

THE FRATERNAL ARK

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We unite at this convention as fellow travelers on our Rosicrucian journey, as a mystical fraternity having deep spiritual bonds and united in the light, life, and love of the way of the Rose Cross. We have all devoted ourselves to reading, practicing, and cherishing the teachings and traditions of our beloved Order. This closeness, of sharing in those essential Rosicrucian ways, opens us to an unquenchable spirit of fraternity that is our heritage.

The teachings and traditions that unite us are a much treasured “ark of wisdom.” This ark has been sailing upon the waters of the primordial tradition for centuries and has opened in the hearts of seekers when they are ready. I use the word “ark” to poetically represent a moving container of wisdom. It can be symbolized by a boat or a ship or as a little treasure chest. The future-making possibilities of our Order’s “ark of wisdom” live as a hope and a promise in our hearts.

Every Rosicrucian journey is a part of the living narrative of our ancient fraternity. Each expression of our Order’s teachings

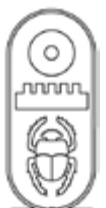
in life, through perhaps parenting, talents, livelihood, and spiritual work, will ensure that this promise will live on. It will always find its future – making light, living in your love for our Order.

This is the incredible spirit and strength of our “fraternal ark.”

Perhaps sometimes people feel that they walk a lonely road in a situation or in a society that little understands the depths and breadths or the eternal dimensions of what they have been learning. Maybe they have faced the dark vicissitudes of life’s challenges, and its chaos, but have overcome these difficulties with serenity through our Order’s “ark of wisdom.”

May it be that they always find the same spiritual courage from within that “ark of wisdom” that has helped so many of our Rosicrucian brothers and sisters to find their way in the past, to journey onwards into the new light of each day.

The following is a story about the spiritual beauty and strength of our “fraternal ark.” This is a story of spiritual



courage, of the victory of adventure over adversity, discovery over desolation.

It is the story of Rosicrucians, who in the seventeenth century chose to set sail from Europe for new lands in America. It appears that they carried a promise living in them to safeguard the Rosicrucian wisdom and create a new opportunity for its future-making. In the summer of 1693 these likely brethren of the Rose Cross sailed forth from Rotterdam in the Netherlands to new lands unknown to them.

They sailed first to London, then, leaving in the chill of winter, onwards to Philadelphia in a ship named the *Sarah Maria*, traversing around 3,900 nautical miles of ocean and arriving close to the summer solstice of June 1694. Surely this journey was a momentous event in the greater cosmic sense, and a momentous event in the history and mysteries of our Order.

We know that the voyage of the *Sarah Maria* was filled with trials, but these brethren were steadfast in their purpose and inner promptings, believing wholeheartedly in Divine providence. The name of the ship, the *Sarah Maria*, was considered by them to be a benevolent sign for overcoming danger with faith,

hope, and love. A war was raging on the seas between European nations. Despite warnings from their families, they continued. The *Sarah Maria* encountered some mysterious serendipity, which helped her overcome a near shipwrecking and survive attacks from hostile warships.

The Atlantic crossing was known, in those times, to take around six weeks. Despite initial delays, the ocean crossing was unusually long. Where did they go? What was this journey for? And what was in the ark of the *Sarah Maria*? How did the trip come together?

This piece is going to take you on an imaginative journey, as well as provide you with some historical facts about this voyage. But first it is important to open a window into a small book that likely provided a wellspring of inspiration to those Rosicrucians on the *Sarah Maria*.

This small unheralded book published posthumously in 1627 is named *New Atlantis*, and it was tucked into the back of a much bigger book called *Sylva Sylvarum*, or the *Forest of Materials*. On the cover of the *New Atlantis*, are the words “A Worke Unfinished, written by the Right Honourable Francis, Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Alban.” The author is Sir





Francis Bacon. The story is about travelers who get lost on a ship in remote oceans and discover an unknown island inhabited by a mysterious fraternity.

While a connection between the voyage of the *Sarah Maria* and the *New Atlantis* is my own, it is certain that the *New Atlantis* was an important part of the heritage of the Rosicrucian fraternity in the seventeenth century and, as an esoteric narrative, it would have been studied in Rosicrucian circles. The real journey of the *Sarah Maria* followed in the wake of the metaphorical journey of the *New Atlantis*. Spiritually, both are connected and form part of the ark of the fraternal heritage of our Order. Sir Francis Bacon was an eminent English Rosicrucian-mystic-philosopher-statesperson. He led movements for the advancement of both natural philosophy and the scientific method, but many of his writings have highly poetic breadths and metaphorical depths, and extensively allude to the Rosicrucian fraternity. Right through this period there was a lot of Rosicrucian activity centered around Tübingen University, in Germany, a place particularly associated with the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian manifestos.

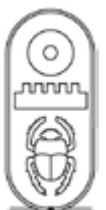
So, when I was researching the voyage of the *Sarah Maria*, I could imagine that there were children of those well-educated

Rosicrucians who had likely read *New Atlantis* with their Rosicrucian parents. Picture for a moment a child encircled in the light of a candle flame, being read this story, and those words; so precise, so passionate, and spoken with such a silken warmth that the story may have expanded like an airborne lantern in those children's souls. This story could have fanned sparks in their imagination, and strengthened their desire for discovery, especially if, as they grew up, the allegory's meaning was more and more revealed to them. It could have led to one of the greatest journeys of their life if those children became travelers on the voyage of the *Sarah Maria*.

Let me open a doorway for you into the mysterious spiritual beauty of *New Atlantis* by sharing some parts of this story. This will provide the foundations for us to imaginatively journey further together.

The narrative begins:

So that finding ourselves in the midst of the greatest wilderness of the waters of the world, without victuals, we gave ourselves up for lost men and prepared for death. We lifted up our voices to God [the Divine], who showeth wonders in the deep, that is in the beginning, he discovered the face of the deep, and brought forth dry



land, so now discover land to us, that we might not perish.

After this, the lost travelers discover an island, named Bensalem, meaning “the inheritor of peace.” Inhabited by a mysterious fraternity who had advanced skills of knowledge in all areas of the highest and most refined arts, science, and philosophy, it is a utopian place pervaded by the cultivation of serenity.

It is easy to imagine students in Rosicrucian circles at Tübingen University debating over the allegorical meaning of this lostness, seeing it as representing the lost and sorry state of humanity. Perhaps they felt it to be an allegory for the aching lostness of any person who has forgotten their divine nature. Finding a peaceful island with refined and learned inhabitants could be a metaphor for the discovery of a special form of wisdom. Bacon was surely alluding to the fraternity of the Rose Cross. Upon arriving in the waters surrounding Bensalem, a boat meets the travelers, who are read a warning on a scroll about not landing on the shore. Although perplexed by this warning, the travelers experience an unusual humanity shown towards them.

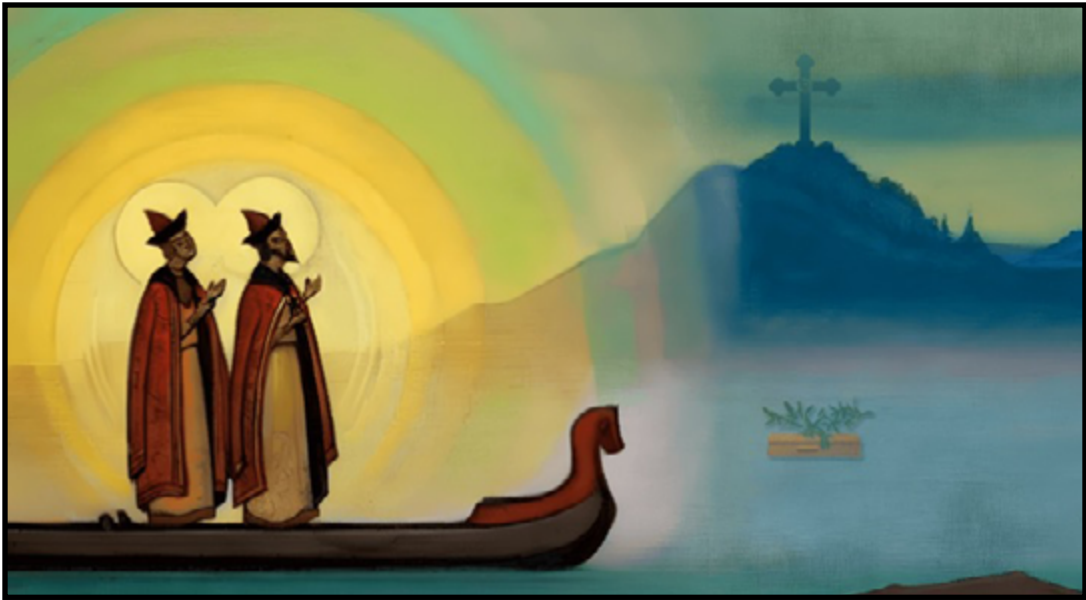
They are asked certain questions and, having answered sincerely, are

admitted into the “House of Strangers.” This beautiful residence on the island of Bensalem is full of crafted provisions and learned attendants, scientific researchers and those healing the sick. In such a beautifully composed atmosphere they wish to refine themselves. Being warned and questioned before being admitted on to the island likely alludes to the requirements of becoming a student of the fraternity.

As the allegory unfolds, the travelers are told about an ancient king of Bensalem, named Salomon. He was the lawgiver of that land and wholly dedicated to making the people happy. His house was known as “the eye of the kingdom of the fraternity.” This king could therefore represent the very highest office of leadership in the fraternity. As a mark of Salomon’s supreme office, every twelve years he allowed two ships of three brethren to sail beyond the waters of his crown to give knowledge to other countries.

Do you know what was the only thing that King Salomon allowed them to trade? The exact words written are: “But thus, you see, we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels... nor for any other commodity of matter, but only for God’s





[the Divine's] first creature which was light.”

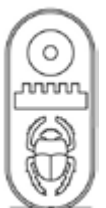
It is a beautiful picture, that this fraternity was only allowed to trade in Divine Light! Imagine for a moment a “fraternal ark,” that is our worldwide community of Rosicrucians being exchangers of Divine Light.

There is another part of this story that seems significant to our Order's fraternal ark: One evening a brother of Salomon's house was sailing on a boat just off the island. He saw a great pillar of light arising from the sea. On top of it, a large cross of light emerged. The cross dissolved, leaving a small ark of cedar wood and a palm branch at its fore. The little chest-ark contained a book and a letter. It is important to mention that the main protagonists in *New Atlantis* are a priest, king, and philosopher. These three symbolic figures perhaps represent the soul qualities of devotion, dignity, and the love of wisdom, that the brothers or sisters of the Rose Cross aspired to achieve, and which those Rosicrucians on the *Sarah Maria* may have exemplified. But what could the little floating box chest-ark mean? Bacon stated that parable was a form of ark containing knowledge about the most precious portions of the

sciences, philosophy, the beauty of life, and the human soul. This little ark might represent the most core treasures of the Rosicrucian wisdom.

To understand the essence of the symbol of an ark it is helpful to reflect upon what an ark does in many ancient stories. It is a moving container that transfers something of significant importance. Something of great spiritual value is being purposefully moved, to be entrusted into new constructive, benevolent conditions. An ark might be symbolized by a ship traversing a vast ocean, like Noah's Ark, or as a box chest that appears at a special moment, or as a sacred tabernacle being moved to a promised land, like the Ark of the Covenant, or even as a relocated coffin containing a body, like the casket containing Osiris that floated down the Nile to Byblos. The moving vessel contains higher knowledge; the aim is to take it on a new course into the future, where it may be of greatest benefit. The voyage of the *Sarah Maria* likely safeguarded the Rosicrucian wisdom and created a new opportunity for its future-making. This perhaps explains what this journey was for. But why did they leave in 1694?

The terrible Thirty Years' War between two sides of the Christian faith had left



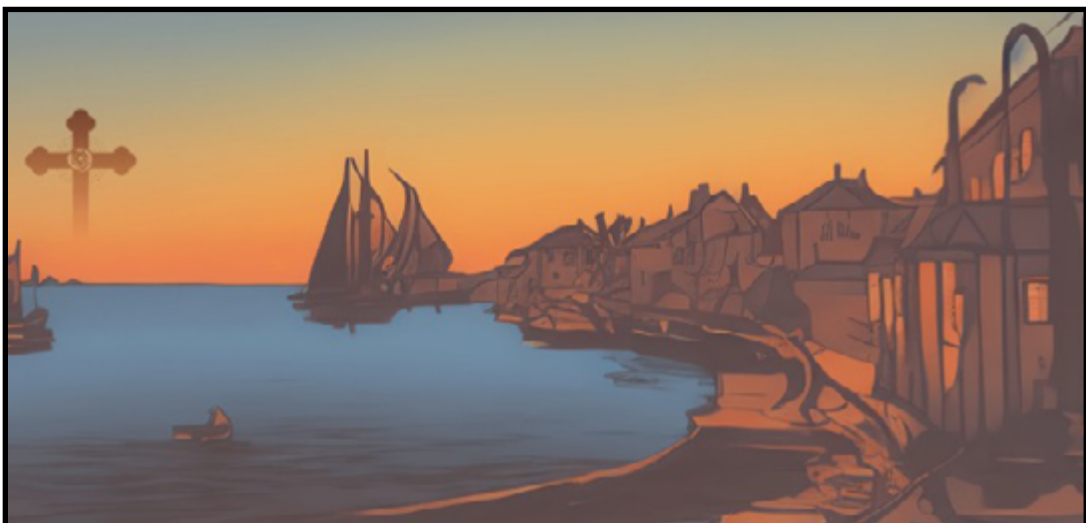
despair and futility in the air of Europe. Then came strange weather, caused by climatic change and vile diseases. The Rosicrucian manifestos, now around seventy-five years old, encouraged creating places where peace could reign, and humanity could advance and honor the divine works.

The leader of the brethren, Johann Jacob Zimmerman, was someone who devoted himself to measurements of the stars, and the horoscopes of humanity. He calculated divine influences upon the approaching end of the century, and held millennialist views of an imminent golden age, requiring the fraternity to find new beneficent conditions. Sadly, Zimmerman passed through his transition in Rotterdam, just two days before the voyage. Johannes Kelpius was only twenty-seven when he took over Zimmerman's leadership. He was a visionary yet introspective young man, and also a student from Tübingen. The diary of Kelpius contains an account of the voyage. In it he expresses the atmosphere of continuous fraternal discourse and devotional prayers onboard. Historically speaking, the travelers are noted as being pietists, but these leaders firmly point towards the travelers likely being a Rosicrucian fraternity.

Also, a large number of Rosicrucian documents and manuscripts were onboard. During the sixty-eight years between Bacon's *New Atlantis* and the ship leaving, it seems that there was much intense communication between brethren in Britain and mainland Europe, including those Behemists, hermeticists, pietists, alchemists, and kabbalists who might have turned with eyes of interest towards the ideals of the Rose Cross.

Before they crossed the Atlantic Ocean, their sights were set on London, where important meetings were likely held. Members of the Philadelphian Society in London were purported to have financed the ship's journey. The travelers likely met the elusive mystic Jane Lead, known for her visions of the divine Sophia. Although in society she was an ordinary homemaker, she was actually an adept in all manner of esoteric practices and the leader of the Behemist group, which became the Philadelphians in the same auspicious year of the voyage.

Lead's alchemical scripts were clothed in intense expressions of Christian revelation, but her central vision was of an "alchemical ark" – a great, glittering golden ark, with six wings and ruby-red eyes, which could fly as well as sail. She





was deeply passionate in conveying that we must find this divine ark in ourselves.

After the *Sarah Maria* left London she was forced to anchor in the seas after becoming almost shipwrecked on sandbanks. There followed lengthy times waiting for the safety of a convoy of ships that did not appear. It seems, however, that only a single sister ship, *Providence*, accompanied them to safer waters, assisting with defense from an attack by warships. After this, the route becomes obscure. Perhaps they sailed via the islands of the Azores. It was not uncommon. The lost civilization of Atlantis that Bacon had alluded to, and which Plato had written about, mythically centered around the Azores, as island remnants of those lands, including Pico Island with the magnificent Mount Pico. Atlantis, of course, could allude to spiritual islands rather than physical places, but either way, if the route went via the Azores, it surely would have been evocative of the mysteries.

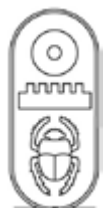
Now imagine attuning with the voyage of the *Sarah Maria* as if you are on this ship. Please close your eyes briefly and begin some neutral breathing.

As night begins to fall, the last promontory of land is enshrouded in a misty eventide light. It is as if a farewell

hand is reaching out to us on the *Sarah Maria*, blessing her. With the rest of your brothers and sisters of the Rose Cross you gaze out over a vast, vast ocean. You are not fearful, for a great guiding majesty seems everywhere present, enveloping the *Sarah Maria* as if giving her pure sails of Divine Light.

Under the exquisite cosmic architecture, the laws of the universe seem to reflect so very gently and sweetly in the waters of the ocean, as well as in the stars, glittering above with a radiant hope. We hear a faint echo of Francis Bacon's words: "the Divine Majesty took delight to hide His [Its] works, to the end, to have them found out."

We gather on the decks around our brazier, where our promise seems to be abiding in each other's eyes. Our cherished manuscripts are stored deep in the hull of the ship, below the water line, rising and falling as every wave passes. After many hours of discussion, a mystical silence descends among us, and we enter into mystical communication, filled with an atmosphere of eternity and the bonds of fraternal peace. As the midnight hour approaches, we retire to the calm darkness of our cabins, each feeling alone as travelers in the cosmic immensity.



On a foreign shoreline we gather on the beach and burn all the remaining excessive and sentimental objects of our former life. These are dangerous times. This act is to push back our fears through lightening the burden of our sentimentality. Our hope is to strengthen our fraternal unity and our closeness with the omnific mind, whose most holy name is love. *Providence* accompanies our *Sarab Maria* for many weeks, like a benevolent soul, a guide and protector.

Arriving at a small village of colored houses, we welcome aboard three travelers in turbans of red and green. They bring books of mathematics from the libraries far away to the east, in the lands of Arabia. They give us sweet birds in ornate cages, and attar, a perfume from the roses of Damascus. A pleasant aroma arises, and we meditate in the shadows of our sails.

Is it just a dream that we arrive in the azure remote waters of the Azores, where we ascend the *Montanha do Pico* for gaining far vision and other reverent acts? Leaving *Pico* at dusk, our course is now fully set westwards. Each day is closed with the golden eventide silence of meditation and prayer, as we move ever closer towards the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia.

We are not spared further trials and troubles, for in the middle of the great

expanse of ocean, the wind no longer fills our sails. We drift listlessly for two whole weeks. A mysterious sloop passes us by, its silent grace piquing our curiosity. Yet, after many weeks becalmed, a bickering breaks out between some of our brethren. There is a bitter air hanging over the *Sarab Maria*.

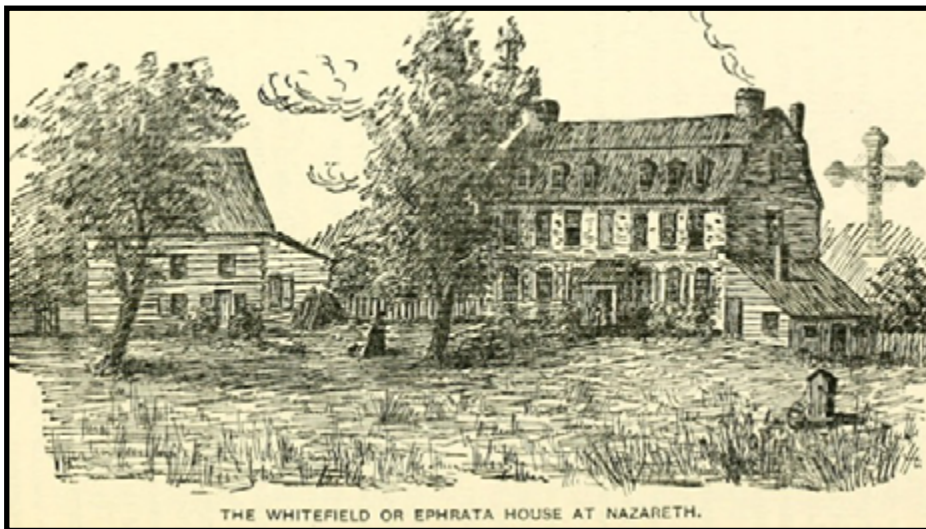
The winds began to rise once more, but a fire breaks out on the deck, mirroring the unfettered anger and clouded humility in the hearts of some. But nature ensures that goodwill is restored, lest we perish. Our ship is saved from destruction because all hands work together to put out the fire. But we are tested of our fraternal resolve once more when a mighty storm rises on the seas.

We ask the God of our Hearts, with all our united fraternal love, for calm to abide in the waters of the seas and as well as in ourselves. The seas calm and a vital breath fills our sails and fills each of us. From then onwards, our promise seems to guide the remainder of our voyage, like a star of peace. Our promise is safe.

The light of the rising sun envelopes our vessel, surrounding it with a rainbow of new hope. The new lands are not far away now; our promise will be fruitful.

Although our maps and instruments of navigation were tattered or lost in the storm, a cosmic picture, unique to each of





us, grows in our midst, and we re-find our course without further trial.

At last, we arrive in Philadelphia, where we meditate and give prayers of thanks on the banks of the river for the safe delivery of our promise. The seeds of our meditations and prayers are cultivated as we build our little community, which later becomes named “Ephrata,” meaning “fruitful.”

Let us now end this imagination and return to historical records. The brotherhood became known as “The Woman of the Wilderness” since its activities were likened to the biblical woman in the “Book of Revelation,” who had gone to into the wilderness to meditate. Kelpius created his own special sanctuary in a cave above a creek in the Wissahickon wilderness.

When past Emperor Harvey Spencer Lewis spoke of being entrusted to develop a new cycle of our Order, in the early part of the twentieth century, he did not speak of it as the “creation” of our Order in America, but of an “awakening.” He saw his work as the second cycle of Rosicrucianism in America, as he greatly valued the fruitful works of the seventeenth-century Rosicrucians there. He deeply valued the well-researched account, written in 1895,

by Julius Frederick Sache, a descendent of those on the voyage.

You might also know that Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, was believed to be Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order in the seventeenth century, during the time of King James 1. He cast many fruitful Rosicrucian thoughts, words, and deeds far and wide.

The importance of the direction that Rosicrucian wisdom took by virtue of the voyage of the *Sarah Maria* will likely never be fully known. But it was definitely significant to the future-making of our Order.

The ark of Rosicrucian wisdom was opened in those new lands and became fruitful.

Our worldwide “fraternal ark” continues to sail on into the mists of time, as if a resilient vessel of light, surmounted by a Rose Cross. As if it is continuously attuned to the ethereal wind of the Égrégoré of our Order. We, as its travelers, exchange our light, life, and love with the world.

May it be that a promise lives within you.

