

The Arcane Setting for the Coronation

In accordance with royal custom, Westminster Abbey in London was chosen for the coronation of HM King Charles III. The Abbey is properly a church and an abbey no longer, and while this change may be traced to the campaign of Henry VIII against the sacred sanctuaries of Britain, Westminster was largely spared the ravages inflicted by this religious reformer. Its formal designation is the Collegiate Church of Saint Peter at Westminster, and there is evidence that it occupies the site of a former temple of Apollo; among other things, this evidence suggests that the site was where the legendary King Bladud fell following his magical flight.¹⁷ Many kings have since been interred at

¹⁷ In the 18th century, Bath architect John Wood identified King Bladud with Abaris the Hyperborean, at least in part because the latter was also remembered

the site, and the center of the church has long been dedicated to the shrine and sanctuary of the saint and king Edward the Confessor.

At the center of the sanctuary is a Medieval treasure in the form of its Cosmati Pavement, and it is upon this floor that the coronation of the monarch is traditionally performed. The name "Cosmati" refers to a family of Italian craftsmen renowned for the type of geometric mosaic work represented upon the floor at Westminster. Such mosaics are comprised of small triangles and rectangles of glass and colored stones which were often incorporated from ancient monuments. As part of his Gothic renewal of Westminster, King Henry III brought Italian craftsmen to England especially for this work, and the pavement's position within the floorplan indicates that the king intended for it to be the setting for royal ceremony. Nevertheless, this intricate masterpiece has rarely been seen in modern times, and has even been covered during previous coronations, including that of HM

for his supernatural flight. Abaris was of course a follower of Apollo, and King Bladud's legendary discovery of the mineral springs in Bath is in accordance with Apollonian tradition (on Apollo and mineral springs, see *Paths of the Western Sun* volume I). Even before Wood's time, however, Shakespeare has King Lear swear by Apollo, when King Leir is legendarily the son of King Bladud.

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Queen Elizabeth II. In a study attempting to evaluate the pavement's meaning, art historian Richard Foster ends up posing the question, "did hiding it from public view mean that its significance was too great to be an open secret?"¹⁸

Following a thorough conservation effort and its rededication in 2010, the Sanctuary Pavement has providentially been prepared for the coronation of the new king, and this coincidence is reason enough to reconsider its significance. What is more, it has also been dubbed the "End of the World Pavement," suggesting that its purpose is not yet fulfilled. This name in fact refers to an inscription within the pattern that, although surviving incomplete, has nevertheless been successfully deciphered:

In the year of Christ, the
thousandth, twice hundredth,
twelfth, with the sixtieth, with
four subtracted,¹⁹ the third King
Henry, [the Pope in] the city [of
Rome], Odoric, and the Abbot
[of Westminster] fixed together
these porphyry stones.

¹⁸ Richard Foster, *Patterns of Thought: The Hidden Meaning of the Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1991, page 164.

¹⁹ The date of the pavement is therefore 1268.

Pendragon

If the reader would revolve prudently all the arranged things here he will find the end of the Prime Mover. Should you add hedges three times, dogs and horses and men, stags and ravens, eagles, tremendous sea monsters, the world, each thing following triples the years of the one going before.

The spherical globe here shows the archetypal macrocosm.²⁰

In the most general terms, the pattern of the mosaic is composed of circles and squares, and inasmuch as these shapes symbolize Heaven and Earth, the design is appropriate for the shrine of the saintly King Edward. More specifically, the

²⁰ Translation by David Howlett in "The Inscriptions in the Sanctuary Pavement at Westminster" (*Westminster Abbey: The Cosmati Pavements*, edited by Lindy Grant and Richard Mortimer, Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2002). Howlett subjects the words of the inscription to an analysis based upon complicated Biblical numerology, and notes that the word "end" here signifies not only chronological "conclusion" but also "purpose." The inscription's middle section has been traced to the Greek poet Hesiod (cf. Foster, op. cit., pages 102-3); its reckoning of some 19000 years likely relates less to chronology than to the symbolism of numbers, and therefore its "purpose."

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The Sanctuary Pavement at Westminster

composition is dominated by formulations of the numbers 5 and 6. The number 6 appears clearly in the hexagrams and hexagons that recur throughout the pattern. As for the number 5, it is emphasized through an artistic motif called “guilloche” that involves sinuous interweaving. At the middle of the arrangement, the central circle is bound by guilloche to four others at the cardinal directions, and these five circles are

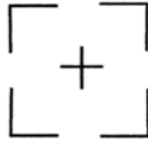
isolated within a square. This one square in turn is bound by guilloche to four more circles, one at the center of each side, and $1 + 4 = 5$. Finally, each corner of the overall design is composed of five circles bound together by guilloche. These numbers in fact support the more general interpretation of the design, since 5 and 6 represent "Earth and Heaven in their reciprocal action and reaction."²¹ No doubt Richard Foster is correct to trace the meaning of the Sanctuary Pavement to the teachings of Plato and Pythagoras on the science of number. In the Classical world, the number 5 was a signature of sorts of the Pythagoreans in the form of the pentalpha, and in the time of King Henry III the number 6 was specifically associated with the Pythagoreans "and those who follow their doctrines."²² Foster fails to appreciate, however, that Plato and Pythagoras belong to a singular tradition, that of Apollo, and that the presence of these teachings at a site formerly dedicated to Apollo is not without significance in itself.

In Christian terms, the overall design of the Sanctuary Pavement is immediately comparable to a particular form of the *gammadion* (pictured opposite), especially since the five

²¹ René Guénon, *The Great Triad*, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001, page 56. Cf. also page 21 in this volume.

²² Ibn Arabî, *Le Livre du Mîm, du Wâw et du Nûn*, presented by Charles-André Gilis, Beirut: Albouraq, 2002, page 61.

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circles at the center of the Cosmati pavement are arranged in a cross. The *gammadion* is related to figural depictions of the four Evangelists around Jesus Christ, yet its geometric form encompasses related meanings comprehensible through the science of symbolism. As the foremost authority on the latter, René Guénon chooses to relate the form of the *gammadion* to the Arabic term *al-arkān*,²³ meaning ‘supports.’ *Al-arkān* is a term applied in the Islamic tradition to the four elements of Classical cosmology - fire, air, water, and earth – while the “*rukṅ al-arkan*” is the fifth element or “quintessence.” The relevance of cosmological principles to the pavement is indicated clearly by the final words of its inscription that refers to the “archetypal macrocosm.” The relevance of the Arabic formula becomes clear when it is recalled that the use of the Latin term *arcanum* (“secret”) in Medieval Europe was “certainly influenced directly by the Arabic word in question.”²⁴ It was,

²³ “*Al-Arkān*,” *Symbols of Sacred Science*, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2004.

²⁴ “The Cornerstone,” *Symbols of Sacred Science*, op. cit.

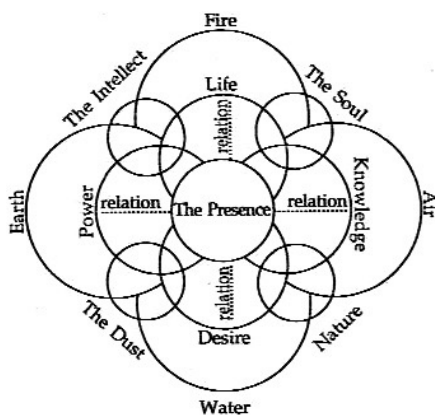
after all, through the influence of Islam that the “arcane” sciences of the Pythagoreans came to be incorporated within Christendom during this period.

In his study, Richard Foster searches within Medieval Christendom for cosmological formulations comparable to the Sanctuary Pavement, and the closest example he offers is the rose window of Lausanne Cathedral. Significantly, Foster connects the development of this window to the School of Chartres.²⁵ In “The Labyrinth of the Age of Gold,” I summarized evidence for this school being responsible for expressing the Apollonian tradition within the context of Christian and Islamic eschatology in the form of its labyrinth.²⁶ Foster muses on the close relationship between the labyrinth of Chartres and its rose window, but if he fails to understand the nature of the Apollonian tradition, he is even less able to consider the participation of the Islamic. This is so despite his admission that the central stone of the Sanctuary Pavement at Westminster is almost certainly

²⁵ Op. cit., pages 145-6.

²⁶ *Guardians of the Heart: Essays on Sacred Geography*, Temple of Justice Books, 2022. Part of this formulation concerns the significance of the number 19, which may be compared to the reckoning of some 19000 years according to the inscription within the “End of the World Pavement.”

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from Egypt, and that its glasswork betrays an Islamic origin.

If we consult the very authority who seems to be the source for the Islamic eschatology on display in Chartres, the Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi, we discover a cosmological diagram (above) worth comparing to the “End of the World Pavement:” According to the teachings of the Shaykh al-akbar (the “greatest master”) who was also known as the “Son of Plato,” the four elements may be envisioned as circles around a fifth circle; yet here there are other sets of four circles nearer to that center, and these may even be depicted at positions intermediate to the circles of the

elements.²⁷ Here, then, is a solution to an aspect of the Westminster pavement's design that is a source of confusion for Foster. The art historian admits that his interpretation of the design is speculative, and somewhat inexplicably allows for more than one set of four elements. Still, his thoughts on the four circles nearest to the central stone in the pavement are not without merit, in particular his observation that the circle with its central point suggests the traditional symbol for the Sun while the circle containing the heptagon suggests a lunar aspect. In light of the above diagram, however, perhaps the solar circle is better associated with the Intellect, the active principle traditionally symbolized by the Sun. The other circles may then be related to the Soul, the Dust,²⁸ and Nature in turn.

In a series of articles on cosmological symbolism in which he makes reference to the *arkān*,²⁹ René Guénon insists that the central *rukṅ al-arkan* properly occupies a superior rank to the other four, a fact that is not easily understood

²⁷ This version of the Shaykh's diagram is from William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1997, page 230.

²⁸ The multi-rayed design within one of the circles especially suggests the multiplicity characterizing the cosmological Dust.

²⁹ "The Cornerstone," "Lapsit Exillis," and "Al-Arkān" in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, op. cit.

with diagrams restricted to a horizontal plane. Guénon therefore makes recourse to architectural symbolism that includes the vertical dimension in order to explain the identification of the *rukn al-arkan* with the “cornerstone.” However, he explains that a symbolic “foundation stone” may be understood to belong to the same plane as the other *arkān* while having an axial relationship with the cornerstone. It is well known that the name Peter means “stone,” and Guénon mentions the role of Saint Peter as a “foundation stone” in relation to Jesus Christ as cornerstone. It will further be recalled that Westminster Abbey is the Church of Saint Peter; but what is especially remarkable is that Guénon makes explicit reference to Westminster in the context of the mysterious stone, the *lapsit exillis* or Holy Grail, that operates, as it were, in the axial dimension:

To return to the *lapsit exillis*, it must be pointed out that some have compared it to the *Lia Fail* or “stone of destiny” which was in fact also a “speaking stone” and furthermore may have been in a certain sense a “stone from heaven,” since according to the Irish legend the *Tuatha de Danann* brought it with them from their first abode, to which is attributed a “celestial” character, or at least a “paradisal” one. This

Lia Fial is known to have been the coronation stone [*pierre du sacre*] of Ireland's ancient kings, and it subsequently became that of the kings of England, having been brought by Edward I to Westminster Abbey according to the most widely held opinion; but what may seem strange is that this same stone, from another viewpoint, is identified with the one consecrated by Jacob at Bethel.³⁰

Given the relationship of this "pillow" of Jacob with the angelic ladder (*mi`raj*) he witnessed, the identification of the Coronation Stone, or Stone of Scone, with the stone of Bethel is perfectly comprehensible, since it serves as a foundation for superior influences.

As for the Sanctuary Pavement, it provides a precise geometrical formulation of the foundation stone positioned upon it, despite the fact that it precedes the historical arrival of the Coronation Stone itself. Enthroned upon the Stone (see frontispiece) during the coronation, the king is positioned over the five circles at the center of the pavement; and given the celestial

³⁰ "*Lapsit Exillis*," *Symbols of Sacred Science*, op. cit., page 281. Since 1996, the Coronation Stone has been held in the spiritual center of Edinburgh.

portents attached to the accession of His Majesty King Charles III, it is worth recalling the literal meaning of the title "Pendragon:" "the 'chief of the five,' that is, the supreme king...situated at the center of the four subordinate kingdoms which correspond to the four cardinal points."³¹ Obviously the British monarch unites the four lands of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland most immediately. While the Coronation Stone is rectangular, and so in keeping with the encompassing square upon the pavement, Saint Edward's Crown is of course circular, so again we have the presence of symbols relating to Heaven and Earth, here joined through the "axial" body of the king. This crown is claimed to hold precisely 444 precious and semi-precious stones, and this number invites an important observation. 444 is 4 times 111; and while 4 has just been specified as the number of subordinate kingdoms, I have often insisted on the importance of 111 in Islamic esoterism, and I have even had occasion to note its presence in the British national epic *The Lord of the Rings*.³² According to gematria, 111 is the number of the name of the axial letter *alif* as well as the number of the title *qutb* ("pole" or "axis") for the highest

³¹ "The Wild Boar and the Bear," *Symbols of Sacred Science*, op. cit., page 163.

³² *Alchemy in Middle-earth: The Significance of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, Temple of Justice Books, 2003, page 85.

Pendragon



Cypher of HM The King

rank of spiritual authority. This number is moreover present in the cypher of His Majesty King Charles III, since 3 in Roman numerals is indistinguishable from 111.

Finally there is the significance of the date chosen for the coronation, 6 May.³³ Again, while 23 April is the day of England's patron Saint George, this date on the Julian calendar corresponds to 6 May on the modern Gregorian. In the lands of the Ottoman Empire, where Christians followed the Julian calendar, Muslims

³³ There is a further coincidence to be noted, since this date of the 5th month brings together the number 5 and 6 that were associated above with the relationship of Earth and Heaven. For that matter, the Islamic or Hijri date of the coronation belongs to the year 1444, so here again the number 444 is present.

and Christians respected 6 May as the spring festival of Hidrellez, the name of which is a conjunction of the names of Khidr, or Saint George, and of Elias, or Elijah. Now, according to the teachings of Islamic esoterism, these ever-living prophets belong to a rank of four that also includes Jesus, as well as Idris in his solar abode who is called the *qutb*.³⁴ These four are invested with supreme authority over all spiritual and worldly affairs, and with a Christian king's crown of 444 stones, the ceremony on Hidrellez should be understood to be under the benediction of all four chiefs of the saintly hierarchy. Despite the role played by the Archbishop of Canterbury, his is not the supreme authority, and even Saint Edward whose crown he presumes to bestow did not follow the Church of England.

Much to the irritation of the Archbishop, the future king long ago made clear his intention to serve in "defending faith itself" rather than the Church of England only,³⁵ and it is expected that his coronation ceremony will be the most ecumenical in Britain's history. In defining his

³⁴ Just as Idris occupies a position at once both solar and axial, Apollo has both solar and polar attributes, the latter by virtue of his being Hyperborean; in this connection it may be recalled that his periodic visit to the Hyperboreans is sometimes calculated as occurring every 19 years.

³⁵ Cf. *Alchemy in Middle-earth*, op. cit., pages 77 and 94.

incomparable role in that history, he has used the unofficial title “Defender of Nature;” and given the importance of Nature in Islamic cosmology, as we have seen, his defense of Islam is consistent with his defense of nature’s importance. His Majesty has already presented a manifesto that is essentially Pythagorean,³⁶ and his reign as a philosopher king in the Platonic sense has long been anticipated. Now the arcane is on display for the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III in Westminster, where “end of the Prime Mover” might better be translated “purpose of the *qutb*,” and with this saintly renewal of ancient tradition there is hope that, in the words of Virgil, “the iron race shall begin to cease, and the golden to arise over all the world.”

³⁶ This manifesto is the book *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at the World*; see *Sacred Geography and the Paths of the Sun*, pages 115-6.