

The Count of Saint-Germain and Ignaz von Born

Eastern European Provenance and the Occult Leitmotif of Demi-Orientalism

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Abstract. By foregrounding the previously underexamined cases of the Count of Saint Germain and Ignaz von Born, this study highlights how figures associated with the eastern regions of Europe are embedded in interpretive frameworks that emphasize alterity, mysticism, and proximity to esoteric knowledge. Rather than treating these representations as reflections of regional specificities, the study situates them within a broader pattern of Western European discourse that has constructed both Central and Eastern Europe as a liminal and symbolically charged space. In this context, geographical distance becomes intertwined with cultural hierarchies, and the eastern parts of the continent are recurrently associated with forms of knowledge and belief positioned outside the normative boundaries of Enlightenment rationality. Ultimately, the article argues that the attribution of magical or esoteric characteristics to Eastern European contexts constitutes a form of discursive projection, as these motifs do not point to a distinct regional ontology, but instead draw on widely shared European imaginaries that have been unevenly distributed and reinterpreted across the continent.

Keywords: Orientalism, Eastern Europe, Central Europe, discourse, occult, magical

Introduction

“Then there are groups of various Rosicrucian bodies widely spread in Hungary and Bohemia. In all of these bodies enumerated can be traced clearly the guiding hand of that ‘messenger’ of the eighteenth century, or of some of his immediate friends and followers.”¹

Seen in light of such references—including the Occult milieu and its Central European loci in Hungary and Bohemia, as well as the attention surrounding Saint-Germain in Western European writings—the central question is how these configurations

1 Cooper-Oakley, *The Comte*, 178.

are to be understood within the broader discourse on Orientalism and its later reinterpretations.

As numerous authors have already shown, Orientalism has long addressed universal clichés of human nature—particularly those tied to power and discourse—that resonate with and beyond the conventional East–West divide.

By dismantling the West’s tendency to depict itself as rational, developed, humane, and superior, while presenting the Orient as underdeveloped, aberrant, and inferior, the spiritus rector of such trains of thought, Edward Said maintained that it was for the purpose of its domination that the Orient appeared as “the other” in Western descriptions.”² Since then, a number of authors have engaged in the post-Saidean debate, as reflected by inter alia Maria Todorova’s book *Imagining the Balkans* and Milica Bakić-Hayden’s concept of “nesting Orientalisms.”³ “They projected such premises onto non-Western geocultural spheres. Sarah Lemmen uses the term in the context of the interwar period’s Czechoslovak First Republic, speaking of “non-colonial Orientalism,” as Said’s original concept proves insufficient to capture the country’s exceptional position. It is well known that Said does not take into account countries that were not direct participants in colonial expansion and whose travellers had no need to represent an empire in the course of their journeys.”⁴ While a detailed engagement with such nuances—evident in the works of Todorova, Bakić-Hayden, and Lemmen—does not fall within the primary scope of the present inquiry, it nonetheless already signals the layered and internally differentiated nature of Orientalist discourses in the Central European context.

At the same time, we should underline—also bearing in mind Larry Wolff’s “classic” arguments on the supposed invention of Eastern Europe⁵—how philosophers and the Parisian intellectual milieu cultivated the idea of the backwardness of “Eastern Europe” in order to affirm the importance of “Western Europe,” a dynamic that largely coincides with what Ezequiel Adamovsky has termed “Euro-Orientalism.”

In light of the aforementioned context, the study presents two case studies. The first is the Count of Saint-Germain, who has been associated—despite the enduring controversy surrounding the matter—with a lineage tracing back to Francis Rákóczi II. The second figure is Ignaz von Born, whose career ranged from Alba Iulia (Hungarian: Gyulafehérvár; German: Karlsburg) to the imperial circles of Vienna. Following a brief revisiting of the relevant Western topoi concerning the region, we situate Saint-Germain and Born within a critical framework that demonstrates how

2 Hetemi, “Seeing Each Other,” 313.

3 Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms,” 917.

4 Lemmen, “Noncolonial,” 209–27; Chejnová, “Last Mummy,” 45.

5 Wolff, *Inventing*.

an occult and quasi-magical aura accompanies both men's reception, thereby complicating their place within a Central European surpassing of the Saidian paradigm.

"Western" clichés vis-à-vis Eastern and Central Europe

As noted in the preceding discussion of variations of Orientalism, certain observations should not be understood as absolute or universally applicable. In the second half of the nineteenth century, schematic constructions of the "self" and the "other" became increasingly widespread. The stereotypes disseminated throughout Europe during this period, although not necessarily rooted in the well-known *Völkertafel*⁶ tradition of ethnic typologies, emerged, as pointed out by literary historian István Fried, not from a genuine engagement with alterity but rather from the logic of actual or perceived political and power discourses.⁷

Mary Louise Pratt posits that imperial powers employed discrete "projects" to construct the "other" as a distinct category.⁸ As an introductory note to the theme of tensions and conflicts, one might call to mind Act I of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*—whose premiere was conducted by Franz Liszt. In the scene where King Heinrich [der Vogler] addresses a Brabantine delegation, he conjures a sentiment strikingly similar to the conflicts outlined in the introduction, exclaiming: "Dear Lord, save us from the wrath of the Hungarians!" (in the original: "Herr Gott, bewahr uns vor der ungarn wut!"). Martyn Rady similarly introduces us to persistent portrayals of Hungarians rooted in this era, noting: "And, like the Huns too, 'they eat their meat raw, drink blood, chop up the hearts of captives and swallow them bit by bit as if they were medicine.'" From this, it becomes evident that Hungarians in particular were often depicted in an antagonistic manner, and that the German-speaking intellectual milieu served as one of the principal—though by no means sole—channels for the dissemination of such images. At the same time, as Rady and others demonstrate, these narratives were not confined exclusively to Hungarians; other regional "others" were similarly subjected to comparable representational patterns.⁹

A scholar primarily concerned with Russia, Adamovsky notes that "certain characteristics of countries such as Russia, Poland, and so on" were, for centuries, frequently compared by French authors to Turkey or the Tatars, or were associated with evocations of the ancient Sarmatians.¹⁰

6 Ötvös, "Aktualisierung," 265–82.

7 Fried, "Imagológia."

8 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201–29; Chejnová, "Last Mummy," 44.

9 Rady, *Middle Kingdoms*, 53; Iványi, *When the Central*, 85.

10 Adamovsky, "Euro-Orientalism," 593–94.

In the following—while acknowledging the extensive scholarship devoted to this topic—we highlight a selection of illustrative cases. Indeed, well into the thirteenth century, populations inhabiting the eastern regions of Central Europe were widely perceived in highly negative terms. Otto of Freising, who traversed Hungary in the 1140s, portrayed its inhabitants as ‘of disgusting aspect, with deep-set eyes and short stature ... barbarous and ferocious in their habits and language ... caricatures of men.’ The Poles, in his account, were ‘practically barbarous and very warlike ... and devour one another in time of famine.’ Writing more than a century later, Rady expands the perspective, incorporating what might anachronistically be described—following Benedict Anderson—as a proto-“national” viewpoint: an anonymous French geographer reached similar conclusions. According to the account of the Frenchman in question Hungarians were short, robust, dark-complexioned, and warlike; Poles, though more physically appealing, coexisted with fantastical beings such as unicorns, centaurs, and tigers; while Czechs were characterized as thieves. Dangers were also imagined beneath the surface, in the subterranean realms of Central Europe’s dwarf kings.¹¹ As reported by a French monk writing about Transylvania in 1235, these diminutive underworld inhabitants would suddenly emerge from their caverns, riding scarlet horses and marking with red anyone imprudent enough to seize them.¹² In a different vein, Voltaire, the illustrious compatriot of this anonymous monk, recounts in Chapter XXVII of *Candide* a dinner in Venice shortly before Candide and Martin depart for Istanbul. There, they encounter six dethroned monarchs [Fr.: rois détrônés], each narrating his personal tale of loss and decline. These accounts underscore the instability of fortune and the fleeting nature of power, reinforcing Voltaire’s critique of illusions of grandeur—while also implying that the political turmoil associated with Poland may have been somewhat exaggerated. Among the assembled rulers are two explicitly identified Polish kings: August III [Pol.: Sas] and Stanisław Leszczyński.¹³

Before proceeding, it is worth briefly considering the particular relevance of travel accounts as a distinct yet illuminating corpus for our purposes. In this context, the traveller’s interpretation of the unfamiliar environment serves as a conduit for the exploration of cultural identities and the establishment of shared meanings. This interpretation, when examined through the lens of the traveller’s home environment, offers insights into the concept of the “other” and the processes of cultural identification and definition. In essence, travel writing serves a dual purpose: firstly, it provides a description of the world around the author; secondly, it demonstrates

11 Rady, *Middle Kingdoms*, 77–78.

12 Rady, *Middle Kingdoms*, 77–78.

13 Voltaire, *Candide, ou l’Optimisme* (Geneva, 1759). <https://candide.bnf.fr/candide.pdf>; Iványi, *When the Central*, 85–86.

how the author interprets their own reality, and how this reality is interpreted by the collective imagination and discourse.¹⁴

A comparably instructive example is provided by Rudolf Erich Raspe, editor of the Baron Münchhausen tales, who articulated a distinctive form of “double Orientalism” by aligning both Hungarians and Poles with Eastern peoples. In his 1776 preface to Ignaz von Born’s *Travels through the Bannat of Temeschwar*, he argued that their fur-trimmed garments placed them along a continuum with Turks and Persians, all supposedly descending from “northern Asian” origins. Similarly, in a travel account published somewhat later, the English historian and cleric William Coxe, observing Polish society, asserted—much like the French aristocrat Louis Philippe, Marquis et comte de Ségur—that he was, in effect, departing from Europe: “The Poles, in their features, look, customs, dress, and general appearance, resemble Asiatics rather than Europeans; and they are unquestionably descended from Tartar ancestors.”¹⁵ The Bavarian writer Johann Pezzl, in his 1786 *Sketch of Vienna*, depicted the city’s population in an essentializing fashion reminiscent of the aforementioned French observer, presenting it almost as a theatrical inventory of exotic costumes:

“Here you can often meet the Hungarian, striding stiffly, with his fur-lined dolman, his close-fitting trousers reaching almost to his ankles, and his long pigtail; or the round-headed Pole with his monkish haircut and flowing sleeves: both nations die in their boots [...] Bohemian peasants with their long boots; Hungarian and Transylvanian waggons with sheepskin greatcoats; croats with black tubs balanced on their heads—they all provide entertaining accents in the general throng.”¹⁶

In this portrayal, Eastern Europe is staged as a form of urban theatre in Vienna, each identity condensed into its ‘half-oriental’ attire. In the same year, the Welsh author Hester Lynch Piozzi, visiting Prague shortly before Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, remarked that “here everything seems at least five centuries behind.” As Larry Wolff observes, such phrasing was consistent with the discourse employed by other travelers across Eastern Europe.¹⁷

Based on Hans Lemberg, Adamovsky also points out that the traditional perception of Europe according to a North/South axis did not change to an East/West divide before the years between the Congress of Vienna and the Crimean War (ca. 1815–56).¹⁸

14 Cp. Hall et al., *Representation*, 1–22; Chejnová, “*Last Mummy*,” 44.

15 Coxe, *Travels into Poland*, 209–10; Wolff, *Inventing Europe*, 29.

16 Pezzl, *Sketch of Vienna*, 65–66.

17 Iványi, *When the Central*, 86–87.

18 Adamovsky, “Euro-Orientalism,” 599.

The Romantic era offers equally telling examples. In *Balsamo, the Magician; or The Memoirs of a Physician* (1846) by Alexandre Dumas, a participant at a Freemasonic gathering reflects on the social conditions of his homeland under Tsarist domination. He depicts them as profoundly feudal and sharply divergent from those of the Western attendees—without, however, delving into their historical determinants, including the partition of the country. As he states: “My people are either discontented nobles or wretched serfs. The serf, who owns not even his life, can offer nothing...”¹⁹

In addition, this pattern may be extended to the fin-de-siècle period, insofar as roughly half a century later, similar representational logics remain discernible in literary discourse. The relatively underexplored portrayal of Slovak and Romani communities in *Dracula* is evident in the English solicitor character Jonathan Harker’s characterization of the Slovaks as “barbarians” and their boats as “primitive,” which reflects an imperialistically inflected sense of cultural superiority toward other peoples.²⁰

The Mystical Eastern (European)?

We have learned from Edward Said that, as he notes in *Orientalism*, thinkers such as French medical doctor and art historian Élie Faure portrayed the Orient as essentially mystical. In this interpretation, Faure argues that unless the Oriental subject learns to adopt rational modes of thought and develops techniques of knowledge and positivity, no meaningful rapprochement between East and West can be achieved.²¹

Following in Said’s footsteps, Maria Todorova similarly emphasized that “the East, in general, was constructed for the West as an exotic and imaginary realm, the abode of legends, fairy tales, and marvels; it epitomized longing and offered option, as opposed to the prosaic and profane world of the West.” Expanding on this line of thought, Todorova interprets Anthony D. Smith’s account of Bulgaria as demonstrating that, much like the Orient, the region offers a form of mystical escape—often directed toward the Middle Ages—yet notably without the luridness and overtly sexual overtones typically associated with classical Orientalism.²² We may also add that the intellectual life of our Central European region can be grasped as situated both as a subject of Western (for instance, Habsburg) colonisation and (demi-)Orientalism—a wording and concept applied on account of Larry Wolff, who introduces the critique to an “intellectual project” accordingly.

19 Iványi, *When the Central*, 87.

20 Tchaprazov, “The Slovaks and Gypsies,” 524–25.

21 Said, *Orientalism*, 253.

22 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 13–14.

While the present author agrees with István Fried's dynamic approach, consistent with Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann's *Einführung in die Komparatistik*,²³ imagological research need not—and indeed cannot—aim to abolish the distinction between the “self” and the “other”. Within this framework, the “other” does not denote an adversary but simply those situated in different linguistic, cultural, geographical, or historical contexts.²⁴ At the same time, it should also be noted that discussions of *othering* frequently assume that the construction of otherness is inherently hierarchical or subordinating and, therefore, something to be overcome. Such a perspective is valuable but should not be exclusive. Nevertheless, when the issue concerns the recurrent portrayal of historical individuals or entire regions as inherently magical, superstitious, or occult, it is equally important to ask whether these representations exaggerate particular cultural traits. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, the image of an exceptional susceptibility to magic, superstition, or occult practices deserves critical scrutiny rather than simple acceptance or rejection. At this juncture, we should briefly reflect on what is at stake in conceptualizations of the magical. As Michael D. Bailey observes, the category of magic remains inherently elusive. While the term appears intuitively clear—most people having a general sense of what is meant by “magic” or the “magical”—it proves remarkably difficult to define coherently across the diverse contexts in which it is employed. This challenge is not merely a modern phenomenon but has persisted throughout history. Moreover, although beliefs and practices that may be categorized as magical have been present in virtually every known human culture, the meanings and connotations attached to such terms have undergone significant transformations over time.²⁵

In a similar vein, Bailey notes that, just as authorities in earlier periods sought to regulate and interpret magical practices, modern scholars likewise attempt to understand and explain magic and superstition—domains long regarded as inherently mysterious, obscure, and occult—in ways that render them intelligible and meaningful within contemporary frameworks.²⁶ From this perspective, superstition must be situated within the broader trajectory of European history.²⁷

These considerations may also be brought into dialogue with literary figures such as Dracula, as well as Comte de Saint-Germain, who is supposedly from the lineage of the Hungarian noble Rákóczi family. The latter, although widely known in Western fiction, remains comparatively underexamined within postcolonial

23 Corbineau-Hoffmann, *Einführung*, 195–97.

24 Fried, “Imagológia.”

25 Bailey, *Magic and Superstition*, 11.

26 Bailey, *Magic and Superstition*, 2.

27 Bailey, *Magic and Superstition*, ix.

discourse analysis, particularly with regard to his potential Central and Eastern European implications—an area in which the present manuscript seeks to offer a substantive and original contribution. By contrast, another illustrative case to be introduced, Ignaz von Born, the Transylvanian-born polymath, points in an equally interesting, albeit somewhat different direction. Although he did not achieve a similarly prominent afterlife in imaginative literature, his figure will serve as the second case study of this inquiry and will be examined in greater detail below. Indeed, he proves equally instructive insofar as he is also situated within an exoticized and quasi-magical framework in contemporary representations, a tendency that is particularly visible when viewed via the lens of the narrative of Egyptologist Christian Jacq.

Without entering into a detailed analysis at this stage, it is worth briefly revisiting the case of *Dracula*, which recent scholarship has increasingly situated within the colonial logic of the Victorian era. Published in 1897 by the Irish author Bram Stoker, the novel offers a revealing lens onto contemporary structures of representation. As the Czech Anglicist Alice Sukdolová observes, Transylvania is depicted in Victorian Britain as a romanticized and metaphysical space—precisely during the period that proved formative for Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism.²⁸

Within this framework, *Dracula* is associated with the transgression of rational explanation and the disruption of the Victorian moral and social order, thereby embodying a central instance of the Romantic Sublime. At the same time, the protagonist emerges as a violent and invasive “other,” extending his power into England and spreading contagion—features that align the novel with the literary tradition of decadence.²⁹ In this sense, the Transylvania of *Dracula* both encapsulates and intensifies the Victorian dichotomy between civilization and wilderness.

The Count of Saint-Germain: Enigmatic origins and a putative Transylvanian (Rákóczi) lineage

For centuries, this enigmatic figure has attracted considerable attention, particularly among European authors of historical and adventure literature. His legendary attributes—ranging from claims of extraordinary longevity, even spanning centuries or millennia, to supposed alchemical abilities—have been embedded in the cultural imagination since the Romantic era and continue to resonate in later intellectual reflections, including those of Umberto Eco.

Yet Saint-Germain’s genealogy remains highly contested. Narratives concerning his origins are frequently overlaid with a form of Eastern European “exoticism,”

28 Sukdolová, “The Gothic,” 4.

29 Sukdolová, “The Gothic,” 46.

which further complicates the already dense layers of occult and mystical interpretation. The present analysis also aims to function as a *differentia specifica* within the scholarly discourse by separating empirically grounded historical hypotheses from narrative constructions shaped by literary, esoteric, or ideological frameworks—an approach aligned, *inter alia*, with the more objective perspective advocated by Russell Bertrand.

As for the Count of Saint-Germain, the true identity and provenance of this individual remain shrouded in mystery. A European adventurer, this figure's interests and achievements encompassed scientific, alchemical, philosophical, and artistic domains. It was in the European high society of the mid-eighteenth century that he first gained prominence, a circumstance largely attributable to his literary output and interests. He associated himself with some of the outstanding contemporary figures of his age, including Casanova, Voltaire, and Mozart.

The hypothesis of Saint-Germain's Transylvanian, specifically Rákóczi lineage, is most prominently articulated in the work of Jean Overton Fuller.³⁰ Fuller treats this lineage as virtually axiomatic, even foregrounding it in the subtitle of her monograph. In the foreword, she writes:

“He himself said, towards the end of his life, that he was a son of Prince Francis Rákóczi of Transylvania. Yet sometimes he spoke as though he were Francis Rákóczi himself. If he was a son of Francis, which son was he? Let us begin by getting to know Francis Rákóczi, and of course, his family.”³¹

A full chapter is devoted to the question of descent³² in which Fuller often—probably with a largely atmospheric or illustrative intent—invokes elements of “Hungarian exoticism”. This is particularly evident in her reflections on the Hungarian language and its presumed ancient connections, where linguistic features are framed in a manner that evokes a sense of prehistorical continuity.³³

Such passages, while not strictly evidentiary, contribute to the broader aura of mystery surrounding Saint-Germain. Fuller concludes by noting that, within theosophical and related esoteric traditions, Saint-Germain is identified as “Master Rákóczi,” often abbreviated as “The Master R.”³⁴

A similar interpretive trajectory is evident in the earlier work of Isabel Cooper-Oakley.³⁵ The author situates Saint-Germain within Rosicrucian networks and

30 Fuller, *The Comte*.

31 Fuller, *The Comte*, 13.

32 Fuller, *The Comte*, 14–51.

33 Fuller, *The Comte*, 14.

34 Fuller, *The Comte*, 261.

35 Oakley-Cooper, *The Comte de St. Germain*.

emphasizes his connections with Hungarian and Austrian esoteric circles.³⁶ She devotes substantial attention to purported genealogical links,³⁷ drawing on contemporary press accounts and associating him with a Transylvanian “Prince Ragoczy,” including possible marital ties to the Thököly family (named as Tékéli – sic! by the author.)³⁸

Cooper-Oakley’s argument seeks to counter the notion of Saint-Germain as a mere adventurer, asserting instead that inherited rights and wealth derived from the Rákóczi lineage render such interpretations untenable: “Hence we must cast aside the theories that M. de St. Germain was a homeless and penniless adventurer...”³⁹ It is noteworthy that in 1950 Johan Franco made a similar conclusion concerning the alleged nexus between the Count’s social status and genealogy.⁴⁰

The Rákóczi hypothesis has, however, been explicitly challenged. In his 1998 *The Great Secret of Count Saint-Germain*, Raymond Bernard acknowledges Saint-Germain’s apparent aristocratic status but rejects the claim that he was the last heir of the House of Rákóczi.⁴¹ Bernard advances a markedly different theory, suggesting that Saint-Germain adopted multiple identities throughout history—among them Francis Bacon and Johann Valentin Andreae—and ultimately identifies him as “Francis Tudor,” a supposed rightful heir to the English throne.⁴² Within this framework, the Rákóczi origin narrative appears as a deliberate construct intended to obscure his “true” identity. Further, Bernard cites an interpretation by theosophist author E. Francis Udny, according to which Saint-Germain could not have been the son of Prince Rákóczi due to chronological inconsistencies; instead, he is posited to have been identical with the prince himself.⁴³ This argument is embedded in the notion of “philosophical death,” whereby the same individual purportedly reappears across historical periods under different names.

Saint-Germain’s appeal as a referential figure for enthusiasts of the occult sciences—and, more broadly, his potential placement within the imaginative and discursive field of Eastern European magic—is aptly illustrated in Chapter 96 of Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, which advances this association through a distinctly ironic and parodic lens. The passage is as follows:

36 Cooper-Oakley, *The Comte*, 163.

37 Cooper-Oakley, *The Comte*, 18–26.

38 Cooper-Oakley, *The Comte*, 21.

39 Cooper-Oakley, *The Comte*, 25.

40 Franco, “The Count of St. Germain,” 540–50.

41 Bernard, *The Great Secret*, 1.

42 Bernard, *The Great Secret*, 1–2.

43 Bernard, *The Great Secret*, 80.

“At that same time, reading some pages of our Diabolicals, we found that the Comte de Saint-Germain, among his numerous disguises, had assumed the identity Rackoczi, at least according to the ambassador of Frederick II in Dresden. And the landgrave of Hesse, at whose residence Saint-Germain was supposed to have died, said that he was of Transylvanian origin and his name was Ragozki. We had also to consider that Comenius dedicated his *Pansophiae* (a work surely born in the odor of Rosicrucianism) to a landgrave (another landgrave) named Ragovsky. A final touch to the mosaic: browsing at a bookstall in Piazza Castello, I found a German work on Masonry, anonymous, in which an unknown hand had added, on the flyleaf, a note to the effect that the text was the work of one Karl Aug. Ragotgky. Bearing in mind that Rakosky was the name of the mysterious individual who had perhaps killed Colonel Ardent, we now could include in the Plan our Comte de Saint-Germain.”⁴⁴

It is noteworthy that, although Saint-Germain frequently appears in the context of eighteenth-century Freemasonry, spiritualism, and theosophy—often alongside figures such as Alessandro Cagliostro—the Rákóczi lineage is conspicuously absent from major literary representations. Neither Alexandre Dumas (*Balsamo, the Magician; or The Memoirs of a Physician*), nor George Sand (*Comte de Rudolstadt*), or Antal Szerb (*The Pendragon Legend*) make any reference to such a genealogical connection.⁴⁵ Similarly, Mór Jókai omits this motif in his historical novel *The Two Trenks* (Hung.: *A két Trenk*) despite its temporal proximity to the same eighteenth-century milieu.

Ignaz von Born and “esoteric eastern” knowledge

In the second case, the figure of Ignaz von Born emerges at the intersection of Enlightenment scientific inquiry and esoteric knowledge-seeking. His intellectual profile, as reconstructed both by contemporaries and later interpreters, exceeds that of a conventional natural scientist. According to Michel Parouty, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart modelled the wise Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* partly on Born,⁴⁶ and even composed *The Mason’s Joy* (*Die Maurerfreude*), a short, celebratory cantata in his honour. In this sense, Born’s figure transcends the boundaries of scientific discourse, entering the realm of artistic and symbolic representation.

44 Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, 404.

45 Dumas, Alexandre. *Balsamo, the Magician; or, The Memoirs of a Physician*. New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910; Sand, George. *The Countess of Rudolstadt*. Translated by Gretchen van Slyke. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008; Szerb, Antal. *The Pendragon Legend*. Translated by Len Rix. London: Pushkin Press, 2006.

46 Parouty, *Mozart*, 118.

Based on historically attested—though not always uniformly documented—accounts, Born appears to be among the polymath scholars of the late Enlightenment whose intellectual trajectories traversed both the natural sciences and the esoteric currents of their age. Born in 1742 in Transylvania and deceased in 1791, he received a Jesuit education before continuing his studies in Prague, where he engaged with philosophy, law, and the natural sciences, with particular emphasis on mineralogy. He emerged as a distinguished mineralogist and metallurgist, gaining recognition within the Holy Roman Empire during the 1770s. His scientific interests extended across a notably wide spectrum, including mining, palaeontology, chemistry, and malacology, reflecting the encyclopaedic intellectual ethos of the Enlightenment. His contribution to mineralogy is commemorated in the naming of bornite or “peacock ore” (Cu_5FeS_4), a copper ore mineral.

Concurrently, he maintained an active presence within intellectual and socio-political networks. As a prominent member of Freemasonry, he is reported to have held a leading position in a Viennese lodge. This image is further elaborated in the narrative reconstruction offered by Christian Jacq in Chapter 27 of the first part of his Mozart tetraology entitled *Le Grand Magicien*. This is illustrated by a scene set in Prague in August 1770:

“A tempered disappointment—born of the mediocrity of most of the Brethren and the feebleness of their rites—yet also a quiet vindication of his earlier intuitions: that beneath these threadbare vestments, Freemasonry preserved the modern guise of an initiation once rooted in the mysteries of ancient Egypt. The path, then, led inexorably back to the source. With tireless resolve, Ignaz von Born pursued the faint trail toward a long-forgotten treasure.”⁴⁷

In Christian Jacq’s account, Ignaz von Born’s Transylvanian origin is briefly noted, but not developed into an explicit line of interpretation. At the same time, it lends a subtle, almost esoteric colouring to his portrayal. In other words, Born appears not only as a representative of Enlightenment rationality, but also, more implicitly, as someone positioned at the intersection of Western intellectual life and the distant echo of ancient “Eastern” mysteries in Jacq’s otherwise brilliant opus.

In Chapter 66 of *Le Grand Magicien*, although Ignaz von Born is not directly named, we encounter another revealing scene:

“Hermannstadt, 1 May 1778.

Before the wide-eyed gaze of Hungarian Freemasons, Prince Alexander Murusi unfurled a map of the ancient possessions of the Order of the Temple in Hungary, Transylvania, and Slavonia.

47 Jacq, *Le Grand Magicien*, 123. Author’s translation.

Become aware, my Brothers, of the extraordinary achievements of our predecessors and exemplars! Immensely wealthy, they ruled over Europe and dictated their will to monarchs. The Strict Observance is not merely an intellectual doctrine—it proclaims it aloud: we are worthy of such an example.”⁴⁸

To pursue the line of critique outlined above, it is necessary to bring into focus the discursive interplay through which an ostensibly “Eastern” occult aura is produced—thereby also rendering Ignaz von Born’s portrayal particularly instructive. It is precisely this dynamic, reminiscent of the mechanisms described by Edward Said and Larry Wolff that calls for closer attention.

Shared conclusion of case studies: Exotic genealogy accompanied by mystical constructions

The juxtaposition of the Saint-Germain and Ignaz von Born cases reveals a recurring interpretive pattern in eighteenth- and later nineteenth–twentieth-century representations. First, the multiplicity of theories concerning the origins of Count of Saint Germain illustrates the complex interplay between historical speculation, literary imagination, and esoteric thought. The attribution of the Francis II Rákóczi lineage reinforces a narrative of Eastern European exoticism and simultaneously reflects a broader tendency to mythologize the figure through genealogical elevation.

Second, we can observe a parallel dynamic in the reception of Ignaz von Born. While his historical existence and scholarly achievements are well-documented, later French and English authors—among them Christian Jacq—tend to frame his Transylvanian origins within a semi-exoticizing discourse. At times, this Eastern European background is explicitly emphasized, serving as a marker of proximity to ancient or esoteric knowledge; at other times, it is deliberately conflated with mystical attributes, thereby blurring the boundary between empirical biography and symbolic construction.

In summary, from a critical standpoint, such claims and representations demonstrate how both real and imagined figures associated with Eastern Europe become sites of projection, where Enlightenment rationality, Romantic imagination, and esoteric traditions intersect.

In a conversation between Casaubon, Belbo, and Diotallevi, the expedition of Sir Francis Drake is attributed to the belief that “the East is the source of all occult knowledge”⁴⁹ in Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*. Despite its pervasive irony, this

48 Jacq, *Le Grand Magicien*, 305.

49 Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, 336.

notion also reveals enduring Western assumptions that cast the East in the shadow of the occult and the magical. The present study has sought to illuminate the nuances and complexities of this discourse.

Although this issue fell beyond the scope of the present discussion, as a complementary observation rather than a qualification of the foregoing discussion, it is worth noting in passing that István Fried's observation may occasionally apply even within the region itself: "Eastern Europe is accompanied by superstition, prejudice, misunderstanding, (self-)mockery, and blasphemy, while Central Europe is at times surrounded by an aura of mysticism."⁵⁰ The cases and examples under consideration substantiate the claim that Western European authors have consistently tended to orientalize European populations located further to the east, frequently attributing to them a heightened susceptibility to or affinity for magical practices. Such representations, however, warrant critical qualification. As Johannes Dillinger demonstrates, the underlying belief systems that appear to support these claims are by no means confined to a specific "Eastern" cultural sphere, but rather reflect a set of widely shared early modern European imaginaries. In his words:

"The non-human protectors of treasures were of supreme importance for early modern treasure beliefs. Early modern Germans believed that fairies were the guardians or owners of treasures. If these mysterious beings were addressed in the proper way they could be persuaded to give away at least a part of their riches. In eastern Germany the *Drache* or *Drak* played a major role in treasure lore. A spirit that was often supposed to take the form of a flying fiery snake, the *Drache* was no medieval dragon. Rather, it was a household spirit comparable to the house or hearth spirits in snake or bird form found in Hungarian and Baltic tradition."⁵¹

Through the introduction of these case studies, we have demonstrated how literary representation draws on esoteric traditions in order to endow the eastern regions of Europe with a persistent aura of magic and mystery. This, in turn, reinforces a critical perspective that becomes particularly relevant in hindsight, when considered alongside the techniques of othering employed, *inter alia*, by Otto von Freising, Voltaire, Rudolf Erich Raspe, William Coxe, and Johann Pezzl vis-à-vis regions of Central Europe.

Read in this light, the attribution of magical proclivities to Eastern Europeans emerges less as an empirical observation than as a discursive projection, one that obscures the fundamentally pan-European character of such beliefs while simultaneously reinforcing a culturally stratified imaginary of the continent. By coming to

50 Fried, *Kelet- és Közép-Európa*, 10.

51 Dillinger, "The Good Magicians," 106.

this conclusion and identifying the corresponding factors, our findings join in the critical row hallmarked by authors such as Maria Todorova, Alice Sukdolová, Atdhe Hetemi, and Ezequiel Adamovsky.

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