



ELIPHAS LEVI

- 1862 -

ABOUT ELIPHAS LEVI

from THE DOCTRINAL BASIS
OF TRANSCENDENTAL MAGIC

Witchcraft Fundamentals

A Translation of
Dogme Et Rituel De La Haute Magie
By Arthur Edward Waite

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ABOUT ELIPHAS LEVI

Éliphas Lévi Zahed (born February 8, 1810 and died May 31, 1875) was the pseudonym used by Alphonse-Louis Constant after 1853, around the time he first published *Doctrine and Ritual*. An artist, poet, political activist and writer, and in his later years of life, occultist, here was a man who helped to fuel the occult revival and focused interest on spiritualism that swept through the Western world during the French Revolution and which would endure until the World Wars.

Constant was born into a poor working class family, the son of a shoemaker. However, he demonstrated prodigy and high intellect from a young age, which inspired the priest of his local parish to send Constant to the Society of Saint Sulpice for a free seminary education where the boy learned Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. In his childhood, Constant tended to be a solitary child, more interested in drawing and painting. Later he would manage to support himself by selling his art. Though he entered the seminary on a track to priesthood, he was later compelled to drop out due to an alleged affair with an underage female student and his incompatible theological beliefs that were growing at odds with the Church.

Throughout his 20s and 30s, Constant was a radical socialist, a form of extreme left liberal political ideology of his time. He attributed his political leanings to his Christian love of humanity, in spite of such leanings tending to run contrary to the Church. While devoted to his faith, Constant was also critical of the Church, and spoke out against its conservative views on sexuality and its denigration of women.

In 1841, he was thrown in jail for his incendiary journalism and political activism. At trial, he made the following statement: “As a child of the people, I have suffered with the people and have dared to speak in the name of the people. . . . My only crime has been a deep love of mankind.” Fellow Socialist activists, however, didn’t quite understand him. While they supported his radical left political writings, they said this about him: “You possess devotion and energy, but you are mistaken when you speak to us of God, Spirit, and Love. We know only nature and matter.”

One of his first notable creative works to be published came in 1845, a poem titled “Les Correspondences.”

*Formé de visibles paroles,
Ce monde est le songe de Dieu;
Son verbe en choisit les symboles
L'esprit les remplit de son feu.*

The poem portends the key themes that would come up in his later occult works: As visible forms of words, this world is dreamt up by God; the language He uses is that of symbols, which Spirit fills with its fire.

During this time he also co-authored *The Emancipation of Women* with Flora Tristan (1803 – 1844), the *nom de plume* for Flore-Celestine -Therèse-Henriette Tristan-Moscoso, a feminist, socialist, writer, and outspoken champion for the working class (though she died of a sudden death and from unknown causes at the age of 41).

By 1848, Constant was thrown in jail yet again for his socialist politics. By his late 30s, Constant switched from politics to occultism and at the age of 46, published what would become his masterpiece, *Dogme et ritual de la haute magie* under the pen name Eliphas Levi. However, he never fully gave up politics, as his political writings had him incarcerated in 1855, the interim year between the publication of *Doctrine and Ritual*. After *Doctrine and Ritual*, he published the *History of Magic* in 1860 when he was 50 and then *Key to the Great Mysteries* in 1861. For much of his life, he struggled financially, was sedentary and introverted, and spent most of his time pent up in his small rented Parisian apartment.

“Newton leads us back to Pythagoras,” he said famously. Thematic across all of his occult works would be the proposition that magic is a science, that science itself inherits a legacy of occult traditions, and for any religion to be true, it must agree with philosophy.

Given his date of birth, Constant/Levi would have been a sun sign Aquarius and moon sign Aries. His chart suggests a heavily cerebral and humanitarian individual.

Sun	♒	19°	Jupiter	♃	20°
Moon	☾	Waxing Crescent	Saturn	♄	13°
Mercury	☿	3°	Lot of Spirit	♃	
Mars	♂	21°	Lot of Fortune	♁	
Venus	♀	10°	North Node	♊	

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