

Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society, 1697

On p. 16 of “The Key to Theosophy” HPB quotes the American Theosophist Dr J. D. Buck, who says:

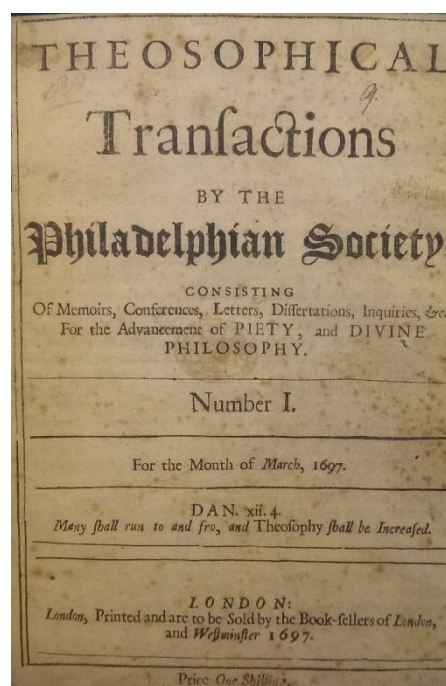
“The present Theosophical Society is not the first of its kind. I have a volume entitled: ‘Theosophical Transactions of the Philadelphian Society,’ published in London in 1697”

Extracts from the website

www.theosophicaltransactions.com

by Dr Liam Temple:

The *Theosophical Transactions*, or *Acta Philadelphica*, were a series of five small memoirs published by the Philadelphian Society between March and November 1697. Edited by leaders of the group, Richard Roach and Francis Lee, they were intended to be circulated amongst members to inform them of religious occurrences and newly published works. They were published in London and sold for one shilling.



The Philadelphian Society emerged into public view in 1697 and declared themselves to be returning to the teachings of the ancient Church from the time of the Apostles. They took their name from the Philadelphian Church described in Revelation 3:7-8, which promised to ‘set before thee an open door’ which ‘no man can shut’. **They strongly denied accusations they were a new sect, but rather insisted that they were a society under which those of all religious denominations could come together.** They saw themselves as a way to heal the ‘Divisions and Sects of Christianity, all pretending to be the True Church, [which] can not be otherwise cured but by the Effusion of the Spirit’.

[In the first volume] stories relayed to members included an account of a ‘Black Bituminous Vapour’ in France which ‘arose out of the Earth, and did considerable Mischief’. This vapour destroyed fields, trees and 12 houses, but apparently passed over people if they laid on the ground. Elsewhere, in Germany a respected gentleman was awoken by a ‘little man’ and given the key to treasure hidden in a mountain (only to lose the key and face divine punishment). The members speculated wildly on what this account meant, and in the fourth Transaction even went as far as to suggest that in England such treasures remained from the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII. These treasures had curses set upon them which would activate if the treasure was found in a way that differed from ‘a Way of Devoluton as was Originally Design’d’. The event was legitimated by being linked to a similar event in the life of **German Lutheran Jacob Boehme, whom the Philadelphians were heavily influenced by.**

Extracts from the works of an ancient Christian writer, a deceased English Civil War Roundhead General, and a contemporary female author promoting the rights of women, serve to highlight the eclectic reading habits promoted among members. The final page of the memoir advertises other works published by the Society, including *A Message to the Philadelphian Society* and *A Fountain of Gardens*, both by their prophetess Jane Lead, which were published separately.

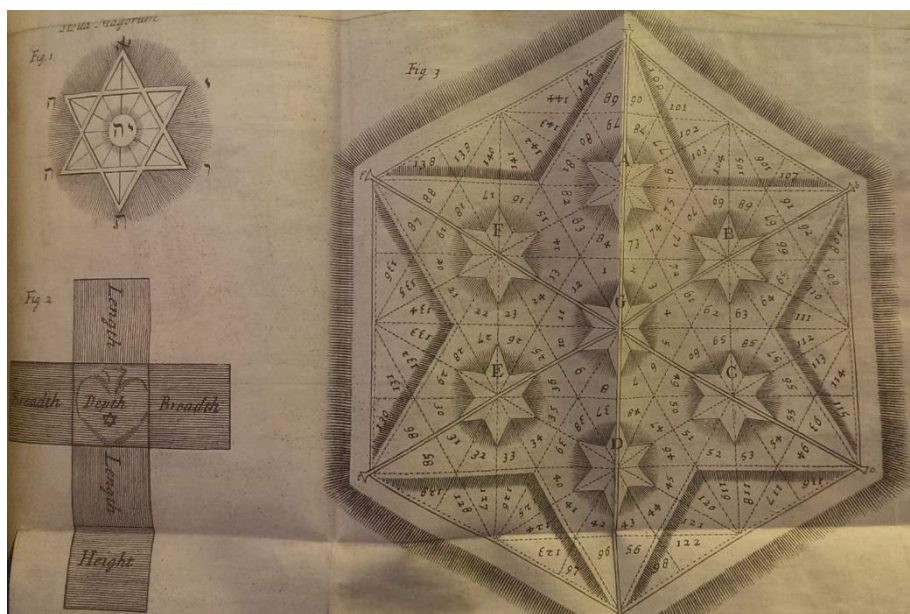
At the back of the volume there is also a section on ‘A New Theory of Musick’, which proposes music should be viewed as ‘an outward Representation of the Harmony of the Divine Powers and Properties in the Nature of God.’

Because the Philadelphian Society was set up as an additional community in which members of separate churches could come together, the *Theosophical Transactions* give a sense of the nature of this community. United in their belief that the new millennium was close at hand, members of the Society needed a way to keep up-to-date with the miraculous events happening across the world, as well as discover newly published works which would satisfy their spiritual hunger.

The *Transactions* therefore fulfilled a very practical purpose, to spread news of spiritual occurrences, and highlight that members of the group kept one eye firmly fixed on continental events which might signal the arrival of the new age.

The [third] volume continued in-depth discussions over visions, alchemy and Kabbalah that had been started in previous volumes. Translations were also still being published; volume three included *Of the Heavenly New Jerusalem* by the radical Pietist Johanna Eleonora Petersen, who was to become a leader of German Philadelphianism alongside her husband. Also included were extracts from ‘an Ambassadors in Muscovy’ about the religious traditions practiced in Asia. The extracts were provided in both Latin and English, hinting at the calibre of reader. Included was a discussion of the ‘Daley Lamma’ or Dalai Lama, whom it was reported ‘has lived for many Ages past’. It recounted how he changed with the moon, so that ‘in the New Moon he is as a Youth, in the First Quarter as a perfect Man, in the Full Moon an old Man, and in the last Quarter, as Decrepit and worn out with Age’. The Philadelphians seemed especially interested in his religious authority, for the translation notes that those trusted by the Dalai Lama to rule and govern ‘are all first to be Instructed and qualified in the Philosophical Colledge’.

For the first time the *Transactions* included a folded page of images, which is reproduced [below]. Figure 1 represented ‘Wisdoms Star’, which was also the name of a poem included at the back of the publication. The sun in the centre represented the love and wisdom of God, with the twelve beams of light signifying the twelve patriarchs and apostles. Figure 2 sought to show the mystery of the sacred cross in the dimensions of a cube. At the centre was the heart of Christ, wherein the ‘Wisdoms Star’ of Figure 1 could be found. Finally Figure 3 represented the seven stars of spiritual Wisdom, but also featured individually numbered segments which totalled 144. This was a direct reference to Revelation 21:10, which discussed the holy spiritual city of New Jerusalem. There it detailed how the city had twelve gates with the names of the twelve patriarchs, and twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles. Hence the number 144 was 12×12 , taken from both such examples. As the Philadelphians were awaiting the awakening of a spiritual New Jerusalem within their souls, they likely had an intense interest in any visual representations concerning such a topic. The images show the complexity of visionary and mystical imagery prevalent among the group.



The group largely dissolved after the death of their main prophetess Jane Lead in 1704. It was only Richard Roach who would attempt to continue the Society, combining it with the Camisard refugees referred to as the French Prophets in 1709.