

Symbolism of the Ark

Universal Symbolism of the Receptacle of Divine Immanence

by

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations

Table of Hebrew Letters

Preface

1. Introduction

1. The Traditional Perspective
2. The Ark: Principle and Form
3. Hypostatic and Cosmological Numbers

2. Symbolism

1. The Divine Language
2. The Adequacy of Symbols
3. The Symbolic Web
4. The Universality of Symbols
5. The Cosmic Theophany
6. The Laws of Analogy
7. Summary

3. *Zero: Symbolism of Water*

1. Introduction
2. The “Divine Nothingness”
3. Zero: Void-Plenum
4. *Tsimtsum: Creatio Ex Nihilo*
5. The Upper and Lower Waters
6. The Kings of Edom
7. Eden
8. Fire and Water
9. Traversing the Waters

4. *The Monad: Centre and Origin*

1. Introduction
2. The One and the Monad
3. The Naked Essence
4. Rest
5. The Seed
6. The Stone and the Pillar
7. The Divine Light
8. Centre and Origin

5. The Duad: *Two by Two*

1. Introduction
2. Knowing God through the *Coincidentia Oppositorum*
3. The Essential Complementary
4. The Divine Androgyne
5. The Isthmus
6. The Symplegades
7. The Twin Peaked Mountains
8. *Coincidentia Oppositorum* in Ark Symbolism

6. The Ternary: *Unity in Plurality*

1. Introduction
2. The Trinity
3. The Ternary
4. The Three Worlds of the Ark
5. The Nine-Fold Division
6. The Ternary Projection
7. The Receptacle of Sound

7. The Quaternary: *The House of God*

1. Introduction
2. The Quaternary as Ontological Unfolding
3. The Cross and the Square
4. The *Tetraktys*
5. The House of God

8. Conclusion

1. The Container and the Contained
2. Mercy and Charity
3. Summary and Synthesis

Sources

ABBREVIATIONS

Burckhardt, <i>ISD</i>	<i>An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine</i>
Burckhardt, <i>MI</i>	<i>Mirror of the Intellect</i>
Charlesworth (ed.), <i>OTP1</i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol.1</i>
Charlesworth (ed.), <i>OTP2</i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Vol.2</i>
Chevalier & Gheerbrant, <i>DS</i>	<i>Dictionary of Symbols</i>
Cohen, <i>ET</i>	<i>Everyman's Talmud</i>
Coomaraswamy, <i>SP1</i>	<i>Selected Papers Vol.1: Traditional Art and Symbolism</i>
Coomaraswamy, <i>SP2</i>	<i>Selected Papers Vol.2: Metaphysics</i>
Dalley (ed.), <i>MM</i>	<i>Myths from Mesopotamia</i>
Daniélou, <i>MGI</i>	<i>The Myths and Gods of India</i>
Meister Eckhart, <i>Comm. Gen.</i>	<i>Commentary on the Book of Genesis</i>
Meister Eckhart, <i>Par. Gen.</i>	<i>Book of the Parables of Genesis</i>
Meister Eckhart, <i>Comm. Jn.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
Meister Eckhart, <i>Comm. Wis.</i>	<i>Commentary on the Book of Wisdom</i>
Rabbi Gikatilla, <i>SO</i>	<i>Sha'are Orah (Gates of Light)</i>
Guénon, <i>SC</i>	<i>Symbolism of the Cross</i>
Guénon, <i>MB</i>	<i>Man and his Becoming According To The Vedānta</i>
Guénon, <i>LW</i>	<i>The Lord of the World</i>
Guénon, <i>GT</i>	<i>The Great Triad</i>
Guénon, <i>ED</i>	<i>The Esoterism of Dante</i>
Guénon, <i>RQ</i>	<i>The Reign of Quantity & The Signs of the Times</i>
Guénon, <i>FS</i>	<i>Fundamental Symbols</i>
Guénon, <i>MSB</i>	<i>The Multiple States of the Being</i>
Ibn al-‘Arabī, <i>Fusūs</i>	<i>Fusūs al-hikam (Bezels of Wisdom)</i>
Ibn al-‘Arabī, <i>Lubb</i>	<i>Lubbu-l-Lubb (Kernel of the Kernel)</i>
Ibn al-‘Arabī, <i>Futūhāt</i>	<i>al- Futūhāt al-Makkiya (The Meccan Revelations)</i>
Al-Jīlī, <i>al-insān</i>	<i>al-insān al-kamīl (Universal Man)</i>
Mathers, <i>KU</i>	<i>The Kabbalah Unveiled</i>
<i>NJB</i>	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i>
Nasr, <i>NS</i>	<i>Knowledge and the Sacred</i>
Nasr, <i>ICD</i>	<i>An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines</i>
Metford, <i>DCLL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend</i>
Oldmeadow, <i>Traditionalism</i>	<i>Traditionalism: Religion in the light of the Perennial Philosophy</i>
Perry, <i>TTW</i>	<i>A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom</i>
Rappoport, <i>AI1</i>	<i>Ancient Israel Vol.1</i>
Rappoport, <i>AI2</i>	<i>Ancient Israel Vol.2</i>
Rappoport, <i>AI3</i>	<i>Ancient Israel Vol.3</i>

Schaya, <i>UMK</i>	<i>The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah</i>
Scholem, <i>MTJM</i>	<i>Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism</i>
Schuon, <i>LAW</i>	<i>Light on the Ancient Worlds</i>
Schuon, <i>LT</i>	<i>Logic and Transcendence</i>
Schuon, <i>UI</i>	<i>Understanding Islam</i>
Schuon, <i>EPW</i>	<i>Esoterism as Principle and as Way</i>
Schuon, <i>FDH</i>	<i>From the Divine to the Human,</i>
Schuon, <i>SPHF</i>	<i>Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts</i>
Schuon, <i>IFA</i>	<i>In The Face Of The Absolute</i>
Schuon, <i>G:DW</i>	<i>Gnosis: Divine Wisdom</i>
Schuon, <i>TUR</i>	<i>The Transcendent Unity of Religions</i>
Schuon, <i>TB</i>	<i>Treasures of Buddhism</i>
Schuon, <i>SW</i>	<i>Stations of Wisdom</i>
Schuon, <i>LS</i>	<i>Language of the Self</i>
Schuon, <i>SME</i>	<i>Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism</i>
Snodgrass, <i>SS</i>	<i>The Symbolism of the Stupa</i>
Snodgrass, <i>ATE1</i>	<i>Architecture, Time and Eternity Vol.1</i>
Snodgrass, <i>ATE2</i>	<i>Architecture, Time and Eternity Vol.2</i>
Tishby, <i>WZ1</i>	<i>The Wisdom of the Zohar Vol.1</i>
Tishby, <i>WZ2</i>	<i>The Wisdom of the Zohar Vol.2</i>
Tishby, <i>WZ3</i>	<i>The Wisdom of the Zohar Vol.3</i>

TABLE OF HEBREW LETTERS

Numerical Value	Letter	Name	Symbolism	Transcription
1	א	alef	Ox	per vocalisation
2	ב	beth	House	v or b, bh
3	ג	gi'mel	Camel	g
4	ד	da'leth	Door	d, dh
5	ה	he	Window	h
6	ו	vav	Peg, Nail	v (u or o as a vowel)
7	ז	zayin	Weapon; Sword	z
8	ח	heth	Enclosure; Fence	ch
9	ט	teth	Serpent	t
10	י	yod	Hand	i, y
20, Final = 200	כ ,ך	kaf	Palm of hand	kh, k
30	ל	la'medh	Ox-goad	l
40, Final = 600	מ ,ם	mem	Water	m
50, Final = 700	נ ,ן	nun	Fish	n
60	ס	sa'mekh	Prop; Support	s
70	ע	ayin	Eye	per vocalisation
80, Final = 800	פ ,ף	fe or pe	Mouth	f, p
90, Final = 900	צ ,ץ	tsa'dhe	Fishing-hook	ts, tz
100	ק	kof	Back of the head	k
200	ר	resh	Head	r
300	ש	sin or shin	Tooth	s, sh
400	ת	thaw or taw	Sign of the Cross	th, t

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A Note on Referencing and the Use of Foreign Terms

As biblical tradition is my starting point I have placed biblical references within the body of the text; all other references are in footnotes. There is a focus on Hebrew as the language of the biblical Ark traditions. However, this is not a work of linguistic analysis; hence, both the use of Hebrew and the general transliteration of languages is kept simple. Spelling, use of accents and italicisation of foreign terms has been standardised throughout.

Preface

In diverse traditions we find an ensemble of symbols, motifs and narratives centring on the idea of a “container” or “receptacle” for the divine Presence. This idea is found in the symbolism of what we might loosely call “the Ark.” In the Semitic traditions this symbolism is most conspicuous in the biblical accounts of the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant. The aim of this book is to uncover the more or less universal significance of Ark symbolism through an exploration of its biblical expressions. The starting point for this inquiry is a set of immutable metaphysical and cosmological principles constituting the *philosophia perennis*, which informs the world’s integral mythological and religious traditions. I understand the Ark as the receptacle of Divine Immanence or, what amounts to the same thing, as the dwelling place of God. Immanence may be symbolised by a series of numerical hypostases, the most fundamental of which is the progression from the monad to the quaternary. In turn, the unfolding of the quaternary reveals the fullness of the decad, with the number ten adequately expressing the return of the monad to metaphysical zero. With the account of the Ark of Noah and, to a lesser extent, the Ark of the Covenant in the foreground, we survey the symbolic “progression” from zero to four. Thus the mythology of the Ark of Noah is considered as the movement from zero (the waters of the flood), through the principal monad (the Ark as “seed”), via the duad as both retraction (“two by two”) and emanation (the “twin peaked mountains”), to the ternary, both as a hierarchy of constituent elements (the “three decks” of the Ark) and as a creative “power” (the “three sons” of Noah), to the quaternary, which may be said to express Immanence in terms of cosmic stability (the Temple, the *Ka’bah*). The Noah myth is an expedient point of departure for a consideration of the Ark as a universal symbol with two fundamental expressions: the Ark as the divine “vehicle” (boat, ship, chariot) and the Ark as the “house of God.” These, however, are only the most obvious expressions of the symbolism under investigation and allusion is made to a variety of other related symbolic motifs (cup, trumpet, conch, heart, amongst others). In the final analysis we are engaged in an inquiry into universal metaphysical and cosmological principles.

The Ark is the receptacle of Divine Immanence. However, such a statement is too simple or even too obvious to bring into focus the vast body of symbolisms and the

complex hermeneutics that explicate it. My aim is two-fold: to present an examination of the metaphysics related to the symbolism of the Ark, and to alert the reader to the broad scope of this symbolism. It might help to clarify the nature of this enterprise by first saying what it is not. It is not a work of historical investigation, history of religion, history of ideas, nor speculative or systematic theology, in any limited sense of these words. Neither is this a work concerned with contemplative spirituality, although it is this rich tradition that yields some of the most valuable writings concerning the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant: one thinks of Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe morali et de arca Noe mystica* and Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Major (The Mystical Ark)*, and the influence this last had on *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

This book might best be described as a work of comparative symbolic exegesis. I have attempted to present a study of the traditional symbolisms and metaphysics associated with the idea of the Ark envisaged as a universal principle. Admittedly this is not original in any modern sense of the word. It is not my intention to formulate some new idea, but simply to fathom the depths of the Ark symbol and its related symbolisms. Still, while this is not original it is nevertheless relatively unique among modern scholarly studies, which are more often than not concerned primarily with historical proofs of the Ark of Noah or the Ark of the Covenant.

This work is far from exhaustive; it seeks simply to suggest certain understandings and symbolic relationships that by their very nature are multivalent. When discussing principles I have tried to be direct and concise. Where I engage with examples, be they mythological, symbolical, or literary, I generally let the web of allusions, correspondences and analogies speak for itself. If we appear to wander from what might be thought of as Ark mythology, be this the Ark of the Flood or the Ark of the Covenant, this is due to my central premise: that the Ark symbolises the receptacle of Divine Immanence. Immanence includes every manifested and created thing from the Cosmos itself to the most insignificant speck of dust. God exists in all things and all things exist in God. Thus one might speak of any "thing" as the receptacle of Divine Immanence.

To fully understand the Ark as the receptacle of Immanence one must consider the relationship of Immanence and Transcendence. Thus one moves to a study of Reality in Its fullness, the content of which is infinite. The scope of such a study is limited only by one's intellectual horizon. Yet one is obliged to find a starting place. The

notion of the symbolism of the Ark provides that starting place for this book. It is finally, as in fact all symbolism should be, a stepping-stone to an appreciation of the Divine.

*Noah's Ark is the symbol of our species,
A boat wandering the ocean.*

*A plant grows deep in the centre of that water.
It has no form and no location.*

— Jalāl al-Din Rūmī, *Kulliyat-e Shams*, 546, 561(tr. C. Barks)

