

## ***Christopher Wren, Christian Cabala and the Tree of Life***

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Following disasters of; plague, civil war and conflagration, London, the governmental and spiritual center of England, began a renovation that promised to establish the ideal, reasoned Christian City, the “New Jerusalem”. Christopher Wren was the son of the Dean of Windsor and Registrar of the Order of the Garter and the nephew of a prominent and progressive Anglican Catholic Bishop. In his own right, Wren was a Professor of Astronomy, Royal Surveyor and founding member of the Royal Society. All of the above made him uniquely qualified to contribute to meeting these physical and spiritual challenges.

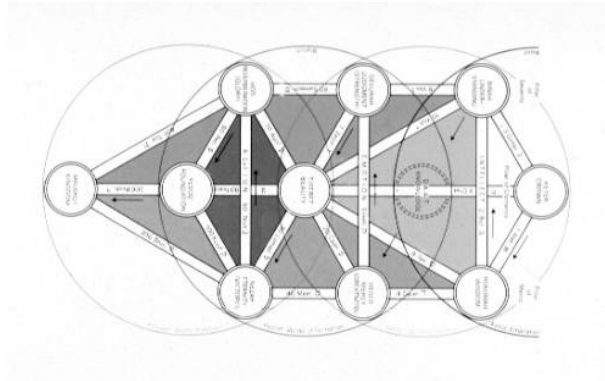
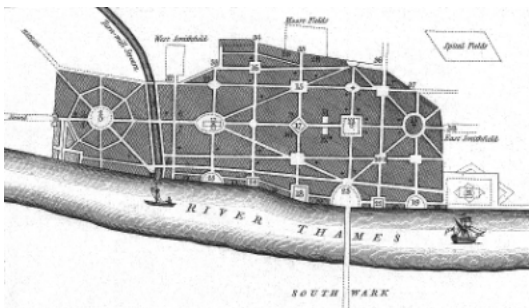
In fact, efforts to renovate London into the “New Jerusalem” had been underway in a variety of forms for generations. Nearest to Wren’s time, the Stuart monarchy had been closely associated with King Solomon (as head of Church and State), their palace at Whitehall with Solomon’s palace, and St. Paul’s Cathedral with Solomon’s Temple. Inigo Jones had modeled his designs for the latter two examples on their Solomonic precedents as they were known to him.

Wren’s design for the new St. Paul’s also attempted to act as a resurrected version of “Solomon’s Temple” as it was understood at his time. The design incorporated geometric ordering principles derived from Platonic/Pythagorean sources, Masonry, Hermetic traditions and the Hebraic Cabala – most specifically in the use of the Sephirotic “Tree of Life”. All of these traditional sources were actively studied by some of Wren’s closest colleagues, most notably Robert Boyle, the pioneering scientist and fellow charter member of the Royal Society. In fact, several charter members of the Royal Society were also members of the “Cabala Club”.

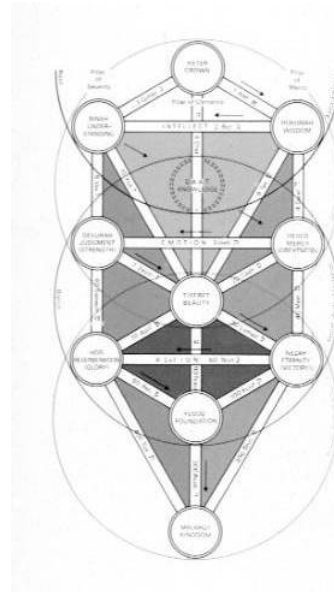
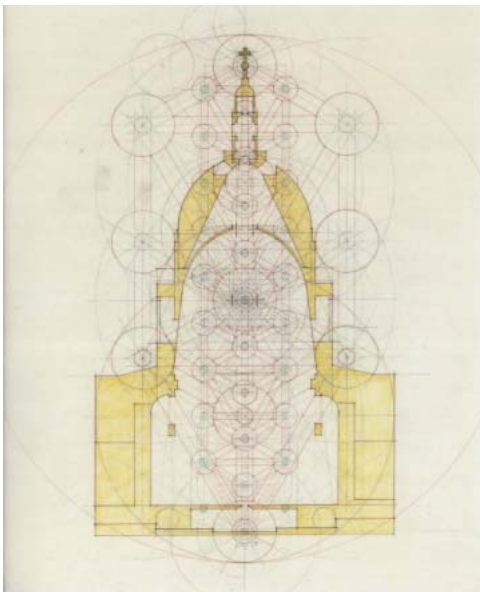
Far from being an institution devoted entirely to “science” as we currently understand it, the Royal Society at its founding engaged in an epistemological syncretism. The members did not refer to themselves as scientists but as “natural philosophers”. Their father figure, Francis Bacon had advocated an understanding of the natural world based on close observation, disciplined methodology and careful documentation. In order to support this cause, he called for the establishment of an “Invisible College” with its organization to be based largely on Rosicrucian symbolism. Bacon’s contemporary on the continent, Johannes Kepler was developing mathematical models to explain and predict planetary motion at the same time he was attempting to reconcile them with the platonic “harmony of the spheres”. The later “natural philosophers” mixed and matched the four 17<sup>th</sup> C epistemological models we can identify today. They are the: 1) Hermetic model, 2) Mechanical model, 3) Platonic/Pythagorean model, 4) Empirico-Descriptive model. Of these, only the fourth can be directly linked to what we now refer to as science. As examples of the syncretism:

Robert Boyle, commonly referred to as the father of modern chemistry, kept a voluminous collection of carefully produced notebooks of symbolic esoteria that included many examples of sacred geometry. Isaac Newton, most famous today for his work in mathematics and author of the laws of gravity, was also a life-long, avid practitioner of alchemy. And Christopher Wren, in addition to being a professor of astronomy and famous for his many practical structural inventions, was also a practitioner of sacred geometry, had an active interest in the symbolic content of Solomon's Temple and was not only a member of freemasonry, but also the master of his lodge.

For Wren and his contemporaries, their intellectual pursuits were not exclusive of spiritual truths nor of practical applications. So, the symbolism of the cabalistic "Tree of Life" was studied and applied. The efficacy of doing so was not questioned. It was applied to the city plan (as in John Evelyn's example)



and to the city's cathedral (as in Wren's example).



As geometric “ghosts” the “Tree” diagram was to infuse its subject with the divine qualities known as the ten Sephirots, named here as: Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Mercy, Judgment, Beauty, Eternity, Reverberation, Foundation and Kingdom. These divine qualities (plus “hidden Knowledge”) were in turn to contribute to an eschatological purpose. That the “Tree” was invisible to human eyes made it all the more potent. The intention of its use was not as a manifested icon but as a subliminal device perfecting human consciousness and action. The belief in the efficacy of multiple models of understanding and action is the reason for Wren and his contemporaries’ interest in the “Tree” and Solomon’s Temple as well as “natural philosophy”.

As one example of this interest, on September 6, 1675, Sir Christopher Wren was having dinner with friends. The topic of conversation was the geometric properties of Solomon’s Temple. The reason we know this is due to an entry in Robert Hooke’s diary,

*“At Mr. Storys coald venison and coadling. With Sr Chr. Wren. Long Discourse with him about the module of the temple at Jerusalem.”*  
(Soo, Pg. 123)

This seemingly unimportant, if interesting, dinner conversation was linked to many of the most important political, religious and intellectual themes of Wren’s era. The syncretism practiced by Wren’s contemporaries and those who preceded them sought to fuse various models of understanding the world. For Wren and his contemporaries this fusion was to serve an instrumental purpose: to prepare the world for the Second Coming - with London (the “New Jerusalem”) as the site.

This research includes original illustrations by the author that demonstrate the use of the “Tree” and Solomon’s Temple’s geometric principles in the preparation of his drawings for the design of St. Paul’s. It draws upon much of the conventional scholarship on Wren, the documentation of the design’s drawings as well as scholarship on the intellectual, political and religious context of Wren’s time. In addition, it draws upon more recent scholarship on his contemporaries’ interest in fusing the symbolism of Christianity with that of Hebraic mysticism, the “Christian Cabala”.