

**Frater Acher**

**MMXXII**



**JACOBS  
DÜRER**

**The Shadow of a  
19th Century Goês**

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**To Jake Stratton-Kent.**

**To repeat: don't think, but look!**

— *Ludwig Wittgenstein*

**Rather stray than follow.**

— *Austin Osman Spare*

# JACOB DÜRER

*The Shadow of a 19th Century Goes*



# Introduction

*So we also follow the banal in the life of the man with the love of the historian – in the opinion that although in this historical treasure digging not only pure gold will come to light, yet at least the shards of a past that is supposed to be unlosable, because it is irretrievable.<sup>1</sup>*

Now, let me tell you about my dead friend Jacob Dürr. A long time ago, he was a tailor in the small German town of Kirchheim, where he lived from 1777 to 1840. The few traces we have of his life and work are deeply intertwined with those of the much more renowned physician, poet, and occultist Justinus Kerner (1786-1862).

Admired by Søren Kierkegaard for his poetry, Kerner is known today above all for his further development of Franz Anton Mesmer's magical-magnetic healing method, which he used above all in the then sensational case of the *Seeress of Prevorst*. What is less often remembered is that Kerner's continued exploration in his unconventional healing methods led him to explore various cases of daemonic possession. An account of which he published in 1834 under the title: *Stories of Possessed People of Recent Times – Observations from the Field of Cacodemonic-magnetic Phenomena*.

Underlying Kerner's exploration was the straightforward idea that all humans have a natural state of consciousness, which under particular circumstances can be diverted to become alike to their *Übernatur* (*Supernature*) or *Unternatur* (*Subnature*). Both words are neologisms, compounded by adding the German terms for *above* (Latin: *super*) and *below* (Latin: *sub*) to the word for nature. Thus, Kerner's work is guided by a strong Christian-Gnostic worldview, which not only holds marked

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1 Gehrts, 2015, p. 194

dualistic echoes but also assigns this dualism a vertical axis in which the high is equated with the divine and morally good, and the low with the untamed and ethically dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

Into this Christian-social construct now erupts the raw, unpolished power of our tailor, Jacob Dürr. Our simple man knew no such sophisticated distinctions. Although today preserved only in marginal notes – and often with shameful forethought – we still recognise in him traces of the chthonic *goês*, who received their knowledge not from books and high places, but from the daily contact with the spirits in house, yard and wilderness...

*Only for one of them what happened was not a matter of faith, it was not religious in the usual sense: for Dürr. He lived in it as in his world, in a world which was not divided into certainties of this side and invisible truths of faith on the other side. His own world was the realm of spirits, alien to all others, in which he communicated with daemons and the dead, with angels and devils - in a language of spirits which nobody could understand and which could not be made understandable.<sup>3</sup>*

Dürr's first literary appearance is still anonymous, and follows weeks of failed attempts to heal a possessed women by means of magnetic healing methods combined with classical Christian exorcism. Kerner writes:

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2 This dualism is even made explicit by Kerner's publications on the subject. Whereas his first books were concerned mainly with the *Übernatur*, it was his book from 1837 in which he explored the dangers and implications of man's *Unternatur*. In the latter's preface he explains: *In all stories of the daemonic-magnetic (or, if one wants to say so, good-magnetic) the supernature in man constantly emerges, all speak of a connection with good spirits, of saints whom they have for guides; but in the cacodaemonic-magnetic conditions (the other pole) brought up here, the subnature in man emerges, mockery against everything holy, cacodaemonic possession.* (Kerner, 1834, iii)

3 Gehrts, 2015, p. 189



*It was now clear that the mere exorcism of the demons was not sufficient, since another one always took the place that the previous one had left empty. If the unfortunate woman was to be healed completely, she had to be kept safe for the future. Through the research of friends, I became acquainted with a person living far away, who, in addition to great faith, possessed diverse experience in such matters. I am not permitted to give him a more detailed name. He appeared and the power of his faith and his magical operations (which do not allow for a more detailed description) succeeded in doing what had never been done before, not only to free the unfortunate woman from the demon, but also to keep her safe for the future.<sup>4</sup>*

So let's see what we can bring back from the past, about the life of this Jacob Dürr and his goëtic work.



## Life and Character.

Jacob Dürr was born in Waldorf near Tübingen on January 28, 1777.<sup>5</sup> The father, Jakob, already had been a tailor and so the son followed in the family tradition and became a tailor as well, just as his son Jacob later would also become a tailor.

Our Jacob married a woman from Kirchheim in 1804 where he became a master tailor and citizen of Kirchheim. Of the children his wife bore him, only the son survived him. She herself died in childbirth in 1813. His second wife survived him in turn with three children.

In his character as a spiritual healer, we first see him emerge in the years 1817-19. From some file notes and later allusions we learn that he was notorious at that time because of his *Medicastroierens* (old German term for illicit medical activity) and blessing speaking and that whole flocks of people followed him.

In those decades, the academically educated physician was just becoming generally accepted. At that time, there were still the *Wundärzte* (wound physicians) of various classes, who had emerged from the old bathers' profession and who themselves often still drew their main income from barbering. In more remote areas, the first medical assistant was typically still the blacksmith, the shepherd, the clover master, the herb woman.

It was only gradually that the new medical regulations prevailed, and our tailor Dürr came into conflict with them: he was deprived of the practice of medicine. Some of his patients petitioned the king that he be allowed to continue treating the sick, but the prohibition was the

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5 The following details are mainly taken from the two critical essays by Heino Gehrts *Jacob Dürr aus Kirchheim (1777-1840) - Der letzte deutsche Schamane* in: Der Teckbote Nr. 137 (16.6.1962), und *Der Schneider von Kirchheim*, in: Der Teckbote Nr. 266 (16.11.1963); both reprinted in Gehrts, 2015.

law the king had only recently signed. Dürr therefore had to be at odds with the medical police for the rest of his life. Even his son Jakob was punished in 1846 - after his father's death – for *Medicastroieren*.

But it is precisely because of this obvious tension with the medical class that Dürr's *chutzpah*, his courage, and his constant willingness to engage in battle with spirits emerge only the more clearly from the few surviving remarks about him.

In November 1837, for example, the sixty-year-old Dürr was called to an inn where a Bavarian farmer had arrived seeking help with his apparently daemonically possessed daughter. Imprudent and ruthless mainly against himself, as Dürr is described to us from several sources, he remained in true form and immediately performed a magical intervention in the inn room, in the presence of all the other guests, to identify the daemon who had taken hold of the girl... The police had no choice but to intervene and interrogate the strange tailor, who despite everything managed to get away unpunished.<sup>6</sup>

Only a month later, in December of the same year, the unfortunate happened to him when a peasant who was treated by him with strong means – the sources are silent about whether these were natural or magical means – died as a result of the treatment. Dürr was charged with negligent homicide, but the matter came to nothing, and already two years later we hear of renewed, astonishing successes of the tailor in curing possession.<sup>7</sup>

As will also become apparent from the analysis of Dürr's magical methods, his character seemed to contain strange contradictions. On the one hand, the tailor possessed the ability to operate in quietness and to converse with spirits and daemons purely by visionary means, e.g. while standing silently in the corner of room. On the other hand, a rebellious bellicosity against all unruly daemons led him into much

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6 Eschenmayer, 1837, p. 63/64

7 Gehrts, 2015, p.191

trouble. The former vicar Carl A. Eschenmayer observed that Dürr “usually goes after the daemons with fire and sword”.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere, Eschenmayer, who worked with Dürr over many years and on different cases of daemonic possession, gives us a fuller picture of his unusual partner:

*This is a weird saint, headstrong and wilful, but also truly peculiar and very idiosyncratic. He possesses peasant strength, quick-wittedness, and tenacity; little of high spirituality and formality, but a convincing honesty and conscientiousness, a primitive prudence and wisdom, ingenuity, even some cleverness. He is unique. He lives in a world of archetypes and possesses the power of vision of the soul.*<sup>9</sup>

The retired vicar also sheds light on the accusation of alcoholism that was repeatedly raised against the meagre tailor. Allegedly, he had a peculiar constitution that made him tremble with just a few sips of coffee and exalted and seemingly confused at small amounts of alcohol.<sup>10</sup>

When Eschenmayer asked him about the effect this had on him, Dürr plainly responded: *Where am I supposed to get the strength for my cures? I can eat almost nothing, and I can't replace it from anywhere else. Wine is my only substitute.* Furthermore, Eschenmayer adds that while Dürr's confused speech under the influence of small amounts of alcohol had garnered him the reputation of being a Witcher and Devil's charmer, Dürr had never appeared drunk or intoxicated at all during the ten weeks he stayed with Eschenmayer.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Eschenmayer, 1837, p. 92

9 Carl A. Eschenmayer's description of Jacob Dürr, quoted after: Gehrts, 2015, p. 190

10 Eschenmayer, 1835, x

11 Eschenmayer, 1837-xi

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In spring of 1835 Dürr made a visit to Stuttgart where he met Karl von Kerner (1775-1840)<sup>12</sup>, Justinus' brother, who held a strong interest in his brother's mago-medical experiments and the person of Dürr in particular. In the estate of Justinus Kerner, Heino Gehrt's during his extensive research on *the last German shaman*, as he called him, found this rare testimony of a direct encounter with Dürr:

*This morning at 10 o'clock Dürr came and stayed for about an hour and a half. He was interesting to me – without my being able to define him. He has received something extraordinary from nature, which is easy to see in him, but the human school of the educational institutions do not seem to have made any significant contribution to him. He told me a lot about his cures, but I had to guess what he wanted to say with his narration more than I understood, be it that he is missing too many teeth or that he is not able to speak audibly. He also seems to love brandy, since he apparently had some with him, judging by the smell. Therefore, I am not quite able to tell whether this did not have an influence on his unfortunate statements - or whether it is a lack of explanatory power. Provided, however, that everything is true that I could understand about his cures, then he is a true miracle man and a rare phenomenon.<sup>13</sup>*

Thus, for us, the picture of Dürr's appearance and character rounds off from a distance. Uneducated, rugged, wild and confused was the impression on the one hand; but equally genuine and earthy as well as imbued with charisma and fascination about his work with the spirits.

In the person of Dürr – as in a social mirror – the 19th century

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12 Karl Friedrich Kerner, von Kerner since 1806, Baron von Kerner since 1812, was a major general, landowner, metallurgical expert, mountain councillor and briefly Minister of the Interior of the Kingdom of Württemberg.

13 Karl Kerner in a letter from spring 1835 to his brother Justinus Kerner on Jacob Dürr, quoted after: Gehrts, 2015, p. 195

observer encountered their own doubts and fears about the uncanny night-side of an enlightened worldview, as well as their fascination with the person of the ghost-seer, witcher, and genuine folk magician who possessed the natural gift of traversing this sphere with innate skill.

Given the notorious reputation Dürr had earned, he could easily have taken financial advantage of the situation and charged considerable sums for his unique interventions. But he lived in poverty until his death and never set a price for his work, but took the alms he was given.<sup>14</sup>

In his last letter to Justinus Kerner, Eschenmayer once again traces the rough, contradictory traits of this extraordinary character. Abstaining from a final judgment, he brings to the fore the seeming riddle of the actual spirit-practice – paraphrased as *strong faith* in his Christian rhetoric - as the central pivot around which Dürr's entire later life revolved.

*So this enigmatic man has sealed with his end the truth of his power, which the world does not want to believe and which brought him nothing but ridicule, slander, and persecution. He leaves his wife and children in bitter poverty, even to the funeral expenses I had to contribute. A few days before his death, Dean Bahnmeier gave him communion. This was at the same time an act of reconciliation with him, which made me very happy. We may now judge this rare man as we wish: We cannot deny the many successful things he did, and we must attribute this to his strong, partly magnetic, partly magical power of faith. The many failures, on the other hand, are not proof of the lack of this power: They may have their reason in quite different relations, which we cannot fathom.<sup>15</sup>*

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14 Eschenmayer, 1837, xi

15 Eschenmayer on the death of Jacob Dürr in a letter to Justinus Kerner, in: Kerner (ed.), 1853, p. 413



# Practices

## Goëtic Practices

*His eye is penetrating, he has secret formulas and powers, possesses amulets and knows how to make them, deals with spirits, both his own and the guardian spirits of others, and tells strange stories about them.*<sup>16</sup>

Precisely because we lack many details about the actual practices of Jacob Dürr, the sparse sources like to list everything strange about him in cumulative enumeration. We find such a list in Heino Gehrts' most recent essay on Dürr to date, from 1963, in Dürr's "magic-belt and amulets, in his intoxicating ability, his secret remedies, his spells, and incantations."<sup>17</sup>

Let's slow this down, and dissect the few yet valuable recorded details we have about Dürr's spirit practice.

### (I) DAILY SPIRIT-COMMUNION

While we hold no information how Dürr ended up deviating his life as a tailor to become a witcher, we know about the rigorous practice that enabled him to work as the latter in his later years.

In one of the very few original documents by Dürr – a letter to Justinus Kerner – we read that he was strictly committed to commune with a group of 21 celestial princes every day for at least two hours.

*The other letter is even more important, because it gives us the only insight into Dürr's own world. March 1835, he cannot immediately*

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16 Carl A. Eschenmayer on Jacob Dürr in a letter to Justinus Kerner, quoted after: Gehrts, 2015, p.185

17 Gehrts, 2015, p. 194



*respond to Kerner's call for help, since he has to talk for two hours to 21 celestial princes every day. Therefore, he is not allowed to leave, or it would go very badly for him. "I cannot come earlier. I must stay with my law... Otherwise I would lose my gifts... I will not be driven out of this law at all."*<sup>18</sup>

Calling this rhythm of communion *his law*, Dürr emphasises that without adhering to this rigid schedule he would lose *his gift*. In this we recognise the common acknowledgement, still so obvious to the premodern world, that the powers of the witcher do not stem from their own psyche or inner qualities, but from their lived relationship with the spirits. It is the beings the witcher or *goês* is bound to and intrinsically interwoven with who enable them to take effect on the world.

## **(II) THE SPIRIT-BELT**

Secondly, we know that Dürr commonly used to wear a spirit-belt (*Zaubergürtel*).<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, though, none of the sources specifies any detail about this paraphernalia: Whether it contained pouches with his herbs, paper sigils of his familiar spirits, or possibly embroideries of their seals, we do not know.

Given everything else we know about Dürr, and given the poor circumstances of his life, we should not think of this object as something romantic or exuberant. Rather than a folk magical version of a bat-belt, we should imagine it simply as an *unusual version* of a standard 19th century leather belt.

Whenever Dürr prescribed herbs or substances as healing remedies the sources indicate he did not carry these on himself or in this belt, but asked other people to get them. Equally, from the little that we know, the belt did not seem to be involved in any overt ritualistic practice.

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18 Gehrts, 2015, p. 186

19 Gehrts, 2015, p. 190

### (III) COMMON VERNACULAR

While Dürr often spoke to the spirits in a language ineligible to other people, he used the most common vernacular to speak *about* them.

For example, when he could not come to Kerner at short notice, he sent him a letter telling him that he had sent “a strong one” ahead of him.<sup>20</sup>

During the work with the possessed, we find him differentiating pragmatically and broadly only between the daemon and the *guardian spirits* (*Schutzgeister*) he had called for assistance. None of the individual names or hierarchies of e.g. the 21 celestial princes he used to communion with ever comes to the fore or is overtly mentioned in their operations or to other people.

The only familiar spirit of Dürr known to us by name was called by his common name, *Anton*, because he was the soul of a recently deceased monk in a nearby village.

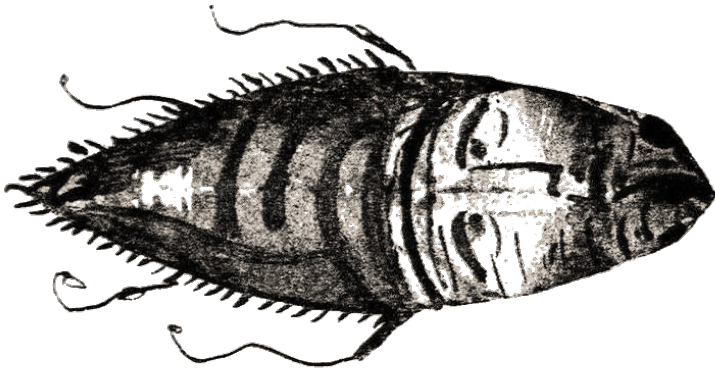
Most blatantly, however, the following example portrays the rough, down-to-earth language Dürr was willing to use even in dealing with spirits. Whether this was one of his well-known fiery outbursts of temper, caused by the consumption of *small sips* of alcohol, or a time-tested way of dealing with the daemons according to our witcher’s experience, the sources unfortunately do not tell us...

*However, we do not intend to lose ourselves here in profound reflections on human nature, but rather, after Karl Kerner’s description, we want to call the tailor himself onto the stage once again - namely in that exciting scene in mid-November, when Eschenmayer’s enterprise suffered the strongest external setback – precisely as a result of Dürr’s recklessness and lack of self-control. A farmer had come from Dinkelsbühl with his sick daughter to have her treated by Dürr. The*

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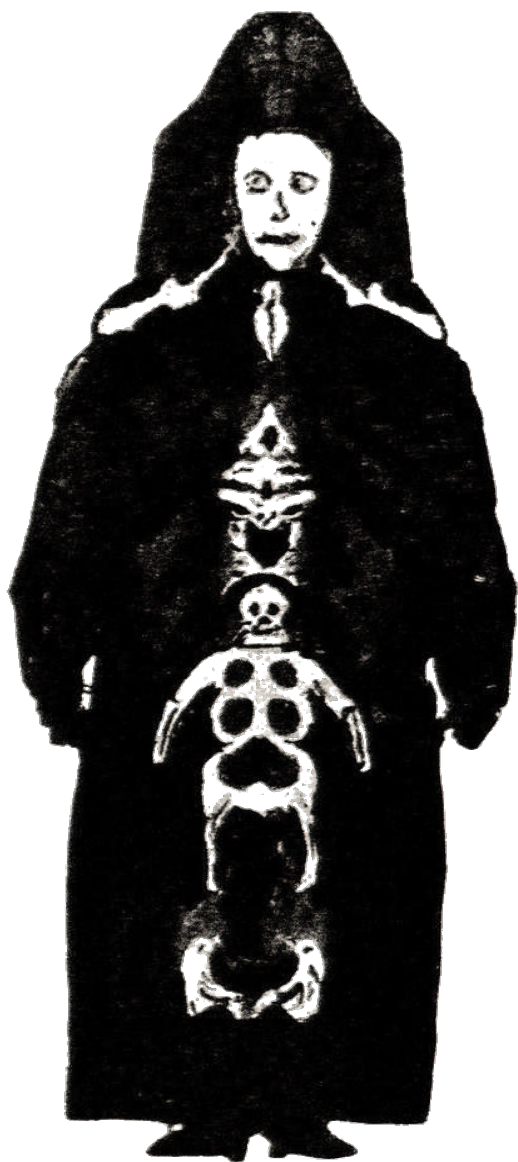
20 Gehrts, 2015, p. 186 — We note Dürr’s skill of sending out a spirit to assist in remote matters.

latter took her to the lower rooms of the inn, where, as every evening, many people sat together with beer and wine, opened all the windows, stepped from one to the other, waved to his spirits and spoke with them. Then the prayer began with the girl and first summoned her demon in the name of God, “whereupon the longer the more he staggered and slurred, just as the longer the more the people gathered around the house”. But as the demon would not leave, he summoned him in the name of the chief of the devils, and this seemed to many to be the greatest impiety, that he preached in the name of the devil. Finally, however, he added with a loud cry, “And if you unholy spirit do not want to go out yet, you can (sic!) lick my ass!”<sup>21</sup>



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21      Gehrts, 2015, p. 199-200; the slander *lick my ass* is abbreviated as *i.A.l.*, as the German *im Arsch lecken*.



## (IV) A DEADMAN'S SOUL AS FAMILIAR

The fact that Dürr entertained the soul of a deadman as a Familiar Spirit seems important enough to highlight it here as a separate point.

We actually know quite a lot about this spirit by the name *Anton* from Justinus Kerner himself.

In his book *An Apparition from the Night Realm of Nature* from 1836<sup>22</sup> Kerner describes the occult events surrounding a female prisoner by the name of Elisabetha Eslinger in the prison of his hometown Weinsberg to whom the spirit of a monk who died in 1414 appeared.<sup>23</sup> Kerner's concern, as he himself writes, is to claim recognition for such occult haunting and possession phenomena, which is why his account is written as medically precise and objectively as possible.<sup>24</sup>

The spirit originally appeared to her as a pillar of mist, and asked her for salvation. For this she had to go to the cellar of a woman named *Singhaasin* in Wimmmental because the spirit was bound there.<sup>25</sup> Later, the spirit took the form of an emaciated man, dressed in a pleated skirt, with a belt, a cap on his head, and surrounded by a bright sulphur-coloured light that often made only his outline appear. The spirit entered at night through the window and sometimes through the door,

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22 Kerner, Justinus, *Eine Erscheinung aus dem Nachtgebiete der Natur, durch eine Reihe von Zeugen gerichtlich bestätigt und den Naturforschern zum Bedenken mitgeteilt*, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1836

23 Elisabetha Eslinger was a 39 year old widow from Backnang/ Baden-Württemberg, roughly 30 km northeast of Stuttgart. The spirit began to appear to her not during the four months of her imprisonment, but earlier. Kerner suggests that the crime of treasure digging that led to her arrest was probably assisted by this spirit, since she wanted to use it to find the treasure, but did not succeed. (Kerner, 1936, p. 1, 6)

24 Kerner, 1836, viii and xx

25 Wimmmental is another small village in Baden-Württemberg, about 30km or a six hour walk from Backnang, and belongs to the community of Weinsberg, where Kerner used to live.

accompanied by a cool wind and a strong musty smell that emanated from his mouth.

He claimed to be a monk from Wimmthal, where he died in 1414, and that his soul was unredeemed due to an embezzlement he had committed with his father and brothers. His name was Anton, and the reason why he visited the woman was the urgent request that she prayed for him at the indicated place in the cellar in Wimmthal, as this would lead to his salvation. In his entreaty, he harassed the woman at night, his touch felt as if of cold wood, and he “often laid his head completely down to her, and she had to pray into his mouth, quite as if he were hungry for prayer.”<sup>26</sup>

Later in Kerner’s book, he reproduces the protocol of a Mrs. Wörner, a righteous woman who was not related to Mrs Eslinger, but who had possessed the gift of the second eye from childhood.<sup>27</sup> Her protocol vividly describes how Mrs Eslinger finally, on a stormy day, accompanied by her sisters and Mrs. Wörner herself, went to the place indicated by Anton, knelt and prayed for him, and was finally able to redeem his soul.<sup>28</sup>

So much for the *origins* of Anton, from monk to trickster, to haunted spirit and redeemed soul. Yet, this is where Dürr’s work with Anton only began.

As we learn from Carl A. Eschenmayer in his book from the following year, 1837, shortly after these events our tailor had visited Mrs Wörner<sup>29</sup> in Weinsberg and had “come into contact” with the spirit of Anton and “received permission to call upon him”.<sup>30</sup>

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26 Kerner, 1836, p. 6-13

27 Kerner, 1836, p. 207

28 Kerner, 1836, p. 207-212

29 Here her name is given as *Werner*.

30 Eschenmayer, 1837, p. 29

When he was working with Eschenmayer on the well-documented possession case of Caroline Stadelbauer<sup>31</sup>, Dürr called Anton and assigned him to the possessed woman as a guardian spirit, with the obligation never to leave her while she was possessed by a demon.

Thus, in Eschenmayer's book, which describes the protocols of the various attempts of exorcising and conversing the daemon, we learn a great deal about Anton in his new role as a purified guardian spirit and dual familiar-spirit to both Jacob Dürr as well as – temporarily assigned to – Caroline Stadelbauer.

### **(V) MAGO-MAGNETIC EXORCISMS**

We know rather little about Dürr's actual exorcistic practice, which he carried out under the scrutinising eyes of Kerner and Eschenmayer. A few details, however, seemed to stand out to the observers.

Again and again it is emphasised that Dürr was standing at the open window for an operation when he first made contact with the spirit. We also know about his already mentioned spirit language<sup>32</sup>, which was incomprehensible for others and which he could explain neither for Kerner nor for Eschenmayer.<sup>33</sup> Finally, Dürr made movements with his hands while calling his spirits over the window threshold; but again we do not know whether these gestures had a ritual function and/or were an expression of his fiery temperament.

What is attested though is that due to the collaboration with Kerner Dürr began integrating *magnetic strokes*<sup>34</sup> into his operations. Yet, instead of pulling the magnetic energy from the heart centre away

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31 Eschenmayer, Carl A., *Conflict zwischen Himmel und Hölle, an dem Dämon eines besessenen Mädchens beobachtet von Professor C.A. Eschenmayer in Kirchheim unter Teck*, Tübingen & Leipzig: Verlag Zu-Guttenberg, 1837

32 German: *Geistersprache*

33 Eschenmayer, 1837, xi

34 German: *magnetische Striche*

into the limbs and then out of the body, Kerner and Dürr seemed to learn that for exorcisms in particular the reverse movement was more effective.

So, while Dürr spoke to his spirits in an unintelligible language<sup>35</sup> or murmured folk magical prayers, he applied *magnetic strokes* from the feet and hands increasingly towards the center of the patient's body.

A vivid description of Dürr's practice survives in Eschenmayer's report of the case of Caroline Stadelbauer.

*We found Caroline in the room with the Psalter open in front of her. The booklet by Kempis on the discipleship of Christ and a scripture by Arnd also lay on the table. Shortly after us Dürr arrived. He opened the window a little, as he always did afterwards, seemed to speak something softly, which he accompanied with movements of his hands, and then came to Caroline's bedside. No sooner had he begun to speak his prayer formulas than, like the last time, her eyes and all the features of her face became distorted.*

*With the magnetic pulls from the bottom up, the most violent movements came first to the stomach, then to the chest, where the girl gasped for breath, then to the throat, which puffed out quite thickly. And then the strange sounds were heard: O! Ta, Te, Ta, with unusual rapidity.*

*All this was accompanied by ranting and raving and flailing about, so that always during this action three persons had to restrain him. Whom he could catch by the clothing, he grabbed so tightly that one had trouble to make the hand free again. Dürr read prayers again. If a*

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35 We note the similarities to the infamous *barbaric* words and incantations known at least since the time of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, and equally Hildegard of Bingen's *lingua Ignota* as her secret script to commune with angels.



*holy name came up, a devilish fury entered the demon, he clenched his fist threateningly and shook his head with such vehemence that all the hair around Caroline's head flew.*<sup>36</sup>

These operations put so much strain on Dürr that he suffered a breakdown in 1836. At this time he was working on two complex patients at the same time and had severely strained his strength in the years before by spending months in Weinsberg with Kerner. From this time we possess the records of at least five possessed people who Dürr was able to heal completely.<sup>37</sup>

His collapse unfortunately had longer-term consequences: For weeks he remained paralysed in both arms and one leg. Aggravated by the fact that Dürr immediately returned to treating patients as soon as he had regained the smallest measure of strength and mobility, he only made his physical weakness worse.<sup>38</sup>

This intransigence towards himself and his work stands out in Dürr's path to the very end. Only months before his death in January 1840 we hear of an intensive, three-day treatment of a possessed woman, whom he was able to cure completely. Badly affected, however, Dürr returned to Kirchheim, fell ill in December and died a few weeks later.<sup>39</sup>

## **(V) HERBAL MEDICINE PRESCRIBED BY SPIRITS**

The final aspect to highlight in Dürr's practice are the direct instructions for herbal remedies he received from his spirits.

*Dürr gets the indication to apply now also an internal remedy, namely the Asa foetida. I had the essence come, of which every 3 hours 6 drops*

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36 Protocol of 28th of October, in: Eschenmayer, 1837, p. 19

37 Gehrts, 2015, p. 186-187

38 Gehrts, 2015, p. 187

39 Gehrts, 2015, p. 191

*had to be taken in water. The first effect was astonishing. The demon gathered all his strength to resist and shook for a few minutes. Already he could no longer, as before, prevent swallowing.*<sup>40</sup>

In another case, Dürr Kerner left a vial of plant essence for a possessed patient to smell at regularly.<sup>41</sup>

In a legal complaint against Dürr by a Catholic priest from 1838, a prayer is preserved that Dürr had written down for a patient to repeat, as well as two slightly more complex prescriptions.

*An oral powder consists of equal parts of aloe, rhubarb, anise, myrrh, arum, red bolus armenia and double part of asa foetida. An ointment consists of single parts of camphor and saffron and double parts of pounded frankincense and Asa foetida – finely pounded and freshly dressed with vinegar.*<sup>42</sup>

Two things at least are remarkable about these detailed instructions.

First, we know of several occasions when Dürr stood at an open window, speaking softly and gesturing with his spirits as he turned and dictated the exact details of the particular recipe to be used internally or externally. Provided we are willing to exclude wilful deception, we recognise in this practice an ancient animistic-shamanic pattern: the knowledge of healing and of the healing power of natural substances does not come from human authority, but directly from the spirits. In the story of Jacob Dürr and his spirit-practice we thus encounter a remarkable example of a *goês* reading in the *Book of Nature*.

Second, as Heino Gehrts has already noted, Dürr's approach to treating cases of demonic possession proves to be holistic in a rather

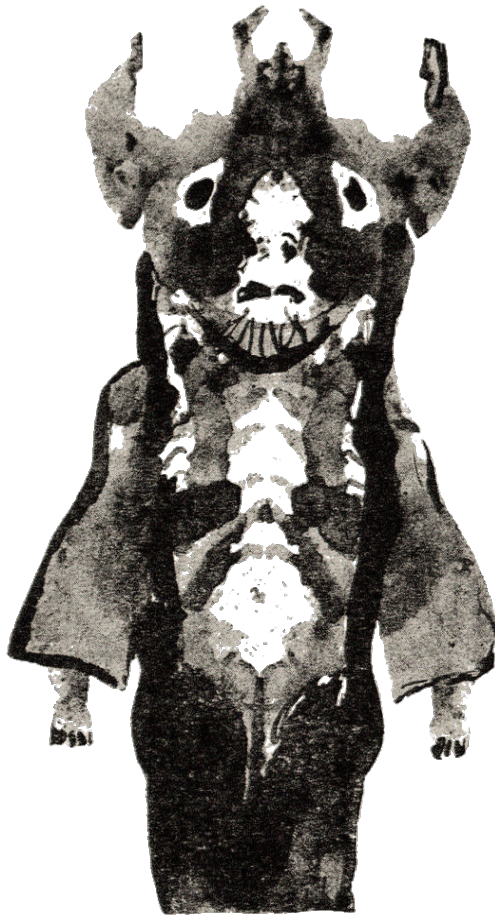
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40 Eschenmayer, 1837, p. 138

41 Gehrts, 2015, p. 186

42 Gehrts, 2015, p. 201

modern sense: The outside intervention of a healer is combined with “continued spiritual activation by repeating prayer thrice and doing so three times a day – and finally the application of external and internal, primarily herbal remedies.”<sup>43</sup>







# Conclusions

As far as it is possible in such a short essay and due to such scanty sources, I have tried to condense the most important facts concerning Jacob Dürr and his goëtic work, to present them objectively, and of course to make them accessible in English.

To determine the particular value of this historical character and his biographic episodes, I would like to leave to each reader. For the historian other aspects will come to the fore than e.g. for the goëtic practitioner.

So, although I dare to offer here some reflections from my own perspective, these are under no circumstances intended to assume a complete or conclusive character.

After reading the German-language reports listed in the bibliography, one aspect in particular stands out for me. Despite Kerner's emphasis on the early modern scientific approach and Eschenmayer's emphasis on Christian theological reflections, as far as we can tell, none of the practitioners involved were able to achieve any sustained healing successes – with the exception of our self-trained tailor Dürr.<sup>44</sup> In view of this, it must be surprising that Dürr's actual techniques and practices in all the records are given peripheral importance at best.

Kerner as well as Eschenmayer can be observed in their feeble attempts to understand that which is by definition closed to the light of enlightened rationalism as well as to orthodox-charged Christian speculation. But their efforts are satisfied with the barest details, and always quickly return to the familiar terrain of their own fields of expertise. The reader can almost feel the trepidation and uneasiness that Dürr's goëtic practice must have evoked in the more educated gentlemen.

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44 Gehrts, 2015, p. 207

Thus, although all of these books theoretically deal with *Radical Otherness*<sup>45</sup>, their actual unbiased interest in it seems rather slight.

Instead, the accounts may well serve as examples of 19th-century intellectual colonialism. The topography of the occult, largely abandoned by pre-modernity, is toured with a predilection not to create genuine space for the *Other*, but to assimilate it into prefabricated frameworks of knowledge. Precisely because of this bias, Jacob Dürr – despite his significance in producing actual results – remains a shadowy supporting actor, and so do his practices as well as his spirits.

As Heino Gehrts eloquently noted, this fact is particularly surprising considering that the Brothers Grimm and other fairy tale collectors were traveling through the European hinterland precisely in the years of our goëtic events to preserve the atavistic tales of the people.

What a striking difference we encounter between the academic attitude towards the *narrative of and the practice with Radical Otherness*.

*Therefore, no one considered it worth the effort to record them [the stories about Dürr]. At the same time, when the old traditional legends and fairy tales were most eagerly put down on paper, nobody recognised that from the mouth of Dürr such things were to be preserved in the original state, in the making - directly comparable to what the angekok [among the Inuit of Greenland, a person believed to have magical powers of healing], the medicine man, shaman tells about journeys to the other world and other experiences in the interior. After all, some things are preserved for us in the margins.<sup>46</sup>*

Despite the fragmented lens through which we look at the figure of Jacob Dürr, such a view through the historical kaleidoscope nevertheless

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45 For an in-depth exploration of *Radical Otherness* in the context of goëtic practice, please see my book *INGENIUM* (TaDehent Press, 2022).

46 Gehrts, 2015, p.185-186



allows us a glimpse into the deep past of an animistic-shamanistic – or in our words, *goëtic* – tradition.

Dürr's relationship to the spirits was as raw and primal as it was marked by devotion and personal piety. Most importantly, it was a *lived relationship* that reached out far into the topography of *Radical Otherness*...

Let me invite you to meditate over Dürr, as he is sitting in his humble chamber, every day for at least two hours, convening and communing with the 21 celestial princes. – Who were these beings and how had he come into contact with them? More specifically even, what was his practice that required such a secluded lifestyle and daily ritual?

Maybe that's it: The man with the striking gaze, sitting in the center of the room with the door locked and the windows open, reciting *barbaric* words and litanies accessible only to him and his spirit companions. Perhaps he used powdered herbs in vials to create dwellings for these spirits; places from which he could have restored his personal supply of herbal remedies. If I had been in his place, as he worked with celestial beings, I would have hung these vials from the ceiling, in the cardinal direction from which each spirit appeared. If I had walked in a circle through the plain room, I could have run my hands over the vials hanging silently by their strings from the ceilings. And with every touch, every gesture and every *barbaric* word, I would have strengthened the bond between the spirits and me. Maybe we have to imagine, Jacob Dürr singing to his spirits, allowing them to become flesh in herbal bodies and to grow roots into the earth.

Maybe the scenery was completely different – and you want go to into vision and explore it yourself?

Whatever the framework of Dürr's *goëtic* operations, we know that he was alone in his practice, and throughout his life.

He walked the lone practitioner's path, like many of us centuries before him and after him.



And although secular and spiritual orthodoxy in the West constantly pretends that our path, our practice and our people do not exist, we all continue walking by ourselves.

In the end, we are all living atavisms – and Jacob Dürr is one more link in the chain that holds us together.

*Dürr demonstrated to them [Kerner and Eschenmayer] what they would hardly have been able to imagine without him, what the Europeans at that time were just beginning to understand about foreign peoples, Siberians, Indians, as a form of life and culture and what they were to discover far later as a basic form of their own existence. In the heart of Swabia this, an atavism difficult to understand, had once again arisen among them.<sup>47</sup>*





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