



Dear Masonic Student,

We had a good question this week, and I thought you might like to see a likeness of Brother Joseph Balsamo, actually he was born with the name Giuseppe Balsamo. Above is a photo of a Bust of Count Cagliostro, the other name Brother Balsamo went by; the bust is by Brother Jean Antione Houdon, who was member of the Lodge of Nine Sisters in Paris.

We had some very good correct answers this week from three very knowledgeable Brethren. I should mention that the first answer I received was from **Brother Elliott Saxton** who sent me his answer within minutes of my sending out the question in the March 3rd issue of Mehr Licht, or More Light. He was so fast I was really surprised, and he had the right answer. Masonic Research truly is fun!

The three Brethren who had the right answer were:

Brother Elliott Saxton of North Star Lodge #23 in St. Cloud, MN and also of Lake Harriett Lodge #277 in Mpls, MN

Worshipful Brother Norman Davis, Brother Norman is the current Worshipful Master of Tuscan # 77 Waseca, MN and Unaka Lodge # 651, Tellico Plains, TN

Most Worshipful Brother Don Severson of Phoenix Daylight Lodge and Arcana Lodge in Minneapolis.

All three of these Brothers are very knowledgeable Masons, and it was good to hear from them on this week's question.

Our Grand Lodge Annual Communication is coming up in April and I know I'll see my good Brothers Norman and Don there, and I'll see my good Brother Elliott tomorrow night in Lodge.

The answer I have to the question will follow, it is quite long, so you may want to read it in parts. It, of course comes from Mackey's Masonic Encyclopedia; Clegg edition. There is also information on this question in Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia.

However, I thought you might like to read the answers I received. So here is the answer from **W.B. Norman Davis**:

Joseph Balsamo (Cagliostro) is said to be one of the greatest figures in occult, although since the late 19th century he has been considered by many to be a charlatan. Many wild stories have grown up around him, which have obscured the true facts of his life, which are more unbelievable than the fiction. He is said to have invented, in 1777, that grand scheme of imposture under the name of Egyptian Freemasonry, by the propagation of which he subsequently became so famous as the great Masonic charlatan of his age. Catherine the Great of Russia was his most powerful and relentless enemy. Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of France lost their heads due, in part, to his machinations

Born Giuseppe Balsamo in 1743 in the Albergheria, a haunt of cut-throats, prostitutes and

extortionists in Palermo, Italy. The date was either June 2nd or 8th depending on which resource you quote.

In the month of April, 1776 he received the degrees in Esperance Lodge, No. 289, which then met at the King's Head Tavern, London. Cagliostro's greatest coup was reinventing freemasonry, converting it from essentially rational associations of free thinkers into pseudo-Egyptian mumbo-jumbo. This Egypt Freemasonry constituted the great pursuit of the rest of his life, and was the instrument which he used for many years to make dupes of thousands of credulous persons. He was better known as Alessandro, Comte de Cagliostro aka: Count Cagliostro .

Brother Elliott Saxton provided this answer:

He was born as Giuseppe Balsamo, he was made a mason at Esperance Lodge No. 289 in London in 1776. He's made famous under the name of Count Cagliostro and is famous for founding the clandestine egyptian rite of freemasonry.

M.W. Brother Don Severson reminds us that Brother Balsamo died in a French Prison:

I did not have time to research this one in depth, but briefly, He was Born Guiseppe Balsamo in Sicily. He was an occultist, a charlatan and a con man. He was made a Mason in London, England, and was known to most of the world as Count Cagliostro. He died in a French prison.

I know these Brethren are busy men, and don't always have the time they'd like for research but they did a great job on this question – Good going!

CAGLIOSTRO

Alessandro, Count of Cagliostro

Giuseppe Balsamo = See Coil's Cagliostro

Of all the Masonic persons of romantic celebrity who flourished in the eighteenth century the Count Cagliostro was most prominent, whether we consider the ingenuity of his schemes, the extensive field of his operations through almost every country of Europe, or the distinguished character and station of many of those whose credulity made them his enthusiastic supporters.

The history of Freemasonry in that century would not be complete without a reference to this personage. To write the history of Freemasonry in the eighteenth century and to leave out Cagliostro, would be like enacting the play of Hamlet and leaving out the part of the Prince of Denmark. And yet Carlyle has had occasion to complain of the paucity of materials for such a work.

Indeed, of one so well known as Cagliostro comparatively little is to be found in print. Doctor Mackey held that there was sufficient published to prove him to be a "charlatan" and a "prince of Masonic imposters."

The authorities on which Brother Mackey rested his belief are mentioned in his following sentence. The only works upon which he who would write his life must depend are a Life of him published in London, 1787; Memoirs, in Paris, 1786; and Memoirs Authentiques,

Strasbourg, 1786; a Life, in Germany, published at Berlin, 1787; another in Italian, published at Rome in 1791; and a few fugitive pieces, consisting chiefly of manifestoes of himself and his disciples. The widest differences exist among writers as to Cagliostro's true standing, the majority following the lead of Doctor Mackey, whose account is appended.

Joseph Balsamo, subsequently known as Count Cagliostro, was the son of Peter Balsamo and Felicia Braconieri, both of mean extraction, and was born on the 8th of June, 1743, in the city of Palermo. Upon the death of his father, he was taken under the protection of his maternal uncles, who caused him to be instructed in the elements of religion and learning, by both of which he profited so little that he eloped several times from the Seminary of St. Roch, near Palermo, where he had been placed for his instruction.

At the age of thirteen he was carried to the Convent of the Good Brotherhood at Castiglione. There, having assumed the habit of a novice, he was placed under the tuition of the apothecary, from whom he learned the principles of chemistry and medicine. His brief residence at the convent was marked by violations of many of its rules; and finally, abandoning it altogether, he returned to Palermo. There he continued his vicious courses, and was frequently seized and imprisoned for infractions of the law. At length, having cheated a goldsmith, named Marano, of a large amount of gold, he was compelled to flee from his native country.

He then repaired to Messina, where he became acquainted with one Altotas, who pretended to be a great chemist. Together they proceeded to Alexandria in Egypt, where, by means of certain chemical, or perhaps rather by financial, operations, they succeeded in collecting a considerable amount of money.

In 1776 Cagliostro appeared in London. During this visit, Cagliostro became connected with the Order of Freemasonry. In the month of April he received the degrees in Esperance Lodge, No. 289, which then met at the King's Head Tavern. Cagliostro did not join the Order with disinterested motives, or at least he determined in a very short period after his initiation to use the Institution as an instrument for the advancement of his personal interests. Here he is said to have invented, in 1777, that grand scheme of imposture under the name of Egyptian Freemasonry, by the propagation of which he subsequently became so famous as the great Masonic charlatan of his age.

London did not fail to furnish him with a fertile field for his impositions, and the English Freemasons seemed no way reluctant to become his dupes; but, being ambitious for the extension of his Rite, and anxious for the greater income which it promised, he again passed over to the Continent, where he justly anticipated abundant success in its propagation. This Egypt Freemasonry constituted the great pursuit of the rest of his life, and was the instrument which he used for many years to make dupes of thousands of credulous persons.

During Cagliostro's residence in England, on his last visit, he was attacked by the editor Morand, in the *Courier de l'Europe*, in a series of abusive articles, to which Cagliostro

replied in a letter to the English people. But, although he had a few Egyptian Lodges in London under his government, he appears, perhaps from Morand's revelations of his character and life, to have lost his popularity, and he left England permanently in May, 1787. He went to Savoy, Sardinia, and other places in the south of Europe, and at last, in May, 1789, by an act of rash temerity, preceded to Rome, where he organized an Egyptian Lodge under the very shadow of, the Vatican. But this was more than the Church, which had been excommunicating Freemasons for fifty years, was willing to endure. On the 27th of December of that year, on the festival of St. John the Evangelist, to whom he had dedicated his Lodges, the Holy Inquisition arrested him, and locked him up in the castle of San Angelo.

There, after such a trial as the Inquisition is wont to give to the accused-in which his wife is said to have been the principal witness against him-he was convicted of having formed "societies and conventicles of Freemasonry." His manuscript entitled *Maçonnerie Egyptienne* was ordered to be burned by the public executioner, and he himself was condemned to death; a sentence which the Pope subsequently commuted for that of perpetual imprisonment. Cagliostro appealed to the French Constituent Assembly, but of course in vain.

Thenceforth no more is seen of him. For four years this adventurer, who had filled during his life so large a space in the world's history-the associate of princes, prelates, and philosophers; the inventor of a spurious Rite, which had, however, its thousands of disciples-languished within the gloomy walls of the prison of St. Leo, in the Duchy of Urbino, and at length, in the year 1795, in a fit of apoplexy, bade the world adieu. But there is another side to the foregoing account by Doctor Mackey. Some more recent writers have seriously questioned the identity of Cagliostro and Balsamo.

Both Trowbridge and Spence deem the later evidence to have proven that Cagliostro was not Balsamo. Lewis Spence sums up the situation thus in his *Encyclopedia of Occultism* after a lengthy review of the various assertions of the authorities and the test of them by the ascertained facts:

"It is distinctly no easy matter to get at the bedrock truth regarding Cagliostro or to form any just estimate of his true character. That he was vain, naturally pompous, fond of theatrical mystery, and of the popular side of occultism, is most probable.

Another circumstance which stands out in relation to his personality is that he was vastly desirous of gaining cheap popularity. He was probably a little mad. On the other hand he was beneficent, and felt it his mission in the then king-ridden state of Europe to found Egyptian Masonry for the protection of society in general, and the middle and lower classes in particular. A born adventurer, he was by no means a rogue, as his lack of shrewdness has been proved on many occasions. There is small question either that the various Masonic lodges which he founded and which were patronized by persons of ample means, provided him with extensive funds and it is a known fact that he was subsidized by several extremely wealthy men, who, themselves dissatisfied by the state of affairs in Europe, did not hesitate to place their riches at his disposal for the purpose of undermining the tyrannic powers which then wielded sway.

There is reason to believe that he had in some way and at some period of his life acquired a certain working knowledge of practical occultism, and that he possessed certain elementary psychic powers of hypnotism and telepathy. His absurd account of his childhood is almost undoubtedly a plagiarism of that stated in the first manifesto to the public of the mysterious Rosicrucian Brotherhood, as containing an account of the childhood of their Chief. But on the whole he is a mystery, and in all likelihood the clouds which surround his origin and earlier years will never be dispersed. It is probably better that this should be so, as although Cagliostro was by no means an exalted character, he was yet one of the most picturesque figures in the later history of Europe; and assuredly not the least aid to his picturesqueness is the obscurity in which his origin is involved."

For further reading on the career of Cagliostro, a showing to the effect that if he was not of unalloyed honor, he was not altogether an impostor and scoundrel, consult Cagliostro: The Splendor and Mystery of a Master of Magic by W. R. H. Trowbridge, and An Encyclopedia of Occukism by Lewis Spence.

Other books of reference are Cagliostro and Company, by Franz Funck-Brentano, and the Life of Joseph Balsamo, published at Dublin in 1792, the latter being translated from the original proceedings published at Rome by order of the Apostolic Chamber and therefore of especial interest as the Roman Catholic argument against one condemned by the Inquisition for being a Freemason. This report (page 239), asserts that the judgment entirely accords with justice, equity, prudence, religion, and public tranquillity.

It then runs thus: "Joseph Balsamo, attainted and convicted of many crimes, and having incurred the censures and penalties pronounced against formal heretics, dogmatists, heresiarchs, and propagators of magic and superstition, has been found guilty, and condemned to the censures and penalties denounced as well by the apostolic laws of Clement XII and of Benedict XIV against those who in any manner whatever favor or form societies and conventicles of Free Masons, as by the edict of the Council of State against those who are guilty of this crime at Rome, or any other place under the dominion of the Pope.

Notwithstanding this, by way of special grace and favor, this crime, the expiation of which demands the delivery of the culprit over to the secular arm, to be by it punished with death, is hereby changed and commuted into perpetual imprisonment, in a fortress where the culprit is to be strictly guarded, without any hope of pardon whatever."

This order was carried into effect as was also the burning by "the hand of the hangman" of Cagliostro's manuscript on Egyptian Freemasonry as were all his other books, instruments, symbols, etc., relating thereto. The order also confirmed and renewed the laws of the Roman Catholic Church prohibiting societies and conventiclors of Freemasons, and winds up by declaring "We shall enact the most grievous corporal punishments, and principally those provided for heresies, against whosoever shall associate, hold communication with, or protect, these societies."

