

Secret Societies

by Jaap Kloosterman

Attempts to circumscribe our topic are naturally hampered by the fact that secrecy is a many-sided thing. The expression "secret societies" evokes a Wittgensteinian family resemblance of a great variety of organisations with all sorts of similarities, yet not a single feature common to all. As a result, most existing definitions are accompanied by abundant provisos, qualifications, and exceptions. For a historical survey, the easiest way to get a grasp of the subject is first to trace the history of the term. Then we shall look in turn at the two sides of the secret society: Its bringing together of men who are hiding something.

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Birth of a Concept: Secret Societies During the 18th Century

This contribution will approach its elusive subject by first looking at the emergence of the expression "secret societies" in publications of the 18th century. This will then allow us to discuss the different social phenomena the term referred to at the time, in order to move on to their functions and development up to the 20th century. The expression "secret societies" in its alliterative and often plural form – also found in French (*sociétés secrètes*) and German (*geheime Gesellschaften*) – dates back to the final quarter of the European 18th century. This is paradoxically documented by what looks like its first appearance in a monograph title, *De secretis societatis litterariis* (→ Media Link #ab), written by the philosopher Johan Bilmark (1728–1801) (→ Media Link #ac) at the Royal Academy of Åbo (Turku) in 1772. Although the author illustrated his argument with a series of historical examples, his main aim was to applaud the recent birth of *Aurora*. This name refers to a literary-musical association in Åbo that like its model, the Swedish society *Utile Dulci*, was not an open organisation, but initiated members into a number of degrees.¹ In other words, Bilmark's title should be translated as "On secret literary societies" rather than as "On literary secret societies".²

▲ 1

The real beginnings of the modern term probably go back to the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* of the mid-1780s. At that time, the journal, published by Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811) (→ Media Link #ad), pointed its arrows at the Jesuit order. Even though the *Societas Jesu* had been suppressed (→ Media Link #ae) in the Bourbon-governed countries and abolished by Pope Clemens XIV (1705–1774) (→ Media Link #af) in 1773, it was suspected to survive underground and to combat Protestantism and the Enlightenment through "eine Menge geheimer schädliche[r] Gesellschaften".³ The ensuing discussion (→ Media Link #ah) soon encompassed the fate of the *Order of the Illuminati* which had been founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830) (→ Media Link #ai). He was a professor of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt who took his inspiration from both the Jesuits and the Masons (→ Media Link #aj). His "geheime Gesellschaft", as Weishaupt labelled it, sought to win members among the elite and to conquer good positions in order to influence government. In 1785, however, it was closed down by the Bavarian Elector Karl Theodor (1724–1799) (→ Media Link #ak), to the delight of the Catholics and the indignation of their enemies.⁴

▲ 2

These matters raised a lot of dust. Since the 1750s, opponents of the Jesuits had been reprinting the infamous *Monita secreta* (→ Media Link #al), a collection of falsified "secret instructions" of the order that first appeared in Kraków in 1614, and the Jesuit fathers had retaliated by repeating their accusation (→ Media Link #am) of a Jansenist conspiracy which had supposedly been planned at Bourgfontaine in 1621.⁵ The Bavarian government published compromising documents (→ Media Link #ao) of the *Illuminati*, to which some members responded in defence: In the five years following 1785, no less than 50 publications in Germany and abroad discussed the nature of the group.⁶ By then, the revolutionary events in France had begun to create even more favourable

Ever since the French Revolution (→ Media Link #aq) had been studied and interpreted, some had sought to identify certain groups that could be held responsible for its course. These individuals were not only thought of as more or less unwitting abettors – such as the Calvinists and *philosophes* in many a Catholic's eyes – but also as determined long-time plotters. The originators of these theories had very diverse backgrounds. One of them, Jacques Le Sueur, was better known as the prolific dramatist Beaunoir (actually Alexandre-Louis-Bertrand Robineau (1746–1823) (→ Media Link #ar)). He, who himself was a defrocked priest and a Mason, published the novelistic work *Les Masques arrachées* ("The Masks Removed") in which he accused a certain number of Freemasons and Jesuits of having started the revolutions in France and Brabant. Charles-Louis Cadet de Gassicourt (1769–1821) (→ Media Link #as), who was a bastard of Louis XV (1710–1774) (→ Media Link #at) and would later become the apothecary of Napoleon I (1769–1821) (→ Media Link #au), also was and always remained a Mason. In *Le Tombeau de Jacques Molai* (→ Media Link #av) ("The Grave of Jacques Molai", 1796), he proposed a genealogical line from the *Templars* and *Assassins* through the Jesuits and Freemasons to the *Illuminati*. John Robison (1739–1805) (→ Media Link #ax), the author of *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1798), was not only a Mason but also a friend of the inventor James Watt (1736–1819) (→ Media Link #ay) and a professor of philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. By contrast, Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (1735–1809) (→ Media Link #az), a celebrated Spanish linguist who wrote *Causas de la revolución de Francia* ("Causes of the French Revolution") in 1794, was also a Jesuit priest. So was Augustin de Barruel (1741–1820) (→ Media Link #b0), whose *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (→ Media Link #b2) ("Memoir Providing a History of Jacobinism", 1798–1799) most famously described the "conspiracy theory" about the French Revolution. All these and quite a few other authors cemented the idea that numerous secret societies existed and constituted unseen, yet powerful tools of subversion.⁷

▲4

Besides, the German *Bundesroman*, the English Gothic novel, and a mass of popular literature both stimulated and reflected the fascination of noble or sinister brotherhoods.⁸ Ever since the late 18th century, such books spread entertaining knowledge about the secret societies' workings. Sometimes it was not easy to tell fact from fiction, as in Charles Nodier's (1780–1844) (→ Media Link #b3) tale of anti-Bonapartist conspiracies, but his *Histoire des sociétés secrètes de l'Armée* (→ Media Link #b4) ("History of the Secret Societies of the Army", 1815) portrayed organisations that had a positive image at the moment of publication, after the fall of Napoléon Bonaparte.⁹ In many places, however, secret societies were considered to be bad regardless of their political role: In Prussia, for example, the *Tugendbundstreit*, a debate in 1815–1816 concerning the semi-clandestine *Tugendbund* ("League of Virtue"), raised the suspicion of conspiracy in spite of the members' impeccably patriotic attitude during the French Wars (→ Media Link #b5).¹⁰

▲5

At the same time, the suggestion that secret societies had caused the end of the monarchy in France did nothing to belittle their reputation among reformers. The *Americanos* who took up the struggle for independence from Spain were among the first to embrace the model.¹¹ And when the outlines of post-Napoleonic Europe became clear, it would seem to many as if liberals and democrats were involved in a *pas de deux* with autocracy, in which conspiracy also played a major role. In 1819, after the theology student Karl Ludwig Sand (1795–1820) (→ Media Link #b6), a member of the secret *Unbedingten* ("Uncompromising Ones"), had murdered the writer August von Kotzebue (1761–1819) (→ Media Link #b7), the German Confederation held a conference at Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary) which issued a series of decrees against "demagoguery" and established a Central Commission of Investigation in Mainz.¹²

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In 1820, a military conspiracy in Spain reinstated the liberal Constitution of Cádiz, which had already been proclaimed in 1812 but abolished two years later. This encouraged the *Carbonari* in the Two Sicilies and a clandestine group of Portuguese liberals to rise in demand of constitutions as well. Piedmont followed this example in 1821.¹³ In response, Russia, Prussia, and Austria decided at the congresses of Troppau (Opava, 1820), Laibach (Ljubljana, 1821), and Verona (1822) to begin a military intervention in Italy and Spain, in the latter case with French troops. But in 1822, these troops themselves showed signs of being subverted by the *Charbonnerie* ("Charcoal Burners"), as we can see in the case of the four sergeants of La Rochelle, who were executed for conspiracy and then became popular heroes.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the *Philiki Etairia* ("Friendly Society") had started the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829). And during the Decembrist uprising of 1825, Russian officers inspired by Freemasonry and the *Tugendbund* revolted in St Petersburg.¹⁵ By that time, the "secret societies" were to all intents and purposes a household word, and special police forces to combat them were being created in consequence.¹⁶ The 1830 revolution (→ Media Link #b8) in France, with its echoes in Belgium (→ Media Link #b9), Germany, Poland, and Italy, further enhanced the societies' prestige.¹⁷

▲7

Expansion: Secret Societies Outside Europe

The "secret societies" now had also acquired a history, first of all as a result of their being closely associated with Freemasonry. Indeed, in *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (→ Media Link #ba) (1723), James Anderson (ca. 1680–1739) (→ Media Link #bc) connected Masonic history with Adam, following the craft guilds in linking their origins to the oldest suitable Biblical figure.¹⁸ All through the 18th century, Masonic and para-Masonic associations created genealogies with varying degrees of probability, involving the 17th-century *Orden des Rosenkreuzes* ("Rosicrucian Order") as well as the *Knights Templars* suppressed in the 14th century.¹⁹ In the 1780s, some French and German Masons attempted to clarify their origins, but could not reach a conclusion before their efforts were ended by the French Revolution.²⁰ The historical works on Freemasonry that started to be produced after the Napoleonic era usually encompassed non-Masonic "secret societies", if only to emphasize that these were different and Masonry ought not to suffer from the repressive measures taken against them.²¹ Since the mid-19th century, all major European languages (→ Media Link #bd) were endowed with one or more multi-volume works that searched history for possible forerunners and established a canon which continues to inspire most present-day overviews of the field.²²

▲8

One result of this search was the "discovery" of secret societies outside Europe. In 1818, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) (→ Media Link #be), a pioneering Austrian Orientalist, used newly-found documents to suggest significant parallels between European secret societies and the Persian *Assassins*.²³ In 1821, William Milne (1785–1822) (→ Media Link #bf), a Protestant missionary (→ Media Link #bg), coined the term *Triads* for certain Chinese associations he likened to Freemasonry; and in the 1830s, the *Thugs or Stranglers of India*, suspected of heinous cultish crimes, started their long journey into Western popular culture.²⁴ Soon the young discipline of ethnography found a startling number of "secret societies" all over the world (→ Media Link #bh), and at the beginning of the 20th century felt confident enough to deliver its first general theories.²⁵ Thus, Europeans not only shaped the perception of indigenous associations in their colonies (→ Media Link #bi), but were shaped by them in turn.²⁶

▲9

With the emergence of the new science of religion, the term "secret society" was increasingly applied to non-political organisations as well. Various debates on new and not-so-new questions – for example, on the *disciplina arcani* ("Discipline of the Secret") of the early Christian Church – kindled an interest in the "mystery religions" of Antiquity, whose cult associations were now reexamined.²⁷ At the same time, the middle of the 19th century saw what has been called the Occult Revival or the Theosophical Enlightenment, which resuscitated or inspired the sort of esoteric organisations that had proliferated in the 18th century.²⁸ Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, more and more white American men were joining what were openly called "secret societies", especially after the Civil War. Some of these associations had been imported from Europe, but others were newly founded, as in the case of the *Order of the Iroquois* of the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881) (→ Media Link #bj) or the *Improved Order of Red Men*, both inspired by Native American initiation rituals. At the end of the 19th century, almost one out of every five adult men in the United States had joined one of the tens of thousands of lodges belonging to hundreds of fraternal orders. From the mid-1890s onwards, these were all neatly listed in an annual statistical manual, which conveniently specified the conditions of the insurance packages that many associations offered.²⁹ Many Europeans now considered secret societies to be an almost natural phenomenon "of all ages and countries", for better or for worse.³⁰

▲10

The Age of Associations: Secret Societies in the 19th Century

From a more restricted perspective, the European secret society may be seen as one among many types of voluntary associations that emerged from the 17th century onwards. Building on a tradition shaped by guilds, confraternities, and congregations, the new organisations usually had selective admission procedures, often including initiation rituals, and retained a more or less "closed" character. In this context, Freemasonry was not as exceptional as has sometimes been suggested. In Britain, it differed from other associations more by its respectability than by anything else and was "never in any real sense a secret society". Thus, it was exempted, though only just, from the *Unlawful Societies Act* of 1799.³¹ Likewise, in pre-revolutionary Provence, Masonry was above all an attractive alternative for elite circles who wished to get organised apart from the more inclusive *confréries*. Masonic lodges made up 77 of the 301 *Aufklärungsgesellschaften* ("Enlightenment Societies") found in 18th-century Central Germany, as against 15 self-styled "secret societies" with much stronger political opinions, all dating from the last quarter of the century. After the American Revolution (→ Media Link #bl), Masons in the United States were for fifty years regarded as decency incarnate.³²

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In spite of this, Freemasonry acquired the image of the secret society *par excellence*. One important reason was the early and long-lasting opposition of the Roman Catholic Church, which first condemned the "liberi Muratori seu Francs Massons" in the bull *In eminenti* (1738). After the French Revolution, this attitude hardened, only to find itself vindicated when political developments in Italy, France, and Spain in the second half of the 19th century made many Catholics feel that semi-Masonic governments had declared war on organised religion. In the fight (→ Media Link #bm) against republican secularism, which continued well into the 20th century, few cared to differentiate between Freemasonry and the "secret societies", and the terms became virtually synonymous.³³

Another problem the Craft had to face was that – at times – it was in fact used for subversive purposes. Already in the 1770s, rumour had it that many German lodges were steered by the hidden hand of the Jesuits; and when it turned out that it was the *Illuminati* who actually had tried to do just that, the possibility of the existence of "unknown superiors" could no longer be denied. Indeed, at around the same time, Count Honoré-Gabriel de Riquetti de Mirabeau (1749–1791) (→ Media Link #bo) advocated that French lodges should be secretly taken over and reformed.³⁴ The *Illuminati* were intertwined with Freemasonry to an extraordinary degree, but many founders of 19th-century secret societies such as Filippo Buonarroti (1761–1837) (→ Media Link #bp), Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881) (→ Media Link #bq), Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) (→ Media Link #br), and Michail Bakunin (1814–1876) (→ Media Link #bt) were or had been Masons, or had a disproportionate number of Masons among their acquaintances, and used this network for their endeavours.³⁵

▲ 13

Early 19th-century Polish Freemasonry actively promoted national independence, later to be followed by lodges in other countries, most notably Italy.³⁶ Persons in political exile often constituted irregular lodges, and unorthodox currents like the French Martinists³⁷ clearly articulated political aims. Even without the "Satanist" mystifications of Léo Taxil (1854–1907) (→ Media Link #bv) at the end of the century, it cannot have been easy for outsiders to discern what represented the Masonic mainstream and what did not.³⁸ This is even more true for the lodges created by contemporaneous reformers on the periphery of Europe to further their modernist projects.³⁹ In the American colonies belonging to Spain and Portugal, the patriotic societies that helped win independence were similarly identified with Freemasonry for a long time.⁴⁰

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Several of these cases illustrate that the fundamental weakness of Freemasonry in the face of its critics was precisely its strength as an organisational model which was well-suited for clandestine purposes. Its graded structure, which was protected by oaths and initiations, proved enormously attractive. Even opponents such as Ferdinand de Bertier's (1782–1864) (→ Media Link #bw) *Catholic Chevalerie* or the political police of various countries adopted these and other principles – including the guise of compartmentalization (division into isolated units) and the distribution of knowledge on a need-to-know basis. Established institutions like the *Compagnonnage*, the brotherhoods of French journeymen, did not escape the influence of Masonry, either.⁴¹ Yet nowhere was it felt as strongly as in the secret societies, ever since the days of the *Illuminati*.

▲ 15

Mostly, the appearance of Masonic characteristics in an association is not due to unmediated borrowing, but rather to the fact that such characteristics had been widely disseminated from the beginning – the first of innumerable "revelations" about Freemasonry was printed less than a decade after Anderson's *Constitutions* – and were easily assimilated by men to whom they looked familiar. In this way, the founders of secret societies usually avoided the so-called "liability of newness", the introduction of entirely new types of organisation with the "high costs in time, worry, conflict, and temporary inefficiency" that come with the new roles members have to learn.⁴² Throughout the 18th century, Masonic lodges had demonstrated their great elasticity by accommodating a broad variety of individuals and aims. In the 19th century, this model was adopted and copied on a large scale. Migrants also tend to prove this rule when they take associational customs with them. As an example, the *Molly Maguires* (→ Media Link #bx), a secret society of Irish miners in Pennsylvania in the 1870s, drew directly on the traditions of their Irish home counties, albeit in the framework of local lodges of the *Ancient Order of Hibernians*, an Irish-American brotherhood that normally followed the "fraternal" model imported from Britain.⁴³

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As this example shows, several traditions may fuse and be adapted to local circumstances. Here the most famous case is the *Carboneria*, which appeared in the Kingdom of Naples after its occupation by the French in 1806 and later radiated throughout Italy, attracting many tens of thousands of members. Its similarities (→ Media Link #by) to Freemasonry on the one hand and to the *Charbonniers* of the Franche-Comté on the other have been the subject of long-lasting debate.⁴⁴ Although these similarities are undeniable, efforts to trace them back to a single source are ineffective. Even if a particular "founding moment" were established to everybody's satisfaction, it would be unlikely to account for the *Carbonari's* many peculiar features and the numerous differences among the *buoni cugini* ("good cousins", i.e. members) in the various towns and regions of Italy. Many *vendite* ("lodges", i.e. assembly places) soon became an intrinsic part of the social texture, following existing fault lines in the local communities. Their differences, however, would probably have been even greater without the unifying pressure of the Masonic model.

▲ 17

Webs of Deceit: Internal Structures and Cooperations

The impact of traditional forms of organisation is partly explained by the fact that secret societies are normally created on the basis of pre-existing social networks. This is related to the crucial importance of trust among their members, who are after all selected on the supposition that they can keep a secret. It would seem that the structure of the older networks and the degree to which the leadership controlled the necessary resources both exert considerable influence on the level of centralisation and hierarchisation of the new organisation.⁴⁵ Since the societies are typically caught between hierarchy (some members know more secrets than others) and equality (the shared secret creates a bond), problems of decision-making may ensue. This in turn may support or produce a special type of charismatic leadership that acts as a "substitute for authority in anti-authority organisations".⁴⁶

▲ 18

The demands of secrecy are an obvious impediment to the growth of secret societies and the degree of cooperation between them. One consequence is that more than the usual caution is needed when assessing claims about their size and mutual relations. Such claims frequently overstate the case as a result of a natural complicity between supporters and detractors, who both have grounds to exaggerate the possible impact of the organisations. As an example, the Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) (→ Media Link #bz) was convinced that the European secret societies were all united under a *comité directeur* ("head committee") with its seat in Paris. As if to prove him right, Gioacchino Prati (1790–1863) (→ Media Link #c0), a lieutenant of Buonarroti, wrote that he had been a member of "the centre with which ... all political events which took place on the continent have been connected".⁴⁷ Yet even if this putative centre had indeed existed, one would be hard put to name even a single goal it might have achieved, except, that is, for bolstering Austrian efforts to improve the police forces of Europe. Powerful headquarters "vseznajušego i nikomu neizvestnogo" ("knowing everything yet known to none")⁴⁸ were a phantasy – a dream to some and a nightmare to others.

▲ 19

What *did* exist, born from the chronic instability of the Restoration, was an informal network of networks that has been termed a "liberal International".⁴⁹ It had largely been fostered by the Continental governments themselves when they forced their opponents into exile at a limited number of safe havens such as Geneva, London, Brussels, or at times Paris. Unsurprisingly, the concentration of more or less like-minded refugees in a tolerant or even sympathetic environment gave rise to an exchange of news and ideas, and occasional cooperation in practical matters. Since political exile was a permanent condition in Europe throughout the period, the refugee networks sometimes changed – liberals and nationalists were followed by socialists and anarchists –, but suspicion remained constant. The appearance of cross-border organisations of workers (→ Media Link #c1), in a context of class conflict which was violently illustrated by the Paris Commune of 1871, renewed accusations of conspiracy. The *International Working Men's Association*, founded in 1864, was declared a secret society in various countries. In fact, though, institutions like the trade unions at the basis of the IWMA, even when they had clandestine beginnings, signalled the gradual transition from predominantly closed to open forms of organisation (→ Media Link #c2).⁵⁰

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In spite of Metternich's misgivings – or those uttered by Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) (→ Media Link #c3) in Britain⁵¹ – it would seem that coordination, as it existed between secret societies, took place *ad hoc* between individual organisers, and never or only very rarely under the aegis of anything resembling an interorganisational structure. After all, building a secret society is in itself a formidable task, and keeping it alive is difficult. Apart from the question of funding, founders face the problem of maintaining interest among its members, especially if their aims are long-term; and losing members is inherently risky.⁵² As a rule, therefore, the secret society is an ephemeral structure. It is not surprising that the documented attempts to coordinate two or more organisations (like Mazzini's *Giovine Europa* ("Young Europe"), founded in 1834 to unite the national liberation movements of various European countries) hardly got off the ground.⁵³

▲ 21

This state of affairs is not incompatible with the fact that knowledge (→ Media Link #c4) and networks could be conveyed from one conspirator to the next, leaving an impression of continuity and expansion. Consider the case of Bakunin, whose life as a wandering person in exile was not untypical among the organisers of secret societies. Born in a Russian family that counted several prominent Decembrists among its members, in his youth he fell for the ideas of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) (→ Media Link #c5) about the "vocation of the scholar",⁵⁴ which shaped his own conception of the duties of a moral elite. In the 1840s, he met representatives of virtually all major conspiratorial traditions in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Belgium, and France; he even went on a walking tour in the Swiss Alps with August Follen (1794–1855) (→ Media Link #c6), the former *Burschenschafter* (member of a German student fraternity). Bakunin organised secret societies in 1848–1849 and, after his return from Siberia in 1861, until the mid-1870s. He had become a Freemason and used his Masonic contacts, notably in Sweden and Italy, when he tried to create an underground international organisation from 1863 onwards. Having absorbed much of the living history of these societies, he in turn inspired groups in Spain, Italy, and Russia that followed his example for many years to come. In this way, Bakunin was part of a chain that linked practices rather than organisations.

▲ 22

Ways of Hiding: Associations and Their Strategies

All in all, secrecy would seem to be the only common denominator discernible among secret societies, yet even this is not a simple matter. Organisations may hide their aims, their rules, their rites, their members, a combination of this, or their very existence. They can do so under external pressure or following their own free will. And this can change over time, or at any rate be perceived in a different light by changing observers, for the definition of secrecy itself was in constant flux in much of Europe since the waning of the Middle Ages. The increasing profitability of commercial secrets as well as of their disclosure, the secularization of political thought, the religious struggles with consequences as diverse as Nicodemism (i. e., pretending to have another religion in order to avoid prosecution) and the Baroque, the meandering rise of modern science (→ Media Link #c8), the birth of public opinion (→ Media Link #c9) – all of these developments were incessantly tugging at the borders of public and private secrecy and openness.⁵⁵

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In this confusing context, it helps to distinguish between two different modes of secrecy in associations. The first, which might be labelled "clandestinity", is a condition usually imposed by the prohibitions or hostility of powerful outsiders, even if this may have been provoked by the victim itself, as in the case of a criminal gang. Minority groups anywhere often are or have been involuntarily clandestine for some time. By contrast, the second mode, proper "secrecy", is defined from the inside. Here, the organisation possesses privileged knowledge it wants to hide from those deemed unfit or unworthy, for its ideas "patiuntur ... iacturam cum loquacibus et incredulis animis ingeruntur".⁵⁶ Indeed, some associations would even consider themselves not as in possession of, but as giving limited access to an inexpressible secret.⁵⁷

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This distinction translates into another loose classification which was first suggested with regard to the evolution of Buonarroti's secret societies. A course from a "French" to a "German" type of secret society can be distinguished. The first, so named because of its "tipica confluenza di un elemento giacobino e di un elemento militare" ("typical accordance of a Jacobinical and a military element"), followed the model of the "vera e propria cospirazione politica" ("true and proper political conspiracy"). It found its expression in the 1796 *Conjuration des Égaux* ("Conspiracy of Equals") founded by François Noël (Gracchus) Babeuf (1760–1797) (→ Media Link #ca). The second and later type, resembling the concept of an association that "non è più solo meccanismo di urto, ma anche sviluppo e palestra di quella 'filosofia' che deve render possibile la riforma della società", demanded a quasi-permanent, semi-professional activity that might be called "metapolitica per la netta distinzione che vi si introduce fra la società civile sulla quale agire e il gruppo settario liberatosi dalla corruzione e dall'ignoranza".⁵⁸ In the terms of our earlier differentiation, the "French" type tended towards clandestinity, the "German" type towards secrecy.

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Although the differences between "clandestine" and "secret", "French" and "German" can be easily overstated, two ideal types are unmistakably recognizable among the political secret societies of 19th-century Europe. Organisations of the "French" type were aiming at the conquest of political power in the short run, if necessary through a pronunciamento.⁵⁹ Accordingly, in France, Spain, and Italy, liberal officers were for a long time overrepresented in secret societies, and all-military conspiracies were far from rare. Of course, these associations – from the *Charbonnerie* to the *Blanquists* and from *La Giovine Italia* ("Young Italy") to the *Fenians*⁶⁰ – held strong political ideas, but their programmes were practical rather than philosophical. Their membership was always larger, and often much larger than that of the "German"-type associations. They were in many ways still-clandestine forerunners of the modern political parties, but also symbols of national independence and unity over much of Europe.⁶¹

▲26

"German"-type associations were smaller and rarer. The London-based *Communist League*, founded by Karl Marx (1818–1883) (→ Media Link #cb) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) (→ Media Link #cc) in 1847, was among them. So were the post-1863 organisations of Bakunin, who like Buonarroti evolved from a "French" to a "German" model. Nor would it be too bold to include the Bolshevik party created by Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924) (→ Media Link #cd) in 1903.⁶² All of them were not so much conceived for the short-term goal of insurrection as for the strategic leadership of a long revolutionary process that was not expected to be completed during their founder's lifetime. On the contrary, it was supposed to continue for a considerable time after the insurrectional moment. They had a fundamentally international, universalist perspective, which substantiated their claim to be the vanguard of a vast historic movement. In this respect, it seems that their origins coincide more or less with the birth of artistic and intellectual avant-garde groups, at the same time marginal and elitist, with a similarly universalist outlook.⁶³

▲27

Towards the Margins: Secret Societies After 1900

In spite of the continuous acerbic polemics surrounding the secret societies, there can be little doubt that by the last quarter of the 19th century the phenomenon had begun to decline, at least in Western Europe. With the extension of the right to vote, the improvement of education and the growth and acceptance of open associations, secret societies became less attractive to the radical liberals and socialists who had been their most ardent organisers. Secrecy began to follow a path already implied by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) (→ Media Link #cg) when he wrote that the existence of secret societies is an indicator of a lack of freedom.⁶⁴ Where representative democracy was absent or slow to appear, clandestinity could be a rational response to a repressive state; indeed, the very existence of the clandestine condition was an indictment of that state and an argument in favour of the opposition.⁶⁵ It is true that political secret societies continued to be created on the margins of Europe, but from the late 19th century onwards they began to reject the label. Paradoxically, in 1914, when their power seemed to reach its zenith as a member of *Smrt ili Život* ("Death or Life") fired the bullet (→ Media Link #ch) that would kill Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914) (→ Media Link #cj), triggering the First World War which would bring down four empires, the halcyon days of the secret societies were over.

▲ 28

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Appendix

Sources

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Notes

1. ^ Degrees are ranks reflecting a member's personal development.
2. ^ Bilmark, De secretis societibus 1772. The text was written for the examination of Carl Christopher Ekman (1747–1818), later a mayor of Nystad (Uusikaupunki). On Bilmark, see Brusiin, Bilmark-Studien 1971.
3. ^ "a number of secret harmful societies" ([Anonymous], Proselytenmacherei 1785, p. 65; quoted in Hippchen, Verschwörung und Verbot 1998, p. 55). Note that the term occurs already, also in an anti-Jesuit context, in Adolph von Knigge's (1752-1796) pseudonymous pamphlet Ueber Jesuiten 1781, p. 7, and see pp. 32f.
4. ^ For the extensive literature on the *Illuminati* from 1784 to 2006, see Markner / Schüttler, Bibliographie 2006. An interesting addition is Gregory, Wissen und Geheimnis 2009.
5. ^ Pavone, Astuzie dei Gesuiti 2000; Grassl, Aufbruch zur Romantik 1968; Van Kley, Jansenists 1975; Klausnitzer, Poesie

- und Konspiration 2007, chap 1.3. Anti-Jesuit accusations of conspiracy continued throughout the 19th century; see Leroy, *Mythe jésuite* 1992; Cubitt, *Jesuit Myth* 1993; Healey, *Jesuit Specter* 2003; Franco, *Mito dos Jesuítas* 2006. See also Fabre / Maire, *Antijésuites* 2010.
6. ^ Agethen, *Geheimbund und Utopie* 1984, p. 81.
 7. ^ Le Sueur, *Masques arrachées* 1790; Cadet de Gassicourt, *Tombeau de Jacques Molai* 1796; Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy* 1797; Hervás, *Causas de la Revolución* 1807; Barruel, *Mémoires* 1803. See also the pamphlet by Barruel's English translator (Clifford, *Application of Barruel's Memoirs* 1798). On Barruel, see Schaeper-Wimmer, *Augustin Barruel* 1985; Riquet, *Augustin de Barruel* 1989. – The literature on conspiracy theories is vast; among historical studies directly relevant to our topic, see Roberts, *Mythology* 1972; Bieberstein, *These von der Verschwörung* 1976; Wood, *Conspiracy* 1982; Lemaire, *Origines françaises* 1985; Porset, *Hiram sans-culotte?* 1998; Coward / Swann, *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory* 2004; Révauger, *Franc-maçonnerie et politique* 2006; Cazzaniga, *Complotto* 2006; Campbell / Kaiser / Linton, *French Revolution* 2007.
 8. ^ Thalmann, *Romantik des Trivialen* 1970; Voges, *Aufklärung und Geheimnis* 1987; Schings, *Brüder des Marquis Posa* 1996; Müller-Seidel / Riedel, *Weimarer Klassik* 2002; Wagner, *Turmgesellschaft* 2006; Hogle, *Gothic Fiction* 2002. For an example of an English "bluebook" or "penny dreadful", see [Anonymous], *Mysterious Spaniard* 1807.
 9. ^ Nodier, *Sociétés secrètes de l'Armée* 1815. See Guillon, *Complots militaires* 1894, chapter VIII; Oliver, *Charles Nodier* 1964, pp. 78–81; Lund, *Nodier et le roman de l'histoire* 1981.
 10. ^ Kraus, *Schmalz* 1999, pp. 189–242. The *Tugendbund* (short for *Sittlich-Wissenschaftlicher Verein*, i.e. "Moral and Scientific Association") was part of the reform movement that sprang up in the wake of Prussia's defeat against Napoleon in 1806. Formally approved of (1808) and later disbanded (1810) by Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840), it propagated civic virtue in the open, while secretly trying to organise resistance against the French.
 11. ^ Their activities were most notable in what would later become Mexico and Argentina; see for instance Guedea, *Mexican Independence* 2000.
 12. ^ Luys, *Anfänge der deutschen Nationalbewegung* 1992. – *Unbedingte* was the name of a group of students at the University of Gießen inspired by Carl (1796–1840) and August Follen (1794–1855); they were among the most radical elements of the *Burschenschaften*, the student unions that had supplied many fighters to the struggle against Napoleon.
 13. ^ Arnabat, *Sociedades secretas* 2006; Valín, *Masonería y revolución* 2008; Castells, *Constitución gaditana* 1989; Pascual, *Circolazione di miti politici* 2007; Mogarro, *José da Silva Carvalho* 1990; Berti / Della Peruta, *Carboneria* 2004.
 14. ^ Spitzer, *Old Hatreds* 1971; Lambert, *Charbonnerie* 1995. – The French *Charbonnerie*, an underground merger of various groups, brought together some 30,000 opponents of the Bourbon Restoration in 1821–1823.
 15. ^ Clogg, *Struggle for Greek Independence* 1973; Bokova, *Epocha tajnych obščestv* 2003. The *Philiki Etairia*, founded in Odessa in 1814, consisted largely of diaspora Greeks; its leader Alexandros Ypsilantis (1792–1828) started the insurrection of 1821.
 16. ^ On the political police, see Liang, *Rise of Modern Police* 1992; Napoli, *Naissance de la police* 2003; Emerson, *Metternich* 1968; Siemann, *Deutschlands Ruhe* 1985; Nolte, *Demagogen und Denunzianten* 2007; Pegenaute, *Trayectoria* 1978; Monas, *Third Section* 1961; Squire, *Third Department* 1968.
 17. ^ As illustrated by Perreux, *Au temps des sociétés secrètes* 1931.
 18. ^ Schmidt, *Symbolische Konstituierung* 2007, p. 127. At the same time, Anderson removed other traditions from the story (see Schuchard, *Restoring the Temple* 2002; idem, *Emanuel Swedenborg* 2012).
 19. ^ On the *Templar* myth, see Partner, *Murdered Magicians* 1981. On the first *Rosecrucians*, see Dickson, *Tessera of Antilia* 1998; Edighoffer, *Rose-Croix* 1998; Tilton, *Quest for the Phoenix* 2003.
 20. ^ Schüttler, *Intervention des deutschen Illuminatenordens* 1992; Bode, *Journal* 1994; Porset, *Philalèthes* 1996. Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (1731–1793) was an important member of the *Illuminati*.
 21. ^ See, for example, [Thory], *Acta Latomorum* 1815; Lenning, *Encyclopädie der Freimaurerei* 1822–1828; [Anonymous], *Catalogue* 1834; Bègue-Clavel, *Histoire pittoresque* 1843; Kloss, *Bibliographie der Freimaurerei* 1844.
 22. ^ Zaccone, *Histoire des sociétés secrètes* 1847–1849; De Castro, *Mondo secreto* 1864; Heckethorn, *Secret Societies* 1875, vol. 1–2; De la Fuente, *Historia de las sociedades secretas* 1870–1871; Deschamps, *Sociétés secrètes* 1874–1876; Schuster, *Geheime Gesellschaften* 1906. For more on these authors and their books, see Kloosterman, *Hidden Centres* 2009.
 23. ^ Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte der Assassinen* 1818. On Hammer, see Galter / Haas, *Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall* 2008; Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration* 2008. The *Assassins*, in fact the Shi'i community of *Nizari Isma'ilis* that came into being in 1094–1095, suffered from the combined hostility of Sunni Islam and the Christian Crusaders, who first learned about them in the 12th century and knew their leader as the *Old Man of the Mountain*. See Daftary, *Assassin Legends* 1995.
 24. ^ Murray, *Origins of the Tiandihui* 1994; Singha, *Despotism of Law* 1998; Van Woerkens, *Voyageur étranglé* 1995; Wagner, *Thuggee* 2007. Whereas the *Triads* were mostly migrant organisations, the *Thugs* took to a form of often kin-based seasonal banditry patronized by local rulers. Both groups became a source of fascination in the West. Ever since the *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) by Philip Meadows Taylor, the Indian highwaymen have figured in novels and movies, most notably perhaps in Steven Spielberg's (*1946) *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). And since the Buddhist monastery of Shaolin is significant for the foundation myth of the Chinese societies, these have been associated with the sort of martial arts made popular by the actor Bruce Lee (1940–1973). Sax Rohmer (1883–1959) combined the Chinese and Indian villains in his stories of *Fu Manchu* from 1912 onwards.
 25. ^ See, for example, Schurtz, *Altersklassen* 1902. See also Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies* 1908; Van Gennep, *Rites de*

passage 1909.

26. ^ See also Johnson, *Criminal Secrecy* 1991; Anderson / Johnson, *Revealing Prophets* 1995, chapter 1; Wedgwood, *Nature and Functions* 1930; Herdt, *Secret Societies* 1990.
27. ^ Martin, *Secrecy in Hellenistic Religious Communities* 1995, p. 118, speaks of "the sensationalizing of secrecy as a category of religious explanation". See also Bowden, *Mystery Cults* 2010.
28. ^ McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi* 1972; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment* 1994. For the older tradition, see Frick, *Erleuchteten* 1973; Frick, *Licht und Finsternis* 1975–1978; Le Forestier, *Franc-maçonnerie templière* 1987; Viatte, *Sources occultes* 1979; Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme* 1986–1996.
29. ^ Carnes, *Secret Ritual* 1989; Gist, *Secret Societies* 1940; Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood* 1989.
30. ^ Cf. Heckethorn, *Secret Societies* 1875, vol. 1–2.
31. ^ Clark, *British Clubs and Societies* 2000, p. 312; Prescott, *Unlawful Societies Act* 2002; Beaurepaire, *William Pitt* 2005.
32. ^ Agulhon, *Pénitents et Francs-Maçons* 1968, pp. 206–211; Zaunstöck, *Sozietätslandschaft* 1999, p. 99; Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood* 1996.
33. ^ In general, see Ferrer Benimeli, *Masonería, Iglesia e Ilustración* 1976–1977; Clark / Kaiser, *Culture Wars* 2003; Porset / Révauger, *Franc-maçonnerie et religions* 2006; Borutta, *Antikatholizismus* 2011. For Southern Europe, see Poulat / Laurant, *Antimaçonnerie catholique* 2006; Jarrige, *Antimaçonnerie en France* 2006; Pruneti, *Sinagoga di Satana* 2002; Cazaniga, *Massoneria* 2006; Ferrer Benimeli, *Contubernio judeo-masónico-comunista* 1982; Martín, *Arquitectos de la República* 2007; Gomes, *Catolicismo e tradicionalismo* 2009. It should be noted that this debate contributed to the creation of a false dichotomy in which Masons and *Illuminati* represent Enlightenment values against various forms of presumed irrationality; but see for instance Neugebauer-Wölk, *Esoterische Bünde* 1995; idem, *Aufklärung und Esoterik* 1999; Mulsow, *Weishaupt als Philosoph* 2002.
34. ^ Agethen, *Geheimbund und Utopie* 1984 (pp. 279–287 for the rumours on the Jesuits); Porset, *Mirabeau* 1996.
35. ^ Saitta, *Buonarroti* 1972; Eisenstein, *First Professional Revolutionist* 1959, chapter 3.2; Combes, *Franc-Maçonnerie et Blanquisme* 1986; Damiani, *Bakunin* 1977; Polo Friz, *Michele Bakunin* 1989.
36. ^ Bieberstein, *Bedeutung der Freimaurerei* 1980; Polo Friz, *Massoneria italiana* 1998; Novarino, *All'Oriente di Torino* 2003.
37. ^ The Martinists were an order established in the 1880s which claimed to build on the occult ideas of Martinès de Pasqually (died 1774) and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803).
38. ^ Bossu, *Loge de proscribed* 1958; Galtier, *Maçonnerie égyptienne* 1989; Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment* 2005; Weber, *Satan Franc-Maçon* 1964. See also Conti, *Massoneria e radicalismo* 2005. For a Masonic complaint, see Baylot, *Voie substituée* 1985.
39. ^ Lambton, *Secret Societies* 1958; Landau, *Prolegomena* 1965; Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes* 2002.
40. ^ Vázquez, *Masonería en México* 2011; idem, *Imagen pública* 2011; Ferrer Benimeli, *Aproximaciones* 2012. The debate about the Lautaro lodge and its role in the struggle for independence in Argentine, Chile and Peru is typical; for a summary, see Castro Olivas, *Libertadores* 2011, chapter 1.2.
41. ^ Bertier, *Souvenirs inédits* 1990; Truant, *Rites of Labor* 1994.
42. ^ Stinchcombe, *Social Structure and Organizations* 1972, p. 148.
43. ^ Kenny, *Molly Maguires* 1998. See also Lause, *Civil War* 2011. For another example, see Cohen, *Politics of Elite Culture* 1981, which shows how Sierra Leone politics in the 1970s pitted (imported) elite Creole Freemasonry against (indigenous) non-elite Poro societies. On the British "export" of Masonry, see Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire* 2007.
44. ^ Starting with Luzio, *Massoneria* 1925, and Leti, *Carboneria e Massoneria* 1925; see the relevant chapters in Berti / Della Peruta 2004. On the *Charbonniers*, see Merlin, *Bons cousins charbonniers* 2005; on their possible role in Naples, see Mastroberti, *Pierre Joseph Briot* 1998, chapter 6. See also the recent regional studies of De Cristofaro, *Carboneria in Basilicata* 1991; Gin, *Sanfedisti* 2003; Dicara, *Elite di periferia* 2004.
45. ^ Erickson, *Secret Societies and Social Structure* 1981; Fidel, *Military Conspiracy* 1980.
46. ^ Ellis, *Charismatic Leadership* 1991, p. 314. See also Douglas / Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture* 1982, chapter 6.
47. ^ Sked, *Metternich* 2008, p. 130; Prati, *Autobiography 1837–1839*, here 10 February 1838.
48. ^ Bakunin, *K oficeram ruskoj armii* 1870, p. 5.
49. ^ Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile* 2009.
50. ^ For the general development, see Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie* 2003.
51. ^ Disraeli told the House of Commons in 1856: "It is useless to deny, because it is impossible to conceal, that a grand part of Europe ... is covered with a network of these secret societies, just as the superficies of the earth are now being covered with railroads"; see Her Majesty's Stationery Office, *Hansard 1803–2005*, 3rd series, vol. 143, p. 774. His words were later used as an epitaph by Webster, *Secret Societies* 1924, p. IV.
52. ^ Buonarroti considered meetings to be essential, even though they courted danger. He insisted that they had to be not just useful but "agréables et intéressantes" ("pleasant and interesting"); he also organised festivities and wrote, "On ne doit pas négliger de parler aux sens; le raisonnement ne suffit pas toujours, et souvent un geste, un mouvement, un chant, un tableau font sur le cœur humain surtout jeune plus d'impression durable que les discours les mieux conçus et les plus remplis de vérité" ("One must not neglect the stimulation of the senses; reason is not always sufficient, and often a gesture, a movement, a song, or a painting leaves a greater impression on a human heart, especially on a young one, than the best and most truthful speeches", Saitta, *Buonarroti* 1972, vol. II, pp. 157–160). Andryane, *Souvenirs* 1839, contains sketches of some such meetings.

53. ^ For a positive view, see Mastellone, *Progetto politico* 1994.
54. ^ Cf. Fichte, *Bestimmung des Gelehrten* 1794.
55. ^ Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship* 2001; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* 1994; Senellart, *Arts de gouverner* 1995; Snyder, *Dissimulation* 2009; Zagorin, *Ways of Lying* 1990; De la Flor, *Pasiones frías* 2005; Burke, *Social History of Knowledge* 2000; Shapin, *Social History of Truth* 1994; Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 1962; Engel, *Geheimnis* 2002. On secrecy in general, see Hölscher, *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis* 1979; Tefft, *Secrecy* 1980; Assmann / Assmann, *Schleier und Schwelle* 1997–1999; Petitot, *Secret et formes sociales* 1998; Cavallé, *Mensonge* 2010.
56. ^ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia* 1992, p. 406 ("suffer loss, when they are poured into prating and incredulous minds"; translation: James Freake (1651)). As Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) said in 1886, "Man liebt seine Erkenntnis nicht genug mehr, sobald man sie mittheilt" ("One no longer loves one's knowledge sufficiently after one has communicated it", translation: Helen Zimmern; Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* 1886, chapter IV, maxim 160).
57. ^ See Guénon, *Aperçus sur l'initiation* 1946.
58. ^ Saitta, *Buonarroti* 1972, vol. II, pp. 149, 112f. ("that is no longer only a mechanism of force but also creates a room for the philosophy which must make social reform possible", "metapolitics because of the straight distinction which is made between the civil society in which to act and the sectarian group liberated from corruption and ignorance").
59. ^ See Castells, *Utopía insurreccional* 1989.
60. ^ Dommanget, *Blanqui* 1960; Mastellone, *Mazzini* 1960; McGarry / McConnell, *Black Hand* 2009. – After Blanqui's death in 1881, his followers formed a political party that would eventually be absorbed in the French socialist party. *La Giovine Italia* was Mazzini's political organisation from 1831 till 1848; from 1834 onwards it was conceived as a part of *Giovine Europa*. *Fenians* was the name given to the members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood founded in 1858 to bring about a democratic republic; they would play a major role in the struggle for Irish independence.
61. ^ MacKenzie, *Violent Solutions* 1996; Schieder / Dann, *Nationale Bewegung* 1978; Bieberstein, *Geheime Gesellschaften* 1979; Reinalter, *Politische Vereine* 2005.
62. ^ Hund, *Geschichte des Bundes der Kommunisten* 1993; Scheibert, *Bakunins Entwurf* 1968; Rudnickaja / D'jakov, *Rukopis M.A. Bakunina* 1974; Furlani, *Bakunin e la sua associazione segreta* 1977; Mervaud, *Société internationale secrète* 1979; Kun, *Tournant décisif* 1980; Geyer, *Lenin* 1962.
63. ^ Much of the analysis in Poggioli, *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* 1962, applies to the "German"-type secret societies. See also Kreuzer, *Boheme* 1971; Eßbach, *Junghegelianer* 1988; Morowitz / Vaughan, *Artistic Brotherhoods* 2000; Heinich, *Elite artiste* 2005.
64. ^ Kant, *Über den Gemeinspruch* 1978, p. 163.
65. ^ See also Simmel, *Soziologie* 1908, chapter 5, for a discussion of the relation between private and public secrecy.

Klausnitzer, *Poesie und Konspiration* 2007, chap 1.3.

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Eingeordnet unter:
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Citation

Kloosterman, Jaap: Secret Societies, in: European History Online (EGO), published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2013-06-19. URL: <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/kloostermanj-2013-en> URN: urn:nbn:de:0159-2013061019 [YYYY-MM-DD].

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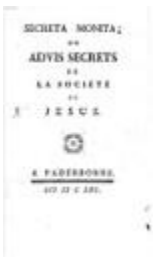
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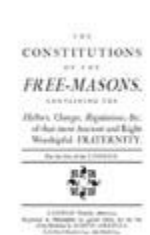
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- Censorship and Freedom of the Press (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-media/censorship-and-freedom-of-the-press/juergen-wilke-censorship-and-freedom-of-the-press>)




Link #ca

- François Noël Babeuf (1760–1797) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/59078391> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118505467>)

Link #cb

- Karl Marx (1818–1883) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/49228757> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118578537>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118578537.html>)




Link #cc

- Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/68928644> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118530380>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118530380.html>)

Link #cd

- Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/7393146> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118640402>)

Link #cg

- Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/82088490> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118559796>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118559796.html>)

Link #ch



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/the-gun-of-sarajevo-1914>
The Gun of Sarajevo 1914

Link #cj

- Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914) VIAF  <http://viaf.org/viaf/50016762> DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118535005>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118535005.html>)