final. The formal causes are what Bacon, like Plato, calls “Forms”, which are the living ideas of God that lie behind all Creation. Sacred tradition refers to these as angels, archetypes, gods, goddesses, or ciphers (Hebrew Sephiroth). These forms or ideas can also be understood as natures—e.g. the essential nature of something. The final causes are the greatest of these divine ideas, of which the supreme cause, “the Summary Law of Nature,” is divine Love or Goodness, the nature of God.

For knowledges are as pyramids, whereof History is the basis. So of Natural Philosophy, the basis is Natural History; the stage next the basis is Physique [Physics]; the stage next the vertical point [apex] is Metaphysique. As for the vertical point, The work that God maketh from the beginning to the end, the Summary Law of Nature, we know not whether man’s enquiry can attain unto it. For as we divided natural philosophy in general into the inquiry of causes and productions of effects, so that part which concerneth the inquiry of causes we do subdivide according to the received and sound division of causes. The one part, which is physic, inquiereth and handleth the material and efficient causes; and the other, which is metaphysic, handleth the formal and final causes.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who was knighted in 1603 as Sir Francis Bacon and later given the titles Baron Verulam of Verulam (1618) and Viscount St Alban (1621), was an expert in cryptography and mathematics, a senior member of the intelligence network in Queen Elizabeth I’s time (and later co-leading his own network with his brother Anthony), and leader of the Society of the Golden and Rosy Cross for the last thirty-three years of his life. Besides being a philosopher, lawyer and poet, he was a mystic and occultist, and a member of the Rosy Cross.
Society from an early age, which he was groomed to lead. Besides Sir Nicholas Bacon, one of his key mentors was the occultist John Dee, a mathematical genius.

Bacon not only used cipher but also invented several ciphers of his own, the *Abecedarium Naturae* cipher being one of them. He names some of them in Book VI of the 1623 Latin edition of his *Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning* (the *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*), which was first published in English translation in 1640:

“Wherefore let us come to CYPHARS. Their kinds are many, as Cyphars simple; Cyphars intermixed with Nulloes, or non-significant characters; Cyphars of double letters under one character; wheele-cyphars; Kay-Cyphars; Cyphars of Words; Others.”4

Bacon then goes on the describe in detail his Biliteral Cipher, which he says he invented in his youth whilst in Paris (1576-9). From the principles of this cipher Morse Code was later developed and, ultimately, the binary system that computers use nowadays.

Previously, in his *Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon had said, but without giving any detailed examples:

“For ciphers, they are commonly in letters or alphabets, but may be in words. The kinds of ciphers (besides the simple ciphers, with changes, and intermixtures of nulls and non-significants) are many, according to the nature or rule of the infolding, wheel-ciphers, key-ciphers, doubles, &c.”5

The simplest of the ciphers used by Francis Bacon and his Rosicrucian fraternity were alphabetical-numerical ones, wherein each letter of the alphabet has an equivalent numerical value. This is an ancient cabalistic cipher method, used in both the Hebraic Old Testament and the Greek New Testament for instance, but which has many possible variations. One which is recorded in Bacon's time is the Latin Cabala, adopted in Italy in 1621 by a circle of literary ecclesiastics, who established it on the occasion of the left arm of the blessed Conrad (a famous hermit) being brought with ceremony from Netina to Piacenza. (The record of this is in a rare pamphlet entitled *Anathemata B. Conrado*, issued in Placentia in 1621.) There are two versions of this Latin Cabala described, one 'Simple' and the other 'Ordinary'—the 'Simple' having twenty-two letters for its alphabet and the 'Ordinary' having twenty-three (the letter 'K' being added).

Bacon's "simple" ciphers are very similar to the Latin Cabala, but based on the twenty-four letters of the Elizabethan alphabet rather than the twenty-two or twenty-three of the Latin Cabala. Three main variations are used—the Simple Cipher, the Reverse Cipher and the Key (or Kay) Cipher. There are two variations of the Key/Kay Cipher and it is the second one which is the most important and used, for instance, in the Shakespeare Folio of plays.

Bacon also used the Pythagorean Cipher, based on the twenty-six-letter alphabet. This is a particular Masonic cipher, identifying Freemasonic things: for Pythagoras is revered in Freemasonry as being the one who introduced Freemasonry into Europe. He and his school were involved in mathematics (geometry and numerology), matching that of the Hebrew kabbalists, and his name is associated with the 47th Problem of Euclid, known as the Pythagoras Theorem and illustrated by a 3-4-5-sided right-angle triangle with squares on each
side. This Pythagoras Theorem is a key symbol of Freemasonry and, when shown hanging beneath the Square, is the jewel of a Past Master.

The basic Simple Cipher (i.e. A = 1, B = 2, ...Z = 24) is illustrated on page 141 in Gustavus Selenus' great cipher book, *Cryptomenitices et Cryptographiae*, published in Germany in 1624.

**SIMPLE CIPHER**

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This Simple Cipher was developed by Francis Bacon into what he called the *Abecedarium Naturae*—a four-fold structure in which the twenty-four-letter alphabet is repeated four times so that the corresponding numbers continue to 96 (i.e. 4 x 24) and each of the numbers/letters in the four sets relates both to a Greek letter and word, and also to an element or celestial body.

The Reverse Cipher is simply the Simple Cipher in reverse (i.e. A = 24, B = 23, ...Z = 1), and its use seems to be as an occasional double-check to the veracity of cipher signatures in the other main ciphers.

**REVERSE CIPHER**

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Key/Kay Ciphers were first mentioned by Francis Bacon in his *Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning* published in 1605. In his 1623 enlarged Latin edition, *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*, he refers to them as the “Ciphrae Clavis” (‘Key Ciphers’). The 1640 English translation refers to them as “Kay Cyphers”.

The Baconian, Mr. W. E. Clifton, discovered the working of the Kay Cipher with the help of two particular volumes from his collection of 17th century books—Thomas Powell’s *The Repertorie of Records* (1631) and a special 1671 edition of Rawley’s *Resuscitatio*, a collection of Bacon’s works. These alerted him to the fact that the cipher uses the twenty-six characters of the old alphabet primers, in which the Ampersand ('&') followed by 'et' was added to the twenty-four-letter alphabet.

In this Key or Kay Cipher, the letter K, as the tenth letter of the 24-letter Elizabethan alphabet, starts the cipher numbering at 10. The numbering then continues to Z (= 24), followed by the '&' and 'et' (= 25 and 26, but are treated as nulls), then moves to the beginning of the alphabet so that A = 27, B = 28, etc...
KEY/KAY CIPHER

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In this way, all the letters of the alphabet correspond to two-digit numbers, to avoid confusion in deciphering. It also defines the letter K (pronounced ‘Kay’) as the ‘Key’ letter that both begins and identifies the cipher. That is to say, K is the key to the cipher—a neat play on letters, words and meanings.

Cabalistically, K, as key, refers to the All, 10 being a cipher for Divinity—hence the ten Sephiroth (‘Ciphers’) of the Tree of Life that denote the All. Moreover, Sephira 10, the Kingdom, represents the Bride of Sephira 1, the Spirit. She is the ‘Omega’ of “Alpha-Omega”, the Revelation of Genesis, the Truth that is the Knowledge of the original Truth or Divine Wisdom/Word. She is symbolised as the Holy Grail into which all the other Sephiroth are poured and which she then contains or holds. The pregnant woman (Venus, whose child is Eros) or the woman’s face with her veil removed are other symbolic images. Bacon’s “Time brings forth Hidden Truth” emblem, printed on the title-page of his New Atlantis (1627), is another example. These are keys to the Greater Mystery.

![](Bride headpiece: Venus and Adonis (1593/4)

Truth-Time emblem: New Atlantis (1627)

These three ciphers—Simple, Reverse and Kay—are employed as signatures on monuments and in published works of Francis Bacon and the Rosicrucian fraternity, including the Shakespeare works. The main signatures are:

CIPHER SIGNATURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Kay</th>
<th>Reverse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis Bacon</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Bacon</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fra. Rosie Cross</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>168</td>
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For instance, in Francis Bacon’s *Advancement and Proficience of Learning* (1640) there are 287 letters on the Frontispiece page, 287 letters on the Dedication page, and 287 letters on page 215, which is falsely numbered and should in reality be page 287, just to make sure we get the message. Each of these key pages is therefore signed ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ in Kay Cipher. Moreover, because it is definitely Francis Bacon’s book (i.e. he is the known author and his book is signed with his name), it definitively associates him with the Rosie Cross Fraternity—and also himself as “Francis Rosicrosse”, as explained by Dr John Wilkins (see below).

Then, in the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare plays, we have the following:

- Ben Jonson’s Portrait Poem on the first page of the Shakespeare Folio has 287 letters, the count of ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ in Kay Cipher.
- The title-page of the Folio, containing Shakespeare’s portrait, has 157 letters in its words, the count of ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ in Simple Cipher.
- The first page of the Dedication in the Shakespeare Folio has 157 words in italic font, the count of ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ in Simple Cipher.
- The Catalogue of plays has exactly 100 Roman letters on the full page, and 100 complete italic words in its second column, the count of ‘Francis Bacon’ in Simple Cipher. The page also has 111 capitals in italic font, the count of ‘Francis Bacon’ in Kay Cipher.
- The first page of the Comedies, (i.e. the first page of *The Tempest*) has 287 words in regular font in its second column, whilst its first column has 100 italic font letters (actors’ character names discounted) and 257 words in regular font. 287 = ‘Fra Rosie Cross’ (Kay Cipher), and 100 = ‘Francis Bacon’ (Simple Cipher). Then, 257 minus 100 = 157 = ‘Fra Rosie Cross’ (Simple Cipher). That is to say, 257 = 100 + 157 = ‘Francis Bacon, Fra Rosie Cross’.6

The main fully-worded text of eight lines on the inscription of the Shakespeare Monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, has 287 letters (i.e. ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ in Kay Cipher) in its 50 complete words. This is the “Stratford Moniment” referred to in the poem by L. Digges prefacing the 1623 Shakespeare Folio. 50 is the number of Argonauts who go in search of (and find) the Golden Fleece. The Golden Fleece represents knowledge of truth, which is illumination. Orpheus and the two Gemini were Argonauts. They are keys to the mystery of Shakespeare. The Gemini were known as Spear-shakers and also as swans, being children of Leda and the Swan. Orpheus was hailed as the “Sweet Swan”, and two of his primary symbols were the cross and the rose.

Complementing this, the deliberately garbled quotation (derived from *The Tempest*, Act 4, scene 1) on the scroll of the 18th century Shakespeare Memorial in Westminster Abbey is made up of 33 complete words containing 157 letters. (In Simple Cipher, 33 = ‘Bacon’, and 157 = ‘Fra Rosie Cross’.) The Westminster Abbey memorial was erected in 1741, but the project was launched in 1726, the centenary of Bacon’s death. (A century = 100 = ‘Francis Bacon’ in Simple Cipher.)

The cipher 287 in the Kay or Key Cipher is understood to mean ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’. This is usually taken to signify ‘Fraternitas Rosie Cross’. However, this interpretation is a mixture of Latin and English. If it was pure Latin, it would read ‘Fraternitas Rosae Crucis’. The better or purer interpretation of ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ is to take it as an all-English expression meaning ‘Rosie Cross Fraternity’ or ‘Fraternity [of the] Rosie Cross’. With the movement of one letter, the
cipher 287 could also be rendered ‘Fra. Rosi Crosse’, standing for ‘Rosi Crosse Fraternity’ or ‘Fraternity [of the] Rosi Crosse’. The two versions mean the same and represent two primary ways that the symbolic title was spelled.

The two Rosicrucian manifestos that publicised the name and existence of the Fraternity—the Fama Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis (1614) and Confessio Fratemitatis Rosae Crucis (1615)—were first translated into English in 1652 by Thomas Vaughan alias Eugenius Philalethes, a self-described member of the “Society of Unknown Philosophers”. In this translation, the RC Fraternity are referred to as the “Fraternity of the Rosie Cross”:

“Now I do not think that there can be found any one who would not wish and desire with all his heart to be Partaker of this noble Treasure; but seeing the same Felicity can happen to none, except God himself give Wisdom, and send his holy Spirit from above, we have therefore set forth in print this little Treatise, to wit, Famam & Confessionem, of the Laudable Fraternity of the Rosie Cross, to be read by every one, because in them is clearly shewn and discovered, what concerning it the World hath to expect.”

“Although these things may seem somewhat strange, and many may esteem it to be but a Philosophical shew, and no true History, which is published and spoken of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross; it shall here sufficiently appear by our Confession, that there is more in recessu then may be imagined…”

“After this manner began the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross…”

Robert Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), mentions the Fraternity as the “Rosie-crosse men”:

“We had need of some general visitor in our age, that should reform what is amiss; a just army of Rosie-crosse men, for they will amend all matters (they say), religion, policy, manners, with arts; sciences, &c.”

The Masonic poem, Muses Thenodie: of Mirthful Mournings on the death of Mr Gall, written by Henry Adamson of Perth and published in Edinburgh in 1638, refers to the “brethren of the Rosie Crosse” and associates them with Freemasonry:

“Thus Mr Gall assured it would be so
And my good genius doth surely know:
For what we presage is not in grosse,
For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse:
We have the Mason Word, and second sight,
Things for to come we can foretell aright.”

The higher degrees of the original 17th century Speculative Freemasonry were, in fact, Rosicrucian. Once a Freemason had undergone symbolic death and been raised to become a Master Mason, he was then exalted to the Holy Royal Arch Degree where he discovered the Mason Word, representing the Word of God. This is revelation; thus, the Royal Arch companion has “second sight” and the gift of prophecy (“Things for to come we can foretell aright”). Revelation is illumination.
A symbolic representation of this is given in the Freemasonic-Rosicrucian headpiece to the Bedson Medley edition of *Shake-speare’s Sonnets* (referred to as *Poems*) published in 1723 by Alexander Pope and Dr. Sewell. 1723 was the centenary of the publication of the First Folio of Shakespeare plays. The year was also marked by the publication of *The Book of Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, written by Dr. James Anderson under the authority and by the express request of the London Grand Lodge. The headpiece contains symbols of the various degrees of Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. The central panel depicts the three Principals of the Holy Royal Arch and higher Rosicrucian degrees. They are observing the Sun, symbol of Light, with one of them pointing and the other two using telescopes.

Masonic tradition, as recounted in James Anderson’s *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (1723), states specifically that St Alibon was the founder and First Grand Master of English Freemasonry, and that he was made Grand Master in 287 and martyred on the 22nd June, 303. Freemasonry teaches via symbolism, so the dates are primarily symbolic and meaningful.

The early Romano-British and then Anglo-Saxon/English Freemasonry, which St Alibon is said to have founded, was in fact Craft Masonry. It always had a speculative core, with secrets; but purely Speculative Freemasonry, as distinct from Craft Masonry, was not truly founded until the early 17th century. The founder and First Grand Master of Speculative Freemasonry was Francis Bacon, who was acknowledged and identified as such when he was given the title of Viscount St Alibon in 1621, being named after the saint rather than the place, St Albans, as would have been normal practice (e.g. Viscount of St Albans). As such, he signed his letters as “Fr. St. Albans” or, occasionally, “Francis St. Alban”. He was also acknowledged as an Apollo, Daystar of the Muses, which is the symbolic title of the President of the Rosie Cross Fraternity, the overarching Grand Master of all.

The year 287 is the Key/Kay cipher for ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’. The year 303 is equivalent to 33 (the zero, 0, is a null) and 33 = ‘Bacon’ in Simple Cipher. 33 also stands for the 33rd degree, the highest degree of the Freemasonic-Rosicrucian initiatory system—the degree associated with Francis St Alibon.

But why should the number 287 stand for ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ (or ‘Fra. Rosi Crosse’)? There is a very good reason as to why this should be so.

The first Rosicrucian manifesto, *Fama Fraternitatis*, describes Father C.R.C.’s vault as having seven sides, each side five feet by eight feet, and seven corners. This strange description gives the equation $7 \times (5 \times 8) + 7 = 287$. Here we have the mathematical and symbolic reason as to why the cipher 287 is associated specifically with the Rosie Cross Fraternity. Moreover, 287 is also the cipher signature of the head or ‘Father’ of the Fraternity, Fra. R.C. or C.R.C.
“In the morning following we opened the door, and there appeared to our sight a Vault of seven sides and corners, every side five foot broad, and the height of eight foot.”\textsuperscript{14}

In the \textit{Fama} and \textit{Confessio} the Father of the Fraternity is simply identified by initials, or ciphers, which vary in different places—e.g. Fra. C.R., R.C., C.R.C., or R.C.C.. The Brothers of the Fraternity are likewise identified by initials, or ciphers—e.g. Fra. G.V., Fra. I.A. and Fra. I.O., who with Fra. C.R.C. comprised the first four Brothers who made the magical language and writing, the dictionary, and the first part of book M. The four extra brothers who then joined them are identified as Fra. R.C., Fra. B., Fra. G. and Fra. P.D. In all these instances ‘Fra’ signifies ‘Frater’, Latin for ‘Brother’. This also means that the ‘Fra.’ in ‘Fra. Rosie Cross’ can signify ‘Frater’ in Latin or ‘Brother’ in English. However, ‘Fra.’ can also signify ‘Franciscus’ in Latin or ‘Francis’ in English, the name of a person.

That this is so is revealed by Dr John Wilkins, Bishop of Chester, a Freemason and a principal founder and Secretary of the Royal Society, whose declared ‘Instaurator’ was Francis Bacon. Wilkins, when speaking of the ever-burning lamps of the ancients on pages 236-7 of his \textit{Mathematical Magick} (1648), states in a footnote that: -

Ludovicus Vives tells us of another lamp that did continue burning for 1050 years, which was found a little before his time. Such a lamp is likewise related to be seen in the sepulcher of Francis Rosicrosse, as is more largely expressed in the confession of that fraternity.\textsuperscript{15}

The prefix \textit{Fra.} is normally assumed to mean \textit{Frater}, the Latin for ‘Brother’, but Wilkins reveals that it actually or alternatively means ‘Francis’. Fra. C.R.C., therefore, could be taken to refer to Francis Bacon as the ‘Father’ and instaurator of the Rosicrucian Fraternity.

Michael Maier, in discussing the Laws of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross in his \textit{Themis Aurea} (1656), confirms that ‘R.C.’ refers not only to the Rose and Cross, prime symbols of the Fraternity, but is also specifically intended to denote “the name of their first Author”.

Moreover, from the evidence of the anonymous \textit{Fama} and \textit{Confessio}, plus that of the \textit{Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz} (‘The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz’) attributed to Johann Valentin Andreea, the cipher C.R.C. would appear to mean Christian Rosy Cross, which is how most people understand it.

If the name Francis is read symbolically according to its meaning (i.e. ‘Free’, from Sanskrit \textit{pri}, meaning ‘love’), then it confirms that the Father, Fra. C.R.C., is someone who is free in the initiatic sense—i.e. set free by love from ignorance and vice to become an ascended master, an immortal-mortal or “Son of God, son of man” (also known traditionally as a god-man), wherein the soul is firmly established in (or united consciously with) its real Self.\textsuperscript{16} This latter interpretation fits both the text and symbolism of the \textit{Fama}, wherein Father C.R.C. is described as kind, beloved, faithful, upright, noble, loving, highly illuminated and godly, and the allegorical discovery and opening of his tomb is equivalent symbolically to that of the Holy Royal Arch Degree in Freemasonry, and the Resurrection and Ascension in Christianity.

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Endnotes

1 Ecclesiastes 3:11.
2 Bacon, Francis, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bk 2, VII (6).
3 Bacon, Francis, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bk 2, VII (3).
4 Bacon, Francis, *Of the Advancement and Proficience of Learning* (1640), Bk 6, Cap.I, III, p.264.
5 Bacon, Francis, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bk 2, XVI (6).
6 See Francis Bacon’s Cipher Signatures by Frank Woodward (1923) for a detailed study.
7 *Fama fraternitatis Roseae Crucis* (‘The Fame of the Fraternity of the Rosie Cross), existed in manuscript in 1610 and was published in 1614. It is an anonymous Rosicrucian manifesto published in 1614 in Kassel, Hesse-Kassel (in present-day Germany). In 1652, Thomas Vaughan translated the work into English. An Italian edition was published as an appendix of the 77th Advertisement (part), under the title *Generale Riforma dell’ Universo* (‘Universal Reformation of Mankind’), from a German translation of Bocallini’s *Ragguagli di Parnasso* (‘Advertisements from Parnassus’).
8 *The fame and confession of the fraternity of R: C: Commonly, of the Rosie Cross. With a praeface annexed thereto, and a short declaration of their physicall work.* By Eugenius Philalethes (1652).
9 ‘To the Wise and Understanding Reader,’ *The fame and confession of the fraternity of R: C: Commonly, of the Rosie Cross.* By Eugenius Philalethes (1652).
10 ‘To the Wise and Understanding Reader,’ *The fame and confession of the fraternity of R: C: Commonly, of the Rosie Cross.* By Eugenius Philalethes (1652).
11 ‘Fama’, *The fame and confession of the fraternity of R: C: Commonly, of the Rosie Cross.* By Eugenius Philalethes (1652).
12 Burton, Robert, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is: With all the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Several Cures of it. In Three Maine Partitions with their several Sections, Members, and Subsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically, Opened and Cut Up.* First published in 1621, but republished five more times over the next seventeen years with massive alterations and expansions.
13 *The muses threnodie, or, mirthfull mournings, on the death of Master Gall. Containing varietie of pleasant poetical descriptions, morall instructions, historiall narrations, and divine observations, with the most remarkable antiquities of Scotland, especially at Perth,* by Henry Adamson, King James College, Edinburgh, 1638.
14 *Fama Fraternitatis, or, A Discovery of the Fraternity of the most laudable Order of the Rosy Cross.* Originally published anonymously in 1615 and 1616. Translated into English by Thomas Vaughan, 1652.
16 See *The Holy Science* by Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (written in 1894 under the title *Kaivalya Darsanam*).