

# The tetractys and the hebdomad:

## Blavatsky's Sacred Geometry Unveiled

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### Abstract

This article traces essential sources behind the Western reception of Sanskrit terminology relating to *subtle anatomy*. Focus is on a central period in late 19th-century when the Theosophical Society and its most significant forefront, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB), first presented her doctrine of subtle anatomy. A change in her teaching took place around 1880-81, in an interaction between American, European and Indian theosophists which distinguishes her two major works *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). A hypothesis regarding how and why Blavatsky's first doctrine of *three human principles* (body, soul, and spirit) developed into her later teaching of *seven human principles*, is also presented. Earlier research has concluded that the exchange of ideas with Hindus and Buddhists initiated the transformation of Blavatsky's doctrine regarding *the number* of human principles. The article explores another possibility: that HPB's ideas about a seven-fold subtle anatomy was there since the grounding of The Theosophical Society (1875), and that it was rooted in specific numerological, mathematical and geometric speculations which she shared with several other contemporary authors. In classical Greek literature, this genre is referred to as "arithmology," but similar ideas in the New Age-literature would today be called "Sacred Geometry." The article investigate some common arithmological speculations in 19th-century American literature, taking a closer look at concepts like the Pythagorean *tetractys*, the symbology of the *tetrad*, the *pyramid*, the *cube*, and the *hexagram*.

### Keywords

Western Esotericism, The Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky, Arithmology, Sacred Geometry, Number seven, Modern Yoga, Subtle Anatomy, Chakras, Human Principles, Subtle Anatomy, Astral Body

### Western reception of South Asian terminology on subtle anatomy

The notion that man beside the physical body also possesses *subtle anatomy* is central to the New Age movement as well as the contemporary holistic milieu in general. Concepts related to a system of subtle "energy centers" in the human body (commonly referred to as *chakras*) can historically be found in India, Tibet, and East Asia. In these traditions, the number of subtle energy centers varies. The modern Western schema of subtle anatomy, however, has a relatively standardized *seven-fold* structure, linked to seven chakras. Since number seven has a central symbolic meaning in both Judaism and Christianity, this is probably not so strange, but although the vocabulary used in modern yoga is old, late 19th- and early 20th-century theosophical renderings of these terms were crucial in forming the Western reception and conception of subtle anatomy (Wujastyk, 2009: 20).

For most Americans and Europeans, Indian religion remained basically unknown until the turn of the 17th-century (Halbfass, 1990: 49). Broadly speaking, yoga-related concepts were introduced to the West in

three "waves": The first wave came through missionary travel-accounts (Halbfass, 1990: 47-54), and during the latter part of the 18th-century came the first translations of Indian *religious* texts (de Michelis, 2008: 40-42). A little later, Duperron's translations of some of *the Upanishads* were published, which inspired Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy and the emergence of American *transcendentalism* (Halbfass, 1990: 35, 82-83). The second big wave of mediation came when the first Indian gurus visited the United States at the end of the 19th-century. One of those who received the most attention was Swami Vivekananda, arousing public curiosity about *Vedanta philosophy* through his speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The Theosophical Society (TS) also contributed immensely to the growing Western interest in Indian religions (de Michelis, 2008: 110). A third wave of reception of Indian ideas was initiated by Paramahansa Yogananda's American bestseller *Autobiography of a Yogi*, published in 1946. After 1965 – and in conjunction with new more open American emigration laws – Hindus traveled overseas, and Eastern religion became better known to the ordinary American citizen. Through this, the foundation for the coming New Age movement was laid (Baier, 2016: 3-4).

This article will examine "the second wave of mediation" of subtle-anatomical concepts to the West. TS were the first to popularize many of the central ideas now found in Western holistic spirituality. The central figure of the first generation of theosophical leaders, Helena Patrovna Blavatsky (HPB), popularized the idea of *a systematic methods for reaching clairvoyant abilities* as well as the concept of "*an astral body*" and of "*astral projection*" (temporary separation of the subtle body from the physical, to travel in time and space). She also presented an idea of *reincarnation as a form of "spiritual evolution"* as well as the, nowadays, standardized *sevenfold chakra-system*. Two second-generation theosophical leaders, Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, further elaborated the concept of "*the aura*" (shapes and colors of the subtle anatomy surrounding the body).

TS also paid the way for new orientalist translations and interpretations of Tantric philosophy. An English lawyer and orientalist (resident in India) by the name John Woodroffe (alias "Arthur Avalon") — largely contributed to modern Western conceptions of *Tantra* and *Kundalini Yoga* (Baier, 2016: 336). Woodroffe was inspired by his Tantric guru Shivachandra Vidyarnava, as well as his collaboration with Indians like Athel Behari Ghose and Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya which helped him produce English translations of tantric texts.<sup>1</sup> Especially Woodroffes illustrated translation of the Tantric text *Satcakranirupana*, titled *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga* (1918), together with Leadbeater's *The Chakras* (1927), had an immense impact on the Western conceptions of subtle anatomy.

Before this time, around 1880-81, there was an apparent doctrinal change taking place in teachings of TS through an interaction between American, European and Indian theosophists. HPB's first conception of "the threefold man" presented in *Isis Unveiled (IU)* in 1877, was then replaced by her sevenfold division of man, presented in her later major writing *The Secret Doctrine (SD)*, published 1888. The change from a three to seven human principles became visible in theosophical writings and articles about two years after Olcott's and Blavatsky's move to India (1879).

Following pages will examine some of HPB's most crucial personal and literary influences during *the first part of her life*, often referred to as her "*Hermetic-Egyptian period*." At first glance, it may look as if the change to *seven* principles occurred due to the confrontation with Hinduism and Buddhism and the new Indian members of the Society. However, there was a previous process leading up to Blavatsky's doctrinal choice of *number seven* as the backbone of her entire fractal cosmology – a process that largely depended on *arithmological* and esoteric themes and concepts, popular in the 19th-century literary genre of *Comparative Religion and Mythology* (which authors are referred to as "mythographers"). This genre influenced HPB immensely when writing *IU*.

As *number seven* has a very central symbolic meaning in both Jewish and Christian traditions as well as in

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<sup>1</sup> Sartori, 2010: 75-80; "Woodroffe claimed that he used the pseudonym to cover the fact that he worked with 'others', especially one anonymous person whom in a previously published paper I identified as the Bengali wakil and scholar Atal Behari Ghose" (Taylor, 2001: 3).

Western Esotericism in general, the popularity of the sevenfold subtle-anatomical schema in the West is maybe not that surprising. Still – I assert – it is possible to discern an *especially significant period* of mediation which initially shaped our contemporary Western schema of subtle anatomy.<sup>2</sup> The thesis of this article is that *HPB's choice to present a sevenfold schema of subtle anatomy has influenced the holistic spirituality of today, and that her choice to present it as sevenfold was primarily influenced on Western sources – such as her contemporary mythographers.*

### Theosophical orientalism<sup>3</sup>

In Modern yoga the subtle anatomy is often depicted as having both *form* and *colors* (which supposedly can be perceived by clairvoyantly skilled individuals). Moreover, it is said to be perfused by "subtle energies," mostly referred to as "*prana*," "kundalini" or "*ki/qi*". The seven *chakras* are said to be placed vertically aligned along the spine and are associated with a verity of different emotions and needs. The diversity of contemporary holistic healing techniques seeks to "release energy from the subtle body" which has been "blocked" in its motion, thereby causing physical or mental problems (Hammer, 2001: 92).

TS played a crucial role in transforming the doctrine of the chakras into an element of global popular culture (Baier, 2016: 309). This process was examined by Hall [Chajes] in "The Saptaparna: the meaning and origins of the theosophical Septenary constitution of man" (2007), and more recently by Karl Baier in "Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer" (2016). According to Chajes there was no direct parallel teaching on the human principles to that of HPB, in neither Eastern nor Western traditions. She argues that Blavatsky's anthropology can be described as a "a syncretic searching for parallels" and "a creation of something new." Her working hypothesis (in 2007) was that HPB – although inspired mainly by Western Esotericism – *invented* this sevenfold division due to her need of an all-encompassing system (Hall, 2007: 11, 25).

Baier shed some more light on the subject, however, showing that early members of TS had ideas about "the significance of certain body centers for spiritual development" before they learned about the South Asian chakras (Baier, 2016: 341). The Indian vocabulary eventually helped them develop a more elaborate system than they had before. Baier also highlighted the *potential benefits* that the teaching of *the ascent through the chakras* could offer TS in terms of occult practice, since the society had previously only focused on "astral projection" as the means to contact the higher spheres (Baier, 2016: 341-342).

Their study of the South Asian cakra systems led HPB and Olcott to the conclusion that successive concentration on the centers of the subtle body was the correct method for developing the ability to project astrally [...] Finally, the theosophical study and appropriation of cakra systems promised twofold enrichment: a better understanding of the subtle body, its anatomy, and physiology, and a more precise conceptualization of the theory and practice of astral projection (Baier, 2016: 341-342).

Moreover, both Baier and Mark Singleton has argued that *mesmerist theories* played an essential role in the Western reception of the chakra system. According to Baier "mesmeric theories and practices provided the necessary convergences for the integration of the cakras into the theosophical worldview and practice" (Baier, 2016: 337-338; Singleton, 2010: 44-51). Baier also brings up the fact that HPB, already in *IU*, described how yogic meditation stimulates the senses of the astral body so that "the most ethereal portions of the soul-essence can act independently of its grosser particles and of the brain" (HPB, 1877, vol 2: 590). According to her the clairvoyant abilities that could be seen in mesmerized persons and the *samadhi* of the yogis only differed in the degree of "seeing" that was reached. Five years later, in Henry Olcotts introduction *the Yoga Sutras* (1882) – *Kundalini Yoga* is interpreted as "self-mesmerization." Olcott states that the difference between "mesmerized subjects" and yogis is that the yogi has not only self-*consciousness* but also self-*control*.

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2 HPB's writings have had a significant impact on the spiritual current, which Hanegraaff defines as "New Age-religion" (Hanegraaff, 1996: 384-513).

3 The term was coined by Christopher Partridge in 2013

He continues by discussing how "the current of nerve aura" (a common mesmeric term) is directed through vital points of the yogi's body.<sup>4</sup>

These important observations are also confirmed by John Patrick Deveney's findings, which suggests that theosophist identified the higher states of yogic meditation with astral projection (Deveney, 1997, "Astral projection and the liberation of the double," *Theosophical History: Occasional Papers*, vol 6: 33).

Shortly summarized, Baier argues that the first steps towards globalizing yoga came about already through Neohinduism thinkers (before Vivekananda's famous speech in Chicago in 1893<sup>5</sup>), but he also highlights the significant contribution of mesmeric theosophical interpretations of the chakras (Baier, "Modern Yoga Research: Insights and Questions" not 35, s. 8).

Julian Strube has, however, stressed the fact that "modern tantra should not simply be seen as a one-way street of Western imaginations but rather as the outcome of complex global exchanges" ("Tantra", *Dictionary of Contemporary Esotericism*, forthcoming). (See the discussion about orientalism below). Through articles in *The Theosophist* in the beginning of the 1880th, Indian authors like Barada Kanta Majumdar and Sabhapati Swami promoted a growing interest in Tantric concepts like *chakras* and *kundalini* among theosophists. They thereby altered the previously negative image of Tantra in the Society.

Western Esotericism did not necessarily have a *greater* impact than Eastern sources on the contemporary Western schema of subtle anatomy in general, however, the HPB's choice to transform her teaching into a seven-fold division of man *was initiated before she moved to India* (in 1979), and was thereby not primarily a consequence of her new resident. HPB first conception of "subtle energy-centers" seems to have been influenced by mesmeric theories. One book in particular, Joseph Ennemoser's *History of Magic* (English translation by Howitt, 1854), is relevant in this regard. In *IU*, HPB stated that "Ennemoser, as well as Du Potet, confirms the theories of the Hindu seers in every particular" (HPB, 1877, *IU*, vol 1: 26). She both quoted Ennemoser but also copied from him without giving reference to the source.<sup>6</sup> According to Ennemoser, the ancient Greeks believed that "the divine soul" was seated in the stomach. HPB also quoted Charles W. Kings here, who depicted the navel as "the circle of the sun" (King, 1864: 204-205). According to Baier, this is an example of the initial theosophical conceptualization of "energy-centers" which would later define the theosophical interpretation of the chakras (Baier, 2016: 341).

In the beginning HPB had a negative view of Tantra, though. During the first years in India she and Olcott collaborated with the reform movement *Arya Samaj* which disputed Tantric literature harshly. Olcott and HPB then thought that Dyananda would be "a true adept of yoga", but eventually they became frustrated by Dyananda's "lack of occult training" (Baier, 2012: 154). HPB changed her mind about him and instead criticized him heavily. In the 1880's there was a wave of interest and many articles about tantric yoga published in *The Theosophist* (Baier, 2016: 326-327) – but after a member in Bengal wrote about his negative experiences of *pranayama* (yogic breathing exercises) critic of the body-oriented yoga exercises referred to as *bathayoga* started to grow within the society. This resulted in another shift towards a more Western concept of meditation, introduced by Gondolphin Mitford and Damodar Mavalankar.

During the last years of her life HPB taught a kind of "Neo-Kundalini Yoga" to the Esoteric Section of TS, connecting the chakras with "the higher *triad* and the lower *quaternary*" of her *seven* principles (HPB, 1890, "Esoteric Instructions", no. 5: 697, 699 in *H.P.B. Collected Writings*, vol 12). According to remarks made by some members of the group, her system was very hard to grasp, something which led to William Quan Judge's (a member of the Esoteric Section and the forefront for TS in America) to reintroduce yogic technics again – now from Patanjali's eightfold path (although with some references to *Kundalini Yoga*) (Baier, 2012: 157-159). A central question if we are to understand the background and influences of HPB's teachings on subtle anatomy – is how well versed she was in Eastern religion during the first years of TS.

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<sup>4</sup> Baier, 2012: 156

<sup>5</sup> World Congress of Religions

<sup>6</sup> "Like Ennemoser, she did not differentiate between the navel, the pit of the stomach, and the cavity of the heart; all these terms were said to signify the same center", Baier, 2016: 339-340.

Several researchers have concluded that her knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism was primarily influenced by: 1) *orientalist translations and interpretations* of Hindu and Buddhist texts, and 2) *representatives of the Indian reform movements* who were influenced by enlightenment ideas, orientalism and Protestant theology (Baier, 2016: 324-326; Partridge, 2013: 314; Urban, 2003: 61; Trompf, 2013: 378-380).

HPB and Olcott had a few Hindu and Buddhist acquaintances before their move to India, however. One of them was P. C. Mitra (who became a member in 1877). Mitra was also a member of the *British National Association of Spiritualists* and the *Brahmo Samaj*. Later he became the head of the theosophical section in Bengal (Godwin, 1994: 327; Rudbøg, 2013: 336-337). Mitra was a spiritualist medium and was well-versed in Western literature. He also wrote about Buddhist psychology for *The Spiritualist* (1877). In 1880, he published an article titled "Stray thoughts on Spiritualism" in which he speculated on "the development of the subtle body, the body of the soul". One year later he also published a small compendium called "On the soul: its nature and development." The latter is quite ambiguous regarding the numbering of the human principles. He wrote about "the five coats or coverings of the soul" but also argued that man, in his innermost essence, is neither the physical body nor any of "the remaining four subtle bodies". At another place he suggested a six-fold division of human principles (Godwin, 1994: 327).

Among HPB's literary references on the *Eastern traditions* in *IU*, are English translations of *the Vedas*, *the Upanishads* and *the Aranyakas*, as well as English works on the traditions of *Vedanta*, *Theravada*, *Mahayana* and *Tibetan Buddhism*.<sup>7</sup> Hall [Chajes], however, suggests that HPB (at this time) mainly derived her knowledge of Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism, from Howitt's *The History of the Supernatural* (1863) and Pocock's *India in Greece* (1854) (Hall, 2007: 20-21). I mean that there is good reason to assume that HPB's emphasis on number seven was *firstly* derived from 19th-century interpretations of Neoplatonism and Pythagorean arithmology (although – according to her – Pythagoras had been initiated in India). Goodrick-Clarke states that HPB's main sources, at the time she was composing *IU*, was Jaccoliot's books on India – but besides this her main influences were sources bearing on Western Esotericism (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 289). Older studies have also argued that the HPB adopted the Indian concepts but interpreted them according to Western sources (Glaser, 1960; Wichmann, 1983; Schwab, 1984) – an opinion which Hanegraaff (1998) and Chajes (2007) also has confirmed.

selected concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism were adopted in so far as it seemed that they could be assimilated; if not, they were either ignored or given a new meaning (Hanegraaff, 1998: 455).

The issue of TS appropriation of Eastern concepts is highly complex, however. "Orientalism" should (based on Said's reasoning) mean that TS – from a perspective of power relations – were guilty of plagiarism as well as corruption and colonialism. However (as King has observed) Said's version of orientalism does not account for how both Eastern and Western cultures could use the encounter of their cultures in their own identity formation. Recently, researchers have slightly refined their view of theosophical orientalism, highlighting the *reciprocity* in the influence between Indian and European as well as American theosophists, up to a point where the exchange of ideas and concepts makes it complicated to even talk about "East" and "West" as separate cultural spheres. Baier describes theosophical orientalism as a "reverse reflection" between, on the one hand, high-casted English-speaking Indians (often themselves theosophists), and on the other hand, European and American theosophists who were interested in and highly valued Hinduism and Buddhism. Both parties had an interest in the cooperation. The Indian theosophists needed to define their identity both with respect to the British colonial power and to Indian reform movements such as *Arya Samaj*. The European and American theosophists had a desire to define themselves as "the others" in their own culture. The Indian teachings and its terminology gave TS their sought for identity as "the others," as

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<sup>7</sup> She was familiar with the *Bhagavad Gita* in English translation (1785) and *Ramayana* in German translation, and she also refers to Haug's *Aytareya Brahmanam of the Rig-Veda* (1863) and Wilson's translation of *Vishnu Purana* (1840). See Rudbøg's bibliography (2013).

well as the exotic status of "being familiar with" Eastern spiritual teachings (which was supposed to be more genuine and closer to "the Eternal Wisdom").<sup>8</sup> Lastly – as mentioned before – it also gave the Society a chance to develop and systematize their doctrine of subtle anatomy so that it became easier to explain such phenomena as astral projection, which was already practiced in TS.

Having summarized some of the yet made conclusions about HPB's knowledge of Eastern religions in the early years of TS, I will now shortly present the doctrines of "the principles of man" in IU and SD respectively.

**"From three to seven" – Blavatsky's doctrine of the human principles**

The said key must be turned seven times before the whole system is divulged. We will give it but one turn, and thereby allow the profane one glimpse into the mystery (HPB, 1877, vol 2: 461).

HPB's worldview was both monistic and pantheistic. She referred to "the divine source" in a Neoplatonic and Kabbalisticly inspired sense, linked to the theory of *seven emanations*. In IU, man, and the world were depicted as three-fold, divided into *a material element* (body), *an astral element* (soul) and a *spiritual element* (spirit) – *but* she also continually emphasized the importance of number seven and giving it a special cosmological role through the idea of the *seven planetary spheres* and the *seven root-races* of man.

**Division of man and cosmos in *Isis Unveiled* (1877)**

microcosmic principle	microcosmic element	macrocosmic element	
<p><b>Divine Spirit</b> ("nous", "pneuma")</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑ - - - ↓</p> <p>"augoiedes", "the finer parts of psuche"</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑ - - - ↓</p>	<p><b>Spiritual element</b> (eternal and unchangeable) "all-pervading one"</p> <p>"a portion of the divine spirit"</p>	<p><b>The Divine Light</b> (spiritual)</p>	<p><i>Akasha</i></p> <p>"The Life-Principle" – the Divine and the Astral Light together, also called <i>Anima Mundi</i>.</p>
<p><b>Human Soul</b></p> <p>"astral spirit", "the grosser parts of psuche"</p>	<p><b>Subtle substance</b> (mortal, inconstant)</p> <p>"subtles substans", "energy", "vitality"</p>	<p><b>The Astral Light</b></p> <p>"the world-soul", "the ether"</p>	
<p><b>Physical Body</b></p>	<p><b>Material substance</b> (mortal)</p>	<p><b>The physical world</b></p>	

<sup>8</sup> Baier argues that theosophical orientalism differs from many other forms of orientalism in that: 1) it considered "the original true religion" to be esoteric (it was an initiatory religion preserved by enlightened adepts); 2) it regarded itself as "the Easternized Other" in Western culture. (TS criticized the fact that India became "westernized", as well as the influence of contemporary Brahmanism in India, which was "as bad as Christianity") (Baier, 2016: 314-318).

In SD her ideas regarding the cosmic cycles became immensely complex. Her rhetoric became more systemized with cosmology and anthropology centered around a vision of a sevenfold micro- and macrocosm. As a rule, humans were now said to reincarnate *on Earth*. Through a long series of rebirths, man's knowledge of the spiritual worlds is awakened, and the spirit, trapped in matter, can step by step return to its original source in the all-pervading Divine Light. In HPB's later lectures to the Esoteric Section, she elaborated a vision of cosmos as *a gigantic seven-fold fractal*, where each of the seven human principles in its turn also included a seven-fold structure (there was an "Atma of kama-rupa," a "Buddhi of kama-rupa" and so on). Reincarnation in microcosms reflected reincarnation in macrocosms. The entire universe, planets and solar systems, also reincarnated, and the goal of the universe's cyclical appearance and disappearance was *the expanding consciousness of the divine*. This goal was achieved by the *Monad* (a union of man's three immortal principles – see table below) periodically incarnating in physical bodies with limited minds, such as ours.

**Division of man and cosmos in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)**

<b><i>Atma</i></b>	” The Higher Self,” ”Spirit”	“a beam from the universal Spirit” (inseparable from its divine source)	immortal
<b><i>Buddhi</i></b>	” The Spiritual Soul”	” atmas individual form”	immortal
<b><i>Manas</i></b>	” Mind”; Intelligence and moral	the higher part – attracted by buddhi  ↑ - - - ↓ the lower part – attracted by kama-rupa	Becomes immortal after it has been purified from the desires of kama-rupa
<b><i>Kama-rupa</i></b>	Feelings and emotional consciousness	” the animal soul”	mortal
<b><i>Linga-Sarira</i></b>	Astral Body, The Double, eidolon	shapes the body into its form	mortal
<b><i>Prana or Jiva</i></b>	Life-Principle,” the active power which produces all vital phenomena”	the body’s” vitality” and” life”	mortal
<b><i>Stula Sarira</i></b>	The Physical Body	the body’s material substance	mortal

(vol. 2, chapter XXV)

HPB grew up in Russia, and throughout her life, she had a positive relationship with the Orthodox faith. Her upbringing probably influenced her early emphasis on the sanctity of the number seven (Goodricke-Clarke, 2013; Chajes, 2007 [Hall]; Rudbøg, 2013). As Goodricke-Clarke remarks:

HPB’s lifelong attachment to the Orthodox Church was rooted in its liturgical emphasis on theosis (mystical union of the soul with God), and its doctrinal and textual heritage of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism through leading Byzantine and Russian theologians, philosophers, and historians. Neoplatonism is the esoteric current

which links the religious world of HPB's youth in Russia and travels in Turkey with her mature Theosophy (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 268).

In *IU*, HPB repeated the significance of the number seven as many as 314 times (often in italics). There are seven planets, seven tones in the octave, seven colors in the light spectrum, seven occult natural forces, seven *manvantaras*, seven days in a week, seven *Sapta Rishis*, seven *Sapta-Poura*, seven *Sapta-Lokas*, seven sacraments, seven deadly sins, seven spirits in the apocalypse, seven heads on the snake *Ananta* (on which *Vishnu* rests), seven vowels above the head of the Gnostic snake, seven Vedic mantras, seven "tongues of flame of Shiva," seven planetary chambers in the pyramids, seven "spirits of God," seven angels in "Apostle-Kabbalist John," seven degrees in "the old English Templar-Rite," seven free arts in the Middle Ages, etcetera.<sup>9</sup> The seven-fold cosmology was the one which eventually was to be accepted within the Society, being further developed and systematized by second-generation theosophists.

### **The *metempsychosis* in *Isis Unveiled***

If the Pythagorean metempsychosis should be thoroughly explained and compared to the modern theory of evolution, it would be found to supply every "missing link" in the chain of the latter (HPB, 1877, vol 1: 9).

In *IU*, HPB refers to the doctrine of *metempsychosis* (a term that she stops using in *SD*). Chajes has described HPB's interpretation of this Greek term as a sort of a "possible immortality" where continued life after death could be achieved during life on Earth (if the soul was fully merged with the spirit). The united spirit-soul could then continue through the higher spheres to finally reach Nirvana in *the seventh sphere* (Chajes, 2019: 45-63). HPB attributes the teaching of *metempsychosis* to Pythagoras, whom she portrays as one of (if not *THE*) greatest initiated master in the West, and she repeats the legend of how Pythagoras brought esoteric secrets from the East to the West. There are a diversity of legends about Pythagorean life, but few confirmed historical facts. He probably lived around 570-490 BC, but whether he left any texts to the afterworld was debated already during Antiquity, and the question remains uncertain. In the oldest Hellenistic sources, Pythagoras is presented as *The Father of the Philosophy of Numbers*,<sup>10</sup> but the ancient authors portrayed him in multitude other ways as well: as a philosopher, scientist, mathematician, politician, legislator, and as the religious authority of a secret initiatory sect. HPB's comprehension of "the teachings of Pythagoras" was filtered through contemporary mythographers (see below). She linked the doctrine of *metempsychosis* to Pythagoras and the Greek philosophers, but she also claimed that it was entirely *in line with* the teachings on rebirth in Buddhism, as well as with the doctrines in the *Law of Manu*. It was depicted as a successive process from lower to higher forms of being. Through *transmigration* (another term that she used in *IU*) the soul was gradually purified and thereby successively ascending into higher spheres (HPB, 1877, *IU*, vol 2: 260).

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<sup>9</sup> Regarding mantras she emphasizes that "the ancient seers" – both Pythagoras and the Brahmins – knew of their magic significance and that the invisible world could be expressed through sounds, speech and forms ("The mystery of the number seven," HPB, 1877, *IU*, vol 2: 405-408).

<sup>10</sup> According to Zhmud, the arithmology was later developed and the type of reasoning described above is evident, for example, by Plato's sister son Speusippus: "...he [Speusippus] does not focus on the correspondences between numbers and things, but on numbers and geometric figures themselves and the interconnections between them" (Zhmud, 2016: 336). At Speusippus, the dyad is generated by a "flow" (ῥύσις) from the monad, the line by a flow from the point, and the plane by a flow from the line. The tetrad is the "origin" and "source" of the decade ("Seven within the decade is neither a factor nor a product") HPB refers to Speusippus at *IU*: "Though some have considered Speusippus as inferior to Aristotle, the world is nevertheless indebted to him for defining and expounding many things that Plato had left obscure in his doctrine of the Sensible and Ideal His maxim was "The Immaterial is known by means of scientific thought, the Material by scientific perception.", HPB, 1877: xviii; 1 is a point, 2 is a line, 3 is a triangle, and 4 is a pyramid; all these are elements and principles of the figures like them. In these numbers is seen the first of progressions and they have 10 for their sum. The primary elements in a plane and solid figures are a point, line, triangle, pyramid, they contain the number ten and are limited by it. "Quote by Speusippus, published by Zhmud, 2016: 337.



## The lack of a system in *Isis Unveiled*

HPB herself admitted to the fact that IU was cluttering work:

Finally, that the work [*Isis Unveiled*], for reasons that will be now explained, has no system in it; and that it looks in truth, as remarked by a friend, as if a mass of independent paragraphs having no connection with each other, had been well shaken up in a waste-basket, and then taken out at random and—published. Such is also now my sincere opinion. (HPB, *Lucifer*, vol. 8, 1891: 242)

IU is potted with quoting's and references to religious texts, philosophical teachings, to works on the History of Religion, to literature and science, to medical treatises, and to articles on archaeology, geology, anthropology, as well as History of Art. In short, a great deal of concentration is required to follow her line of argument in this work. In his article "The Theosophical Imagination," Hanegraaff describes the complicated process of editing IU. (According to him, it was never really finished since HPB continually added new pieces) (Hanegraaff, 2017: 16). When lastly published in 1877, the two volumes sold over a thousand copies only in the first ten days, and it immediately gained a wide reputation. HPB was never satisfied with the result, however.

According to Hanegraaff, HPB was addicted to cannabis (which could be bought at regular pharmacies and was considered "healthy" at that time). If this is true, it is likely that IU, at least partly was written in an intoxicated state (an insight that perhaps can be small comfort to readers exhausted from trying to analyze it). According to a note made by one of her acquaintances – Commodore Robert Bowen – HPB had compared her searching of "the secret doctrine," with the practice of *Jana Yoga*. She described how she used to see *MENTAL IMAGES FLOATING BEFORE HER INNER EYE* – something which confirms Hanegraaff's account of her method of writing. Hanegraaff, however, emphasizes that the theosophical view on clairvoyance markedly differed from that of mesmerism and spiritualism. He believes that HPB's imaginative ability was deemphasized by herself and her successors, for one obvious reason: Too much emphasis on her intellectual and creative abilities risked undermining the credibility of her claims that the system she presented was derived from her clairvoyant and telepathic contact with Secret Masters (Hanegraaff, 2017: 12).

One of HPB's strongest critics – Emmanett Coleman – claimed that even though she cites about 1,400 works in *IU* – all these quotes could have been taken from about a hundred contemporary works. Coleman also claimed that HPB copied all her ideas and that she often plagiarized parts (Solovyoff, 1895: 351). HPB's primary defense when she was accused of plagiarism was that she never had claimed to be the originator of any of the presented ideas, and only wanted to make her readers aware of connections between beliefs, concepts, and symbols by pointing to their underlying esoteric core.

Its perfectly true that HPB often quoted long passages without giving credit to the author. According to Susan Mitchell Sommers (2018), such practices did occur in occult publishing, but they were not considered proper in HPB's time. Tim Rudbøg – who has compiled a bibliography of HPB's sources in *IU* and *SD* – means that Coleman's criticism of HPB is partly justified when it comes to her way of quoting so that it appears as if the words are her own. However, Rudbøg also argues that Coleman's criticism needs to be nuanced due to the quantity of literature that HPB, after all, seemed to be familiar with. Rudbøg claims that we need to consider that HPB not *only* plagiarized ideas from other authors, but also *analyzed, discussed, and criticized* these ideas in-depth.<sup>11</sup> Hanegraaff has addressed the fact that HPB had access to many works in her relatively extensive personal library, and that she also had several close friends with great expertise who were involved both in writing and editing the work. In addition, HPB had – if we are to believe her sister Vera –

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<sup>11</sup> While a thorough analysis of Coleman's work is something which needs to be done in a future study, it will become quite clear how limited Coleman's critique was [...] from a historical perspective and the analysis of how extensive, critical and informed HPB's engagement with the intellectual contexts of her day was (Rudbøg, 2013: 32).

been reading occult literature in her grandfather's library from a very young age. Hanegraaff and Rudbøg both note that Coleman's aims were polemic,<sup>12</sup> but Hanegraaff also asserts that Coleman's *source-analysis was extremely carefully performed* (Rudbøg, 2013: 29-32; Hanegraaff, 2017: 11-13).<sup>13</sup> In his article, Hanegraaff ranks the works which Coleman considered most important for indirect references or citations in IU, by the number of times they were plagiarized (Hanegraaff, 2017: 9). It is interesting to see that in his list of works – all the following authors also emphasize the cosmological meaning and significance of number seven:

- Dunlap's *Sod: The Mysteries of the Adoni; Sod: The Son of the Man and Spirit History of Man* (1858, 1861)<sup>14</sup>
- Ennemoser's *History of Magic* (translated by Howitt in 1854)<sup>15</sup>
- Howitt's *History of the Supernatural* (1863)<sup>16</sup>
- Mackenzie's *Masonic Cyclopaedia* (1877)<sup>17</sup>
- King's *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864)<sup>18</sup>
- Salverte's *Philosophy of Magic* (English translation 1846)<sup>19</sup>
- Cory's *Ancient Fragments* (1828)<sup>20</sup>
- Jaccoliot's *Le Spiritisme dans le Monde* (1875)<sup>21</sup>

The works belonged to the same literary genre of Comparative History of Religion and Mythology, whose foremost authors are discussed by Godwin in his profound study of the predecessors of modern Theosophy (*The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 1994, chapter one and p. 305).

Several researchers have also shown how HPB's "search for an origin" was common among contemporary writers (Godwin, 1994; Hanegraaff, 1998; Hammer, 2001; Rudbøg, 2013). It was fashionable in the intellectual discourse of both the 18th and the 19th century (Rudbøg, 2013: 180-181). Although one no longer sought God as "the original source of creation", one was still searching for a kind of "original form" in several scientific disciplines – an original form of psychology, an original form of society, an original form of religion, etcetera (Rudbøg, 2013: 179-180). HPB's theories of an original Wisdom-Religion must be seen in the light of this discourse.

According to Rudbøg, a close source analysis of the first two articles, in which HPB establishes the concept of theosophy within the society,<sup>22</sup> shows that she – in addition to the ideas she has already raised in IU – especially used Wilders *New Platonism and Alchemy* (1869); Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics* (1856) together with texts by Orientalists such as Jones; Müller<sup>23</sup>; Burnouf; Colebrooke; Haug; de Saint-Hilaire and the naturalist and spiritualist Wallace (Rudbøg, 2012: 179-101-102). Another, relatively unknown writing – *Anacalypsis* (two volumes: 1833, 1836) by Godfrey Higgins – was of great importance to HPB early on (Hanegraaff, 1996: 444).<sup>24</sup> Both HPB and Wilder were also clearly inspired by Higgins theses about "the Divine Wisdom of the Ancients," and themes and exact formulations from Higgins were used in IU (Rudbøg, 2013: 103-106).

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12 "He was a convinced Spiritualist who hoped to destroy the credibility of the occultist competition at a time when the Theosophical Society was on the ascendant while Spiritualism was in decline, and he was a member of the Society for Psychical Research, which had already denounced HPB as a fraud in its so-called Hodgson Report ten years before, in 1885." Hanegraaff, 2017: 8

13 Also shown in Wichester's master thesis: "Roots of the Oriental Gnosis: W. E. Coleman, H.P. HPB, S.F. Dunlap" (2015).

14 Dunlap's *Spirit History of Man* (1858) was plagiarized 77 times (Coleman, 1895: 357. Appendix in Solovyoff, 1895) and number seven is mentioned 165 times. *Sod: the Son of the Man* (1861) was plagiarized 134 times (Coleman). Number seven is mentioned 125 times in the book (archive.org); *Sod: the Mysteries of the Adoni* (1861) was plagiarized 65 times (Coleman) and number seven was mentioned 211 times (archive.org). In the last two Dunlap also refers Knorr von Rosenroth.

15 Plagiarized 107 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 71 times (archive.org).

16 Plagiarized 20 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 47 times (archive.org).

17 Plagiarized 36 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 72 times (books.google.se).

18 Plagiarized 42 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 47 times (books.google.se).

19 Plagiarized 68 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 60 times (archive.org).

20 Plagiarized 20 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 32 times (archive.org).

21 Plagiarized 19 times (Coleman, 1895: 357) and number seven 85 times (archive.org).

22 HPB, 'What is Theosophy?' and 'What are the Theosophists?', *The Theosophist*, I, 1879: 5-7

23 Müller's collected writings, *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1894) started being published after HPB had moved to India.

24 The chapter refers to Godwin's research in *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994).

Goodricke-Clarke noted that *Magic, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism* were the most prominent subjects in HPB's published material between 1873 and 1879 ("Western Esoteric Traditions and Theosophy", *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, 2013).<sup>25</sup> In the first period of her life, India is mostly depicted as a mythological cradle of the "Wisdom-Religion" whose teachings she interprets *through its "Pythagorean and Neoplatonic inheritors."* According to Goodricke-Clarke her move to India initiated a definite shift in focus from Western Esoterism to Hinduism and Buddhism (Goodricke-Clarke, 2013: 261). Prior to HPB's and Olcott's travel to India, the main influence seems to have come from the following genres: 1) speculative and academic studies of History of Religion and Comparative Mythology; 2) Christian Kabbalah; 3) Neoplatonism (and its interpretations of Pythagoras); 4) Freemasonry; 5) Hermetic, Rosicrucian and Alchemical speculations 6) Mesmerism and 7) 19th-century Science. These genres intermingled and married into the 19th-century culture of HPB. The *arithmological correspondences* discussed in the works are reflected in both IU and SD although there is an apparent shift in focus and references between the two works. This shift did not occur overnight, however, but happened more gradually, as the Hermetic and Egyptian references became less in favor of the Indian and Tibetan. Most of the collaboration with Indian members occurred from 1879 and onwards, and it seems reasonable to assume that it now became urgent for HPB to find *a Sanskrit terminology* for the human principles. The new Indian acquaintances were able to offer the language and knowledge that she needed.

### The Universal Mystery Language

The soul, which is immortal, has an arithmetical, as the body has a geometrical, beginning. This beginning, as the reflection of the great universal Archeus, is self-moving, and from the centre diffuses itself over the whole body of the microcosm (HPB, 1877, IU, vol 1:14).

The Theosophical concept of the *saptapara* is a fascinating nineteenth-century attempt to understand the nature of human consciousness and corporeality in relation to the wider universe. It betrays a need to numerically structure an understanding of spiritual anthropology and cosmology, a need attested throughout the history of human thought, (especially within Western esoteric traditions) (Chajes, 2007: 5).

As Rudbøg has shown HPB used the word "theosophy" on three different ontological levels: one *historical level* tied to the original "wisdom religion"; one *practical level* - tied to "Divine Ethics" (and a way to relate to existence) and one *abstract level* - linked to the meaning of intuition or "higher truth" (Rudbøg, 2013: 135). This article will primarily address the last, abstract meaning, of the word theosophy. Theosophy was also on the one hand described as "a non-dogmatic search for truth" and on the other hand as "a secret doctrine", something which created great confusion and disagreement among members of the Society (Rudbøg, 2013: 112-114). In two articles in 1879, HPB tried to sort things out, and many years later, in the article "Is Theosophy a religion?"(1888) she wrote:

The two—Theosophy and the Theosophical Society—as a vessel and the olla podrida it contains, must not be confounded. One is, as an ideal, divine Wisdom, perfection itself; the other a poor, imperfect thing, trying to run under, if not within, its shadow on Earth (HPB, "Is Theosophy a Religion?" (Collected Writings of H. P. HPB, vol. X: 165).

HPB did not distinguish between religion, philosophy and science – the unity of all knowledge was important to her, and theosophy was "all of that" (Rudbøg, 2013: 115). She stated that once upon a time the Wisdom-Religion had belonged to all people. At this archaic age, humans had shared a "universal

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<sup>25</sup> As one of the influences behind HPB's seven-fold division of man, Chajes mentions Gerald Massey's lecture: "The Seven Souls of Man" in 1887. Massey's tables obviously fitted HPB perfectly, but in 1887 she had, as we shall see, already worked out the seven-fold schema. Connected to ancient Egypt, she already describes six different souls in IU, but she also speculated upon the pyramids being built as an allegory of "the soul's journey after death" where each of the seven chambers was known by the name for a planet. Its peak symbolized "the primordial point [...] lost in the unseen universe from whence started the first race of the spiritual prototypes of man" (HPB, 1877, IU, vol 1: 296-297).

mystery language," whose elements were still to be found in symbolism and mythologies throughout the world (Rudbøg, 2013: 118).<sup>26</sup> Among others, Rudbøg and Chajes has also shown that HPB shared a "discourse for a system" and Rudbøg notes that she was familiar with great "system thinkers" like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, More, Cudworth, Newton, Boehme, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel (Rudbøg, 201: 366-371). The comparing of symbology was an indispensable part of HPB's rhetoric. An early influence within the field was Georg Friedrich Creuzer's book *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (1810–12) which she refers to in a letter to the spiritualist and English professor Hiram P. Corson Cornell (about nine months before the founding of the TS):

My belief is based on something older than the Rochester Knockings, and spring out from the same source of information that was used by Raymond Lully, Picas of Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, Robert Fludd, Henry More, etc. etc. all of whom have ever been searching for a system, that should disclose to them the "deepest depths" of the Divine nature and show them the real tie which binds all things together. I found at last—and many years ago-- the cravings of my mind satisfied by this theosophy taught by the Angels and communicated by them (HPB, 16 February, 1875).<sup>27</sup>

In IU she quoted Ennemoser regarding the symbolism in myth:

Symbolical myths, previously supposed to be meaningless fictions, are now found to be "the cleverest and at the same time most profound expressions of a strictly scientifically defined truth of nature," according to Ennemoser [note to "History of Magic," vol. 1.] (HPB, 1877, vol 1: 235).

HPB's way of using her sources has been described by Asprem (2007) as "programmatically syncretism",<sup>28</sup> and Hammer has referred to it as "religious creativity" (2004). Lévi was one of her precursors in this method of writing, and many esoteric groups presented their teachings in similar ways.<sup>29</sup> One must remember, however, that HPB did not believe in "a pure religious traditions." Since she was a *perennialist* – she believed in an underlying *esoteric core* which could be found in *all* traditions. She distinguished "the true *esoteric* wisdom religion" from the *exoteric* religious traditions. To describe the underlying universal core, she had to make comparisons between contemporary and historical teachings and concepts in an eclectic way. According to Blacklocks dissertation *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension: Higher Spatial Thinking in the Fin de Siècle* (2018) HPB was part of an "uncritical and extra-academic tradition of *mystical geometry*" which was very popular at the end of the 19th-century. "Pythagorean ideas" and Plato's *Timaeos* was at the center of interest in the circles that she moved (Blacklock, 2018: 137).<sup>30</sup> Asprem, in his turn, has emphasized *the important role of numbers* in HPB's construction of a theoretical system. He asserts that numbers can work as a form of *mnemonic system* as well as a point of departure when looking for correspondences (Asprem, 2007). In the literary genre of *arithmology* which has influenced Western esotericism profoundly<sup>31</sup> Pythagoras is portrayed as *the first Western initiate* into the "mysticism of numbers." According to historian Leonid Zhmud systematic arithmology was developed by the Greek Academy, mainly inspired by Plato's oral teachings on the *ten ideal numbers* – the *decade* (Zhmud, 2016: 322-324). Traditional number symbolism of earlier times had focused on the importance of individual numbers (often 3, 7 or 9), but in arithmological speculations, all numbers were

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26 During the fourth root-race, however, the wisdom was abused for black magic, which led to the destruction of Atlantis (Rudbøg, 2012: 117). As a consequence, the doctrine was hidden in secret symbols whose esoteric significance was preserved only by a chain of initiated masters (Rudbøg, 2012: 118)

27 HPB, Letter 21, 16 February 1875, in *The Letters of H. P. HPB*, Algeo, 2003; As Rudbøg has shown, a passage in her letter to Corson was copied directly from Christian Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah Its Doctrine, Development and literature: An Essay* (1865: 1)

28 Although it can be problematic to use the term "syncretism" if it indicates the idea of essential, pure and unaffected traditions, (which is not supposed by Asprem) I still consider it a useful concept when one refers to an author who intentionally use an eclectic method.

29 Asprem shows how the occult Kabbala in *The Golden Dawn*, worked like a mnemonic system. It offered (just as the tetraktys of Pythagoras did for HPB) a numerological map through which concepts from different traditions could be linked.

30 italics by Fitger



31 According to Godwin Pythagorean arithmology – often combined with Christian Kabbala – has influence Western esotericism right up to our days (Godwin, 2016: 22).

linked to the decade and thus *organized in a system* that (in addition to its philosophical and theological meaning) accounted for the *purely mathematical properties* of numbers. With Plato, numbers gained existence independent of the material world, as part of the world of *forms and ideas*. According to Esotericism-researcher Jean-Pierre Brach, the nature of arithmology refers to "a 'qualitative' approach to numbers and mathematical objects in general [...] by what is known as "correlative thinking" [...] linking the quantitative values of mathematical entities to a vast array of correspondences" (Brach, 2016: 405). This line of thinking has often been linked to Religious and Esoteric ideas about "The Great Chain of Being" (as is the case in HPB's cosmology). The arithmological concept of a ladder with *seven steps* – from the divine sphere down to the earthly realm – is also common motif in Esotericism in general. The "esoteric ladder" favorably includes conceptions of *subtle levels, between* the physical and the spiritual world. As we will see, all these ideas can be found in Masonic teachings among HPB's acquaintances, and there is a good reason to assume that HPB got many of these speculations from her early contacts with Freemasonry and her familiarity with Masonic literature.

To summarize our discussion so far, it is reasonable to assume that HPB was searching for "a greater system," or as she expressed it: *"the real tie which binds all disparate ideas and teaching together."* Her closest companion, Olcott (who was also freemason) were influenced by Mesmerists such as Ennemoser and Du Potet when initially conceptualizing subtle anatomy and its centers. Greek philosophy and especially "18th- and 19th-century Neoplatonism" were also a major influence on HPB – especially before the move to India.<sup>32</sup> Much of the literature that HPB both quoted and plagiarized had certain arithmological speculations in common, of which one were the strong emphasis on *number seven* as *an ordering principle in nature* and in *creation*. As we will see, there are more arithmological themes repeatedly discussed by HPB and other 19th-century mythographers. I will concentrate on some of the most significant ones, which I believe, came to benefit HPB profoundly when she tried to systematize her great cosmological vision.

### "God geometrizes" – Pythagorean arithmology according to HPB

All systems of religious mysticism are based on numerals. [...] They are a key to the ancient views on cosmogony, in its broad sense, including man and beings, and the evolution of humanity, spiritually as well as physically. The number *seven* is the most sacred of all, and is, undoubtedly, of Hindu origin (HPB, IU, vol 2, 1877: 407). [...] it is not possible to solve fully the deep problems underlying the Brahmanical and Buddhistic sacred books without having a perfect comprehension of the esoteric meaning of the Pythagorean numerals (ibid, p. 409). Turn wherever we will, from the Prophets to the Apocalypse, and we will see the biblical writers constantly using the numbers *three, four, seven, and twelve* (ibid, p. 411).

I suggest that the subtitle of IU – *A MASTER-KEY to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1877) – refers to the notion of a *geometric and numerological key* behind the mysteries of creation. "God geometrizes" is one of HPB's favorite expressions<sup>33</sup> and she associated "theosophy" (in the abstract sense of the word), with "inspiration" and "higher intuition" (Rudbøg, 2012: 120). The hypothesis that *Senzar* (the secret language in which HPB claims *The Stanzas of Dzyan* are written<sup>34</sup>) would not be a language *in the usual sense*, seems very reasonable to me. *Senzar* is rather depicted as a *system of archetypal symbols*, often systemized through geometric figures and numbers. The numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 10 as well as the *circle*, the *triad*, the *tetrad*, and the *cube*, are the most prominent once. The *six-pointed star* or "Solomon's seal"  is also very central, as is the Pythagorean *tetractys* (see explanation below), *Tetragrammaton*  (God's name in Judaism) and the Kabbalistic symbol of *the tree of life* (with ten emanations – *sephirots*). Related to these arguments is

32 With reference to Hanegraaff Chajes [Hall] writes that the reincarnation and evolutionary theories of modern theosophy was derived from a hierarchic organization of the cosmos based on 18th century-Platonism and also that Ellwood has also argued that HPB's doctrine had more similarities with Neoplatonism than with Buddhism (Hall, 2017: 70-72).

33 Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol 3: 196, 313; vol 7: 292; vol 14: 62; IU, 1877: 588 [pub edition].

34 An ancient sacred language and a script, on which HPB claims to have based its teaching in SD.

also speculations about the "*squaring of the circle*" (a concept we will soon return to).

HPB spent her entire life stressing that she did not believe in a *personal* God (Godwin, 1994: 328). According to her, the foundation of existence was an impersonal *Parabrahm* which has no active role in the creation of our world. The active agents or "builders of the architecture of the cosmos" she instead called *Dhyan Chobans*. They constructed our cosmos following a "Divine drawing" found in the Divine thought (*Logos*) but was shaped in Matter (*Mulaprakriti*).

The ancient philosophy affirmed that it is in consequence of the manifestation of that Will--termed by Plato the Divine Idea--that everything visible and invisible sprung into existence. [...] The imaginary atoms [...] are like automatic workmen moved inwardly by the influx of that Universal Will directed upon them, and which, manifesting itself as force, sets them into activity. The plan of the structure to be erected is in the brain of the Architect, and reflects his will; abstract yet, from the instant of the conception it becomes concrete through these atoms which follow faithfully every line, point and figure traced in the imagination of the Divine Geometer (HPB, *IU*, vol. 1, 1877: 62)

One senses a Kabbalistic influence in HPB's interpretation of the concept of *Ain Soph* (Godwin, 1994: 331).<sup>35</sup> HPB refers in part to Plato, Plutarch, and St. James, but she also writes that TS's Masters are "Patanjali, Kapila, Canada" and "all the systems and schools of Aryavarta" (archaic India)." It is from them that the Greek philosophers derived their knowledge, she concludes. Plutarch was essential to her as early as 1875<sup>36</sup> – most likely as interpreted by 19th-century mythographers such as G. Oliver and J. Yarker (Rudbøg, 2013: 349). Later, in SD, she writes:

Plutarch explains (de Plac. Phil., p. 878) that the Achaean Greeks regarded **the tetrad** as the root and principle of all things, since it was the number of the elements which gave birth to all visible and invisible *created* things. With the brothers of the Rosy Cross, the figure of the Cross, or *Cube unfolded*, formed the subject of a disquisition in one of the theosophic degrees of Peuret.." (HPB, *SD*, 2: 601) [marking with bold style by Fitger]

Already in 1875, HPB had a numerical "basic structure" that she tried to apply. This was a structure which she had *not* invented on her own. It was based on the cosmological significance of certain numbers holding a special position because of their supposed role in the creation of cosmos. In *IU*, she repeatedly emphasizes that "everything in this world is a trinity completed by the quaternary,<sup>37</sup> explaining already in the preface the "Pythagorean doctrine":

The mystic Decade  $1+2+3+4=10$  is a way of expressing this idea. The One is God, the Two, matter; the Three, combining Monad and Dyad, and partaking of the nature of both, is the phenomenal world; the Tetrad, or form of perfection, expresses the emptiness of all; and the Decade, or sum of all, involves the entire cosmos. (HPB, 1877, 1: xvi).

HPB refers to Pythagoras 146 times in *IU*. The concept of the "tetraktys" (also spelled "tetractys"/"tetraktis"/"tetractis"), sometimes called "tetrad", "tetragram", "Tetragrammaton" and depicted as a "quarter"/"quaternary" are mentioned 69 times. But how are these terms related? HPB writes about "the triad" (a group of three) + "the tetrad" (a group of four) and the sum of these, making "the heptad" (a group of seven). She also connects  $3+4=7$  to *the human constitution*:

The Pythagoreans called the number seven the vehicle of life, as it contained body and soul. They explained it by saying, that the human body consisted of four principal elements, and that the soul is triple, comprising reason, passion, and desire. The ineffable WORD was considered the Seventh and highest of all, for there are

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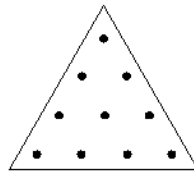
35 Blavatsky Collected Writings, vol 14: 418

36 Rudbøg refers to The Letters of HPB, I, 'Letter 60': 213-14

37 HPB, 1877, vol. 1: 508. HPB's note: "\*\*\* In ancient nations the Deity was a trine supplemented by a goddess — the arba-il, or fourfold God."

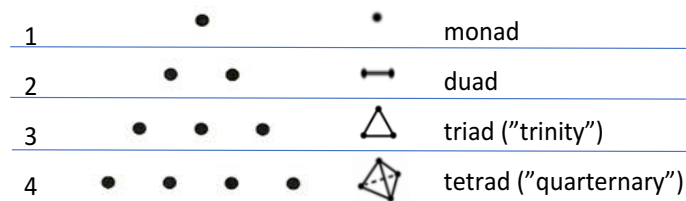
six minor substitutes, each belonging to a degree of initiation (HPB, *IU*, vol 2, 1877: 418).<sup>38</sup>

One of the red threads in *IU* is thus the "Pythagorean triangle" (see figure below) or "tetraktys" (from Greek's "tetros" which means "four").<sup>39</sup>



HPB *makes correspondences using the tetraktys* with concepts in Hindu, Egyptian, Chaldean and Persian mythology, in the Gnostic sects (such as the Ophites), in the Bible and in Kabbalah. Towards the end of her life, in her instructions for the Esoteric group, HPB explains this in the following way:

In occult and Pythagorean geometry the Tetrads is said to combine within itself all the materials from which Cosmos is produced. The Point or One, extends to a Line—the Two; a Line to a Superficies, three; and the Superficies, Triad or Triangle, is converted into a Solid, the Tetrads or Four, by the point being placed over it.<sup>40</sup>



(Illustration by Fitger)

The tetrad thus contain number *three* and *four* and at the same time, the whole *tetraktys* (the *decade*), symbolizing the manifested cosmos – our world of three dimensions.<sup>41</sup> HPB begins chapter 9 in *IU* (vol 2) with a quote from the mathematician "Theos of Smyrna"<sup>42</sup> stating that the tetraktys contains "the nature of all things."<sup>43</sup> She also refers the Proclus:

Proclus says that "The first monad is the Eternal God; the second, eternity; the third, the paradigm, or pattern of the universe"; the three constituting the Intelligible Triad. Everything in this visible universe is the outflow

38 italics by Fitger

39 Dewald Bester's dissertation: H. P. Blavatsky, theosophy, and nineteenth-century comparative religion (2017) is the only academic source I have come across yet, that also mentions the significance of the tetraktys in *IU*. He also notes that "In terms of the basic patterning, we see numerous "sevening" moves throughout *IU*. Macrocosmically, the basic structure, reflecting the Pythagorean tetraktis (1+2+3+4 = 10) and the Kabbalistic tree of life, is presented in the double-page diagram presented earlier. This basic pattern makes extensive use of trinities, septenaries, and ternaries, all fundamental features of mature Theosophical thought. Linked with this is a doctrine of emanations involving a descent from spirit into matter and a re-ascent to the spiritual state" (Bester, 2017: 99)

40 HPB, "The Transactions of the HPB Lodge", 1889, H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, 10: 355. The same way of reasoning is found in Oliver's *Signs and Symbols* (1837). In connection to the tetraktys he writes: "...from numbers points, from points; from points, lines; from lines, superficies; from superficies, solids..", 1837: 207 (note)

41 A few times later on HPB also mentions speculation about a "fourth dimension" and its connection to the seventh: "The "Adept" affirms in this connection that orthodox, or so-called official science, uses very often the word "infinite" without attaching to it any adequate importance [...] This is the direct result of the present conception of a three-dimensional space. The turn of a four-dimensional world is near, but the puzzle of science will ever continue until their concepts reach the natural dimensions of visible and invisible space—in its Septenary completeness" (HPB, "Question I: Do the adepts deny the nebular theory?", HPB Collected Writings, Vol. 5, 1883: 151-52) .

42 HPB refers to "Theon of SMYRNA: Mathem., p. 147"

43 "The Tetraktys was not only principally honored because all symphonies are found to exist within it, but also because it appears to contain the nature of all things." Quoted by HPB, 1877, *IU*, 2: 417

of this Triad, and a microcosmic triad itself. (HPB, 1877, *IU*: vol. 1: 265)

Her speculations on the tetraktys (and its connection to the number seven) is similar to Proclus's commentary on *Timaeus* as translated by her favorite 19th-century Platonist – Thomas Taylor (1820).<sup>44</sup> Taylor writes for example:

All the genera, therefore, are seven, and the monad is exempt from the hexad. And the monad, indeed, is analogous to the one intellect which connects all the fabrication of generated natures; but the hexad is analogous to the more partial orders under this intellect (Taylor, 1820: 129).<sup>45</sup>

In Taylor's translation, Proclus also referred to "seven local movements": the circle; up; down; left; right; forward and behind (Taylor 1820: 461) – something which gives us a hint to how HPB viewed the geometrical creation of the physical world symbolically depicted as *a cube in a circle* (see "The Arithmology of H. P. Blavatsky," 2019).<sup>46</sup>

The link between the tetraktys and the sevenfold constitution of man existed as a continuous discourse in *IU*, albeit not in the complete and "systemized" form (with Sanskrit names for each principle) as in *SD*.<sup>47</sup> In an article written in *La Revue Spirite*, (January 1879, in response to criticism directed at TS teachings) HPB defends her depiction of the human constitution as "a quaternary" and "a tetractys."<sup>48</sup>

What about her sources on the tetraktys then? Even though I have not systematically examined the bibliography in *IU*, I have already come across the tetraktys of and/or the cosmic division: 3 + 4 = 7 in references (made in *IU* by HPB) listed below.<sup>49</sup>

- Iamblichus – *Life of Pythagoras* (translated by Taylor)
- Proclus – *On the Timaeus* (Taylor)
- Theon of Smyrna – *Mathematica* (Taylor)
- All Paracelsus works on alchemy <sup>50</sup>
- Böhmes works, for example *De signatura rerum* (1621)<sup>51</sup>
- Reuchlin – *De Verbo Mirifico* (1480)
- Kircher – *Magnes; sive de arte magnetica opus tripartitum* (1641)
- Fludd – *Mosaicall Philosophy: Grounded upon the Essentiall Truth or Eternal Sapience* (1659)
- Cudworth – *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678)
- Taylor - *Theoretic Arithmetic* (1816)
- Higgins – *Anacalypsis* (1836)

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44 "The theory of the different vehicles or the psychic 'astral body,' familiar nowadays from modern theosophical theories, fulfills several crucial functions in Neoplatonic psychology.." (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/proclus/#PhyAstMat>)

45 Later on Taylor also writes: "Plato beginning therefore from body, in the first place gives it to be sensible according to the extreme senses. In the next place, he imparts to it that which is more perfect than this, viz. the bond through analogy, which is connective of the bodies it contains. In the third place, he makes it to be a whole consisting of the wholes of the elements. Afterwards, in the fourth place, he gives it a spherical figure, in order that it may be most similar to itself according to form. In the fifth place, he shows that the world suffers all things in itself. In the sixth place, he distributes to it an appropriate motion. Afterwards, in the seventh place, he animates it through a divine soul" (Taylor, 1820: 390).

46 Professor April DeConick has published a seminal article discussing a new way to explain the similarity of elements in narratives of soul-flights in different cultures through a common human, physiological and cognitive framework. See "Soul Flights: cognitive ratcheting and the problem of comparison", 2017 in *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* (17): 81-118.

47 See "The Tetraktis in Relation to the Heptagon", *SD*, 1888, vol 2: 598 ff.

48 "May we be allowed a comparison, the best we can find, between the concrete and the abstract; between what our critic calls "the triple hypostasis" and we "the tetraktys"? Let us compare this philosophic quaternary, composed of the body, the périsprit, the soul and the spirit—to the ether—so well foreseen by science, but never defined—and its subsequent correlations. The ether will represent the spirit for us; the dead vapor that is formed therein—the soul.." HPB, "Erroneous ideas concerning the doctrines of the theosophists", *La Revue Spirite*, Paris, Jan, 1879 [translation from French], Blavatsky Collected Writings, 2: 14-15

49 See Rudbøg, 2013 regarding the bibliography of *IU*.

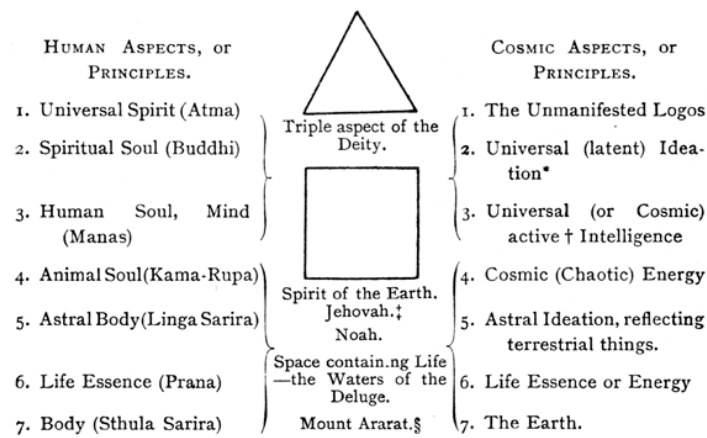
50 HPB refers to a number of works by Paracelsus, but she could also have picked them from Eliphas Lévi's works.

51 According to Böhme, God revealed the world through a series of seven steps, the so-called "Quellgeister" ("Source Spirits" or "Forms of Nature").



- Lévi – *Dogme et Rituel de la haute Magie*, (1854, 1856)
- Ginsburg – *The Kabbalah Its Doctrine, Development and literature* (1865)
- Jennings – *The Rosicrucians, their rites and mysteries* (1870)
- Yarker – *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (1872)<sup>52</sup>
- Oliver – *The Pythagorean Triangle* (1875)<sup>53</sup>
- Skinner – *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measures* (1875)
- King – *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864)
- Lardner – *Popular Lectures on Science and Art* (1850)

In IU HPB talks of the individual Souls "transmigration" through *seven spheres* after death and how "the Mortal or Astral Soul perishes at each gradual change at the treshold of every new sphere, becoming with every transmigration more purified (HPB, 1877, vol 1: 12)." At each sphere, a new Astral Soul would be aquired (HPB, 1877, vol 1: 12). I believe that we can find *the seed to the sevenfold division of man* in this idea. In SD, after the physical body, the human principles successively become more and more "subtle" or "pure."



(HPB, 1888, SD, vol 1: 593)

### Blavatskian Kabbala – Separating "the seven" from "the three"

ten figures and twenty-two letters, a triangle, a square and a circle: such are the elements of the Kabbalah. [...] THE Septenary is the sacred number in all theogonies and in all symbols, because it is composed of the triad and the tetrad. The number seven represents magical power in all its fullness; it is the mind reinforced by all elementary potencies; it is the soul served by Nature; it is the SANCTUM REGNUM mentioned in the Keys of Solomon. (Lévi, Waites translation of *Dogme et Rituel*, 1999 [Kindle-edition]: 723, 1832).

Most 19th-century writers interpretations of ancient Greek philosophy had some common points of departure (Chajes, 2019: 109). Neoplatonic and Gnostic emanation doctrine and pantheism were popular ideas, but there was also a profound interest in Kabbalah. HPB referred to and quoted Eliphas Lévi immensely in IU. As is plainly expressed in the quotation above, arithmology and Kabbalah were keys to the mysteries according to Lévi. "The heptad," "the tetraktys," "the pyramid," and "the tetrad," were also reoccurring concepts both in his and HPB's writings.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, HPB refers to the same series of enlightened masters as Lévi, such as Pythagoras, Paracelsus, Böhme, Mesmer, Bulwer-Lytton, and many

<sup>52</sup> It's quite probable that she also knew of Yarker's *The Quadrature of the Circle* (1851)

<sup>53</sup> HPB does not refer directly to *The Origin Of The Royal Arch Order* (1867), but she refers to Oliver and *The Pythagorean Triangle*, and her reasoning indicates she could have been familiar with this work as well.

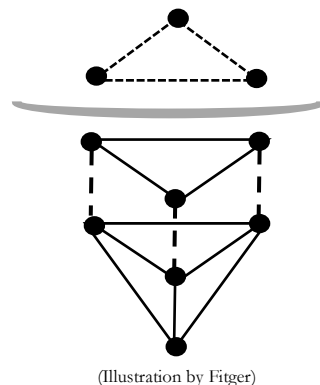
<sup>54</sup> Lévi (translated by Waite) 1999, [kindle edition]: 723, 1256, 2489

others.<sup>55</sup> According to Hanegraaff, Lévi valued Kabbalah so highly precisely because of what he perceived as its *universality*, making it possible to use it as a *key*, unlocking the secrets of all religions and philosophies (Hanegraaff, 2010: s. 120-121). Lévi's conception of *the astral light* and the notion that *the astral body dissolves after death* were both essential ideas for HPB. Likewise, she was probably influenced by Lévi's idea that *spiritualistic phenomena were caused by elemental spirits* (Godwin, 1994: 288).

According to Chajes, HPB was familiar with many Kabbalistic texts and commentators, including *Zohar* and Isaac Luria's writings. She, however, interpreted them in the light of her contemporaries – both through academic authors such as Adolphe Franck, and non-academics such as Lévi and Hargrave Jennings (Chajes, 2016: 34-35).<sup>56</sup> The Kabbalistic concept *Ain Soph* was popular amongst writers who, like HPB, was searching for a *philosophia perennis*. Chajes depicts the notion of *Ain Soph* as "a hook" on which different systems and teachings could be hung and thereby linked to each other. By finding similarities and identifying them with *Ain Soph*, the 19th-century writers on Comparative Mythology wanted to show that different teachings and religions had a more profound and common denominator (Chajes [Hall] 2016: 36-37).<sup>57</sup>

HPB refers to "the most ancient Hebrew document on occult learning" — the "*Siphra Dʒenionta*" (HPB, 1877, vol 1: 1). In *IU* she stopped spelling "Cabala" (like Jennings) and started spelling it with a "K" (like Ginsburg, Dunlap, King, and Franck). According to Chajes, HPB probably first heard of *Siphra Dʒenionta* through Lévi (see *Fables et symboles avec leur explication*, 1862: ii). She also frequently refers to *Kabbala Denudata* (1677-1684) – a collection of Latin translations of various parts of *Zohar* as well as other Kabbalistic writings – compiled by a German named Knorr von Rosenroth. Chajes, however, convincingly shows that Rosenroth was not her primary source and that her quotes were picked from an appendix titled "Kabbalah" in Dunlap's book *Sod: The Son of The Man* (1861) (Chajes, 2016: 47, 55-56).

HPB's early interpretation of Kabbalah (up to and including *IU*) was closely related to her doctrine of *metempsychosis*. Highlighting the importance of number seven, she thereby distinguishes the "three higher" and "seven lower" levels of emanation of the Divine Light (Chajes, 2016: 42). Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah, its Doctrine, Development and Literature* (1865) may have influenced her on this point. He describes the three first sephirot in the tree of life forms a *triad* which then spreads out into *the heptad* of seven lower sephirot, forming "the Primordial or Archetypical Man." Several other authors make the same division into three higher and seven lower sephirot.<sup>58</sup>



55 "...Logos, according to Lévi, manifests itself on the highest level of creation as a symbolism of numbers; and their meanings and dynamics can serve as a universal hermeneutical key at all ontologically lower levels of reality, according to the logic of correspondences or universal analogy" (Hanegraaff, 2010: 21).

56 Kilcher ('Verhüllung und Enthüllung', 2006) has displayed how Lévi lay the foundations for the great influence of the work *Kabbala Denudata* in TS, as well as in esoteric Freemasonry, and the Golden Dawn (Hanegraaff, 2010, 124-125 [note]).

57 In the holistic spirituality of our age, the schema of subtle anatomy is employed in a similar fashion as a container of classic esoteric correspondences between physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of man.

58 for example Ginsburg, Yarker and Jennings

According to HPB, the doctrine of *Ain Soph* can be found in Ezekiel, Daniel and Enoch, as well as in John's Revelation, which is wholly Kabbalistic and Hellenistic in their nature. The concept could also be found in Hinduism and Buddhism. *Ain Soph* became a key concept in her construction of the Wisdom-Religion.<sup>59</sup> She also narrates how the Jewish Kabbalah had evolved from the "original Oriental Kabbalah" in which Moses was initiated in Egypt. According to HPB, Moses then, to some extent, distorted the original Kabbalistic doctrine. From Hardinge Britten's writings *Ghost Land* or *Art Magic* (1876) she may have been given the idea of separating "Oriental Cabala" from "Jewish Kabbalah" (Chajes [Hall] 2012: 215). In Europe, she believed that the Rosicrucian's had preserved the most genuine Kabbalah.<sup>60</sup>

### Adam Kadmon and "the Gnostic tetraktys"

All systems of religious mysticism are based on numerals. With Pythagoras, the Monas or unity, emanating the duad, and thus forming the trinity, and the quaternary or Arba-il (the mystic *four*), compose the number seven. [...] They are a key to the ancient views on cosmogony, in its broad sense, including man and beings, and the evolution of the human race, spiritually as well as physically. [...] This number reappears likewise on almost every page of *Genesis*, and throughout the Mosaic books, and we find it conspicuous (see following chapter) in the *Book of Job* and the *Oriental Kabala*, [...] Have the seven prismatic colors of the rainbow seen by Noah no other meaning than that of a covenant between God and man to refresh the memory of the former? To the kabbalist, at least, they have a significance inseparable from the seven labors of magic, the seven upper spheres, the seven notes of the musical scale, the seven numerals of Pythagoras, the seven wonders of the world, the seven ages, and even the seven steps of the Masons, which lead to the Holy of Holies, after passing the flights of *three* and *five*. (IU, vol 2: 407-408)

HPB considered Kabbalah to be the key to the esoteric truth in the Bible stories. "Reject the Talmud and its old predecessor the Kabala, and it will be simply impossible ever to render correctly one word of that Bible" (HPB, 1877, 2: 450) she proclaimed. One of the general themes in the second volume of IU is that of *the fall* depicted in *Genesis*. The fall should not, according to HPB, be interpreted as "an Original Sin," but rather as *an allegory for the creation*. The emanations of Divine light, depicted in IU, illustrates the same principle as she in SD calls "involution." After the physical death, the human spirit returns through the same *seven* "planes of light" – but now in the opposite, ascending direction. On the macrocosmic scale, this is what she describes as the spiritual "evolution." In her narrative of the fall, "the first Adam" is a pure and entirely spiritual being, but the Adam of *Genesis's* second chapter is unsatisfied with the position given to him by the *Demiurge* ("the first Adam" or "Adam Kadmon"). This "second Adam," or "man of dust," strives in his pride to become a creator himself. As a result, the light from the highest divine triad is projected down into a *fourth* sephirah, associated with the mythological figure *Sophia* (HPB, 1877, IU vol 1: 303 and vol 2: chap. IV, V and VI). According to HPB, "Adam Kadmon is the type of humanity as a collective totality within the unity of the creative God and the universal spirit (IU, vol 2: 207)." So, the first *triad* develops into *quaternary*, again reflecting her interpretation of the *tetraktys*: "strictly speaking, there is a TETRAKTIS or quaternary, consisting of the Unintelligible First monad, and its triple emanation, which properly constitutes our Trinity (HPB, 1877, IU vol 2: 36)."

The Gnostic-Kabbalistic speculations in IU heavily depended on King's *The Gnostics and their Remains* (1864). According to Coleman, HPB plagiarized King as many as 42 times in this work (Coleman: Appendix

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59 The notion of subtle anatomy functions in a similar way in contemporary holistic spirituality.

60 HPB's Kabbalah differs in part between her various writings. In her first doctrinal article - "A Few Questions to Hiram" (1875) - she writes of "Rosicrucian Cabala" as another name for the universal wisdom religion (HPB, IU, vol 1: 106-111). In IU, she mentions that "Oriental Kabbalah" has Buddhist roots - something she does not write about later. In his article "Oriental Kabbalah And The Parting Of East And West" (2010) Marco Pasi makes an important analysis of HPB's view on Kabbalah in relation to the ideas of her contemporaries. HPB initially distinguishes between "Primitive Oriental Cabala" and a "corrupted Western Cabala", of which the first had been orally transmitted by the Chaldeans, the Indians, the Persian, and the Egyptians.

in Solovyoff, 1895: 357<sup>61</sup>). They both linked *the seven planetary spheres* to the allegory of the fall, and King also speculated on mystic and geometric interpretations of Gnostic findings.<sup>62</sup> Another parallel is his depiction of "the ineffable name of the Creator"<sup>63</sup> as well as Buddhism as the "ancient roots of Kabbalah" (Chajes and Huss, 2016: 12). But HPB's Gnostic-Kabbalistic cosmogony was also inspired by Plato's *Timaeus* which she repeatedly refers to – mostly as translated by Benjamin Jowett (though she is very critical of his interpretations, preferring Taylors).

## Masonic symbolism

Well acquainted as may be a scholar with the hieratic writing and hieroglyphical system of the Egyptians, he must first learn to shift their records. He has to assure himself, compasses and rule in hand, that the picture-writing he is examining fits, to a line, certain fixed geometrical figures which are the hidden keys to such records, before he ventures on an interpretation (IU, vol 1: 155-156).

At the beginning of chapter IX (IU, vol 2) a number of quotes are presented containing numerological references on the *triad* and *number seven* (*T. of Smyrna, Faust, Numbers, Genesis, Bhagavad Gita* etcetera) and HPB proceeds:

OUR task will have been ill-performed if the preceding chapters have not demonstrated that Judaism, earlier and later Gnosticism, Christianity, and even Christian Masonry, have all been erected upon identical cosmical myths, symbols, and allegories, whose full comprehension is possible only to those who have inherited the key from their inventors (HPB, 1877: volume 2: 405).

But the "Master-key" is indeed mentioned already in her subtitle. Actually, the initiative to start TS (September 7, 1875) was taken after a lecture in HPB's New York-apartment, demonstrating *the existence of such a key*. The lecture was given by a George Henry Felt – an engineer and "elected member of the "American Association for the Advancement of Science," with patents on several technical inventions (Demarest, 2011: 5-7, 19). Felt was referred to as a "freemason" in the press and he was headlining a lecture on "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians" (Santucci, 1997: 254). Unfortunately, the paper Felt held is now lost, and we are left to interpret the audience and journalist comments about it (Santucci, 1997; Demarest, 2011). According to them, Felt claimed to have found a mathematical and geometrical figure which served as "a key to the underlying geometry of nature". He had already presented his discovery on numerous occasions during the previous years, and it seems to have attracted relatively broad and partly positive interest. The "key" was also said to explain how "the ancient science used to build the pyramids" (a secret knowledge that, according to Felt, had been passed from Egypt to Greece). Likewise, Solomon's temple was said to be built in accordance with the key (Demarest, 2011: 56). Felt called his key "the Star of Perfection," and for his lecture, he had brought a variety of photos and illustrations that was supposed to support his finding (of which all seems to be lost today).

How can we know what Felt's "Star of Perfection" look like then? We have at least two different sources that probably gives us a quite accurate picture. Figure 1, below, is from a poster advertising Felt's lecture (Santucci, 1997: 251) and figure 2 is a copy from one of the plates of Felt's work, made by Claude Bragdon

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61 "As soon as Jesus was born, Christos, uniting himself with Sophia, descended through the seven planetary regions, assuming in each an analogous form, and concealing his true nature from their genii, whilst he attracted into himself the sparks of divine light they retained in their essence." (King, 1864: 31)

62 As for the geometrical figures so often introduced, they bore, perhaps, much the same import as in the Rosicrucian philosophy, which obtained these and many other Gnostic symbols by tradition, probably through the Arabs. In their system, the Square stands for the Four Elements; the Triangle, for Body, Spirit, and Life; or for the Sun, Moon, and Mercury. (King, 1864: 103-104)

63 "the numerals 5, 3, 7, i.e., the Triad, Pentad, Heptad, lucky and mystic numbers in all Eastern religions. Hence the letters upon these gems are usually disposed in three, five, or seven lines.. (King, 1864: 103-104)."

and/or Viola de Grunchy, before it perished in a fire (the drawings are currently in the Bragdon collection at the University of Rochester).<sup>64</sup>



Figure 1

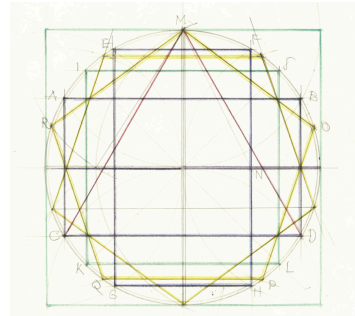


Figure 2

The same year as Felt presented his "Star of Perfection" at HPB's apartment, *The Liberal Christian* (1875) wrote a review of one of Felt's lectures, asking if this was: "anything more than a CAREFUL STUDY OF THE UNIVERSE'S LAWS and their marvelous harmony, whereby her mysteries can be unlocked, and the veil of Isis lifted? (Demarest, 2011: 12).<sup>65</sup> These words could as well have been HPB's own. In 1875, she already spoke of Kabbalah as "a far more advanced science" than that of her times, whose truth was concealed in the secret teachings of the Orient.

According to Felt his key was not "only" the key to reveal the ancient mysteries and the fundamental geometry of nature – with its help he also claimed to have succeeded in *eliciting elemental spirits*. He also offered to demonstrate this, and as a response to this offer Olcott suggested founding a society with the aim of practically exploring Felt's discoveries.<sup>66</sup> Felt collected money from the audience to prepare his research but disappeared before he had succeeded in showing any "elementaries" (Santucci, 1997: 246).

Although Felt had blown the trumpet-horn, proclaiming that *he* was the one to have found "the Talmudic key," he was far from alone speculating in that direction. As we will see, the idea about similar "keys" was popular during this time (just as it is in our contemporary "Sacred Geometry").<sup>67</sup> As curiosities we can compare "Felt's Star" with an example of how HPB depicts *a numerical and geometric key* in IU (vol 1: 506). She writes: "Attach thyself," says the alchemist, 'to the four letters of the tetragram disposed in the following manner'", and to the left of the text is a curious figure made of following three symbols.

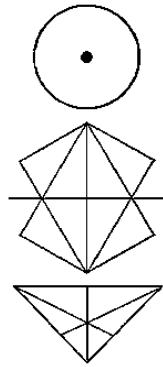
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64 PowerPoint from a lecture by Demarest, 2012 ("The Life and Times of Emma Hardinge Britten, Spiritualist Propagandist") at the Emma Hardinge Britten Archive: [www.ehbritten.org](http://www.ehbritten.org). (2019-08-24)

65 *The Liberal Christian* (1875) described it as follows: It consists of a circle with a square within and without, containing a common triangle, two Egyptian triangles, and a pentagon, forming the STAR OF PERFECTION. "

66 Olcott seems to have been most avid to investigate the elementary spirits. It may be that HPB and other early members were more interested in the geometrical key though.

67 To example was of such authors were John Yarker's (another freemason-acquaintance of HPB) which she refers to repeatedly in IU (Yarker 1872, Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity; HPB, 1877, IU, vol 2: 317, 374-377, 394) and George Oliver (*The Pythagorean Triangle*, 1875) – but there were many more.



The text goes on: "The letters of the ineffable name are there, although you may not discern them at first. The incommunicable axiom is cabalistically contained therein, and this is what is called the *magic arcanum* by the masters." "The ineffable name" is another masonic concept repeatedly referred to in IU, based on the Kabbalistic idea that the ultimate reality or God is symbolized by a *lost name or word* (Algeo, 1996: 34).

Above the figure she also makes a cryptic comparison with the element *hydrogen* and its molecular structure depicted. This is a typical example of what Rudbøg (2013) has identified as one of the most prominent of HPB's discourses – that "the ancient masters" possessed a far more profound knowledge than HPB's contemporary scientists did. In this specific example she was implying that the chemists of here time did not understand the deep numerical and geometric principles inherent in nature.<sup>68</sup>

In HPB's "secret key" we first find a very common religious and esoteric symbol – the circle with a central point (depicted, for example, by Yarker). But what about the other two symbols? Did they come "floating" to HPB as "etheric mental pictures", or did she copy them from someone else?

Maybe both answers could be true. It could be that she creatively combined things that she had heard, seen, and read visualizing it as symbols animated by her imagination. If we compare the figure from Felt's poster (1) with HPB's symbols in IU (2) we find at least two of them (2) – as shown in figure 3 below.<sup>69</sup>



figure 1

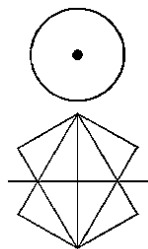


figure 2

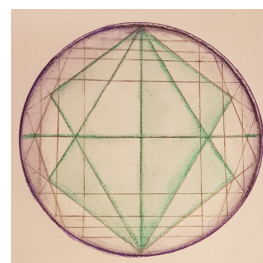
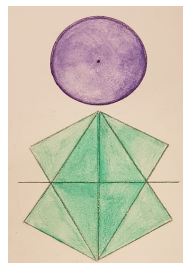


figure 3

Now, Felt's "Star of Perfection" is of course based on very basic geometric figures that reoccur now and then in the literature referred to by HPB (as well as and in the esoteric circles that she moved at the time). This makes it difficult to know if Felt's star was the inspiration behind HPB's key. Its, however, evident that numerical and geometric speculation had a very central impact on *how HPB chose to structure* her teaching.<sup>70</sup>

68 What is this mysterious athanor? Can the physicist tell us — he who sees and examines it daily? Aye, he sees; but does he comprehend the secret-ciphered characters traced by the divine finger on every sea-shell in the ocean's deep; on every leaf that trembles in the breeze; in the bright star, whose stellar lines are in his sight but so many more or less luminous lines of hydrogen? (HPB, 1877, 1: 506)

69 Figure 2 depicts two of the three symbols presented as a "secret key" in IU (colored so to make it more visible). Figure 3 is an illustration (by Fitger) of the Felt's star with HPB's symbols inside.

70 "Any Kabalist well acquainted with the Pythagorean system of numerals and geometry can demonstrate that the metaphysical views of Plato were based upon the strictest mathematical principles. "True mathematics," says the Magicon, "is something with which all higher sciences are connected; common mathematics is but a deceitful phantasmagoria, whose much-praised infallibility only arises from this—that materials, conditions, and references are made its foundation." (HPB, 1877 [epub edition]: 19)

(For a more pedagogic overview and interpretation of HPB's geometrical conceptions in IU, see also the Appendix "The Circle Squaring Itself", Fitger 2019).

According to HPB's close friend and travel companion Rawson, she had been in Paris in 1873 "...and compared notes with Thevenot, Grand Secretary of the Grand Orient of France, and astonished that very learned and highly advanced Freemason by her knowledge of all the secrets of the degrees in one branch to the Thirty-third, and in another to the Ninety-fifth."<sup>71</sup> The branch of 33 degrees, called the *Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*, is mentioned by her a couple of times in IU. According to Pierre Mollier it was also known by the name of "Rite of Perfection" ("the most widely practiced system of higher degrees in the world"). The 31-33rd degrees develops the Templar elements presented in the 30th-degree of "Kadosh" ("Freemasonry and Templarism", *Handbook of Freemasonry*, vol 8, 2014: 90).<sup>72</sup> HPB also mentions "Kadosh" a couple of times in IU (vol 2: 384, 388) as well as present the "Cipher of the Knights Kadosh" (IU, vol 2: 395). A search for "tetractis" in masonic journals from the 1860s and the 70s shows that "the Pythagorean doctrine" was relatively frequently discussed.<sup>73</sup>

The leading figure in 19th-century American Freemasonry was Albert Pike (Gilbert, 2014, "Freemasonry and Literature", *ibid*: 531-532). In his writing *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (1871: 840) (a work which remained in print for over one century) we find the following illustration in the chapter of grade 32, titled "Sublime Prince of The Royal Secret."



The illustration – also known as "the cosmic egg of Rebis" is found in 17th-century alchemical writings, like for instance one of HPB's favorites, Basil of Valentin's works. Now, notice the similarity between Felt's "Star of perfection" and the globe with the square (and number 4) and the triangle (and number 3) in the picture. The concept of Pythagoras *tetraktys* was central in the symbology relating to these masonic grades, and only in the chapter of the 28th grade number *seven* is mentioned 94 times.)

Thus, it is that Unity, complete in the fecundity of the Ternary, forms, with it, the Quaternary, which is the key of all numbers, movements, and forms (Pike, 1870: 771).

Pike wrote of *the human principles as seven*, and that Pythagoras had taught that that *each soul was a vehicle* (Pike, 1870: 669). He depicts Adam as *the human Tetragram* reflecting *the Divine Tetragram* in the exact same way as HPB (1877, vol 2: 276). Moreover, HPB also uses many expressions present in Pikes work, such as

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71 Quote by Albert Rawson's in Godwin, 1994: 280

72 The name 'Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite' was used for the first time in an agreement made between the "Supreme Council and the Grand Orient of France" (a Grand Lodge). De Hoyos, 2014: 372.

73 See: <https://masonicperiodicals.org>

describing man as "a microcosmos, or little world"<sup>74</sup> (HPB, 1877, IU vol 1: 323, 502; vol 2: 276) or discussing "the matrix of the world" (vol 1: 147, 157, 212, 285; Pike, 1870: 668, 770).

HPB seems to have romanticized Rosicrucian Freemasonry since childhood (though to her grandfather's involvement<sup>75</sup>) – but her relationship with Freemasonry was also split. On the one hand, she had several close friends who were Freemasons – including Olcott,<sup>76</sup> who was the person who probably stood closer to her than anyone else<sup>77</sup> (Algeo, 1996: 42). Rawson was a Rosicrucian and highly initiated Freemason with a specific interest in "secret Oriental brotherhoods" (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 279) and Sotheran (who helped HPB with writing IU) was also a Rosicrucian and high-grade Freemason.<sup>78</sup> Like HPB, these two men were both engaged in socialist circles, as well.<sup>79</sup>

Sotheran was probably the one who first gave HPB the idea of calling her teaching "Theosophy." He worked as an antiquarian and bookseller and was the "librarian" in TS (Godwin, 1994: 283-284; Rudbøg, 2013: 422). Sotheran was initiated by Yarker in the *Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis*, the *Scottish Rite* and the *Rite of Mizraim*, and he was also the one who brought HPB into contact with both Yarker and Kenneth Mackenzie (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 280). When still working on the script for IU,<sup>80</sup> Sotheran gave HPB Yarker's book *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (1872) which became influential in her writing. Sotheran was very impressed by HPB's draft, and he suggested to Yarker that the Freemasons should recognize HPB for "her great work and esoteric knowledge." Yarker soon sent a certificate to HPB for membership in the female branch of an Indian Freemason system called "Sat Bhai."<sup>81</sup> Not long afterwards, Yarker also acknowledged HPB by giving her the highest degree of "adopted masonry" in the *Rites of Memphis* and the *Rites of Mizraim* – called the "The Crowned Princess."<sup>82</sup>

Yarker, who was an active figure in alternative or "quasi-Masonic orders"<sup>83</sup> during the 1870s and 1980s,

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74 Pike writes: "Pythagoras called man a microcosm, or little world, as possessing in miniature all the qualities found on a great scale in the Universe (Pike, 1870: 667)."

75 According to Johnson, the foundation of HPB's occult worldview was probably laid already in her childhood (Johnson, 1994: 21-22). Her grandfather was a mason, and from him, the family had inherited an extensive library of magical, alchemical and occult literature, which HPB – according to sister Vera – studied extensively as a young woman. It was a form of Rosicrucian masonry, and secret masters are sometimes referred to as "Oriental Rosicrucian's by HPB.

76 "Everywhere she was involved with Freemasonry, Oriental secret societies, occult fraternities, and with the spiritualists who constituted, as it were, the exoteric "church" from which doors opened to the more esoteric circles." Godwin, 1994: 281; "Although HPB's direct involvement with Freemasonry was limited, her indirect connection, especially through friends and colleagues like George Felt, Stainton Moses, Henry Olcott, Albert Rawson, Charles Sotheran, and W. Wynn Westcott, who were active in the Craft, was extensive." Algeo, 1996: 16

77 According to Algeo, Olcott was initiated into the "the Hugenot Lodge", "the Grand Lodge of New York" and "the Royal Arch, Corinthian Chapter"

78 "He was a life member of the Soc. Ros. in America (a companion to the Soc. Ros. in Anglia, founded in 1866), a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason and a member of the 95th degree in the Royal Masonic Rite of Memphis. (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 279)

79 "He had already been involved with descendants of the Orphic Circle, and with an order of magical experimentation founded in 1873 as the Fratres Lucis or Brotherhood of Light (see Board 1988). Albert Rawson (1828–1902), an Orientalist and illustrator, claimed a long-standing acquaintance with HPB and collaborated with Sotheran in masonic and fringe-masonic orders. Rawson had co-founded the "Nobles of the Mystic Shrine," an order influenced by his enthusiasm for Arab culture and his initiation into a "Brotherhood of Lebanon." Sotheran and Rawson supported the Free Thought (secularist) movement in its opposition to the established churches and Judeo-Christian dogma (Godwin, 2013: 19)."

80 HPB mentions Yarker's book on several occasions in IU (HPB, 1877, 2: 316-317, 374n, 376-377, 394). According to her Yarker was (among other things) Grand Master of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Freemasons" and "Grand master of the rite of Swedenborg" (HPB, 1877, 2: 376).

81 Yarker wrote: "At this time, I was Grand Master of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis, 95°; and before that of the combined Scottish Rite of 33°, and Mizraim of 90°; and among our initiates, 32°-94°, was Brother Charles Sotheran who left England and settled at New York. [...] at the request of Bro. Sotheran I sent Madame HPB the certificate of the female branch of the Sat Bhai (Seven Brothers, or seven birds of a species, which always fly by sevens); it was a system organized at Benares in India by the Pundit of the 43rd Rifles, and brought to England by Major J. H. Lawrence-Archer, 32°-94°." (Blavatsky B.C.W, 1: 311 ff.)

82 HPB quotes Yarker: "We think we have sufficiently established the fact of the connection of Freemasonry with other speculative rites of antiquity, as well as the antiquity and purity of the old English Templar-Rite of seven degrees.." (HPB, 1877, IU, vol 2:b 377).

83 According to John Yarker, Rawson founded several quasi-masonic secret societies." (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 279)



had imported the *Rite of Memphis* from the United States to England in 1872 (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 279).<sup>84</sup> He was also the one who tried to launch and build "Sat Bhai" in England. In 1886 Yarker published "a revised edition of the Sat Bhai Code." Here he translated the name "Sat Bahi" as "seven brothers, or seven birds of a species, which always fly by sevens." The number seven was thus of significant importance also to Yarker. In *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity*, he repeatedly refers to *a ladder or a staircase, with seven steps*, which was said to symbolize emanation (descending) and initiation (ascending).<sup>85</sup> He also writes about "the two intertwined triangles" (the *hexagram*) linked to "the Order of the Temple," referring to this symbol being used by the Indian Brahmans (where the triangles symbolized the male and female principle and the angles that are formed when intertwined). HPB, makes the same comparison in IU. Yarker wrote about "The Brahmanic Trinity,"<sup>86</sup> as well (Yarker, 1872: 50). Regarding the history of Sat Bhai, he wrote:

The Royal Oriental Order of Sikha (Apex) [Sat Bhai]. This is a Hindu Society organized by the Pundit of an Anglo-Indian regiment, and brought to this country, about the year 1872, by Captain J. H. Lawrence Archer" [...] "a native civilian who was employed to teach the British officers of Indian regiments the Hindi language and to read the Devanagriscript (Yarker, quoted by Howe, 1978).<sup>87</sup>

Knowledge of the Hindu written language should have been something that interested HPB at this time (before encountering Subba Row and other learned Indians).<sup>88</sup> The idea of Secret Masters was also part of Sat Bahai's mythology (with Archer keeping his alleged Indian teacher's identity secret).<sup>89</sup>

HPB was not taken seriously by all her mason contacts, however. In 1879 Mackenzie (who was also involved Sat Bhai) wrote to a brother named Irwin: "Archer is mysterious. You and Bro. Scott has, it seems, both resigned, and from another source, I hear that Madam HPB is the head of the Order! This last item of news is 'quite too awfully laughable.'"<sup>90</sup> HPB's many personal contacts with Freemasons (together with the fact that her closest spiritual companion Olcott was highly initiated) must have added something to the knowledge of Freemasonry symbolism that she acquired through literature (Algeo, 1996: 23). HPB was keen to emphasize the authority, degrees, and knowledge of her Freemason friends, and they were often keen to emphasize her insights as well. Olcott and HPB even had far-reaching plans to turn the TS into a Masonic lodge with rituals and degree systems (Olcott, Old Diary Leaves 1: 46 8-9; Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 280).

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84 Something which was disapproved by "the Supreme Council 33 ° of the Ancient and Accepted Rite", who had already excluded Yarker two years earlier (Howe, E. P. 1978). *Fringe Masonry in England 1870-85*. Ars Quatuor Coronatorum (2076): London. <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/aqc/fringe/fringe.html#gulls>, 2018-09-16

85 "As practiced in France the K. H. degree has the ladder of seven steps, and seven passwords corresponding with the seven questions anciently addressed to a Templar on his reception ; and it is worthy of mention that the spiral staircase of the ancient Temple at Paris, admitted of defense from story to story, by seven successive gates with a sentinel at each." (Yarker, 1872: 126-127)

86 with a note to (Vide, 1861). "This symbol has been common in Kabbalistic and Gnostic sects at all times", Yarker writes.

87 Devanāgarī (sanskrit देवनागरी), or nāgarī, is the written alphabet used for the classical languages of India, for Sanscrit, Hindi and many other modern Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Northwestern of India.

88 At the end of her life she wrote: "The Devanagari characters in which Sanskrit is generally written, have all that the Hermetic, Chaldean and Hebrew alphabets have, and in addition the Occult significance of the "eternal sound," and the meaning given to every letter in its relation to spiritual as well as terrestrial things. As there are only twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and ten fundamental numbers, while in the Devanāgarī there are thirty-five consonants and [fourteen] vowels, making altogether [forty-nine] simple letters [or 7 x 7], with numberless combinations in addition, the margin for speculation and knowledge is in proportion considerably wider. Every letter has its equivalent in other languages and its equivalent in a figure or figures of the calculation table. It has also numerous other significations, which depend upon the special idiosyncrasies and characteristics of the person, object, or subject to be studied. As the Hindus claim to have received the Devanagari characters from Sarasvati, the inventress of Sanskrit, the "language of the Devas" or Gods." (Blavatsky Collected Writings, 14: 96)

89 "Freemasonry was an early model for HPB's conception of occult Masters since it combined esoteric lore with an international network of secret societies, often dedicated to radicalism and reform. Both HPB and Olcott blended ideas of international brotherhoods spanning Egypt, the Levant, Turkey, India, and Tibet. Describing the Masters as an "occult Brotherhood," HPB stated it had not originated in Tibet, nor was it only in Tibet, remarking that one of their highest Mahachaoans lived in Egypt and only went to Tibet a year before she did in 1878 and that he was neither a Tibetan nor a Hindu. She added that the origins of the brotherhood were more Masonic than present-day Masonry" (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 279-280.)

90 A couple of years later, Yarker weaved together "Ceremony of Perfection" with a ritual in the newly established "Order of Light" (Howe, 1978).

On the other hand, HPB *was a woman* and thus (as clearly seen in the quotation above) she could never get an *active* role in Freemasonry, which corresponded to her male friends.<sup>91</sup> How involved HPB was is difficult to know for sure, she could never have been given a role that matched her expectations and the knowledge she thought she possessed. Her and Yarker's respective recognition of each other was probably primarily about an exchange that both had something to gain from. It is clear in IU that HPB wanted to show her "initiated" knowledge about Freemasonry. At the same time, she points out that no Masonic Order in Europe or the United States "since the Knights of the Temple" has had something worth keeping secret.<sup>92</sup> – This, apart from "a few consecrated brethren" (HPB, 1877, 2: 371-72). Or as she eloquently summarizes her view: "Like Christianity, Freemasonry is a corpse from which the spirit long ago flowed" (HPB, IU, vol. 2: 388).<sup>93</sup>

HPB's discussion of Freemasonry in IU contains several central themes that can be summarized in the following points: 1) Masonic symbolism is about building Solomon's temple (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 282). In the East, this knowledge is called "seven-storied" or "nine-storied"; 2) Jesus was "Pythagorean" and had both an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine which had been transmitted to the Gnostics (HPB, 1977, 2: 145-147);<sup>94</sup> 3) Freemasons have carried on a knowledge that originally came from the Indian tradition (from which the oldest roots of the words also derive). The "ineffable name" had existed in Egypt and was known by the Brahmins;<sup>95</sup> 3) The Jesuits possessed important knowledge, but over time distorted it so that God gained anthropomorphic properties. (In HPB's interpretation, they did something unforgivable: They let the Demiurge take the place of the highest divine principle.<sup>96</sup>) The Jesuits deny that they are a secret order, but had, according to HPB, infiltrated the Catholic Church. She ends the chapter on Freemasonry by providing a cipher for the higher Freemason degrees (HPB, 1877, 2: 145-147, 355, 384, 402,) also mentioning the fact that the societies she has been involved with is Eastern, and thus she is under no oath to keep any secrets.

### **Magic stars of micro- and macrocosm**

As is evident from the similarities in both their symbolism and way of reasoning, HPB picked up a lot from Lévi. Referring to Agrippa, Lévi had also drawn correspondences between the human body<sup>97</sup> and *the pentagram* (five-pointed star), linking *the seven planets to different parts of the body*. The six-pointed star – named "the Seal of Solomon" or "the Grand Pentacle" – he calls "the most simple and complete abridgment of the

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91 Regarding the freemasons relation to women, HPB refers to Sotheran: "Speculative Masonry has much, too, within its ranks to do. One is to accept a woman as a co-worker of man in the struggle of life." (HPB, 1877, 2: 391)

92 Yarker also noted later that "the Sat Bhai's raison d'être somehow ceased to be necessary" when TS was established (Yarker, 1909: 492).

93 Commenting on a dispute regarding her supposed membership in the freemasons in Franklin Register and Norfolk County Journal (1878) HPB wrote in a letter: "...full assurance is given that I have never taken "the regular degrees" in any Western Masonic Lodge. Of course, therefore, having taken no such degree, I am not a thirty-third degree Mason. [...] My Masonic experience—if you will so term membership in several Eastern Masonic Fraternities and Esoteric Brotherhoods—is confined to the Orient. But, nevertheless, this neither prevents my knowing, in common with all Eastern "Masons," everything connected with Western Masonry (including the numberless humbugs that have been imposed upon the Craft during the last half-century) nor, since the receipt of the diploma from the "Sovereign Grand Master," of which you publish the text, my being entitled to call myself a Mason. Claiming nothing, therefore, in Western Masonry but what is expressed in the above diploma, you will perceive that your Masonic mentors must transfer their quarrel to John Yarker." (B.C.W. 1: 311 f.)

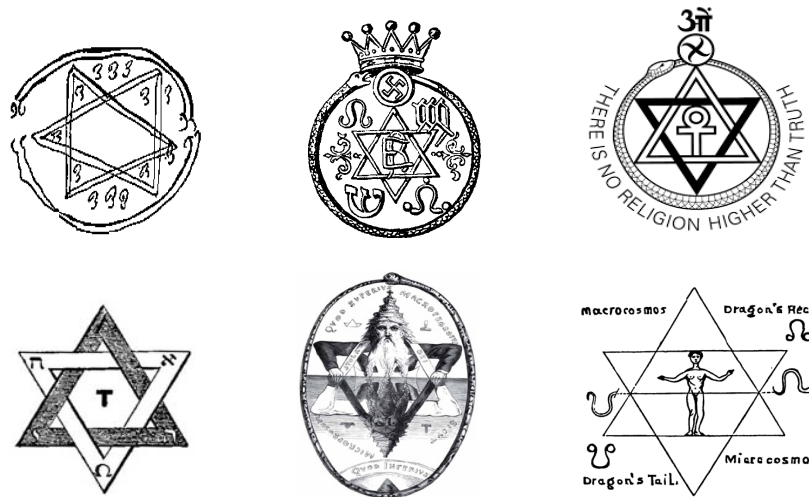
94 According to HPB, Jesus knew the secret name of the Father and used it to cast out demons – but the freemasons of today does not know it (HPB, IU, 1877, 2: 387).

95 Regarding HPB's discrimination between "Jehovah", the highest Divinity and "the ineffable name", see IU, 1877, 2: 402.

96 They did more harm than the "armies of Satan" (HPB, IU, 1877, 2: 352).

97 "In the human Body, the Sun is analoges to the heart, the Moon to the brain, Jupiter to the right hand, Saturn to the left, Mars to the left foot, Venus to the right, Mercury to the generative organs, whence an androgyne figure is sometimes attributed to this planet". Lévi, 1999 i Waites översättning av Dogme et Rituel, [1854-56] [Kindle]: 4485; "The Pentagram, or Sign of the Microcosmos, represents, among other magical mysteries, the double sympathy of the human extremities with each other and with the circulation of the Astral Light in the human body." Lévi, 1999 [Kindle]: 3951-3953

science of all things." While the (five-pointed) *pentagram* is said to symbolize the microcosm or human body, the six-pointed star stands for macrocosm (Levi, 1999 [Kindle]: 1213). HPB speculated a lot on *the Seal of Solomon* as well, concluding that it originally came from India (see figure 1, below from IU).<sup>98</sup> Figure 2 is HPB's monogram, found on a note paper from the forming of TS in 1875.<sup>99</sup> Figure 3, TS seal, is also a hexagram, with an Egyptian *ankh* in the middle, and an *ouroboros* enclosing it.<sup>100</sup> Lastly, figure 4 and 5 are two versions of Solomon's seal as depicted by Lévi.<sup>101</sup> Several other authors in HPB's bibliography also shared similar representations. Figure 6, for example, is reproduced in another most influential source: Hargrave Jennings *The Rosicrucian's* (1870) – a work that HPB both referred to and plagiarized repeatedly.<sup>102</sup>



The *hexagram*<sup>103</sup> also has a compelling connection to the development of HPB's seven-fold doctrine of subtle anatomy. In her article "The six-pointed and five-pointed stars – Our answer" (*The Theosophist*, November 1881)<sup>104</sup> it is explained as consisting *seven fields* (the six points and one field in the center) – thereby illustrating the *seven principles in man*.

The medieval Kabalists give us in their writings the key to its [the double triangle of the Kabalists] meaning. "Man is a little world inside the great universe," teaches Paracelsus. "A microcosm, within the macrocosm, like a foetus, he is suspended by his three principal spirits in the matrix of the universe." These three spirits are described as double: (1) the spirit of the Elements (terrestrial body and vital principle); (2) the spirit of the stars (sidereal or astral body and will governing it); (3) the spirit of the spiritual world (the animal and the spiritual souls)—the seventh principle being an almost immaterial spirit or the divine Augoeides, Atma, represented by the central point, which corresponds to the human navel. This seventh principle is the Personal God of every man, say the old Western and Eastern Occultists (*B.C.W.*, vol 3: 321)

98 HPB wrote: "The figure is the identical Solomon's seal, or double triangle of the Kabalists. Did the Hindu get it from the Jewish kabalist, or the latter from India, by inheritance from their great king-kabalist, the wise Solomon?" (HPB, IU 1877: 136).

99 "Preamble and Bylaws" (okt. 1875) i *The Theosophist*, Aug. 1931: 645

100 Above is an Indian sun-cross. The Aum-sign was not there from the beginning and can eventually have been put there (after the second world-war) to weigh up the negative associations with the sun-cross. Hesselink 2018-09:11

([http://www.katinkahesselink.net/his/THEOSOPHICAL\\_SOCIETY-seal.htm](http://www.katinkahesselink.net/his/THEOSOPHICAL_SOCIETY-seal.htm))

101 Levi, (2017-03-28T23:58:59). *Transcendental magic, its doctrine and ritual*, Kindle Locations: 1140 och 466.

102 Jennings, 1870 [Kindle]: 345, 3802 (and titel page)

103 Lévi called it "the Grand Pentacle"

104 HPB, *The Theosophist*, Vol. 3, Nr. 2, nov. 1881: 31-33. "Our Answer" was a comment on an article by K. Lalshankar titeld "The Six-Pointed and Five-Pointed Stars" (*Blavatsky Collected Writings*, 3: 312).

In another of her articles "The Number Seven" (published in June 1880, about a year after her move to India – but before the seven-fold subtle anatomy had been established by Hume)<sup>105</sup> she again refers to *the tetraktys* and *the heptad*:

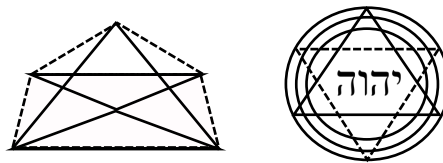
The Pythagoreans considered the figure seven as the image and model of the divine order and harmony in nature. It was the number containing twice the sacred number three or the "triad," to which the "one" or the divine monad was added [...] Consisting of a union between the number three (the symbol of the divine triad with all and every people, Christian as well as pagans) and of four (the symbol of the cosmic forces or elements), the number seven points symbolically to the union of the Deity with the universe (HPB, 1880, B.C.W, vol 2: 411-412).

In this article she also refers to *a division of man into seven parts*: "The ancients divided the human frame into seven parts; the head, chest, stomach, two hands and two feet; and man's life was divided into seven periods" (HPB, B.C.W, vol 2: 413).

### Squaring the circle

The primordial point is a circle; the circle squaring itself from the four cardinal points becomes a quaternary, the perfect square, having at each of its four angles a letter of the mirific name, the sacred TETRAGRAM. (HPB, 1877 [epub edition]: 587-588)

HPB's words from IU (above) is clearly illustrating the same concept as the following to figures from Ralston Skinner's *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measures* (1875: 311).



To the left is a four-sided pyramid, to the right is Solomon's seal (the *hexagram*) with the *four* Hebrew letters for *Tetragrammaton*. "The primordial point" (number 1) divides into *four triangular sides* (number 4 and 3) and into a square (number 4). It is the same *cosmogony, expressed in geometric forms* as well as the numbers 1 and 3 + 4 = 7, as HPB's.<sup>106</sup>

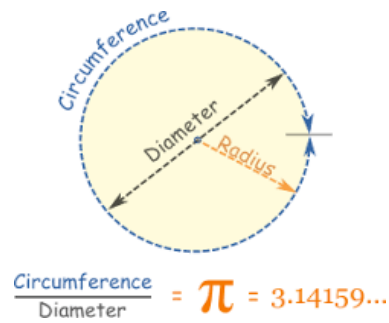
This symbology has also got to do with mathematical problem of "squaring the circle" which was known already in antiquity and is one of the classic design problems in geometry. Proclus's commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* describes how *the soul is constructed according to mathematical proportions through which it can shape the body – as an image of the arithmetic and geometric ideas immanent in the world of ideas*.

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105 See "On Fragments of Occult Truth," Hume, *The Theosophist* (okt.) 1881: 17-22. This is a series of articles of which Hume wrote the first three and Sinnett the following once, based on HPB's teaching and the Mahatma-letters from M. and K.H.

106 Maybe it is a bit far-fetched; however, there could possibly also be a conceptual connection with HPB's "secret key" if we compare Yarker's figure with HPB's symbol turned upside-down.





Similar speculations have been relatively common in Western Esotericism. The 19th-century Neoplatonists, alchemists and occultists also sought to solve the classic problem of squaring the circle. Examples of some authors (which HPB read early on) who discuss "the square of the circle" are Lévi,<sup>107</sup> Yarker, the mathematician John Parker, as well as Skinner, mentioned above. This mathematical problem involves constructing a square with the same area as a given circle. The problem became "proved insoluble" in 1882 when Ferdinand von Lindemann showed that  $\pi$  (pi) is a transcendental number and thus not constructible, which means that it is impossible to find the square of the circle.<sup>108</sup> There are, however, a variety of methods that *almost* square the circle – with more or less precise results.<sup>109</sup> Parker's *The Quadrature of a Circle* (1851) is an example of such attempt. Parker thought it illogical to assume that "the width of a line" was infinitely divisible (and that it therefore should be given a specific value). On this basis, he wrote a mathematical formula for the square of the circle. The method was never accepted by academic mathematics, however.

HPB comments on the square of the circle a couple of times in *IU*, stating that the fact that it is not found "on the physical plane" does not mean that it does not exist on a *metaphysical plane*:

And so it happens now, that when a kabalist who has devoted his whole life to studying occultism, and has conquered the great secret, ventures to remark that the Kabala alone leads to the knowledge of the Absolute in the Infinite, and the Indefinite in the Finite, he is laughed at by those who because they know the impossibility of squaring the circle as a physical problem, deny the possibility of its being done in the metaphysical sense. (HPB, 1877 [epub edition]: 474)

Skinner's book *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measure* (1875)<sup>110</sup> was a commentary on Parker's "discovery." HPB had exchanged letters with Skinner<sup>111</sup> and also refers to *Source of Measure* and other texts by Skinner. Later, in the *SD*, Skinner and his *Source of Measures* are mentioned more than any other author – except for Plato (Rudbøg, 2013: 224). The *philosophical* and *symbolic* significance that theosophists and other esoterics have attached to the problem of "squaring the circle" is most likely about trying to unite "the unlimited Unity" or Divinity (symbolized by *the circle*) with "the limited and orderly cosmos" (symbolized of *the square*).<sup>112</sup>

Everything seems to indicate that the writings of another prolific freemason, by the name George Oliver (referred to in *IU* as "The Rev. Dr. Oliver, another Masonic authority"), also played a pivotal role for HPB's speculation on the *tetraktys* (HPB, 1877, *IU vol 2*: 389). The middle-figure of the *tetraktys* (below) is depicted

107 Lévi, 1999, translated by Waite [Kindle]: 1104-1107

108 The problem was considered insoluble over time, and as early as 1775 the French Academy of Sciences decided to stop dealing with theses that dealt with it. However, the desire to find this geometric key did not stop attracting. As late as the beginning of the 20th century, however, several writings were published annually regarding the square of the circle.

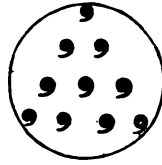
109 For example, in 1913, the mathematician S. Ramanujan published an article in *The Journal of the Indian Mathematical Society* in which he displayed a geometric construction that gives the result of  $\approx 355/113 \approx 3.141592920$ .

110 Title continues: "...by which was built the Great Pyramid of Egypt and the Temple of Solomon; And Through the possession and use of which, man, assuming to realize the creative law of the Deity, set it forth in a mystery, among the Hebrews called Kabbala"

111 *Theosophical History*, vol 18, no. 1-2, 2016, Accessed at <http://theohistory.org/issue-archive/volume-xviii/>, 2018-09-02

112 "The problem of squaring the circle means for the student of practical occultism the adapting of finite life to the infinite, of spirit to matter, and matter to spirit. As geometry and mathematics, number and magnitude, are keys to cosmic architecture, it follows that the problem of squaring the circle is a most important key to unlock many mysteries." <https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/edge-uml/edge-uml.htm>, 2018-09-01

in several of his writings.<sup>113</sup> In the same year as TS was founded, Oliver published *The Pythagorean Triangle: Or, The Science of Numbers* (1875) – a book that specifically dealt with this concept.



Oliver's work contains a chapter entitled "The remarkable properties of the heptad, Septenary or heptagon," which HPB later plagiarized from.<sup>114</sup> Below is a comparison between Oliver's sevenfold division of man and HPB's later division.

Oliver's division in *The Pythagorean Triangle* (1875)<sup>115</sup>

HPB's division in *SD* (1888)<sup>116</sup>

1. The divine golden man		7. atma
2. The inward holy body from fire and light, like pure silver		6. buddhi
3. The elemental man	→	5. manas
4. The mercurial growing paradisaical man		4. kama-rupa
5. The martial soul-like man		3. linga-sarira
6. The venerine, according to the outward desire.		2. prana/jiva
7. The solar man, an inspector of the wonders of God		1. stula-sarira

HPB has given the seven principles Sanskrit names. If we look at the meaning of Oliver's concepts, she also seems to have changed place on principle number three and four. HPB mentions Oliver's seven-fold division for the first time in SD, but all other geometric and numerical speculations about the *tetraktys*, *number seven* and *its connection to man* is very similar to Oliver's – already in IU. In the same manner as Skinner, Oliver discusses how *the tetrad* is a *pyramid* from which *the cube* (matter) develops.

Dewald Best's dissertation "H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy, and Nineteenth-Century Comparative Religion" (2017) is the only work I have seen this far that takes notice of Oliver's importance to HPB. Bester also means that Oliver had significance for HPB by referring to the *number seven in connection with man* – but he means that the similarities end there:

HPB has, in effect, interpreted, appropriated, and re-presented Oliver's work in service of her larger project. To call this plagiarism or to suggest Oliver "influenced" H. P. HPB is a mistake; she quite simply read through him and found what she was looking for, her own thoughts. (Bester, 2017: 169)

113 Oliver 1863: 276; Oliver 1867: 143; Oliver, 1857: 170

114 Oliver writes: "The dyad doubled makes a tetrad, and the tetrad doubled makes the hebdomad" [group of seven] (Oliver, 1875: 104); HPB repeats this sentence verbatim in two places. Partly in SD, 2: 599 and partly in ("The Transactions of the HPB Lodge," 1889, Blavatsky CW, 10: 355-356).

115 Oliver 1875: 179-180

116 HPB, SD, chapter 2, XXV

I fully agree with Bester on the description of how HPB appears to have used her sources. She had an idea – a kind of draft structure – and looked for appropriate to fit in to her structure. However, as I have tried to show, I believe that there are numerical and geometric representations that she shares with both Oliver, Skinner and many other writers, and that these representations were a central part of the "structure" that she later elaborates on the human principles. Firstly, she seems to visualize the representations in pictorial form (for example as geometric figures) and secondly the terminology is connected to these representations where it – for different reasons (often numerological ones) – were considered to fit in.

Many of HPB's ideas about "Rosicrucian Kabbalah" also came from the writings of Freemasons like Jennings and Yarker (Chajes and Huss, 2016: 11)<sup>117</sup> which wanted to establish a connection between modern Freemasonry and the Gnostic mysteries. According to Yarker, the esoteric knowledge of Egypt had been passed on by the Jews, and by Pythagoras, who was one of the great initiates. He calls this ancient knowledge "Concealed Theosophy" and draws parallels between cosmological systems in different religious traditions through number mysticism and emanation theory. Yarker also emphasizes the *Septenary* profoundly. He speaks of *the top triad* in the tree of life as "a later addition upon the old ladder of seven steps" and about Pythagoras he writes:

so closely does his [Pythagoras] system resemble modern Freemasonry, that various documents and rites have assumed the absolute identity of the two [...] they had secret signs and methods of communication, and their symbols were derived chiefly from Geometry, and consisted of the right angle, the equilateral triangle, the square, the cube, the point within a circle, the dodecahedron, the triple triangle, and the letter Y. (Yarker, 1872: 23)

### Rosicrucian influences

According to Godwin HPB most likely traveled in Egypt sometime during the 1850s (as referred to by her near friends Rawson and Sinnett). Godwin also believed that Rawson, as her traveling companion in Egypt, had contact with an order called "the Brotherhood of Luxor" – an occult group which later also contacted Olcott in New York (in 1875). He suggested that the order may secretly have guided TS for some time. It may also be this order that – after HPB's and Olcott's move to India – became known by under the name "Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor" (and sought to recruit dissatisfied theosophists). Godwin, however, found it difficult to state this with certainty (Godwin, 1994: 298, 348).

As Deveney pointed to, HPB spoke of herself as a "Rosicrucian" already when she came to New York in 1873, and she made similar statements later, as well (Deveney, 1997: 265).<sup>118</sup> According to him, there was no other form of Rosicrucian's in the United States than Randolph's "Brotherhood of Eulis" (founded in 1874) at this time.<sup>119</sup> There is no evidence that HPB and Randolph met or corresponded in writing – although this, of course, is possible since they periodically moved in the same circles in the late 50's. Randolph had met Olcott once, fleetingly, and Olcott and HPB were both familiar with Randolph's teachings. HPB does not refer directly to Randolph in IU, but an interesting connection is seen in the *Mahatma Letters* (which were sent to central people in the TS like Olcott, Sinnett, and Hume, beginning in the mid-70s, signed by secret masters).<sup>120</sup> In these letters, the motto "TRY" appears. The same motto – linked to the idea that esotericism and occultism can only be understood by trying and making own experiences – was also used extensively by Randolph. When HPB, in 1875, reveals more about the secret

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117 see the list above

118 According to HPB, the rose crosses were an "offshoot" of an older and even higher initiated company whose seat was in the Orient. European rose crosses had long since disappeared, but the "oriental rose crosses" - "for such we will call them, being denied the right to pronounce their true name" were, according to HPB, still active and had retained all the secret knowledge of the Chaldeans (HPB, "A Few Questions to HIRAF", *Spiritual Scientist* (1875), Blavatsky CW, 1: 101-119.

119 See chapter 12 and 13 about HPB in Deveney, 1997

120 The *Mahatma Letters* started arriving to Olcott in August 1874 and was signed by an Egyptian master called "Tuitit Bey" (Goodrick-Clarke, 2013: 276).

society that she said that she belonged to, she called them "the Brotherhood of Luxor." She also emphasized that her mission was widespread in America and that the Masters' most important motto was "try" (Deveney, 1997: 265 -266).

The seven-fold division is central to Randolph as well. He speaks of *seven spheres of light* and *seven non-terrestrial entities* (creative intelligence/energies) which have *seven "etheric fields"* of pervasive fluid. Just like HPB, he distinguishes between "the soul" and "the spirit" and he speaks of "envelopes" in which man is clothed at birth. According to Randolph, the spirit world in which man enters after death consisted of *seven large zones or belts of ethereal matter*, and *each zone was in turn divided into seven smaller zones*. Linked to the concepts of subtle anatomy, he also speaks of a "nerve aura" (Deveney, 1997: 177, 185, 442).

## Conclusion

The harmony and mathematical equiformity of the double evolution--spiritual and physical--are elucidated only in the universal numerals of Pythagoras, who built his system entirely upon the so-called "metrical speech" of the Hindu Vedas. [...] If the Pythagorean metempsychosis should be thoroughly explained and compared with the modern theory of evolution, it would be found to supply every "missing link" in the chain of the latter. (HPB, 1877, *IU*, vol 1: 9)

For HPB, it was evident that her wisdom religion originated in the East. To base it in "Pythagorean" teachings did not contradict this statement – since Pythagorean's knowledge, according to her, was derived from the Vedic teaching. (Admittedly, there is, of course, a hypothetic possibility that Pythagoras had knowledge of Eastern tradition, but that is not the question we are interested in investigating here.) We have looked at the *direct* influences behind HPB's choice of number seven as a fundamental cosmological structure. Now, what significance had the move to India for her change of doctrine at this point?

According to Hall [Chajes], TS seven-fold conception of the human principles was first introduced in Hume's article "Fragments of Occult Truth" (1881). This is true if we refer to *the exact terminology* of the principles that is presented later, in SD. As we have seen, however, HPB associated number seven with the microcosm of man, already in *IU*.<sup>121</sup> In "Classifications of" Principles "(1887: 91) HPB responded to Row's articles where he claimed that the seven-fold division of man did not exist in "Classical Hinduism" (1887: 282-283). HPB then claims that number seven *is seen everywhere in nature* as for example, in the *color spectrum of light*. She also refers to *the Pythagorean tetractis*, *the pyramid*, *the tetrad* and the Kabbalistic *sephirots* (as  $3 + 7 = 10$ ) – linking all of the arguments to the concept of the *quadrature of the circle* and to Skinner's and Yarker's discoveries. What I have tried to show here is that all these arguments were present already in the *IU*. According to Chajes [Hall], there was no direct parallel to the seven-fold division of man in the East – and not in the West either. HPB's conception of "the sevenfold man" was therefore (according to her working hypothesis in 2007) an expression of syncretism where she sought parallels and "created something new". As we have seen, number seven was an entirely natural choice for HPB given the mythical discourse of the late 19th-century, linked to the geometric and numerical representations we have seen. We have looked at some of the authors and contacts which we know that HPB was familiar with early on. Authors which use similar Neo-Platonic and "Pythagorean-inspired" representations (such as the circle, the triangle, the tetrad/pyramid, the cube, the tetractys – as well as the hexagram and the Kabbalistic concept of Tetragrammaton). These authors shared a common mythographic discourse about a *philosophia perennis* where *geometry and number mysticism are interwoven to describe a cosmogony*. We have also seen that HPB lacked a structured system in her first works – and I suggest that this is where arithmology came to play its part.

There is, of course, much more to be said concerning HPB's early influences. My focus in this article has

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121 She also mentioned seven specific parts of the body, already a year before Hume's article "On Fragments of Occult Truth" (The Theosophist, 1881: 17-22). She does not connect them to the usual "chakra points" here, but this is done later (after Humes article) in 1882.



mainly been 19th-century mythographers and HPB's masonic symbolism, but there were also other significant sources that may have contributed to her choice of a sevenfold cosmology – spiritualistic, for example, where an important figure was Andrew Jackson Davies (see Jeffrey D Lavoie's *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement*, 2012). I have also totally left out HPB's esoteric interpretation of late 19th-century *Science* – a subject well-examined by Egil Asprem (see "The Problems of a Gnostic Science: The Case of Theosophy's Occult Chemistry" in *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 2014: 444-480 and "Theosophical attitudes towards science: past and present" in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, 2013). Another subject not discussed in this article is how HPB sought to reconcile the symbolic of *the pyramid* with *the seven planets* and the alchemical uniting of the three "base metals", or *tri prima* (mercury representing "the mind", salt representing "primeval matter" or "the body" and sulfur representing "the spirit") with *the four elements* (air, earth, fire, water). The alchemical speculations about the four elements could also advantageously be compared with the geometric cosmogony in *Timaeos*.<sup>122</sup>

TS continued contributing to the growing popularity of the chakras in the late-nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth, by publishing translations of relevant Sanskrit texts as well as via the writings of its members (Baier, 2016: 344). Like Chajes, I believe that HPB, after the move to India and in the early 1880s, benefited from the Indian theosophists' help with linking the seven-fold structure of man that I believe *was already immanent in her earlier speculations* in IU (Chajes [Hall], 2007: 24). Her close Indian adviser Subba Row gave her the "suitable" Sanskrit designations for the seven principles but later withdrew his statements. Theosophical ideas were shown to be very important for the development of ideas about the *aura* as well (and about the possibility of interpreting its colors). These ideas were further developed by the second generation of theosophical leaders – especially Annie Besant and George Leadbeater. Along with John Woodroffe's influential books on tantra and *Kundalini Yoga*, they became key persons in the Western reception of the Indian teaching on the chakras.<sup>123</sup>

It is very likely that the seven-fold standardization of the chakra system that has become so prevalent in Modern Yoga dates to Pūrṇānanda Yatis's text *Satchakra-nirūpana* ("Explanation of the six chakras" – a chapter derived from a tantric text from 1577). *Satchakra-nirūpana* became known to the West through Woodroffe's English translation titled *The Serpent Power* (1918). A man named Baradakanta Majumdar wrote articles for *The Theosophist* in 1880 which mentioned this text, before he thirty years later translated texts for Woodroffe (Taylor 2001: 134; Baier, 2016: 313).

In her response to Row's questioning of the seven-fold human doctrine ("The Septenary Principle in Esotericism," 1883) HPB attempted to show that she had been coherent in all her statements. According to her, nature, cosmos and man's seven-fold constitution was supported by Row's own previous research (which, he however, now rejected). She also claimed that her doctrine of a sevenfold structure could be supported by Indian texts such as *Atharvaveda*, the *Law of Manu*, "*Nyaya Sutras*", the *Upanishads*, "*Sankhya-Karika*" and "*Atma Bodha*" by Sankaracharya. However, just as Row argued, the sevenfold division of man seems to be relatively rare in Sanskrit literature. There are a variety of divisions, but the seven-fold one is not "a classical Brahman teaching" (Samuel, 2013: 37-38).

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<sup>122</sup> See for example HPB, 1877, IU, vol 1: 308-309

<sup>123</sup> Theosophy took over these first initiatives in medical yoga research, in order to find evidence for the congruence of age-old yoga wisdom and the newest discoveries of western science. In so doing, Theosophy had a huge effect on the change in the image of yoga in the modern world and its consequent popularity. The foundations of kundalini yoga were known to the Theosophists since 1880. They interpreted the rise of the serpent power through the cakras as a natural movement of the 'nerve aura', a movement which it was believed constituted the physical aspect of human spiritual development. [...] The medicalization of yoga eventually gained a new quality in the 1920s as it became connected with the new culture of practicing āsanās and prāṇāyāma, to which we will return below (Baier, "Modern Yoga Research," 123: 4).

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