

regeneration effected in the psychic domain, that is, in those elements of the being which by their nature pertain to the intermediary world.⁸

As regards the eight directions, we have drawn attention to a concordance between different traditional forms which, though it relates to something other than what we had more especially in mind here, nevertheless seems to us too worthy of note not to be cited. Luc Benoist mentions⁹ that 'in the *Scivias* of St Hildegard, the divine throne which encompasses the worlds is represented by a circle supported by eight angels'. Now this 'throne which encompasses the worlds' is as exact a translation as possible of the Arabic expression *al-ʿArsh al-Muḥīṭ*, and an identical representation is found in the Islamic tradition, where it is also supported by eight angels who, as we have explained elsewhere,¹⁰ correspond both to the eight directions and to groups of letters of the Arabic alphabet. It must be admitted that such a 'coincidence' is rather surprising! It is no longer the intermediary world that is in question here, unless it can be said that the function of these angels is to establish a connection between the intermediary and celestial worlds. However that may be, this symbolism can nevertheless be linked, at least in a certain respect, with what has been said above, if we recall the Biblical text according to which God 'Maketh the winds his messengers',¹¹ not forgetting that the angels are literally the divine 'messengers'.

45 § The Cornerstone

THE symbolism of the cornerstone in the Christian tradition is based on this text: 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner', or more exactly, 'the head of the angle' (*caput anguli*).¹ What is strange is that this symbolism is usually misunderstood, due to a common confusion between the 'cornerstone' and the 'foundation stone', referred to in the even better known text: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it'.² This confusion is strange, we say, because

8. When consecrating the water, the priest traces on its surface, with his breath, a sign having the form of the Greek letter *psi* [ψ], the first letter of the word *psuché*—a very significant consideration in this respect, as it is in fact in the psychic order that the influence vehicled by the consecrated water has to operate.

9. Op. cit., p. 79.

10. 'Note sur l'angéologie de l'alphabet arabe', *Etudes Traditionnelles*, August-September, 1938 [republished in a posthumous collection of the author's essays, *Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, Paris, 1973, Tr.].

11. Psalm 104: 4 [Revised Authorized Version. Cf., the *Qur'ān* also: God 'sendeth the winds as good tidings heralding His mercy'. 7: 57; also 25: 48 and 26: 63. Tr.]

1. Psalm 118 (117): 22; Matthew 21: 42; Mark 22: 10; Luke 20: 17.

2. Matthew 16: 18.

from the specifically Christian point of view, it amounts to confusing St Peter with Christ himself; for it is Christ who is expressly designated as the 'cornerstone', as is shown by the following passage from St Paul, who, moreover, clearly distinguishes it from the 'foundations' of the building: 'Ye are . . . built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the supreme cornerstone (*summo angulari lapide*), in whom all the building fitly framed together is growing unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are being built together (*coedificamini*) for a habitation of God in the Spirit'.³ If the misunderstanding in question were solely modern, it would not have been particularly surprising, but it seems that it is in fact to be found already in times when it is hardly possible to attribute it purely and simply to the ignorance of symbolism. One is thus led to wonder if in reality it was not rather a question in the beginning of an intentional 'substitution', this being explicable by the role of St Peter as 'substitute' for Christ (in Latin, *vicarius* corresponding in this sense to the Arabic *khalifah*). If it was so, this way of 'veiling' the symbolism of the 'cornerstone' would seem to indicate that it was held to contain something particularly mysterious, and it will be seen in what follows that such a supposition is far from being unjustified.⁴ Be that as it may, even from the point of view of simple logic, this identification of the two stones confronts us with an impossibility which becomes altogether obvious once we examine the above quoted texts with a little attention: the 'foundation stone' is the one which is positioned first, at the very outset of the construction of a building (and this is why it is also called the 'first stone');⁵ how then could it be rejected in the course of this very same construction? For that to be so it is necessary, on the contrary, that the 'cornerstone' be such that it cannot as yet find its place; and in fact, as we will see, it cannot find it except at the moment of the completion of the entire edifice, and it is thus that it really becomes the 'head of the angle'.

In an article to which we have already called attention,⁶ Coomaraswamy remarks that the purpose of the text of St Paul is obviously to depict Christ as the unique principle on which the entire structure of the Church depends,

3. Ephesians 2: 19–22.

4. The 'substitution' may also have been prompted by the phonetic similarity between the Hebrew name *Kephas*, meaning 'stone', and the Greek word *Kephalē*, 'head'. But there is no other link between these two words, and the foundation of a building obviously cannot be identified with its 'head', that is, its summit, which would amount to inverting the whole structure. It might also be wondered whether this 'reversal' does not have some symbolic correspondence with the crucifixion of St Peter head downwards.

5. This stone must be placed at the Northeast angle of the building; but it is to be noted in this connection that in the symbolism of St Peter several aspects or functions, corresponding to different 'situations', are to be distinguished, for on the other hand, as *janitor*, his place is to the West where the entrance to the normally oriented church is to be found. Moreover, St Peter and St Paul are also represented as the two 'columns' of the Church, and then they are usually represented, one with the two keys and the other with the sword, in the attitude of two *dwārapālas*.

6. 'Eckstein', in the review *Speculum*, January 1939 [reviewed by Guénon in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, May 1939].

and he adds that 'the principle of a thing is neither one of its parts among others nor the totality of its parts, but that to which all the parts are brought back into a unity without composition'. The 'foundation stone' can, in a certain sense, be called a 'cornerstone' as it usually is, for it is placed at an angle or at a corner of the edifice;⁷ but it is not unique as such, the edifice necessarily having four angles; and even if one wishes to speak more particularly of the 'first stone', it in no way differs from the foundation stones of the other angles except by its situation,⁸ and it is not distinguished from them either by its form or its function, being just one of four supports all equal to each other. It could be said that any one of the four 'cornerstones' 'reflects' in a sense the dominant principle of the edifice, but it could in no way be considered as being the principle itself.⁹ Moreover, if this were really all there is to it, we could not even speak logically of 'the cornerstone', as in fact there would be four of them. Thus the cornerstone must be something essentially different from a 'cornerstone' understood in the current sense of 'foundation stone', and all they have in common is that they both pertain to the same symbolism of construction.

We have just alluded to the shape of the cornerstone, and in fact there is a particularly important point here: it is because this stone has a special shape which sets it apart from all the others that not only can it not find its place in the course of the construction, but even the builders cannot understand its purpose. If they could, it is obvious that they would not reject it and that they would be content to set it aside until the end. But they ask themselves, 'what they are to do with the stone', and not being able to give a satisfactory answer to this question, they decide to 'heave it over among the rubbish',¹⁰ believing it to be unusable. The purpose of this stone cannot be understood except by another category of builders, who have not yet come upon the scene. These are they who have passed 'from the try-square to the compass'; and by this distinction we must naturally understand that of the geometric forms which these two instruments respectively serve to trace, namely, the square and the circle which are known to symbolise in a general way earth and heaven. The square form corresponds here to the lower part of the building, and the circular form to the upper part which, in this case, must consist either of a dome or a vault.¹¹ In fact, the 'cornerstone' is in reality a

7. In this study we shall often have to refer to English 'technical' terms which belong to the language of ancient operative Masonry, and which have been preserved for the most part in the rituals of *Royal Arch Masonry* and the accessory grades attached to it, rituals for which there exist no equivalents in French.

8. According to the operative ritual, the 'first stone' is, as we have said, that of the Northeast angle. The stones of the other angles are then placed successively according to the apparent course of the sun, that is, in this order: Southeast, Southwest, Northwest.

9. Obviously this 'reflection' is directly related to the substitution of which we spoke.

10. This Masonic phrase (see note 7) contains the two ideas of raising up and rejecting. [The crucifixion combines them. Tr.]

11. This distinction, in other words, is that of *Square Masonry* from *Arch Masonry* which by their respective relationships with 'earth' and 'heaven' are here placed in correspondence with the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries.

'keystone' (*clef de voûte*). Coomaraswamy says that in order to give the true meaning of the expression 'is become the head of the corner', it could be translated as 'is become the keystone of the arch', which is exactly right; and thus this stone, by its shape as well as by its position, is really unique in the entire edifice, as it must be to symbolise the principle on which all depends. It may seem surprising that this representation of the principle should thus be put into place only as the final act of construction; but it can be said that the building process, in its entirety, is ordered in relation to this keystone (which St Paul expresses in saying 'in whom all the building fitly framed together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord'), and that it is in the keystone that the building finds at last its unity. We have here yet another application of the analogy which we have already explained on previous occasions between the 'first' and the 'last' or the 'principle' and the 'end': the construction represents manifestation, in which the principle does not appear except as the final accomplishment; and it is precisely in virtue of the same analogy that the 'first stone' or the 'foundation stone' can be regarded as a reflection of the 'last stone' which is the true 'cornerstone'.

The ambiguity implied in an expression such as 'cornerstone' stems from the different possible meanings of the word 'angle'. Coomaraswamy remarks that in various languages the words meaning 'angle' are often related to others meaning 'head' and 'extremity': in Greek, *kephalê*, 'head', and in architecture, 'capital' (*capitulum*, diminutive of *caput*) can only apply to a summit. But *akros* (Sanskrit, *agra*) may indicate an extremity in any direction, that is, in the case of a building, the summit or one of the four 'corners' (this last word is etymologically akin to the Greek *gonia*, 'angle'), though often it is also applied by preference to the summit. But even more important from the special point of view of the texts concerning the 'cornerstone' in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the Hebrew word for 'angle'. This word is *pinnah* and one finds the expression *eben pinnah*, 'angle stone'; and *rosh pinnah*, 'head of the angle'. But what is especially to be noted is that in a figurative sense, this same word *pinnah* is used to signify 'chief': an expression designating the 'chiefs of the people' (*pinnah ha-am*) is translated literally in the *Vulgate* by *angulos populorum*.¹² A 'chief' is etymologically a 'head' (*caput*); and *pinnah* is, by its root, linked to *pne*, which means 'face'. The close relation between the ideas of 'head' and of 'face' is evident and, moreover, the term 'face' pertains to a very widespread symbolism which deserves a separate examination.¹³ Yet another related idea is that of 'point' (which is found in the Sanskrit *agra*, the Greek *akros*, the Latin *acer* and *acies*); we have already spoken of the symbolism of points in connection with the symbolism of weapons and horns,¹⁴ and we

12. I Samuel 14: 38; the Greek of the Septuagint likewise uses the word *gonia* here.

13. Cf., A. M. Hocart, *Les Castes*, pp. 151-54, the expression 'faces of the earth' used in Fiji to designate the chiefs. The Greek word *karai*, in the first centuries of Christianity, served to designate the five 'faces' or 'heads of the Church', that is, the five chief patriarchates, of which the initial letters form this word: Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem [Jerusalem].

14. It may be noted that the English word corner is obviously derived from the Latin *cornu*, horn.

have seen that it is linked to the idea of extremity, but more particularly as concerning the upper extremity, that is, the highest point or the summit. Thus all these parallels only confirm what we have said about the position of the 'cornerstone' at the summit of the edifice. Even if there are other 'cornerstones' in the more general sense of the expression,¹⁵ it is indeed only this which is really 'the cornerstone' *par excellence*.

We find other interesting information in the meanings of the Arabic word *rukṅ*, 'angle' or 'corner'. This word, because it designates the extremities of a thing, that is, its most remote and hence most hidden parts (*recondita* and *abscondita* as one might say in Latin), sometimes takes a sense of 'secret' or of 'mystery'; and in this respect, its plural, *arkān*, is comparable to the Latin *arcanum* which likewise has this same sense, and which it strikingly resembles; moreover, in the language of the Hermetists at least, the use of the term 'arcane' was certainly influenced directly by the Arabic word in question.¹⁶ Furthermore, *rukṅ* also has the meaning of 'base' or 'foundation', which leads us back to the 'cornerstone' understood as foundation stone. In alchemical terminology, *al-arkān*, when used without any other specification, are the four elements, that is, the substantial 'bases' of our world, which are thus assimilated to the foundation stones of the four angles of a building, since it is on them in a way that the whole corporeal world (likewise represented by the square) is constructed;¹⁷ and this brings us back directly to the very symbolism which is now our particular theme. In fact, there are not only these four *arkān* or 'basic' elements, but there is also a fifth *rukṅ*, the fifth element or the 'quintessence' (that is, ether, *al-athīr*). This fifth element is not on the same 'plane' as the others, for it is not simply a basis as they are, but rather the very principle of this world.¹⁸ It will be represented, therefore, as the fifth 'angle' of the edifice, which is its summit; and to this 'fifth', which is in reality its 'first', the designation of supreme angle rightly belongs, the angle *par excellence* or 'angle of angles' (*rukṅ al-arkān*), because the multiplicity of the other angles is reduced in it to

15. In this sense there are not only four 'cornerstones' at the base, but there are also others at any level of the construction; and these stones are all of the same ordinary form, rectilinear and rectangular (that is, cut 'on the square', the word 'square' moreover having here the double meaning of 'try-square' and of 'square' in its ordinary sense) in contrast with the unique 'keystone'.

16. It might be interesting to investigate whether there may be a genuine etymological kinship between the two Arabic and Latin words, even in the ancient usage of the latter (for example, the *disciplina arcana* of the earliest Christians), or whether it is only a question of a 'convergence' produced later with the Hermetists of the Middle Ages.

17. This assimilation of the four elements to the four angles of a square is naturally also related to the correspondence that exists between these same elements and the cardinal points.

18. It would be on the same plane (in its central point) if this plane was taken as representing an entire state of existence; but this is not the case here, as it is the whole of the edifice that is an image of the world. Let it be noted in this connection that the horizontal projection of the pyramid, of which we speak a little further on, consists of the square base with its diagonals, along which the lateral edges are projected, with the summit at their meeting point, that is, at the very centre of the square.

unity.¹⁹ It may be noted further that the geometric figure obtained by joining these five angles is that of the pyramid with a quadrangular base: the lateral edges of the pyramid emanate from its summit like so many rays, just as the four ordinary elements, which are represented by the lower extremities of these edges, proceed from the fifth and are produced by it; and it is also following in the direction of these same edges, which we have intentionally compared to rays for this reason (and also in virtue of the 'solar' nature of the point they issue from, according to what we have said about the 'eye' of the dome), that the 'cornerstone' of the summit is reflected in each of the 'foundation stones' of the four angles of the base. Finally, in what has just been said there is the very clear indication of a correlation existing between alchemical symbolism and architectural symbolism, which, moreover, is to be explained by their common cosmological character; and this is yet another important point to which we shall have to return in connection with other parallels of the same order.

The 'cornerstone', taken in its true sense of 'summit stone', is designated, in English, both as 'keystone' and as 'capstone' (the last term is sometimes found also written as 'capestone'), and as 'copestone' (or 'coping stone'). The first of these three words is easy to understand, for it is the exact equivalent of the French term *clef de voûte* (or *clef d'arc*, the word 'keystone' being applicable to the stone that forms the summit of an arch as well as that of a vault); but the two others demand a little more explanation. In 'capstone', the word cap is obviously the Latin *caput*, 'head', which brings us back to the designation of this stone as the 'head of the angle'; this is the stone which 'achieves' or 'crowns' an edifice; and it is also a capital, which is in the same way the 'crowning' of a column.²⁰ We have just spoken of 'achievement', and the two words 'cap' and 'chief' are, in fact, etymologically identical;²¹ the

19. In the sense of 'mystery' that we indicated above, *rukn al-arkān* is the equivalent of *sirr al-asrār*, which is represented, as we have explained elsewhere, by the upper point of the letter *alif*, the *alif* itself representing the World Axis; this corresponds exactly to the position of the 'keystone', as we shall see yet more clearly later.

20. The term 'crowning' here is to be compared to the designation of the 'crown' of the head by reason of the symbolic assimilation that we noted previously of the 'eye of the dome' with the *Brahmarandhra*. Further, it is a fact that the crown, like horns, expresses the idea of elevation. It is to be noted also in this connection that the oath of the Royal Arch grade contains an allusion to 'the crown of the skull', which suggests a parallel between the opening of the cranium (as in the posthumous rites of trepanation) and the 'removing' of the 'keystone'. For the rest, the so-called 'penalties' expressed in the oaths of the different masonic grades, as well as the signs that correspond to them, relate in reality to the several subtle centres of the human being.

21. In the meaning of the word 'achieve' or of the somewhat equivalent expression 'bring to a head' the idea of 'head' is associated with that of 'end', which corresponds to the 'cornerstone', both as 'summit stone' and as 'last stone' of the edifice. We will mention yet another term derived from *chef*: the *chevet* [also in English as a loan word, with precisely the same meaning. Tr.] of a church is its 'head', that is, the eastern extremity where the apse is located, the semi-circular shape of which corresponds, in the horizontal plane, to the dome or cupola in a vertical elevation, as we have explained on another occasion.

'capstone' is, therefore, the 'head' or 'chief' of the edifice or of the work, and by reason of its special shape, which requires particular knowledge or abilities for its cutting, it is also and at the same time a *chef d'œuvre* in the guild sense of this expression.²² It is by the 'capstone' that the edifice is completely finished, or in other words, that it is finally brought to its 'perfection'.²³

As for the word 'copestone', the word 'cope' expresses the idea of 'to cover'. This is to be explained by the fact, not only that the upper part of the edifice is its 'cover', but also—and we would even say especially—that this stone is placed in such a way as to cover the opening of the summit, that is, the 'eye' of the dome or vault, of which we have already spoken.²⁴ It is thus, in this respect, the equivalent of a 'roof plate', as Coomaraswamy remarks; and he adds that this stone may be considered as the upper end or capital of the 'axial pillar' (Sanskrit *skambha*, Greek *stauros*).²⁵ That pillar, as we have already explained, does not have to be materially represented in the structure, but it is none the less its essential part, around which the whole is co-ordinated. The 'summit' nature of the 'axial pillar', no more than 'ideally' present, is indicated in a particularly striking way in those cases where the 'key of the vault' is prolonged in the form of a pendentive down into the inside of the building, without being visibly supported by anything at its lower end.²⁶ The entire construction has its principle in this pillar, and all its diverse parts are finally unified in its pinnacle which is the summit of this same pillar and which is the 'key of the vault' or the 'head of the angle'.²⁷

The real interpretation of the 'cornerstone' as being the 'summit stone'

22. The word 'work' (*œuvre*) is used both in architecture and in alchemy, and it will be seen that it is with reason that we make this comparison: in architecture, the fulfilment of the work is the 'cornerstone'; in alchemy, it is the 'philosophers' stone'.

23. In certain Masonic rites the grades which correspond more or less exactly to this upper part of the structure (we say more or less exactly, for there is sometimes a certain confusion in that domain) are designated precisely by the name 'grades of perfection'. On the other hand, the word 'exaltation', which designated accession to the grade of Royal Arch, may be understood as alluding to the elevated position of the 'keystone'.

24. 'To bring forth the copestone' is the 'technical' Masonic phrase that we have found used in connection with the placing of this stone. As it has been buried 'among the rubbish', it is a question of extricating it and therefore of bringing it back to light in order to place it prominently at the summit of the building, so that it becomes the 'head of the angle'; and thus, 'to bring forth' is the opposite of 'to heave over'.

25. *Stauros* also means 'cross', and in Christianity the cross is assimilated to the World Axis. Coomaraswamy compares this word with the Sanskrit *sthavara*, 'firm' or 'stable', which is in fact a most fitting epithet for a pillar and which, moreover, is in exact agreement with the meaning of 'stability' given to the joining of two columns of the Temple of Solomon [cf., I Kings 7: 15–22. Tr.]

26. As we have said, it is the summit of the 'axial pillar' which corresponds to the upper point of the *alif* in the symbolism of Arabic letters. As regards the terms 'keystone' and *clef de voûte*, we recall also that the key itself has, as symbol, an 'axial' significance.

27. Coomaraswamy recalls the symbolic identity of the roof (and more particularly so when it is in the form of a vault) with the parasol. We will add also that the Chinese symbol of the 'Great Extreme' (*Tai-ki*) literally designates an 'achievement' or a 'summit'; it is in fact the summit of the 'roof of the world'.

seems in fact to have been quite generally known in the Middle Ages, as is clear from an illustration (figure 15)²⁸ in the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*. This work was widely disseminated, for several hundred manuscripts of it are still extant. Two masons are to be seen here, each holding a trowel in



Figure 15

one hand, and supporting by the other hand the stone which they are about to place at the summit of the edifice (apparently a church tower, whose summit this stone is to complete), which leaves no doubt whatsoever as to its meaning. It is to be noted, in connection with this drawing, that the stone in question, as 'key of the vault', or in any other similar function it may have according to the structure of the edifice it is destined to 'crown', cannot, by its very form, be placed in position except from above (falling which, moreover, it might well fall down inside the building). As such it may be said to represent the 'stone descended from Heaven', an expression which applies perfectly to Christ²⁹ and which also recalls the stone of the Grail (the *lapis ex illis* of

28. *Manuscript of Munich*, col. 146, folio 35 (Lutz and Perdrizet, II, plate 64). A photograph of this was sent to us by Coomaraswamy, and it was published in the *Art Bulletin*, xvii, p. 450, figure 20, by Erwin Panofsky, who considers this illustration as closest to the prototype and who, in this connection, speaks of *lapis in caput anguli* as of a 'keystone'. It could also be said, following our previous quotation, that this figure represents the 'bringing forth of the copestone'.

29. A parallel could be drawn, in this respect, between the 'stone descended from heaven' and the 'bread descended from heaven', for there are important symbolic relationships between the stone and the bread; but this falls outside the scope of the present study. In any case, the 'descent from heaven' naturally represents the *avatarana*.

Wolfram of Eschenbach, which can be interpreted as *lapis ex caelis*).³⁰ There is also another important point to note here: Erwin Panofsky has remarked that this same illustration shows the stone as diamond shaped (which again links it with the Grail stone, since that is always described as being cut into facets). This question deserves closer examination, for although such a representation is far from being the most common, it has to do with aspects of the complex symbolism of the 'cornerstone' other than those we have studied so far and of equal interest for bringing out the connections of this symbolism with traditional symbolism as a whole.

Before going on to this however, there is still a secondary question that needs to be clarified: we have just said that the 'summit stone' may not in every case be the 'key of the vault', and in fact it is only so in domed structures. In every other case, for example, that of a building surmounted by a pointed roof or a roof in the form of a tent, there is none the less a 'last stone' which, placed at the summit, plays the same part as the 'key of the vault' in this respect, and which consequently corresponds to it from a symbolic point of view, but without it being possible to designate it by the same name; and as much must be said of the special case of the 'pyramidion' to which we have alluded on another occasion. It should be clearly understood that in the symbolism of the Medieval builders, which is based on the Judeo-Christian tradition and which is especially linked, as to its prototype, with the construction of the Temple of Solomon,³¹ it is an unchanging constant that, as regards the 'cornerstone', it is a 'key of the vault' that is meant; and if the exact form of the Temple of Solomon has given rise to discussions from the historical point of view, it is in any case quite certain that this form was not that of a pyramid. These are facts that must necessarily be taken into account in the interpretation of Biblical texts relating to the 'cornerstone'.³² The 'pyramidion', that is, the stone forming the upper point of the pyramid, is in no way a 'key of the vault'; but it is, none the less, the 'crown' of the edifice, and it may be noted that it reproduces in miniature the entire form thereof, as if the whole structure was thus synthesized in this one unique stone. The expression 'head of the angle', in the literal sense, fits it quite well, as does also the figurative sense of the Hebrew word for 'angle' as meaning the 'chief', the more so in that the pyramid, starting from the multiplicity of the base and

30. Cf., also the symbolic stone of the *Estole Internelle* of which Monsieur Charbonneau-Lassy has spoken and which, like the emerald of the Grail, is a faceted stone. This stone, in the cup wherein it is placed, corresponds exactly to the 'jewel in the lotus' (*mani padmā*) of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

31. The legends of the guilds, in all their branches, bear witness to this, no less than those 'remains' of the old operative Masonry which we have been considering here.

32. Thus it could in no way be a question here, as some have claimed, of an allusion to an incident that occurred during the construction of the Great Pyramid which supposedly, as a result was never altogether completed—a very dubious hypothesis in itself and an historical question that is probably insoluble. Besides, this very lack of completion would run directly counter to the symbolism according to which the stone that had been rejected finally takes its eminent place as 'head of the angle'.

gradually converging towards the unity of the summit, is often taken as the symbol of a hierarchy. On the other hand, according to what we have explained previously on the subject of the summit and the four angles of the base in connection with the meaning of the Arabic word *rukni*, it could be said that the form of the pyramid is contained implicitly as it were in every architectural structure. The solar symbolism of this form, which we then indicated, is expressed more particularly in the 'pyramidion', as diverse archaeological descriptions cited by Coomaraswamy clearly show. The central point or the summit corresponds to the sun itself, and the four faces (each of which is included between two outermost 'rays' which delimit its domain) correspond to so many secondary aspects of this same sun, in relation with the four cardinal points towards which these faces are respectively turned. Despite all this, it is none the less true that the 'pyramidion' is only a particular case of the 'cornerstone' and that it represents it only in a special traditional form, that of the ancient Egyptians; to correspond to the Judeo-Christian symbolism of this same stone, which pertains to a very different other traditional form, it lacks an essential characteristic, and this missing quality is that of being a 'key of the vault'.

We can now return to the representation of the 'cornerstone' in the form of a diamond. Coomaraswamy, in the article we referred to, begins with a remark made in reference to the German word *Eckstein*, which has precisely the meaning of both 'cornerstone' and 'diamond';³³ and he recalls in this connection the symbolic meanings of the *vajra*, which we have already considered on various occasions.³⁴ Generally, the stone or the metal which was considered as the hardest and the most brilliant has been taken, in different traditions, as a symbol of 'indestructibility, of invulnerability, of stability, of light, and of immortality'; and these qualities in particular are very often attributed to the diamond. The idea of 'indestructibility' or of 'indivisibility' (both are closely linked, and are expressed in Sanskrit by the same word *akshara*) suits the stone which represents the one principle of the edifice (true unity being indivisible). The idea of 'stability' which, in the architectural realm, is applied to the pillar, is equally apt when the stone is considered as constituting the capital of the 'axial pillar' which, itself, symbolises the world axis; and this axis, which Plato describes as an 'axis of diamond', is also on the other hand a 'pillar of light' (as symbol of *Agni* and as 'solar ray'). All the more applicable, then, 'pre-eminently' one might

33. John Joseph Stoudt, *Consider The Lilies, How They Grow*, in connection with the meaning of an ornamental motif in the form of a diamond, explained by writings in which Christ is spoken of as being the *Eckstein*. The double meaning of this word is plausibly explained, from the etymological point of view, by the fact that it can be understood both as 'angle stone' (cornerstone) and as 'angled stone' (faceted stone). But this explanation, of course, takes away none of the value of the symbolic connection indicated by the junction of these two meanings in one and the same word.

34. [See for example ch. 27. Ed.]

say, is this last quality to the summit of the axis, to its 'crowning', which represents the very source whence, as luminous ray, it emanates.³⁵ In Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, whatever has a 'central' or 'axial' meaning is generally assimilated to the diamond (for example, in expressions such as *vajrasana*, 'diamond throne'); and it is easy to understand that all these associations form part of a tradition which may be called truly universal.

This is still not all: the diamond is considered as the 'precious stone' *par excellence*. Now, this precious stone is also, as such, a symbol of Christ, who is herein identified with his other symbol, the 'cornerstone'; or let us simply say that these two symbols are thus united into one. It could then be said that this stone, insofar as it represents an 'achievement' or an 'accomplishment'³⁶ is, in the language of the Hindu tradition, a *chintāmani* which is the equivalent of the Western alchemical expression 'philosophers' stone';³⁷ and it is very significant in this respect that the Christian Hermetists often speak of Christ as being the true 'philosophers' stone', no less than as being the 'cornerstone'.³⁸ We are thus brought back to what we said previously about the two senses in which the Arabic expression *rukṅ al-arkān* can be understood, and of the correspondence that exists between architectural and alchemical symbolism; and to close, with a remark of an altogether general bearing, this already long though no doubt incomplete study—for the subject is one of those that are almost inexhaustible—we can add that this very correspondence is only a particular case of that which likewise exists (though perhaps in a way that is not always so evident) between all the traditional sciences and arts, because they are all just so many manifestations and applications of the same principal and universal truths.

35. The uncut diamond naturally has eight angles, and the sacrificial post (*yupa*) must be made 'of eight angles' (*ashtashri*) to represent the *vajra* (which here is understood also in its other sense of 'thunderbolt'). The Pali word *attansa*, literally, 'of eight angles', means both 'diamond' and 'pillar'.

36. From the 'constructive' viewpoint it is the perfecting of the realisation of the architect's plan; from the alchemical point of view, it is the perfecting or the ultimate end of the 'Great Work'; and there is an exact correspondence between the one and the other.

37. The diamond among stones and gold among metals, both the one and the other, are what is most precious: both, also, are 'luminous' and 'solar'; but the diamond, like the 'philosophers' stone' to which it is here assimilated, is held to be even more precious than gold.

38. The symbolism of the 'cornerstone' is expressly mentioned, for example, in various passages of the Hermetic work of Robert Fludd, cited by A. E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 27–8. It must be mentioned, moreover, that these texts seem to contain the confusion with the 'foundation stone' which we spoke of at the outset; and what the author, in quoting them, himself says about the cornerstone, in several places in the same book, is hardly better qualified to clarify the question and can only serve to perpetuate still further this same confusion.

46 § 'Lapsit exillis'

WHILE speaking of the symbolism of the cornerstone, we had occasion to mention incidentally the *lapsit exillis* of Wolfram von Eschenbach. It might be interesting to give more specific attention to this question because of the many parallels which it suggests. Under its strange form,¹ this enigmatic expression may comprise more than one meaning. It is certainly, before all else, a kind of phonetic contraction of *lapis lapsus ex caelis*, 'the stone fallen from the sky'. Moreover, this stone, precisely by reason of its origin, is as it were 'in exile' in its earthly sojourn,² whence moreover it must finally reascend to the heavens.³ As regards the symbolism of the Grail, it is to be noted that even though it is most commonly described as a vase and though this is its most widely known form it is also sometimes described as a stone, as in fact it is by Wolfram von Eschenbach. Furthermore, it can be both simultaneously, for the vase is said to have been cut from a previous stone which, having fallen from the forehead of Lucifer at the time of his fall, had likewise 'fallen from heaven'.⁴

On the other hand, what seems to increase even more the complexity of this symbolism, but which can in reality provide the 'key' to certain connections, is this: as we have already explained elsewhere, if the Grail is a vase (*grasale*), it is also a book (*gradale* or *graduale*); and in certain versions of the legend, there is mention in this respect not exactly of a book in the ordinary sense but of an inscription traced on the cup by an angel or by Christ himself. Inscriptions of similarly 'non-human' origin also appeared in certain circumstances on the *lapsit exillis*,⁵ which was thus a 'talking stone', or, we might say, an 'oracular stone'; for if a stone can 'speak' by emitting sounds, it can do so quite as well (like the shell of the tortoise in the Far Eastern Tradition) by means of characters or figures appearing on its surface. Now, what is also very remarkable from this point of view, is that the Biblical

1. A. E. Waite, in his work on *The Holy Grail*, gives the variants *lapis exillis* and *lapis exilix*, for it seems that the spelling differs according to the manuscript. He also points out that, according to the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (citing Arnold of Villeneuve), *lapis exillis* was among the alchemists one of the designations of the 'philosophers' stone', which naturally must be linked with the considerations we have indicated at the end of the same study.

2. *Lapis exili* or *lapis exsulis*, according to the interpretations suggested by Waite as possible in this regard.

3. We do not think there are grounds for taking much account of the Latin word *exillis*, taken in its literal sense of 'thin' or 'tenuous', unless perhaps one should intend to associate with it a certain idea of 'subtlety'.

4. On the symbolism of the Grail, see *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5. Also to be mentioned in this connection is the symbol of the *Estoile Internelle*, in which the cup and the precious stone are united even while being in this case distinct from one another.

5. As on the 'black stone' of Ourga, which had to be, like all the 'black stones' playing a part in different traditions, a meteorite, that is, yet again, a 'stone fallen from heaven' (see *The Lord of the World*, ch. 1).

tradition mentions an 'oracular cup', that of Joseph,⁶ which in this respect at least could be regarded as one of the forms of the Grail itself; and curiously enough it is another Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, who is said to have become the possessor or guardian of the Grail and to have brought it from the East to Britain. It is surprising that no notice seems ever to have been taken of these 'coincidences' which, nevertheless, are not insignificant.⁷

To return to *lapsit exillis*, a connection has been made between it and the *Lia Fail* or 'stone of destiny', which was also, in fact, a 'talking stone', and which may have been, in a certain sense, a 'stone from heaven', for according to the Irish legend, the *Tuatha de Danann* had brought it with them from their first abode, which is said to have been 'celestial' or at least 'paradisaal'. This *Lia Fail* is known to have been the anointing stone of the ancient kings of Ireland, 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 strange though it may seem, this same stone is, on the other hand, identified with the one which Jacob consecrated at Bethel.⁸ Nor is that all: according to the Hebrew tradition it would also seem to have been the stone which followed the Israelites in the desert and from which flowed the water they drank of,⁹ and which according to St Paul's interpretation was none other than Christ himself.¹⁰ It is then supposed to have become the *shethiyah* or 'foundation stone', placed in the Temple of Jerusalem beneath the Ark of the Covenant,¹¹ and thus marking symbolically the 'centre of the world', likewise represented in another traditional form by the *Omphalos* of Delphi;¹² and since these identifications are obviously symbolic, it can assuredly be said that in all this it is indeed always one and the same stone that is in question.

6. Genesis 44: 5.

7. The 'oracular cup' is in a way the prototype of 'magic mirrors', and there is an important point to be made in this connection: a purely magical interpretation, which reduces symbols to a merely divinatory or 'talismatic' level as the case may be, marks a certain stage in the degeneration of these symbols, or rather of the understanding of them, a stage less advanced, however, than the completely profane deviation that attributes to them a merely 'aesthetic' value, for it does at least refer to a traditional science. On the subject of the 'divinatory cup', it is to be noted also that the vision of all things as present, if this is understood in its true sense (the only sense to which can be attached the 'infallibility' explicitly in question in the case of Joseph), is clearly related to the symbolism of the 'third eye', and thus also of the stone fallen from Lucifer's forehead where it had occupied the place of the 'third eye'. It is moreover by his fall that man himself lost the 'third eye', that is, the 'sense of eternity', which the Grail restores to whoever succeeds in winning it.

8. *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9.

9. Exodus 17: 5. The drink given by this stone should be compared with the food provided by the Grail, considered as the 'vase of abundance'.

10. I Corinthians 10: 4. Let us note the relationship between the anointing of the stone by Jacob, that of kings at their crowning, and the person of Christ or of the Messiah who is literally the Anointed *par excellence*.

11. In the symbolism of the *Sephiroth*, this 'foundation' is related to *Iesod*. The 'cornerstone', to which we are going to return shortly, is related to *Kether*.

12. Again, cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9. The *Omphalos*, moreover, was a baetyl, a designation identical to *Beth-el*, or 'house of God'.

It must be clearly understood, nevertheless, as regards the symbolism of building, that the foundation stone just mentioned must in no way be confused with the 'cornerstone', which is the crown of the edifice, while the other is at the centre of its base;¹³ and inasmuch as it is central, it likewise differs from the 'foundation stone' in the ordinary sense, which is at one of the angles of the same base. We have already said that the foundation stones of the four angles reflect, as it were, the true 'cornerstone' or 'summit stone', and participate in it; again, in the present context, a reflection can also be spoken of, but this time the relationship is more direct than in the previous case, for the 'summit stone' and the 'foundation stone' are on the same vertical line so that the 'foundation stone' is as the horizontal projection of the 'summit stone' on to the level of the foundation.¹⁴ It could be said that the 'foundation stone' synthesizes in itself, even while remaining on the same level, the partial aspects represented by the stones of the four angles (this partial character being expressed by the obliquity of the lines which join them to the summit of the edifice). In fact, the central 'foundation stone' and the 'cornerstone' are respectively the base and the summit of the axial pillar, whether this pillar is represented visibly or whether it has only an 'ideal' existence. In this last case, the 'foundation stone' can be a hearthstone or an altar stone (which, moreover, is the same in principle) and which in any case corresponds in a way to the very 'heart' of the edifice.

We have said, as regards the cornerstone, that it represents the 'stone come down from heaven'; and we have now seen that the *lapsit exillis* is more precisely the 'stone fallen from heaven', which might suggest a certain relationship with the 'stone which the builders had rejected', if from the cosmic perspective these 'builders' are considered as the Angels or *Devas*;¹⁵ but since every descent is not necessarily a fall,¹⁶ there is scope for a certain differentiation between the two expressions. In any case, the idea of a 'fall' could no longer apply in any sense once the cornerstone occupies its

13. Not being angular, that is, not being placed at one of the angles, the central 'foundation stone' cannot, in this respect at least, be confused with the 'cornerstone', in connection with which we therefore did not need to speak of it.

14. This corresponds to what we have already pointed out on the subject of the horizontal projection of the pyramid, the summit of which is projected onto the meeting point of the diagonals of the base square, that is, at the very centre of this square. In operative Masonry, the positioning of a building was determined—before construction began—by what is called the 'method of the five points', which consisted of fixing first the four angles where the first four stones were to be placed, then the centre, that is, the meeting point of the diagonals of the base which is normally square or rectangular. The pegs that marked these five points were called *landmarks*, which is doubtless the primary and original sense of this Masonic term.

15. Who must be regarded as working under the direction of *Vishvakarma* who is, as we have already explained on other occasions, the same as the 'Grand Architect of the Universe' (cf., especially *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3).

16. It goes without saying that this remark applies above all to the descent of the *Avatāra*, even though his presence in the terrestrial world can also be like an 'exile', but only according to outward appearances.

definitive position at the summit.¹⁷ We can still speak of a 'descent' if the building is thought of as part of a more extensive whole (as when we drew attention to the fact that the stone cannot be put in place except from above); but if this edifice is considered only in itself, along with the symbolism of its different parts, then this very position can be called 'celestial', as the base and the roof correspond respectively, as regards their 'cosmic model', to earth and heaven.¹⁸ Let us add (and this will be our closing remark) that all that is situated on the axis at various levels can, in a certain way, be considered as representing different situations of one and the same thing, situations which are themselves related to different conditions of a being or of a world, according to whether the standpoint is 'microcosmic' or 'macrocosmic'; and in this respect, as applied to the human being, we will simply point out that the relationship between the 'foundation stone' of the centre and the 'cornerstone' of the summit are not unconnected with what we have said elsewhere about the different 'localisations' of the *luz* or the 'kernel of immortality'.¹⁹

47 § Al-Arkān

By way of addition to what we have already said about the 'cornerstone' we think it will not be without interest to give some further details about a particular point, which has to do with our references to the Arabic word *rukṇ*, angle, and its different meanings. In this connection our main purpose is to draw attention to a very remarkable concordance to be found in early Christian symbolism, a concordance on which light is thrown (as always) by the comparisons that can be made with certain data from other traditions. We propose to speak of the *gammadion*, or rather, we should say, of the *gammadia*, for this symbol has two forms that are distinctly different though the same meaning is generally given to each. It owes its name to the elements which it is made up of in both its variants and which, being in fact try-squares, are shaped like the Greek letter *gamma*.¹

The first form of this symbol (*figure 16*), sometimes also called the 'cross of

17. It would be so only when, before being put in place, this same stone were to be considered in its state of 'rejection'.

18. See 'The Symbolism of the Dome' [41 above] and also *The Great Triad*, ch. 14.

19. This connection with the *luz* is clearly suggested, moreover, by the parallels we have pointed out above with Bethel and with the 'third eye' (see on this subject *The Lord of the World*, ch. 7).

1. See *Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 10. As we noted then, it is these *gammadia* which are the true 'gammadion crosses', and it is only today that this designation has been applied to the *swastika*, a mistake which can only cause an unfortunate confusion between two entirely different symbols which in no way have the same meaning.

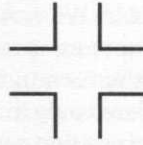


Figure 16

the Word',² consists of four try-squares, the right-angled summits of which are turned towards the centre. The cross is formed by the try-squares themselves, or more precisely by the empty space between their parallel sides which as it were represents four ways, starting from the centre or ending there, according to the direction they are traversed in. Now this same figure, considered as the representation of a crossroads, is the primitive form of the Chinese character *hing*, which designates the five elements: we see here the four regions of space which correspond to the cardinal points, and which are in fact called 'try-squares' (*fang*),³ around the central area to which the fifth element is related. These elements,⁴ despite a partial similarity of name, cannot be identified in any way with those of the Hindu tradition and of Western antiquity, so that, to avoid all confusion, it would doubtless be better, as some have suggested, to translate *hing* by 'natural agents', inasmuch as they are forces acting within the corporeal world and not constitutive elements of the bodies themselves. It is none the less true, as is clear from their spatial correspondence, that the five *hing* may be regarded as the *arkān* of this world, just as are, from another point of view, the elements in the ordinary sense, though with a difference as to the meaning of the central element. For while ether, not being on the same basic level as the other elements, corresponds to the true 'cornerstone', that of the summit (*rukṇ al-arkān*), the 'earth' of the Far Eastern tradition must be placed in direct correspondence with the 'foundation stone' of the centre, of which we have previously spoken.⁵

The representation of the five *arkān* appears still more clearly in the other form of the *gammadion* (figure 17) where four try-squares, forming the angles

2. The reason for this (according to the general meaning of the symbol) is that it is held to represent the Word expressing itself by the Four Gospels. It is to be noted that, in this interpretation, these must be considered as corresponding to four points of view (symbolically related to the 'quarters' of space), the reunion of which is necessary for the integral expression of the Word, just as the four try-squares form the cross by joining at their summits.

3. The try-square, in the Far Eastern tradition, is essentially the instrument used to 'measure the Earth'; cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 15 and 16. It is easy to see the relationship between this *gammadion* and the square divided into nine parts (*ibid.* ch. 16) which can be obtained simply by filling in the outline of a square round the outside of the *gammadion* and joining the summits of the try-squares so as to enframe the central section.

4. These are: water to the North, fire to the South, wood to the East, metal to the West, and earth at the Centre. It will be seen that there are three designations in common with the elements of other traditions but that earth none the less does not have here the same spatial correspondence.

5. It should be noted, in this connection, that the mound raised at the centre of a country truly corresponds to the altar or hearth placed at the central point of an edifice.

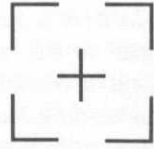


Figure 17

(*arkān* in the literal sense of the word) of a square, surround a cross drawn in its centre. The summits of the try-squares are then turned outwards instead of towards the centre as in the previous case.⁶ Here we can consider the entire figure as corresponding to the horizontal projection of an edifice onto its foundation plane: the four try-squares then correspond to the foundation stones of the four angles (which in fact must be cut 'on the square'), and the cross to the 'cornerstone' of the summit which, though not being on the same level, is projected onto the centre of the foundation according to the direction of the vertical axis; and the symbolic assimilation of Christ to the 'cornerstone' justifies this correspondence still more explicitly.

In fact, from the standpoint of Christian symbolism both the *gammadia* are considered as representing Christ, he himself being the cross in the middle of the four Evangelists, who are represented by the try-squares. The whole is thus the equivalent of the well known figuration of Christ himself in the midst of the four animals of the vision of Ezekiel and of the Apocalypse,⁷ these animals being the most usual symbols of the Evangelists,⁸ whose assimilation to the foundation stones of the four angles is moreover in no way out of keeping with the fact that St Peter, on the other hand, is expressly designated as the 'foundation stone' of the Church. We have simply to see in this the expression of two different points of view, one referring to doctrine and the other to the constitution of the Church; and it is certainly incontestable, as regards Christian doctrine, that the Gospels are very truly its foundations.

In the Islamic tradition, a similarly arranged figure is also to be found, comprising the name of the Prophet at the centre and those of the first four *Khulafā*, at the corners. Here again, the Prophet, appearing as *rukṅ al-arkān*, must be considered, like Jesus Christ in the preceding figure, as situated at a level other than that of the base, and consequently he also corresponds to the 'cornerstone' of the summit. Moreover, it must be noted that, of the two points of view that we have just indicated as regards Christianity, this representation directly recalls the one which looks on St Peter as the

6. The summits of the four try-squares and the centre of the cross, being the four angles and the centre of the square, correspond to the 'five points' by which the exact site of an edifice was traditionally determined.

7. These four symbolic animals, moreover, correspond to the four *Mahārājas* who, in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions, are the regents of the cardinal points and of the 'quarters' of space.

8. In a very similar way, the ancient Egyptian tradition represented Horus in the midst of his four sons. Moreover, in the first years of Christianity, in Egypt, Horus was frequently taken as a symbol of Christ.

'foundation stone', for it is obvious that St Peter, as we have already said, is also the *Khalīfah*, that is, the 'vicar' or the 'substitute' of Christ. But in this case only a single 'foundation stone' is considered, the first of the four stones to be put into place, without developing the correspondence any further, while the Islamic symbol in question includes all four foundation stones. The reason for this difference is that the first four *Khulafā'* have, in fact, a special function with regard to 'sacred history', while in Christianity, the first successors of St Peter have no characteristic which might distinguish them, in a comparable way, from those who came after them. It may be added, in connection with the five *arkān* manifested in the terrestrial and human world, that the Islamic tradition also considers five celestial or angelic *arkān*, who are *Jibrīl*, *Rufā'īl*, *Mīkāl*, *Isrāfīl*, and lastly *ar-Rūh*, (the Spirit) who is identified with *Metatron* as we have explained on other occasions. He also is ranked at a level higher than that of the four others, who are his partial reflections in different and more particularised or less principal functions, and in the celestial world, he is truly *rukn al-arkān*, he who, at the boundary separating *al-Khalq* (creation), from *al-Haqq* (truth, reality), is at that very 'place' through which alone an exit from the Cosmos can be effected.

48 § Gathering What Is Scattered¹

IN *The Great Triad* (ch. 6) with reference to the *Ming-Tang* and the *Tien-ti-Houei*, we have cited a Masonic formula according to which the task of the Masters is 'to diffuse the light and to gather that which is scattered'. In fact, the comparison that we made then bore only upon the first part of this formula.² As to the second part, which may seem more enigmatic, it has some remarkable connections in traditional symbolism, nor do we think it would be without interest to make here some observations which could not be included on that other occasion.

In order to understand as completely as possible what is involved, it is advisable to refer first of all to the Vedic tradition which is particularly explicit in this respect: 'what has been scattered' is the dismembered body of the primordial *Purusha* who was divided at the first sacrifice accomplished by the *Devas* at the beginning, and from whom, by this very division, were born all manifested beings.³ It is obvious that we have here a symbolic description of the passage from unity to multiplicity, without which there could not in fact be any manifestation whatsoever; and this makes it already

1. Cf., [Luke 11:3; 'He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.' Similarly Matt. 12: 30. Tr.]

2. The devise of the *Tien ti-Houei* that was in question is in fact this: "To destroy the darkness (*tsing*), to restore the light (*ming*)'.

3. See *Rig Veda* 10: 90.