

CLEMENCE ISAURE: THE ROSICRUCIAN GOLDEN ISIS

Grand Master Julie Scott, SRC



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

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

Why in this place, the Hall of the Illustrious in Toulouse's Capitole (city hall), and before this painting, did the Grand Master choose to present himself to the American mystic who would later re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America as the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis? The answer goes back to the

ancient mystery traditions, perpetuated by our Order and so beautifully symbolized in this painting.

Who Was Clemence Isaure?

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

According to legend, following the death of her troubadour love who praised her through his beautiful songs and whom she adored, Clemence Isaure took a vow

of chastity and silence. Before doing so, however, she established an endowment for the city of Toulouse to re-establish the poetry contests of the Gai Savoir, a poetry society established in 1323 through a new group called the Jeux Floraux.

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

The Mysterious Territory of Oc

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

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

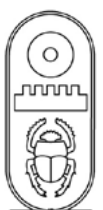
The kings of northern France (a separate country at the time) and the Roman Catholic Church wanted the wealth, land, and converts of the Languedoc, especially of the Cathars. These two powerful forces plotted against the people of Oc, resulting in their persecution and the near extinction of the Occitan traditions, or at least their public presence, in the 1200s. As many as 500,000 people of the Languedoc,

including Christians, Jews, and other mystics may have been murdered during the twenty-year Albigensian Crusade and the century-long Inquisition that followed.

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



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





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

The Gai Savoir and Jeux Floraux

Following the intense persecution in the area, seven individuals in Toulouse, known as the seven troubadours, founded a mystical society in 1323 called the Gai Savoir, meaning “happy knowledge.” The exoteric mission of this society was to make the world a happier and better place through poetry. Though veiled, the esoteric meaning of their poetry was clear for those with eyes to see.

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

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

preserved, and discreetly perpetuated them.

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

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

The Rosicrucians Announce Their Presence in France

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

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

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

since the thoughts attached to the real desire of the seeker will lead us to him and him to us.

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

Clemence Isaure: The Painting

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

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

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

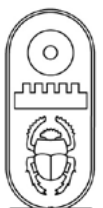


Henri Martin, The Appearance of Clemence Isaure to the Troubadours.

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

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

Following many synchronistic events, H. Spencer Lewis was able to travel to Paris a year and a half later. After meeting with the bookseller and passing many tests and trials through many cities in France, H. Spencer Lewis was mysteriously handed a note directing him to go to the Hall of the Illustrious in the Capitole of Toulouse at





H. Spencer Lewis, 1915.

a particular time. He was to speak of this to no one.

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

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

Satisfied with this answer, the man then handed H. Spencer Lewis a note with instructions on how to proceed. This man was the Grand Master of the Rose+Croix

of Toulouse, who was probably Clovis Lassalle, a well-known photographer (of historic buildings and archival documents) and mystic of Toulouse. Through the Rose+Croix of Toulouse, the Jeux Floraux, and the Archaeological Society of Midi, Grand Master Lassalle was associated with those who had directed H. Spencer Lewis on his initiatory journey, including the Parisian bookseller and those who would later initiate H. Spencer Lewis into the Rosicrucian tradition.

At midnight on August 12, 1909, H. Spencer Lewis received his mystical initiation into the Rosicrucian Tradition in a Rosicrucian Lodge in an ancient chateau outside of Toulouse. Here he also accepted the charter to re-establish the Rosicrucian tradition in America, thereby perpetuating the ancient mysteries that so significantly contributed to it, beautifully symbolized by the inspiring image of Clemence Isaure, the Rosicrucian Golden Isis.

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