

William Lethaby, Symbolism and the Occult

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Abstract

The thesis will reconsider the thought and design work of the architect William Richard Lethaby (1857–1931). The research will focus upon Lethaby's affiliation with the occult, with particular reference to alchemy. The relationship between nineteenth- and twentieth-century architects and occultism has been overlooked, and in many cases intentionally neglected, by scholars and historians. Current scholarship in the field has placed a greater emphasis on twentieth-century proponents of the occult. This detailed study on Lethaby and the occult therefore forms an original contribution to existing scholarship, highlighting the parallels between the nineteenth-century architect's work and the ideology and imagery of the occult. The thesis will demonstrate Lethaby's familiarity with occult concepts and the extent to which these were employed by him in his work. The study will then go on to examine how Lethaby's fascination with occult themes and magic had a consequent influence on his contemporaries and question how far this interest in the occult impacted the future generation of designers and subsequent movements.

The research will recognise Lethaby's work within the context of its time and suggest it to be a product of its era. Alongside the well-documented Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth-century there also existed a spiritual revolution. This encouraged countless individuals, particularly members of the avant-garde, to reject the traditional religious pathways and to seek answers through more experimental and mystical alternatives. The majority of Lethaby's working life was spent in London, where there was a revival of interest in the occult that included the foundation of such societies as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The thesis will illustrate how Lethaby was profoundly influenced by the *Zeitgeist*, which was saturated with references to spiritualism, mysticism and the occult.

Lethaby's attraction towards mysticism and magic, as seen in his first published book, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (1891), which was later revised and retitled *Architecture, Nature and Magic* (1928), was not confined to his theoretical work but also pervaded both his design and his completed work. A considerable portion of the thesis will therefore, for the first time, extensively scrutinise several of Lethaby's drawings and architectural work to suggest how they embody his interest in the occult. The study will conclude by unearthing parallels between Lethaby's completed works and those executed by prominent modern architects with recognised occult affiliations, such as Lauweriks, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, to suggest a comparable use of occult symbolism, with similar intent.

The thesis will create a renewed interest in Lethaby and address the impact of occultism on the architect, his contemporaries and the wider Arts and Crafts Movement. Finally, it will put forward that subsequent twentieth-century schools or movements in architecture with spiritualist tendencies, such as the Bauhaus and the Modern Movement, were not so much revolutionary as evolutionary, advancing from a previous Arts and Crafts ideology.

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1. Introduction

William Richard Lethaby (1857–1931) was one of the foremost exponents of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. In spite of this, Lethaby has been retrospectively underrepresented by historians. The following thesis broadens the inquiry into Lethaby beyond historical accounts of his life and formal analysis of his architectural work. It instead comprehends a relatively unknown and unexplored area of Lethaby's work and character. The research will, for the first time, comprehensively establish Lethaby's relationship with occult ideas. This will be executed through in-depth study of Lethaby's theoretical writings, illustrations and completed work. The research will bring to light Lethaby's comprehension of occult ideology, in particular magic and alchemical symbolism. This will form an original contribution to the study on Lethaby, whose character and work have never previously been examined at length in this way.

Lethaby is well regarded for contributing to the field of architectural history and theory. His first published book, *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth* (1891), later revised and retitled *Architecture, Nature and Magic* (1928),¹ would immediately suggest a need for further investigation into his affiliation with mysticism and magic. Yet, remarkably, Lethaby's direct relationship with magic has never been fully investigated. The thesis therefore aims to fill this gap in research. The study will not only show the affiliations between Lethaby and the occult but will endeavour to discover whether Lethaby exploited an occult language on an eclectic basis, because it fascinated his inquisitive mind, or if he was attempting to revive an ancient codified language to transmit a perennial message. It will explore whether Lethaby's interest in such areas of study were limited to research for his book or went beyond this,

¹ Lethaby rewrote the book as a series of articles for *The Builder* in 1928. These were then reproduced in book format with a biographical note by Alfred Powell in 1956.

permeating his entire ethos. It will also question whether such beliefs were transitory, swayed by the spiritual milieu and only held for a short space of time, then later substituted for a more rational emphasis on science and mathematics, or if they were a fundamental part of Lethaby's character that persisted throughout his life. The study will also attempt to comprehend what Lethaby hoped to achieve through the knowledge and employment of occult philosophy and symbology, and to what extent his work in this field inspired his contemporaries and future generations of architects. The thesis on Lethaby will assist in questioning the novelty of occult symbolism exploited during the Modern Movement and enquire into whether this was indeed a new area of exploration by twentieth-century architects, or in actuality, an extension and reinvention of an existing occult language, present within the Arts and Crafts Movement.

1.1 William Richard Lethaby: a biographical sketch

Lethaby was born on 17 January 1857 at Barnstaple in North Devon, the son of Richard Pyle Lethaby and Mary Rowe Lethaby. Lethaby's parents were both Bible Christians who were concerned with 'non-conformist religious ideals, reacting against the established church, and with what we should now describe as social work among the deprived' (Fireman, 1975:30). Lethaby's mother is known to have died in 1870, when Lethaby was just thirteen years of age, and it appears that he had a brother and sister who also died (Fireman, 1975:31). Lethaby attended Barnstaple Grammar School and later Barnstaple Literary and Scientific Institution. In 1868 he was attending 'Night Drawing Class' conducted by local architect and Ossianic poet Alexander Lauder (1836–1921). Lauder recognised Lethaby's potential and provided him with architectural training in his offices. In 1878 Lethaby left Barnstaple to work for architect Richard Waite in Duffield near Derby. He left Waite's office after a year

and went to work in Leicester in the practice of T. H. Baker, only returning to leave once more for London. (Rubens, 1986:29). In 1879 Norman Shaw (1831–1912) invited Lethaby to his office to work as chief assistant. Lethaby began finally establishing himself in prominent circles during this time, and his reputation grew. He won a number of prestigious awards, including the *Building News* Design Competition (1877), the Soane Medallion (1879), the Pugin Travelling Scholarship (1880), the Royal Academy Tite Memorial Prize (1881) and the Goldsmiths' Hall Silver Competition (1882 and 1883) (Plaat, 2002b:2).

In May 1883 Lethaby and some other young architects from Shaw's office founded the St George's Art Society to hold monthly discussions on art and architecture. The society consequently played a significant role in establishing both the Architectural Illustration Society and the Art Workers' Guild in 1884. Lethaby did a considerable amount of the preliminary committee work that helped to found the Guild and later, in 1911, became its Master (Rubens, 1986:72). Lethaby also helped found the Art and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888 and eventually became its president; he submitted designs to the 1888 and 1889 shows and contributed essays to the society's publication. Lethaby also exhibited his work at the Royal Academy in 1883, 1884 and 1885. He became a member of William Morris's Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1891 and was elected to the committee two years later, becoming on closer terms with William Morris (1834–1896). During his time working for Shaw, Lethaby made a number of life-long friends including Reginald Blomfield (1856–1942), Walter Maitland, Alfred Powell (1865–1960), Ernest Barnsley (1863–1926), Sidney Barnsley (1865–1926), Ernest Gimson (1864–1919), Richard Weir Schultz (1860–1951), Sidney Cockerell (1867–1962), Detmar Blow (1867–1939), John

Sedding (1838–1916), Richard Phené Spiers (1838–1916) and Philip Webb (1831–1915).

In 1889 Lethaby left Shaw's office to start his own practice on Hart Street (now Bloomsbury Way). In the following year, Lethaby and friends Sidney Barnsley, Blomfield and Gimson founded Kenton and Co., a workshop dedicated to the design and craftsmanship of quality items of furniture. It was also during this time that Lethaby worked on his imaginative illustrations and articles and his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. In 1891 Lethaby gave up his office and moved to 2 Gray's Inn Square, joining his friends Webb, Barnsley and Gimson. It was in this same year that Lethaby received his first independent architectural commission, Avon Tyrrell (1891). This was followed by a handful of other significant commissions, including Melsetter House at Hoy in Orkney (1900), Rysa Lodge and the chapel of St Colm and St Margaret in Orkney (1900), the Eagle Insurance Company Building in Birmingham (1900), High Coxlease in Hampshire (1901) and All Saints Church, Brockhampton, in Herefordshire (1902).

In 1894 Lethaby was appointed Art Inspector for the Technical Education Board of London, and in 1896 he was given joint directorship of the newly founded Central School of Arts and Crafts, alongside sculptor George Frampton (1860–1928) (Rubens, 1986:180–189). In 1903 Lethaby became sole principal of the school and remained there until his retirement in 1911. In 1901 Lethaby was married to Edith Crosby (Rubens, 1986:277). Alongside his work at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, Lethaby continued to contribute to his expansive list of published articles, books and lectures. He also accepted the position of Professor of Ornament and Design at the Royal College of Art in 1901, from which he resigned in 1918, and was appointed as

the Surveyor of Westminster Abbey from 1906 until submitting his resignation in 1928, three years before his death in 1931.²

Throughout his life, Lethaby sought to clarify his thoughts on the subject of architecture – its true meaning and purpose. These are most revealing in his very first and last books published on the topic. Whilst Lethaby spent a lifetime attempting to perfect his initial thesis presented in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, he never abandoned the occult premise that, beyond utility, architecture was created for magical and mystical purposes (Lethaby, 1939:17).

1.2 The occult

The term ‘occult’ will be used repeatedly throughout the thesis. The word is derived from the Latin *occultus*, meaning hidden or concealed. However, when applied at the fin-de-siècle the word, occult, is far more elusive and is hard to define precisely:

The term *occult* ... encompasses such a broad spectrum of beliefs, ideas, and practices that it defies precise definition. It is often applied without qualification to activities as diverse as divination (astrology, palmistry, tarot reading, crystal gazing and so on), sorcery, and black magic (the manipulation of natural forces, often for self-interested purposes), and various kinds of necromancy or spiritualist-related practices. This diversity is underpinned, however, by an implicit acceptance of the idea that reality as we are taught to understand it accounts for only a fraction of the ultimate reality which lies just beyond our immediate senses. It is this hidden reality that the psychic, medium, or magician claims to access, and serious occultists invariably conceive of their endeavours as the study and exploration of an occluded spiritual realm. Nineteenth-century occultism was cast in this mold (Owen, 2004:19).

Even though occultism, spiritualism and mesmerism were amalgamated and not many could differentiate one from the other, there were nuances that set them apart. Occultism involved greater study and examination in a state of complete

² For a detailed account of Lethaby’s life see Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857–1931* (1986) and Fireman, ‘W. R. Lethaby 1857–1931: Notes Towards an Assessment of his Achievements as Architect, Designer, Teacher and Writer’, volume 1 (1975).

consciousness; only through intensive research were occultists able to discover the arcane wisdom they desperately sought. Occultists were required not only to control, but also to understand the phenomena that they were working with. This set the occult apart from mysticism and spiritualism, which were more passive activities that might have been acquired as an innate gift. It could very well have been practised by a medium who had little understanding or control over the process in which they were involved.

The root of occult studies generally lay in ‘ancient wisdom’, but increasingly individuals and occult societies of the nineteenth-century placed emphasis on diverse aspects of the occult. There were those ‘who sought knowledge of or power over secret forces of the universe’ (Owen, 2004:48) and focused on practical occult arts such as ritual magic. Conversely, there were individuals who eschewed practical occultism and ‘aspired to mystical union with the divine’ (Owen, 2004:48). Union with the divine was a foremost aim of all adepts. Occultists repudiated the notion of a transcendent godhead that watched over all creation and instead sought to directly experience the divine: ‘Contact with ultimate reality ... [could] be achieved either through a spontaneous mystical revelation or through some ritual initiation such as those of the mysteries of Eleusis. The possibility of illumination through initiation distinguishes the occult from mysticism and connects it to secret societies such as Masonry’ (Surette, 1993:13). The mystical revelation is said to be preserved by occultists in the form of books and oral traditions but only comprehensible to the enlightened few, hence ‘occult’ to those thus far uninitiated. The distinctive quality and appeal of the occult for seekers, which sets it apart from religion and mysticism, was this secret wisdom, and a ‘belief that throughout human history certain individuals have had intimate contact with the divine and from this contact have gained special

knowledge (wisdom, or gnosis), which they have preserved in a form comprehensible only to the already enlightened and which is passed on in texts whose esoteric interpretation is preserved by secret societies' (Surette, 1993:14).

1.3 Methodology

The current research study will be modelled on previous examples of books and monographs relating individual architects or artists exclusively to the occult. Examples include *Part Seen, Part Imagined: Meaning and Symbolism in the Work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald* (1994) by Timothy Neat, *Symbolism and Sources in the Painting and Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (1996) by Rodger Drew, *Yeats and Alchemy* (1996) by William Gorski, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (2001) by M. E. Warlick, and *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (2009) by Jan Birksted.

There are inherent dangers to a study such as this. However, this cannot inhibit one from exploring the topic of the occult. The problems are defined by Neat, who writes:

The vague and sometimes frightening facts of occult practice are not usually seen as profitable areas of study for any serious artist, and art historians remain sensibly anxious to give themselves and their subject documentary respectability within an academic framework they would like to claim as watertight as good science. Thus they steer clear of mysticism. Despite this there can be no doubt that spiritualism and mysticism of various kinds were of great importance to many of the artists, writers and musicians whose work and discoveries created Modernism and who have so fundamentally shaped Western culture in the twentieth century (Neat, 1994:124).

However, in more recent times the academic study of the occult in relation to modernism has developed and there is now less stigmatism surrounding the subject matter, with numerous studies being published, most recently *The Occult World* (2015), edited by Christopher Partridge, and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (2012), edited by Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Wilburn.

The current research has been the result of collecting primary and secondary data available on Lethaby and analysing it through a limited occult perspective, to provide a narrow but penetrating examination into his affiliation with the occult. The study has taken into consideration Lethaby's published work, notebooks, sketchbooks, diary, letters and drawings, and has examined his completed work. The research has also consulted accounts of the architect by his close friends and students. This has allowed for an encompassing depiction of the architect and has assisted in identifying anomalies in his character that have thus far remained unexplained. In order to assist the reader comprehend the complexity of symbols and symbolic language, semiotics of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1918) and Carl Jung's (1875-1961) theory of symbols are utilised as analytical tools.

Chapter two of the thesis will provide an overview of the existing scholarship on Lethaby to demonstrate how inconsistencies in Lethaby's nature have been highlighted to some extent but have never been fully explored. This will be followed by an introduction to the spiritual *Zeitgeist* of the turn of the nineteenth-century, in order to place Lethaby in the milieu of his time and allow the reader to come to grips with the environment that he was exposed to. Chapter three will then present the theory of symbols. This will clarify Lethaby's contact with symbolic theory and also provide the reader with a foundational understanding of symbolic language that will assist in fully appreciating future chapters that detail symbols within Lethaby's work. Chapter four will outline a number of case studies, including drawings by Lethaby and his completed works. These will be analysed comprehensively, and their magic and alchemical features will be extracted and explained. Finally, chapter five will look to Lethaby's legacy, showing how his interest in the occult and magic also penetrated the

work of his contemporaries and how the occult continued to influence future architects of the Modern Movement.

The ensuing research will present an alternative Lethaby: a Lethaby who is carefully hidden behind the cover of the prevailing narrative presented by friends and colleagues. Through the case study analyses, it is possible to discern vestiges that point to a deeper degree of both knowledge and intent on Lethaby's part, supporting the central thesis that Lethaby was indeed fascinated by and surreptitiously utilising occult symbolism within his work.

2. Lethaby, Occultism and Symbolism: A Twenty-first-century Perspective

2.1 Lethaby through the eyes of modern scholarship

Despite Lethaby's authority over architectural matters during the nineteenth-century in England, there is very little written about the architect and his work. Lethaby held vast sway over architectural decisions on the restoration of ancient buildings, contemporary building design and also future architecture through his work in architectural education, as an Art Inspector to the Technical Education Board in London, as Principal of the Central School of Arts and Crafts and as Professor of Ornament and Design at the Royal College of Art. However, much like his master, Philip Webb, Lethaby shunned any recognition for his work and preferred to keep his personal life concealed from the public eye, choosing to have much of his correspondence destroyed after his death. Lethaby's desire for privacy may, like Webb's, have contributed to his being overlooked and neglected by modern scholarship.

Godfrey Rubens is one of the foremost scholars on the life and work of Lethaby. Rubens's published monograph, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857–1931* (1986), is one of the most comprehensive accounts on the architect available for a wide readership. Another published book, *W. R. Lethaby 1857–1931: Architecture, Design and Education* (1984), is a companion volume to the exhibition of the same name held at the Central School of Arts and Crafts from 22 October to 17 November 1984 and later at the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum from 22 December 1984 to 2 February 1985. The publication is a compilation of articles on Lethaby by several scholars, edited by Sylvia Backemeyer and Theresa Gronberg. Alongside these published sources, there are also shorter journal articles and dedications written about

the architect as well as a handful of theses focused upon Lethaby. This section will introduce some of the key works on the architect, paying particular attention to research that considers Lethaby's occult/esoteric nature. This will allow the reader to place the current study within the existing field of research, and consequently to appreciate the substantial gap in research on Lethaby that the author is attempting to fill.

Irene Vernon Fireman's unpublished thesis 'W. R. Lethaby 1857–1931: Notes Towards an Assessment of His Achievements as Architect, Designer, Teacher and Writer' (1975) provides a detailed overview of Lethaby's personal life as well as his professional life. Fireman writes about Lethaby's character, personality and philosophy and then moves on to consider him as an architect, designer, teacher and writer. These sections are all dealt with on a chapter-by-chapter basis, providing a very clear and concise biography of the architect. Later, in 1986, Rubens published his monograph on Lethaby, which indirectly builds on Fireman's research. However, Rubens does not solely provide a detailed biography as Fireman does, but offers a more critical study, delving deeper into the character of Lethaby. Rubens considers Lethaby's work as being representative of the second generation of the English Arts and Crafts Movement. Rubens also acknowledges the esoteric and occult tendencies in some of Lethaby's earlier work. He states:

[W]hile Lethaby's attempt to formulate a rational theory of symbolism was perfectly successful, he could not escape the influence of the contemporary *fin de siècle* climate, with its wide but superficial interest in mysticism, which affected his style. In his attempts to convey his enchantment with archaic secrets, his style became in some passages overcharged with imaginative phrases, and his meaning, perhaps half deliberately, obscured (Rubens, 1986:82).

Rubens is not particularly encouraging of Lethaby's interest in mysticism. When scrutinising Lethaby's drawing of *A Beryl Shrine*, he concedes to Lethaby's fascination with symbolism at this stage in his development but is derisive of its

enduring impact on the architect, instead declaring that ‘the designs and drawings discussed here, however interesting and successful, could be seen as purely exotic adventures, attempts to introduce some “strangeness in the proportion”’ (Rubens, 1986:65). Despite the fact that Rubens does not endorse this aspect of Lethaby’s character, he is obliged to recall it on various occasions throughout the book due to its prominence in Lethaby’s work. Rubens explains:

[T]hough he demanded a ‘positive’, intelligible architecture, there is clear evidence of an important and fascinating esoteric element in several of his works, mostly occasioned by his researches for that book. Two motifs of this nature are part of the façade of Avon Tyrrell: the bellcote ... and the principal chimney stack with its attendant birds ... In All Saints’ church, too, though Christian symbolism of course predominates, it mingles with more ancient and occult symbolism (Rubens, 1986:164–167).

Although Rubens may be somewhat dismissive of the importance of such ideas for Lethaby, the study is one of the first published works to bring to light the fundamental role that esoteric and occult symbolism played in Lethaby’s built and written work.

Trevor Garnham is another author who broaches the issue of Lethaby’s ‘sympathy with a mystical attitude to life and nature’ (Garnham, 1980:53). In his 1980 dissertation, ‘William Lethaby and the Problem of Style in late 19th Century English Architecture’, Garnham briefly acknowledges a few sources which reveal Lethaby’s interest in the mystical, including the drawing of *A Beryl Shrine*, a sketch of Edward Burne-Jones’s (1833-1898) *Love and Pilgrim*, and a strange and supernatural poem written by Lethaby. Garnham also explicitly discusses the nineteenth-century fascination with spiritualism and mysticism, and considers that during the 1880s Lethaby became entangled in the spiritual milieu, influencing the ‘development of his mind before his 30th year when he set up for himself in 1889’ (Garnham, 1980:144). Garnham introduces the Theosophical Society and creates a direct link between its members and the Fabian Society. Garnham suggests that theosophical influences

permeated the Fabian Society and thus made a direct impression on Lethaby, who was indeed a Fabian (Garnham, 1980:53). Another concept examined fleetingly by Garnham is Lethaby's interest in James Frazer (1854-1941) and his discussions on sympathetic and homeopathic magic, whereby a desired effect was sought by imitating a certain object. This is related back to Lethaby and his use of symbols imitating things in nature (Garnham, 1980:58). Whilst Garnham does not elaborate further on these ideas, his study makes novel propositions for future research on Lethaby connected to Theosophy, spiritualism and magic. Hence, the current thesis builds upon this existing research.

Deborah van der Plaat is a leading scholar on Lethaby, having written her thesis and published a number of articles on the architect. Plaat's principal concern is Victorian mythography as opposed to mysticism, and her research on Lethaby is largely focused on myth and the reconciliation of dichotomies. Plaat studies the opposition between rational knowledge and artistic imagination, or the 'known and imagined'; she utilises Matthew Arnold's terms 'Hellene' and 'Hebraic' or 'sweetness and light' to determine Lethaby's position between these two polarities. Plaat also employs the *Hypnerotomachia* to support her thesis. She does not allude to the alchemical nature of the manuscript, but makes use of the text to authenticate her thesis of the 'known and imagined' and the desire to take the middle path which straddles two disparate and opposed traditions. The middle path is considered by Plaat to be the syncretic model that Lethaby sought for modern architecture. Although Plaat does not directly associate Lethaby with occultism, there is mention of Lethaby's 'theory of modernism' in relation to the Bauhaus and Theosophy. Plaat explains that whilst modern architecture and the Bauhaus have been mistaken by many as extremely rational enterprises breaking away from tradition, the presence of Theosophy and

spiritual practices within such environments, as highlighted in Rykwert's *The Dark Side of the Bauhaus* (1970), exemplify the continued emphasis on the past and tradition (Plaat, 2002b:194). Plaat therefore considers the spiritual and occult practices at the Bauhaus as part of a long-lasting tradition rather than a taboo, and something that Lethaby would have endorsed in order to achieve harmony between the architecture of the past and of the future.

Joanna Merwood's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth: Modern Symbolism in the Writing of William Richard Lethaby* (2004) is the first essay to acknowledge Lethaby's fascination with occultism, magic and alchemy overtly. Merwood recognises Lethaby's captivation with architecture as 'embodied magic'. This is emphasised in her synopsis of *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*: 'Saturated with references to precious stones and metals, cosmological classification, and magic numbers, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* attempts to demonstrate the deep alchemical significance of architectural symbolism through literary reference' (Merwood, 2004:187).

Merwood succinctly introduces figures such as Frazer, François Lenormant (1837-1883) and Éliphas Lévi (1810-1875) to present Lethaby's reading on magical matters. This allows the reader to discern to some extent Lethaby's comprehension of magic spells, rituals, totems, occult symbols and alchemy (Merwood, 2004:183–185). Merwood puts forward that Lethaby's belief in a living architecture could be compared to Frazer's religious totems, which are not only an object but a receptacle of the soul, with occult and demonic powers. This theory is used to explain the animation of inert architecture by Lethaby, with ceilings like the sky and floors like the sea. Architecture thus becoming an 'instrument of magic'.

Through the paper Merwood reveals Lethaby's understanding of ancient magic as an original science. This discussion is advanced by considering how Lethaby created a historical continuity in his writing, between the magical architecture of the past and modern scientific architecture. In relation to this, towards the latter half of the paper Merwood introduces the idea of a changing emphasis in the terms employed by Lethaby later in his career. Lethaby appears to move away from his more romantic understanding of magic in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* to a more psychological one in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*. Lethaby's language is indicative of this, becoming considerably more sanitised and scientific to articulate his thoughts on magic, and employing words such as 'psychology' and 'unconscious'.

Merwood's paper is a vital contribution to the field of research on Lethaby. Merwood is the first to analyse Lethaby in specific relation to the occult and alchemy. Whilst the paper is short in length and hence not particularly comprehensive due to this limitation, it views Lethaby through an unfamiliar lens. Merwood successfully places Lethaby in the spiritual *Zeitgeist* of the nineteenth-century and attempts to appreciate the impact of such an environment on the architect and his written work. The paper is therefore a catalyst for the current study, which endeavours to examine in more detail many of the ideas raised by Merwood and consequently to generate greater awareness of this aspect of Lethaby's work and character.

Vaughan Hart's paper 'William Lethaby and the "Holy Spirit": A Reappraisal of the Eagle Insurance Company Building, Birmingham' (1993) is another study that considers the esoteric nature of Lethaby's work. It is significant as it is the first paper to provide a detailed analysis of one of Lethaby's built works, attempting to describe

its use of magic symbolism.³ Through his paper Hart aims to illustrate how Lethaby practically realised his theory of ‘pagan development’ set out in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* to his later Eagle Insurance Company Building (1900). Hart examines the building façade in depth and relates key features of the façade to Lethaby’s book and esoteric symbolism. Hart appreciates the didactic nature of Lethaby’s symbolism and correlates this with Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) and the French symbolism movement, which ‘turned to mythical and magical themes’ (Hart, 1993:151). Hart, like Merwood, acknowledges Lethaby’s psychological understanding of symbolism, asserting that ‘Lethaby anticipated some of the preoccupations of Carl Jung, for example ... his interest in Mandala designs’ (Hart, 1993:148). This paper has again been influential in the current analysis, particularly in regard to the case study section.

There are a number of other studies that refer in passing to Lethaby’s esoteric or mystical nature but none that are markedly detailed or ground-breaking. Ikem Okoye, in his paper ‘William Lethaby: A Reassessment’ (1989), briefly alludes to the symbolic and esoteric qualities found at Melsetter House, which he states have consequently resulted in Lethaby receiving a reputation as both an esoteric and a romantic. Julian Holder, in his dissertation ‘A Thought Behind Form: Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, and Its Place in Architectural Theory 1880–1910’ (1986), makes reference to Freemasonry in connection with Lethaby but does not delve further into the topic: ‘Indeed the place of Masonry within the Symbolic architecture of the 1890s and the early part of this century is a matter of some interest and relationship to the present study but cannot be dealt with now’ (Holder, 1986:34). Shams Eldien Eissawy

³ However, Hart utilises the term ‘ancient’ as opposed to ‘magic’ when discussing Lethaby’s ornamentation.

Naga, in 'William Richard Lethaby: The Romantic Modernist' (1992), writes that 'Lethaby's interest in mysticism was part of a general fin-de-siècle interest in symbolism. The Décadents ... a group of writers and artists connected with symbolism, had a profound effect on literature and art. The Décadents regarded symbolism as the expression of an idea; they introduced objects merely for the purposes of such expression' (Naga, 1992:142). Finally, Charlotte Vestal Brown, in her 1974 thesis 'W. R. Lethaby: Architecture as Process. Implications for a Methodology of History and Criticism', puts forward a concise point that will be developed during the present study. Brown proposes that 'what Lethaby really wanted to reform was not only art, but society' (Brown, 1974:131). The reformation of society through art was a significant aim of many avant-garde artists and architects. It appears that Lethaby desired to accomplish this through his use of symbolic language. This intent is clarified further by Lethaby himself, when he writes in *Form in Civilisation* (1922):

The outward and the made must always be exact pictures of the mind of the makers. Not only is this so at any given stage, but it is so all the more in a going concern, for the outward is always reacting again on the inward, so that the concrete becomes a mould for the spiritual. Man builds towns so that that towns shall build his sons. As the old Greek said, 'The city teaches the man'⁴ (Lethaby, 1922:1).

The current research will investigate the symbols Lethaby chose to employ, and aim to understand why Lethaby exploited the symbolic forms that he did, questioning whether they were in actuality intended to reform not only art but society as a whole.

⁴ 'the old Greek' is a reference by Lethaby to Simonides, one of the early Greek poets.

2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle (focused on spiritual, political and social issues)

During the nineteenth-century, Victorian Britain experienced extensive urban and industrial growth. This growth was coupled with a decline in organised religion, which encountered the challenges of increasing secularism and scientific advancement. In contrast, esoteric and occult societies experienced a revival of interest on a scale not witnessed since the sixteenth century.

Modern scholarship on Victorian Britain has, since the 1990s, slowly brought to light the extent to which the occult and spiritualism were central cultural forces that infiltrated all spheres of Victorian life, from family and friendships to social organisations (Lipsey, 1988: xxi). In recent years many books and hundreds of articles have been published on Victorian occult practices, from studies on Theosophy, mesmerism, and spiritualism to alchemy and magic. The burgeoning field of research on Victorian spiritualism and occultism demonstrates the popularity of such themes in current research and the receptiveness to these themes of eager audiences.

The table rappings heard by two young girls living in New York in 1848, was generally and superficially thought to be the trigger behind the modern occult revival in Britain. Katherine and Margret Fox, twelve and thirteen years old respectively, were living in a house that was allegedly haunted. After moving into the house the sisters supposedly heard knockings and rappings, which they discovered were communications by a spirit that haunted the house. Using rappings, the sisters were able to establish a code through which to talk to the spirit. The Fox sisters became local and national celebrities, and within two years the girls were famous and thousands became involved in spirit rappings. The spiritualist movement grew and spread to Europe and Britain, being espoused by avant-garde art and literary circles, middle-class professionals and academics, and also the lay public (Owen, 1989: 18).

The proliferation of all things occult was assisted by the several occult periodicals in circulation at the time. The growth of spiritualism in the late 1840s and the 1850s in America, and following this in Britain, could in part be attributed to the rapidly growing periodical network (Morrison, 2008:6). Occultists embraced the novel print culture and commercial printing, utilising it to support their cause. The occult journals exploited the latest developments in print media, for example linotype, inexpensive paper, half-tones and inexpensive processes for printing plates and colour images. The journals were therefore made to look visually appealing and attracted vast public attention but were, nevertheless, produced relatively cheaply: ‘The occult periodical press came into being to publicize occult ideas, to support emerging occult institutions and settle disputes within a counter-public sphere of occultism, and to legitimate occult knowledge in the dominant public sphere in quasi-scientific terms of validation’ (Morrison, 2008:1). On the face of it, publishing occult knowledge and making it available for mass consumption would seem a contradiction of sorts. However, occult institutions saw the periodicals as the exoteric dimension of their work. Occultists generally made a distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric. The esoteric would constitute the hidden or unseen knowledge only made available to a few adepts or initiates, leading to self-transformation and union with the divine. The exoteric, on the other hand, would comprise the overt components, taking place in the public dimension in the form of rituals and so forth. This outer facet was capable of spreading the seed of truth far and wide. In spite of this, whilst the periodicals were able to generate mass public interest in occult topics and esoteric wisdom, they were unable to bestow admittance into the esoteric sphere, which was only accessible through the inner consciousness. Some of the most distinguished periodicals that advanced the occult cause during the fin-de-siècle were *The Occult Review*, *The Quest*, *The*

Unknown World, The Equinox, Lucifer, The Theosophical Review, The Theosophist, The Irish Theosophist, The Theosophical Quarterly and *The Path*. These were designed to spread occult wisdom, to support occult studies and institutions, and finally and most importantly to sanitise occult knowledge, providing esoteric claims with scientific legitimacy, ready to be assimilated by the modern world.

2.2.1 Sanitising the occult

The sanitisation of spiritual and occult ideas was seen to be imperative in order for the public to accept the claims advanced by occultists. Because of this there was a great push to write up findings in line with the conventions of scientific publications, and including illustrations of the structures, charts and tables. This was the case in Annie Besant (1847-1933) and C. W. Leadbeater's (1854-1934) *Lucifer*, and in Aleister Crowley's (1875-1947) *Equinox*.⁵

Owing to spiritualistic activities having a tangible aspect, some considered it feasible to examine and measure phenomena using scientific apparatus and tools. Means of measurement that were suggested included 'thermometers, self-recording photographic cylinders, and ultra-red illumination ... used in séances to measure and register the changes in temperature of séance participants' (Noakes, 2012:46). Such experiments consequently resulted in the formation of a 'spiritual science' that closely resembled experimental psychology. It was important for spiritualist to present themselves as scientific and rational so that they were not threatened by the new scientific discoveries of the period as Christianity had been. The growing scepticism towards biblical authority meant that spiritualists had to find alternative methods to

⁵ Lethaby too altered his original, more romantic tone, as witnessed in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, to emphasise a more scientifically oriented approach in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*.

showcase their spiritual ideology. This was achieved by providing scientific evidence for their beliefs:

[B]elievers hoped that a scientific epistemology would verify the materiality of the unseen world whilst at the same time exposing the paucity of a militant scientism which espoused a barren materialist philosophy. Spiritualists opposed what they regarded as the gross materialism of an age in which things of the spirit no longer had relevance, but proposed a new metaphysical cosmology based upon an (albeit rarefied) form of matter (Owen, 1989:vii).

The scientific outlook of modern esotericism was therefore greater than just scientific terminology and was an ongoing struggle endeavouring to consolidate the worlds of ethereal spirit and physical matter (Goodrick-Clarke, 2008:235). However, taking this path may have inevitably hampered spiritualists' overall progress, with psychical researchers discovering fraudulent activity and publicly defaming mediums. Psychical researchers were also known to impose considerable restrictions upon mediums during controlled séances, rendering them inert and consequently invalidating their claims.

The Society of Psychical Research was founded in 1882 by English philosopher Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900). The society was set up to objectively investigate spiritual phenomena, the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers that lay latent in man:

Under the auspices of psychical research and in the names of 'progress, science and modernity', eminent chemists and physicists, philosophers, philologists, biologists and embryologists conducted boundary-work across scientific fields and realms. If philosophy was the art of dying, then psychical research was the means of attaining knowledge of what happens next (Kontou and Willburn, 2012:7)

The society comprised some of the most distinguished figures of the day, including Andrew Lang (1844–1912), John Ruskin⁶ and Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), emphasising the solemnity with which the occult was investigated during the fin-de-

⁶ Ruskin, Rossetti and other members of their inner circle were known to attend séances and engage in spiritualist experimentation (Owen, 1989:20).

siècle. Prominent members of the Theosophical Society and leading spiritualists also joined the Society of Psychical Research (Owen, 2004:33).

2.2.2 Key occult influences in Victorian Britain

Symptomatic of the occult revival was a growing interest in medieval and Renaissance Christian mysticism, as well as in esoteric readings of the world's sacred literatures, particularly those of the East. There was increased exposure to Eastern religious texts during the century. Translations and interpretations of sacred texts by scholars such as Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) and Andrew Lang made Eastern religion and philosophy widely available to the English-speaking public for the first time. The 'Theosophical Society thus emerged at a time when discussion of the world's major religions and exposure to Eastern sacred texts were part of educated Victorian cultural life' (Owen, 2004:30). Lethaby is a prime example of this exposure, referring to Müller, Lang, Frazer and numerous other scholars on several occasions in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* as having studied Eastern texts and culture.

The Theosophical Society was the most renowned of the occult societies in late Victorian Britain. The Society was established in 1875 in New York by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). Blavatsky was an enigmatic figure; she claimed to have travelled the world and studied in Tibet with 'Mahatmas' or holy men, who had chosen her to 'reveal the secret esoteric teachings that lay at the root of the world's religions' (Owen, 2004:31). Her teachings incorporated Western occultism and Buddhist as well as Hindu philosophy. She published *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), two popular works that brought to light the fundamental secrets behind all world religions and philosophy. The combination of Eastern wisdom and the association with secret

traditions was incredibly appealing to Victorian society and attracted many new and loyal adherents to the Theosophical Society. Blavatsky, in contrast to the members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, envisaged Theosophy as a metaphysical and spiritual path that rejected practical occult arts, preferring the study of ancient wisdom to develop the spiritual nature and gain mystical experience. This said, due to increasing pressure from its members, the Theosophical Society did in 1888 establish a private Esoteric Section that dabbled in the occult arts.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was one of the foremost magical orders of the Victorian period. The order attracted many eminent personalities, including William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), Henry Marriot Paget (1857–1936), Mina Bergson (1865–1928), E. Nesbit (1858–1924) and the notorious Aleister Crowley. The Order also drew in reputable middle-class individuals such as doctors, lawyers and the heads of family firms. The Order emphasised the practical techniques of ritual and ceremonial magic, and learning how to control and manipulate the invisible forces that permeated the world: ‘Occult knowledge gained through learning and direct experience was what the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn offered’ (Owen, 2004:4). Candidates for the order were chosen through personal recommendations, but only a few of these were ever advanced to the stage of the higher magical arts, which was reserved for only the very best hand-picked initiates. This preference for applied magic, set it apart from other groups of the time such as the Theosophical Society, which for the main part eschewed practical occultism.

Éliphas Lévi was one of the first, if not the first, major figure of the occult revival in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Lethaby was familiar with Lévi, as is clear from his mention of Lévi in the chapter ‘The Planetary Spheres’ in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. When discussing the relationship of planets to their

colour counterparts, he writes: ‘The significance of colour is thus given by a modern magician (Eliphas Levi)’ (Lethaby, 1994:121). Lethaby’s subsequent quote detailing the significance of colour is taken from Lévi’s *Transcendental Magic*. The book was initially published in two volumes between 1854 and 1856, and the well-known English translation by Arthur Edward Waite (1857-1942) was published in 1896. *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* was first published in 1891; this would suggest that Lethaby had read or had access to the French version of the book, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, and not to the ensuing English translation.

Another mention by Lethaby of Éliphas Lévi is found in his 1886 notebook. This reference to Lévi is accompanied by a sketch, seen in Figure 1, of the magic square⁷ of Saturn and also the word ‘abracadabra’ written several times in a descending arrangement (Lethaby, 1886). The magic square of Saturn appears in Lévi’s book discussed above, in which he writes that ‘[t]he tarot alone interprets the magic squares of Agrippa and Paracelsus’ (Lévi and Waite, 1958:383). The writing of the word ‘abracadabra’ by Lethaby in such a specific arrangement is once more found in Lévi’s *Transcendental Magic*, accompanied by the following text: ‘The magic triangle of pagan theosophists was the celebrated ABRACADABRA, to which they attributed extraordinary virtues’ (Lévi and Waite, 1958:223). After describing the significance of the letters, Lévi ends by proclaiming:

‘He that hath understanding’ – that is, the key of kabalistic numbers – ‘let him count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred three score and six.’ It is, in fact, the decade of Pythagoras

⁷ The magic square is an arrangement of numbers where the sum of each row, column and diagonal are the same. There are seven traditional magic squares with a corresponding planet/deity, each possessing different colour qualities and attributes. Magic squares are considered by some to possess magical and supernatural powers and are used as talismans and for summoning spirits/demons.

multiplied by itself and added to the sum of the triangular Pantacle of ABRACADABRA: it is thus the sum of all Magic in the ancient world, the entire programme of human genius, which the Divine Genius of the Gospel sought to absorb or transplant (Lévi and Waite, 1958:224).

Lévi impelled the introduction of Western esotericism into the modern era. His published books on magic included *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (*Transcendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual*) (1854–1856), *Histoire de la magie* (*The History of Magic*) (1860) and *La clef des grands mystères* (*The Key to the Mysteries*) (1861). Lévi comprehensively explored ideas on transcendental magic, discussing the magical virtues of cosmological, Gnostic and Masonic as well as Taoist symbolism. Lévi's approach combined theories of mesmerism with his own philosophy. He was also the first to correlate the tarot with magical symbolism, which later became a popular and accepted theme in modern occultism. Lévi visited London first in 1854 and later in 1861 and was admired by many prominent occultists of the time: Blavatsky makes mention of Lévi's work repeatedly in her books; MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918), the co-founder of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, referred to him as the 'great qabalist'; A. E. Waite translated his major works into English; and Aleister Crowley considered himself to be the reincarnation of Lévi (Goodrick-Clarke, 2008:195). Lethaby's obvious interest in Lévi's work on magic is revealing and immediately generates a new narrative for Lethaby's character, which is rather more enigmatic than previous research has led us to believe. This dimension of Lethaby will be uncovered further as the research unfolds.

2.2.3 Occultism and socialism

The years 1880 to 1914 were critical in Britain's development as a 'modern' nation. These were years of vast social and political change, and it was during this time that occultism gripped the nation. Modern Victorian Britain was becoming increasingly

disenchanted with the rational rhetoric that was being ardently promulgated. This led to a widespread revolt against rationalism and subsequently resulted in the occult revival. The occult revival saw Victorian society take on a transcendental view of social life. This was once more a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. Transcendentalism privileged 'intuitive spiritual experience and legitimated a mystical oneness with God and the natural world' (Owen, 2004:117). The fin-de-siècle was accompanied by a proliferation of new religious movements and experimental ideas. However, it was the 1890s that was the turning point, and it was during this decade that the revival got seriously under way. By the time of the First War World 'those with a finger on the cultural pulse of the nation acknowledged that a general "spiritual renaissance" and "mystical revival" were part of the general milieu and mark of the times' (Owen, 2004:17).

There were many reasons behind the mass adoption of occultism. It was the age of reform and revolution. The Industrial Revolution, with its advances in science and technology, led many to question and re-evaluate their understanding of the world around them and their fundamental belief system. There were countless men and women who felt 'fear and insecurity in the face of a Godless world', which sent them 'scrambling for religious alternatives' (Owen, 2004:27). Many left the restricted world view that they encountered in Christianity in favour of the more progressive outlook of the occult. Social reform was also a significant contributing factor behind the popularity of the occult societies; it is therefore no coincidence that many occultists were also socialists:

It was considered perfectly feasible at the turn of the century to adhere to a communitarian vision and socialist principles while espousing a belief in an unseen spirit world, a cosmic mind, and Eastern religion, and many did. This potent mix remained a feature of both progressive thought and 'mysticism' into the 1900s (Owen, 2004:25).

Campaigners for social transformation were normally simultaneously concerned with the place of the spirit in modernity and deeply drawn to ideas of the spiritual regeneration of society:

[M]en and women [who] were well-to-do and well connected...were also philanthropic and liberal, and their work unexpectedly sustained the original link between paranormal interests and social experiment which turned esoteric quests such as psychic research and Spiritualism into a nursery of emancipatory change in education, politics, women's status, and the approach and enterprise of scientific knowledge itself (Warner, 2006:239).

This is demonstrated most lucidly when the Fabian Society members list is scrutinised. Lethaby became a member of the Fabian Society in the 1880s (Fireman, 1975:58; Garnham, 1980:53; Ward, 1957:222). Preceding this, he was attending meetings and actively recruiting members to the Labour Emancipation League (Rubens, 1986:79). Writing of his socialism in correspondence with Harry Hardy Peach (1874–1936), Lethaby declares: 'my own socialism I believe is an idea and hope – a religion' (Lethaby, 1926). During the 1880s membership of the Fabian Society was limited, comprising around forty members in total (Garnham, 1980:53). It is therefore likely that most members would have known one another, some more personally than others. Lethaby's involvement in the Society, with its high-profile personalities, places him at the very centre of social and simultaneously occult reform. One of the foremost members of the Fabian Society was Annie Besant, who was a Fabian and went on to become the head of the Theosophical Society. Besant's close friend George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was also a member of the Fabian Society. Shaw was on close terms with Lethaby, as Noel Rooke has identified in his article 'The Work of Lethaby, Webb and Morris' (Rooke, 1950:167–168) and as can also be witnessed in Lethaby's correspondence, where he mentions Shaw to his close friend Cockerell (Meynell, 1940:131). Cockerell was an intimate of Shaw and William Butler Yeats, as can be attested by his many letters to both men published in Viola Meynell's *Friends of a*

Lifetime: Letters to Sydney Carlyle Cockerell (1940) and *The Best of Friends: Further Letters to Sydney Carlyle Cockerell* (1956).

Shaw was familiar with the work of Blavatsky and attended meetings of the Society for Psychical Research with his Fabian friends (Owen, 2004:24). At one point Shaw was in a relationship with Florence Farr (1860–1917). Farr was known to be ‘established with the artistic Bedford Park set, mixing with the socialists who moved in William Morris’s circle’⁸ (Owen, 2004:65). She became an initiate of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1890 and later an advanced adept within the second order of the Golden Dawn. Later, William Butler Yeats and Farr also became lovers. Other prominent members of the Fabian Society included Herbert Burrows (1845–1922), who later joined the Theosophical Society, Holbrook Jackson (1874–1948) and Alfred Richard Orage (1873–1934). The latter two were both initially co-editors of the *New Age* journal that promoted Nietzschean philosophy and mystical topics as well as socialist ideas. Orage was also an overt member of the Theosophical Society, joining in 1896 (Owen, 2004:25).

Many who had occult propensities preferred not be directly linked with any society and therefore did not become fully fledged members of a particular society. There were several contributing factors, including the cost of membership, anonymity, discretion and spiritualist labelling. The preference of many to keep their occult lives

⁸ Associations between anarchists, socialists and spiritualists were quite common in London’s bohemian communities like Bedford Park from the 1880s ((Beaumont, 2012:169). Interestingly, it was Norman Shaw who was responsible for designing most of the house types found at Bedford Park (Muthesius and Sharp, 1979:31).

secret makes it difficult to gauge the number of people who actually attended and were involved in meetings and séances⁹ (Owen, 1989:25).

The idea of a utopian brotherhood was a central tenet of both occultism and socialism. The yearning for imminent social and political change brought on by some apocalyptic event was shared amongst socialists and occultists alike. The approach of a new century promised a departure from the old world order in favour of an enlightened new age. However, when social change was not as immediate as many hoped, occult groups such as the Theosophical Society became an increasingly appealing option for disillusioned social reformists, and ‘spiritualism came to substitute for socialism’ (Beaumont, 2012:177). The occult offered socialists a vision of a reformed society that eradicated materialism, poverty, overwork and commercialism and instead endorsed individual fulfilment. The reformation of society was intimately related to a spiritualised social consciousness, with Blavatsky insisting that ‘if spiritual self-education remains the primary concern of reformists, corrupt laws will simply collapse’ (Beaumont, 2012:177).

The correlation between social and the spiritual reform, could be seen to be endorsed by Lethaby. Lethaby was an advocate of social reform but believed that a meaningful or ‘magic’ architecture was the vehicle through which this reform could be accomplished intuitively. Lethaby proposed that ‘buildings were not only for ritual purposes, but they themselves were embodied magic’ (Lethaby, 1956a:147), and these buildings spoke through ‘a code of symbols ... inextricably bound up with a people’s thoughts about God and the universe’ (Lethaby, 1994:12). Lethaby attempted to

⁹ It could be conjectured that Lethaby was involved, in some capacity, with the occult societies of the nineteenth-century. However, his preference for anonymity and privacy may have been the reason that he did not officially join any one spiritualist or occult society.

decipher the symbolic codes in order to produce a modern architecture with profound meaning that was able to 'aid life and train it, 'so that beauty may flow into the soul like a breeze' (Lethaby, 1994:16).

3. General Symbolic Theory

Whilst analysing the work of Lethaby and other architects and artists of the fin-de-siècle, it is important to keep in mind how topical ideas on symbolic theory were. Symbols were applied with intent and consisted of multiple meanings. The following section will consider key figures such as Charles Sanders Peirce and Carl Jung, and theoretical frameworks such as semiotics that were related to symbolism during the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, to provide a brief overview of the topic. This will also include a summary of magic symbols, which, without doubt, pervaded the *Zeitgeist*. The later part of the discussion will highlight and introduce figures and frameworks that had a more direct bearing on Lethaby and were referenced by him on several occasions in his work.

3.1 Semiotics: the study of signs and symbols

The ensuing discussion of the theory of signs and symbolism will assist the reader to fully grasp the magnitude of symbols and symbolic language. Whilst Lethaby may have had no direct contact with these theories, they are still useful as an instrument through which to analyse his use of symbolic language. Hence, they will also be utilised later in the study when examining symbols found in Lethaby's work, in particular the theories of Carl Jung. Jung wrote extensively on alchemical symbolism and its underlying psychological implications (Jung and Hull, 1968). He thus proves to be an indispensable source when attempting to comprehend the deeper significance of alchemical symbolism. Lethaby appreciated the psychological dimension of symbolism, as is evidenced in *Architecture, Nature and Magic* and his reading of Wilhelm Worringer's (1881–1965) 'Art as Human Psychology' in *Form in Gothic* (1927) (Lethaby, 1956a:146). Therefore to allow the reader to lucidly comprehend

some possible hidden or obscured meanings within Lethaby's work, Jung's ideas will be explored.

Peirce, produced some of the most distinctive and innovative work on the theory of signs and semiotics. The nineteenth-century philosopher believed that:

[b]oth artist and scientist 'solve' the problem posed by perception – the one by representing it mimetically, the other by reducing it to a formal identity through abduction. It follows that the value of a work of art is not in the meaning we attach to it. The attributed meaning actually neutralizes the work of art. The truth of the work of art is the truth of the semiotic process it brings about. The work of art gives room to individuality, to non-programmed action. Thus the work of art gives individuality its form: the form of semiosis (Heusden, 1996:245).

This semiotic process requires, according to Peirce, three essential elements. First there is the sign; this sign must stand for something, and this is the object; lastly, the sign must create an effect in the interpreter, which is called the interpretant (Fitzgerald, 1966:40). An interpretant is, in effect, a second representation of the same thing. It is the thought that occurs following the sign, thus generating another sign to be interpreted. This associationism is what gives meaning to signs. However, 'there is no guarantee that two users of the sign will share the same range of interpretants and hence no reason to think they take it in exactly the same sense. Nor is it necessary that they have the same interpretants in mind. Communication requires only that they agree on enough of them' (Meyers, 1996:25).

This agreement leads the interpreter to the object. Signs themselves make reference to an object, and all interpretants and consequent signs refer the interpreter back to the object in question. The 'object is not a pragmatic addition to the sign, it is what makes the sign be a sign' (Joswick, 1996:96), and even though the sign is unable to express its object, it may describe it or indicate it in some way through which the object can be found.

Peirce held that only things which pointed beyond themselves could be considered as signs. He divided signs into three different categories: icons, indices and symbols. A sign which stands for something because of its resemblance to that thing is termed an *icon*. If there is a direct physical connection between the sign and the thing signified, such as smoke with fire, then this sign is an *index*. Finally, if the mind associates the sign with its object in what appears an arbitrary way, the sign is a *symbol*. Peirce maintained that symbols constituted the class of genuine signs with a triadic relationship. The symbol is the most taxing of the three signs due to this arbitrary nature, and it provides little or no cuing support for its referent. The symbol affects

the images, the concepts and the actions of the interpreter. 'The being of a symbol consists in the real fact that something surely will be experienced if certain conditions be satisfied. Namely, it will influence the thought and conduct of its interpreter' ... The law, which is the primary meaning of symbol, operates in such a way that upon the hearing or seeing of a token of the symbol, the interpreter will associate a mental icon with the objects which are denoted by the context in which the symbol is used. (Fitzgerald, 1966:63).

The power of the symbol would therefore be relative to the power of association in the mind of the interpreter; the stronger the associations, the more powerful the interpretants consequently produced. In a wider sense, semiotics 'is all about pattern: how things which at first glance appear to be unrelated actually form part of a system of interrelating parts' (Barnard, 2000:127). Understanding these broader connections and invisible structures is dealt with in theories of Structuralism.

The application of semiotics theory within buildings had infinite possibilities for architecture. It enabled a building to be read in a completely novel way, creating a virtual space within a literal one. The act of reading architectural space is dealt with by twentieth-century architectural theorist Donald Kunze. Kunze's theory may help to clarify the current discussion and will therefore be briefly touched on below:

A question of dimensionality seems to stand in the way of any use of reading as a metaphor for understanding architecture. Reading's linear array of signs produces images that, in turn, construct the three-dimensional fictive world of the book. If architecture is thought to exist as an already three- or four-dimensional phenomenon, an act of reading cannot occur in any ordinary sense. But – and this is the pivotal issue of my thesis – what if the dimensionality of a work of art is not automatically given by the medium of the art form, but is drawn from our experience of the work? What if, in addition, the serial dimensionality of perception and the multi-dimensional restructuring of memory are implicit and indispensable to the understanding of any work? Then it might be possible and even necessary to say that reading is our principle metaphor for the way in which lived art achieves abiding permanence through virtuality, gesture, and re-ordering (Kunze, 1988:31).

Thus, the act of reading would allow an architect to create an imaginary and intangible world within a corporeal environment. There might also be the likelihood that the architect would conceal esoteric meaning within this virtual reality, which would only be accessible to those who were successful in producing the correct interpretants.

Jung similarly held that things that conspicuously denoted the object to which they were attached were signs. Like Peirce, Jung believed that a symbol was 'a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us' (Jung, 1964:20). Jung considered the symbol to have a wider unconscious aspect that was beyond definition or description and led one to ideas outside the grasp of reason. This he imagined was the reason that religions, throughout the ages, employed symbols to express spiritual ideas. Religious groups make use of symbolic language to express spiritual concepts and 'eternal truths' that move beyond the sphere of human comprehension. Jung considered that without the use of symbols it would be hard for them to articulate these abstract ideas in the realm of human perception.

For Jung, symbols manifested in two ways: consciously, for example through religious rituals and mythology; and unconsciously and spontaneously, in the form of

dreams. Jung conducted extensive research on dream symbolism. He found that dreams commonly presented associations and symbols that paralleled those found in primitive ideas, rites and myths, and these he termed 'archetypes'. These archetypes were reproduced all over the world throughout the ages and, for Jung, formed the 'collective unconscious':

Jung argued his case for the collective unconscious many times and quite effectively. He pointed out that ... 'The brain has a history exactly like the body and in the basic structure of the mind you will naturally find traces of the archaic mind.' Unlike the body, however, this archaic mind is not directly observable. Instead, we have the next best thing: its products, the myths and universal symbols from whose presence we infer the existence of Jung's archetypal unconscious. From the dreams, fantasizings, and creative work of children, normal adults, and asylum inmates, Jung uncovered the perplexing and inexplicable repetition of motifs from myths, fairy tales, or rituals of whose history their begettors were totally ignorant. Neither diffusion nor personal experience could account for the wide-spread occurrence of these 'primordial images' or archetypes amongst all peoples, everywhere, and at all times (Gras, 1981:472).

Jung's collective unconscious brings to mind Lethaby's call for 'the ultimate facts behind all architecture' (Lethaby, 1994:13). Lethaby put forward that particular symbols were perennially exploited in architecture from the earliest of times across the world. These symbols formed a code which, he believed, was intrinsically related to nature and the 'known' and 'imagined' facts of the universe (Lethaby, 1994:13). The symbolism was cosmical, sacred and esoteric.

Jung suggested that as scientific understanding had increased, the world had become more dehumanised, with man becoming isolated from the cosmos and no longer having a relationship with nature; the unconscious identity that once existed with natural phenomena had been all but lost (Jung, 1964:95). Lethaby proposed a similar thesis in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, declaring that '[i]f we trace the artistic forms of things, made by man, to their origin, we find a direct imitation of nature' (Lethaby, 1994:13). Lethaby's express purpose behind the book was to elucidate the

connections between architecture, nature and consequently the wider cosmos. He was of the belief that '[o]ld architecture lived because it had purpose. Modern architecture, to be real, must not be a mere envelope without contents ... if we would have architecture excite an interest, real and general, we must have a symbolism, immediately comprehensible by the great majority of spectators' (Lethaby, 1994:16).

Jung proposed that the human mind compensated for this severed connection between man and nature through dream symbolism. Dream symbolism existed because of the preservation of the symbol-making capacity in the unconscious mind of modern man.¹⁰ Jung's work on symbols involved a deep comprehension of occult and alchemical symbols. The connection between the study of archetypal symbols and occultism is pertinent to the current study. The author proposes that Lethaby's interest in symbols was also in part related to their occult connotations. Through recognising parallels in the two men's approaches, it could be loosely suggested that Lethaby's work in this field was a precursor to Jung's, but importantly it also puts forward that the two themes have a somewhat intrinsic connection, whereby one is compelled towards the occult after comprehending the 'ultimate facts' or archetypal symbols.

Occult matters were at the forefront of Jung's interest from the very start of his professional career. For his M.D. dissertation on 'The Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena' (1902), he consulted a large amount of occult literature. As an undergraduate student in 1897, Jung discussed the occult in a lecture to the Zofingia Society, a student club, and in 1905 he presented a lecture at Basel

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) dealt with the psychological techniques to decipher dream symbolism in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. However, there is clear disparity between the two men's outlooks on the subject matter.

University, title 'On Spiritualistic Phenomena'. Jung also discussed his interest in the occult with Freud on several occasions. In November 1907 Jung wrote to Freud to tell him that because of his services as an occultist he had been elected as an honorary fellow of the American Society for Psychical Research. In December 1910, when the two men met in Munich, they had a long talk about occultism (Jung, 2008:vii–xi). Jung was sympathetic towards occult practices, believing that 'the soul does exist, it is intelligent and immortal, not subject to time and space. He declared the reality of spirits and spiritualism, on the evidence of telekinesis, messages of dying people, hypnotism, clairvoyance, second sight, and prophetic dreams' (Jung, 2008:vii).

Jung was of the view that occult symbols, in particular alchemical symbols, were transformative in nature and were able to generate the transformation of an individual on both a personal and a transpersonal level. The current research purposes that it was this transformative power that is likely to have attracted Lethaby to occult and alchemical symbols, in the hope that their intentional introduction within architecture would lead to the transformation of individuals on a personal but also a societal level.

3.2 The theory of magic symbols

The theory of magical symbols is almost indistinguishable from the theories of semiotics and psychological symbolism discussed above. This said, it seems that when studying the theory of magical and occult symbolism a much greater emphasis appears to be placed on the potency of the symbol. The symbol is bestowed with a great power to stimulate and produce a transformative affect within the mind of the spectator. This is clarified by French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), who writes in *The General Theory of Magic* (1902) that

the natural association of ideas simply serves to render magical judgments possible. Magical judgements are far from being a mere collection of images.

They are real, imperative precepts, which imply a positive belief in objectivity of the chain of ideas which they form. As far as the mind of an individual is concerned, there is nothing which requires it to associate – in the categorical way magic does – words, actions or instruments with the desired effects, unless it be experience, and it is precisely this experience which we have just shown to be impotent. A magical judgment is imposed by a kind of convention which establishes, prejudicially, that a symbol will create an object, and a part will create the whole, a word, the event and so on. Actually the essential fact is that the same associations should necessarily be reproduced in the minds of several individuals or rather of a mass of individuals. The universality and the *a priori* nature of magical judgments appear to us to be the sign of their collective origin.

It follows, therefore, that it is only those collective needs, experienced by a whole community, which can persuade all the individuals of this group to operate the same synthesis at the same time. A group's beliefs and faith are the result of everyone's need and unanimous desires. Magical judgments are the subject of social consensus, the translation of a social need under the pressure of which an entire series of collective psychological phenomena are let loose. This universal need suggests the objective to the whole group ... It is because the result desired by everyone is expressed by everyone, that the means are considered apt to produce the effect (Mauss, 1972:125–126).

Magic symbols are endowed with the ability not only to produce associations in the mind but also to have a tangible outcome and effect on the beholder and, on a larger scale, the whole community, whether this be physically through curing an illness, or through gaining deeper spiritual insight and producing feelings of inner harmony or rapture.

Occultists held symbols in the highest regard. Symbols, for them, were a form of hidden communication that was only accessible to those who were capable of meditating and studying deeply. The secret of symbols was not communicable through human speech, and their suggestive nature meant that one could only see as far as one's vision would allow one to perceive: 'One can learn of worldly things by listening to the words of teachers. It is not the same case with initiation. The real secret remains for ever incommunicable. It is not passed on by word of mouth. To possess it one must succeed in assimilating it in the mind, by discovering it within oneself' (Wirth, 2012:58). Symbols were considered a more eloquent method by which to express

esoteric thought. They had the capacity to reveal concepts that were too nuanced and subtle to be defined through speech and prose, owing to the limitation of words. The thoughts aroused by symbols had to be felt and experienced internally through the whole of the being.

A magic symbol or figure that was intended to produce results was commonly referred to as a pantacle. Lévi,¹¹ believed the pantacle to be a complete and perfect synthesis that was expressed via a single sign. He claimed that the pantacle was capable of focusing the entire intellect into a single glance and was the initial activation point for the efficient projection of the will (Lévi and Waite, 1958:272). Occultist Oswald Wirth (1860–1943) wrote:

A diagram whatever it is, is significant, but it only becomes a pantacle provided that it puts the mind on the path of thoughts which tend to thrust it into an incipient intellectual ecstasy.

At the sign of a pantacle we ought to enter meditation and through ourselves find the all (pan), the world of thoughts to which it is related (Wirth, 2012:209).

The magic symbol was also unique in its intention. The magic symbol aimed to make use of the icons from the natural world, in order to express the supernatural world. Hermeneutist and mythologist Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1916–1973) makes this apparent in his *Dictionary of Symbols* (1962):

For psychologists, the symbol exists almost wholly in the mind, and is then projected outwards upon Nature, either accepting language as its being and its form or converting being and form into dramatic characters, but it is not seen in this way by orientalists and esoteric thinkers, who base symbolism upon the incontrovertible equation macrocosm = microcosm ... the whole of Nature is but a symbol, that is, its true significance becomes apparent only when it is seen as a pointer which can make us aware of supernatural or 'metaphysical' truths ... The symbol must be inferior to the thing symbolized, which destroys all naturalist concepts of symbolism' ... This latter idea is repeatedly stressed

¹¹ For further detail on Lethaby's knowledge of Éliphas Lévi see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle and section 4.2 Alchemical Imagery

by Guénon, declaring that ‘what is superior can never symbolize what is inferior, although the converse is true’ (Cirlot, 1971:xxxix).

For the occultist the symbol was not only a pointer towards the supernatural world but also, as strange as it may sound, a means by which to travel there. Occultists viewed the symbol as a gateway through which they could experience a world that eluded their senses and existed beyond everyday consciousness. Adepts believed that particular symbols could facilitate their entry into the astral realm. These undertakings were commonly termed ‘astral projection’ or ‘astral travel’. Such travels into the ‘astral light’ and occult realms were popularised by John Dee (1527-1608), Lévi and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Adepts of the Golden Dawn were instructed to make use of a rich variety of symbols, chiefly coloured geometric symbols referred to as tattwas (or tattvas), to induce a self-hypnotic state. Individual tattwas were painted on to a square of cardboard and made up of two of the five elemental signs. The magicians of the Golden Dawn were taught to meditate deeply on the tattwas to gain entry into specific areas of the astral realm. They were taught to gaze intently at the image until they were able to ‘see *into* it’, or to place the symbol against the forehead with their eyes closed (Owen, 2004:150). Through intense concentration and invocation, the magician was able to transform the symbol, for example the triangle or circle, into a great door, through which they were able to enter the desired astral region. The ‘astral planes’ were acknowledged to be potentially dangerous places, with planes and celestial inhabitants not always particularly friendly or welcoming. The main reason for the undertaking was to ‘gain direct knowledge of nonhuman realms of existence, but it was also possible to use interaction with astral beings to explore, for example, aspects of past lives or to acquire the strength and support of powerful spiritual guardians’ (Owen, 2004:149). Adepts in the art of astral travel were aware

that at one level the journey was an interior one, within the mind, and relied heavily on a structured imagination:

Occultists, of course, understood that ‘imagination is a reality,’ and that ‘when the Imagination creates an image – and the Will directs and uses that image, marvellous magical effects may be obtained.’ Magicians of the Golden Dawn were taught ... ‘that man, by his creative power through Will and Thought’ is ‘more Divine than the Angels.’ And while it is clear that not all magicians regarded ‘creative’ astral experiences as real in the most literal sense, indeed, some regarded them as a kind of experiential metaphor, they nevertheless understood the richly visualized occult domains and beings that inhabited them to be symbolic of powerful natural forces ... magical practice was dedicated to understanding, accessing, and ultimately controlling a real if symbolically represented and invisible natural world (Owen, 2004:151–152).

The ocular infusion of knowledge through symbols is once more emphasised by occult philosopher John Dee. Dee possessed Pseudo-Solomonic seals that required him to look upon them with great reverence and devotion to gain perfect knowledge and understanding of them. The seals, including their text, were designed to be inspected rather than read to reveal their underlying magic character. On one instance when ‘Dee is being instructed on how to use the *sigillum* to generate angelic names, for example, Dee is told by the angel Michael, to “apply” his “eye” to it’ (Clucas, 1998:124). This looking required the physical sight, as well as spiritual vision, in order to facilitate the ‘ocular infusion of prophetic “mysteries” or revealed knowledge’ (Clucas, 1998:126).

For the occultist there were manifold intentions behind the use of a symbol. The symbol was bestowed with latent powers; it was also an icon that referred to a supernatural world beyond the perception of the senses; in addition to this, it was seen as gateway to the supernatural, supersensible world that it depicted. There was nothing easy about any magic symbol: whether it was a straight line or a small dot, it was saturated with meaning waiting to be deciphered through intense study and meditation. Lethaby would have been familiar with such occult concepts through his reading of

Lévi's *Transcendental Magic* if nothing else,¹² and he may have applied protective symbols or 'charms', as he refers to them as in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, to his architecture, with an underlying magic purpose (Lethaby, 1956a:132).

3.3 Introduction to the language of symbols in the nineteenth-century

Associationism was a popular theory in psychology during the nineteenth-century. The fundamental explanatory principle was the association of ideas. Ruskin was one of many advocates of the theories of associationism: 'In England, Associationism had asserted a unique influence on artists and critics alike since the middle of the eighteenth century, and continued to be a popular theory well into the middle of the nineteenth-century' (Wettlaufer, 2003:223). Lethaby considered Ruskin as his very first master and prophet (Roberts, 1957a:47). As a student Lethaby had read everything written by Ruskin, so it is probable that he would have been familiar with such theories (Fireman, 1975:51). For Ruskin everything had meaning, and the universe was a semiotic entity that one could decipher if only they had the key. This notion of turning things into semiotic signifiers in order to interpret their symbolic message was a popular theme dealt with in the contemporary theories of associationism. Associationism activated the imagination of the viewer. The experience of observing a building or painting was intertwined with the associated images that would be generated in the mind through such observation:

While everyone may not possess the same creative imagination, every viewer and reader does possess some degree of memory and imagination. Thus the experience of viewing a scene or a painting, or of reading a book, would similarly evoke associated images and feelings in the mind, memory and imagination of that viewer or reader. Following this formulation, the finest works of visual or verbal art are those which can directly access these images and emotions through the respective languages of the artist's genre (Wettlaufer, 2003:229).

¹² For a more detailed account on Lethaby's reading of Éliphas Lévi see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle and section 4.2 Alchemical Imagery.

The idea was that certain symbols or colours were able to evoke particular responses, especially upon those who were in some way initiated into these ideas previously. Through active interpretation of visual signifiers, images and symbols were transformed into a secret language more accessible to those who were properly able to 'see'. This was also part of its appeal: the challenge and difficulty of deciphering the messages engaged the viewer, who consequently became part of the creative process and not just a passive spectator. The more the work challenged the senses and intellect, the greater was its appeal, and the more it was capable of exalting the viewer to higher levels of awareness. Ruskin further elaborates on this in *Modern Painters*:

I say that the art is greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas; and I call an idea great in proportion as it is received by a higher faculty of the mind, and as it more fully occupies, and in occupying, exercises and exalts, the faculty by which it is received (Ruskin and Rosenberg, 1964:23).

Ruskin's associationism was built upon empiricist psychology derived from David Hume (1711-1776) and David Hartley (1705-1757) and attempted to summon forth unconsciously remembered associations and to extract these possibly overlooked and neglected images and emotions from the mind of the observer (Hanley and Walton, 2010:10).

The influence of psychology on the fundamental understanding of art during the fin-de-siècle is again witnessed in Worringer's *Form in Gothic*. Worringer was read by Lethaby, and Lethaby was clearly receptive to Worringer's psychological outlook. Lethaby references Worringer's chapter 'Art and Human Psychology' from *Form in Gothic* in his *Architecture, Nature and Magic* (Lethaby, 1956a:146), and he also adopts Worringer's more scientific terminology within his own book, utilising phrases such as 'psychology of mankind' (Lethaby, 1956a:146) and 'increasing self-consciousness' (Lethaby, 1994:139), and referring to ornamentation as 'a sort of

tattooing' (Lethaby, 1956a:132). This is in contrast to Lethaby's original, more romantic thesis expressed in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*.

In his book Worringer provides a psychological explanation for Gothic architecture. He charts the evolution of the psychology of man and determines how this informed the artistic expression of that particular era:

[T]he variations of style in the history of art, cannot be purely arbitrary or fortuitous. On the contrary, they must have a consistent relation to those spiritual and mental changes occurring in the constitution of mankind generally, those changes which are clearly reflected in the historical development of myths, of religions, of philosophical systems, of world conceptions. Directly we have discovered this consistent relationship, the history of the artistic will takes equal right of place with the comparative history of myths, the comparative history of religion, the comparative history of philosophy, the comparative history of world conceptions: it takes equal right of place with these great stages in the general psychology of man (Worringer, 1957:12).

Worringer describes the changes in artistic expression throughout the history of mankind through examining primitive, classical and oriental man, each of whom had their own unique forms of expression. Primitive man

creates a primitive ornament which provides him not only with a mere delight in decoration and play, but with a table of symbolic absolute values, and therefore with the appeasement of his condition of deep spiritual distress. He employs the magic powers which, in his thoroughly logical conception, reside in these clear, stable, inevitable line symbols, by covering all his cherished belongings with these magic signs: and first and foremost seeks to make his person taboo by ornamental tattooing (Worringer, 1957:17).

Another influence on the way Lethaby perceived symbols was philologist Friedrich Max Müller. Müller was one of the foremost Sanskrit experts in Victorian Britain and published ideas on language and culture. These ideas were disseminated widely amongst the educated public. Even Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society was aware of Müller's writings and often quoted his work. Müller examined the universality of myth, through different epochs and cultures. Myths were able to embody folk wisdom and, despite their simplicity, were in essence, as Müller

supposed, an ancient philosophy and the religion of the ancient world (Patton and Doniger, 1996:59). Müller's, *Comparative Mythology: An Essay* (1909), was his first attempt at scrutinising myth by integrating both European and non-European materials, thus demonstrating the relationship between the cultures and languages.

This concept of historical perpetuity proposed by Müller was extrapolated by Lethaby to include architectural language and thus allowed him to begin constructing a lexicon of archetypal symbols that persisted throughout the architectural ages: 'Behind every style of architecture is an earlier style, in which the germ of every form is to be found' (Lethaby, 1994:12). Observing this method, Lethaby was capable of bridging the gap between the magical architecture and ornament of the past and modern scientific building: '[b]ehind all the minor categories of the "styles" there is a general unity in ancient architecture of the magic type. The passing of the old ages of magic into the ages of science has opened a widening abyss between them and us, and a great gulf is thus set between ancient magic architecture and modern scientific building' (Lethaby, 1956a:147). Hence, Lethaby in his book provided a thorough analysis of symbolism utilised in ancient buildings in order that modern scientific buildings could retain a sense of beauty. He hoped for practical genius and artistic expression to once more work together in union, asserting: 'That is what we have to get back in our buildings – high functional *beauty*' (Lethaby, 1956a:146).

The reappearance of key themes in mythology was also explored by Lang. Lang's work interested Lethaby, who even admits to being inspired by the title of Lang's book *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (1887) for his own *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (Lethaby, 1956a:15). Lang extensively investigated mythological themes within fairy tales. He collected, translated and published a vast collection of fairy tales between 1889 and 1910, amassing a total of 437 different tales from a diverse range of cultures

and sources. Alongside his fascination with mythology and folklore, Lang was also concerned with psychic events and encouraged the Folk Lore Society to extend their boundaries to include contemporary narratives of psychic events. He explored these topics in *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1894), *The Comparative Study of Ghost Stories* (1885) and *The Book of Dreams and Ghosts* (1897). In the preface to the second edition of *Cock Lane and Common-Sense*, Lang argues:

Since the first publication of *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* in 1894, nothing has occurred to alter greatly the author's opinions. He has tried to make the Folklore Society see that such things as modern reports of wraiths, ghosts, 'fire-walking,' 'corpse-lights,' 'crystal-gazing,' and so on, are within their province, and within the province of anthropology (Lang, 2012:2).

The book includes chapters on 'Scrying or Crystal Gazing', 'Apparitions, Ghosts and Hallucinations' and 'A Modern Trial for Witchcraft'. Lang attempted to analyse accounts of psychic events in a more critical and scientific way, as did the Society for Psychical Research, but also to deal with the historical aspect of these events, which was on the whole neglected by the Society. Using this method, Lang began to see an intrinsic link between science and magic: 'science...is only magic with a legitimate hypothesis, using real, not fanciful experience' (Lang, 2005:3). He considered that '[i]n the long run magic and religion are to die out, perhaps, and science is to have the whole field to herself' (Lang, 2005:4). This may also shed light on Lethaby's reversal from an overly romantic notion of architecture in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. In *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* he makes more use of poetic language, and he frequently includes extracts of poetry and references to literary examples throughout the book to support his central thesis. However, in his revised edition, *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, there is greater focus on constructed work, and he places emphasis on science and psychology:

At the inner heart of ancient building were wonder, worship, magic and symbolism; the motive of ours must be human service, intelligible structure

and verifiable science ... In saying that the old ways are closed to us, please do not think I would have it so if it might be otherwise; my own mind rests with the poetries of ancient art and I am altogether inadequate for the methods of science. However, I do see that science has a new magic wonder of its own (Lethaby, 1956a:16).

James Frazer was another prominent figure in the field of anthropology during the nineteenth-century and one who was extensively read by Lethaby. Lethaby references Frazer on a few occasions in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* and later, in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, gives a special mention to ‘Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*’ (Lethaby, 1956a:15). Frazer dealt with ideas on myth, religion and magic. His widely influential *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890) includes comparative studies that attempt to demonstrate shared beliefs and practices between different cultures throughout the world. The main thesis sets forth the progression of man’s beliefs, beginning with magic, moving on to religion and finally culminating in scientific thought. Within his book Frazer deals expansively with the subject matter of magic. He highlights two major principles of magic: sympathetic magic, whereby the magician is able to produce the desired effects through imitation; and contagious magic, which assumes that whatever is done to an object will consequently affect the person with whom it was in contact. Both are based on the association of ideas. Frazer later categorises magic as either positive or negative: ‘The aim of positive magic or sorcery is to produce a desired event; the aim of negative magic or taboo is to avoid an undesirable one’ (Frazer, 1993:19). The nature of magic described by Frazer has a close connection with symbols and can be seen to be applied by Lethaby. Lethaby used symbols as imitative devices that could produce associations in the mind of the beholder, and aimed at bringing forth a desired outcome, whatever this was intended to be. This is demonstrated most apparently when Lethaby takes symbols described in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* that were

used in ancient architecture to represent the ‘Heavenly Temple and the Earthy Tabernacle’ (Lethaby, 1994:13) and employs them within his own architecture. This can be seen clearly in Avon Tyrrell and the Eagle Insurance Company building, where two birds are perched at the very top of the north façade of Avon Tyrrell and again an eagle, originally intended to be placed on the parapet, is seen on the façade of the Eagle Insurance Company building. These birds most likely alluded to the two eagles that sat at the sides of the omphalos, which represented the centre of the earth, brought to light by Lethaby in his chapter ‘At the Centre of the Earth’ (Lethaby, 1994:71). Using symbols in his own built work that were outlined in his book, Lethaby must have wanted them, and the building as a whole, to take on associations and refer to something greater than itself – perhaps something like the heavenly temple, one of the main purposes of which was to ‘localise the sacred centre’ (Lethaby, 1956a:102).

Another source which supplied Lethaby with information on magic spells and rituals was François Lenormant’s *Chaldean Magic* (1874). In the book are found translations of ancient Chaldean tablets, many containing magic spells and incantations. Lethaby references Lenormant numerous times in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. The preceding would suggest that Lethaby had a thorough understanding of symbolic language and its potent effects. He was clearly aware of a symbol’s power to generate associations in the mind of the beholder and some of the deeper psychological implications of these associations. Providing a quote from Worringer, Lethaby confesses that the history of art illustrates the ‘development of the religious and philosophical ideas of man and reveals to us the actual psychology of mankind’ and that ‘variations of style in the history of art cannot be purely arbitrary or fortuitous. On the contrary, they must have a consistent relation to those spiritual and mental changes occurring in the constitution of mankind, changes reflected in the

development of myths, religions, [and] philosophical systems' (Lethaby, 1956a:146). Lethaby was also, as demonstrated above, conscious of the underlying themes of magic attributed to symbols. Appreciating this, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Lethaby intentionally set out to use the symbol in a didactic and meaningful way. Taking this further, it can be put forward that Lethaby had an underlying magical agenda which was impelled by his reading of Lévi's work. Lethaby testifies his interest in magic most conspicuously in his revision of his book title to include the term 'magic'. It is not the case that Lethaby elected to use the word in his title for effect, as he confesses was the reasoning behind his choice of the word 'mysticism' (Lethaby, 1956a:147), but throughout *Architecture, Nature and Magic* Lethaby seems to fully grasp and convey the use of 'embodied magic' within architecture of the past, where 'art was everywhere the hand-maiden to the supernatural. We see art always penetrated by magic: aesthetic needs yielded priority to the more urgent needs of magic' (Lethaby, 1956a:98). Lethaby came to appreciate building as a magical art (Lethaby, 1956a:87). This is encapsulated in his conclusion to the book, where he writes:

It seems clear at first sight that such practical art as building developed in the main in response to bodily need, but even this may be doubted. Without the stimulus provided by theories of magic man might have been content with the bare satisfaction of very simple needs; the impetus of magic wonder and the desire to control nature were required to urge him forward to great tasks. Ideas of sharing the permanence of the universe by correspondence, in form and ceremonial, by size and by accuracy of workmanship, pointed the way. The greater buildings were not only for ritual purposes, but they themselves were embodied magic (Lethaby, 1956a:147).

It would therefore not be completely irrational to assume that Lethaby incorporated a magic language in his own built and design work with a number of possible desires, which may have included the desire to control nature, to animate architecture with a living spirit (Lethaby, 1956a:90) or to provide 'magic security' (Lethaby, 1956a:101)

and ‘magic protection’ (Lethaby, 1956a:97). These suggestions will be further explored in the case studies chapter of this study.

4. Occult Symbolism in Lethaby's Illustrations and Architecture

The Occult Revival of the nineteenth-century witnessed a rejuvenated interest in magic, alchemy and other hermetic fields. These fields all lie within the occult spectrum and share many commonalities due to the amalgamation and diffusion of ideas from one field to the next, and also the engagement of individuals in more than one practice, for example alchemists experimenting in magic practices.

However, there is normally a distinction that separates one occult field from another. This is particularly applicable when discussing magic and alchemy, and the distinction will be explored here briefly. The chapter will focus on both these fields in relation to Lethaby to illustrate how his work encompassed a broad range of occult symbolism. Part one will place greater emphasis on magic symbols and artefacts and part two on alchemical imagery. Lastly, part three will be a combination of both, with emphasis placed on Lethaby's completed work. There will, of course, be concepts found in magic that parallel those in alchemy owing to their occult nature, and hence there will be a repetition of underlying themes in each section. This said, the distinct characteristics of both magic and alchemy will be elucidated here in brief to assist the reader in understanding the nuances of the two fields.

Magic and alchemy are two disparate disciplines that permit one to read and manipulate the physical world. Magic practices were popular amongst the Greco-Roman populace. The practice of magic consisted partly of enchanted objects and symbols that had both positive and negative effects. It included the reverence and use of rings, gems, amulets and talismans, and other magical objects and tools engraved with magic symbols and incantations. Prophecy and fortune telling were also part of magic practices. Magicians explored the relationship between the seven ancient

planets and seven ancient metals, and they ‘believed in the occult or hidden powers of plants, stones and animal products to heal the sick. They found correlations between the energies of the planets above to the animal, vegetable and mineral realms below’ (Schenkel and Welz, 2007:4).

There were considered to be two key types of magic: natural and demonic. Natural magic endeavoured to uncover the occult powers of the natural world, whilst demonic magic sought the assistance of demons to gain control over people and nature. Magic performed in relation to God or by God’s chosen people in the form of miracles was considered commendable and antithetical to magic performed by ‘charlatans’ with the aid of demons. Such ideas were endorsed and popularised from the Renaissance onwards (Schenkel and Welz, 2007:6).

Occult magic was unlike spiritualism, which encouraged a passive will and mediumistic trance, and instead ‘stressed the control of consciousness through the operation of the active will’ (Owen, 2004:69). Practical magic was utilised by members of the Golden Dawn and was ‘based on the belief that an Adept can use a series of revered and ancient techniques in conjunction with a knowledge of correspondence in order to converse with those worlds beyond our own and gain control over the invisible forces of the universe’ (Owen, 2004:74). Commanding universal forces was not the only ambition of the magician. One of the foremost goals of the magical enterprise was to reconcile the human and divine. This would lead the magician into a direct communion with God and bring them into a superhuman and semi-divine state. The Golden Dawn magicians would realise this state through intense meditation, ‘in which the magician visualized herself traveling up the Tree of Life in order to meet and become suffused with Divine Light as it streamed down from the uppermost First Sephiroth known as the Crown (Kether)’ (Owen, 2004:77).

Early alchemical philosophy developed in Hellenistic Egypt and was a combination of Western classical philosophy, Eastern mystical beliefs and practical experimentation. The alchemical manuscripts contained a wide selection of scientific processes for refining metals, preparing tinctures and manufacturing alloys to create synthetic gold. These manuscripts seemingly placed emphasis on ingredients, recipes and the scientific processes rather than the occult aspects of the art. Later alchemical texts persisted along similar lines and contributed significantly to the fields of medicine, metallurgy and natural philosophy.

Alchemical imagery is therefore set apart from magic symbolism in that it stresses the experimental nature of the art. Alchemical illustrations normally depict scientific apparatus, such as vessels, and also include some reference to the elements. It is common to see the elements personified and given the appearance of a male or female, with a character corresponding to that of the element depicted. Colour is normally used in an emblematic way and usually based upon colours produced during the reaction series between substances within the vessel. Alchemists understood this imagery to be practical as well as allegorical. It represented the physical and metaphysical, or the material and spiritual, as one whole, undivided:

Alchemical emblems are clearly, often, of a metaphysical nature, expressing psychic and spiritual truths for the alchemist's contemplation. But this constitutes only one side of the picture. They are not simply 'arcane wisdom clothed in a language of natural signs' ... Alchemical emblems can also represent physical, chemical substances which their illustrators clothed in the language of gods and goddess, kings and queens, birds and beasts, as well as planets and characters from Greek, Roman and Egyptian myth (Abraham, 1998:99).

Alchemists are popularly associated with two main goals: the quest for the philosopher's stone, able to transmute base metals into gold and the production of the elixir of life able to grant immortality. Both these themes were explored by

alchemists, exoterically and esoterically, as is made lucid by the steps in the alchemical opus. The initial stage involved the fusing of the four base metals – lead, tin, copper and iron. This fusion produced a black substance that was termed *nigredo*. Following this the black substance was heated with silver and then mercury or tin to generate a white substance, *albedo*. The iridescence seen in the *nigredo* before its change to *albedo* was likened to the peacock's tail. During the next stage gold and sulphur waters were added, which yielded a yellow colour, *citrinatis*. Finally the combination of sulphur and mercury led to the production of mercuric sulphide or cinnabar, which was blood red, *rubedo* (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:14–15). These colours played a significant role in alchemical symbolism and were used in manuscripts to suggest the exoteric alchemical process as well as the inner esoteric, psychological or spiritual process¹³.

The above has provided an overview of magic and alchemical symbols. The chapter will now move on to focus on specific case studies to demonstrate Lethaby's application of these symbols, beginning with his depiction of *A Beryl Shrine*.

4.1 *A Beryl Shrine* (1888)

Lethaby's *A Beryl Shrine* illustration, shown in Figure 2, was produced for *The Architect* in 1888 (Lethaby, 1888). The drawing has welcomed attention from scholars such as Godfrey Rubens, Trevor Garnham and Ray Watkinson. Nevertheless, the illustration is predominately dismissed as a 'purely exotic adventure' (Rubens, 1986:65) and generally considered as part of an experimental period in the life of the architect. Identifying *A Beryl Shrine* as merely experimental facilitates sanitisation of the discourse around Lethaby; yet it avoids fully gauging Lethaby's understanding of

¹³ There were of course variations in the choice of substances used. However, the colour theory is relatively consistent and can be applied generally.

symbolic language, and how it may have been subsequently exploited by him to convey esoteric meaning. The following investigation hopes to make clearer Lethaby's understanding of occult and, in particular, magic symbols and artefacts, and to begin to fathom what Lethaby desired to achieve through their employment. Ultimately, the case study will aim to demonstrate a shared vision between Lethaby and many occultists at the time

4.1.1 Lethaby's transformation

The end of the 1880s initiated a transitional period in the Lethaby's life. It was at this time that his ideas on architecture, and most probably on life, were scrutinised, transfigured and finally defined (Rubens, 1986:79). In 1889 Lethaby left the prolific office of Richard Norman Shaw, where he had worked as chief assistant for almost a decade, to set up his own practice. This gave him the freedom to pursue his own imaginative design work and also the time to write his first book, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. At this stage, Lethaby was attending meetings addressed by architect Philip Webb of the Labour Emancipation League, where Lethaby took an active role in recruiting members (Rubens, 1986:79). Hereafter, Lethaby grew to be a strong supporter of the socialist cause. The Arts and Crafts Movement, to which both Lethaby and Webb belonged, was deeply influenced by politics, 'for some of the most important figures in the movement were also part of the early Socialist Movement in Britain' (Crawford, 1997:15).

During the 1880s Lethaby became a member of the Fabian Society (Fireman, 1975:58; Garnham, 1980:53; Ward, 1957:222). The Fabian Society at this time had only around forty members, including George Bernard Shaw, who was on close terms with Lethaby (Rooke, 1950:167–168), and Annie Besant, who later became president of the

Theosophical Society (Garnham, 1980:53). Not only Besant but several other members of the Fabian Society were, as well as being passionate socialists, also interested in spiritualism and mysticism. There was a distinct relationship between socialism and occultism in the 1880s and 1890s, which historians of the socialist movement in England have usually under-emphasised (Beaumont, 2012:167). Alex Owen goes as far as to say that ‘committed advocates of social transformation during this period were often as concerned with the idea of spiritual regeneration as political change, and socialism itself was by no means the strictly secular movement that some of its late-Victorian and subsequent proponents claimed’ (Owen, 2004:23).¹⁴

Being in the midst of these radical reformers of his time, it is unlikely that Lethaby would have escaped exposure to the ideas of mysticism and spiritualism that proliferated at the turn of the century. This chapter will go on to suggest that Lethaby was in fact profoundly influenced by theories of magic, which led him to produce some of his most experimental and unconstrained design work towards the end of the nineteenth-century.

This, however, does not intend to imply that these ideas were isolated and bear little relation to Lethaby’s subsequent work, as other Lethaby scholars have proposed. In fact, on the contrary, it suggests that concepts articulated at this time went on to form the core of Lethaby’s belief system, shaping his world view for years to come.

4.1.2 Magical artefacts and symbolism

Lethaby’s *A Beryl Shrine* illustration was made to accompany Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s (1828-1882) poem *Rose Mary* (1871–1881) (Rossetti, 1881:3–68). *Rose*

¹⁴ For detail on the relationship between socialism and the occult during the fin-de-siècle see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle.

Mary has usually been considered one of the author's best poems, blending occult ideas seamlessly into a romantic tragedy (Hyder, 1963:197). It is no secret that Rossetti had a fetish for things occult. His studio assistant, Dunn, comments on this, explaining: 'the interest displayed by Rossetti in everything leaning on the occult gave me an insight into his nature and however trivial these relations may appear they showed how largely both his poetry and his painting was influenced by the bent of mind in that direction and his yearning for the unseen' (Drew, 1996:6). Lethaby's interest in the poem is in itself significant. It demonstrates an appetite for the unseen much like Rossetti's. This may be elucidated to some degree by a poem written by Lethaby 'which reveals a belief in communion with the dead mingled with a feeling of the living presence of nature and the mystery of the evening'¹⁵ (Garnham, 1980:53).

Rose Mary is the story of a girl who is instructed by her mother to consult a beryl in order to seek out the foes of her love, Sir James of Heronhay. Intrinsic to the story is that the stone once contained evil spirits which were driven away by good ones. These evil spirits were sure never to return provided the stone was not misused by a Christian who had sinned. However, unbeknown to Rose Mary's mother, Rose Mary is no longer a virgin. This 'sin' therefore obscures her vision when gazing into the beryl,

¹⁵ The poem, found in an 1880 notebook in the North Devon Atheneum, includes reflections upon Lethaby's mother's death in 1870. Trevor Garnham quotes the following extract:

And yet I deem her presence near,
 By lonely contemplation led;
 By love that links her life with mine;
 And thoughts that blend me with the dead.
 But now the mighty mists appear,
 And wreath the landscape all in blue,
 The sounds are hushed, the deep toned bell
 Hath ceased its solemn vespers too.
 The moon that leaves the eastern wolds,
 Resume her calm celestial reign
 The fitful owl with sudden call
 Gives out his night watch o'er the plain (Garnham, 1980: 159–160).

resulting in Sir James's death. In Part II of the poem Rose Mary's mother discovers her daughter's secret alongside Sir James's. She uncovers that Sir James had promised to marry Jocelind, the sister of his slayer; however, she never divulges this impropriety to her daughter. Later in Part II, Rose Mary goes to the altar where 'Twixt wings of a sculptured beast unknown, Rose Mary saw the Beryl-stone' (Rossetti, 1881:54). Here, Rose Mary shatters the beryl and ends her own life too. This time, however, Rose Mary is not reprimanded by the spirits, but redeemed:

The death she had won might leave no trace,
On the soft sweet form and gentle face:
In a gracious sleep she seemed to lie;
And over her head her hand on high,
Held fast the sword she triumphed by (Rossetti, 1881:63).

Rose Mary wins her place in heaven through her true and steadfast love, whilst her former lover is consigned to hell for his treason. Many occult devices have been employed by Rossetti in this poem, as Hyder details in his 1963 paper 'Rossetti's "Rose Mary": A Study in the Occult'. The beryl described by Rossetti was most probably an allusion to the scrying stone of John Dee. Rossetti was familiar with Dee and also interested in the ancient art of scrying, which involved looking into a shiny or reflective surface to facilitate visions (Hyder, 1963:204). The poem testifies to this very fact, as Rossetti sets the scene in a dimly lit room with a veil hanging in the centre. Swami Panchadasi, in his book, *A Course of Advanced Lessons in Clairvoyance and Occult Powers*, outlines instructions given by an English writer on the art of crystal gazing. He mentions how 'the room should not be dark, but rather shadowed, or charged with a dull light'; he also describes the need for screening the crystal in order that it is 'partially surrounded by a black silk or similar wrap or screen, so adjusted as to cut off any undesirable reflection' (Panchadasi, 1916:110). Rossetti also refers to the hearing of voices from the crystal, and keeping the crystal on an altar. These ideas

may again have been influenced by Dee, who was known to have kept his stone on a holy table (Hyder, 1963:203). The virginity of the scryer is another aspect of the poem which shows Rossetti's attempts to include further occult elements within his work. The relationship between scrying and virginity was not a novel idea: Gervase of Tilbury in his *Otia Imperialia* maintained that 'some spirits can be observed only by virgins; since the pure have more spiritual perception their eyes are especially useful in magic' (Hyder, 1963:205).

Hyder's paper raises many probing questions in relation to the current study on Lethaby. The most pertinent here being Lethaby's awareness of the poem's occult allusions. It must at the outset be noted that Lethaby includes many of the key devices mentioned above. He places the beryl on an altar behind a veil; he also includes tapers burning above, which give the dim lighting conducive to scrying. It could naturally be assumed that Lethaby included such elements to depict Rossetti's poem accurately. This, however, is not the case, as Lethaby deviates from the original poem in other instances, such as the placement of the snake and the helmet and sword. It could therefore be proposed that Lethaby only exploited symbols he identified with for his illustration, thus enabling him to propound his own interpretation of *Rose Mary*. How far, then, was Lethaby aware of the magic symbols and artefacts employed within Rossetti's poem, and how was this consequently utilised in *A Beryl Shrine*?

The beryl stone is a key component of both the poem and the drawing. Lethaby's knowledge of beryl stones and the art of crystal gazing would have in all probability been gained through Andrew Lang, who propagated these ideas on several occasions. Lang's considerable research on the art of scrying and crystal gazing is not likely to have gone unrecognised by Lethaby. Lang devoted a whole chapter to scrying and

crystal gazing in *Cock Lane and Common-Sense* (1894). He later touched on crystal gazing briefly in his book *Magic and Religion* (1901) and went into further detail on the subject in his book *The Making of Religion* (1900). Lang also wrote an introduction to Northcote Thomas's book *Crystal Gazing* (1905).

Lethaby's addition of incense may well be another indicator of his understanding of magical settings. Incense is not mentioned in Rossetti's *Rose Mary*, but seven sticks of incense burn in front of Lethaby's beryl stone. In Thomas's *Crystal Gazing*, the use of incense during magical rituals is commented upon on several occasions. The practice of burning incense to induce a state of trance is described again in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Frazer, 1993:95). The employment of seven sticks may also be of importance. The seven sticks could represent the planets: 'surrounding the scrying table with symbols of the seven planets provided a means of organizing and remembering the otherwise bewildering maze of images' (Peterson, 2003:16). Lethaby fully acknowledged the significance of the number seven, as is evidenced in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* where he writes:

Immense has been the influence of this magic number in philosophy, material and metaphysical. The life of man has been divided into seven stages ... so the life of the world was in the Middle Age histories divided into seven eras ... there were seven material heavens ... seven architectural wonders of the world. Mr Ruskin tells us he found great difficulty in limiting his 'seven lamps' ... The seven planets have had a potent influence over architecture and the arts (Lethaby, 1994:106).

It could also be conjectured that Lethaby intended for rosemary to be burnt at the altar. Rosemary has a direct relationship with the protagonist of the poem, whose name is Rose Mary, and its symbolism has further connotations. In the Middle Ages burning rosemary was seen by some to drive away evil spirits; others saw the herb as a symbol of love and fidelity (Sasikumar, 2004:244). Both symbolic associations would be suitable in this context.

Moving from specific details to the wider composition of the drawing, we find many more symbolic allusions. A reading of the chapter ‘The Microcosmos’ in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, which incidentally begins with a quote from the poem *Rose Mary*, assists in developing this discussion. In this chapter Lethaby explains how the temple was built in the likeness of the world. He also makes clear that ‘[o]ften it was not so much the actual earth and visible heavens that were symbolised, as the original celestial world of the golden age – Paradise’ (Lethaby, 1994:42). In his illustration Lethaby appears to incorporate many features of the world temple found in Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*. In the chapter he cites how

[t]he town was divided into seven great rings named from the seven planets, with four main streets and gateways looking to the points of the compass; the temple in the centre was also circular, and domed. Above the altar, a large globe represented the earth; on the dome were all the stars of heaven from the first to the sixth magnitude, with their names and influences marked, and the meridians and great circles in relation to the altar. The pavement was of precious stones. Seven golden, everburning lamps bore the names of the seven planets (Lethaby, 1994:44).

Later in the chapter Lethaby goes on to talk about the Eastern architecture of China, describing how it is a ‘physical axiom in China that heaven is round and the earth is square’ (Lethaby, 1994:45). He develops this theory further when discussing stupa architecture, commenting on how ‘[t]he square platform represents the earth, the semicircular dome figures out the air, [and] the railed structure on the top denotes the heaven, where watch the four gods’ (Lethaby, 1994:48). Both descriptions can be related directly back to Lethaby’s drawing. The altar is circular, topped with a dome. Around the altar are chequered squares.¹⁶ The circular altar in this case represents heaven, and the squares earth. The seven burning sticks of incense, as discussed above,

¹⁶ Chequered squares are also witnessed in Buddhist architecture. Lethaby describes how ‘the curious Buddhist railing, which surrounds some of these structures, is of a chessboard pattern, as the enclosing walls of Paradise are described to be’ (Lethaby, 1994:47).

are analogous to the seven planets. The rail upon which lie four tapers could well represent the four gods as seen on the railed structure of the stupa. In addition to this Lethaby discusses the use of the veil in temple pageantry, describing how ‘the sky was often represented by a veil or mantle of purple tissue scintillating with stars, either robing the God, hung before the sanctuary, or covering artificial erections’ (Lethaby, 1994:37). Applying the above description in relation to *A Beryl Shrine*, where the veil conceals the altar and simultaneously the beryl stone, it is possible to infer that Lethaby intended the beryl to symbolise the Godhead.¹⁷

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that when one begins to decipher Lethaby’s drawing and Rossetti’s poem, they both appear to employ magic imagery and artefacts more conspicuously than first imagined, in order to engender a mysterious and enigmatic atmosphere. The beryl stone, candles, incense and so forth are not concealed but quite plainly visible and waiting to be read and understood. However, this said, Lethaby’s drawing conceals an even greater depth of occult intention that requires further effort to penetrate.

4.1.3 Serpent imagery: *A Beryl Shrine*

Rubens, has attempted to uncover the motive behind some of Lethaby’s more peculiar symbolism. Rubens has explored the discrepancies between the serpent found in Rossetti’s *Rose Mary* and that in Lethaby’s *A Beryl Shrine*. Rubens makes the connection between Lethaby’s serpent and the woman serpent, Lamia, as found in John Keats’s poem *Lamia* (1820). Rubens sheds light on Lethaby’s interest in *Lamia*,

¹⁷ A description of the tabernacle by Lethaby presented in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, taken from Édouard Charton’s *Voyageurs Anciens et Modernes* (1854–55), could have contributed to Lethaby’s representation of *A Beryl Shrine*. Lethaby describes how Charton ‘considers the Tabernacle in detail. The candlestick represented the seven planets, the veil with its tissue of hyacinth, purple, scarlet, and fine linen, recalled the elements, and divided the outer temple from the sanctuary, as the earth is divided from the heavens’ (Lethaby, 1994:34).

which is quoted in Lethaby's notebook accompanied by a small sketch of a snake. In his monograph on Lethaby, Rubens quotes a description of Lamia from Keats's poem, but maintains that Lethaby only copied down a few key lines of the passage. The lines are 'a palpitating snake, / Bright and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake' and 'Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar' (Rubens, 1986:64). Rubens, however, underestimates Lethaby's interest in the poem, as in actuality Lethaby quotes a much longer passage from the poem in his 1886 notebook, as seen in Figure 3 (Lethaby, 1886):

Until he found a palpitating snake,
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries-
So rainbow-sided, touched with miseries,
She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes – what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair,
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air?
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as though bubbling honey, for Love's sake. (Keats, 2007)

He quotes fourteen of the twenty-one lines of the description, omitting only the lines highlighted above. The poem is discovered together with a small quick sketch which emphasises the human mouth and eyes of the serpent. These features, as identified by Rubens, are again found in the serpent of *A Beryl Shrine*. Whilst Rubens indicates this relationship, he does not elaborate upon it. The concluding part of this chapter will therefore seek to open up the discussion surrounding Lethaby's interest in such figures and show how they subsequently imbued *A Beryl Shrine* with profound meaning.

Lamia tells of the relationship between Lycius and Lamia. Lamia was once a beautiful serpent who desired physical love and a mortal body, and through magic was transformed into a seductive woman in order to receive the object of her desire, Lycius. Lycius' relationship with Lamia is built on magic, emphasising physical and sexual love but by no means containing elements of divine love (Boulger, 1961:251)¹⁸.

Lamia is commonly associated with the figure of Lilith and the names are at times used interchangeably. In 1864 an encyclopaedia of the legends and folklore of biblical literature was published, in which Lilith is defined as '*Lamia* ... which has much the same meaning as our *witch* but which was originally the name of a Libyan Queen, who having lost her child, was said to prey on the children of others' (Allen, 1984:292). As the legend goes, Lilith was created alongside Adam, but Lilith left Adam to keep company with demons and became known as the 'destroyer of men' (Allen, 1984:292), bewitching them in their dreams. This latter aspect of Lilith was a theme that was explored by Rossetti extensively and is most significant to our discussion. The subject of Lilith is also of consequence in regard to Lethaby, who appears to have shown a personal interest in the legend of Lilith. In Lethaby's 1886 notebook, in which he quotes passages from *Lamia*, he also notes the name of Lilith alongside that of Adam, identifying her as Adam's wife (Lethaby, 1886). It may therefore be surmised that Lethaby, too, identified Lamia with Lilith, and that this consequently informed his drawing.

¹⁸ Another dichotomy explored in the poem is the struggle of Lycius 'to bridge the gap between the world of sense and understanding, and that of the imaginative ideal' (Boulger, 1961:248). The conflict between the actual and the ideal, and the world of spirit and of matter, is a recurrent theme in Keats's poetry. This theme becomes relevant later in the chapter when comprehending Rossetti's connection with the character, Lilith.

Rossetti's painting of Lilith seen in Figure 4 (Rossetti, 1866–1868) shows her 'narcissistically focused on her own image' (Allen, 1984:291). The watercolour is accompanied by Shelly's translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749-1832) Walpurgisnacht scene:

Beware of her hair, for she excels
All women in the magic of her locks
And when she twines them round a young man's neck
She will not ever set him free again.

This idea of hair twining round a man's neck may be associated with Lethaby's image. If we consider the column to represent a phallic symbol and hence the male element, the snake coiled around the column would signify the female counterpart, in this case the hair of Lilith, ensnaring it. Another factor to support this argument is Lilith's original form, which was often depicted as a serpent. The serpent imagery was furthermore exploited by Rossetti in his ballad *Eden Bower* (Allen, 1984:293), which may have also influenced Lethaby's depiction.

The painting by Rossetti is purposefully saturated with contradictory themes. The mirror, held by Lilith, reflects the candlesticks but also doubles as a window looking out to a woodland scene. The bedroom accessories are accompanied by roses and poppies. This confusion between external and internal spaces is created deliberately by Rossetti to put an end to the duality produced by the interior and exterior parts of the room. The point of this was to end a more significant duality. The room was an allusion to the spiritual and material realms. By combining the two spaces Rossetti was in essence merging the spiritual with the material and creating an ideal depiction of Eden, where duality ceased to exist (Miller, 1991:335). However, the painting is not quite an ideal Eden; instead it could be considered more a mirror of Eden, where Lilith is the mirror of Eve (Miller, 1991:334).

The character of Lilith is again depicted in Rossetti's poem *The Orchard Pit*:

‘Come to Love;’ and of the sweetness of Love she said many things. And next she sang, ‘Come to Life;’ and Life was sweet in her song. But long before I reached her, she knew that all her will was mine: and then her voice rose softer than ever, and her words were, ‘Come to Death;’ and Death’s name in her mouth was the very swoon of all sweetest things that be. And then my path cleared; and she stood over against me in the fork of the tree I knew so well, blazing now like a lamp beneath the moon. And one kiss I had of her mouth, as I took the apple from her hand (Rossetti and McGann, 2003:364–365).

Rodger Drew's description of this passage in his 1996 thesis ‘Symbolism and Sources in the Painting and Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’ is pertinent to the understanding of Lilith's nature. Lilith ‘precisely presents the three aspects of the Moon ... Life, Love, and Death. Here, however, the order is changed, and Life seems to be the result of Love, and Death the gift of Love ... In this tale, however, Death is not a glorious transformation, but simply, Doom ... nothing more than a tale of the supernatural told with relish’ (Drew, 1996:184). This notion almost replicates that of Keats's Lamia mentioned earlier. Lilith offers love, but her love is not the transformational love that the lover is seeking. She is but a temptress who mirrors Eve and hence fools those who are susceptible to her charms. Lilith represents the body's beauty but not the soul's (Drew, 1996:109): ‘She has passion without love, and languor without satiety – energy without heart, and beauty without tenderness or sympathy for others – for her lovers least of all’ (Drew, 1996:380).

The snake imagery in Lethaby's *A Beryl Shrine* can, as a result of the above analysis, be inferred as Lamia or Lilith. It is likely to have been employed by Lethaby as a metaphor for the material world. This is further emphasised by the use of the column. The column may perhaps have been used to symbolise the tree of life. In *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* Lethaby himself describes how the columnar form was originally derived from that of the tree. The tree was commonly associated with the cosmos and

was a symbol of the centre of the world, with its vertical axis denoting the world-axis. The three main portions of the tree – roots, trunk and foliage – were seen to correspond to the three worlds of underworld, middle world and upper world, or hell, earth and heaven respectively. The relationship between the different levels of the tree and their connection with snake imagery are further elaborated by Cirlot:

As regards the symbolism of levels, it is possible to establish a vertical scale of analogies: dragon and snakes (primal forces) are associated with the roots; the lion, the unicorn, the stag and other animals expressing the ideas of elevation, aggression and penetration, correspond to the trunk; and birds and heavenly bodies are brought into relation with the foliage ... The snake coiled round the tree introduces another symbol, that of the spiral. The tree as world-axis is surrounded by the sequence of cycles which characterize the revealed world (Cirlot, 1971:350).

Another point of accord between the snake and the column symbolism would be their phallic nature. Watkins explores this aspect in regard to the column. However, the phallic metaphor could be taken even further, with the snake also being considered as a phallic symbol. In Rossetti's *Eden Bower* Lilith practically worships the snake. Here, the phallic symbolism is employed quite explicitly:

'O my love, come nearer to Lilith!
(*Eden bower's in flower.*)
In thy sweet folds bind me and bend me,
And let me feel the shape thou shalt lend me!' (Rossetti, 2014).

The point being emphasised is that the tree trunk and the snake both represent man's lower, material nature. This can be explained with greater clarity by again employing the Lilith metaphor in Rossetti's *Eden Bower*. Lilith is 'known by her body alone, which is really the extent of her "magic" – the illusion of love gained through an illusory sexual gratification' (Pittman, 1974:49). She allures men, but those who become entangled in her golden hair lose any notion of their higher self. Lilith represents the 'animal part of human nature that can so easily spoil everything for our better selves' (Pittman, 1974:48). Nevertheless, it must be recognised that Rossetti

was not averse to a physical or sexual relationship, but he believed that it must be part of a more meaningful experience. Rossetti argued for a balance with the sexual and sensual, declaring that ‘all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared – somewhat figuratively, it is true, but unmistakeably – to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times’ (Buchanan, 1872:58). This balance suggested by Rossetti would theoretically lead to a more fruitful and creative love. In essence this metaphor put forward that to be truly successful in love, and ultimately in life, man must strive to create a balance between his lower, material and his higher, spiritual natures.

This concept is seen actualised in Lethaby’s illustration. Unlike in Rossetti’s *Rose Mary*, where the serpent is described as lying flat, asleep and coiling (Rossetti, 1881:54),¹⁹ Lethaby’s snake rises and spirals up a column,²⁰ a column that does not feature in Rossetti’s poem. Watkinson has suggested Lethaby’s rather more dynamic response to be a reference to Tantric kundalini²¹ (Watkinson, 1986:31). This is most fitting, as it proposes a driving upward of vital inner energy from the lowest chakra to the highest. The snake moving upwards may well illustrate the movement up from the world of matter to the world of spirit. This could be supported by the fact the snake

¹⁹ Rossetti’s description of the serpent in *Rose Mary* is used by Lethaby in his chapter ‘The World Fabric’ in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* to help depict the Norse understanding of the universe: ‘In the Norse system a vast tree, the world-ash rises in the centre of the earth, its branches forming the seven heavens of the gods, its roots strike deep into hell, and there – “... A serpent evermore/ Lies deep asleep at the world’s dark core”’ (Lethaby, 1994:18).

²⁰ Lethaby’s spiralling serpent could also be associated with ‘The Chaos Serpent’ of the Assyrians that, as elucidated by Lethaby, ‘lay coiled round the earth until slain by Merodach the Lord of Light.’ The serpent is represented with the body of a woman, and ‘it was this Queen of Chaos who ruled while the earth lay like the cosmic egg in her coils, in the time when as yet none of the gods had come forth’ (Lethaby, 1994:221).

²¹ Kundalini is the energy that rests coiled at the base of the spinal cord. Tantric practice is a process used to awaken this cosmic energy, and move it through the seven chakras that lie along the axis of the spine. The practice transmutes mental energy to spiritual energy and leads to the unfoldment of the spiritual consciousness. The ultimate purpose of tantric kundalini is to unite the individual consciousness with the Absolute consciousness. Advancing from duality once more into unity.

encounters the form of a bird as it rises. The bird could be identified as various creatures, such as a guardian griffin (Lethaby, 1956a:97), but one creature it could surely be is an eagle.²² The combination of snake and eagle is a recurrent theme in occult literature.²³ At times the eagle is seen with a dead snake in its mouth; the eagle in such an image is considered to be ‘redeemed’. The pairing aims to illustrate how ‘the lower nature of the serpent has been killed, and ... the higher nature is free’ (Goodman, 1989:21).

Additional analysis of the image corroborates the above findings. In the drawing we see the beryl lying between the wings of the eagle. It sits comfortably between the column and snake below, and the sword directly above. The sword is used by Rose Mary to shatter the beryl. In Rossetti’s poem the sword and helmet are placed at the side of the altar: ‘O’er the altar-sides on either hand / There hung a dinted helm and brand’ (Rossetti, 1881:57). Lethaby’s placing of the sword is therefore without doubt deliberate. According to Cirlot, the sword symbolises spiritual evolution and physical extermination. To die a philosophic death and be reborn into the world of the spirit is a common occult theme. This idea is reinforced by the sword evoking the image of the cross, which itself denotes philosophical death. In relation to the column, which suggests a tree and hence involution into life and matter, we begin to see the twofold nature that Rossetti himself described. The beryl sits between the tree, the mother of

²² The eagle was incorporated prominently upon the façade of Lethaby’s Eagle Insurance Company Building, along with other features from the drawing including the chequered squares and the square and circle. The façade can also be separated into seven levels corresponding to the seven sticks of incense.

²³ The pairing of the eagle and snake is witnessed in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). Here they could also be viewed as variants of the ancient chthonic and celestial forces that aid Zarathustra on his road to self-knowledge and the attainment of the ‘stone of wisdom’. Peter Behrens was profoundly influenced by Nietzsche’s allegory and owing to this incorporated images of the eagle and crystal within his work (Anderson, 1990:108–116). Lethaby may have been aware of Nietzsche’s text, which was widely read, especially by architects, during the fin-de-siècle

life, and the cross, the mother of death (Jung, 1967:271). It lies between the sensual and the spiritual.

Through his image Lethaby sets out to resolve the same conflict faced by Keats, Rossetti and the occultists: how is man able to sustain the mystical union and do away with the veil of illusion permanently? Lethaby's resolution lies in achieving a balance between the two worlds of matter and of spirit, without favouring or rejecting either. This equilibrium paradoxically leads to the ending of all dualities and hence to mystical union. We see how the chequered floor transitions into a plain circular altar, metaphorically proposing that mystical union requires the eradication of duality and the polarities it creates, and ultimately leading to the alchemist's 'philosopher's stone', or in this case to the beryl, which could therefore be seen as equivalent to the Godhead or divine knowledge.

A relief designed for the Liverpool Cathedral Competition in 1902 (Lethaby, 1902), contains some devices comparable to those found in *A Beryl Shrine* (Figure 5). The designer of the piece is unknown. Trevor Garnham, in his 1980 dissertation, attributes the piece to Henry Wilson (1864-1934). Whilst Wilson may have been responsible for the carving of the relief, it seems likely that the design itself was the working of William Lethaby. Lethaby is known to have been responsible for much of the design work of the competition entry (Brandon-Jones, 1957:220). Considering this alongside the similarities in symbolic language, it is not implausible to deem the relief the design work of Lethaby.

The image is saturated with symbolic devices which may yield a number of diverse readings. However, it will not be within the scope of this thesis to analyse all interpretations; therefore the focus will remain on establishing direct parallels between

the relief and Lethaby's *A Beryl Shrine*. The relief depicts Jesus crucified on the cross, with Adam and Eve below. It is possible to immediately perceive the cross as a tree – a metaphor identical to that portrayed by the column in *A Beryl Shrine*. Jesus on the cross could be seen as equivalent in symbolic terms to the sword in Lethaby's illustration. Adam and Eve stand at the bottom of the image: they stand in the realm of the material. Just like the snake symbolism in *A Beryl Shrine*, their love can remain sensual or can become a creative force, allowing them to rise to the heights of the spiritual.

Taking a closer look at the image, we see these ideas further elaborated upon. The cross, on which Jesus is crucified, is not a cross but is in fact a tau. The tau symbol is seen employed extensively by the ancient Egyptians and also more recently by occult societies. The symbol denotes moving down from the spiritual realm to that of matter (Goodman, 1989:17). There also appears to be an arc within the tree. The upward-facing arc symbolises the capability of holding the spirit (Goodman, 1989:17). On the other hand, the tree's two branches unite to form a downward-pointed V shape, which conversely refers to the capacity to move down into the material realm (Goodman, 1989:14). The whole image is again, like the altar of *A Beryl Shrine*, enclosed within a circle. This form of enclosure is typically used to suggest that all the components within the circle are required to achieve the specific goal. In this instance, both the relief and Lethaby's *A Beryl Shrine* refer to the unification of the material and the spiritual to achieve mystical union with the divine. Finally we see this expressed in the image itself. Here, there is no beryl to represent the Godhead but instead, in the middle of the image, we find two crescent shapes on either side of the tree, each holding a dove. Cirlot describes the dove as an intermediary between the spiritual and the material worlds (Hall, 2003:279). It therefore seems fitting that the dove lies

between the material and the spiritual representation in the relief also. However, we find even more compelling evidence in Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth* to identify the meaning of such imagery. Lethaby, in his chapter on the 'Golden Gate of the Sun', refers to the great door of the temple, which would represent the gate of heaven on a microcosmic scale. This door is represented on many occasions with the sun alongside the moon. Lethaby describes how at Ebba the sun rises between two moons, as seen in Figure 6 (Lethaby, 1994:150). On other occasions the above symbols are accompanied by birds, as shown in Figure 7 (Lethaby, 1994:152). This is witnessed at Hatra, where a temple erected under the Parthian dynasty has 'the sun rising between two moons displayed on the eastern door; this and many others, have birds right and left' (Lethaby, 1994:152). It is probable that Lethaby may have intended this imagery to depict the gate of heaven where, just as the worshipper might pass through to the temple, metaphorically the soul passes to the other world (Lethaby, 1994:162). In this respect, the central section of the relief could well depict the gate of heaven, with moon and bird on both left and right, and the crown above the head of Jesus as the central sun. The 'gate of heaven' could be seen as comparable to the beryl in Lethaby's *A Beryl Shrine*. Both lie in the middle, between the physical and the spiritual worlds, and it is through achieving a balance between the two polarities that one is to obtain union with the divine Godhead.

The preceding analysis has attempted to shed some light on Lethaby's exploitation of magic symbols and artefacts. It has also introduced Lethaby's comprehension of wider occult themes and philosophy, with the case study uncovering many parallels that exist between Lethaby's design work and occult symbolism. The study has also put forward the contention that, far from being an anomaly, *A Beryl Shrine* was in fact intrinsic in forming the foundation through which Lethaby later developed his own ideas on the

symbol, manifesting not only in a few drawings but in his whole architectural paradigm. The subsequent case studies will endeavour to substantiate this claim further.

4.2 Alchemical imagery: exoteric and esoteric emblems found in Lethaby's work

Section two of the chapter will focus on the alchemical symbolism uncovered within Lethaby's drawings and his font and canopy design created for St John the Baptist Church, in Low Bentham, Yorkshire (1890). The ensuing case studies hope to reveal the extent to which alchemical symbolism influenced the work of Lethaby. To do this, the highly influential fifteenth-century esoteric text *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) will be analysed and its relationship to Lethaby explored. The book will form a key component of the chapter. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was read by many of the Arts and Crafts exponents, including Lethaby, Morris, Ruskin, Burne-Jones and Rossetti. The text is saturated with architectural metaphors and is considered to be an allegory interwoven with obscure alchemical symbolism. Hence, further insight into the text will assist in discovering whether or not there was a hidden alchemical agenda behind Lethaby's designs.

4.2.1 Introduction to Lethaby's drawings and font design

Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, documents his pursuit of the origins of architecture, deeply rooted in myth and ancient notions of the cosmos. Through his book Lethaby sought to reveal the 'esoteric principles of architecture' (Lethaby, 1994:9). Whilst being a seminal anthropological study, undertaken first hand by an architect rather than a historian, Lethaby's book presents a difficulty for the reader, as throughout his complex, and by his own admission 'uncritical' (Lethaby, 1994:15) text, Lethaby fails to provide the reader with a systematic form of referencing and

remains vague regarding the sources he consulted when writing. It therefore becomes problematic to ascertain where Lethaby's ideas surfaced from. There are nevertheless rare occasions when Lethaby openly acknowledges the literature that influenced his study. These junctures are therefore all the more significant because of their scarcity. One source which Lethaby reveals on more than one occasion is the fifteenth-century, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. The *Hypnerotomachia* is the story of Poliphilo, who is lost in a dream and in search of his beloved Polia. In the course of his journey Poliphilo is transported to mysterious realms and introduced to architectural wonders, including those of classical antiquity. Poliphilo is no doubt overwhelmed and awed by the architecture he encounters, as is reflected through the book's long and recondite descriptions.

Lethaby was particularly enchanted by the *Hypnerotomachia*. On 7 December 1889, he wrote the following entry in his diary: 'Evenings for the last month spent in extracting Palace and Gardens from the French edn. of *Hypnerotomachia*' (Lethaby, 1889:xii). This suggests that Lethaby not only referenced the *Hypnerotomachia* in his book, but also had a personal interest in the manuscript which absorbed him in his free time. Lethaby's extensive and in-depth study of the text, along with its numerous woodcut illustrations, was a fruitful endeavour, which resulted in the production of three drawings: Figure 8, *A Garden Enclosed* (1889) (Lethaby, 1889a), reproduced in J D. Sedding's *Garden-Craft Old and New* (1891) (Sedding, 1891); Figure 9, the frontispiece for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook* (1889) (Lethaby, 1889b), found in Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work (1857–1931)* (Rubens, 1986:77); and Figure 10, an unpublished invitation (as far as the author is aware) designed for the Architectural Association annual dinner (1891) (Lethaby, 1891). The book also inspired Figure 11, Lethaby's design for the font and canopy of

St John the Baptist Church in Low Bentham, Yorkshire (1890) (Lethaby, 1890:87). Another of Lethaby's works, Figure 12, *A Drawing of a Room* (1885), will also be scrutinised in this section (Lethaby, 1885). Whilst the design does not demonstrate an obvious link to the *Hypnerotomachia*, it does include alchemical components that will be brought to light.

The above works have so far not been subject to a critical study, and their symbolic references have remained for the most part elusive. It is therefore the aim here to decipher these images through an alchemical lens and suggest possible interpretations that Lethaby may have intended for the designs. What was it about this particular manuscript that fascinated Lethaby, and why did he choose to spend his evenings laboriously extracting images from the text?

4.2.2 The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and Lethaby

Lethaby's relationship with the *Hypnerotomachia* has been previously examined by Rubens, Merwood and Plaat. Rubens explains how Lethaby stumbled across the book and its woodcut illustrations in the course of his research and that 'by the end of the 1880s these illustrations had already become the source for some of Lethaby's designs' (Rubens, 1986:80). Merwood discusses the modern symbolism in Lethaby's writing, and the effect of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* upon the architect. She writes how the

architectural fantasises...seemed to hold a particular fascination for Lethaby. He invoked these texts for their fantastic and beautiful descriptions of the symbols that make up the chapters of his book. Saturated with references to precious stones and metals, cosmological classification, and magic numbers, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* attempts to demonstrate the deep alchemical significance of architectural symbolism through literary reference (Merwood, 2004:187).

Merwood's supposition that Lethaby's book was his endeavour to illustrate the 'alchemical significance of architectural symbolism' is intriguing. The current study hopes to build upon this claim and propose that Lethaby did not stop at literary references but found a practical application for such symbolism in his own design work.

Lastly, Deborah van der Plaat's paper "'Would you know the new, you must search the old": William Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (1891) and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499)' (Plaat, 2002a) deals exclusively with Lethaby and the *Hypnerotomachia*. However, distinct from the current examination, Plaat's line of reading is primarily focused on the architectural styles found throughout the book and the lessons to be learned by the nineteenth-century architect. Plaat introduces the multiple debates taking place within architectural practice during the century, including ideas on whether architecture was determined by the imagination or by reason, fine art or science, and the application of knowledge developed through contemplation or, instead, of knowledge developed through the active process of making.

Plaat suggests that the *Hypnerotomachia* surreptitiously deals with these issues and, through their reading of the book, provided architects, including Lethaby, with a key to the way to proceed:

Poliphilo's journey through the forest in which numerous architectural monuments are scattered, demonstrates that architecture was about looking, contemplating and the study of the material world (both natural and built); a method which had conventionally resulted in the imitation and replication of what was seen (mimesis). However, by placing Poliphilo's journey within a dream, the process of contemplation was tempered by the active imagination, the transformative powers of the mind, which freed the architect to combine and modify the elements of the past in order to invent something new (Plaat, 2002a:12).

Plaat asserts that throughout the book are lessons on how to reconcile the dual conceptions of history prevalent during the nineteenth-century, another example being Poliphilo's decision at the Tripartite Gate. Here Poliphilo must choose to proceed through one of the three doors labelled, *THEODOXIA* (Glory of God), *EROTOTROPHOS* (the Mother of Love) and *COSMODOXIA* (Glory of the World). Poliphilo selects the middle door representing love. Pérez-Gómez understands the doors to the left and right to represent design canons: *THEODOXIA* representing a life of contemplation – architecture as a liberal art; and *COSMODOXIA*, the world of human action – architecture as craft (Plaat, 2002a:7). Poliphilo's decision to take the middle path is indicative of his rejection of the two separate canons in favour of a more balanced incorporation of both, working in harmony with each other.

Plaat's paper centres Lethaby within a turbulent period where industry was rapidly evolving and architects sought to find their place in modern society. Lethaby was no doubt affected by these changes and worked tirelessly to determine a path for the modern architect. At the same time, he was much like the protagonist of the *Hypnerotomachia*, forced to reevaluate his own path in life and decide how he planned to proceed with his own journey.

4.2.2.1 The nineteenth-century revival of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* embraced the nineteenth-century *Zeitgeist* impeccably and for this reason experienced a revival of interest during the century. The book dealt with themes relevant to the times, which because of its many architectural references were particularly applicable to artists and architects. In 1883 the first complete French translation of the book was published by French enamellist and scholar Claude Popelin. It was also during this period that the text was studied

critically. In 1888 the South Kensington Museum produced *The Dream of Poliphilus: a facsimile of one hundred and sixty-eight woodcuts in Poliphili's Hypnerotomachia* (Colonna, 1888), and following this, in 1889, Andrew Lang released a reprint of the 1592 English edition attributed to Sir Robert Darlington (Lang, 1889), highlighting the popularity and unprecedented availability of the text during the fin-de-siècle.

The Arts and Crafts exponents were particularly receptive to the book. This may have been largely due to its handmade woodcuts and exquisite detailing. The Arts and Crafts Movement was set up on the premise that objects and buildings should be honest and 'express their functional and structural character without pretense' (Crawford, 1997:16). The movement also believed in abolishing the hierarchy of the arts, in which fine arts such as painting and sculpture were seen as superior to architecture and the decorative arts. Combined with the championing of the decorative arts was the desire for ordinary labour to be pleasurable. Ruskin was a great advocate of ordinary workmen taking pleasure in their craftwork. Inspired by the Gothic builders, Ruskin equated joy in work with handwork and was heavily opposed to the use of machinery. Working by hand was strongly promoted by the Movement, but not all Arts and Crafts proponents rejected the machine completely. Some instead sought to develop honest methods by which to exploit it. In regard to aesthetics, the work produced was strongly based on associations over two main areas: nature and the past (Crawford, 1997:22). These themes were explored expansively in the *Hypnerotomachia*.

The manuscript was an item of beauty, and its original hand-bound editions were collectors' items. It no doubt reflected the aims of the Movement, with its hand-crafted workmanship, and illustrations depicting ruins of Egyptian, Greek and Roman architecture together with beautiful gardens. The book transpired to be a treasure trove

of inspiration, drawn upon by artists and architects to create some of their most esteemed work.

Rossetti was known to have held two copies of the *Hypnerotomachia* in his library: the Italian Aldine edition printed in 1499, and the French translation, *Le Songe de Poliphilie*, dated 1561²⁴. It is highly probable that Rossetti inherited both editions from his father after the latter's death in 1854 (Bentley, 1977:280).

When the poet William Allingham visited Burne-Jones and Morris in 1866, he noted that Burne-Jones, when in the mood, busied himself with designs for Morris's stories, finding his style in the old woodcuts of the *Hypnerotomachia*, of which he had a fine copy (Weinberg, 2003:368). This sixteenth-century copy of the Italian edition was presented by Morris to Burne-Jones and is now held at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Houghton Library is also in possession of Ruskin's copy of the second Aldine edition, published in 1546 (Oettinger, 2000:9–10). The book's influence in England was not limited to Arts and Crafts circles but was rather more extensive. Sir John Soane (1753–1837) possessed three copies of the book (Plaat, 2002a:3). Charles Cockerell (1788–1863), architect and lecturer at the Royal Academy in London, studied the text in his 1842 lecture series, outlining its lessons for the modern architect (Plaat, 2002a:3). Cockerell's 1848 drawing, *The Professor's Dream* has been paralleled with imagery found within the *Hypnerotomachia*, and it has been suggested that Cockerell's *Dream* was a direct response to Colonna's *Dream*, representative of the architect's collective memory (Bordeleau, 2009:118).

²⁴ The sixteenth century French edition is more of an adaption of the original text and not as literal as Popelin's later French translation.

The text was also adopted towards the last decade of the nineteenth-century by English Decadent school members Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) and Frederick William Rolfe (1860-1913):

The extraordinary coincidence between Colonna's artistic programme and the obsession of the Nineties accounts for the fact that the *Dream of Poliphilus* not only influenced, but also directly served as a conscious model for, two of the most curious books of the period, Aubrey Beardsley's *The Story of Venus Tannhäuser* and Fredrick William Rolfe's *Don Renato* (Vergne, 1992:58).

The preceding has demonstrated the vast influence of the book within avant-garde circles during the latter part of the nineteenth-century. It has also illustrated the significance of the *Hypnerotomachia* within Lethaby's personal circle of acquaintances. It is therefore highly probable that the book's themes were discussed extensively at this time, and its central thesis propagated by Lethaby and his friends.

4.2.2.2 The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*: a brief sketch

The original Aldine edition of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* was printed and published in 1499 by Aldus Manutius. It was the most highly illustrated book ever printed at the Aldine Press, containing a total of 172 woodcuts (Oettinger, 2000:6–7). The book title, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, is a composite of three Greek words: *hypnos* (sleep), *eros* (love) and *mache* (strife). Together this translates as the strife of love in a dream. The author combines Italian syntax with a Latin vocabulary. He also uses Greek words. In addition, the text displays knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean. The book is known for its difficult and recondite language and its elaborate architectural descriptions. Joscelyn Godwin, the translator of the first complete English edition, published in 1999, believes that 'Colonna uses his erudition not to educate so much as to dazzle his audience, just as Poliphilo is dazzled by the highly-polished and over-decorated surfaces of the monuments he sees' (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:x).

The title recalls the struggle of Poliphilo, the book's main protagonist, to find and gain the love of his beloved Polia. Poliphilo's journey unfolds in a dream within a dream. The book is separated into two parts. The first part begins with Poliphilo finding himself in a wild dark forest. Through prayer he finds his way out to an ancient ruin. Here he enters a porch in which he again finds darkness. Attempting to turn back, he encounters the form of a triple-tongued dragon, so he must instead continue into the gloomy vault, which he finds to be a labyrinth (Stewering, 2000:7). Poliphilo again manages to locate his way out and finds himself in a fertile plain, in the realm of Free Will. Here he encounters five nymphs personifying the five senses. They take him to bathe in an octagonal bath-house and later to a banquet with Queen Eleuterilida. After hearing about Poliphilo's strife Queen Eleuterilida orders two nymphs, Logistica (Reason) and Thelemia (Will), to be Poliphilo's guides to the realm of Aim. After passing two gardens, a water labyrinth and a golden obelisk, they arrive at the tripartite gate of Aim. Here Poliphilo must choose between Earthly Fame, Heavenly Fame and Love. He chooses the central portal of Love and is then left by his two nymph attendants. In the realm of Love he meets a beautiful nymph bearing a torch, who will be his new guide. Poliphilo falls in love with the nymph and questions whether she could, in fact, be Polia. Together they watch the four triumphal processions in honour of Jupiter in union with the four elements (Stewering, 2000:7). Polia then leads Poliphilo to the fountain of Narcissus. This is followed by sightings of the fifth chariot of Vertumnus and Pomona – the god and goddess of fertility. They then pass the altar of Priapus, past Pan and Silvanus, until finally they arrive at the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. Here a ritual ceremony ensues, and the nymph's torch is extinguished by Poliphilo in the central cistern. The nymph's true nature is uncovered, and she reveals herself as Polia. Further sacrificial rites and magical apparitions are performed, after

which the two lovers leave to await Cupid's bark. As they wander the antique town, Poliphilo is instructed by Polia to visit the Polyandron, which is dedicated to triple-bodied Pluto. After observing a mosaic within the Polyandron illustrating the rape of Proserpine, Poliphilo is terrified for Polia and hastens back to the shore where she awaits him. They then board the bark of Cupid and sail together to the island of Cythera. Cupid leads them to the amphitheatre at the centre of the island. After a ceremony before the goddess of love, reflective of the couple's sexual relationship, the heptagonal fountain of Venus is revealed at the centre of the amphitheatre. Following this, Mars enters with a wolf and is embraced by Venus. The couple then leave the amphitheatre and move to the tomb, and finally to the hexagonal fountain of Adonis, where Polia sits with the nymphs and retells the story from her perspective. This forms part two of the book.

4.2.2.3 The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and alchemy

The origins of alchemy can be traced back to Egypt and the Middle East and also separately to India and China. Alchemy appeared in Italy in the early eleventh century. From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards, however, alchemy was publicly rejected in Europe. This was in part due to fear of rebuke by the church: 'Franciscan and Dominican monastic orders both found it necessary to repeatedly ban the "study and practice of alchemy". Penalties ranged from "imprisonment to excommunication." Not only was the practice of alchemy banned but the reading of alchemical treatises was forbidden as well' (Deming, 2016:63) Alchemists were looked upon with suspicion. Their work was seen to lie somewhere between the legitimate study of astronomy and physics and the more questionable study of astrology. Many began associating alchemy with necromancy and witchcraft, with alchemists being publicly denounced for invoking demons (Deming, 2016:63).

However, this did not deter private practitioners of alchemy, who continued to utilise alchemical expressions in their literature. During the late fifteenth century this language further developed, and alchemical texts became a platform for expression through which educated men could express their knowledge of the psyche allegorically, without any fear of repercussions.

A French edition of the *Hypnerotomachia* published in 1600 by François Béroalde de Verville (1556–1626) consists of an essay in cipher and a frontispiece illustration, both identifying the text as an alchemical treatise. Béroalde considered all the architectural references in the book as ‘merely a prudent cloak for the book’s invisible yet visible meaning’ (Fierz-David, 1987:10). He believed the text’s author, Francesco Colonna, to be an alchemist, who was ‘leading by the nose those readers who imagine they can grasp the essence of the book by its externals’ (Fierz-David, 1987:10). For Béroalde these externals were superfluous to the main treatise hidden within the book.

Linda Fierz-David’s *The Dream of Poliphilo: The Soul in Love* (1950) examines the symbolic parallels that subsist between the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and alchemy. Fierz-David does this through studying alchemical sources alongside employing methods of modern psychology. The work of Jung is referenced in many instances, enabling the author to depict the spirit of Renaissance psychology. Jung’s psychological interpretation is used by Fierz-David as a tool to unlock some of the obscure imagery within the text. Jung researched and wrote extensively on the relationship between alchemy and psychology. In order, therefore, to assist the reader to understand the alchemical undertones of the *Hypnerotomachia*, she employs Jung’s work to decipher the ambiguous symbols found within the text.

Jung writes the forward to Fierz-David's book, where he explains how twenty-five years earlier he had come across Béroalde de Verville's translation of the *Hypnerotomachia* and later went on to admire the woodcuts of the Italian edition:

I cannot even say how far it was this book which put me on the track of alchemy. In any case, not many years later I began to collect the old Latin treatises of the alchemists. In the course of a close study of them lasting many years, I actually discovered that line of thought that we might call subterranean, and from which there sprang, not only the alchemist's images, but also Poliphilo's dream (Fierz-David, 1987:xiii).

Fierz-David has no doubt that the 'industrious monk who wrote the *Hypnerotomachia* had obviously practised alchemy as a science and taken it seriously' (Fierz-David, 1987:25–26). She goes on to describe how '[t]he book displays a remarkable knowledge of the subject, not only in regards to its fundamental symbolism, but also in the form of an extensive lore of plants, herbs, and stones ... That is why, as we have seen, its author was claimed as a fellow labourer in the field by the later French alchemists' (Fierz-David, 1987:26).

Alchemy had many forms, and it would have been easy for the novice to have mistaken alchemy for a purely scientific process by which to gain wealth and esteem. Whilst the practical application of alchemy was of course a fundamental aspect of the art, it was far from the only concern of many alchemists. To many, alchemy was 'the secret way of a rebirth, it was the Great Work in which the adept was involved, in action and suffering. As he put forward all his powers in his struggle with matter, it became the mirror of his unconscious, and his work the moving symbol of the change and liberation of his self' (Fierz-David, 1987:24).

Tracey Winton's 1996 thesis, 'Why Architects Wear Black', also recognises and elaborates upon the 'large amount of syncretic alchemical and magical imagery' within the text (Winton, 1996:12). Winton describes the quest of man searching for

union with his female counterpart within the *Hypnerotomachia* as metaphorically alluding to the ‘journey of the soul towards God, or the descent of the hero into the underworld’ (Winton, 1996:13). Winton relates Poliphilo’s transformation and transubstantiation through the book with the art of alchemy, describing Poliphilo’s journey as

a recasting of the myth of the hero, who braves the dangerous descent into the underworld in order to overcome trials and return with some valued treasure, be it jewels, a maiden, wisdom or the *lapis angularis*. His return recirculates spiritual or erotic energy into the world. The swallowing of the hero by the earth or a monster is the assimilation of the conscious mind by the larger unconscious psyche, not bounded by the physical body. This is a voluntary death to waking consciousness which is followed by a rebirth of a transformed and heightened consciousness. In dreams the divine and the immortal are revealed, and because true divinity is pneumatic, they are a space of inspiration and divination. For this reason the story is set in a dream (Winton, 1996:9).

The question that remains to be answered is, how far Lethaby was aware of and impelled by the alchemical inferences within the *Hypnerotomachia*.

4.2.3 A Garden Enclosed (1889)

John D. Sedding’s *Garden-Craft Old and New* was first published in 1891 (Sedding, 1891). The book includes chapters on ‘The Theory of a Garden’ and ‘Art in a Garden’. The first edition of Sedding’s book saw Lethaby’s drawing featured in the third chapter, ‘Historical and Comparative Sketch of the English Garden’. The 1895 and later editions, however, presented Figure 8, Lethaby’s ‘A Garden Enclosed’, as the frontispiece to the book (Lethaby, 1889a).

The garden drawn by Lethaby recalls the descriptions of the gardens of Cythera in the *Hypnerotomachia*. Cythera is a circular island, divided into twenty parts by twenty paths and bordered by a hedge of cypress and myrtle. The twenty paths unite in the centre of the island, where lies the amphitheatre within which rests the fountain of

Venus. The island is split further by concentric circles constructed of colonnades and hedges (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:294).

As Poliphilo moves through the island towards the centre he encounters a meadow, where he climbs seven steps of red and black stone and enters a colonnade, with double columns all the way around in pycnostyle arrangement, the spacing between the columns in the colonnade measuring one and a half diameters. Poliphilo observes that '[o]ne column of each pair was of splendidly shining jasper, and after every seven there was a square column of red, topped with a brilliant ball of gilded bronze' (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:315). Poliphilo then goes on to describe how on top of the pycnostyle he saw 'innumerable peacocks, white, red and normal-coloured, freely running and perching, some unfurling their tails, while others let their splendid plumage droop' (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:315).

The above description and Lethaby's drawing have many analogous features. It can therefore be surmised that it was this section of the book that Lethaby chose to depict. Lethaby undoubtedly exploits elements from the narrative and adapts them for his illustration. We see a pseudo-colonnade represented by a hedge topped with peacock topiary. One male and one female peacock are depicted in the foreground, and the square column topped with a ball is seen in the centre of Lethaby's drawing. Cupid appears to stand upon the colonnade behind with bow outstretched. Bearing in mind that Cupid is the god that leads Poliphilo and Polia to the amphitheatre at the centre of the island, it seems an appropriate symbol to include at this stage. What therefore was Lethaby conveying through his use of these particular features? And what was it about this part of Poliphilo's journey that particularly appealed to Lethaby?

Firstly, if we consider the title of the piece, ‘A Garden Enclosed’, we may begin to understand Lethaby’s intent to a certain degree. Fierz-David suggests that in the *Hypnerotomachia*, each time the ‘soil is sacred or the building very precious’, there is a pronounced mandala character and ‘[e]very “magic circle” is subject to a divine figure and closed to the outer world’ (Fierz-David, 1987:145). This concept of enclosed spaces is built upon by comparing them to an alchemical vessel. The alchemical vessel is a place in which transformation of the elements or metals takes place. This also metaphorically refers to the transformation of the self. Therefore spaces that are considered as ‘vessels’ in the book are also places where Poliphilo undergoes a measure of self-transformation, dying to his former self and being renewed in some way.

If we contemplate Lethaby’s image, we observe that it is presided over by Cupid and that the enclosure forms a mandala shape, with four paths leading to the octagonal base of the square column topped with a ball. Lethaby departed from the description in the *Hypnerotomachia* when placing this column in the centre of the image, thus allowing for the creation of a mandala form. ‘Mandala is a Sanskrit term that is believed to translate to “circle” in English’ (Buchalter, 2012:11): mandalas can take the form of a ring, magic circle or cycle (Jung and Shamdasani, 2012:12), and they have historically been employed by Hindus and Buddhists to aid meditation. Jung believed that a mandala was the product of the unconscious, being irrational and possessing almost magical attributes. Owing to the occurrence of mandala forms from the beginning of history, Jung placed them as part of the collective unconscious (Buchalter, 2012:12). For Jung the mandala was ‘the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the center, to individuation’ (Jung, 1989:196).

Moving now to reflect upon the main subject matter of the drawing, the peacock, we find even more alchemical significance. The peacock has various symbolic connotations. Its tail is considered a symbol of renewal. It is also regarded as a solar symbol, a symbol of beauty and of immortality. The solar association derives from the wheel-like tail of the peacock, and the way in which the peacock greets the rising sun, much like the cock. Aristotle's belief that the peacock's flesh was incorruptible led to its being adopted by the Christian tradition, becoming emblematic of Christ's resurrection and the promise of immortality (Werness, 2006:319).

For the alchemist, the peacock's tail denotes a sign of progress in their achievement of the Great Work, and the beginning of any real process of redemption (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:140). This stage sees many colours appear in the alchemical vessel, reminiscent of the peacock's tail. It is pertinent that the description in the *Hypnerotomachia* includes white and red peacocks alongside normal-coloured ones. The white and red colours are both allusions to the alchemical stages following the many-coloured stage of the peacock's tail. The alchemical process has three main phases: *nigredo*, *albedo* and *rubedo*, or black, white and red respectively. In addition to this there are two transitional points: the peacock's tails, which appears between black and white; and yellow, which appears before red. Each colour represents a different phase and is also associated with different levels of self-transformation (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:47).

Lethaby's drawing and the description found in the *Hypnerotomachia* hold some strong parallels with an image found in a sixteenth-century illuminated alchemical manuscript, *Splendor Solis* by Salomon Trismosin. The original manuscript of the twenty-two coloured plates, dated 1582, can be found at the British Museum (Trismosin, 1582). If we examine Figure 13, which shows plate sixteen of *Splendor*

Solis (Trismosin, 1582), the peacock in the central alchemical vessel is apparent. The alchemical vessel in which the transformation of elements or metals occurs is also commonly referred to as an alembic (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:44). The alembic is placed within a golden niche supported by columns within a deep reddish-gold interior. The rectangle at the bottom is pink or light red in colour (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:137). The surroundings appear harmonious and no longer in conflict with one another, as is the case with a number of plates preceding plate sixteen in *Splendor Solis*. Already it is clear that some parallels exist between this image and Lethaby's. The peacock holds a central place in each illustration and in both images the peacock appears to be enclosed by columns. It could be conceded that the association of the columns with the peacock symbolism was wholly due to the description found in the *Hypnerotomachia*. However, Lethaby's design for the Architectural Association annual dinner invitation contradicts this very notion (Figure 10) (Lethaby, 1891). Here we again see columns depicted in the background. These columns appear to be decorated with peacock feathers, suggesting that Lethaby was aware of the association and possibly understood its alchemical reference.²⁵

Lethaby's image is noticeably black and white, but it would not be unreasonable to surmise that Lethaby could have been recalling particular components present within the meadow of the *Hypnerotomachia*, including its colour descriptions. The colours described in the *Hypnerotomachia* for the square column of red topped with a brilliant ball of gilded bronze are found in Trismosin's plate, where similar red and bronze tones are utilised for the columns, interior and bottom rectangle. The colours once more point to the future *rubedo* of the alchemical process (Fierz-David, 1987:145).

²⁵ For further analysis of the Architectural Association dinner invitation design see later in this section.

Another salient feature of Lethaby's image is Cupid with bow outstretched, placed at the top of the drawing. It seems beyond coincidence to find the same image of Cupid at the top of plate sixteen of *Splendor Solis* also poised to shoot an arrow. Cupid here rides at the front of Venus's golden chariot drawn by two birds. Venus and Cupid embody the Eros principle, which represents 'not just love or sexual attraction but true *relatedness*, the human capacity for communication of discriminated feeling ... the opposite of narcissistic self-love' (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:137). This appears to be a symbolic association that would no doubt have appealed to Lethaby, whose gravestone epitaph was 'love and labour are all' (Roberts, 1957b:225). It is remarkable to witness the image of Cupid employed in an almost identical way in both images. The above analysis could go as far as to suggest that Lethaby had come across the illustration taken from the *Splendor Solis*, and had sought to represent elements of the alchemical painting.

Finally, Lethaby's drawing features two peacocks occupying the foreground. One is a male and the other female. This itself has an alchemical connotation of which Lethaby may have been aware. The entire process of alchemy encompasses a unification of opposites, also known as *coniunctio*, within the alchemical vessel. The ubiquitous mystical marriage of king and queen in alchemical manuscripts is a representation of the final operation of the opus. Owing to the dual nature of alchemy, this metaphor refers on the one hand to the culmination of a scientific process, but on the other, to the harmony between masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche (Gorski, 1996:123). The idea is once more prevalent in the *Hypnerotomachia* and expounded by Fierz-David when referring to Polia as Poliphilo's anima. The anima, according to Jung, is that which is found in the unconscious of the male and finds expression as a feminine inner personality. Hence, the aim of Poliphilo's journey was quintessentially

the realisation of and union with his anima. Lethaby's drawing could be suggestive of this process, and it might be postulated that he was here pre-empting this mystical union in his image.

Peacock symbolism was employed frequently by Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau exponents. Morris exploited the symbolism for his textile design *Peacock and Dragon* (1878) (Morris, 1878); Beardsley's drawings for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1891) (Wilde and Douglas, 1894) incorporate numerous peacock illusions; and James Whistler dedicated a whole room to the peacock in his *The Peacock Room* (1876–77) (Whistler, 1876–77). Mary Watts (1849-1938) and the Glasgow Four were also fond of peacock imagery and made use of its symbolism on many occasions.²⁶ The Four, often referred to as the 'Spook School', were made up of Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928), Herbert MacNair (1868-1955) and the sisters Margaret (1864-1933) and Frances Macdonald (1873-1921). The group were known to frequently employ within their art symbols which were infused with allegory and mysticism. Timothy Neat has found many correlations between the very specific symbols selected by the group and Celtic mythology, quasi-religious movements of the nineteenth-century and Rosicrucian philosophy (Neat, 1994:7).

One example of the Four's use of peacock symbolism can be seen in Figure 14, a candle sconce titled *The Eyes of Thoth* (1896), designed by Margaret and Frances Macdonald (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1896). The sconce is made from beaten copper, and along with its apparent peacock symbolism it seems to recall the motifs from plate sixteen of *Splendor Solis*. The peacock is found in the centre of the sconce, and its body appears enclosed from both left and right. The unfurled peacock feathers

²⁶ For further detailed analysis on Mary Watts and C. R. Mackintosh see chapter 5: Lethaby's Legacy.

give the impression of a vessel in which the peacock stands, and the eyes at the top practically form a stopper, to seal the vessel. The copper colour of the scone evokes the red and golden shades of the plate in *Splendor Solis*.

Ultimately, it could be inferred that Lethaby, Margaret and Frances Macdonald, along with other nineteenth-century artists and architects, were utilising peacock imagery in their work, not for facile decorative ends but for profound symbolic purpose, and further still to depict a stage in the alchemical process.

4.2.4 Frontispiece for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook* (1889)

The Architectural Association was founded in 1847 by a group of young students looking for reform of the current structure of architectural education. The students created the organisation to provide a systematic course of training for architects independently of private practice, which was the existing format and was considered by the Association to be rife with corruption and vested interest. The Architectural Association was at the centre of architectural development in the nineteenth-century, and from 1859 onwards membership steadily increased and social life flourished. The association was a hub of debate, protest and exhibition. It was largely due the Architectural Association's petitioning that the RIBA's voluntary examination was established in 1862 and made compulsory by 1882. Lethaby's design for the frontispiece for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook*, seen in Figure 9 (Lethaby, 1889b), must have circulated widely amongst the vanguard, along with his design for the invitation for the annual dinner, which was considered a key event within the Architectural Association social calendar (Bottoms, 2010).

In his description Rubens points out the irrational quality of the frontispiece (Rubens, 1986:78), and Platt suggests that the drawing 'appears to be modelled on the *Temple*

of Venus Physizoa' (Plaat, 2002a:9). These accounts, whilst insightful, are nonetheless inchoate. Lethaby's drawing conceals a depth which has thus far remained unexamined. The illustration can be identified as a product of the amalgamation of numerous disparate layers. It seems as though, through this layering process, Lethaby is attempting to capture the entire journey undertaken by Poliphilo in one image, and far from representing one architectural wonder of the book, it seems to include several at once.

Beginning with the foreground, two columns are depicted covered with scale-like detail, perhaps an allusion to the beginning of Poliphilo's journey where he enters a gloomy vault whilst attempting to escape from the triple-tongued dragon. The two circles on the left and right could well be the two mirrors in which Poliphilo sees his reflection from both sides after entering the vault. In her analysis, Fierz-David interprets Poliphilo's confrontation with the dragon and the journey into the gloomy vaults as his passage into the unconscious. When Poliphilo tries to turn his back on the vault after encountering only darkness, his path is blocked by the dragon: 'Many a man of our day does the same thing by turning his back on the unconscious, imagining that if he sees no more and knows no more, there is nothing there but a terrifying void. But for him who reaches this threshold, the way back is cut off' (Fierz-David, 1987:61). The dragon is a symbol of 'the venomous, blinding danger of the unconscious which threatens to annihilate human consciousness if the human being cannot overcome it by entering the unconscious. But if he enters, perdition turns to salvation' (Fierz-David, 1987:61). At the two mirrors in the porch Poliphilo is shown his two sides, which constitute opposites. He sees that he contains both light and darkness, good and evil, which is a realisation that all adepts of alchemy must, at some point, confront. This theme seems to be played out in Lethaby's image as a whole,

which will be dealt with in detail later. The drawing for that reason represents not only Poliphilo's journey within the book, but concurrently an archetypal journey, undertaken by the alchemist, through the unconscious self. Beyond the two columns Lethaby depicts an arcade with three openings, reminiscent of the three portals of Queen Telosia, where Poliphilo selects the middle door to proceed to the realm of Love. The central portal in Lethaby's drawing, framed by the two columns at the front, suggests this as the correct way to enter.

Upon the floor of Lethaby's image are depicted two circular reflective elements. These could be a reference to Poliphilo's experiences with water during his travels. Water is an important symbolic tool within the *Hypnerotomachia* and alchemy, being exploited for its purifying qualities. Two conspicuous example of water being utilised metaphorically are Poliphilo's bath with the five senses and his baptism at the Temple of Venus Physizoa. The water at the bath-house is a mixture of male and female substance, male urine and virgin's milk. Again, at the Temple of Venus, there is a baptism by water and double baptism by fire, and a union of male and female substance which produces a healing fruit. These examples can both be viewed as examples of *coniunctio*, where the unification of opposites produces a divine substance. Psychologically, this can be explained as the union of the conscious attitude with the unconscious (Franz, 1980:102). The reflective circles may therefore represent not only a literal progression in Poliphilo's journey but also an allegorical progression thorough his unconscious. The first reflective circle could represent the bath-house and the second, found beyond the arcade, the cistern at the centre of the Temple of Venus. At the bath-house Poliphilo is reconnected with his senses, a connection that he had thus far repressed, and later, at the Temple of Venus, he experiences a union of

love which transforms his being. Both encounters require Poliphilo to re-establish a connection with, and advance deeper into, his unconscious.

Flooring formed of reflective black stone such as obsidian, giving the illusion of water, could be what Lethaby intended to be portrayed here. The floor of the amphitheatre in the *Hypnerotomachia* is made up of a single block of obsidian that consequently disorients Poliphilo. Floors reminiscent of water appealed to Lethaby so much that he devoted a whole chapter to 'Pavements like the Sea' in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. Here he wrote not only of Poliphilo's experience with obsidian stone, but also of similar events that transpired between the Arabian Knights, and Solomon and the Queen of Sheeba (Lethaby, 1994:172–73).²⁷

To the rear of the drawing emerge silhouetted trees and a double spiral staircase leading to an amphitheatre.²⁸ These images recall the gardens of the Island of Cythera and the amphitheatre at the centre of the island, in which is located the fountain of Venus. The island, with its various concentric rings, is believed to indicate the stages of the alchemical process (Fierz-David, 1987:171). This process culminates at the amphitheatre, where Poliphilo finally beholds the goddess Venus. Lethaby's drawing also concludes at the amphitheatre, the pinnacle of the inner journey.

²⁷ For further detail regarding floors resembling water and glass architecture see section 5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

²⁸ It is possible that the staircase may be an allusion to the flight of 'winding stairs' that forms part of the Freemasons' initiation ceremony. This staircase consist of three, five and seven steps, which lead to a place representing the middle chamber of King Solomon's Temple. The seven steps represent the seven liberal arts and sciences. It is interesting to find a list of these liberal arts and sciences in Figure 15 showing Lethaby's 1901 notebook alongside a sketch of a hand holding a compass upright. If Lethaby was aware of these in relation to Masonry, another alternative reading of the drawing is possible. An additional interpretation could be an allusion to the Freemasons' initiation ceremony, which begins with the initiate passing through two brazen pillars on the left and the right representing strength and establishment respectively (Ronayne, 1917:132–153). Due to the scope of the research, this cannot be dealt with in detail here.

This said, the irrational quality of the image dissolves boundaries between the layers, and it is difficult to distinguish between individual levels and decipher where each lies in the final sequence of events. This feature of the image calls to mind a dreamlike state in which Poliphilo finds himself, where time and space are disordered and obscured. An example of this distortion of occurrences in dreams is described by Marie-Louise von Franz in her book *Alchemy* (1980). Franz describes a young doctor who, when recording his dream, comments how ‘he dreamt that something happened in the house and that then afterwards he went into the house. In retelling the dream in the morning he corrected the time sequence and wrote down that he went into the house and then experienced this and that’ (Franz, 1980:16). This supports the irrationality of the unconscious mind, which does not necessarily follow the rational logic of the conscious mind.

Proceeding to consider the aesthetic quality of the image, it is evident that there is a clear juxtaposition between its black and white components. Lethaby plays with the duality of colour along with reflective elements to distort the space. There is a similarity between Lethaby’s drawing and Éliphas Lévi’s depiction of the *Seal of Solomon* (Figure 16) (Lévi, 1854–56: facing 1). The illustration can be found in Lévi’s *Transcendental Magic*. Lethaby is known to have read Lévi’s book and referenced from it in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*²⁹ (Lethaby, 1994:121). Lévi’s image shows the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm. This imagery is placed inside two overlapping equilateral triangles, also known as the Star of David. According to Lévi, the image depicts the God of Light and the God of Reflection (Lévi and Waite, 1958:xxi). The star is finally concealed within an ouroboros. If Lethaby’s drawing is

²⁹ For further detail on Lethaby’s reading of Éliphas Lévi see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle and section 3.1 Theory of magic symbols.

deconstructed using a comparable method, it is intriguing to find some geometrical parallels as identified in Figure 17. The core elements of Lethaby's drawing are enclosed perfectly within a circle. When the Star of David is drawn in the centre of this circle, it delineates the positions of key constituents of the illustration, such as the columns in the foreground and the two circles on the left and right. Lethaby's image is vertically symmetrical much like Lévi's, and when the star is split horizontally to produce a lozenge shape in the centre, it creates a contrast of light and dark space, as seen once more in Lévi's seal. Developing this argument further, and reintroducing the architectural elements of Poliphilo's journey, it becomes visible that the amphitheatre and the fountain of Venus, where the journey concludes, lie at the top of the Star of David, and reflected in the bottom half of the star is the cistern of the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. This imitates Lévi's reflection of the macrocosm in the microcosm, where the amphitheatre, which is the ideal paradigm, is reflected in the Temple of Venus below, representative of its latent potential.

The Sabbatic Goat (Lévi, 1854–56:186), taken again from Lévi's *Transcendental Magic*, could possibly shed light upon the curious double spiral staircase Lethaby adds to the centre of his design (Figure 18). Lévi's image comprises a caduceus placed at the lower part of the body, which according to Lévi portrayed the mysteries of universal generation. Lethaby's staircase recalls this caduceus.

Cirlot argues that the essence of the caduceus is to be found not in its individual elements but in its entirety. The symmetrical relationship of the caduceus is expressive of an active equilibrium of opposing forces

balancing one another in such a way as to create a higher, static form. In the caduceus, this balanced duality is twice stated: in the serpents and in the wings, thereby emphasizing that supreme state of strength and self-control ... which can be achieved both on the lower plane of instincts (symbolized by the

serpents) and on the higher level of the spirit (represented by the wings) (Cirlot, 1971:37).

The caduceus symbolism portrayed by the double spiral staircase therefore works at a microcosmic level to balance and unify the lower and higher planes, which Lethaby once again attempts to achieve in the broader arrangement of the piece. Lethaby's drawing is an image of many parts that work together in a harmonious way and subsequently engender a gestalt and unifying symbolism.

The drawing is, without doubt, saturated with complex imagery, which can be interpreted on an aesthetic level as well as on a deeper symbolic and psychological one. Why this drawing was thought to be a suitable frontispiece for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook* is a matter of intrigue, and would surely benefit from further study.

4.2.5 Dinner invitation: Architectural Association (1889)

Alongside the frontispiece Lethaby created for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook* (1889), he also produced a design for an invitation to the Architectural Association's annual dinner in 1891 (Figure 10) (Lethaby, 1891). The Architectural Association's membership had been on a steady incline since 1859, after their move to larger premises shared with the RIBA. At this time the Association placed much greater emphasis on advertising and publicity than they had previously, leading to events such as the soirée and annual dinner becoming popular occasions in the calendar (Bottoms, 2010). Lethaby's design for the annual dinner invitation has, as far as the author is aware, remained unexamined. At first glance the design has a peculiar charm, but when contemplated further it presents many questions to the observer, the main one being: what is the significance of the symbols? The illustration includes four key features: three rabbits, a fountain, six columns and finally a rose bush. Why were

these figures chosen and arranged in such a composition? Other questions that arise are: what was it about Lethaby's illustration that seemed to represent the mood or theme of the upcoming event? And why was this particular drawing chosen to be sent out to what was seen to be an exceptionally politically and socially motivated body of students? Because of the scope of the examination, the first of these questions will be dealt with in detail here, leaving the other two to be pondered and hopefully further investigated in future research.

It seems unlikely that Lethaby, an architect who expressed the view that '[m]odern architecture, to be real, must not be a mere envelope without contents' (Lethaby, 1994:16), would include empty symbolism. Therefore Lethaby's symbols must have been alluding to something in particular; but what exactly this was has yet to be discovered. The following analysis hopes to provide an alchemical interpretation of the illustration, utilising once more the imagery found within the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. The analysis will put forward an intriguing, or as some would see it a controversial, reading of Lethaby's illustration.

The drawing was produced for the annual dinner on 28 May 1891. Around this time Lethaby was particularly fascinated by the fifteenth-century Renaissance architectural allegory the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, as has been explored earlier in the chapter. The book's many gardens were of special interest to Lethaby, and he dedicated a lot of his free time analysing these. Fountains are also another important feature of the book and delineate key events that take place through the journey. It therefore seems likely that the garden in the illustration would have been inspired by the distinguished gardens and fountains found in the *Hypnerotomachia*.

The frontispiece of the *Architectural Association Sketchbook* created by Lethaby in 1889 was also highly influenced by the *Hypnerotomachia*. It is intriguing to see that the frontispiece and the dinner invitation share some evident parallels. This can be seen clearly in Figure 19 which has been deconstructed using the Star of David, as used previously with the Architectural Association Frontispiece illustration³⁰. Both drawings are in black and white, with a stark contrast between light and dark areas. The bottom half of each illustration is generally darker whilst the top half is much lighter and brighter in comparison, again appearing to portray the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm. Both drawings also appear to be composed of a series of superimposed layers that form a narrative as one deconstructs them sequentially. It can therefore be put forward that both of these drawings were the outcome of Lethaby's research on the *Hypnerotomachia* and produced around the same period.

An image that could have influenced Lethaby during the production of his drawing is Figure 20, Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* (1514) (Titian, 1514). Titian's (1488-1576) painting contains a number of the critical features that are found within Lethaby's drawing.³¹ These include three hares, a rose bush and a fountain in the centre. Could it be that Lethaby was referencing this work through his illustration?

The oil painting shows two young women in a pastoral setting, one lavishly clothed and the other semi-nude. The women sit on the edge of a fountain carved in the form of a classical sarcophagus, and behind them is a winged infant with his right hand

³⁰ Whilst it appears that Lethaby used hidden occult/sacred geometric forms to guide some of his illustrations the author has not found this to be the case in all of Lethaby's work. Further research is therefore required to grasp the extent of Lethaby's use of geometry and its recurrence within his work.

³¹ Titian's works was displayed at the National Gallery, and he was mentioned in articles in *The Burlington Magazine*, to which Lethaby himself contributed. Ruskin also refers to Titian on several occasions in his work. It is therefore very likely that Lethaby would have been aware of Titian's work.

immersed in the fountain. There are several interpretations of this painting and its figures, but one that is most pertinent to this discussion, written by Walter Friedlaender, will be focused upon here. In his paper 'La tintura delle rose' (1938), Friedlaender contends that the source for the iconography of Titian's painting was the *Hypnerotomachia* (Friedlaender, 1938:321), and that the two women sitting on the left and right sides of the fountain are in fact Polia and Venus respectively and the young winged boy behind them, Cupid (Friedlaender, 1938:323–324). Friedlaender also believed that the relief painted at the bottom of the fountain depicted the story of Adonis, and that the fountain carved in the form of a sarcophagus is a reference to the tomb of Adonis seen at the end of book one in the *Hypnerotomachia* (Friedlaender, 1938:323). This is an interesting analysis of the work and could be a possible explanation for the inclusion of some of Lethaby's key symbolism. Was he somehow attempting to allude to this painting discreetly?

The title given to Titian's painting, *Sacred and Profane Love*, is the result of a late eighteenth-century interpretation. The themes of the sacred and the profane were of enduring interest to the Arts and Crafts exponents (Plaat, 2002b:95). Rossetti and Morris were both concerned with these themes that pervaded the *Hypnerotomachia*, and they later exploited them in their poetry and art (Drew, 1996:282), one such example being Rossetti's painting of *Arthur's Tomb* (1854–1855) and another, Morris's poem *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858). It is likely that Lethaby's interest in the *Hypnerotomachia* also extended to its suggestive theories, and he was indeed aware of such themes explored within the book. This is another reason that Lethaby may have been attracted to Titian's painting.

Titian's painting was highly desired at the end of nineteenth-century, when in 1899 the Rothschild family offered to buy the work from the Borghese Gallery for 4 million lire. This price exceeded the estimated worth of the gallery and its entire collection, which was valued at 3.6 million lire (Walks of Italy, 2012). The reasons behind the painting's desirability are uncertain, but the Rothschild family and possibly Lethaby may have been aware of a hidden layer of meaning that is not at first accessible.

Nevertheless, the absence of the two main figures from Lethaby's drawing may suggest an alternative reading. A potential reason for this may be that Lethaby was attempting to depict the themes of sacred and profane through architectural metaphor. The ideas of sacred and profane love, or love and desire, are not applicable only to the main protagonist of the *Hypnerotomachia* but, as argued by Alberto Pérez-Gómez, extend to the architecture as well. Throughout the text the author, Colonna, associates the architecture with the notion of love but at the same time views it as an erotic object, through the eyes of Poliphilo.³² Titan's painting will be considered as one of many sources that may have inspired Lethaby's illustration. Other possible sources will now be examined.

The three hares in the foreground of the image, whilst appearing to blend into the scene, seem to be a peculiar addition to an Architectural Association annual dinner invitation. The symbolism must certainly have held some special significance for Lethaby. Two hares are seen in a Vittore Carpaccio painting, *Birth of the Virgin*

³² Pérez-Gómez takes this a step further by relating the themes of love and desire back to contemplation and action, which are two of the three choices that confront Poliphilo on his journey through the book. Pérez-Gómez considers these to be representative of architectural creation inspired by contemplation and as a liberal art, and conversely architecture as a craft, produced by the act of the medieval mason. (Plaat, 2002b:95). These themes were rife at the time in architectural discourse. The path suggested by Colonna was the path that lay somewhere between the two polarities.

(1502–1504). This painting is part of a series of six paintings by the artist that depict episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary. The series was inspired by Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (1260–1275), which depicted the lives of saints. *The Golden Legend* was translated into English by William Caxton in 1483. This source is significant, as Lethaby had read Caxton's version of the book and was quite obviously taken with it, copying out and even illustrating numerous pages from the manuscript in his 1886 notebook (Lethaby, 1886). What does this then tell us about the hares? The hare is commonly viewed as a symbol of procreation and fecundity and is thus attributed with a feminine character. In a Christian context, the Virgin Mary is at times associated with the hare. Some ancient theories believed that the hare was a hermaphroditic creature and could procreate without a mate and therefore give birth without the loss of its virginity, hence the association with the Virgin Mary (Chapman, 2016).

Another Renaissance image that relates hares with the Virgin Mary is Albrecht Dürer's (1471-1528)³³ woodcut of *The Holy Family with Three Hares* (1496) (Figure 21) (Dürer, 1496). In the image the Virgin Mary, Joseph and the child Christ sit in an enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*)³⁴ surrounded by plants. Before them are three hares. The hares have been given various interpretations, including as a symbol of the holy trinity, but such readings may be somewhat facile when reflecting upon Dürer's

³³ William Morris was particularly fond of Albrecht Dürer's work. Dürer's engravings were among the very few pieces hung on the walls of Kelmscott Manor as 'Morris did not 'believe in' making houses look like art galleries' (Glasier, 1921:48). Dürer's drawing of the *Holy Family* is also presented in Worringers's *Form in Gothic*, which was read by Lethaby (Worringers, 1957:149).

³⁴ *Hortus conclusus* is a Latin term that translates to 'enclosed garden'. The representation of such a garden in Christian art from the Middle Ages onwards is meant to suggest purity. The garden is at times metaphorically bestowed with female attributes and considered to be a fertile and productive space. The *hortus conclusus* is also commonly associated with the Virgin Mary. Lethaby's *A Garden Enclosed* could be a reference to the *hortus conclusus*.

work. Dürer was an extremely gifted artist, writer and theoretician. His work has been subject to countless interpretations, with its perplexing symbolic language eluding many scholars. Could Dürer have been referencing something much more profound with the inclusion of the three hares in the foreground of his woodcut, along with the explicit mention of them in the title? One possible explanation could be that the hares have an esoteric significance.

It is understood that early in the sixteenth century Dürer and another famous German artist, Lucas Cranach, were both influenced by alchemical ideas and symbolism. John Read's paper Dürer's 'Melencolia: An Alchemical Interpretation' (1945) studies the potential alchemical symbolism concealed within Dürer's *Melencolia* (1514) woodcut. Read suggests that whilst there is no evidence that Dürer had an acquaintance with alchemy as intimate as that of Chaucer, alchemy formed an essential ingredient in the cultural background of Dürer's time (Read, 1945:283). This seems to be the case with Dürer's students, who also appear to have been inspired by alchemy. It has been the matter of speculation that Dürer's students from Nürnberg, Simon Bening, Nikolaus Glockendon and Hans Sebald Beham, were responsible for the illuminations of the alchemical manuscript *Splendor Solis* (1582) (Warlick, 1998:41). The close relationship between alchemy and Renaissance art and poetry is well known and has been firmly established by authors such as Katherine Eggert, in *Disknowledge: Literature, Alchemy, and the End of Humanism in Renaissance England*, and Stanton Linden, in *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration*. This begs the question whether there could have been an alchemical reason for the inclusion of three hares in Dürer's woodcut, Titian's painting and consequently in Lethaby's illustration.

4.2.5.1 The hare and alchemy

From ancient times and within mythology, the hare is characterised as having divine associations and being a magical creature. The hare or rabbit is a well-known alchemical symbol of Mercurial volatility (Wamberg, 2006:158). According to Albertus Magnus, ‘just as bread is leavened and raised through good yeast, so the matter of metals may be transmuted through these four spirits into white and red, but especially through mercury, because it is the source and origin of all metals’ (Simonds, 1998:139–40). Mercury is a critical component of the alchemical process, leading to the production of the Philosopher’s Stone. Female Mercury must be wedded to its opposite, male Sulphur, in order to produce the elusive stone. Salt is added in order to trap and fix Mercury, and Fire or heat are used to instigate the chemical wedding. This process forms the beginning of the required purification of the element of Earth before it is transmuted into a higher form (Simonds, 1998:140).

Hares are found in popular alchemical illustrations. They can be seen in plate three of Steffan Michelspacher’s *Cabala: Spiegel der Kunst und Natur*, 1615 (Figure 22) (Michelspacher, 1615), and also Figure 23, *Mons Philosophorum*, 1604 (Mons Philosophorum, 1604), an illustration found in *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer, aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert* (1785). Both images look strikingly similar and show the alchemical work from beginning to end. In Michelspacher’s emblem there is a blindfolded man in the foreground who appears to have lost his way, but nature in the form of the hare or rabbit guides him towards the right path (Sire, 1998:205).

Another more conspicuous use of hares in alchemical literature is Figure 24, an illustration commonly referred to as the ‘Hunt of Venus’, which can be discovered in

Basilus Valentinus'³⁵ *Chymische Schriften*, 1677 (Valentinus, 1677). The emblem includes three hares running in a circle, joined by their ears, which form a triangle at the centre of the image. Within this triangle is the astrological symbol of Mercury. Surrounding the three hares are three wolves. The hares and wolves are enclosed in a circle that includes some text, over which is a flaming heart pierced by an arrow with the name of Venus written above. Exactly what Valentinus was aiming to represent by the three hares is unclear.

The symbol of the three hares joined by their ears is an ancient one, with the earliest known examples, dating back to the sixth century AD, found depicted on the ceilings of Buddhist cave temples in Dunhuang, China. The motif forms part of the medieval heritage of Europe and Asia and appears to have been important to the world's major faiths, spanning thousands of miles and at least 1,500 years (Chapman, 2016). Nevertheless, the meaning of the symbol has thus far remained elusive³⁶.

Valentinus' illustration includes the name of Venus, and within the circle the text roughly translates to '[Sun] [Moon] and [Mars] are hunting with [Jupiter], [Saturn] has to carry the yarns, put [Mercury] rightly to the wind, thus is caught lady [Venus] child'. There is reference to hunting here, which may help to elucidate the illustration. Valentinus may not only be using the imagery to represent mercurial volatility, which could be a likely possibility, but actually indirectly referring to the story of Venus and

³⁵ Lethaby is likely to have been aware of Valentinus through his reading of Lévi's *Transcendental Magic*, in which Valentinus is mentioned along with his highly influential alchemical treatise, *The Twelve Keys of Basil Valentine* (1599).

³⁶ It is said that the design derives from sacred geometry and the ears are the shapes which form from the intersections of the Vesicae Piscis within the Flower of Life, itself a sacred design concerned with creation of form. Lethaby was aware of the Flower of Life symbolism illustrating it in Architecture, Nature and Magic. He also uses the sacred geometry of the Fruit of Life which is derived from the Flower of Life, in a design for a sash window (Figure 25). This design is further pertinent as it has a striking resemblance to an alchemical image by Johan Daniel Mylius depicting the tree of the philosophers surrounded by symbols of the *opus* (Figure 26).

Adonis, which he may have believed to have held alchemical symbolism. Knowledge of the symbolic language within the story of Venus and Adonis would consequently clarify the symbolism within Valentinus' work for the observer. This layering of symbolism and cloaking in allegory is a common technique used within alchemical work to prevent it from being accessed by the uninitiated masses. If Lethaby had come across Valentinus' image, it is probable that he would have been aware of the Venus and Adonis connection through his reading of *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.

The myth of Venus and Adonis appears in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare wrote his own version of this myth in his poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593). The poem is said to reflect Renaissance ideas of cosmology, time and seasonal change as well as representing themes of love and loss. Another widely held thesis is that the work is a metaphor for alchemy and the ancient art of distillation (Simonds, 1998:133).

Peggy Muñoz Simonds's paper, 'Love is a spirit all compact of fire: Alchemical Coniunctio in Venus and Adonis', analyses Shakespeare's use of alchemical imagery in great detail (Simonds, 1998). Simonds talks about hunting themes present in the poem and how hunting is an important aspect of alchemy. The alchemist was hunting for new truths, self-knowledge and in many cases new medicines. In the poem Venus hunts Adonis in a sexual chase, and she also encourages Adonis to hunt the hare. However, Adonis does not heed her advice and instead hunts the boar in a chase for self-knowledge.³⁷

Shakespeare's poem emphasises the colours of the alchemical process: black, white and red. Examples of this include black birds rising into the air, white skin and

³⁷ The hare could also be seen as the metaphorical depiction of the physical aspect of the goddess Venus, which was rejected by Adonis in order to hunt her for her spiritual side instead.

reddened cheeks. The myth of Venus and Adonis ends with Adonis being killed by a boar and transmuted into a purple flower chequered with red and white. In other accounts of the myth, the white roses are tinged with the crimson blood of Venus when she is pricked by their thorns as she rushes to Adonis. This is also the case in the *Hypnerotomachia* (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:376). This signifies the end of the alchemical process, with the *rubedo* stage being accomplished. Additionally, there are allusions to evaporation and the art of distillation that takes place within the alchemical alembic. These are shown through metaphors of sweat, breathing and moisture (Simonds, 1998:148). There are also three examples of *coniunctio* in the poem, between Venus and Adonis, between two horses, and finally between the boar and Adonis (Simonds, 1998:143). According to Simonds, Adonis represents Sulphur and Venus denotes Mercury; the metaphorical fire that conjoins the two is Love. Once the two are conjoined in Shakespeare's poem, we see Adonis being transformed into a flower, and what Simonds considers to be the philosopher's stone, releasing a green sap that can be compared to the elixir of life (Simonds, 1998:154).

Michael Maier (1568-1622), in his alchemical emblem book *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617), also clearly understood the myth of Adonis and Venus as an alchemical allegory:

Although the story of Atalanta and the golden apples is the primary alchemical narrative in Maier's emblem book, he sees the Adonis tale as a parallel myth of the stages in the alchemical hunt for knowledge and perfection, a hunt which leads through sexual intercourse between opposites (the *coniunctio*) to death and putrefaction (the *nigredo*), and ultimately to rebirth (the *albedo*) in a new form (Simonds, 1998:139).

It could be that Valentinus, in his illustration the *Hunt of Venus*, was attempting to represent the following alchemical process just as Maier did, but in a more obscure way. What does this analysis therefore imply in regard to Lethaby's image? It could be that Lethaby, like Valentinus, is using the *Hypnerotomachia* and the story of Venus

and Adonis as an alchemical metaphor, and also like Valentinus relating the hare back to the allegory and Venus, whilst simultaneously relating it to Mercury and the alchemical process. It is possible that Lethaby would have come across Shakespeare's poem, but the extent of his awareness of the alchemical imagery can only be inferred.³⁸

The hare symbolism may have had multiple meanings for Lethaby, as was the case with most alchemical emblems. If we now move on to study the remaining symbols in the illustration, this may provide us with a clearer understanding of what Lethaby was attempting to achieve in his drawing.

4.2.5.2 The alchemical journey illustrated

The invitation design, analogous with Lethaby's frontispiece for the *Architectural Association Sketchbook*, could be considered to be formed of multiple layers that work together to form a single narrative. The drawing would then not be just a stagnant image but would delineate a journey that the observer must actively interact with. Using architectural and landscape symbolism in this way was common practice for seventeenth-century esoteric illustrators such as Heinrich Khunrath, Fludd and Kircher (Szönyi, 1998:52). Buildings, gates and gardens were amongst the common iconography utilised. A pertinent example of such practice is found on the *Officina Plantiniana* title page of Roderico de Arriaga's philosophical textbook:

The picture shows a system of gates arranged in perspectival order through which the student of philosophy has to progress. His way leads through a labyrinth garden containing a fountain of knowledge, and in the distance there is a domed building, perhaps the desired goal, the temple of knowledge. Patrons, Ferdinand III and Queen Mary of Austria representing Fortitudo and Gratia, guard the first triumphal arch on top of which allegorical characters personify Physica, Logica, and Metaphysica ... the same elements have

³⁸ The reference to the *Hypnerotomachia* in Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* alongside the hare symbolism and other significant details, such as Cupid appearing to take out newly coloured roses from the fountain that appear to have changed from white to red (Friedlaender, 1938:324), could also suggest that Titian himself was aware of and attempting to depict the alchemical symbolism of the myth.

important meanings in the revelatory symbolism of occult treatises, too (Szönyi, 1998:52).

The technique could surely apply to Lethaby's illustration. As we have analysed above, the foreground is formed of three rabbits. This is followed by a fountain that overflows to form two streams on the left and right sides, six columns and then finally a rose bush. The outlined sequence of images will now be scrutinised further in an attempt to illuminate their possible alchemical connotations.

Lethaby's fountain brings to mind *The Mercurial Fountain* found in an eighteenth-century English manuscript copy of *The Rosarium philosophorum* (1550) (Figure 27) (*The Mercurial Fountain*, 1550). The eighteenth-century edition includes a series of twenty woodcuts derived, with some alterations, from one of the most important texts of European alchemy, the sixteenth-century Renaissance manuscript *De Alchimia opuscula complura veterum philosophorum* (1550). The said fountain is the first woodcut of the series and is believed to represent the prima materia, which is the initial material required to commence the alchemical magnum opus (Hyde, 2009). The prima materia has been given many names, but it is essentially a fifth element, a quintessence, or the material beginning and end of all things. *The Mercurial Fountain* has a circular basin, from which rises a phallic pillar. Crowning the pillar is a globe with several spouts, on top of which rests a five-pointed star. From three of the fountain's spouts, liquid pours. The spouts are labelled in Latin which translate as 'the virgin's milk', 'the spring of vinegar' and 'the water of life'. The first two flows represent the feminine and male and their respective lunar and solar forces. The water of life can be seen to be associated with Mercury. All three substances and vital juices of life flow endlessly and mix together in the basin to create the water of Mercury, in which the latter stages of the alchemical process take place (Tompkins, 2013).

There are obvious similarities between Lethaby's fountain and the *Mercurial Fountain*. Both have a circular basin out of which rises a phallic column topped with a globe. Whilst Lethaby's fountain does not have spouts, his globe is punctured with what seem to be star-shaped holes, from which water is released and flows towards the basin. The stars have five points and recall the star resting at the apex of the *Mercurial Fountain*. The two overflowing streams may be Lethaby's way of making apparent the mixture of male and female substance within the fountain.³⁹ The same concept can also be observed in plate three of *Splendor Solis*, where a knight stands upon two fountains with a foot on each. One fountain is surmounted by a nude boy urinating grey liquid, and on the other side a nude girl is urinating a golden fluid. The two streams of urine mingle together and overflow into the countryside (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:46).

This represents an initial stage of the alchemical process, depicting a union of opposites and the beginning of self-purification. This is the stage where hard work is required, and the *prima materia* must be constantly washed and distilled: 'thus the first activity of the opus is distilling, washing, and cleansing, over and over again' (Franz, 1980:221–222).

Behind the sketch of the fountain in Lethaby's illustration are six columns that are engraved with peacock feathers. The iridescence seen in *nigredo* just before it changes into *albedo* was compared to the peacock's tail.⁴⁰ For the alchemist this was a joyous moment and symbolised the dawning of a new day. Further back is an illustration of a rose bush that encloses the scene. The rose, as has been explained previously, was

³⁹ The mixing of male and female substance is seen once more in the *Hypnerotomachia*. See earlier in the section.

⁴⁰ For further information on the alchemical process see the beginning of chapter 4. Occult Symbolism in Lethaby's Illustrations and Architecture.

associated with the goddess Venus. The reddening of the rose within the myth of Venus and Adonis had its alchemical implications and was associated with the final *rubedo* of the alchemical process. The rose is also known to be a symbol of the esoteric Rosicrucian order.⁴¹ The order is best described as a system of Christian mystical alchemy. The Rosicrucian manifesto, the *Fama*, appeared in 1614, with the order being made up of ‘courtiers, scholars, scientists – that is, alchemists – and visionaries, in the days when all these roles might easily co-exist’ (Drew, 1996:185). The Rosicrucians employed the crucified rose as their emblem. It has been given several interpretations, including being related to St George, Christ, the Virgin Mary, Venus and Adonis (Drew, 1996:225–226), but the consistent metaphor that persists is as follows:

The crucified Rose is ... applied symbolically to indicate immortality, or the secret of the creation of the universe, – that is the Logos, or Light, concealed in darkness, – Truth as the Thought of God, hidden yet made manifest, in the works of the creation. This Truth is the archetypal Mind, or meaning of the world. It is the creative idea, or ideas, which are clothed in Nature’s art, as a truth may be concealed in a fable, myth, or allegory ... so is Truth open yet secret, concealed and hidden, according to our capacities’ (Drew, 1996:217).

The rose always represents the culmination of the journey and the realisation of the goal. Considering this when looking again at Lethaby’s illustration, it seems fitting that the rose has been placed at the back of the image, almost hidden away or concealed, but there none the less. The six columns and fountain stand almost as an obstacle that must be crossed before one is able to enjoy the roses on the other side. If we look at the sequence in chronological order, we can begin to discern strong parallels between Lethaby’s symbolism and the order in which it appears, and the alchemical process. The hares take their place at the front of the image, much as in *Cabala*:

⁴¹ According to Rodger Drew, who has critically analysed the symbolism within the work of Rossetti, ‘Rosicrucian symbolism plays an important part in the work of both Rossetti and his immediate circle’ (Drew, 1996:188).

Spiegel der Kunst und Natur and *Mons Philosophorum*. They work as nature's guide, directing the alchemist's path. Next the fountain is encountered, which represents the *prima materia* and one of the initial stages of the alchemical process. This is a stage of *coniunctio* and purification through hard work. After this appear the peacock columns. These are placed perfectly to depict the next stage of the alchemical process, which is the appearance of the iridescent peacock's tail after the hard work during the *nigredo* phase. Finally, at the very back of the drawing, is the rose bush – the rose, which symbolises the completion of the alchemical process.

When the drawing is observed in this light, it seems that Lethaby was attempting in his illustration to depict none other than the magnum opus of the alchemist. The drawing is incredibly allegorical and difficult to penetrate, but this only strengthens the conviction that Lethaby was perhaps aiming to depict this secret process metaphorically, like many alchemists preceding him: 'All the masters in alchemy who have written concerning the Great Work have employed symbolical and figurative expressions, and have been right in so doing, not only to deter the profane from operations which would be dangerous for them, but to make themselves intelligible to adepts' (Lévi and Waite, 1958:282).

Does this mean Lethaby was a secret alchemist? Well, it suggests that there is a high probability that Lethaby was aware of alchemical symbolism and applied these symbols within his work purposefully; he was also clearly adept at concealing his use of such symbolism from the general public. It also demonstrates that Lethaby had an interest in storytelling and creating within his images a narrative waiting to be deciphered. More examples of Lethaby's exploitation of themes located in the *Hypnerotomachia* and of alchemical imagery will be presented to further substantiate this claim.

4.2.6 Font and canopy design (1890)

In 1890 Lethaby designed the font and canopy for St John the Baptist Church, at Low Bentham in Yorkshire (Figure 11) (Lethaby, 1890:87). Norman Shaw had restored the church the previous year, and the commission for the piece is most likely to have been given to Lethaby by Shaw. The font is made from alabaster, and the canopy is of walnut (Rubens, 1986:86).

Rubens has made the comparison between the font design and the illustration of the temple found within the Polyandrion of the *Hypnerotomachia* (Rubens, 1986:86). This goes a small way to explain the symbolism Lethaby was utilising for his font design. However, the intention here is to delve further into its symbolism, in order to provide a more penetrating analysis of the font and canopy, and to suggest that it, too, concealed secret alchemical wisdom.

The font and canopy appear to contain a duality which is played out by Lethaby in his design with reference to the *Hypnerotomachia*. Building upon Rubens's postulation, we could maintain that the canopy at the top represents the Temple of Pluto located within the Polyandrion, and correspondingly the font beneath recalls the Temple of Venus Physioza. This could be taken still further, through equating the Temple of Pluto with the tomb of Adonis, and the Temple of Venus Physioza with the fountain of Venus located in the centre of the amphitheatre on the island of Cythera. As discussed previously, the fountain of Venus and the tomb of Adonis could be considered as ideal paradigms, which are reflected earlier in the *Hypnerotomachia* in the form of the Temple of Venus Physioza and the temple of Pluto respectively, representing their latent potential. Through viewing the font in this way, it appears that Lethaby is successful in creating a dynamic sculpture dealing with strong dichotomies, such as masculine and feminine and light and darkness. By sharply contrasting these

elements and at the same time reconciling them, Lethaby produces a stimulating design. This will be examined in further detail below.

In the course of the journey, Poliphilo faces a baptism alongside Polia at the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. The temple is a feminine symbol, where everything is beautiful, light and directed upwards. The notion of divine water is a recurrent theme within the *Hypnerotomachia*, and Poliphilo's baptism takes place around a central cistern within the temple. The water for this cistern is gathered by collecting rain water, which flows through the hollow pilasters of the outer walls of the temple, then through a set of pipes located under the temple and finally into the cistern (Fierz-David, 1987:106). Above this cistern a lamp hangs from the summit of the temple's dome. The lamp consists of four external globes and a central one. The four globes are intended to symbolise the four elements. A corresponding lamp is placed on the outer summit of the dome, alongside an eagle resting upon a crescent moon.

Lethaby's initial designs for his font are revealing and suggest that he may have been attempting to replicate the system for water collection found at the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. Lethaby's sketches show that he was working on an intricate method to bring water into his font (Figure 28). The system involved water travelling through a pipe and then entering a glass sphere (Lethaby, 1888d). This method recalls the pipe system located at the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. We could therefore speculate that it was this scheme that Lethaby was attempting to duplicate.

The idea of entering a glass sphere is also pertinent and brings to mind the alchemist's alembic. Rough sketches reveal that, rather than a glass sphere, Lethaby's initial concept was a pear-shaped vessel, reminiscent of fifteenth-century alchemical apparatus. Why did Lethaby desire his water to enter the font in this way? It could be

surmised that Lethaby intended the water to symbolically enter a hermetic vessel, where the water would undergo some level of transformation. Hence, Lethaby may have intended his font to represent a place of transformation, not only in a biblical sense but also in an alchemical one.

The hexagonal structure towards the top of the canopy, as highlighted above, could symbolise the Temple of Pluto. The temple is explored by Poliphilo alone, after his baptism at the Temple of Venus Physiozoa. The temple of Pluto, in contrast to that of Venus, is masculine, with a dark interior and oriented downwards. The temple is comparable to the descent into the underworld. Here Poliphilo sees an image of two lakes, one freezing and the other burning, occupied by tormented 'souls who had killed themselves because of overheated love, and those plunged in the horrible ice were those who had showed themselves frigid and unyielding towards love, and had stubbornly rejected it' (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:250). Following this, Poliphilo also views a mosaic of the Rape of Proserpine, after which he remembers his beloved Polia whom he has left alone. Terrified that she could face the same fate as Proserpine, he runs back in fear (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:273). Pluto's altar is covered in dreadful darkness. The scene represents, psychologically, the inner sanctuary of the self, where ultimate transformation is achieved.⁴²

Both elements of the font and canopy, placed across from one another, could symbolise the dual aspects of the temples of Venus and of Pluto. Poliphilo's visits to both temples are crucial to his inner journey and allow him to reach a stage of sacrifice where he dies to his old self and is reborn – a key to alchemical transformation. The visits forecast the climax of Poliphilo's journey at the fountain of Venus in the

⁴² Poliphilo's desire for Polia is here transformed into absolute surrender; he no longer wishes to possess her, but to become whole through her (Fierz-David, 1987:156).

amphitheatre. However, here Poliphilo no longer remains an observer but becomes an active participant in the concluding events.

At the paradisaal amphitheatre, there are two water sources: the fountain of Venus and the hexagonal fountain of Adonis. This calls to mind the two rivers found in Dante's earthly paradise in the *Divine Comedy* (1555).⁴³ Lethe and Eunoe, the rivers of oblivion and of remembrance respectively (Fierz-David, 1987:171). At the fountain of Venus a sacred marriage is performed between Poliphilo and Polia. Through this Poliphilo is made a vessel of the Godhead, meaning that he receives God as a vessel but does not himself become God. Venus exhales her divine breath upon the lovers and whispers in their ears tasks to strengthen their love, though what was said by the goddess is not divulged to the reader (Colonna and Godwin, 2005:367). This stage could be considered as equivalent to Lethe, the river of oblivion; here, Poliphilo is aware of his divinity and his godliness. However, this phase must be counter-balanced in order that Poliphilo does not forget his physical self. This is achieved using the figure of Adonis.

Adonis's tomb and fountain are experienced by the couple after the marriage ceremony is performed. The fountain and tomb are therefore comparable to the river of Eunoe, and remembrance. Adonis's tomb reminds Poliphilo of the body of corruption and 'the vilest and most perishable part of man' (Fierz-David, 1987:180), in need of redemption. The tomb may be considered in terms of a vessel, where '[t]he body in the grave might be denoted as a vessel within a vessel, containing the self as the pearl of great price. This pearl can only be made accessible by the opening of grave

⁴³ Lethaby had read Dante's *Divine Comedy* and makes reference to the text on several occasions in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. (Lethaby, 1994:29).

and the resurrection of the body ... Thus man can only find his self when he turns to this grave and gives fresh life to the body by love' (Fierz-David, 1987:183).

There are various accounts of the myth of Adonis. One narrates how the goddess Venus fell in love with the young Adonis, who was subsequently killed by a boar or, some say, by the jealousy of Mars. Another reveals that Adonis was loved by both Proserpine and Venus, resulting in a quarrel between the two. This led Jove to order Adonis to spend one third of the year with Proserpine, corresponding to winter, and the remaining two thirds of the year, with Venus.⁴⁴ Adonis represents the cycle of death and life, and the process of dying to be reborn once more. Hence, as a symbol Adonis is in essence comparable to the alchemist's philosopher's stone: 'The resurrection of Adonis and his divine journey from Proserpine to Venus would then represent the self-awakening to life and action by uniting the heaviness of animal nature and the subtlety of the spirit, the hither-worldliness of consciousness and the other-worldliness of the unconscious' (Fierz-David, 1987:183).

Lethaby's font and canopy could therefore also be a reference to the figures of Venus and Adonis, in a format similar to its allusion to the temples of Venus and of Pluto. Just as earlier the font was compared to the Temple of Venus Physiozoa, similarly it could also be associated with the fountain of Venus. Consequently, the canopy that was said to resemble the Temple of Pluto could in this case refer to the fountain and tomb of Adonis. The hexagonal building at the top could evoke the figure of Adonis and his hexagonal fountain, with the font beneath referencing the life-giving fountain of Venus. The addition of half-opened pomegranates held upon pinnacles surrounding the hexagonal structure and the wild roses and honeysuckle decorating the six fretted

⁴⁴ For further accounts and variations of the story of Venus and Adonis are mentioned earlier in the section.

brackets that support the canopy further endorses this theory. Pomegranates are popularly associated with Proserpine,⁴⁵ who is linked with both Pluto and Adonis. Lethaby may also have associated the pomegranate with immortality from his reading of Anna Jameson's *Sacred and Legendry Art* (1848) (Lethaby, 1994:163). Jameson writes that '[t]he pomegranate bursting open, and the seeds visible, was an emblem of the future, – of hope in immortality' (Jameson, 1868:40). Both allusions would seem fitting to be applied here. In addition to this, the honeysuckle and roses found on the fretted brackets have associations with the goddess Venus.⁴⁶

Both Pluto and Adonis are in some way associated with Proserpine; therefore that Lethaby intended the top of his canopy to reflect the temple of Pluto, and simultaneously, by utilising a hexagonal structure, the fountain of Adonis, is conceivable. Lethaby may have also at the same time desired the canopy to portray the tomb of Adonis, representing the darker side of life, consciousness and morality. The pomegranates around the font successfully add to this narrative by surreptitiously alluding to hidden possibilities, suggesting that the body in the tomb has the potential for resurrection and immortality. This is signified by the font below, which essentially lies beneath the tomb at its depths. This is the life-giving fountain of Venus, which renews life, provides knowledge of the unconscious self and ultimately bestows immortality. The fact that Lethaby chose to bring the cord of suspension down to the cover, so that 'it not be (as is usual) a sort of spire hung up by the finial' (Rubens, 1986:87), demonstrates his desire to unite these two polarities. This theme of the unification of masculine and feminine, light and dark, and height and depth is

⁴⁵ Dante Gabriel Rossetti himself associated the open pomegranate with Proserpine, painting his version of her eating a pomegranate a total of eight times.

⁴⁶ Rossetti's painting of Venus, *Venus Verticordia* (1863–68), shows the goddess with apple in hand and surrounded by roses and honeysuckle in the foreground.

reiterated throughout the *Hypnerotomachia*. The process of unification of opposites, or the *coniunctio*, is similarly the upmost ambition of the alchemist, through which the Great Work is finally accomplished.

4.2.7 A Drawing of a Room (1885)

Another drawing by Lethaby, which once more exhibits alchemical undertones is Figure 12, *A Drawing of a Room* (Lethaby, 1885). The unexecuted design for the decoration of a room in panelling and paint was originally shown at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society's first exhibition in 1888. It has since been exhibited at the Central School of Art and Design in 1984 and published by Rubens in *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857–1931* (Rubens, 1986:56). This said, the work remains as yet to be critically analysed. At a quick glance the image does not give much away and all seems very commonplace, but when we delve deeper into the illustration there are symbols that immediately draw the observer's attention, and questions begin to surface. The room is almost a metaphoric representation of Lethaby himself, who appeared quite ordinary to the common eye but hid an immense depth that was not visible to many of his time or later.

The analysis will commence at the focal point of the illustration, which is the fireplace, and then pan out. The fireplace clearly has four elements depicted within. These are illustrated and labelled in order to make them very obvious to the observer. There are plants towards the bottom half of the drawing representing the Earth, a pair of fish enclosed in a circle on both the left and the right sides, representing Water, two peacocks above depicting Air, and finally Fire takes centre stage. When this image is scrutinised through an alchemical lens, the four elements immediately bring to mind the elements of the magnum opus. The four elements are widely characterised in

alchemical literature, as each is a form, or changing manifestation, of the prima materia, and each has the capability to transform into another. For example, the application of heat to Earth causes it to forego its rigidity and transforms it to Water. Additional heat changes the Water to Air and Air to Fire. These first three stages of the process are referred to as volatising the fixed. The final stage, fixing the volatile, is achieved by cooling the Fire, which again turns to Earth. This completes a single cycle of the refinement process. The process of refinement must be repeated, preserving each element's own qualities whilst eliminating contaminating qualities, until Quintessence is achieved. The immaterial Quintessence must not have any contradictory qualities and must simultaneously have all qualities. The cyclic process of refinement of the elements must go on until the Quintessence at the centre of the rotation is finally achieved⁴⁷ (Opsopaus, 2016).

It is not only the depiction of the four elements that is of interest, but also the emblems Lethaby uses to represent them. For Water, as mentioned earlier, he chooses a pair of fish on each side of the fire enclosed within a circle. Two fish in water are considered significant in alchemy and are representative of the spirit and the soul. They are found in plate XXII of Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (Maier, 1617). Two fish are also seen in *The Book of Lambspring*, first published under the title *De Lapide PhilosophicoTriga Chemicum* (Prague, 1599) and compiled by the Frenchman Nicolas Barnaud, who was prominent in alchemical circles. *The Book of Lambspring* is a work of spiritual alchemy, and the first emblem of the book begins with two fish swimming in the sea accompanied by the description:

⁴⁷ Above the fireplace a lady sits at a spinning wheel. One possible explanation behind the use of this imagery could be that Lethaby was attempting to allude to the elemental rotation and the process of refinement towards the quintessence, or philosopher's stone.

The Sea is the Body, the two Fishes are Soul and Spirit.

The Sages will tell you That two fishes are in our sea
Without any flesh or bones.

Let them be cooked in their own water;

Then they also will become a vast sea,

The vastness of which no man can describe.

Moreover, the Sages say That the two fishes are only one, not two;

They are two, and nevertheless they are one, Body, Spirit, and Soul.

Now, I tell you most truly, Cook these three together,

That there may be a very large sea.

Cook the sulphur well with the sulphur,

And hold your tongue about it:

Conceal your knowledge to your own advantage,

And you shall be free from poverty.

Only let your discovery remain a close secret (Waite, 1893:8).

The use of peacocks to symbolise Air is again revealing. The peacock and its relation to alchemy has been discussed in detail earlier in this section.⁴⁸ Its use here once more reveals the symbol's immense appeal for Lethaby. It is also interesting to see Lethaby, as in *A Garden Enclosed*, depicting one male and one female peacock. This creates a duality and opposition between the two sides of the fireplace. Duality is a theme Lethaby experiments with in many of his images: this is a common occult device and also often found used in alchemy.

The colours used in this section of the drawing are fascinating in regard to their alchemical qualities. Lethaby employs red, white, black and yellow – all colours found in the alchemical process. It is not just a random placing of colour either. On the right side there appears to be more black pigment in conjunction with some red, and then on the left there are mainly red and yellow tones. The Water elements on each side are also connected with what could be postulated as resembling delivery tubes that run

⁴⁸ For more on the peacock and its relation to alchemy see earlier in the section. Lethaby's use of peacock symbolism is by no means restricted to his drawings but is also witnessed in his architectural work, such as Avon Tyrrell.

over the central fire. This may conceivably be a reference to the distillation and refinement processes of alchemy.

The fire in the centre is also significant. The alchemist Olympiodorus said in the fifth or sixth century AD: 'Fire is the primary agent, that of the whole art. It is the first of the four elements' (Opsopaus, 2016). Fire takes a central position in the image, as it is only with the help of fire that the transmutation of matter into higher forms can occur and, ultimately, the philosopher's stone be found. The fire here could also represent a philosophical fire of love for Lethaby, which is needed for inner transformation to be achieved. After all, for Lethaby, 'Love and labour ... [were] all' (Roberts, 1957b:225).

It seems fitting that just above the fire on the surround we find two small hearts and two small diamond shapes: the diamond representing the four elements; the heart, the unification of these in the created world, through love (Goodman, 1989:58).

Another interesting addition to sides of the fireplace comes in the form of overlapping circles. These circles border both the left and the right side. The circles are connected in an almost snake-like form, which is striped black and white, spiralling up the circles. The striped effect is more obvious on the left-hand side. Curiously, there is also a pair of small circles resting at the bottom of every other circle of the border. So what is the significance of this addition, and how does it relate to the fireplace imagery discussed?

The snake in alchemy symbolises the transformative act as well as the transformative substance. The image of the coiled snake awakening and beginning to uncoil is strongly associated with the kundalini. The kundalini refers to the dormant creative energy within every human that is waiting to unfold. This energy, which is spiral in nature, gradually moves vertically through the seven chakras (energy centres) of the human body. The energy arises from the root chakra at the base of the spine to the

crown of the head. As it does so, it provides different levels of spiritual awakening and mystical experience. The seven-fold scheme reveals similarities between kundalini practices and the alchemical opus (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:149). The uncoiling process may be what Lethaby was attempting to represent.⁴⁹ This relates back to the alchemical symbolism of the fireplace, denoting the cyclical refining process of the alchemist until the quintessence or philosopher's stone is attained. The pair of smaller circles, as insignificant as they may seem, only add to this reading of the symbolism. On many occasions the symbolic snake is found twisted into two circles (Goodman, 1989:11). The well-known image of the caduceus of Hermes, consisting of two snakes intertwined around a central rod, also produces two small circles along the rod. The circles represent duality: evil and good, light and dark. These dualities are an important aspect of alchemy, and it is always emphasised that both have a role to play in the process of the Great Work.

The symbolism in the image is not restricted to the fireplace. Further images are depicted just above the fireplace, which are once more fascinating and can again be found to be related to alchemy. There are three images, starting with a fountain on the very left, followed by a lady sitting at a spinning wheel, and finally a man wearing a hat and robes standing by a glass vessel almost as tall as him. This figure is seen again standing in a niche, close to a vessel, on the right-hand side of the room.

The robed figure beside the glass vessel quite noticeably recalls an alchemist. One suspects that Lethaby is almost trying to make it obvious that he is referring to the art of alchemy in his drawing. The figure evokes the image of the alchemist in Figure 29, supposedly Hermes Trismegistus, found in the first panel of the *Ripley Scrolls* (Ripley

⁴⁹ Lethaby's use of an uncoiling snake is also seen in his illustration of *A Beryl Shrine*. For further detail see section 4.1 *A Beryl Shrine*.

Scroll, 1415–1490). The panel contains a drawing of an alchemist, wearing a cap and robe, who lightly touches an enormous hermetic vessel containing eight roundels. Inside the vessel are depicted stages of the alchemical process, and the handles bear the inscription: ‘Ye must make Water of Y^e Earth and Earth of Y^e Ayre & Ayre of Y^e Fier & Fyer of Y^e Earth’ (Ripley scroll, Huntington Library: 1415–1490). Other panels depict the rotation of the four elements allegorically, using arcane symbols such as black toads and falling feathers, and also dualisms such as male and female, sun and moon, red and green lions, and feathered and featherless birds (Linden, 1998:83). These are themes that Lethaby has directly dealt with in his fireplace. It could be that Lethaby was alluding to the *Ripley Scrolls* here and introducing the themes which he later addresses beneath in the fireplace.

The fountain on the left side could be a reference to the *Mercurial Fountain* of the alchemists mentioned previously.⁵⁰ This would then indicate an initial stage of the alchemical process. It may also have links with the living fountain of Venus found in the *Hypnerotomachia*. This could be likely, as Venus was, it seems, in Lethaby’s thoughts when he created the piece, with what appear to be images of Venus with Cupid depicted just above the fireplace on the back wall, along with the oyster shells commonly associated with the goddess. The idea of a living fountain is repeated once again in the *Ripley Scrolls*, where the ribbon just above the alchemist bears the following caption: ‘Est Lapis occultus secreto fonte sepultus / Fermentum variat Lapidem qui cuncta colorat’, which translates to: ‘Here is the occult stone, buried in the secret fountain; it transmutes or varies the fermented Stone, which tinctures or colours everything’ (Linden, 1998:87).

⁵⁰ For more on the *The Mercurial Fountain* see earlier in the section.

The lady sitting at the spinning wheel in the centre is a novel addition to the illustration and one that the author has not come across previously in Lethaby's work. Like any symbol, it could have a range of connotations. The spinning wheel or the spinner's distaff and spindle are commonly associated with witches and magic, most probably because of the deeply rooted mythological fears associated with the craft. In Dürer's engraving *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat*, the witch is represented as naked old woman with spindle and distaff in hand (Dürer, 1500). In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer also refers to the damaging aspects of spinning believed in by different cultures, such as twirling corn stalks and damaging crops or tangling the guts of an unborn child in the womb. He outlines these in his chapter on sympathetic magic (Frazer, 1993:20). Also many of the spinning fairy tales studied by folklorists couple spinning with demons and spirits. One such tale is 'Rumpelstiltskin'.

The Grimm brothers' tale 'Rumpelstiltskin' (Rumpelstilzchen in German), first appeared in the collection of *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Grimms' Fairy Tales) in 1812. It is likely that Lethaby would have read this tale in Lang's translation of the story in *The Blue Fairy Book*⁵¹ (1889) (Lang, 2015:72). Briefly, the story is about a miller's beautiful daughter who is said to be able to spin straw into gold. The deceitful claim is made by the miller to the king, who then locks the young woman away in his castle and announces that if she does not spin the provided straw into gold for three days she must die. However, if she succeeds she will be married to the king. The daughter is in despair until the arrival of Rumpelstiltskin, who agrees to spin the gold for the three days in exchange for three of her possessions. On the first day the imp-like creature

⁵¹ Lethaby mentions the Grimms' 'Briar Rose' or 'The Sleeping Beauty' in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* which he probably also read through Lang's translation (Lethaby, 1994:141).

takes the daughter's necklace, on the second day her ring and lastly, on the third day, he asks for the first-born son of the king and the miller's daughter. After a year of marriage Rumpelstiltskin returns to collect his outstanding payment of the child. However, he offers the queen a pact: he will leave her the child if she learns his name within three days. The first two days are hopeless, but on the third day Rumpelstiltskin is heard reciting a poem about his name, and consequently the queen guesses it correctly and is able to keep her son (Pinkus, 2010:106–107). The story has many alchemical themes which Lethaby may have picked up on and indirectly alluded to in his image of the lady spinning, the central and most conspicuous theme being the production of gold from a common, cheap, base material – in this case straw. Other themes include the production of gold in secret and at night, and the conjunction of the king and queen to produce a son.

The spinning wheel is a common symbol in alchemical literature. The notion of a wheel turning and transforming something of little value into something esteemed is a popular metaphor for the circularity of the alchemical process. Therefore all three images could be Lethaby's way of representing the essential alchemical processes which he elaborates on and details lower within the fireplace. Even as we pan out, taking in the entire room at large, features such as the red rug, the cat and the ball of thread all augment the alchemical reading of the work. However, because of the scope of the research it will not be possible to elaborate on all the details found in the drawing.

Lethaby's fascination with the *Hypnerotomachia* is not a matter for speculation but is overtly expressed by Lethaby himself. Part two of this chapter has attempted for the first time to put forward the thesis that Lethaby's relationship with the *Hypnerotomachia* was not exclusively due to its architectural affiliation but

conceivably owed much to the book's vast alchemical metaphors. Lethaby's drawings inspired by the *Hypnerotomachia* find symbolic counterparts in alchemical literature and can be seen to incorporate a surreptitiously occult language with a potential hidden alchemical agenda. The case studies that have been examined as part of this section show recurrent themes and symbols utilised within Lethaby's work. These symbols point to Lethaby having awareness of alchemical themes. If nothing else, Lethaby's reading of *Transcendental Magic*, in which Lévi talks in detail about alchemy and the role of the adept, would have provided him with a firm grounding in the subject matter. Lethaby's interest in alchemy cannot be classed as anomalous, and should not be seen as deviant but as an outcome of his era. As explained earlier, Lethaby was in the midst of an occult revival taking place during the nineteenth-century. This was assisted by the publication of new editions of ancient texts, including hermetic and alchemical manuscripts. Towards the end of the century English authors such as Arthur Waite and Pamela Colman Smith published extensively on hermetic subjects. Alchemy was particularly attractive to artists and architects owing to its metaphorical and allegorical language, applicable to both the creative and the spiritual spheres. This is exemplified by figures such as the William Butler Yeats, a contemporary of Lethaby's and a friend of Morris's (Faulkner, 1962)⁵². Yeats is well known for being a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and having a fascination with alchemy. Yeats's interest in alchemy is explored in detail by Richard Ellmann in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948) and *Yeats and Alchemy* (1996) by William Gorski. Other figures in the modern art world, such as Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and Max Ernst (1891–1976), have also been explicitly connected with alchemy. Their explorations into

⁵² Two formative influences acknowledged by Yeats when he first moved to London were William Morris and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (Beaumont, 2012:169).

alchemy are investigated at length in *Alchemist of the Avant-Garde: The Case of Marcel Duchamp* (2003) and *Max Ernst and Alchemy* (2001) respectively. The attraction of alchemy was quite pervasive in architectural circles too. Alchemical metaphors were utilised by Expressionists such as Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and later by Le Corbusier (1887-1965).⁵³

Through demonstrating Lethaby's use of alchemical symbols the research is able to create a consistent narrative, showing not a break but a continuation of occult ideology from the late nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century. It also establishes Lethaby as a precursor of later occult predilections witnessed during the Modern Movement. These ideas will be explored further in the chapter regarding Lethaby's legacy. The current chapter will now move on to focus on occult symbolism within Lethaby's completed work.

4.3 Spaces of transmutation: Lethaby's architecture and comparisons with J. L. M. Lauweriks

Part three of this chapter will take a deeper look at Lethaby's use of occult symbolism in his architectural work. It is always more difficult to ascertain symbolism in built work as this has the additional requirement of function. However, as mentioned previously, Lethaby specifically fought to end the superficial addition of symbolism and ornament to buildings: 'Old architecture lived because it had a purpose. Modern architecture, to be real, must not be a mere envelope without contents' (Lethaby, 1994:16). It is therefore unlikely that Lethaby's work would include superfluous ornament that served little actual purpose. This section will therefore explore

⁵³ For more detail on the Expressionists' and Le Corbusier's use of alchemical metaphor see chapter 5: Lethaby's Legacy

Lethaby's use of symbolism in his architecture and question what desired outcome he envisaged through its use.

The subsequent research will examine recurring symbols that appear within the completed work of Lethaby. The work is multifaceted, and like that of many architects and artists during the Arts and Crafts period was inevitably influenced by a wide range of stimuli. This section will, however, focus solely on an occult reading of the symbols found within Lethaby's architecture, as this is an aspect of his work that has, thus far, remained relatively unexamined. To assist in this analysis, Lethaby's use of occult symbolism will be compared to that of Johannes Ludovicus Mathieu Lauweriks (1864–1932), who was an overt member of the Theosophical Society. Through demonstrating parallels in the symbolic language of Lethaby and of Lauweriks, the chapter will question whether both architects also shared similar occult aims and outlooks. This will form part of the original contribution towards research on Lethaby and help to advance the debate on his work. This is not in any way to suggest that there were not multiple meanings behind the symbols used, as considering Lethaby's erudition and wide reading it is very likely that there would have been several allusions pertaining to each symbol.

4.3.1 The significance of the right angle/L-shape in Lethaby's work

The first part of this section will consider Lethaby's use of the right angle or L-shape. The L-shape was used by Lethaby on several occasions and is a consistent symbol that spans the breadth of his completed work, being employed early in his career and continuing to be used up until his very last architectural works.

What is meant by the L-shape? The L-shape is a form that incorporates a right angle. Lethaby uses this form as a singular entity but also at times in multiples. The use of

multiple L-shapes in various arrangements creates variants such as the meander, the swastika and even the labyrinth. These forms will be dealt with in further detail in the course of this section. For the purpose of this study, these L-shaped configurations will be considered to be related and at times used interchangeably for similar purposes. Whilst not exactly the same, and having their own nuances (which will be highlighted), they do suggest similar underlying connotations which stem from the use of the line and the right angle.

The meander is commonly seen ‘as a “symbolic indication of the labyrinth”’ (Kerényi, 1996:91), being ‘the figure of a labyrinth in linear form’ (Kerényi, 1996:90). In Greek art the meander was used as a form of decoration, appearing on vases and bowls. Painters normally used the form of a meander or running spiral within their art to suggest the labyrinth, and audiences immediately comprehended its meaning (Kerényi, 1996:92). Plato writes of the labyrinth in *Euthydemus* (384 BC), describing it as a ‘figure whose most easily recognized feature is an endlessly repeated meander or spiral’ (Kerényi, 1996:92). For Ben Nicholson, a twenty-first-century architect and researcher into the intricacies of labyrinths, ‘the meander – and the labyrinth that derives from a meander folded back on itself – are the most basic traces of bodily movement through time and space’ (Hays, 2010:339)

The meander can also be applied in a three-dimensional sense, in terms not only of the horizontal journey through the labyrinth to the centre, but also of the vertical journey that spirals upwards towards the apex: ‘The winding stairways leading to the temple terrace were characterized as labyrinths by the meander pattern. Here we have at least two elements clarifying the nature of the labyrinth: the staircase is a spiral, a winding path, and this path leads upward’ (Kerényi, 1996:91). This idea will be explored later in this research in relation to the architectural promenade, which can [thus] be

considered another manifestation of the meander and labyrinth for the purpose of this study.

Connected swastikas can be used to form a meander. These swastika-meanders are notably found in Greek and Roman art, one such example being on the exterior wall of Ara Pacis (Rehak, 2006:108). Professor Goodyear, who writes at length on the swastika, asserts that the swastika was initially a fragment of the Egyptian Meander (Wilson, 1896:784). The swastika is also intrinsically connected with the labyrinth: ‘The word *labyrinth* comes directly from the ancient Minoan Snake Goddess culture of Crete, where the swastika was used as a symbol of the labyrinth and is linked etymologically with the “double headed axe” – which is none other than the Tau cross’ (Gardiner, 2007:139). The relationship between the tau cross and the swastika in forming a labyrinth is also explored by Mary Watts. Watts illustrates how the tau cross, which signified immortality, was coupled with the swastika to form a labyrinth, a symbol that was depicted on the eleventh-century Celtic cross at Carew. Watts also utilises the same symbol in her own work⁵⁴ (Watts, 1910:15).

The above has briefly described how the symbols of the L-shape, meander, swastika and labyrinth are interlinked and can be considered as variants of one another. These will now be explored in greater depth in connection with Lethaby.

When observing Lethaby’s small portfolio of completed work, it is surprising to come across four building plans that utilise the L-shape in some way. These include Figure 30, The Hurst (1894) (Lethaby, 1894); Figure 31, Melsetter House (1898) (Lethaby,

⁵⁴ For more on Mary Watts and labyrinth symbolism see section 5.1 Contemporaries influenced by Lethaby.

1898); Figure 32, Rysa Lodge (1900) (Lethaby, 1900a); and Figure 33, High Coxlease (1900) (Lethaby, 1900b).

The meander is also continuously utilised in Lethaby's architecture. Some notable examples of its use are shown in Figure 34, in the interior of the garden house, and Figure 35, on the arch gateway in the courtyard, at Avon Tyrrell (1891). It is again seen in Figure 36, the south façade at High Coxlease (1900). Melsetter House (1898) and Rysa lodge (1900) both incorporate a crow-stepped gable, as seen in Figure 37, to give a meander/ziggurat-like appearance to the exterior (Lethaby, 1898). Ikem Okoye, in his paper 'William Richard Lethaby: A Reassessment' (1989), comments on this peculiar addition to the building: 'The crow-stepped gables used in ending one wing of the south elevation for example, even if borrowed from Country House traditions of the area, are not necessarily "rational" when applied to architecture of significantly smaller scale' (Okoye, 1989:111).

For Lethaby to use the L-shape for almost half of his built work and as a form of ornament is intriguing to say the least. It may be suggested that Lethaby found the shape most functional, or that he continued to use the shape after a successful first attempt and it became familiar to him, and hence he became fond of its use. These are all adequate reasons but seem improbable when considering Lethaby fastidious nature. This was an architect who studied and sketched small, and to some insignificant, architectural details and understood their implication for the wider building. It is unlikely that he would choose architectural convenience over meaningful design. This begs the question of what the L-shape meant to Lethaby.

Lethaby's appreciation of the L-shape may have been in some part due to Philip Webb. Webb was Lethaby's friend and mentor and a highly influential figure in Lethaby's

life: 'Of his circle the man he put highest, and revered most, was Philip Webb' (Rooke, 1950:171). When reminiscing about Webb, Lethaby wrote: 'The happy chance of close intimacy with Philip Webb at last satisfied my mind about that mysterious something that we call architecture' (Roberts, 1957b:19–20). Trevor Garnham believes that it was through Webb and Morris that Lethaby finally understood the true meaning of Ruskin's work, which was inundated with paradoxical statements that made its comprehension difficult (Garnham, 1980:31). Webb's design for William Morris's Red House (1860) is one of his most celebrated architectural works. The house is designed with an L-shaped plan, and the use of the L-shape by Webb has been attributed to a number of reasons. Mackail, who published a biography on Morris in 1899 that was the standard work on Morris for many years, emphasises the rational qualities of Webb's building. It is true that the Red House omits traditional ornament in favour of structural honesty, and Webb employs constructional decorative features, such as unordered red bricks, to enhance the house's beauty (Cooper, 2006:209). The L-shape has been considered to be part of this overall functionalist approach and used, in part, to allow for extending the house easily if required.

This is a more practical concern that may have played some part in Webb's design, but it is unlikely to have been the foremost concern of the architect. In 1971, Gillian Naylor described the house as 'the realization, in bricks and mortar, of a vision of the ideal life that Morris and his friends had constructed for themselves at Oxford and in London' (Naylor, 1971:96). This idea of a domestic paradise, or a utopian lifestyle, must have been one of the fundamental concerns of both architect and client. To achieve this required strict control of all aspects of the houses design, each striving towards the same goal, every detail of the house, including the fixtures and fittings, were designed and made specifically for it. Stained glass, embroidery and murals were

all designed by those close to Morris, including Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The house was one of the first attempts to create a unified whole through the fusion of architecture and interior design.

It would seem that the employment of the L-shaped plan may have been another attempt at augmenting the paradisaal atmosphere, and most probably not just a practical addition. Marcus Waithe argues that the ‘structural characteristics of Red House evoke not only the ideals of its architect and owner, but also the link between medievalism and embryonic socialism, between paternalism and equalitarian inclusiveness’ (Waithe, 2004:568). Waithe also considers the ideas of separation and retreat embodied in the house design, and how the house welcomes visitors but at the same time is also fortified by a huge wall that surround the property, suggesting a withdrawal from the outside world. Waithe proposes that the L-shaped plan contributes to this ideal of welcome on a structural level, and interestingly relates this to Garden City architecture:

If pilgrims are expected – rather fancifully, one understands – to take rest at the side porch, it is possible to imagine the half-courtyard formed by the two wings of the house offering a kind of embrace to the weary stranger. This is a motif that one can see repeated in the Garden City architecture of Letchworth, where ‘L’-shaped blocks combine at least a semblance of open-ness with a protective enclosure of surrounding space (Waithe, 2004:581).

The Red House was a seminal building of its times and is therefore often considered as the precursor to the Modern Movement in architecture. In 1904, Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927) published his great *Das englische Haus*, which did more than anything to place the Red House in the mainstream of architectural history. During his time in England, Muthesius stayed in Hammersmith, the heartland of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and met with the Movement’s leading figures. He absorbed the sentiment of the Movement and understood its significance for the progression of

architectural design in modern times. Muthesius promulgated Arts and Crafts ideology in Germany. The ideas that were resisted vehemently in England were given room to flourish in Germany and later became instrumental in the formation of the Deutsche Werkbund, the infamous Bauhaus and the beginnings of the Modern Movement in architecture (Cooper, 2006:209).

It seems that there is much that the Red House was attempting to evoke. Fiona MacCarthy expands this discussion in her recent biography of Morris, describing the Red House as ‘a deeply symbolic building’ (MacCarthy, 2010:156). This is a poignant statement by MacCarthy and one that will be expanded through this chapter in relation to the L-shape. The L-shape was not confined to Webb’s Red House but, as has been highlighted above, was incorporated by Lethaby continuously in his built work. Later examples of its use include the works of European architects such as Lauweriks and those distinctly associated with the Modern Movement, such as Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) and Le Corbusier.⁵⁵ These will be studied in further detail as part of this study. The examination will also go on to question whether one of the central purposes behind utilising the L-shape was its occult significance.

4.3.2 Lethaby’s explicit thoughts on the meander/labyrinth

Lethaby devotes a whole chapter to ‘The Labyrinth’ in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. He writes that ‘the maze was a symbol of life and of the coil of sin. ‘The whole device was deemed to be indicative of the complicated folds of sin by which man is surrounded, and how impossible it would be to extricate himself from them except through the assisting hand of Providence’’ (Lethaby, 1994:127). Lethaby recalls the

⁵⁵ For further detail on Frank Lloyd Wright’s and Le Corbusier’s use of the L-shaped plan see chapter 5: Lethaby’s Legacy.

examples of labyrinths inlaid into the floors of French, German, English and Italian cathedrals and churches. He also alludes to literary examples of the labyrinth such as those found in *Hypnerotomachia* and Dante's *Inferno*, suggesting that they were 'evidently symbolic of life' (Lethaby, 1994:128). The history and design of labyrinths is discussed by Lethaby. He explains how originally there were 'no false paths, not a single *cul-de-sac* but simply the longest involved path, from the entrance to the eye, you follow far enough, and necessarily reach the centre' (Lethaby, 1994:129). However, this tradition was curtailed from the Renaissance, when the labyrinths became inventive mazes with endless false paths. Lethaby also describes how many of the legendary and archetypal labyrinths were divided by seven zones, circles or walls. The number seven was an allusion to the planets and also the apparent seven walls of the underworld, which are mirrored in the seven walls of heaven.⁵⁶

The concept of the labyrinth was as much metaphorical as it was literal. The journey involved plunging into darkness, fighting a 'serpent, dragon, minotaur of death and darkness' (Lethaby, 1994:133), navigating the convoluted passages and eventually finding the way to the centre. The labyrinth was essentially the passage from darkness to light: 'To go down ... is to descend one's self into the lower world, and to tread the path of the shades ... the daylight fades behind us. At the end of the passage comes a flight of steps, and from the bottom of that flight of steps we see another corridor slanting down into the depths of utter darkness' (Lethaby, 1994:144). However, for

⁵⁶ Lethaby also relates the labyrinth to Sufi dance movements that imitated the sun, moon and planets (Lethaby, 1994:131). This is particularly pertinent later when discussing Frank Lloyd Wright and the labyrinth form, alongside his connection with George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866–1949). See section 5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

those who made it to the ‘confines of the Land of Darkness, the sun emerged ... to light another day’ (Lethaby, 1994:143).

The voyage into the labyrinth was in essence a transformative experience, where one journeyed through the inner self. Lethaby most probably comprehended the spiritual and psychological implications of the journey. He comments, in addition, on the labyrinth form being used for initiation ceremonies, whereby the candidate is exposed to hidden mysteries. This again proposes that he understood the more clandestine nature of the symbol, and that his employment of the labyrinth or L-shape form in his own architectural work would have embraced such metaphorical allusions.

The journey to the centre of the labyrinth was considered by Lethaby as symbolically connected to the journey up the stepped ziggurat. Ziggurats were built in stages; each stage built was smaller than the one before, and the very top was crowned by the earthly temple. This structure represented the celestial spheres, and the temple on top a reflection of the celestial house. The ziggurat was indeed a heavenly hill which, once more like the labyrinth, normally utilised seven stages of progression (Lethaby, 1956a:42–43). Lethaby discusses the ziggurat symbolism in detail in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, describing how ziggurats were ‘ritual imitations of the holy mountain, having at the summit a shrine prepared for the visitation of the god to whom it was dedicated’ (Lethaby, 1956a:41).⁵⁷

Lethaby goes even further to suggest that the ziggurat or stepped triangle, when used ornamentally, conferred magical protection (Lethaby, 1956a:97). He believed, like Worringer, that ‘ornamentation was a sort of tattooing wrought on objects to protect

⁵⁷ The ‘tower as a symbolic of meeting between spirit and nature was used frequently ... by figures such as W. B. Yeats, Pamela Colman Smith, Arthur Edward Waite and in the mystical Rosicrucian organisation of the Golden Dawn’ (Proudfoot, 1994:82).

them from evil spirits and the evil eye' (Lethaby, 1956a:132). Much in the way that amulets were worn to protect the human body from attacks by seen or unseen forces, buildings were adorned with supernatural amulets that would safeguard the building and its occupants from similar harmful forces (Lethaby, 1956a:91). The ziggurat drawn by Lethaby in Figure 38 (Lethaby, 1928) was in particular a charm characteristic of strength or, as Lethaby would term it, a 'battle ornament' (Lethaby, 1956a:133). Lethaby demonstrates the symbol's significance to him by placing it as the frontispiece to the 1892 edition of *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*.

It was by no means only the ziggurat symbol to which this protective magic applied. It was in fact applicable to all the symbols that Lethaby mentioned in both *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* and *Architecture, Nature and Magic*: 'Representations of the world mountain, the starry sky, the waters, the polar tree, the sun disc, guardian creatures, etc., on a small scale were consecrating and protective symbols' (Lethaby, 1956a:132). This would propose that Lethaby's exploitation of such symbolism as ornament within his own architecture was intended to be understood in the same way – as protective symbolism, with magical intent.

Before this section concludes, another curious motive behind Lethaby's use of the L-shape will be considered. It is possible that one of the many reasons for the plan form could be to exclude evil spirits. This inspiration could well have been taken from the typical middle-class Chinese dwelling Lethaby refers to in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, referencing from Herbert A. Giles book, *The Civilisation of China* (1911): 'It is impossible to walk straight into ordinary middle-class dwellings. Inside the front door will be a screen which forces the visitor to turn to the right or the left; the object being to exclude evil spirits, which can only move in straight lines' (Lethaby, 1956a:99).

It is not important to isolate the exact reasoning behind Lethaby's use of the ziggurat/meander/L-shape, as it is most likely that he considered all these implications and more when constructing his plans and adding ornament. It is, however, necessary to appreciate that Lethaby's use of symbolism was in no way superficial and whimsical but, on the contrary, emanated meaning and purpose. Not unlike his beloved ancient architecture, his work 'had a meaning and a message; it was religious, magical, symbolic and cosmical' (Lethaby, 1956a:63).

4.3.3 Theosophical understanding of the L-shape and its relationship with the swastika form

Lethaby had some personal interest in the swastika symbol, which can be observed sketched in the margin of his 1904 sketchbook⁵⁸ (Lethaby, 1904). He also spoke about the swastika in relation to tope or pagoda architecture in his chapter 'The Far East' in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*. Lethaby writes of swastika symbolism, built of stone slabs, found in several relic chambers at the topes. He then explains, in connection with this, that Buddha himself built a pagoda and that 'it was a sacred symbolical or revealed form, not an architectural whim-work' (Lethaby 1956a:69).

The swastika is considered to be a very ancient symbol with universal meaning, found in nearly every ancient and primitive cult in the world. The symbol has been discovered in India, the Far East, Northern Europe and Central America; it has been employed by Hindus, Christians and Celts (Cirlot, 1971:322). Being so widely distributed, the symbol has acquired a plethora of meanings. The word 'swastika' is derived from the Sanskrit word *swasti*, which translates as 'well-being', and it is

⁵⁸ The author would also put forward that the swastika form is experimented with surreptitiously at Avon Tyrrell, both on the chimney stack seen in Figure 39 with a protruding brick pattern and again on the inlaid grey stone pattern in Figure 40 of the south façade.

therefore considered in some cultures as a good luck charm (Nozedar, 2008:189). The swastika is made up of a Greek cross with four arms of equal length, each formed into a right angle. This gives the illusion of rotation, which can be both clockwise and counter-clockwise. This movement has commonly associated the swastika with the solar wheel. The four arms are believed to represent the four cardinal points or the four elements, and hence the material world, whilst the centre symbolises the quintessence or the mystic centre. In recent history the symbol was appropriated by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party during World War II as a symbol for the pure Aryan race. Hitler's high-profile use of the symbol has since amalgamated the symbol with racist and fascist ideology, and consequently the swastika appears as a barrier between Nazi terror and democracy.

Owing to such a wide spectrum of meaning, the current analysis must set a boundary within which the swastika is investigated. This will prevent the analysis from assuming that the purpose of the swastika as a symbolic device has been unchanged throughout history. The analysis will therefore focus in particular on the nineteenth-century use and interpretation of the symbol. Malcolm Quinn in his investigations on the swastika writes:

Although the Nazi swastika can be seen as one version of the Aryan swastika, its transformation of doubt into certainty, and of a marginalised sign into a dominant one, represents a radical shift of emphasis. In the nineteenth century, the swastika served as both an Oriental sign standing at the border and limit of a rationalist discourse, and as an 'orientation' device, an anchoring object for the wayward, anxious and subjective discourses of occultism and Aryanism on the margins of rationalist thought (Quinn, 2005:8).

The relationship between the swastika and occult ideology was intertwined during the nineteenth-century. As Quinn highlights, interest in the symbol was confined to the margins of rationalist discourse of the time. To further appreciate the nineteenth-century context of the swastika it is important to consider a key advocate of the symbol

during the century, the Theosophical Society. The swastika was without doubt given high importance by the Theosophical Society, being part of the Society's emblem as illustrated in Figure 41 (Theosophical Society, 1881) (Goodrick-Clarke, 2000:35).

Blavatsky, wrote the following on the swastika in volume two of her book *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1893):

Few world-symbols are more pregnant with real Occult meaning than the Svastika...it points, in its concrete imagery, as does the ideograph of the number, to the Zenith and the Nadir, to North, South, West, and East; one finds the unit everywhere, and that unit reflected in all and every unit. It is the emblem of the activity of Fohat, of the continual revolution of the 'Wheels,' and of the Four Elements, the 'Sacred Four,' in their mystical, and not alone in their cosmical meaning; further, its four arms, bent at right angles, are intimately related, as shown elsewhere, to the Pythagorean and Hermetic scales. One initiated into the mysteries of the meaning of the Svastika, say the Commentaries, 'can trace on it, with mathematical precision, the evolution of Kosmos and the whole period of Sandhyâ.' Also 'the relation of the Seen to the Unseen,' and 'the first procreation of man and species' (Blavatsky, 1893:621).

Blavatsky also attributed mystical importance to the swastika as 'Thor's hammer' and discredits theories of the sign being connected to the devil. In the following passage she alludes to a myth about the sign that gives it a romantic association with celestial events and celebrates it as a sign capable of bestowing redemption. She writes:

The Svastika, the most sacred and mystic symbol in India, the 'Jaina Cross' as it is now called by the Masons, notwithstanding its direct connection, and even identity with the Christian Cross, has become dishonoured in the same manner. It is the 'devil's sign,' we are told by the Indian missionaries ... What has Satan to do with this highly metaphysical symbol? The Svastika is the most philosophically scientific of all symbols, as also the most comprehensible. It is the summary in a few lines of the whole work of 'creation' ... The Svastika is found heading the religious symbols of every old nation. It is the 'Worker's Hammer' in the Chaldaean *Book of Numbers*, the 'Hammer,' above referred to, in the *Book of Concealed Mystery*, 'which striketh sparks from the flint' ... those sparks becoming Worlds. It is Thor's Hammer, the magic weapon forged by the Dwarfs against the Giants, or the Pre-cosmic Titanic Forces of Nature, which rebel and, while alive in the region of Matter, will not be subdued by the Gods – the agents of Universal Harmony – but have first to be destroyed. This is why the World is formed out of the relics of the murdered Ymir. The Svastika is the Miölnir, the 'Storm-hammer'; and therefore it is said that when the Ases, the holy Gods, after having been purified by fire – the fire of the

passions and suffering in their life-incarnations – become fit to dwell in Ida in eternal peace, then Miölnir will become useless. This will be when the bonds of Hel – the Goddess-queen of the region of the Dead – will bind them no longer, for the kingdom of evil will have passed away (Blavatsky, 1893:103–104).

Blavatsky's description highlights that the swastika was a very potent symbol for the Theosophists, and one that held definite occult meaning. She also indicates that there is a much greater depth to the symbol that cannot be fully disclosed to the uninitiated. The above description is likely to have stimulated Theosophists, such as Lauweriks, to include the swastika form in their architecture. Lauweriks's use of the symbol will be explored later in this section. The latent power of the symbol may explain Lauweriks's continuous employment of it within his work and elucidate why the swastika became a key concept within his design ideology. As a member of the Theosophical Society, Lauweriks may have also been party to the secrets of the symbol reserved for the initiated. This would suggest that there may well have been still further, covert reasons behind his employment of the swastika.

Beyond Blavatsky's interpretations of the sign, there were also other more objectionable uses of and opinions on the swastika during the fin-de-siècle. There was a widely held belief that the swastika was a sexual symbol. According to Wilhelm Reich, in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, the swastika was a sexual symbol that represented two interlocked human figures, the one on the left representing the sexual act of lying down and the other, on the right, the standing position. He puts forward that the two interlocking figures were a powerful stimulus on deep layers of the unconscious (Reich and Carfagno, 2013:4).

The symbol was not only admired theoretically but also utilised practically in magical rites by occult groups of the nineteenth-century. One such group was the prominent Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Reich and Carfagno, 2013:5). Aleister Crowley,

a highly notorious member of the magical order, believed the swastika to hold a range of meanings. He attributed it with being a magical weapon of Kether (crown), the first of the ten Sephiroth, which he believed to symbolise whirling energy and the initiation of all magical force. He also emphasised the sexual aspects of the symbol. Interestingly, Crowley also held the belief that he was the one who inspired Hitler to assume the symbol of the swastika as the Nazi Party emblem (Pasi, 2014:183).

Towards the end of the nineteenth-century the link between the swastika and the Aryan race was also created and propagated. As early as 1877, Ludvig Müller described the swastika as the emblem of the supreme Aryan god. Later, in 1889, Michael Zmigrodzki, a Polish anti-Semite, published *Die Mutter bei den Völkern des arischen Stammes*, a racist article about the swastika. He also exhibited more than three hundred drawings displaying the swastika on artefacts at the Paris Exposition⁵⁹ of 1889 (Goodrick-Clarke, 2000:34).

The most likely and obvious source for Lethaby's awareness of the swastika would be the seal of the Theosophical Society, in which the swastika was incorporated from 1881 (Goodrick-Clarke, 2000:35). Whilst Lethaby was not a member of the Theosophical Society, he was a member of the Fabian Society, several figures of which were either members of the Theosophical Society or involved with it at some level.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Paris Exposition was extremely popular and is best known for showcasing the Eiffel tower. The exposition attracted 55,000 exhibitors and 28.15 million visitors (Nielsen, 2016:43). It is unknown whether Lethaby attended the exposition, but it is highly likely that he would have been fully informed regarding its content.

⁶⁰ For more on the Fabian Society's intricate relationship with the Theosophical Society see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle.

Lethaby's reading of Worringer may also be revealing of his comprehension of the swastika. Although he read Worringer later in life, Lethaby's endorsement of Worringer's theoretical perspective may shed light on his own understanding of the symbol. Malcolm Quinn, having traced the literary tradition of 'romanticised Gothic' of which Worringer's book formed a part, goes on to suggest a connection between *Form in Gothic* and 'the Gothic tradition which had developed in the secret rites of the freemasonry [which] became one of the cultic forms of nationalism in early twentieth-century Germany' (Quinn, 2005:72). Quinn goes on to write that '[t]he "deviant" nature of the twentieth-century Gothic was revealed in Worringer's ambivalent morphology ... "the thesis in question cannot be Gothic in the narrower historical sense but rather a secret, latent Gothic in the psychological sense"' (Quinn, 2005:72). In his analysis Quinn attempts to reveal how the secret tradition and its romantic longing are actualised in Nazism. He does this partly through demonstrating Worringer's interest in forms possessing 'swastikal' symmetry and the associations he makes between these forms and the Aryan race. Whilst the political propensity of Worringer's book is not directly pertinent to the current study, Quinn's analysis of Worringer's attraction to 'swastikal'-type ornament is of interest.

Quinn explains how the swastika presents rotational, without bilateral, symmetry and how '[a]ccording to the Viennese occultist Guido von List, the triskelion, swastika and other Aryan signs could be recognised in the design of the late Gothic tracery and rose windows ... von List saw the visual autokinesis of the swastika as the source of its power' (Quinn, 2005:73). He then goes on to expound that 'in 1912, Wilhelm Worringer had described the same "startling incomplete symmetry" in Gothic ornament as productive of an impression of violent movement that was non-classical and essentially Aryo-Germanic' (Quinn, 2005:73).

Worringer held that, unlike Classical ornament, Northern ornament lacked symmetry, which was instead replaced by repetition. Speaking of the ribbon ornament, he writes that ‘it is more than enigmatical: it is labyrinthine’ (Worringer, 1957:56). He then goes on to clarify that

instead of regular and invariably geometrical star or rosette or similar restful forms, in the North we find the revolving wheel, the turbine or the so-called sun wheel, all designs which express violent movement. Moreover, the movement is peripheral and not radial ... The difference between the radial movement of antique and the peripheral movement of Northern ornament is therefore quite similar to that between simple repetition and repetition with counterchange. In the one case there is quiet, measured organic movement; in the other, the uninterrupted, accelerating, mechanical movement (Worringer, 1957:57).

Worringer’s interest in ‘swastikal’-type ornament and its ability to suggest ‘violent movement’ is fascinating. Worringer had a definite influence on Lethaby,⁶¹ but how far Lethaby ascribed to the autokinetic effect of ornament can only be surmised. It is, however, interesting to consider the possibility that Lethaby’s use of the L-shape/meander may have been due to this suggested movement which animated the ornament and architecture, imbuing it with some latent hidden power.

4.3.4 Lauwerik’s use of the meander

Lauweriks was a member of the Dutch school, and his colleagues included Karel de Bazel (1869–1923), Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934) and Jan Hessel de Groot (1864–1916) (Frank, 1984:61). Lethaby’s was a contemporary of Lauweriks but his familiarity with his work is a matter of speculation. However, due to the vast networks and cross-contamination of ideas during the century, it is possible that Lethaby was conscious of the Dutch school and Lauweriks. One possible connecting pathway may have been Muthesius. Another, more convoluted one, could well have been the

⁶¹ For further detail on Worringer’s influence on Lethaby see section 3.2 Introduction to the language of symbols in the nineteenth-century.

Theosophist Jean Delville (1867–1953). Delville was a professor of painting at the Glasgow School of Art from 1901 to 1906 (Brett, 1992:30), and a friend of Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Neat, 1994:23). Delville was familiar in Dutch circles, where Theosophists, painters and architects such as Lauweriks and Bazel all socialised together. Delville's connections with Lauweriks may have extended to Mackintosh, and through him to Patrick Geddes (1854-1932), and finally to Lethaby.⁶²

The Dutch school was fascinated by the application of proportional systems in architecture to confer beauty. Their systems were not purely objective, as they believed in a rational architecture with mystical overtones. The Egyptian triangle was one such system of proportions employed in the early 1900s by many, including Berlage. Lauweriks did not himself utilise this system but instead made use of his own scheme to create the perfect proportions, which he is likely to have uncovered through the Theosophical Society of which he became a member in 1895 (Frank, 1984:61). The Dutch architects were interested in a profound and meaningful proportional systems that far excelled the superficiality of rationalism.

Lauweriks and De Bazel both became members of the Theosophical Society on 31 May 1894. The two architects and friends later established a private practice together specialising in the arts and crafts, including furniture design and the production of working drawings (Frank, 1984:62). From 1900 to 1904 Lauweriks taught at the Arts and Crafts school in Haarlem, and following this, from 1904 to 1916, was head of architecture at the Arts and Crafts school in Düsseldorf, having been offered the appointment by the prominent German architect, and director of the school, Peter Behrens (1868–1940) (Frank, 1984:63). Behrens was extremely receptive to the Dutch

⁶² For more on the connection between Lethaby, Mackintosh and Geddes see chapter 5: Lethaby's Legacy.

proportional system: 'The clarity, rationality, simplicity, and perhaps even the cosmological basis for Lauweriks's system may have stimulated Behrens's advocacy of it as a teaching method. Behrens's interest in the system was immediately reflected in his own work' (Alofsin, 1993:199). The system was therefore exported to Germany and taught by Lauweriks at Düsseldorf. During his time at Düsseldorf, Lauweriks not only influenced Behrens's design work but had a much broader impact through inspiring some of Behrens's students, such as Adolf Meyer (1881-1929), who was to become Walter Gropius's (1883-1969) future collaborator and partner (Alofsin, 1993:199).

It was during this time that Lauweriks began truly to establish himself. Around 1907 he designed a series of single-family houses for the artists' colony in Hagen sponsored by the wealthy patron Karl Ernst Osthaus (1874-1921). These houses featured Lauweriks's proportional system (Frank, 1984:63), the most distinguished of the houses being designed for the Dutch Art Nouveau artist Thorn Prikker (1868-1932). (Figure 42) (Lauweriks, 1907).

Lauweriks was fascinated by Egyptian culture, and particularly interested in initiation ceremonies held within the pyramids. Lauweriks's daughter, Mejuffrouw Lauweriks, believed it most likely that her father considered Egyptian and theosophical beliefs to be practically synonymous. Lauweriks, like Blavstaky, may well have held the belief that the pyramid was the site of initiation, where men rose towards the gods and the gods descended towards men (Frank, 1984:64). Replicating symbols and proportional systems from Egyptian pyramids in his houses may be viewed as Lauweriks's attempt at recreating this site of initiation in his dwellings and thus creating an intermediary space where the gods and man might meet. This is comparable to Lethaby's use of the

ziggurat form, the summit of which created a link between heaven and earth. Lethaby supports this notion when he remarks that ‘in order to establish relations with transcendent beings, everything about the Palace must be made to recall to the spirits their own heavenly mansions’ (Lethaby, 1956a:32–33). This also seems the reason behind Lethaby’s inclusion of elements from his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, within his own architecture. Such as, the ‘jewel bearing tree’ and the ‘golden gate of the sun’ (Figure 43 and 44). These features were designed purposefully to create a world temple replicating ‘heavenly mansions’ in order to generate a connection to the spiritual realm and attract transcendental beings.

Having studied the principles of Theosophy, Lauweriks and De Bazel came to believe that the current climate of change signalled an awakening of cosmic consciousness. Both architects initially used a highly conspicuous symbolic language in their furnishing and woodcuts to impregnate their work with the essence of the divine but later abandoned this in favour of a more abstract style to allude to the same divine essence. This again finds parallels within the work of Lethaby, who was also in the 1890s very interested in attempting to decipher ancient architectural symbolism and its deeper significance within the architectural setting beyond facile ornament. Later, Lethaby also endorsed a more abstract and scientific building practice, testifying in *Architecture, Nature and Magic*:

In saying that the old ways are closed to us, please do not think I would have it so if it might be otherwise; my own mind rests with the poetries of ancient art and I am altogether inadequate for the methods of science. However, I do see that science has a new magic wonder of its own, and that the manufacture of sham antiquity in our buildings is vain and silly. Look at our sham classic business premises and cinemas and our sham Gothic churches! I am sure for myself that such trivial make-believing too long persisted in must mean national decay (Lethaby, 1956a:16).

Lauweriks was a well-connected figure. Behrens introduced Lauweriks to Osthaus in 1904. Osthaus came from a well-to-do background, being the grandson of a successful industrialist. However, from early on he championed causes for social reform in his home town of Hagen, located in the Ruhr Valley. Osthaus was concerned with the growing degradation of culture in modern society and desired to alleviate this through educating the public. He did this by sponsoring numerous initiatives, including building projects, exhibitions, crafts guilds and other educational projects (Henderson, 1998b:7). Osthaus supported traditional arts and crafts and believed that they could revitalise industry and stem the current destruction of culture. He therefore became a founding member of the Deutsche Werkbund and patron of the Bauhaus movement (Hederson, 1998b:7). Many artists and architects were offered patronage by Osthaus and were encouraged to leave big cities to teach and contribute to creative projects in Hagen. These included Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, Henry van de Velde (1863-1957), Mary Wigman (1886-1973), Jugendstil artist Thorn Prikker and, of course, Lauweriks. Osthaus invited Lauweriks to move to Hagen and build a small colony of houses to accommodate artists and designers and also encourage the growth of a decorative arts industry in the city. Here, Lauweriks was for the first time given the chance to put his theoretical ideas into practice.

In 1904 Lauweriks wrote *A Theosophical Building*, which was his attempt at designing a building keeping in mind a theosophical worldview and perspective. The essay delineates basic theosophical design principles and is inspired in format by Sanskrit religious texts, containing forty slokas (stanzas) in total (Bax, 2011). By arranging the text in slokas, it appears as if Lauweriks was presenting architects with an almost spiritual and meditative guide, which if followed correctly would create the perfect building that would uplift and enlighten, much like the sacred Sanskrit texts.

It is intriguing that one of the leading design principles Lauweriks determines for a theosophical building was the angular, meandering line. Lauweriks refers to this meandering line as kundalini. Kundalini is a Tantric concept and is commonly associated with a snake coiled at the tailbone of the spine of a human being. The snake represents the latent cosmic energy present within matter, which may be stimulated through meditation. As the snake or kundalini energy is triggered, it un-spirals and travels up the spine, activating the chakras and increasing the consciousness of the individual being.⁶³

In solka nine of *A Theosophical Building*, Lauweriks writes: ‘The principle of geometry is the line, a distance. Transferred to geometry kundalini can thus be symbolized by the line’ (Bax, 2011). Later, in slokas ten and eleven, he comments: ‘In architecture this line is represented by the perpendicular and the water-level, by columns and beams, by the bands and divisions of the floors and in different ways in the decorations. The floor, for instance, can be decorated with meanders or bands or motifs that are intertwined’ (Bax, 2011).

Lauweriks’s designs, from his interior decorations to his façades and gardens, show the line used profusely: see Figures 45 and 46 (Lauweriks, 1909). At times it is witnessed in the form of L-shaped building plans, meanders or swastikas. These symbolic forms of the line are used interchangeably to suggest similar connotations. Henderson comprehensively outlines Lauweriks’s use of the meander in his built work:

It was present in the exhibition space at Düsseldorf in the symbolic meanders, and it appeared in the work of de Bazel in the same years. At Hagen Lauweriks took it beyond symbolism, using it to determine the arrangement and order of the whole complex of buildings. Lauweriks conceived of kundalini as a

⁶³ For more on Lethaby’s use of kundalini imagery see sections 4.1 *A Beryl Shirne* and 4.2 *Alchemical Imagery*.

dynamic line that tied major design elements together. At Hagen the meander as the incarnation of kundalini generates and channels energy ... Lauweriks's site plan for the Hohenhagen incorporated ... [a]n imaginary meander [that] connected all the houses along their roof ridges and eventually turned back on itself ... Lauweriks reiterated the meander on the house facades with a single course of rusticated stone running along the base of each house, and a second just under the eaves ... The gardens linked the houses with large squared spirals drawn in plant beds. Leading from house to house the stone coursing culminated in the upper gable of the last house with a labyrinthine encircling of Thorn Prikker's atelier window. The wood slats patterned in square modules, like an abstract mandala, demonstrate the unity of creative energy and cosmic order (Henderson, 1998b:9).

It seems that for Lauweriks the meander brought his architecture to life, infusing it with an internal energy and life force. Lauweriks took the unseen spiritual substance of the universe and forced it to interact with material form. Much like the kundalini rising up the spine, the meander took universal energy and directed it through built form, activating dead and lifeless spaces and infusing them with a life spirit. With his proportional system and the dynamism of the meander, Lauweriks's building were almost simultaneously inhabiting an imaginary plane beyond the construct of time and space: 'This nonrational, mythic quality, envisioning a building synchronized with the cosmos, released it from the usual modes of explanation and ultimately from the contingencies of modernity. Lauweriks living building becomes a sacred totem standing outside of time' (Henderson, 1998b:11).

Several of the houses of the Hohenhagen artists' colony (1910–1914) were designed using an L-shaped plan. As described above, this helped to create an imaginary meander along the top of the roof ridges. The Thorn Prikker house⁶⁴ had an obvious L-shaped plan:

[T]he plan is a square that, with one quadrant missing, initiates the spiral ... The larger spiral implied by the plan recurs on the house interiors, on doors and gates, in meanders in ceiling plaster and inscribed lines on wall panels that bound rooms in a cosmic knot. The creative energy that the meander or spiral

⁶⁴ For details on Le Corbusier's supposed visit to Thorn Prikker house and his meeting with Lauweriks see section 5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

embodied were intended to activate the space and imply a new and modern dynamism (Henderson, 1998b:11).

The Thorn Prikker house is wound into a tight spiral that slowly unfolds. The house's potential is concentrated in the centre, which gradually grows and blossoms outwards much like a germinating seed. This process is repeated throughout the interior, façades and garden layouts, creating a micro and macro effect. The effect is emphasised in the building and the larger site plan. The spiral of the house is echoed in the meandering path formed by the ridge line that connects all nine houses built by Lauweriks along the *Striband* (Padovan, 2013:124). In essence, this is suggestive of the fractal geometry found in nature, where the branches and leaves mirror the structure of the larger tree. This may look to be a minor consideration, but it is likely that Lauweriks, as a Theosophist, would have attributed significant importance to the themes of microcosm and macrocosm in his work. Claude Fayette Bragdon (1866–1946), an American architect and Theosophist, demonstrates this in his collection of essays, *The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture*. Bragdon states:

‘As is the small, so is the great’ is a perpetually recurring phrase in the literature of theosophy, and naturally so, for it is a succinct statement of a fundamental and far-reaching truth. The scientist recognizes it now and then and here and there, but the occultist trusts it always and utterly. To him the microcosm and the macrocosm are one and the same in essence (Bragdon, 1922:24).

Bragdon addresses this matter again under the subheading of ‘Rhythmic Change’, where he speaks about the convolutions of shells, branching of trees and veining of leaves (Bragdon, 1922:27). He later mentions how buildings are often designed to give the impression of growth using the concept of rhythmic change, such as in the refinement of ornament from the ground floor upward.

When returning to Amsterdam in 1916, Lauweriks became the Director of the Quellinus Design School and continued to teach the meandering line as a key design

principle, inspiring a new generation of architects to adopt the form within their design and built work. Lauweriks, like Lethaby, was more effective as a theorist and teacher than as a designer. His built work was produced over a span of six years in his late forties, between the years 1909 and 1915 (Padovan, 2013: 127).

The concept of a theoretically theosophical building with key principles outlined is fascinating when employed as a tool to analyse architecture and understand whether or not a space could be conjectured as theosophical. The fact that the spiral or meander is a central component of this guide to create a theosophical building is even more interesting when applied to Lethaby. As has been outlined above, Lethaby made wide use of the L-shape in his plans and also of meandering lines elsewhere in his buildings. Initially, what could be seen to be a trivial concern becomes much more significant in light of Lauweriks's comments and his application of the same forms to suggest something of much greater consequence. Figure 47 clearly depicts analogous configurations exploited by both Lauweriks and Lethaby. Both architects were contemporaries and their journeys in architecture and the arts and crafts parallel each other in many ways. Both men held a strong interest in ancient architecture and both were concerned with the spiritual significance of architectural forms. It may be possible that the two architects would have heard of each other through Muthesius, but whether they knew of each other's work is a matter of pure speculation.

It would not be an exaggeration to put forward that Lethaby may, like Lauweriks, have understood the spiritual implication of the L-shape and the meander. As highlighted earlier, Lethaby had read Worringer's *Form in Gothic*, which emphasised the peripheral movement of 'swastikal'-type forms; this autokinetic movement was able

to imbue such symbols with an inherent power.⁶⁵ Lauweriks puts forward a similar proposition, imagining that the meander and spiral forms were capable of activating spaces and infusing them with a life spirit. Another point of accord would be the idea of the kundalini expressed by Lauweriks. Lethaby, too, appears to explore the kundalini spiral in illustrations analysed previously, such as *A Beryl Shrine*⁶⁶ and *A Drawing of a Room*.⁶⁷ Whether Lethaby desired to create a theosophical building, is another exciting proposition. Whilst there appear to be no explicit ties between Lethaby and the Theosophical Society, there are indications that he must, at the very least, have been aware of the Society and its purpose. Lethaby was in the midst of the occult revival in London and was well connected within avant-garde circles. Most significantly he was a member of the Fabian Society, several members of which were simultaneously members of the Theosophical Society. It is possible that Lethaby may have learned more about the Theosophical Society and possibly even attended meetings with his fellow Fabian acquaintances.⁶⁸ It could therefore be tentatively proposed that Lethaby may have been employing a theosophical language within his buildings beyond just the meander. This, however, is a far-reaching statement that would require much further research to substantiate.

⁶⁵ Lethaby most probably read Worringer's text later in life, but his concordance with the central thesis may indicate that he was already conscious of some of these ideas prior to his reading of Worringer.

⁶⁶ For more on kundalini and *A Beryl Shrine* see section 4.1 *A Beryl Shrine*.

⁶⁷ For more on kundalini and *A Drawing of a Room* see section 4.2 Alchemical imagery.

⁶⁸ For further information on Lethaby and the Fabian Society and their close relationship with Theosophy see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle.

4.3.5 The square circle

The squaring of the circle is another geometrical concept that has connections with alchemy and the occult. As the symbol is found used by both Lethaby and Lauweriks, it seems pertinent to discuss it briefly.

The use of the circle within the square is a fascinating addition to both these architects' works. Lethaby used the combination of square and circle in 1900 to adorn the façade of his Eagle Insurance Company Building (Figure 48). The circle is seen projecting within a square, repeated twelve times at the very top of the edifice upon a chessboard pattern. Vaughan Hart, in his paper 'William Richard Lethaby and the "Holy Spirit": A Reappraisal of the Eagle Insurance Company Building', considers this section of the building as a symbol of heaven, where the twelve circles are representative of the twelve planetary bodies (Hart, 1993:150). Lethaby's research in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* goes some way to support this claim. Lethaby writes that it 'has ever been accepted as physical axiom in China that heaven is round and earth is square' (Lethaby, 1994:45), and later comments: 'In China ... even the coinage, circular with a square hole, is well-understood as symbolising heaven and earth' (Lethaby, 1994:49). The symbol of the square is not confined to the ornament of the Eagle Insurance Company Building but 'can in fact be traced throughout the façade, not only in its iconography but also as an invisible ordering geometry' (Hart, 1993:150). The square and circle, or cube and sphere, were key features in other buildings by Lethaby. He used them in the bellcote and garden house at Avon Tyrrell, as can be noticed in Figure 49, and also in the bell tower of All Saints Church at Brockhampton. These buildings were symbolic of the world temple, which Lethaby elaborates on in his chapter 'Four Square' in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*: 'The perfect temple should stand at the centre of the world, a microcosm of the universe fabric, its walls

built four square with the walls of heaven. And thus they stand the world over ... with the greatest uniformity and exactitude ... circular and spherical ... From the thoughts of such an enclosure we get ... our word “Paradise” (Lethaby, 1994:51).

The square and circle were evidently highly regarded by Lethaby. Their significance is further illustrated in Figure 50, which shows the title page to the 1892 edition of *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, where a circle is placed on top of a square, over which there is a quotation by César Daly that reads: ‘Are there symbols which may be called constant; proper to all races, all societies, and all countries?’ (Lethaby, 1892).

Another example of the use of the two symbols in conjunction is seen in the relief designed for the Liverpool Cathedral Competition (Figure 5).⁶⁹ The use of the circle within the square in the relief design could metaphorically be associated with Christ,⁷⁰ as the squaring of the circle is also known to have been an icon of the incarnation of Christ, in whom both spirit and matter were reconciled. Such symbolism was explored in depth by alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) (Szulakowska, 2000:132). Lastly, when comprehending the above, it is fascinating that Lethaby chose to name the collective of his colleagues and good friends who lived at Gray’s Inn Square, including Philip Webb, Sidney Barnsley and Ernest Gimson, the ‘Square Circle’ (Rubens, 1986:79). This again demonstrates the sheer magnitude of the symbolism for Lethaby.

Lauweriks was equally charmed by the square and circle geometry. His major theoretical input to the quadrature system of ordering appeared in 1909 in the April issue of *Der Ring*. Lauweriks employed his own church design with illustrations by

⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis of the relief see section 4.1 *A Beryl Shrine*.

⁷⁰ The figure of Christ was commonly employed by alchemists as an allusion to the philosopher’s stone (DeVun, 2014:113).

Christian Bayer to expound his proportional theories (Frank, 1984:64). His favoured proportional system was 4:5:6, which he claimed was adopted not from geometry, but from nature itself. The plans for the church experiment with grids of about 1/32 inch squares, with circles and arcs superimposed. An image that shows a circle inscribed with arcs below a circle enclosed within a square, according to Frank, appears to establish the proportions used in the church plan (Frank, 1984:65). The circle within the square is seen to be used repetitively within the plan.⁷¹

The use of the circle within the square was not confined to Lauweriks. Behrens was also influenced by the Dutch proportionist school. His use of the grid system was first brought to light in 1913 by Fritz Hoeber, who traced its origin to Behrens's designs for the Oldenberg Pavilions of 1905. Behrens made use of the circle within the square on the façade of his Oldenberg Pavilions and later at his crematorium at Celstern, near Hagen, completed in 1907. It is probable that Behrens become conscious of such systems during his collaboration with Lauweriks at Düsseldorf, where in 1904 Lauweriks was appointed head of architecture at the Arts and Crafts school by Behrens. Lauweriks remained in this position until 1916.⁷² (Frank, 1984:66). Behrens was not only integrating the system of the square and circle within his own work but was encouraging the teaching of it to pupils at Düsseldorf:

Incorporating the work of Dutch architect J. L. M. Lauweriks, Behrens proposed teaching all facets of design based on geometric composition. His grids began with a square inscribed with a circle, and the subsequent permutations were made possible by subdividing and duplicating this basic structure. This approach was disseminated to pupils at the Düsseldorf School of Arts and Crafts where he was director from 1903 (Spiekermann, 2010:125).

⁷¹ The way the circle is deconstructed to form twelve arcs was a technique employed by Gothic cathedral builders for finding twelve equally spaced points around a circle, and they used this to create forms such as the iconic rose window design.

⁷² For further details on Behrens see Chapter 5: Lethaby's Legacy.

‘Squaring the circle’ is one of three classical mathematical problems of ancient Greece, dating from around the fifth century BC, the other two being ‘doubling the cube’ and ‘trisecting the angle’ (Wilson, 2008). The challenge involved constructing a square with the same area as a given circle, using only a finite number of steps with compass and straightedge. The impossibility of the task heightened its appeal, and it was a puzzle that exercised medieval minds as well as later being popular in the nineteenth-century. However, the mathematical solution, or lack of a solution, was not the only exciting aspect of this riddle. The fact that the problem could not be solved through Euclidean geometry came to signify that it required some sort of divine intervention to be accomplished. This resulted in the mathematical conundrum becoming associated with alchemy (Szulakowska, 2000:19).

The problem was considered by alchemists as the symbol of the *opus alchymicum*, or Great Work. It was used in prominent alchemical illustrations, one widely recognised example being Figure 51 by German alchemist Michael Maier, emblem XXI in his *Atalanta Fugiens*⁷³ (Maier, 1618: 61); another is Figure 52 by Herbrandt Jamsthaler, in *Viatorium Spagyricum* (1625) (Jamsthaler, 1625). Both show the circle enclosed within a square, which is bounded by a triangle. This was highly significant to alchemist iconography.

The square represented the four elements, which combine in a particular way after the tireless process of distillation and sublimation to create a higher unity, represented by the circle. The circle therefore characterised the fifth element, or quintessence, which

⁷³ Interestingly, the image of the circle with the square is the only direct reference to the philosopher’s stone in Maier’s *Atalanta Fugiens*. The text accompanying the emblem reads: ‘Make a circle around man and woman, then a square, now a triangle; make a circle, and you will have the Philosopher’s Stone’ (Eberly, 2000).

is enigmatically referred to as the philosopher's stone. Metaphorically the sign also represents a union of opposites: spirit (the circle) and matter (the square), heaven and earth, God and the individual soul, and the micro- and macro-cosms.

In Behrens's crematorium at Celstern it is noticeable that he employs not just the circle within the square but places this within a triangle (Figure 53) (Behrens, 1907). This is reminiscent of both Maier's and Jamsthaler's alchemical imagery representing the philosopher's stone and begs the question of whether Behrens was aware of the alchemical significance of his symbolism.

It is likely that the esoteric significance of this symbol would not have escaped Lauweriks, who was a member of the Theosophical Society and must therefore have been familiar with such imagery and symbolism. We could speculate that Behrens may have been introduced to the symbol's deeper significance by Lauweriks during their time together at Düsseldorf. This may therefore account for Behrens's repetitive and conspicuous use of the square and circle as architectural ornament.

Lethaby's use of the same symbolism may also be attributed to its alchemical significance. It is probable that Lethaby would have come across this symbol as part of his research when writing his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. As the author's earlier investigations have attempted to show, it can be assumed that Lethaby had been acquainted with alchemy and, this being the case, would have no doubt encountered the imagery of the square and circle in relation to alchemy. The complexity of the riddle would also have been something that is likely to have appealed to Lethaby, who appreciated the idea of penetrating complex symbols and understanding conflicting and paradoxical statements such as those posed by alchemical treatises (Rubens, 1986:82). The 'square circle' undeniably had a special

significance for Lethaby and his colleagues. Whilst there are several influencing factors behind the use of the square and circle in this way, it seems likely that a possible explanation may well be its profound alchemical significance.

The chapter has introduced the use of the L-shape/meander in Lethaby's architecture. It has shown the many magical and occult connotations of the symbol and suggested that Lethaby, through his use and understanding of the symbol as seen in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* and *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, was conscious of the associations between the symbol and its magic qualities. The study has used the example of Lethaby's contemporary, Lauweriks, to show that the employment of this particular symbolic device was not unique to Lethaby. Lauweriks's parallels in symbolic language and the intrinsic connection of his work with Theosophy make clear that the L-shape/meander was by no means only explored in a functional manner but had vast symbolic ramifications.

The use of the L-shape/meander will continue to be explored in the next chapter, to show how the use of the symbol persisted into the early twentieth-century, being exploited by architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. This investigation will once more demonstrate how the L-shape/meander held a spiritual significance for these architects and was employed beyond practical necessity.

5. The Occult and Lethaby's Legacy

Lethaby was a prominent figure within English architecture at the turn of the century, and his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* was highly influential within Arts and Crafts circles, as it was one of the first books of its kind to express the philosophical and psychological reasoning behind building design and ornament. The ideas put forward by Lethaby in his architectural theory and displayed in his completed work were consequently applied by other Arts and Crafts architects and artists. Lethaby's influence upon his contemporaries will now be explored in further detail. This will be followed by a wider investigation into the continuation of occult ideology by architects of succeeding generations and on future movements in architecture, such as Expressionism and the Modern Movement. Portraying the enduring legacy of the occult into the twentieth-century, will assist in bridging the divide between latter half of the nineteenth-century and the early twentieth-century; indicating a much earlier origin for many occult ideas, commonly associated with architects of the Modern Movement. The study will endeavour, where possible, to show events chronologically, in an attempt to demonstrate the permeation of ideas through time and space⁷⁴.

The main focus will once again remain firmly on the occult and spiritual predispositions of the individuals explored, in order to demonstrate how Lethaby may have promulgated an occult/spiritual ideology, in conjunction with his architectural theory, which was subsequently transmitted to his contemporaries and later generations of architects and artists. Whilst many of the architects examined, may have felt the direct influence of Lethaby, for others the connection with Lethaby is implied through his legacy and the continued use of symbolic/occult language. This is by no

⁷⁴ There are occasional instances where the author has included events outside of the chronological order. This is only the case when it is believed they will be better placed earlier/ later to aid clarity and assist the reader

means an exhaustive list, but it aims to illustrate the vast impact made by Lethaby on some of the avant-garde architects and artists of the nineteenth and twentieth-century.

5.1 Contemporaries influenced by Lethaby and *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*

5.1.1 Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938)

Mary Seton Watts was an artist and the wife of George Fredric Watts (1817–1904). She was born into a distinguished household. Her family were Scottish landed gentry and intellectuals, and she spent her childhood at the family estate at Aldourie near Inverness (Anson, 2013:8). Watts later went on to complete artistic training. She travelled to Dresden and Rome before enrolling at the National Art Training School in Kensington, and later at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1873. Alongside her art she was known for her philanthropy and socialist inclinations, teaching clay modelling to shoeblacks twice a week in the slums of Whitechapel (Anson, 2013:8). She was also a leading member of the Home Arts Industries Association.

Watts was a devout Christian, but through her work she attempted to convey ‘universal spiritual ideas’ (Anson, 2013:21). This is seen most clearly in the three decorated ceilings at her house, Limnerslease, designed between 1890 and 1896, where she assigned specific ancient civilisations and religions to the ceiling panels, including Brahmin, Buddhism, Chaldean, Egyptian and Hebrew panels (Bills, 2011:157–160). Watts was profoundly interested in symbolic art and, like Lethaby, desired to ‘revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning’ (Watts, 1910:2). For Watts

[t]he use of symbols in modern times may be defended only on the plea that they carry their suggestion to the mind along a somewhat disused pathway, and that, as in the case of parable and metaphor, these little tokens dwelt upon earnestly and lovingly have a fire of thought within them which has power to flash new light into the soul. A symbol may well be compared to a magic key.

In one hand it is nothing more than a piece of quaintly wrought iron, in another it unlocks a door into a world of enchantment (Watts, 1910:27).

Symbolic decoration was used profusely in Watts's celebrated cemetery chapel in Compton, which was constructed between 1896 and 1904. The chapel was the combined effort of Watts, who was the artistic force behind the project, George Tunstal Redmayne, who was the architect and designed the doors to the chapel, and finally the villagers, of which no fewer than seventy-three contributed to the chapel efforts (Bills, 2010:17).

Whilst working on the chapel, Mary is known to have been reading Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, and the book became a key influence on her symbolic pattern design (Anson, 2013:21). This can be witnessed in the corbels holding up the friezes on the exterior of the chapel, where three angels hold roundels depicting the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Way is shown as a labyrinth, which corresponds to the image of the Cretan labyrinth, illustrated by Lethaby in *Architecture Mysticism and Myth* (Lethaby, 1994:128), where Theseus finds his way with the aid of Ariadne's thread (Bills, 2011:95). According to Bills, the Wattses were 'close to Walter Crane, William Morris, William Lethaby and Edward Burne-Jones...so that ideas and discussions flowed in both directions' (Bills, 2011:98). The Wattses were also familiar with other painters and architects in Edinburgh who were exploring the past and mysticism, many of whom were friends with W. B. Yeats.⁷⁵ Amongst them were Patrick Geddes (Anson, 2013:29), and artist and craftswomen Phoebe Traquair (Bills, 2011:95).

⁷⁵ For more on W. B. Yeats and his connection with the occult see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle and 4.2 Alchemical imagery

There are particular symbols used by Watts that demonstrate Lethaby's influence upon her, as well as their similitude in thinking. One of these is the labyrinth,⁷⁶ which has been mentioned above. The labyrinth form is used again as the decoration on the columns supporting the sides of the buttresses. This time, however, it is based on a symbol taken from a Celtic cross at Carew in Wales. Mary writes in her book *The Word in the Pattern* that the 'symbol was used by British Christians to signify the labyrinth or maze of life, round which was sometimes written the words, "God leadeth"' (Watts, 1910:15). The labyrinth was made using two ancient symbols, those of the tau cross and the swastika. The tau cross, Mary writes, was the Egyptian 'sign of immortality, and called by them the key of life' (Watts, 1910:15). Mary explains the relation of the swastika to the four quarters of the earth and the path of the sun. She also traces the swastika's origin in her chapel notebook: 'It was used in Mycenae, Illium, Cyprus and Athens, and in Greece it was called the *gammadion*, a cross with hooks' (Bills, 2011:95). The labyrinth was a symbol that had powerful connotations for Watts, as for many other nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists and architects. Watts had faith that '[t]he maze of life may bewilder, but the path of light runs through it:⁷⁷ "It is well" is the name of the path, and the key to life eternal is in the strange labyrinth for those whom "God leadeth"' (Watts, 1910:15).

Another symbol is the peacock,⁷⁸ which is seen on the south-east section of the chapel's exterior frieze. The frieze is named the 'Path of the Just' and is split into four segments representing, hope, truth, love and light. In each segment is a bird

⁷⁶ Further information on the Labyrinth and its connection with occult symbolic language can be found in section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

⁷⁷ The description recalls the labyrinth and swastika form of Le Corbusier's Museum of Unlimited Extension, which encloses and suggests liberation simultaneously see section 5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

⁷⁸ For Lethaby's use of the peacock symbol and its relationship to alchemy see section 4.2 Alchemical Imagery.

symbolising an aspect of the human spirit, and hope is symbolised by the peacock. Peacock feathers are also witnessed over the three-tiered entrance archway. Mary observed how in Hinduism the peacock was considered a sacred creature; Krishna wore a peacock feather in his turban, and in another instances the peacock was illustrated 'striking a rock with its beak, out of which water flows and creates a sacred lake' (Bills, 2011:91). However, for Mary the peacock was, more than anything, a symbol of immortality. She explains how 'those wonderful blue eyes surrounded by rays shining with the colour of light were cast every year and renewed again, and yet again' (Watts, 1910:18).

The notions of resurrection, immortality and eternal life pervade the chapel symbolism, represented by the never-ending circle used on various occasions in the chapel including on the plan, on the very top centre of the internal dome and on the entrance door. The chapel is modelled on the the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which is said to be built on the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. Watts remarks on how the church was called 'Anastasis, or Resurrection, for not the thought of death, but the thought of life, the promise of life eternal, was to be suggested by these sacred walls' (Watts, 1910:25). A number of overlapping circles are seen on the great oaken door of the chapel which, as Mary makes clear, are used to evoke eternity: 'Behind the cross on the door there is a glimpse through a circle into light; circle within circle, with flames and wings – eternity, mystery, light, motion, spirituality, protection' (Watts, 1910:25).

The theme of resurrection is again expressed upon the pillars of the entrance arch, which 'reverently interpret[] parables from the book of nature, that tell him of life after death' (Watts, 1910:11). These include a 'young blade springing from the dry

seed, seemingly, dead and buried' (Watts, 1910:11) and a 'butterfly rising with shining wings from its little tomb, the chrysalis' (Watts, 1910:11).

Mary's chapel and its symbolism are suggestive of an inner spiritual journey. The great oak doors are guarded by a dragon, which must be conquered much like the dragon or serpent that guards the labyrinth. The interior celebrates themes of duality, such as light and dark, growth and decay, joy and sorrow. The panels attempt to create a balance between the dichotomies, where each has its place in the cosmos. This is further emphasised by the Celtic cord of unity that binds all aspects together as one. The themes explored by Mary also have their counterpart in alchemical and occult literature, which have been discussed in relation to Lethaby as part of this research. Nevertheless, it would be fascinating to discover how far Mary was aware of these occult relationships within her own work.

The chapel was, for Mary, 'the story, or at least some fragments of the story, of the spiritual life, on the wing of which, in the passage between the mystery of birth and the mystery of death, material life is lifted to the glorious consciousness of its affinity with the Infinite' (Watts, 1910:3). These mysteries were likewise pondered by Lethaby:

This evening passing pensive by,
I heard a small child question 'Why?'
Such is, and will be till I die
My own heart's most insistent cry.'
'Who can say if by and by
There may be another try?
This might seem a reason why
We're such babies when we die. (Lethaby, 1956b:52)

5.1.2 Patrick Geddes (1854–1932)

Patrick Geddes is considered to be one of the foremost initiators of the modern town planning movement. He was originally a biologist, and in 1874 enrolled in a botany

programme at the University of Edinburgh; he was subsequently admitted to Huxley's courses on the natural sciences (Ponte and Levine, 1989:48). Geddes later turned his hand to town planning and 'attempted to derive from the eternal economics of nature the future economics of society and the city' (Welter, 2003:18). His work incorporated a broad range of interests and influences, which included ideas on religion, metaphysics and mysticism. Such thoughts and activities became more pronounced during the late 1910s and 1920s following the deaths of his son and his wife (Welter, 2003:22).

Geddes worked with Lethaby for a short time in 1898 on the rebuilding of Crosby Hall (Saint, 1991:209); therefore the two architects were at least familiar with each other, if not on close terms⁷⁹. Geddes and his wife, Anna, were close friends of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh. From their correspondence with one another it would seem that the couples were on intimate terms (Welter, 2003:318). Annie Besant was another acquaintance of Geddes. Besant initially met Geddes in the 1870s, when he was a student in London. Here, he gave her and Charles Bradlaugh's daughter lessons in the natural sciences, which were forbidden to them by London colleges at the time (Meller, 2005:158). Geddes later renewed his friendship with Besant in India, and she introduced him to Krishnamurti, the apparent 'harbinger of a New Age' (Scott and Bromley, 2013:51). Geddes was attracted to the Theosophical Society and its teachings and was involved in Society meetings in the

⁷⁹ Crosby Hall was first built in Bishopsgate from 1466 -1475. The Medieval building was later in 1910, relocated to Cheyne Walk opposite Battersea Bridge, in Chelsea. There were a number of schemes designed to provide some context for the Hall, including designs by Lethaby alongside F.W. Troup, Ashbee and Geddes. However these were never realised and the hall was instead re-erected under the supervision of Walter H. Godfrey.

1890s. However, how active his membership was is a matter for conjecture (Scott and Bromley, 2013:50). Another of Geddes's spiritual connections was Swami Vivekananda, whom he met in Chicago in 1900 and again later at the Paris Exposition. The Indian guru made such a great impact on both Patrick and Anna Geddes that they later taught the Raja Yoga exercises acquired from him to their young children (Stavig and Ashrama, 2010:442). It is clear that Geddes had an extensive network of connections with predispositions towards spiritual or occult practices. This is made further evident by Welter, who comments: 'Through friends like Eder and Branford and contacts with people such as Alfred Richard Orage, the editor of the journal *New Age*, Geddes was part of a movement of renewed interest in religiosity and rising fascination with spirituality, mysticism, and Eastern beliefs' (Welter, 2003:22). Hence, Geddes is a good case in point to illustrate the cross-contamination between artists, architects and designers, and spiritual and occult thought and practices, during the fin-de-siècle.

Geddes and Lethaby shared a fascination with a 'metaphysical city centre'. Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* deals with this subject in relation to the world temple, where ideas of the macrocosm are explored on a microcosmic level, in the form of a temple. Thus through his book Lethaby implicitly suggests that by thoroughly understanding temple symbolism, a renewed symbolism can take root based on similar ideals and bring about a reform of life and society. Lethaby's book provided architects with tangible symbols, and hence his ideas contributed to much of the emerging metaphysical approach to city design. Lethaby himself also tried to implement the idea of a metaphysical centre in his unbuilt proposal for a *Sacred Way*, in the city of London (Figure 54). Here, Lethaby attempted to build an avenue from Waterloo Bridge to the British Museum. The way was to be decorated with fountains,

trees and statues, with an omphalos placed at the crossing with the Strand. For Lethaby the *Sacred Way*,⁸⁰ the new metaphysical centre of the city, would bestow on London a new sense of order and unity and improve the city considerably.

Geddes was eager to employ the spiritual centre in his own work. His endeavours began with his

Outlook Tower and the proposed National Institute of Geography in Edinburgh in the 1890s ... [and] ends two decades later in the chanting of psalms around the Great Hall of Hebrew University conceived as an institute of synthesis. The temple as the climax of the city as a form of life – equally rooted in sciences and religion – becomes the center of ecstatic and joyful celebrations (Welter, 2003:231).

Geddes believed that the city spaces should be integrated and connected, rather than a random accumulation of buildings. The creation of this superstructure with the metaphysical centre as stronghold, he believed, would improve the city and, with it, society. Geddes applied his *Notation of Life* diagram as a tool in order to create this perfect city superstructure. The diagram is split into four quadrants focused on social behaviours and the environmental results of such behaviours. The four sections are titled *Town*, *School*, *Cloister* and *City in deed*, which correspond to the terms placed on the outer frame of the diagram, *Acts*, *Facts*, *Thoughts (Dreams)* and *Deeds*, respectively. The two formulas when applied simultaneously propose a four-step process through which individual human lives are raised to higher levels of consciousness, through ‘living in, reacting to, and acting upon the environment’ (Welter, 2003:40). This evolution is compared by Geddes to the coiling of a spiral,

⁸⁰ The *Sacred Way* may in fact be an allusion by Lethaby to the Eleusinian mysteries. The mysteries are related to Demeter and Persephone. Initiation into these most secret of rites was said to elevate man and confer upon him immortality. The celebration of the greater mysteries involved marching ‘along the Sacred Way from Athens to Eleusis, singing, dancing and carrying the “sacred things”’ (Meyer, 1999:18)

and interestingly the *Notation of Life* diagram is graphically expressed by Geddes in the form of a swastika⁸¹ (Welter, 2003:32–39).

The notion of reforming society through designing ideal community spaces with some form of metaphysical centre became a prevalent theme around the turn of the century. This is dealt with in some detail by Welter in his chapter ‘The Metaphysical Imperative in Urban Design around 1900’ (Welter, 2003: 136–172). The development of this concept was later seen in the work of the Expressionists, in particular Bruno Taut, whose city crown is a successor of the earlier cultural acropolis.⁸²

5.1.3 Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928)

Charles Rennie Mackintosh was a Scottish architect, designer and artist. Mackintosh was part of a group known as The Four, which included his wife Margaret Macdonald, her sister Frances Macdonald, and Herbert MacNair. The group were disparagingly termed the ‘Spook School’ by critics because of the ghoul-like elongated forms and symbolism that featured in their work. Mackintosh is known to have utilised symbols as a critical component of his art. He is also believed to have made use of Lethaby’s, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, in order to articulate his thoughts on the subject of symbols and their significance. Mackintosh made reference to the importance of symbolism in many of his lectures:

The artist may have ... an easy grasp and a clear eye for essentials ... but that which characterizes him above all else – and determines his vocation is – the exceptional development of the imaginative faculties – especially the imagination that creates – not only the imagination that represents – The power which the artist possesses of representing objects to himself explains the halucinating [*sic*] character of his work – the poetry which pervades them – and their tendancy [*sic*] towards symbolism ... it will be found that the art of the years that are past – recently past ... lacking in substance ... it is thin – light – artificial – revealing no personality. What one misses ... is – the large

⁸¹ For further clarification on the swastika form and its affiliation with Lethaby and the occult see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

⁸² A more detailed analysis of Taut’s architecture can be found in chapter 5: Lethaby’s Legacy

rhythm that undulates through that of the great masters ... the sustained note of informing purpose – the deep vibration of some unifying undertone ... which every artists work – no matter how trivial, should constitute (Mackintosh, 1990:223–224).

Mackintosh believed art work should be imbued with vast amounts of intention and require penetrating, and not just be used for stylistic and superficial ends. He considered that true art had a soul, and he himself chose to represent that soul through the language of symbols. Symbols were endowed with real power by Mackintosh and The Four as they understood them to possess a mystical charm as well as a subconscious charge. The prominent use of clandestine symbolic language is highlighted by Thomas Howarth. When he met with Herbert MacNair, ‘he was informed that in the group’s early works “not a line was drawn without purpose, and rarely was a single motif employed that had not some allegorical meaning”’ (Neat and McDermott, 2002:140).

Timothy Neat, in *Part Seen, Part Imagined*, has put forward the thesis that much of the symbolic language employed by The Four had an intrinsic relationship with occult symbolism:

There is, at present, no absolute evidence that any of The Four were members of any of the mystical sects – The Golden Dawn, Theosophism, Rosicrucianism – that were so culturally influential in so many far-flung parts of the late nineteenth-century world – but there are many indications that The Four’s ideas and aspirations were deeply affected by the beliefs of such movements ... many of the Mackintoshes’ friends, colleagues and exemplaires were either members or followers of such movements – Francis Newberry, Patrick Geddes, the Yeats brothers, Oscar Wilde, Jean Delville, Carlos Schwabe, Josef Hoffman, Ludwig Hevesi, Arnold Schoenberg, Gustave Klimt, Maeterlink, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Margaret Morris, and J. D. Fergusson (Neat, 1994:23).

W. B. Yeats⁸³ was one of the most well-known figures of the the Golden Dawn. His brother Jack Yeats, the Irish painter, was a Rosicrucian enthusiast and known to be in

⁸³ William Morris became a friend of W. B. Yeats at the beginning of the later’s poetic career, and Yeats ‘retained an affectionate admiration for Morris throughout his life’ (Faulkner,

direct contact with The Four (Neat, 1994:124). As part of his research Neat also relates to The Four the great English Rosicrucian Francis Bacon's fifty-two rules for his secret society. Neat proposes that the aims of The Four relate distinctly to Bacon's Rosicrucian aims. He questions whether this was because 'The Four were idealists whose aims would mesh well with the aims of any idealistic group, or ... because they had close connections with Rosicrucianism' (Neat, 1994:129).

Artist and researcher Dai Vaughan is another to have related the Mackintoshes' work with occult ideas and sympathetic magic (Vaughan, 2003:5). In his paper 'Secret Symbols and Hidden Meanings' Vaughan describes some of the symbols discovered in the work of Mackintosh. These include the scarab found concealed in *The Centre of the Wassail* (1898), a symbol that had 'huge significance to the ancient Egyptians as a symbol ruling providence, directing the powers of nature, renewal and regeneration, and the endurance of the human soul' (Vaughan, 2003:4). Another Mackintosh drawing to which Vaughan attributes obscured symbolism is the *Buchanan Street Tea Rooms stencil design* (1896). Vaughan deems the designs to 'bear a strong resemblance to Eastern diagrams illustrating the various states of awareness as consciousness rises towards enlightenment' (Vaughan, 2003:5). He goes on to describe in further detail how the illustration depicts the chakras along the spinal column and the spiritual energy that moves from the base of the spine⁸⁴ to the 'thousand petalled lotus at the crown of the head' (Vaughan, 2003:5).

Whether or not the The Four or Mackintosh were part of an occult group is a matter of conjecture. However, what is clear is that they definitely used symbolic leitmotifs

1962:4). Sydney Cockerell, a good friend to Lethaby, was also on close terms with W. B. Yeats, as can be discerned from his many letters to the poet (Meynell, 1940:268–73).

⁸⁴ Lethaby's use of parallel symbolism can be found throughout chapter 4. Occult Symbolism in Lethaby's Illustrations and Architecture.

to activate the imagination and generate a spiritual atmosphere. Wagner was successful in developing the idea of symbolic leitmotifs in his music to generate desired emotional responses, and his work in this area inspired the advancement of European Symbolist art. Mackintosh used recurring leitmotifs to produce a similar outcome. These included earth, sun, rose, blossom, tree, dove, moon, water and naked women. The simple yet multifaceted leitmotifs were able to energise Mackintosh's work and provided his art as well as his architecture with profound aesthetic and psychological meaning (Neat, 1994:24).

It was not only Mackintosh's art work and symbolic ornament that had a transformative effect. A journey through his architecture was meaningful in its own right, and suggestive of inner spiritual and transformative experience. Neat's following descriptive passages on the Glasgow School of Art and the Mackintoshes' house at 78 Southpark Avenue, respectively, emphasise this:

All visitors enter the building through a small main door; from a dark hallway they are then drawn up the stairwell towards a flood of light for the first-floor gallery – just as sap is drawn along a stem. Illumined by this light, students, teachers and examiners then spread out into the rooms and studios which open like leaves and blossoms lit by splendid windows ...

The Mackintoshes' house ... is designed around a similar basic concept. On the ground floor is the entrance hall, kitchen and dining room. All these rooms have dark-stained woodwork and a soft, dun-coloured wallpaper. This is the zone of earth, a closed, warm, womb-like place ... The stairway up which one passes to the rest of the house, is, like that at the School of Art, essentially a dark passage towards the light – the atmosphere is almost claustrophobic. Visitors feel physically constricted on the dark and narrow stairs, but suddenly emerge into a room which is brilliant and surprising ... it shocks, like an inhalation of oxygen: a new world is revealed (Neat, 1994:155).

The journey takes the visitor on a transformative journey from darkness to light that culminates towards the summit of the building.⁸⁵ The architecture refers to a metaphoric inner journey as much as an external one through the building itself.

The impact made on Mackintosh by Lethaby is particularly pertinent to the current study. Mackintosh's second lecture on the subject of architecture, delivered in 1893 most probably to the Glasgow Art Club or at the Glasgow School of Art, gave a clear outline of his views on architecture as well as his suggestions for the future of the field. These were in a large part adopted from Lethaby and his *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. The introduction to Lethaby's book was borrowed from liberally by Mackintosh, with nineteen of the fifty paragraphs for his lecture being appropriated from *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. The stark difference in tone between Mackintosh's first paper on architecture, delivered a year earlier and guided by the writings of Ruskin, Reynolds, Scott and Baldwin, and his second attempt on the same subject matter shows the impact that Lethaby had on Mackintosh. Through Lethaby, Mackintosh was finally able to articulate his own ideas on architecture. Lethaby's book was written from the perspective of an architect rather than a historian or critic, and so was accessible and penetrable by architects and designers with an interest in symbolism, providing them with a clearer and deeper understanding of archetypal symbols employed within architecture. Mackintosh found in Lethaby answers to questions he had been contemplating for a while. These proved to be all the more valuable because the answers were given a lucid expression:

One should avoid being distracted from the main ideological issue, which was that Mackintosh was prepared to subscribe to Lethaby's ideas and adopt them in his own practice. In Lethaby, Mackintosh found more fundamental answers

⁸⁵ The passage recalls the architectural promenade discussed in relation to Lethaby and Le Corbusier later in this section.

than Ruskin or Baldwin Brown could provide to the issues he had struggled with in his first paper (Walker, 1990:170).

Mackintosh not only promulgated these ideas theoretically but applied them in his work. As Robert Macleod was the first to observe, ‘much of Mackintosh’s subsequent building can be seen as an attempt to work out in visual terms many of the concerns with which Lethaby was engaged’ (Macleod, 1988:19). Later in the same article Macleod comments that ‘in much of his work Mackintosh was giving strong and topical vision to the thinking of Lethaby’ (Macleod, 1988:23).

It is hard to say whether Mackintosh saw in Lethaby another proponent of the mystical symbolism that he and The Four explored in their work. If he did, he would have most probably penetrated the secret layer of meaning (if there was one) behind Lethaby’s text. Multivalent symbols were a common trait of the Symbolist tradition, which ‘usually presented symbols on not less than two layers: making use of images which are part of the common language of any educated public, and a variety of more or less secret and esoteric symbols which serve as a private language for closed groups’ (Neat, 1994:21). Whether this was the case or not, it is likely that Lethaby ‘had an effect on ... [Mackintosh’s] decorative art which went far beyond the ideal of architecture as the commune of the arts and crafts ... from Lethaby’s detailed studies of the symbolic origins of architectural detail, an artist whose work, as in *The Harvest Moon* of 1892, already had affinities with the Symbolist Movement must have drawn encouragement to think still deeper’ (Walker, 1990:178).

5.1.4 Other contemporaries inspired by *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*

Robert Weir Schultz was born in Port Glasgow and moved to London in 1884 to work, like Lethaby, in the offices of Richard Norman Shaw. Schultz soon became involved in the Art Workers’ Guild; he was officially elected a member in 1891 and, later,

Master for 1920. Lethaby was a founding member of the Guild, and Schultz considered him to be one of his oldest and best friends (Stamp, 1981:4). Schultz was intensely guided by *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*.

Schultz used inspiration from the book when designing the chapel at St John's Lodge for the Third Marquess of Bute, in which he incorporated a 'pavement like the sea' and 'ceiling like the sky'. The Third Marquess was fascinated by symbolism and particularly interested in spiritualism, which created in him a desire to commune with the invisible world not accessible through sense perception. This yearning led to some very strange yet appealing commissions for Schultz. These included a subterranean chapel built in Regent's Park in 1900 and demolished in 1916 (Stamp, 1981:22–23).

Schultz similarly integrated a 'pavement like the sea' into his design for the Chapel of St Andrew at Westminster Cathedral. He made comment on how *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*

opened up to us younger men a hitherto undreamt world of romance in architecture. The labyrinth, the golden gate of the sun, pavements like the sea, ceilings like the sky, the windows of heaven and three hundred and sixty days ... Now through Lethaby, one began to understand something of what they all meant (Schultz, 1932:18).

Schultz felt forever indebted to Lethaby. Through Lethaby he and many other architects learned the value and true meaning of symbolism that had been obscured through time and had lost its significance. Through his book Lethaby was able to reinvigorate timeless and archetypal symbolism with a new lease of life and infuse a greater profundity of meaning in modern works of architecture, which had become superficial and sterile. Schultz's gratitude is shown in his speech to the Art Workers' Guild after Lethaby's death in 1931, when he said: 'I cannot express in words how much I owe to his friendship. Anything I may have done, that may possess merit, is due to his inspiration and teaching' (Schultz, 1932).

Charles Harrison Townsend (1851-1928) is another architect who fell under the enchantment of Lethaby's book. Townsend was a member of the Arts and Crafts Movement and became part of the Art Workers' Guild in 1888. Townsend is best known for three of his iconic buildings in London: the Bishopsgate Institute (1892–1894), Whitechapel Art Gallery (1895–1901)⁸⁶ and the Horniman Museum (1896–1901). All three façade designs emphasise the entrance space with Romanesque arches and include some form of tower. These features confer the architecture with an innate sacred character, typical of a church or other religious buildings.

The Bishopsgate Institute incorporates a decorative frieze that runs across the façade. This relief design depicts the tree of life, which was to become a recurring motif used by Townsend in his work. One such instance of recurrence is seen on the tower of the Horniman Museum. The original entrance gates of the Bishopsgate Institute also depicted a large flaming sun of wrought iron (Holder, 1984:59). The inspiration for the designs is believed to have been Lethaby's *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* (Backemeyer and Gronberg, 1984:83). After the publication of the book a radical change was perceived in Townsend's architecture, with an increasing integration of symbolic devices within the façades of his buildings⁸⁷ (Backemeyer and Gronberg, 1984:83). Bishopsgate is not the only instance of Townsend's application of ideas found in Lethaby's book. Lethaby appears to have made a lasting impression on Townsend, and the latter's design for the Whitechapel Gallery and the Horniman Museum demonstrate this influence. At Whitechapel, '[t]he towers are square in plan but taper as they rise, dividing into four small turrets with a larger turret between. The

⁸⁶ Before moving to Compton, Mary Watts was involved in bringing art and handicraft to the workers of Whitechapel. Interestingly, Townsend's sister also took part in this endeavour (Holder, 1984:61).

⁸⁷ Another possible intent of the symbolic imagery could be related to Freemasonry, as it is likely that Townsend was a Freemason (Wentworth-Sheilds, 1963:26).

cupolas are symbols of the celestial hemisphere. The conjunction of squares and circles, cubes and hemispheres symbolise the relationship between the earth and the universe' (*The Architecture of C. Harrison Townsend*, 2011), and once more 'the magical combinations of square with circle (universe with Earth), cube with hemisphere, tree with stone, were expressed even more clearly in the tower of the Horniman Museum' (Backemeyer and Gronberg, 1984:82).⁸⁸

Finally, Henry Wilson, an architect, designer and a close friend of Lethaby's, was deeply roused by *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. Wilson was elected to the Art Workers Guild in 1892 and became Master in 1912. Wilson was the first editor of the *Architectural Review* from 1896 and president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society from 1915 to 1922. Lethaby and Wilson worked together on various design projects, most notably the Liverpool Cathedral Competition in 1902. Wilson is known to have frequently drawn on *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* for inspiration. This is witnessed in his chalice, designed in 1900 for Gloucester Cathedral. The chalice design relates to several passages of the book describing the world temple (Backemeyer and Gronberg, 1984:82). According to Cyndy Manton, Wilson was able to fully comprehend the magnitude of Lethaby's book:

No one manifested his book's theories more coherently and consistently than Wilson. In him, its ideas fused with the liberating impulses bequeathed him by Sedding, and were channelled into intriguing new directions. It was in following these paths in the 1890 Ladbroke Grove library design, or in his bold church schemes for Lynton (1892) or Highgate (1896), that he most clearly entered into creative interchange with other innovators including Charles Nicholson, Charles Harrison Townsend and Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Manton, 2009:3).

Rubens also illustrates further examples of designs that were likely to have been influenced by a reading of *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. These include J. A.

⁸⁸ The importance of the square and circle and its links with Lethaby are elaborated in section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

Slater's design for a town mansion, which Slater dedicated to Lethaby, and an embroidered wall hanging designed by May Morris, depicting the tree of life and originally displayed at Melsetter House (Rubens, 1986:83–85).

5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Lethaby and occult concepts on the early twentieth-century and beyond

The following discussion will aim to depict the chronology of events that occurred from Muthesius's arrival in England to his involvement in the Deutsche Werkbund and the consequent establishment of the Bauhaus. This discussion will provide an overview of events, showing the main ideological themes that were explored by Muthesius and demonstrating the amalgamation of ideas during the fin-de-siècle. The section will then move on to focus on key individuals, providing a more in-depth account of their involvement in the Modern Movement and focusing particularly on their occult affiliations, in the hope of illustrating the extension of occult ideology into the twentieth-century.

5.2.1 Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927): from *Das englische Haus* to the Bauhaus

Hermann Muthesius moved to Hammersmith, London, in 1896. He worked as the cultural attaché at the German embassy until 1903. Whilst working in London he became particularly interested in the architecture of the domestic English dwelling and its resurgence due to the Arts and Crafts Movement. Muthesius was also attracted to the English educational system, in particular, Lethaby's pedagogic methods and his thoughts on modern art education. These were later absorbed by Muthesius and replicated in Germany. The visit led to Muthesius producing his seminal, three-volume detailed analysis *Das englische Haus*, published in 1904–1905. The study included the work of prominent members of the Arts and Crafts Movement, including Morris, Voysey, Webb, Mackintosh and of course Lethaby (Postiglione, 2004:278). In

addition, Muthesius was a great admirer of Norman Shaw and considered him as his ‘hero architect’, and hence included several examples of Shaw’s work in *Das englische Haus*. However, he looked to Morris, Ruskin and Lethaby for his architectural theory (Muthesius and Sharp, 1979:xv). During his time in Britain, Muthesius became closely acquainted with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, considering him a close friend and the ‘most promising young star on the horizon’ (Muthesius and Sharp, 1979:xv). Muthesius wrote expansively on Mackintosh and the ‘Glasgow Four’⁸⁹ in German journals and even chose the Mackintoshes to become godparents to his third son, Eckart (Muthesius and Sharp, 1979:xvi). Muthesius’s wife Anna was also close to Margaret Mackintosh, who is believed to have influenced Anna’s book *Das Eigenkleid der Frau*. Margaret’s sister, Frances McNair, was responsible for the cover design of this book. It has furthermore been speculated that Frances designed the title piece for the covers of the second edition of Muthesius’s *Das englische Haus* (Muthesius and Sharp, 1979:xvi).

During his visit, Muthesius became particularly interested in the London County Council’s Central School of Arts and Crafts. The school was established in 1896 and was a product of reforms by the London County Council, in particular of Sidney Webb, a Fabian Socialist who was elected by the council in 1891 and set up the Technical Education Board. Lethaby was encouraged by his friends Morris, Webb and Burne-Jones to take up the position of art inspector for the London County Council. The sculptor George Frampton and Lethaby were both jointly appointed part-time art inspectors (Rubens, 1986:181). Lethaby’s influence on education in the arts and crafts grew rapidly. He was adamant about reforming the current schooling system and

⁸⁹ For greater detail on Mackintosh and the Glasgow Four including their connection with occult symbolism see section 5.1 Contemporaries influenced by Lethaby.

creating a modern art education befitting the times. In April 1896, Sidney Webb, impelled by Frampton and Lethaby, called for a central school of art which did not solely promote drawing, but also included systematic study of the arts and crafts. The dream was realised on 30 October 1896, when the Central School of Arts and Crafts opened for registration. Lethaby and Frampton became the directors of the school, in charge of appointing staff. Frampton's role and input into the school was minor compared with Lethaby's. Lethaby went on in 1902 to become the official principal of the Central School and was furthermore appointed as the Council's Art Adviser and, subsequent to this, Chief Inspector. He was also during this time offered the post of Professor of Ornament and Design at the Royal College of Art in London. This gave Lethaby even greater control over how art and architecture were being taught. No other architect had been in such an influential position previously, allowing Lethaby to enforce real and meaningful changes in art education. He went to the extent of producing resources for schools by publishing *School Copies and Examples*, a folder containing large art reproductions to encourage positive change in educational institutions in the short term (Rubens, 1986:195).

Lethaby believed strongly in training art students to understand tools, materials and their functions. This involved teaching the fine arts alongside practical arts and giving scientific training. Through such measures Lethaby hoped to curtail purely academic instruction in architecture, which consisted of design on paper and ostentatious draughtsmanship; this, he trusted, would make the students more employable as a result. In 1946, *The Visual Arts: An Enquiry* declared that the Central School had 'successfully trained designers for industry' and that it was 'better equipped than the Royal College; and its training more realistic' (Rubens, 1986:196). This was

demonstrated by a number of Royal College students attending part-time courses at the Central School.

Muthesius was particularly receptive to Lethaby's pedagogy – the artist as producer. He was similarly keen on Lethaby's insistence on students working from nature as opposed to copying previous examples, and also students executing their own work. This allowed them to fully appreciate and understand the materials they chose to work with. Muthesius admired the system so much that he later went on to duplicate it in Germany from 1903 (Maciuka, 2005:86). Using Muthesius's extensive reports, the German government was capable of discerning the positive implications for Germany should they apply his recommendations to design reform. Muthesius showed how improving Germany's craft trade would result in greater economic development, the reformation of society and finally, on a larger scale, cultural renewal in Germany (Maciuka, 2005:88). In 1904–1905 Muthesius published his ground-breaking study *Das englische Haus*. Here Muthesius, in three illustrated volumes, consolidated all that he had learned about English domestic architecture from pre-Norman times to the present. Lethaby himself commended the thoroughness of Muthesius's study and believed it not only to have investigated architects' work of the present time but also, more importantly, to have understood it:

The first thing in the arts which we should learn from Germany is how to appreciate English originality ... about the year 1900, the German Government has attached to its Embassy in London an expert architect, Herr Muthesius, who became the historian (in German) of the English free architecture. All the architects who at the time did any building were investigated, studied, tabulated, and I must say, understood. Then just as our English free building arrived, or at least 'very very nearly did', there came a timid reaction and the re-emergence of the catalogued 'styles' (Lethaby, 1922:99–100).

However, on a more disparaging note, Lethaby considered Muthesius's research and subsequent proposals to have imitated English arts and crafts, stating that '[i]t is

equally true or even more true that the German advances in industrial design have been founded on the English arts and crafts' (Lethaby, 1922:100). Lethaby deemed the extent of imitation to be to such a degree that he was forced to accuse Muthesius of industrial espionage (Postiglione, 2004:278). Lethaby's damning assessment is particularly interesting when considering the impact Muthesius was later to have on the German arts and crafts industry, and in turn on the revolutionary Modern Movement.

Alongside the industrial innovations and education reforms taking place in England, it is highly likely that Muthesius also witnessed the spiritualist atmosphere within which the Movement emerged. During his time in London from 1896 to 1903, the mystical revival was at its peak. The Theosophical Society was flourishing and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, founded in 1888, was well established.⁹⁰ Lethaby published *Architecture Mysticism and Myth* in 1891, and the ripples from this seminal book were now being felt in architectural circles. Muthesius's direct exposure to and involvement in spiritual or occult movements of the late nineteenth-century is uncertain, but it is doubtful that he would have avoided all contact with the spiritual *Zeitgeist*, especially considering his close acquaintance with Mackintosh and the Glasgow Four. From a reading of Muthesius's *Stilarchitektur und Baukunst* (1901), a spiritual undertone is somewhat implicit in his work. He refers to a spiritual revival of architecture with a 'new spiritual aristocracy' and the need for neophytes 'to stand fast and not be led into error by the whims of fashion':

Today our goal in art must be sought in the integration of all these vacillating movements of the present, with a clearer awareness of their collective center of gravity. For there are no special arts, only a great universal art ... Architecture, as the most difficult of the arts, will naturally be the last to be in a position to draw the full consequences of the new spirit. But the new

⁹⁰ For more on the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle.

movement in the arts and crafts has prepared new powers for it. Already a community of adherents has congregated around the new ideas. The leaders of the movement have already engaged in a pioneering work that history will perhaps recognize as a great feat ... As the bearer of the new ideas, a new spiritual aristocracy arises, which this time stems from the best of the middle class rather than the hereditary aristocratic elements ... Now it is important for those neophytes to stand fast and not be led into error by the whims of fashion. The goal remains sincerity, straightforwardness [*Sachlichkeit*], and a purity of artistic sensibility, qualities that avoid all secondary considerations and superficialities, so that one can be fully dedicated to the great problem of the time ... If from the labyrinth of the arts of the last hundred years we are ever again to succeed to artistic conditions that bear even a remote similarity to the great epochs of the history of art, then architecture must assume leadership in the community of the arts. From her must come the rays of a new artistic life. She will be the one that gives the other arts a spine and breathes into them again the grandeur and firmness that they possessed under her leadership in earlier periods of brilliance (Muthesius and Anderson, 1994:99–100).

This may suggest that the later occult revival that took place in Europe within architecture may have been partially influenced by Muthesius's contact with the English Arts and Crafts Movement and its intrinsic spiritualism, which has been elucidated as part of this research. This is not to imply that the occult tendencies of future movements, and individual architects in Europe, were solely due to the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, but to tentatively suggest that, much like other reforms that occurred in Europe at this time and whilst not exclusively limited to one source of inspiration, they could certainly have been stimulated and inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement in England. It would be useful at this point to provide a brief overview of the sequence of events that occurred upon Muthesius's return to Germany in order to understand the full implications of his research in England.

In 1907 the Deutsche Werkbund was created. Muthesius, along with Peter Behrens, Henry van de Velde, Karl Ernst Osthaus, Bruno Paul (1874–1968), Theodor Fischer (1878–1957) and others, was a leading figure behind the initiative. Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus, was also a member. The Werkbund emphasised collaboration between art and industry; it promoted arts and crafts principles but

extended these to include industrial production. The Werkbund was more progressive in its outlook than the English Arts and Crafts Movement, recognising more fully the value of the machine.⁹¹ Muthesius, in *Stilarchitektur und Baukunst* (1901), declared:

The machine must be, like every other improved tool, a blessing rather than a curse for mankind. Its productions need not be inartistic nor without quality. If the human mind simply conceives forms that the machine can produce, then these, as soon as they logically evolve from the conditions of the machine, will also be those that we will without hesitation call artistic (Muthesius and Anderson, 1994:91).

It is fair to suggest that Muthesius was a major influence and guiding hand behind the Werkbund initiative. He returned to Germany in 1903, published *Das englische Haus* in 1904–1905, and from 1905 laboured to replicate what he saw in England, on German soil:

Muthesius interpreted the English country house in terms of functionalism, suggested by the writings of Lethaby. From the Arts and Crafts Movement he steadily progressed towards the idea of an industrial aesthetic, of the fitting, typical, machine-made object for everyday use. He was the link between the development in England and that which, about 1906, started in Germany and soon after took the lead. If nothing else, Hermann Muthesius was one of the great catalysts in history (Posener, 1972:23).

The Werkbund had a huge bearing on the later, more established Bauhaus in Weimar, with Gropius himself confessing that the Bauhaus owed much to pre-war Werkbund ideology (Campbell, 2015:121). The Bauhaus was formed after Gropius's suggestion to merge the former Grand Ducal Academy of Art with the Grand Ducal School of Applied Art (Forgács, 1995:24), and in April 1919 Gropius was given directorship (Forgács, 1995:29). The Bauhaus rhetoric pushed for a new man in a new environment. Taut, who made a lasting impression on Gropius, also stressed such ideals (Maciuka, 2005:290). Taut believed that buildings were symbolic and

⁹¹ Lethaby discusses similar ideas in his review of John Gloag's (1896–1981) article *Artifex; or the Future of Craftmanship* (1926): 'The author well observes that machine production took a wrong turning at the first in imitating handwork instead of aiming at production which could be frankly characteristic of the machine' (Lethaby, 1926:136).

expressive of more transcendental and spiritual thoughts. This ideological stance later came to be incorporated by Gropius in the Bauhaus April 1919 opening manifesto:

Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all turn to the crafts! ... Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist. Together let us conceive and create the new building of the future, which will embrace architecture and sculpture and painting in one unity and which will rise one day toward heaven from the hands of a million workers, like the crystal symbol of a new faith (Bayer, Gropius and Gropius, 1938:16).

In essence, the Bauhaus was in part a successor to the English Arts and Crafts Movement. This is a by no means novel suggestion and has been explored by numerous scholars, including Sigfried Giedion in his seminal book *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) (Giedion, 1967:295). Goodhart-Rendel's assessment of Lethaby, describing him as the first pioneer of functionalism, is further evidence of this:

Functionalism may be regarded as a close architectural analogue of Puritanism ... Like Puritanism it offered the consolations of assured virtue to those whom a naughty world might otherwise abash ... it was first preached in England by Professor W. R. Lethaby many years ago, but enjoyed no vogue until it was restated more recently by M. Le Corbusier, and by him put into practice ... Although the theory of Functionalism was Lethaby's and therefore English, it nevertheless seemed for many years as though the country of its origin was the only part of Europe in which it never was to be put into practice (Goodhart-Rendel, 1955:255).

This said, however, parallel to the Arts and Crafts Movement in England were comparable movements in Europe, which would also probably have contributed to the Bauhaus model.⁹² One such movement, mentioned earlier in relation to Lauweriks, was the Dutch *Nieuwe Kunst* (Art Nouveau). The movement began with J. H. Cuypers (1827–1921), who took a group of hopeful Dutch designers and architects under his wing. These designers went on to become leaders of the Dutch *Nieuwe Kunst*; they

⁹² The Debschitz School, co-founded by Hermann Obrist (1863–1927) and Wilhelm von Debschitz (1871–1948), had a substantial impact on modern design pedagogy. Its first-year basic course was also a precursor to Itten's *Vorkurs* held at the Bauhaus (Alexander, 2009:206).

included architects K. P. C. de Bazel, H. J. M. Walenkamp and Lauweriks.⁹³ Cuypers was well known for his Rijksmuseum (1877–85) and Central Station (1881–9) designs in Amsterdam. Cuypers was a disciple of the French architect Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), who later became a friend and major influence upon him and his career. He also had a deep admiration for Gothic architecture and espoused the rationality of construction and proportion found in Gothic buildings (Padovan, 2013:126). Peter Behrens was acquainted with the leaders of the Dutch *Nieuwe Kunst* movement,⁹⁴ and it may have been through him that their ideas found their way into the Werkbund and later the Bauhaus.

5.2.2 The Expressionists and the crystal metaphor

It is important to consider how those involved in the establishment of the Werkbund were later to play a vital role in the Modern Movement. One key figure at the turn of the century was German architect Peter Behrens. As part of the new reform movements in Germany, Behrens, impelled by Muthesius in 1903, was appointed director of the school of Arts and Crafts in Düsseldorf (Padovan, 2013:121). Behrens was eager for prominent Dutch architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage⁹⁵ to run the architectural course at Düsseldorf; however, Berlage was unable to take up the position and instead recommended Lauweriks, who was appointed in 1904⁹⁶ (Padovan, 2013:121).

⁹³ For more on these Dutch architects and their use of occult symbolism and geometry see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

⁹⁴ For further detail on Behrens's relationship with members of the Dutch *Nieuwe Kunst* movement see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

⁹⁵ Mies van der Rohe was another Berlage enthusiast and spoke openly about his debt to him (Anderson, 1991:83).

⁹⁶ For further information on Behrens's and Lauweriks's relationship see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

Behrens's influence in architectural circles extended even further. He set up his own architectural office in 1907 and it became home to some of the most well-known figures of the Modern Movement. These included Walter Gropius, Adolf Meyer, Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) and Le Corbusier. Meyer (a student of Lauweriks) and Gropius were two of the first individuals to join the office in 1907–1908. They went on to leave Behrens's office in 1910 and become partners in their own firm. Mies is said to have worked at Behrens's office in 1908; he later left for roughly a year in 1909–1910, and returned after this time. Le Corbusier spent close to six months at Behrens's office in the second half of 1910. The architects may therefore not have worked concurrently at the office, but they were all in some way connected with Behrens's architectural ideology.⁹⁷

Behrens's use of crystal imagery was an important aspect of his work and one that connects him to the German Expressionist Movement.⁹⁸ Crystal symbolism was a notable metaphoric device used to suggest spiritual evolution and also a reference to alchemy. Lethaby also explored such connotations of the crystal within his work. Whilst at the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, Behrens was associated with writers Richard Dehmelt (1863–1920), Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865–1910) and Otto Erich Hartleben

⁹⁷ Karl Ernst Osthaus is another key figure who connects the above individuals. Osthaus was a wealthy scion of an industrial and banking family. He was the founder and director of the Folkwang Museum in Hagen and a patron of the arts and crafts in Hagen (Adamson, 2007:188). Osthaus appointed Henry van de Velde to redesign the museum in 1900. He also met Behrens around this time (Padovan, 2013:121). Van der Velde, Behrens and Lauweriks were later commissioned to design buildings for Osthaus's Hohenhausen estate, an iconic artists' colony. Osthaus also came into contact with Gropius in Spain and recommended him to Behrens, with whom Gropius later took up employment. Bruno Taut was another architect involved in the Werkbund initiative and later the Bauhaus. He was a close ally of Gropius and was also supported by Osthaus in his search for individualism (Anderson, 2003:466). Furthermore, Osthaus was in contact with Le Corbusier from 9 May 1912. Le Corbusier met Osthaus in Hagen, after which a limited correspondence with the patron ensued (Padovan, 2013:125).

⁹⁸ The German Expressionists, in particular Bruno Taut, and their employment of the crystal metaphor will be explored in the next segment.

(1864–1905). These writers were close friends of science fiction writer Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915). Their influence, and consequently through them Scheerbart's, could be one possible reason to explain Behrens's explicit use of crystal imagery (Bletter, 1981:32).

Scheerbart's novels were inspired by an eclectic range of sources. He was interested in nineteenth-century glass architecture such as the botanical gardens and Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace. He was also attracted to Gothic cathedral architecture and light mysticism (Bletter, 1975:83). In addition, Scheerbart is known to have studied Arabic culture and Sufi Mysticism and held these in high regard, believing Arabic culture to be the true cradle of the glass tradition. Scheerbart's varied sources of inspiration allowed him to write novels that included fantastic visions of glass architecture, and the architect as protagonist. Scheerbart's writings dealt with two central themes: one exoteric, in terms of the technical creation of glass buildings, and the other esoteric, related to the transformative aspects of glass. Scheerbart had an almost prescient understanding of the practicalities of glass architecture. He explored small-scale glass structures such as verandas added to existing buildings, larger dramatic designs, moveable glass screens, mobile and transportable glass buildings, artificial illumination and double glass walls to reduce heat loss (Bletter, 1975:89). Whilst the technical aspects of Scheerbart's writing still hold some appeal for a present-day readership, it was more the mystical and metaphorical allusions of glass architecture that drew the early twentieth-century audience.

Another influence behind the symbol of the crystal was no doubt Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900). Nietzsche's allegorical *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) was

widely circulated amongst the avant-garde of the fin-di-siècle.⁹⁹ The book detailed the quest for the Übermensch or ‘superman’, described by the main protagonist, Zarathustra. The Übermensch was a self-realised and enlightened being that had, through pursuing the arduous road of self-knowledge, come to know the true reality of life and had thus attained the elusive philosopher’s stone. The book was popular within architectural circles because, like Scheerbart, Nietzsche employed a vast array of architectural metaphors in his allegory. Alongside the architectural metaphors were definite alchemical ones; an example is the ‘stone of wisdom’ (Nietzsche and Hollingdale, 2003:177)

Behrens’s employment of crystal imagery could therefore have been inspired by both Scheerbart and Nietzsche.¹⁰⁰ Behrens incorporated the symbol of the crystal in his work on various occasions. It was seen to be the leitmotif for his work whilst at the Darmstadt Colony and his frontispiece design for *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst: Eine Betrachtung des Theaters als höchsten Kultursymbols* (Festivals of Life and Art: A Consideration of the Theatre as the Highest Cultural Symbol) (1900) (Bletter, 1981:30), and was once more given prominence in his frontispiece for *Festschrift*, produced for the Darmstadt Colony Exhibition in 1901 (Anderson, 1990:116). The crystal also appeared in Behrens’s music room at his own house. The symbol is used zealously, decorating the ceiling, floor, candelabra, music stand, piano, walls and even the windows (Anderson, 1990:116).

⁹⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was read by Le Corbusier (Cohen, 1999:311–312) and many Expressionists, including Bruno Taut (Taut, Mindrup and Altenmüller-Lewis, 2015:19)

¹⁰⁰ Whilst both men allude to similar spiritual connotations, Scheerbart emphasises social and Nietzsche personal gnosis.

The opening ceremony for the Darmstadt Colony, directed by Behrens, also integrated the crystal. The ceremony was entitled *Das Zeichen* (The Sign)¹⁰¹ and portrayed a prophet descending from a golden portal to reveal a veiled sign, which was in fact a crystal. Architectural historian Rosmarie Haag Bletter reasons that Behrens's use of the crystal symbol here was a direct reference to its alchemical connotations, and 'just as mere carbon can under intense conditions become a diamond, so the power of art was to transform everyday life into "resplendent life filled with meaning"' (Bletter, 2002:352).

Behrens's crystal imagery without doubt had a symbolic purpose, most probably suggesting some form of transcendence on a microcosmic level that was ultimately desired at a macrocosmic level. Whether Behrens communicated his spiritual ideology to his students is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, there is a strong possibility that Behrens would at least in part have introduced some of these themes to his students, who as will be seen later in this research went on to possess comparable spiritual outlooks.

Taut, considered to be one of the foremost initiators of the Expressionist Movement in architecture, had a great influence on the direction of architectural design in Europe at the turn of the century. Taut was a central character in the Deutsche Werkbund and was therefore on close terms with reformers in design at the time. He was the leading member of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Work Council for the Arts), which included Walter Gropius, Eric Mendelsohn (1887-1953), Adolf Meyer and Karl Ernst Osthaus, and was also the head of its offshoot, the Gläserne Kette (Glass Chain). Most projects created by the Glass Chain were purely ideological, generated during the First World

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, this title corresponded to the final section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which was also given the same name (Nietzsche and Hollingdale, 2003:333).

War, when realisation of such ideas was not possible. Whilst not an ideal situation, this did favourably release architects from the practical constraints of design, leading architects of the Glass Chain to produce revolutionary and non-objective forms, in which abstraction dominated and traditional forms were set aside.

The Glass Chain was a small group sworn to secrecy, with each member given the option of a pseudonym by which to be known in the group's correspondence (Whyte, 1985:2–3). Members of the group included¹⁰² Taut, Jakobus Göttel, Hans Luckhardt (1890–1954), Wassili Luckhardt (1889–1972), Carl Krayl (1890–1947), Hans Hansen (1884–1940), Paul Goesch (1885–1940), Hermann Finsterlin (1887–1973), Hans Scharoun (1893–1972), Wenzel Hablik (1881–1934), Max Taut (1884–1967), Alfred Brust (1891–1934), Otte Gröne and Gropius. The group believed strongly in the Nietzschean ideology of the artist standing isolated, leading and enlightening the masses. Taut deemed that 'the people were calling on the architects to lead society out of chaos and toward a new state of harmony and community' (Whyte, 1985:4).

Finsterlin wrote in a letter in February 1920:

We are a true brotherhood of knights, joined in the greatest mission on earth and bearing a message on our banners. But we have no indestructible grail that nurtures the human body with the nectar-like blood of a maternal godhead ... Let our small band of spirits join together physically into a commune ... let us devote the greater part of our days and nights to the abundant, most powerful imaginative feats of which earthly beings are capable ... But remember, nothing is spiritually neutral or irrelevant ... Therefore don't cast your pearls before the swine or preach to the fishes (Whyte, 1985:58).

Taut's vision of the architecture of the future was very much intertwined with faith and religion. He believed that the architect 'must himself become the faith, to such an extent that he almost ceases to be human' (Taut, 1920:272). As part of the Crystal

¹⁰² Taut, with the help of Gropius, attempted to persuade Johannes Itten to join the Crystal Chain, believing him to be 'a very powerful architectonic influence' (Whyte, 1985:97). However, their efforts were unsuccessful (Whyte, 1985:191).

Chain correspondence, themes such as the spiritual basis for creativity, reincarnation and the meaning of the spiritual were all discussed and deliberated. Taut imagined that '[j]ust as the body could become spirit through transformation, so, conversely, the spirit could be given physical, built form through the medium of the architect. The result of this perfect interpretation of mortal faith and divine spirit would be the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth' (Whyte, 1985:5).

In order to realise this increasingly spiritual aim, a symbolic architecture that defined the *Zeitgeist* was sought. The obvious symbol for the new era was, for Taut, the crystal. Crystalline expression was therefore incorporated into architecture through the substantial use of glass and other reflective materials. The use of glass by Taut was not only his way to experiment with new building methods and materials but had very spiritual connotations:

The symbolic nature of glass and crystal can be seen to date back to the Egyptian times, where the making of glass on a large scale first began. The Egyptians were a theocratic society and were 'profoundly influenced by magic'. They appear to have revered glass and attributed to it, the same worth as that of precious stones such as lapis lazuli. Lapis lazuli was believed to possess 'magical often healing properties', and these properties apparently extended to the glass made reproductions of the stone. This notion of glass being a 'plausible substitute' for precious stones, can also be witnessed in the stained glass windows of Gothic cathedrals, where glass colours were named after their stone counterparts, for example ruby and sapphire glass. Whilst precious stones were considered 'the best carriers of divine light' their use was impractical for such purposes, hence the application of a 'noble substitute'. The fact that a material, such as glass, which could take the form of precious stones, was produced from widely available and cheap resources as 'common as that of earthenware ...' may well have been the reason it was symbolically significant to the Egyptian society. This may also explain why many of the recipes for the making of glass were given 'strong magical and religious elements'. (Sangha, 2011:40).

Expressionist ideology used glass-crystal imagery as a metaphorical device to allude to the transformation of the self and society. This metaphoric use has been brought to light in great detail by Bletter in a number of papers published in the 1980s. The use

of glass and crystal imagery as a transformative symbol was not exclusive to the Expressionists but was part of a long tradition stretching back to King Solomon, Arabic legends and medieval accounts of the Holy Grail. Medieval mystics saw glass, gold and precious stones as representative of the body of Christ and, more generally, religious gnosis.

Lethaby was also aware of and interested in the lengthy tradition of glass and crystal symbolism. This is attested to in the 1892 edition of *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, which includes, just before the preface, the following two lines taken from the poem *A Parlement of Foules* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400): ‘And upon pelers grete, of Jasper longe / I sawgh a temple of glas I founded stronge’ (Lethaby, 1892:iv). Later, in his chapter on ‘Pavements like the sea’, Lethaby introduces several examples of floors resembling water. He writes about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who when visiting Solomon’s palace mistook the glass floor ‘to be a great water, and she discovered her legs, by lifting up her robe to pass through it’ (Lethaby, 1994:172). Lethaby then outlines the story of the *Arabian Nights*, where the floor of polished marble at the palace once more resembles water and deceives the beholder (Lethaby, 1994:172). Another story found in the *Mahabharata* in which Duryodhana perceives a black crystal square to be clear water is also discussed (Lethaby, 1994:174). Similar devices used in the *Hypnerotomachia* are also brought to light: ‘the whole area of the amphitheatre was apparently paved with one sole stone of obsidian, entirely black and of invincible hardness, so polished and shining that at the first moment ... [Poliphilo] feared destruction by walking into an abyss’ (Lethaby, 1994:175). Lethaby proceeds to highlight several further examples of floors resembling water in his chapter and also illustrates Morris’s use of parallel imagery in his work. One example given is in the story of ‘Cupid and Psyche’, found in the Morris’s *Earthly Paradise* (1868-1870),

which Lethaby believed was inspired by the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Lethaby, 1994:183).

The glass floor, resembling the sea, was according to Lethaby representative of the sea of heaven upon which the city of heaven was built to float on the heavenly waters. This 'celestial sea forms the floor of the over-world; our dome being the under side of the pavement' (Lethaby, 1994:181). Knowledge of the traditional and literary use of glass and crystal imagery and its associated metaphoric allusions was therefore not unique to the Expressionists but was recognised much earlier.

Nevertheless, the Expressionists were well aware of the literary accounts of the symbol and were deeply affected by them, as can be discerned from *Frühlicht (Dawn)*, a periodical edited by Taut (Bletter, 1981:20). Whilst the designs produced appeared whimsical, and to many, irrational, they were informed by a lengthy historical and esoteric precedent. Taut believed his glass creations to be a maturation of earlier Gothic cathedrals, where light and colour were used within stained glass to meet spiritual needs. Taut's designs aspired to develop light, colour and transparency to an even greater degree, to create a still more illusory world.

Taut was a staunch advocate of Scheerbart, and his architecture was deeply guided by Scheerbart's work; hence Scheerbart's influence is felt strongly in the Crystal Chain letters (Parsch, 2002:212). Scheerbart was particularly fascinated by oriental mysticism and was acquainted with the works of Li T'aipo, Abû Nuwâs and Omar Khayyam. Alongside this attraction for the oriental was his interest in Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) was a friend of Scheerbart's and greatly admired his work (Whyte, 1985:8). Scheerbart's example therefore stimulated the group's interest in oriental mysticism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, with the

‘anthroposophical connection ... continued in the Crystal Chain by the contributions of Paul Goesch and Hermann Finsterlin’ (Whyte, 1985:8).

As has been highlighted previously, Behrens was acquainted with Scheerbart.¹⁰³ Gropius also read Scheerbart’s work with great enthusiasm (Bletter, 1981:37), and even recommended Scheerbart’s *The Gray Cloth* to Hermann Finsterlin in 1919 (Stuart, 1999:87). Scheerbart was considered by some to be the very first Expressionist. Taut met Scheerbart around 1912, and it was in these remaining few years of Scheerbart’s life that their friendship blossomed – so much so that Scheerbart dedicated his book *Glass Architecture* (1914) to Taut, and Taut correspondingly dedicated his Glass House, a pavilion designed for the Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne in 1914, to Scheerbart (Bletter, 1981:33).

Scheerbart believed that using glass communally in architectural spaces would not just affect individual occupants but would assist in creating transformative spaces that would produce better people and in turn an improved society. Glass was a symbolic representation of the search for lucidity, light and a higher truth; glass, with its introduction of the light of wisdom, would banish the darkness of ignorance. The reflective properties of the material and the use of coloured glass to produce kaleidoscopic forms which perpetually moved from chaos towards a desired perfection that was never fully realised was reminiscent of the alchemist’s quest for the philosopher’s stone. Moreover, the flexibility of the material denoted the flexibility of the human mind and its ability to transcend boundaries of sensory human perception. Glass was able to visually represent the internal struggle that brought about constant transformation towards a perfected state of ultimate realisation and enlightenment.

¹⁰³ For more on Behrens and Scheerbart’s connection see earlier in the section.

Taut was successful in taking Scheerbart's theoretical ideas and turning them into practical realities. This is especially true in the Glass House, where he applied stained glass, a double skin of coloured glass, a 'kaleidoscopic room' where patterns and coloured light were projected on a screen, and other features such as a circular opening at the top of the conical ceiling with a fountain below, causing the distortion and reflection of light. Taut went even further in his pictorial treatises in *Alpine Architektur* (1919). Here, he was free to design without any restrictions, and thus invented a utopian society living in crystal houses in the mountains, built by the community, with glass ornaments adorning the mountain lakes (Bletter, 1981:34). Glass was used by Taut to suggest social change and metamorphosis. He and Scheerbart both imagined that the practice of employing glass in architecture would have an inherently positive effect on the populous without their being aware of it; by just being in the presence of such surroundings, society would be spiritually uplifted and purified.

The glass metaphor utilised by Taut and Scheerbart had many parallels with the study of alchemy. Taking glass and introducing movement, reflection and colour, in effect, took a lowly material and transformed it into something of great value. The forms that were once static and fixed became alive with movement and energy. It appears that Taut and Scheerbart only changed the material and form through which alchemical transcendence was suggested. The gold and crystal imagery formerly used to represent the philosopher's stone in alchemical literature was here transferred to glass architectural forms.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Taut's and Scheerbart's metaphoric allusions were used to imply a social transformation, much as in the Gothic sense, and less focused with self-transformation on an individual scale, as was emphasised by the Romantics in their search for the philosopher's stone.

The kaleidoscopic coloured patterns that were generated by the stained glass bring to mind the ancient mandala form, which also has its own alchemical suggestions.¹⁰⁵ The exterior forms are perpetually transforming and recreating themselves, whereas the centre remains steady and untouched by the transitory changes. The colours and patterns on the periphery entertain and distract, but the true seeker searches for the centre of the mandala, where the primal matter or philosopher's stone is to be found.

The kaleidoscopic movement of colour and patterns is also reminiscent of a key passage of Goethe's *Faust*, which is understood to have made use of alchemical imagery:

When you at last a glowing tripod see,
Then in the deepest of all realms you'll be.
You'll see the Mothers in the tripod's glow,
Some of them sitting, others stand and go,
As it may chance. Formation, transformation,
Eternal Mind's eternal re-creation.
Images of all creatures hover free,
They will not see you, only wraiths they see.
So, then, take courage, for the danger's great.
Go to that tripod, do not hesitate,
And touch it with the key! (Goethe and Priest, 1979).

The glass and crystal metaphor was not restricted to the Expressionists alone. Another architect to employ the symbolism was Mies van der Rohe. Mies's use of the glass metaphor is the one most connected to modernism and the rational structures of the Modern Movement. Mies's use, however, demonstrates that the forms of modernism are far from purely functional and in part are an outcome of a rich mythical tradition in glass architecture and a development of earlier Expressionist ideology. Mies first spoke about his glass projects, Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper (1921) and Glass Skyscraper (1922), in Taut's expressionist periodical *Frühlicht* (Bletter, 2002:353). Mies was never directly characterised as an Expressionist, but Expressionist ideas

¹⁰⁵ For more on the mandala and alchemy see section 4.2 Alchemical imagery.

certainly had a lasting impact on him and his architecture, even after he embraced the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). By investigating some idiosyncratic features of Mies's architecture that do not quite fit the modernist functional paradigm, the expressionist and esoteric qualities can be brought to light.¹⁰⁶

Mies experimented with crystalline and biomorphic forms, and was fascinated by the play of reflected light. This is clearly reflected in *Frühlicht*, where he maintains that 'the disposition of these forms should be conditioned less by the effects of light and shade than by the play of reflected light' (Bletter, 2002:353). It was not only his use of glass skin but also the inclusion of other recurring elements invoking illusory sensations that demonstrates Mies's less rational tendencies, one such aspect being the addition of narrow internal spaces. The addition of such spaces seems highly impractical. A narrow elliptical shape is found in the Glass Skyscraper, and again narrow spaces are observed in the German Pavilion in Barcelona (1928–1929), Tugendhat House (1928–1930) and the Glass Room at the 1927 *Die Wohnung* exhibition in Stuttgart. Almost all of the spaces mentioned contain some form of glazing, and Tugendhat House and the Glass Room both contain a 'winter garden' element, where nature can be perceived behind a glass pane. An additional feature of many of the cited building projects was a female torso. The female torso and winter garden both create an opposition to the very masculine glass structures. This produces, and at the same time reconciles, a duality in a single space. Such dualities are found recurrently in alchemical literature. Another interpretation provided by Bletter that

¹⁰⁶ Mies's work for Behrens may have increased his awareness of occult themes, which were later exploited in his architectural work. For more on Behrens and his use of occult symbolism see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation and section 5.2 The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

relates to alchemical lore is that the torso within the enclosed glass echoes Solomon's entrapment of Sheba, and Mies, like Solomon, takes Sheba's magical powers (Bletter, 2002:356).

Lastly, Mies's experiments with glass, particularly in the Glass Room, demonstrate the mystical and expressionist quality of his design. Critic Siegfried Kracauer describes how 'every movement in ... [neighbouring rooms] conjures up shadow-plays on the wall –immaterial silhouettes that hover through the air and become mixed with the mirror images from the glass room itself. The raising of this impalpable glassy ghost, which transforms itself like a kaleidoscope ...' (Lungstrum, 1999:128).

The description recalls Scheerbart's fantasy architecture and Taut's kaleidoscopic room in his Glass House. Kracauer's account conjures a playful and illusory atmosphere within the room. The room becomes a dreamlike space, where the real and imagined merge and disconcert the occupier. The concept of illusion is a fundamental teaching within occult philosophy, where the phenomenal world is said to be a veil upon which our minds project images that are mistaken for reality (Massey, 2006:582). Mies could therefore have intended his room to question the occupants' idea of reality, and if not to remove it entirely then at least to assist in shaking the veil of the phenomenal world just a little for them. The addition of reflective surfaces in his other completed works in the form of pools of water, black glass, onyx and polished marble once more contribute to the deconstruction of space and perceived reality. The use of such features by Mies not only shows that his ideas were far from functional but also proposes an alchemical understanding of materials and their qualities. The use of polished marble alludes to its transmutational qualities, whilst the black glass and onyx flooring recall the deceiving nature of the materials and thus bring to mind the stories

of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the *Arabian Nights* and, of course, the *Hypnerotomachia*, each of which is steeped in alchemical symbolism.¹⁰⁷

5.2.3 ‘The dark side of the Bauhaus’: Johannes Itten (1888–1967) and Mazdaznan

The Bauhaus was inaugurated in Weimar in April 1919, with Gropius as its director. The school had high standards, hence the admission process was difficult. Over its lifetime the school hosted 1,250 student in total, with around 100 studying at any one time (Forgács, 1995:32).

Intriguingly, Lethaby’s opinion of the Bauhaus is shared in his correspondence with businessman and social reformer Harry Hardy Peach. Peach, in a letter sent to Lethaby in May 1927, brings up the Bauhaus, writing: ‘I have had a number of books through lately about the Bauhaus movement. There is one on building and experiments with concrete, breeze blocks etc, which is quite good; otherwise the things are mad’ (Lethaby, 1927). Peach appears to have sent Lethaby two books and a cutting about the Bauhaus during this time. Lethaby’s reaction to these is evidently disapproving, with him writing back to Peach: ‘The things frighten me a little – another kind of art design whereas two things only interest me, human ... workmanship, or harsh science. These German and Holland art styles I hate’ (Lethaby, 1927). Lethaby’s exposure to the Bauhaus movement is likely to have been a superficial one, and his reaction is predictable; that he would object to the advent of yet another ‘style’ is unsurprising.

In his opening manifesto, with its Scheerbartian qualities, Gropius highlighted the Bauhaus as a school to promote the handicrafts and applied arts, pointing out that the

¹⁰⁷ These literary examples of the use of glass and reflective surfaces were well known to Lethaby and the Expressionists. For further section 4.2 Alchemical imagery and also earlier in this section.

‘school [was] the servant of the workshop, and will one day be absorbed in it’ (Bayer, Gropius and Gropius, 1938:16).¹⁰⁸ The manifesto was intended as a ‘recruitment document as well as a statement of intent’ (Naylor, 1985:57). Its success is demonstrated in an account by former student Helene Schmidt-Nonne:

The most exciting stimulus came from the *Bauhaus Manifesto* ... On the cover was the ‘Cathedral of Socialism’ by Lyonel Feininger, with its three shining stars, and inside was Gropius’ call to all artists to unite together to build the ‘new building of the future ... the crystalline symbol of a new faith.’ This challenging call-to-action had a great appeal to idealistic youth, and young people came to the school from all over the country (Neumann, 1970:123).

More than just a design school, the Bauhaus was a spiritual centre made up of a ‘community of seekers’ (Lipsey, 1988:2), where spiritual and religious ideas were nurtured and developed. This was stressed by Gropius in his speech to Bauhaus students in summer 1919, where he declared:

No large spiritual organizations, but small, secret, self-contained societies, lodges ... from the individual groups a universally great, enduring, spiritual-religious idea will rise again ... On the strength of his visual gifts, the artist reads the spiritual parallels of his time and represents them in pure form. When such spiritual common property is lacking, there is nothing left for him but to build up his metaphysical element from his own inner resources. He stands aloof, and at best a few friends understand him (Wingler, 1976:36).

Gropius conceived the Bauhaus as a ‘quasi-Masonic lodge’ (Whyte, 1985:2). The spiritual aspirations, or ‘the dark side’, of the Bauhaus was first brought to light by Joseph Rykwert in his essay ‘The Dark Side of The Bauhaus’, found in *The Necessity of Artifice: Ideas in Architecture* (1944). Rykwert was one of the first architectural historians to challenge the portrayal of the Modern Movement as a solely functionalist undertaking. Through his essay, Rykwert implicitly refuted the concept of ‘form follows function’ commonly associated with the movement and famously

¹⁰⁸ The manifesto surprisingly lacked references to machinery, and ‘it was not until 1923 that the Bauhaus was to show any outward interest in mechanised production, and the problems of designing for it’ (Banham, 1999:278).

disseminated by architectural historians such as Sigfried Giedion: ‘The apologists and the historians of the Bauhaus have always presented it as a shrine of reason in an unreasonable, confused world. I wish to show that this picture is a distortion of what was thought or done. And I propose to suggest that the Bauhaus remains interesting and relevant because it had an irrational, strong dark side’ (Rykwert, 1982:44). Rykwert’s study commenced a new area of study into the Bauhaus and the likely inspirations behind the modernist forms beyond the purely rational accounts that proliferated in existing research.

The Bauhaus was home to educators with interesting pedagogical techniques. One such teacher was Johannes Itten. Itten was first introduced to Gropius by his wife, Alma Mahler,¹⁰⁹ in 1919 and was subsequently invited by Gropius to teach at the Bauhaus. Itten was born in Switzerland, trained as an elementary school teacher in Berne and commenced teaching in 1908. He later became a teacher at the Stuttgart Academy, run by Adolf Hölzel. Itten was in addition a painter, studying painting in Geneva. After some deliberation about his career path, he ultimately chose to pursue a career in teaching

Itten was head of the *Vorkurs*, or preliminary course, at the Bauhaus. The course was announced in January 1921. Every applicant to the Bauhaus was required to complete a six-month trial period, in which, the preliminary course was obligatory. The course aimed to cleanse students’ minds of any preconceived ideas they had on art in order to commence from a blank canvas. The course equipped students with the fundamental principles of design, such as the laws of form and colour. It also allowed them to

¹⁰⁹ During their short marriage Mahler introduced Gropius to her circle of friends in Vienna who had interests in linguistic philosophy and psychoanalysis. Her connections included Oskar Kokoschka, Adolf Loos and Arnold Schönberg (Rykwert, 1982:47).

experiment with different materials and textures, giving them the opportunity to appreciate which material they worked best in and which most appealed to their nature. Finally, the course stressed the creative powers and talents of the students, encouraging and inspiring them to develop their own intuitive perception and experience in order to create genuine work (Itten and Maass, 1964:9). The course 'acquired such fame that it has come to be regarded as the essence, even the entirety, of the Bauhaus Method' (Banham, 1999:278). Later, a modified version of the preliminary course was commenced in art schools all over the world (Neumann, 1970:24). Part of the course's appeal was indisputably the magnetism of Itten, the 'semi-mystic, semi didactic ... teacher as "magus" who would guide his disciples through personal experience to a personal expression of the material work' (Naylor, 1985:77). The inherent spiritualism of the course inspired and gave hope to students and staff during the tough years following the Great War. This is encapsulated by stage workshop teacher Lothar Schreyer, who writes:

We got into spiritual adventure during this time. The Bauhaus became the bastion of Expressionism ... exposing the vagabond life; the Mazdaznan teachings that Johannes Itten brought with him (the Bauhaus kitchen cooked in keeping with this doctrine); anthroposophy; theosophy; Catholicism; spiritualism – all these were founded on the hope for a new world (Neumann, 1970:72).

Itten was a follower of Mazdaznan, a quasi-religious movement that became popular after the First World War. Mazdaznan was founded upon the earlier teachings of Zoroaster in Persia. In brief, the philosophy consisted of the fight between light and darkness. The victory of light would be assisted by cleansing the body through fasting, a vegetarian diet and breathing exercises. During Itten's time at the Bauhaus he wore a long crimson robe and had a shaved head. Itten conveyed the Mazdaznan teachings to the student body, and became a spiritual leader and high priest to the impressionable youth at the Bauhaus. He began all his lessons with physical exercises, including

breathing and gymnastics, after which he engaged the students in improvisational and constructive tasks. The breathing exercises were used to focus the students' minds and increase their awareness:

I studied oriental philosophy and concerned myself with Persian Mazdaism and Early Christianity. Thus I realized that our outward-directed scientific research and technology must be balanced by inward-directed thought and forces of the soul ... it is not only a religious custom to start instruction with a prayer or a song, but it also serves to concentrate the students' wandering thoughts. At the start of the morning I brought my classes to mental and physical readiness for intensive work through relaxation, breathing, and concentrating exercises (Itten and Maass, 1964:11).

Many students followed Itten's example by becoming strictly vegetarian, shaving their heads and wearing crimson-coloured robes (Spretnak, 2014:107). Itten radiated a hypnotic charm for his students, and his supposed knowledge of the secrets of the universe created a magnetic aura around him. This is captured by Bauhaus student Paul Citroën:

Itten was so full of Mazdaznan ... There was something demonic about Itten. As a master he was either ardently admired or just as ardently hated by his opponents ... For those of us who belonged to the Mazdaznan group – a unique community within the student body – Itten exuded a special radiance. One could almost call it holiness. We were inclined to approach him only in whispers; our reverence was overwhelming, and we were completely enchanted and happy when he associated with us pleasantly and without restraint ... There were all sorts of gatherings – lectures, exercises, religious services, councils, meals ... And Itten, entrusted with the mysteries of reincarnation and other secrets of the doctrine ... was our undisputed master (Neumann, 1970: 44–45).

Itten characterised the *Zeitgeist*, and this was to a large extent utilised and exploited by Gropius to increase the popularity of the Bauhaus. Itten was not deterred by this but instead used his leverage to assert his supremacy over the Bauhaus teachings. In essence Itten saw himself as a spiritual leader, using art as a tool to propagate spiritual practices and teaching. He was interested in Goethe's theory of colours and automatic drawing in psychically receptive states. He also stressed the importance of accurate drawing, which he believed increased the observational capacity of the student and

improved the eye, hand and memory (Forgács, 1995:54). These holistic teaching methods allowed Itten to develop students' personalities and their ways of thinking and living. Instead of forcing change in their art, their personal transformation itself infused their art with greater profundity.

Itten's yearning for control of the Bauhaus no doubt soured the relationship between Gropius and Itten. The underlying struggle for power that festered between the two during Itten's time at the Bauhaus created a hostile environment, with factions being formed at the school. The ideological struggles forced Gropius's hand, obliging him to decide between the exoteric and the esoteric. He selected the former, and consequently '[m]odern technology replaced handicrafts; contact with industry became more important than contact with an Oriental philosophy' (Neumann, 1970:24). These changes inevitably and unsurprisingly led Itten to resign his post in 1922.

The move from Weimar to Dessau in 1925 signalled a new era for the Bauhaus, but Gropius did not abandon its former spiritual propensity completely: 'Gropius, at the time he was setting up the second order of Bauhaus teaching, the order of strict geometry and analysis, was far from being the Materialist or Functionalist he is commonly thought to have been – indeed, the Bauhaus had no Functionalist phase until Hannes Meyer (1889-1954) took over on Gropius's retirement' (Banham, 1999:280). Nevertheless, Itten's departure had a considerable impact on the Bauhaus and its consequent emphasis. His legacy is summed up by Rykwert, who maintains:

Itten seems to me the central figure of the Bauhaus heritage, because his method was animated by the conviction that the whole personality must be involved in work ... Whatever Itten's weakness or follies, this essential truth remains to me the most relevant facet of the Bauhaus, and the exercises he evolved the only possible introduction to a modern formal language (Rykwert, 1982:49).

Itten was by no means the only figure at the Bauhaus with spiritual inclinations. Two of the most established artists who had the longest relationship with the Bauhaus, Paul Klee (1879-1940) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), were also captivated by esotericism. Kandinsky's interest in the occult was first identified by Sixten Ringbom in *The Sounding Cosmos* (1970). Kandinsky was familiar with the work of Charles Webster Leadbeater, Annie Besant and Rudolph Steiner, all of whom were influential figures of the Theosophical Movement. Kandinsky was known to have attended lectures by Steiner and to have read his publications (McDonnell, 1989:27). He was interested not only in the theoretical aspects of Theosophy but also in its practical qualities such as meditation and visualisation, which he himself practised. As an artist, Kandinsky was specifically concerned with colour theory, the colour of auras and thought forms spoken about by the Theosophists. These directly informed his own art work and colour theory. The impact that occult studies had on Kandinsky is also clear from his highly regarded theoretical study, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) (Lachman, 2008: 57–61).

Klee was good friends with Kandinsky throughout their time at the Bauhaus. Klee's occultism is more a matter of speculation than that of Kandinsky; nevertheless, it still prevails in his work. Drawings such as *Incomplete Materialisation* (1915) and *Materialised Ghost* (1923) demonstrate Klee's interest in partial or fully materialised forms. He also later, in the 1930s, began using hieroglyphs and signs in his work that were likely to have been derived from H  l  ne Smith's Martian script. Klee is also known to have been interested in other spiritualist phenomena such as automatic writing and levitation (Bauduin, 2015:438).

Kandinsky and Klee were amongst several figures at the Bauhaus who were involved in occult practices. The growing interest in occultism and mysticism at the turn of the

century infiltrated many avant-garde organisations and influenced many individuals. It was widely disseminated in specialised journals, but information was also published in magazines and journals available for public consumption. Therefore the presence of esoteric ideas at the Bauhaus had much more to do with the general *Zeitgeist* than simply with the spiritually inclined teaching staff. This said, the figure of Itten was a dominating presence at the Bauhaus. Itten was not afraid to publicly embrace occult teachings and encourage others to follow his example, which many ‘closet occultists’ were cautious about. Hence, once he departed there was a gradual change in atmosphere at the Bauhaus. The spiritual and quasi-religious ambience that once pervaded was cast off in favour of a more rational tone. Lazlo Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), who replaced Itten in late 1922, amended the preliminary course, removing its metaphysical and esoteric content, and realigned the course to favour industrial design (Spretnak, 2014:107). This signalled the turning point for the Bauhaus, which soon after placed significant emphasis on technology.

5.2.4 Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), Theosophy and the right angle

Frank Lloyd Wright, a distinguished American architect, also seems to have come under the enchantment of Lethaby. W. J. Johnstone elucidates this in his 1957 lecture on Lethaby, published as the foreword to A. R. N. Roberts’s *William Richard Lethaby, 1857–1931: A Volume in Honour of the School’s First Principal*. Johnstone writes: ‘Lethaby’s ideas were the basis of the teaching of the other great teachers of this century, Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, and L. Moholy-Nagy. Frank Lloyd Wright in fact said to me in the United States, “Johnstone, we got it all from Lethaby you know”’ (Johnstone and Roberts, 1957).

The ensuing section will explore the extent to which Wright was influenced by Lethaby,¹¹⁰ paying particular attention to Wright's exploitation of the L-shape. As discussed earlier, Lethaby made use of the L-shape frequently in his plans. The author has correlated this use by Lethaby to possible occult intentions. The following examination will show Wright's application of the L-shape form in his building plans and other design work. It will also demonstrate a link between these and the occult, in particular with Theosophy. The parallels put forward here will not only establish a relationship between the work of Wright and Lethaby but will also help in reinforcing the postulation put forward previously that Lethaby's employment of the L-shape had occult connotations.¹¹¹

Wright utilised the right angle quite prominently in a series of houses designed in the 1930s and 1940s, during the years before and after World War II. The houses are referred to collectively as the Usonian houses and are variations of L-shaped buildings (Knight, 1994:222). Wright comments:

As you can see from the plans, Usonian houses are shaped like polliwogs – a house with a shorter or longer tail. The body of the polliwog is the living room and the adjoining kitchen – or work space – and the whole Usonian concentration of conveniences. From there it starts out, with a tail: in the proper direction, say, one bedroom, two bedrooms, three, four, five, six bedrooms long (Wright, 1954:167–168).

The reasons behind Wright's application of the L-shape may have been partly functional as described above by Wright himself. However, it is possible that there

¹¹⁰ Charles Ashbee (1863–1942) may have disseminated some of Lethaby's ideas to Wright. Ashbee was a prominent figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and a contemporary of Lethaby's. Lethaby, Ashbee and Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) had all been involved in plans for the University Quarter centred on Crosby Hall (Thompson, 1990:14). Ashbee became very close friends with Wright, visiting him in December 1900. Wright also came to visit Ashbee in Chipping Camden in September 1910 (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:25–31). Ashbee's work and the Guild of Handicraft became formative guides for Wright's own Taliesin Fellowship (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:25).

¹¹¹ For more on Lethaby and his use of the L-shape and right angle see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

was an undisclosed and deeper level of meaning behind Wright's use of such a symbolic form. The author would put forward the thesis that Wright's application may well have been akin to Lauweriks's and Lethaby's use of the form,¹¹² with hidden esoteric implications. Whilst it is not within the bounds of this research to explore Wright's work in detail, some indication of his occult predilections will be disclosed in order to substantiate this claim.

From an early age Wright had been influenced by spiritual ideas. His father was a Baptist preacher who, in later life, gave up preaching and began studying Sanskrit and chanting mantras and hymns from Vedic texts: 'Learning the mantras and hymns of the Vedic texts, he attempted to replicate sounds that helped man apprehend the aspects of divinity present in the cosmos and the psyche' (Friedland and Zellman, 2007: 9). Wright therefore grew up in a milieu where inner searching was encouraged and transcendentalist texts were often read.

Wright's father was by no means the only spiritual stimulus for the architect. In truth, whilst Wright may not have been a member of any occult society, he lived and worked in an esoteric environment that shaped a particularly theosophic-inspired architectural theory. Wright's assimilation of theosophical ideas are discussed by Eugenia Victoria Ellis in *The Red Square: Frank Lloyd Wright, Theosophy and Modern Conceptions of Space* (Ellis, 2011). Ellis puts forward the contention that Wright integrates Blavatsky's theosophical outlook on the act of creation in his architecture. Blavatsky held that the 'Universe is worked and *guided* from *within outwards*. As above so it is below, as in heaven so on earth ... We see every *external* motion, act, gesture, whether voluntary or mechanical, organic or mental, is produced and preceded by *internal*

¹¹² For further details on Lethaby and Lauweriks use of the L-shape see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

feeling' (Blavatsky, 1964:274). This concept is embraced by Wright, who believed that the interior of a building should shape the exterior: 'let that sense of the great room shape the whole edifice. Let the room inside be the architecture outside' (Wright, 2005:154). Wright was concerned with the quality of space, as opposed to form or matter, in particular, where the boundaries between external and internal space were dissolved. He experimented with these malleable boundaries through the 'destruction of the box'. By extending horizontally and vertically in plan, Wright created the sensation of an infinite x-y axis (Ellis, 2011:6). This abstraction of space prefigured the non-objective art of De Stijl and suprematism. Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), who was one of the De Stijl movement's foremost contributors, was a Theosophist and deeply affected by theosophical theory

Wright's exploration with space led him to explore the ziggurat¹¹³ and spiral forms. In 1924 Wright designed a ziggurat-shaped form for the Gordon Strong Planetarium in Maryland. Unfortunately, the design remained unbuilt. In 1939, Wright designed the Kaufmann guest house above Fallingwater, with the stairs going down to the house below covered with a stepped spiral roof. Wright's design could be considered as 'the bridge between the digital Fallingwater and the spiral plasticity of the Guggenheim, yet to come' (Hoppen, 1998:140). Later, in 1943, he produced the spiral scheme for the iconic Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Ellis, 2011:13–14), with the first model of the museum incorporating a double spiral (Hoppen, 1998:140). The Guggenheim was intended to be a 'temple of spirit' (Hoppen, 1998:141). The celebration of light from above suggests this and also recalls the evolutionary experience of the

¹¹³ The ziggurat was also investigated by Lethaby. He wrote about its magic qualities in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* and utilised the symbol within his built work. For more on Lethaby and the ziggurat see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

architectural promenade,¹¹⁴ which transports one from darkness to light. However, despite Wright's use of the spiral and meandering routes in his architecture, he remained somewhat ambivalent about the form (Leatherbarrow, 2009:292).

The spiral was also added to Wright's monogram around the year 1938. Wright's original monogram, seen in Figure 55, was a red square circumscribing an encircled cross (Wright, 1898). The logo has connections with the 'circle of orientation', which was a process used by the ancients to align temples with the cardinal directions (Ellis, 2011:1). It also has a striking resemblance to Blavatsky's description of divine creation:

The philosophical cross, the two lines running in opposite directions, the horizontal and the perpendicular, the height and breadth, which the geometrizing Deity divides at the intersecting point, and which forms the magical as well as the scientific quaternary, when it is inscribed within the perfect square, is the basis of the occultist ... it symbolizes our human existence, for the circle of life circumscribes the four points of the cross, which represent in succession birth, life, death and IMMORTALITY (Blavatsky, 1994:508).

Wright later amended the monogram to a red square and double spiral. The spiral form may be linked with the swastika, which, as explained earlier, was connected to the four cardinal points,¹¹⁵ much like the Greek cross of Wright's former logo. Interestingly, Wright's original cross was formed from four right angles that were open at the ends; the spiral form could therefore indicate an evolution of form that did not necessarily greatly alter the meaning.

The spiral was supposedly inspired by Native American rock carving, where one continuous line doubles back on itself. This spiral is similar to those found in Greek Ornamental art, which could be seen to represent the pattern of progression and

¹¹⁴ For more on the symbolism of the architectural promenade see later in this section.

¹¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the swastika symbolism see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

regression. 'After each regression, the new forward movement emerges from a transforming center at the heart of the spiral' (Henderson and Sherwood, 2003:130). Hoppen describes this process in terms of a labyrinth: 'a centripetal clockwise labyrinth that at the center becomes transformed into the counterclockwise, centrifugal exodus' (Hoppen, 1998:139). The spiral invigorates the monogram with energy and movement and also has a mystic centre, similar again to the swastika. The spiral is 'emblematic of the creative process, of the intake of energy that the artist transforms into art. The double spiral represents a vortex of energy. Wright had discovered the eye of the storm, the still center from which creation springs' (Hoppen, 1998:139).

The spiral form was also connected with the fourth dimension, which was a concept that fascinated artists and architects of the early twentieth-century. The fourth dimension was understood to be a spatial dimension that was invisible but coterminous with the perceivable three-dimensional space. Hinton's *The Fourth Dimension* (1904) illustrated the fourth dimension using a spiral moving through a horizontal plane. He put forward the thesis that, to an observer on the horizontal plane, 'a point or particle appears to be moving in a circle, but to the higher-dimensional viewer, a spiral is being pulled straight through a plane ... By training ourselves to see the four-dimensional geometric object, the complete static model, we capture time' (Robbin, 2008:25). Hinton's book was highly regarded within theosophical circles, and his ideas were propagated by Theosophists such as Claude Bragdon to validate the existence of invisible planes of existence and higher spiritual dimensions.

The red square, for Wright, had a symbolic connotation with the colour of creation. Red and white, two colours employed by Wright for his monogram, also have close

connections with alchemy.¹¹⁶ The circle within the square is another alchemical symbol commonly associated with the philosopher's stone.¹¹⁷ Whether Wright would have been aware of these correlations is unknown. However, when considering Wright's spiritual associates, it is likely that he would have been conscious of the link, if only superficially.

During his architectural career, and the evolution of his ideas on space and architecture, Wright was in contact or connected with individuals with spiritual and occult inclinations. This is witnessed in one of Wright's earlier commissions, the Dana House (1899–1904). Dana was a spiritualist, who communicated with her deceased relatives through a medium. She also came to develop an interest in Theosophy and later founded the Lawrence Metaphysical centre in her home, which included a library with a considerable collection of occult literature (Ellis, 2011:5). This was also the case with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The curator of the museum foundation, Baroness Hilla von Rebay (1890–1967), who contacted Wright about the design of the new museum to house non-objective art, was a member of the Theosophical Society. When she was fourteen years of age she frequented classes taught by Rudolph Steiner and in 1909 joined the Theosophical Society in Paris (Ellis, 2011:13). Another instance of Wright's work appealing to Theosophists is the publication of his architectural drawings during 1925, in seven successive issues of Dutch architectural publication, *Wendingen*. The editor of the publication was the architect and Theosophist Hendricus Theodorus Wijdeveld. Each issue was accompanied by an introduction written by those familiar with Wright's work,

¹¹⁶ For more on alchemy see section 4.2 Alchemical imagery.

¹¹⁷ For the previous detailed discussion on the square and circle see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

including H. P. Berlage¹¹⁸ and Eric Mendolsohn (Ellis, 2011:9–10). Berlage was greatly impressed with Wright's work and in September 1912 published an article in three consecutive issues of *Schweizerische Bauzeitung*, which formed the initial introduction of the architect's work in a European periodical. Berlage's article, *Neuere amerikanische Architektur*, was dedicated almost completely to Wright (Turner, 1983:352), and Berlage also lectured on Wright in Zurich and elsewhere from March 1912 (Turner, 1983:353).¹¹⁹

In 1932 Wright founded the Taliesin Fellowship. This was a practical architecture school to educate architects, with thirty or so apprentices carefully selected by Wright. The school was built in an isolated spot, with Wright as its master. Tradesmen were employed to teach the apprentices construction, which was an area normally neglected in their previous academic studies. These newly developed skills were put to use repairing and expanding the site. As well as learning construction, the apprentices were required to farm the land and cook (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:188). For Wright, 'the Fellowship itself was a theater for testing and refining wisdom, with architecture as a vehicle for knowledge and the creative spirit' (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:189). The name 'Taliesin' also had symbolic connotations. It came from a sixth-century Welsh bard and poet, and meant 'shining brow'. Richard Hovey's adaption of this sixth-century tale, in his book *Taliesin* (1896), enchanted Wright. Hovey 'made use of the tale of Taliesin to present the image of the artist as seer, and embedded that tale in his larger treatment of the Arthurian legend, a legend that provided the model

¹¹⁸ For more on Berlage and his connection with Lauweriks see 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

¹¹⁹ Le Corbusier is speculated to have read the article on Wright by Berlage and also to have attended at least one of Berlage's lectures. Disregarding Le Corbusier's lack of acknowledgement, according to Turner, Le Corbusier's development was initially aided by Wright, and Wright in reality contributed to the evolution of key components of Le Corbusier's architecture. Le Corbusier's architectural promenade may be one such idea that could have developed through his contact with Wright's architecture (Turner, 1983:352–353).

of a timeless struggle' (Menocal, 1992:45). It is said that more than one of the apprentices who joined the Taliesin Fellowship were heard to call the place Camelot, recalling the chivalric knightly fellowship of legend (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:37).

Wright's third wife, Olgivanna, was a previous student and devotee of Georgi Ivanovich Gurdjieff¹²⁰ (1866–1949). Gurdjieff spent some time at Taliesin in 1934, teaching the apprentices. However, his visit was cut short because of personal tensions between him and Wright.

Gurdjieff was considered an occult Master and had a powerful and hypnotic presence that was 'steeped in a magical aura' (Owen, 2004:235). His central philosophy was concerned with the human consciousness and its full potential. Gurdjieff believed that human beings needed to wake up and recognise their true consciousness that lay dormant in the subconscious (Owen, 2004:232). Around 1895 Gurdjieff was known to have travelled with the Seekers of Truth, an alliance of men who searched the East for esoteric wisdom. He was also inspired by the theosophical teachings of Madame Blavatsky and by Sufism (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:50–51). Through Sufi dervishes he learned the ancient form of dance which concealed a secret symbolism that led to esoteric knowledge. Later, Gurdjieff began to devise and teach his own version of the dance, through which he believed

[o]ne could attain knowledge once known to the ancients that was now lost to the modern world. Modern man, he taught, was little more than a machine, moving through life in a state of perpetual sleep, of unthinking habit and no self-awareness. The sacred dances were part of a system of techniques designed to awaken him. Under his guidance, he claimed, his students might

¹²⁰A. R. Orage was a follower of Gurdjieff's teachings and in 1932 travelled to New York to prepare for Gurdjieff's arrival the following year. He later began teaching Gurdjieff's ideas in the United States. For further on Orage's connection with the Fabian Society see section 2.2 Overview of the fin-de-siècle.

achieve a kind of super-consciousness – and, if they were willing to struggle and suffer enough, even immortality (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:50–51).

Gurdjieff's presence at the school along with that of Olgivanna, who no doubt espoused views taught by Gurdjieff in her early years and finally Wright's own spiritualist background, meant that the school had a definite cosmic significance. Taliesin was much more than an architecture school, and like the Bauhaus it incorporated spiritualist and occult teachings in its pedagogy. According to Lath Schiffner, the 'genius of Taliesin was that it was able to be an esoteric school' and to 'have all the appearance of not being one' (Friedland and Zellman, 2006:596).

The numerous spiritual and occult influences upon Wright from an early age suggest that these became a fundamental part of his character, and later of his architecture. Wright himself acknowledged Lethaby's impact upon him, but exactly what this was, or how far it guided his own work, is a matter for speculation. It is possible that, like many architects during the fin-de-siècle, Wright had read *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. Wright's use of the L-shaped plan in the 1930s and 1940s could also have been inspired by Lethaby's earlier experiments with this very form. It would seem that architects at the turn of the century were looking to enrich their work with greater profundity and were turning to the occult, mysticism and magic in order to achieve this aim. This will now be demonstrated in the work of the Griffins and later of Le Corbusier, another celebrated figure of the Modern Movement, to show once more the use of a comparable iconography within his work.

5.2.5 Walter Burley Griffin (1876–1937) and Marion Mahony Griffin (1871–1961)

Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin were both architects who were born and educated in America and worked for Frank Lloyd Wright early in their careers.¹²¹ The couple were married in 1911, after which they worked together on several architectural commissions. One such project was their plan for the capital city of Australia, Canberra.

Jeff Turnbull, in his paper ‘The Architecture of Walter Burley Griffin: Archetypal Patterns’ (2005), has argued that Lethaby’s archetypal forms of the ziggurat,¹²² stupa and golden gate of the sun, discussed in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, played a fundamental and recurring role in the architecture of the Griffins (Turnbull, 2005:8). During his career, Griffin exploited quintessential features of these archetypal forms in a number of his works, such as the proposed Capitol Building on Capitol Hill for the Canberra competition submission in 1911 (Turnbull, 2005:8) and for Newman College at the University of Melbourne (1916–1918) (Turnbull, 2005:10). Lethaby’s black-and-white silhouetted forms were bold and clear, and thus memorable, allowing Griffin to deposit overall compositional details within his memory bank and recall key features when required for his designs (Turnbull, 2005:5–6). Turnbull explains:

It is not known whether their library held Lethaby’s *Architecture, Mysticism & Myth*, 1891, or its consequent editions. Nevertheless a small number of Griffin’s works indicate a debt to Lethaby. Indeed it is evident that both Griffin and Mahony Griffin referred to these and other Lethaby books without necessarily acquiring them for the office library.

Lethaby was connected to a network of authors of books and articles that Griffin studied. This same network of authors also appeared within the titles of the known books that the Griffins collected for their private office library.

¹²¹ Wright’s L-shaped plan, discussed previously, has by many been credited to Walter Burley Griffin, who is believed to have developed the L-shaped plan when working in Wright’s office (Deuchler, 2013:53)

¹²² The Griffins’ interest in the ziggurat form is noteworthy and could well relate to its occult connotations discussed in section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

The network of authors included the American architect and historian, Russell Sturgis (1836–1909), the Scotsman adventurer and historian, James Fergusson (1808–1886), and the Englishman Richard Phené Spiers (1838–1916), who had strong French and American connections (Turnbull, 2005:4).

The significance of the Griffins' interest in Lethaby is of even greater consequence and pertinence to the current study when comprehending their other affiliations, which included Theosophy¹²³ and Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy. The couple were deeply affected by theosophical ideas during the 1920s, and from 1926 onwards were closely connected to esoteric, theosophical and anthroposophical groups. The couple publicly disclosed their occult affiliations in lectures and articles, and even undertook a number of design commissions for theosophical clients from 1926 (Weirick, 1998:58). Whilst the Griffins never officially joined the Theosophical Society, they did later in life become members of the St John Group of the Anthroposophical Society – Marion in September 1930, and Walter, a year after, in September 1931 (Weirick, 1998:58).

Even before their explicit ties to the occult, their work was believed to incorporate a hidden occult language, as in their plan for Canberra with 'its geometry arising from the Vesica and its axiality, both being clearly derived from sacred and divine traditions' (Proudfoot, 1994:43). One popular theory behind the Griffins' early work is that of an occult conspiracy, which suggests that 'it is not possible to document their esoteric sources because they kept everything secret. According to this argument, there is a "secret plan of Canberra" based on the "cosmic canon of the ancients" which the Griffins guarded "just as the medieval master masons guarded their secrets"' (Weirick, 1998:58). Peter Proudfoot goes even further to suggest a possible link between the Griffins and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, stating that whilst '[t]here is no

¹²³ The couple had personal contact with American Theosophist and architect Claude Fayette Bragdon (1866–1946) (Proudfoot, 1994:85).

written evidence to link the Griffins' work to the Golden Dawn movement ... it would be surprising if they were not aware of it' (Proudfoot, 1994:82).

The Griffins not only employed archetypal symbols and geometry but also made use of crystal imagery, which is most discernible in the monuments drawn by Marion for the Canberra plans. The Capitol building in particular is reminiscent of Taut's Crystal House and the earlier work of the German Expressionists. Proudfoot goes as far as to say that '[i]n many ways, the Canberra designs rendered by Marion, prefigure[] the work of the German Expressionists during the 1920s' (Proudfoot, 1994:71). The use of crystal symbolism, in the form of angular and faceted forms, light and water by the Griffins, was akin to the Expressionists' work in its metaphoric suggestion of spiritual transcendence and transmutation (Proudfoot, 1994:74). The influence behind the symbolism and its metaphoric allusions could be attributed to a number of potential sources. It is likely that the couple were aware of Scheerbart's literature, with many of his fictional works being based in America¹²⁴. Other possible stimuli could have been Wenzel Hablik (Proudfoot, 1994:76), a member of the Glass Chain, who published *Creative Forces* (1909), a series of drawings illustrating a journey through an imaginary universe of crystalline structures. Goethe was another who explored crystal imagery in his work, and he would have been familiar to the Griffins through their relationship with the Anthroposophical Society and the work of Rudolph Steiner. Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) was a key figure for the Griffins; his theory of transcendental ornament¹²⁵ may also have played a part in their consequent choice of symbolism (Proudfoot, 1994:76–79). Finally, a reading of *Thought Forms* (1901) by

¹²⁴ For further detail on the work of Paul Scheerbart see earlier in this section.

¹²⁵ Louis Sullivan's concept of transcendental ornament was influenced by the theories of the mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (Proudfoot, 1994:42).

Besant and Leadbeater would also have introduced to them the blue-white prism crystal thought form, which emphasised the relationship between the crystal metaphor and movement between higher and lower spiritual planes (Proudfoot, 1994:80–81). This was a popular theosophical text and likely to have been read by the Griffins.

Due to the limitations of the current study, it is not possible to fully explore the extent of the Griffins' use of occult symbology within their work. However, the preceding analysis has highlighted the couple's affiliation with occult groups and their consequent employment of occult geometry and metaphors within their architecture. It has also demonstrated that Lethaby influenced the couple's interest in the occult. This once more builds upon the theme established within the chapter of architects simultaneously being inspired by Lethaby's work and by the occult.

5.2.6 Le Corbusier (1887–1961), Freemasonry and alchemy

Le Corbusier – or, as he was previously known, Charles Édouard Jeanneret, was born into the Calvinist faith but, dissatisfied with this religious path, continually sought and explored alternative spiritual systems that would address his curious and questioning mind. A good example of his alternative spiritual outlook can be found conspicuously in his *Poème de l'Angle Droit* [Poem of the Right Angle], written between 1947 and 1953 (Samuel, 1999:400). The poem not only expresses Le Corbusier's interest in occultism, in particular alchemy, but also demonstrates the link between architecture, occultism and the right angle/L-shape.

The connection between the three areas has been explored earlier in relation to Lethaby and Lauweriks.¹²⁶ The following discussion aims to show the use of parallel

¹²⁶ For the previous discussion on the L-shape/meander related to Lethaby and Lauweriks see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

symbolism with similar connotations in relation to Le Corbusier. This will not only display the continued use of such symbolism into the Modern Movement but will also assist in augmenting the previous argument, which proposed that the L-shape/meander when used in architectural plans and ornament may have an alternative motive, beyond function, related to occult and magic symbolism. Lethaby was aware of Le Corbusier and wrote the following in reaction to his phrase, 'A house is a machine to live in':

It is striking and really suggestive when judiciously interpreted, but some attempted applications seem only to be a new kind of whim works in Corbusier 'style'. First of all, should the phrase be read 'A house *is a machine* to live in', or 'A house is a machine to *live in*'? The 'living in' should be the operative part of the saying...making it to function properly for its own purpose (Lethaby, 1931:54).

Lethaby appears to have grasped the substance of Le Corbusier's aphorism. Which is no surprise when considering he himself advocated comparable sentiments in regards to architecture much earlier, when writing that "architecture" must give way to buildings as efficient as a bicycle' (Lethaby, 1939:236).

Le Corbusier's *Poem of the Right Angle* is an amalgamation of symbolic paintings and text, organised in panels and representing a tree. The poem is separated into various stages by the use of colour, with the seven rows of the poem each bestowed with a title and colour. The poem also notably emphasises the union of opposites. Both colour and the combining of dualities are themes which are commonly associated with the alchemical process – in which Le Corbusier is known to have been interested (Samuel, 1999:400). According to Moore:

Alchemy appealed to Le Corbusier first for the way in which opposites were separated and joined (*solve et coagula*); second, for its attempt to transform basic matter, or the original four elements, into a higher fifth substance known as the 'quintessence' or 'philosopher's stone'; third, for its assertion that earthly elements and processes were expressions of greater cosmological phenomena and events (Moore, 1980:111).

Le Corbusier began conspicuously utilising alchemical imagery in his architectural work from the early 1930s onwards. However, his interest in such imagery commenced much earlier (Samuel, 2010:75). One of Le Corbusier's initial influences in regard to such imagery could have been Lauweriks.¹²⁷

N. H. M. Tummers has conjectured that Le Corbusier, or Jeanneret as he was then known, must have visited the Hohenhagen estate in mid-1910 in relation to construction problems at one of Behrens's houses, the Cuno house. Tummers suggests that Le Corbusier spent five months employed with Behrens, beginning in April 1910. The building of Thorn Prikker house had commenced after June 1910, so it would have been under construction during Le Corbusier's supposed visit,¹²⁸ and it would be very unlikely that Le Corbusier did not come across Lauweriks's Thorn Prikker house at this time (Padovan, 2013:123). Tummers has speculated that Le Corbusier's account of his meeting with the so-called 'gardener' during the visit may have in truth been an encounter with Lauweriks, as at the time of construction Lauweriks was housed in the gardener's dwelling (Padovan, 2013:124). Tummers proposes that Lauweriks would have shown Le Corbusier the plans and have gone into detail about the design and the intrinsic proportional systems. This he believes later influenced the architect when he was creating the layout for his iconic Domino houses in 1914–1915 (Padovan, 2013:124). Le Corbusier's omission in mentioning Lauweriks's influence on his work is revealing. An evasive attitude is once more witnessed when he is discussing his time in Germany, and also architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright. This is most probably

¹²⁷ For more on Lauweriks see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

¹²⁸ There has been some dispute of these dates, with H. Allen Brooks stating that Le Corbusier did not enter employment with Behrens until November 1910. However, Brooks does provide evidence of Le Corbusier's visit to Hagen on 9 May 1912 and his meeting with Osthaus (Padovan, 2013:125).

because '[h]is debt was so great, indeed so profound, that Le Corbusier thought it best that it should be left unknown' (Brooks, 1999:247).

Le Corbusier writes in *The Modular*, during a period of his life when he had many questions and was searching for 'the rule that orders, that connect all things' (Corbusier, 2000a:26), that he remembered visiting a modern villa where the gardener said to him: '“This stuff, you see, that's complicated, all these twiddly bits, curves, angles, calculations, it's all very learned' The villa had belonged to someone call Thorn Brick (?), a Dutchman (about 1909)”' (Corbusier, 2000a:26). After this admission in *The Modular*, Le Corbusier begins deliberating the magnitude of the right angle. It appears that this revelation, potentially impelled by Lauweriks, was a turning point in Le Corbusier's life.

Moving back once more to the *Poem of the Right Angle*, it is fascinating to observe Le Corbusier using both the iconography of the right angle and alchemical imagery together in this one source. Both forms of iconography have been discussed in relation to Lethaby and his interest in occult symbolism. It is therefore highly significant that we find yet again another avant-garde architect drawn to the same forms. However, whilst Le Corbusier's fascination with occult symbolism has recently been studied and brought to light by scholars such as Flora Samuel, Richard Moore, Jan Birksted and others, Lethaby's connections remain obscure. Therefore, demonstrating the parallels that exist between Lethaby and Le Corbusier should hopefully assist in clarifying the intrinsic occult intentions within the work of Lethaby.

Richard Moore closely examines the *Poem of the Right Angle* in relation to alchemy and its mythical themes.¹²⁹ Moore helps to establish how Le Corbusier's 'pictorial work was the center of his creativity', as Le Corbusier himself proclaimed (Moore, 1980:111). Le Corbusier was fascinated by the language of symbols, concealing many symbols within his work and making clear that they were inaccessible to those with 'eyes that do not see' (Corbusier, Cohen and Goodman, 2007:145). At the time when he was writing the *Poem of the Right Angle*, symbolism became integral to as well as dominant within his architecture. To understand the nature of the symbolism within his architectural work it is vital to grasp the symbolic language used within the *Poem of the Right Angle*.

The poem, as illustrated in Figure 56, is constructed of seven horizontal zones that form a top-heavy cross pattern (Le Corbusier, 1947–1953). The cross holds similarities to the pontifical cross, which is a cross with three transverse lines. The pontifical cross has strong associations with the occult, in particular with Freemasonry. Wirth alludes to the cross in his *Tarot of the Magicians* (1927), revealing how '[o]ut of the ternary comes a septenary formed by the round ends of the traverse lines and at the rounded top of the cross' (Wirth, 2012:77). He continues by saying that 'seven is the number of harmony and also of secondary causes which direct the world: these causes correspond to the planetary influences or to the seven notes of the human scale' (Wirth, 2012:77). Le Corbusier's cross and seven distinct zones may well have been inspired by such occult ideas.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Moore's article covers, in depth, the alchemical imagery found in the work of Le Corbusier, but the chapter will specifically focus on the *Poem of the Right Angle*.

¹³⁰ Lethaby made use of a similar cross, seen in Figure 57, as part of his monogram in his notebooks of 1887–1889.(Lethaby, 1887).

The seven horizontal zones, referred to as *iconostase* by the architect, are further divided into adjacent squares, numbering 5, 3, 5, 1, 3, 1, 1 from the top to the bottom of the cross respectively. Le Corbusier's seven zones are alphabetised and given a title and colour: 'A, *milieu* or environment (green); B, *esprit* or spirit (blue); C, *chair* or flesh (violet); D, *fusion* (red); E, *caractère* (clear); F, *offre* or offering (yellow); and G, *outil* or instrumentality (purple)' (Moore, 1980:113). The seven zones and colours may also have been a reference to the seven operations of alchemy, which include Calcination, Dissolution, Separation, Conjunction, Fermentation, Distillation and Coagulation.

The alchemical interpretation is strengthened by the symbolism of the cover page observed in Figure 58 (Le Corbusier, 1947–1953). The left side is blue with a red sun, and the right side red with a crescent waning moon. This recalls the *coniunctio* stage of the alchemical process, where male and female, or sulphur and mercury respectively, come together in union. The female mercury is occasionally represented using the colour blue and male sulphur by the colour red. Sulphur is also associated with the sun and mercury with the moon (Moore, 1980:113). A distinct example of such symbolism in alchemical literature can be found in Figure 59, depicting plate four of *Splendor Solis* (Trismosin, 1582). The process of coagulation was central to alchemy, and it is astounding how far Le Corbusier's cover page parallels such imagery. Another example by Le Corbusier of the *coniunctio* phase and the use of blue and red is in part two of zone A of the *Poem of the Right Angle*. Here is an image that resembles the alchemical woodcut seen in Figure 60, *The Extraction or Impregnation of the Soule*, found in the sixteenth-century *Rosarium philosophorum* (The Extraction or Impregnation of the Soule, 1550). In the sixteenth-century image, the king and queen engage in coitus upon a pool of water. They are accompanied by an image of

the sun and moon, and hence once more represent the union of mercury and sulphur. In Le Corbusier's image we again find two characters lying one on top of the other in a similar position, with what could be assumed as blue water below. One of the figures, in red, appears to be wearing a crown upon their head. The two figures are colour coordinated, with the one on top clearly red and the one below blue. Again, this could be Le Corbusier's attempt to show the union of male and female, or mercury and sulphur. The union of opposites and male–female dualism is a theme that is very prominent in Le Corbusier's art and architecture, seen again in his 1946 Apollo/Medusa emblem, where two dualities are combined to form one composite head (Moore, 1980:113). The concept of the unification of opposing forces and the elimination of all dualities is central to the tenets of alchemy and occultism.

Another use of alchemical iconography is shown in Figure 61, the last image of the *Poem of the Right Angle* (Le Corbusier, 1947–1953). The accompanying description pays homage to the right angle:

With carbon
we have
traced the right angle
the sign
It is the answer and the guide
the fact
an answer
a choice
it is simple and naked
yet knowable
The savants will talk
of relativity and rigour
But conscience
makes it a sign
It is the answer and the guide
the fact
my answer
my choice (Corbusier and Hylton, 1989:20)

The illustration depicts a hand drawing a cross with a stick of charcoal within another cross of green pigment. This cross is placed within a squarish circle. There is another smaller cross of blue beneath, accompanied by a red arrow, this pair being reminiscent of the Freemason's set square and compass. Moore offers a detailed alchemical analysis of the iconography employed by Le Corbusier at the end of his text, suggesting:

The cross shape represents the four elements and the red arrow below, pointing toward another version of the cross outside the empty silhouette, symbolizes the mathematical value of 'greater than' the four elements, or, in this case, five, the quintessence. As in orthodox alchemy, the beginning is somewhat equivocally the end, an *opus circulatorium*. One begins with the philosopher's stone and ends with the philosopher's stone, but at a higher level of purification, and only after seven eternally repetitive stages of sublimation (Moore, 1980: 123).

The poem has been studied not only in relation to its alchemical properties but also in connection with Freemasonry. Jan Birksted, in his monograph *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, provides a comprehensive account of Le Corbusier's connection with Freemasonry. The Freemasons' grand aim was to exercise universal beneficence and love to all mankind. This aim transpired through architecture by the production of 'universal, classically stripped architecture for ... all social classes' (Birksted, 2009:120).

When analysing the *Poem of the Right Angle*, Birksted suggests that Le Corbusier was incorporating the emblematic imagery of the Scottish Rectified Rite. The Scottish Rectified Rite exploited emblematic imagery as opposed to symbolic imagery as part of their rituals, which gave them a distinct character from other Masonic rites. Birksted indicates that the sun and moon on the cover page as well as the compass type image and right angle on the last page are all emblems from the Scottish Rectified Rite, with the right angle being considered as a Masonic symbol of righteousness (Birksted,

2009:234). According to Birksted, the first three images witnessed at the beginning of the poem also allude to the symbols of the Knight Beneficent of the Holy City. They include a boat, compass, right angle, broken column and sword (Birksted, 2009:240).

Another association explored by Birksted is that of tarot cards. Tarot cards received renewed interest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, leading to the reprinting of older decks and to new decks being produced. One of the most prominent was Oswald Wirth's *Le tarot des imagiers du Moyen Âge* (The Tarot of the Magicians). In 1931, Wirth published a method of positioning tarot cards in a cross format. This formation could have inspired the configuration of Le Corbusier's *iconostase*. Another similarity between the *iconostase* and tarot cards is the way in which major and minor cards, or arcana, are divided. The major arcana are split into sections that relate to the mind, spirit or body, and the minor show real people in everyday life. Each card is numbered, and all major arcana are associated with a particular symbolic letter. This structure is analogous to that of the *Poem of the Right Angle*, where, as mentioned earlier, seven zones are alphabetised and given titles, with the corresponding brightly coloured images being numbered. These zones potentially represent the major arcana. Alongside these coloured images, which create the overall structure of the poem, are another set of black-and-white images, which could well form the minor arcana (Birksted, 2009:243).

It is clear from the analysis that the *Poem of the Right Angle* is saturated with occult intentions. The poem no doubt holds true to Le Corbusier's aphorism that 'a finished and successful work holds within it a vast amount of intention, a veritable world, which reveals itself to those who have a right to it: that is to say, to those who deserve it' (Corbusier, 2000a:32).

In 1954 Le Corbusier wrote to his childhood friend that the *Poem of the Right Angle* was not ‘only the foundation of my being but also the very foundation of my architecture’ (Birksted, 2009:287). The right angle is more than anything the central component of the poem and is given the utmost importance by Le Corbusier. It is present in the title as well as the culmination of his work. Le Corbusier’s high regard for the right angle is further elaborated in his *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning*:

The laws of gravity seem to resolve for us the conflict of forces and to maintain the universe in equilibrium; as a result of this we have the vertical. The horizon gives us the horizontal, the line of the transcendental plane of immobility. The vertical in conjunction with the horizontal gives us two right angles. There is only one vertical, one horizontal; they are two constants. The right angle is as it were the sum of the forces which keep the world in equilibrium. There is only one right angle; but there is an infinitude of other angles. The right angle, therefore, has superior rights over other angles; it is unique and it is constant ... The right angle is ... the essential and sufficient instrument of action because it enables us to determine space with an absolute exactness. The right angle is lawful, it is a part of our determinism, it is obligatory (Corbusier, 1987:20–21).

André Wogenscky, when describing Le Corbusier’s fascination with the right angle, comments that the ‘right angle is the foundation of his architectural thinking ... The right angle is not only geometry but a symbol. It is charged with mystical value. It is the image of the man standing up to act, and lying down to sleep and to die’ (Wogenscky and Corbusier, 1989).

This correlation between the right angle, alchemy and Freemasonry moves beyond Le Corbusier’s theoretical and artistic work into his architecture. This is established in the forms of the meander, labyrinth and architectural promenade.

5.2.7.1 Le Corbusier: meander and labyrinth

Le Corbusier was fond of the meander form, utilising it in his architectural promenade (a three-dimensional manifestation of the meander, where the vertical journey towards

the apex corresponds to the journey to the centre of the labyrinth)¹³¹ and also recommending meandering lanes for pedestrians in *The City of To-morrow*. The form, as brought to light earlier in relation to Lethaby and Lauweriks, has occult connotations.¹³² The meander received particular attention in the *Poem of the Right Angle*:

Meander will live
its adventure to its
absurd consequence moreover take
its times millennia
if necessary. The inextricable
bars the way the incredible! But
life must force a passage burst the dam
of vicissitude. It cuts through the
meander pierces the loop
.
The law of the meander is
present in thought and
man's enterprise forms (Corbusier and Hylton, 1989:20).

The meander, when used as an architectural device, forces one to become observant, obliging one 'to turn several times at right angles before the view is fully unveiled' (Leatherbarrow, 2009:28). The concept of the meander is applied in Le Corbusier's design for the Museum of Knowledge (1929) and again in the Museum of Unlimited Extension (1939). The Museum of Knowledge takes the form of a ziggurat,¹³³ whilst the Museum of Unlimited Extension resembles a flattened version of the former, with the pyramid's spiral compressed onto a horizontal plane (Cohen, 1999:324). The multiple use of meanders produces labyrinth-like structures, which one is forced to navigate through. The conceptual museum projects inspired several future

¹³¹ For further detail on the relationship between the architectural promenade and the meander and labyrinth see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

¹³² For more on Lethaby's and Lauweriks use of the meander and its connection with occult symbolism see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

¹³³ To understand the spatial significance of the ziggurat form see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

architectural projects built by Le Corbusier, including at Ahmadabad, Tokyo and Chandigarh.

The Museum of Unlimited Extension is commonly referred to as one of the spiral museums, which Le Corbusier and his studio were designing between 1929 and 1965. The 'prototype' museum was the product of a decade of research, in which a square spiral form is employed to construct the plan. There are in reality two forms that are combined in the production of the plan: the spiral form and the swastika¹³⁴ (Moulis, 2003:138). Le Corbusier chose these two configurations mindfully. His intention was to create a discontinuity in the flow of movement for the visitors and thus amplify the attention required by them to navigate the museum successfully. By following the spiral form, visitors would progress slowly around the museum, with their movement halted on various occasions. This alone would oblige visitors to slow down, resulting in them spending more time observing the museum displays. The square spiral form here is analogous to the labyrinth. As the visitor progresses through the museum they are made to innately feel that something is obscured from their sight, and this feeling only heightens as the spiral unfolds, with every section of the journey being a little longer and with fewer turns than the last. This labyrinth-like structure creates a sense of wandering in the visitor and produces the desire to escape or the desire for some form of transcendence (Moulis, 2003:138–140).

The labyrinth is traditionally considered to be a region of darkness, through which the hero must successfully pass if he is to enter the centre of true light. Lethaby, in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, believed the labyrinth to be 'evidently symbolic of life' (Lethaby, 1994:128). He describes the familiar myth of Ariadne and Theseus and

¹³⁴ For a detailed discussion on the swastika, its occult connotations and its links to Lethaby and Lauweriks see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

emphasises that Theseus's 'achievement of the labyrinth was one of many descents into the nightland to fight the serpent, dragon, or minotaur of death and darkness' (Lethaby, 1994:133). The journey through the labyrinth was as much metaphoric as literal, relating to the concepts of darkness and light. The disorientating and disconcerting passages are obstacles to those who are strong, but a labyrinth to the ones who doubt and have lost their way (Harries, 1999:36). The labyrinth is a space of exploration but, importantly, it 'only manifests itself to a subject who has already entered into its maze like passages' (Vidler, 1999:61). This is because it is a space with no obvious external façade; hence its meaning lies in its interior alone. The notion of a living interior is markedly supported by Le Corbusier when he remarks on 'the façade, the word they have made the basis for your studies, which so often becomes the screen behind which you hide your mistakes. No: we are dealing with a creature born of your thoughts, who has a heart inside him' (Corbusier, 1999:55).

The visitor's experience of the museum is further intensified by the square spiral form being superimposed with the swastika. The swastika is formed by four axes that run from the central hall to the edge of the museum, cutting through the spiral form. These axes are triggered when the visitor stands aligned between: a view to the centre and at the same time a view to the edge. Unlike the spiral/labyrinth which encloses space, the swastika allows the extension of space to the horizon (which is in this case the garden) and the origin space (the central hall) (Moulis, 2003:139). The use of the swastika form therefore offers a feeling of transcendence from the labyrinth spiral, however short or fleeting this may be:

While the square spiral form creates a sense of wandering (and concomitantly) the desire for transcendence from wandering; it is the axial plan form that 'satisfies' this desire, intermittently, by forming long views out of the space of the spiral. The wished for transcendence from labyrinthine space is given in a

look that takes in the fullest extent of space from the interior to the horizon (Moulis, 2003:140).

The horizontal views are cleverly controlled and become less frequent as the journey progresses: ‘less frequent perhaps, but more sought after or more greatly desired’ (Moulis, 2003:140). The horizon fascinated Le Corbusier in conjunction with its counterpart, the vertical; together these formed the venerated right angle. This point where the two lines came together was, for Le Corbusier, a point of intensity and the ‘point of all dimensions’. Exploiting the horizon line in the museum adds to the drama of the space. It is desirable but always a little out of reach. Coexisting with the labyrinth, it gives an overall feeling of infinite aspiration, where the goal is in sight but beyond grasp:

By itself, the horizon is the ‘line of the transcendental plan of immobility,’ an abstract place where mathematical order and the perceived order of nature coincide. But while this line brings together reason and nature, it does so at an unfathomable distance. It is always present, never reachable, perceptible but never palpable, single but infinite (Gans, 2014:82–83).

5.2.7.2 The architectural promenade

This journey through Le Corbusier’s buildings, which is composed of movement around corners and ascending staircases, is an architectural application of Le Corbusier’s right angle theory. The architectural promenade can therefore be considered as a form of expression comparable to the meander and labyrinth discussed above.¹³⁵ The experience is usually one that begins at ground-floor level and spirals upwards. The movement at times involves navigating a series of right-angled turns that simultaneously reveal and conceal spaces, invoking a labyrinthine environment. The spiral was also intrinsic to the architectural promenade as it allowed for the

¹³⁵ For further clarification of the architectural promenade’s relationship with the right angle, meander and labyrinth forms see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

repetition of archetypal spaces, whilst at the same time the progression to higher levels, mimicking the concept of evolution (Samuel, 2010:95). Lethaby's architecture appears to have some characteristic qualities of the architectural promenade too.¹³⁶ These will be brought to light once key parameters of the architectural promenade have been highlighted.

The 'Promenade architecturale' or architectural promenade was most probably inspired by the earlier Beaux Arts concept of 'la marche'. However, Le Corbusier rejected the Beaux Arts models for being created around perspectives that could only be appreciated from one fixed viewing point. He preferred the notion of spaces that were understood and developed in the mind's eyes whilst on the move (Samuel, 2010:41).

In his 1942 lectures to students of architecture, Le Corbusier outlined the significance of the architectural promenade, whereby a series of unfolding views are presented to the occupant as they move through the building. The journey through the building is intentionally made to be novel and disconcerting. The term first appeared in Le Corbusier's work when describing Villa Savoye at Poissy (1928) (Samuel, 2010:9). Le Corbusier considered architecture to be dead or living depending on the amount of this sequential movement that had been accounted for. He believed that the more movement and views there were, the greater the life and vivacity of the building would be¹³⁷ (Mohith, 2015:61). The architectural promenade was not only the sensation of

¹³⁶ Mackintosh also appears to have experimented with the architectural promenade in his architecture, showing that an evolving narrative within architectural spaces was not exclusive to Le Corbusier but had been explored much earlier. For further detail see section 5.1 Contemporaries influenced by Lethaby.

¹³⁷ This idea of living spaces relates back to Lauweriks and his use of the meandering line. It is also connected to the autokinesis suggested by the swastika. For more on these themes see section 4.3 Spaces of transmutation.

walking through a building but operated on a much deeper level, as with much of Le Corbusier's work. The promenade was a route to initiation, a journey beginning in darkness and ending in light.

Flora Samuel has suggested and applied a narrative path to Le Corbusier's architecture. She describes the journey through the architectural promenade in a series of key experiences:

- a. Introduction (threshold)
- b. Disorientation (sensitising)
- c. Questioning (savior habiter)
- d. Reorientation
- e. Culmination (ecstatic union) (Samuel, 2010:66).

The introduction space is often a darker, muted area at the threshold or in some cases placed a little distance from the building. The space is used to focus and prepare the occupant to enter the building. It is followed by an entrance hall, which employs homogenous materials on all surfaces and a lack of detail; these features used alongside glass and mirrors distort the space, eliminating the sense of scale and proportion. The boundaries between interior and exterior spaces are also blurred. These qualities heighten the sense of disorientation. After this comes the inhabited floor. In Le Corbusier's domestic architecture this would form the living spaces of the house. This area engages the needs of the body, offering playful, contemplative spaces as well as taking care of the ritual aspects of daily life, such as eating. This is the questioning section, which offers distractions from the central journey; nevertheless, the occupant is eventually drawn back to proceed on the next stage. This usually takes

the form of an ascending staircase, which is often spiral in form. It is the space of reorientation, where there is greater intensity of light, contrasting materials, and gaps and spatial illusions within the staircase to heighten tension. It is an area in which the senses are reawakened in anticipation of the final stage of the journey. The culmination of the journey is the rooftop, where one is welcomed by the sun or the moon. This experience is usually intensified through the framing of views (Samuel, 2010:100).

The journey was also at times amplified through the injection of colour. This is the case at the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux, where colour plays a symbolic and possibly alchemical role; much as in the *Poem of the Right Angle*, it is utilised to introduce an additional layer of meaning to an already complex arrangement. The narrative path through the Villa Savoye is described lucidly by Nicholas Weber in *Le Corbusier, A Life*:

What is achieved as you approach that body and take the splendid upward journey inside is a sequence of vistas; the act of looking is encouraged at every turn. You go from one tableau to another, from a halting view of a solid black door and white impassive walls to a sweeping vista, as in a musical progression from silence to a rhapsody (Weber, 2008:289).

Later he comments: 'The Villa Savoye is both a place to live and a temple to the sun ... Everything is about the journey through whiteness, rugged and challenging in its way (neither the ramp nor the stairs are easy), offering as its reward the miraculous sky' (Weber, 2008:290).

This experience of the architectural promenade is once more discussed by Birksted, who relates it back to Masonic rituals and initiation. The introduction into the house is considered as a symbolic entry into another world. This is compared to the Masonic ritual of two Masons throwing the blindfolded initiate upon a paper frame, which breaks, signifying the candidate's penetration from the visible to the visionary world (Birksted, 2009:165). Another initial stage in Masonic rituals is the Cabinet de

Réflexion. This stage requires the initiate to reflect upon themselves. In some versions of the ritual this may incorporate a mirror on which are the words 'Know Thyself' (Birksted, 2009:158). This again recalls the mirrored or glass surfaces found in the vestibule just after entering one of Le Corbusier's buildings. The next stage of the initiation is some form of the Trois Voyages. This is representative of the stages of human life and development, taking the initiate from childhood through youth to maturity, or alternatively from Apprentice to Fellow Craft (Birksted, 2009:145). The 'Entered Apprentice has to grope his way in darkness, the Fellow Craft walks with his eyes open, a fully developed man, who can and should appreciate the beauties and joys this earthly life can provide' (Birksted, 2009:159). This once more recalls the journey through Le Corbusier's promenade, beginning in darkness and culminating in light. Le Corbusier himself acknowledged that 'at a certain turning point there should come an illumination: a man sees daylight: a man discovers' (Corbusier, 2000b:17).

Another conspicuous parallel is the way in which initiation ceremonies are fraught with dangers, introducing obstacles and ominous sounds to frighten the candidate.

This is a feature observed by Le Corbusier, who

[i]n countless later projects ... built in a final stage of the progress around the house which reaches the level of danger – the steep spiral stairs on the roof of the Villa Stein or the first project for the Villa Savoye, the exposed and parapet-less roofs of the La Roche gallery wing – all these seem prepared as tests for the intrepid client and his visitors (Benton, 1987:37).

The key zones of the promenade could also be applied to Lethaby's architecture.

Lethaby appears to make use of similar vocabulary, but using a less rigid framework than that constructed by Flora Samuel. Much of Lethaby's built work accentuates the entrance to the building with a large protruding overhang. The overhang has been related to Lethaby's attempt to recreate 'The Golden Gate of the Sun', which is the door to the world temple, to which he devotes an entire chapter in *Architecture*,

Mysticism and Myth. The best example of its use in this way is seen at the Eagle Insurance Company Building. The striking resemblance of the doors of the Eagle Insurance Company Building to the East Toran, Sanchi Tope, illustrated in Lethaby's chapter, is demonstrated by Rubens (Rubens, 1986: 168). Lethaby explains how:

Egyptian architecture...is displayed in 'the tendency to exaggerate the door-posts and lintels until in the New Empire the great temples become transformed into little more than monstrously overgrown doorways and pylons.' ... They represented the means of communication between the living and the dead, and, symbolically, the portal by which the dead acquired a re-birth into a new form of existence. It was presumably for this reason that the winged disc as a symbol of life-giving was placed above these doors (Lethaby, 1956a:113).

The winged disc was at times represented as an eagle as in 'the classic period of Syrian art most of the great temple doors had sculptured on the under side of the epistyle an enormous eagle with expanded wings' (Lethaby, 1994:151). The eagle was not the Roman eagle but the oriental eagle consecrated to the sun. The winged shape of the exaggerated overhang of the Eagle Insurance Company Building, along with the eagle sculpture residing towards the summit, recall the ancient metaphor. The metal doors are another indicator that Lethaby intended these to represent the doors to the world temple, as it was common to cover the eastern door itself with shining metal: the 'gate of glory I made as brilliant as the sun' (Lethaby, 1994:164). The circles with a dot at their centre that Lethaby uses resemble the common astronomical symbol for the sun. When accompanied by four smaller circles at each corner plate around the central circle, this would probably exemplify the four seasons, as seen in Japanese architecture (Lethaby, 1994:156). The sun disc used ornamentally, as expounded by Lethaby himself, was a symbol of new birth and resurrection (Lethaby, 1956a:134).

Lethaby's overhang therefore creates a threshold space, much like Le Corbusier's architectural promenade, where there commences a dissipation of exterior and interior

space. The space is impregnated with possibility, and conjures up hope and anticipation. This area prepares the candidate for entry.

The relationship with light is also significant, as the ‘door of enormous size was properly the sole opening to the temple, serving as much for light as to enter by’ (Lethaby, 1994:148). The doorway to the temple, and correspondingly to Lethaby’s buildings, was metaphorically the beginning of a journey from death to life and from darkness to light. The light that floods the building on first entry is on many occasions obscured once the door is closed. This occurs at Avon Tyrrell, The Hurst, High Coxlease and All Saint’s Church, bringing to mind the disorientation space of the promenade. The lack of light is disconcerting, and the sense of space is distorted along with the scale and proportion. This is usually, but not always, followed by a turn to the left or right to enter an inhabited floor, which is made up of the main living spaces – the questioning space. The reorientation space is particularly observable at Avon Tyrrell, which presents a winding staircase that includes a large glazed window and landing halfway up the flight of steps. The winding staircase augments the tension and the window intensifies the light. The glazed window also depicts what appears to be a deliberately framed view of the bellcote, which was a microcosmic representation of the world temple described in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. This further enhances the promenade narrative and anticipates what is to come. The final culminating stage is less apparent in Lethaby’s architecture. It could be that Lethaby instead suggested this through the exterior symbolism he utilised, such as the eagle crowning the apex of his architecture (Avon Tyrrell and the Eagle Insurance Company Building) or the circle or Star of David upon the summit of the gable (All Saints Church) or possibly the crow-stepped gable (Melsetter House).

The above analysis has put forward that Lethaby may well have been using a concept similar to the architectural promenade at Avon Tyrrell to suggest an inner journey. Lethaby's addition of a narrative that unfolds with movement may not be surprising considering that he was an advocate of buildings revealing a story and referring to something beyond themselves, as it evidenced in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*. Avon Tyrrell was one of Lethaby's first independent commissions, in which he experimented with some of his theoretical ideas. He included examples of the world temple replicated in the bellcote and garden house and he also ambitiously produced a calendar house. Avon Tyrrell incorporates 365 windows (days of the year), 12 chimneys (months), 4 floors (seasons), 52 rooms (weeks) and 7 external doors (days of the week) (Philip Webb Award 2016 – Category I, 2016:3). To therefore infer that Lethaby would have thoroughly considered the internal spaces and the movement through this metaphoric building, alluding to the world structure, seems a rational deduction. If this truly was the case, Lethaby becomes a precursor to Le Corbusier's later experiments with the architectural promenade.

The chapter has introduced several architects who were in some way influenced by Lethaby and his architectural theory, philosophy and design. It has also put forward the notion that, alongside their interest in architecture, many of Lethaby's advocates were simultaneously preoccupied with occult theory and philosophy. The recurrence of such findings suggests the connection to be beyond coincidence, and the author would go as far as to advance the belief in a profound and inherent link between Lethaby and the occult.

6. Conclusion

A certain childlike simplicity must be mentioned first. Then his nobility of outlook, his self-effacement, his learning, his wit, his penetrating vision, his industry in research, his fairness in discussion, his sympathetic encouragement of young students, his general loving-kindness, and his scorn of all that is shoddy, pretentious and base. His many friends looked up to him with a singular admiration and devotion. By each one of them, while life lasts, his memory will be cherished as that of one of the rarest of spirits. In their eyes he was indeed not so much the artist, the scholar, the authority on this or that, as the saint-like and peerless comrade whom they will see no more (Meynell, 1940:140).

Carver and calligrapher Eric Gill, summed up Lethaby's spiritual nature in 1940 when he wrote: 'who shall measure the greatness of this man – one of the few men of the nineteenth-century whose minds were enlightened directly by the Holy Spirit?' (Gill, 1968:138).

Lethaby was an inspiration to his fellow architects, students and friends. His legacy is testament to his extensive influence on architectural discourse at the turn of the century. He was admired for his erudition, imagination, kindness, humility and loyalty. Lethaby was 'a teacher of great gifts. A slender, delicate-looking man of no commanding presence or resonant voice, he yet possessed a quietly impressive personality and the ability to convey his own enthusiasm to students and to awake a wholehearted response from them' (Roberts, 1957a:31). When looking back to the turn of the century, Lethaby does not emerge as one of the most successful or popular figures of his time compared to Shaw, Mackintosh, Voysey and Lutyens, but it would be wrong to judge him in this way. He should instead be 'judged by his ideas, which were perhaps not put with the great force utilised by men such as Ruskin and Le Corbusier, but have the timeless and universal qualities of successful revolt against convention and creative speculation as to the future' (Ward, 1957:222). Whilst Lethaby was esteemed by all who knew him, there was always a part of him that was

never quite uncovered. Schultz elucidates this aspect of Lethaby's character further when writing: 'I don't think Shaw ever quite understood Lethaby, but he trusted him implicitly. A friend one day, in conversation with Shaw, alluded to Lethaby as his pupil. "No," he said, "on the contrary, it is I who am Lethaby's pupil"' (Rooke, 1950:167). Lethaby's enigmatic nature is captured perfectly by Ray Watkinson, who declares:

Perhaps Lethaby the man never quite emerges from the documentation of his work or even from the memories of close friends, though the witness of those who knew him and of letters to and from, attests a man well-loved as well as much admired, even revered for his work, for his ideas; yet who held separate a centre to which nobody quite penetrated (Watkinson, 1986:31–32).

The current research on Lethaby has attempted for the first time to broaden the discussion on the architect and present him in a new and unfamiliar light. This has assisted in unravelling part of Lethaby's hidden persona. The study has illustrated Lethaby's fascination with the occult and suggested it to be more than just an insignificant and superficial phase in the life of the architect. The thesis has uncovered the secret sources behind Lethaby's work and challenged long held beliefs on the architect. The research has scrutinised several drawings, architectural details and plans to discover a persistent occult language permeating through Lethaby's work. It has also revealed the depth of Lethaby's indebtedness to alchemy. These claims have been further substantiated through identifying identical symbolism within the work of other architects informed by the occult, such as Lauweriks. The thesis therefore creates a fresh dialogue on Lethaby, viewing him as more than just an Arts and Crafts architect, and thus begins the journey to uncover more of the rich and diverse sources that informed his work.

The research not only opens new discourse on Lethaby but the Arts and Crafts Movement as a whole. The study has revealed many other Arts and Crafts exponents

that shared Lethaby's outlook; further analysis may expose a much larger trend relating the Arts and Crafts Movement to the occult. This has been the case in regards to the Modern Movement and the Bauhaus, where the likes of Rykwert and Banham were amongst the first to have exposed, 'the irrational...urges that underlay the rational platitudes with which the Bauhaus...[was] justified to later generations' (Banham, 1999:12). Historians have, as a consequence, rejected Louis Sullivan's misleading jingle 'form follows function' to describe the work of the modernist architects, and debunked the myth propagandised by the likes of Sigfried Giedion, to display the Modern Movement as a completely functional enterprise. Banham suggests that 'it is doubtful if the ideas implicit in Functionalism – let alone the word itself – were ever significantly present in the minds of any of the influential architects of the period' (Banham, 1999:320). The rich history of the occult informing modern architects and architecture has subsequently been researched and uncovered. However, the same is not true of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which is sometimes lost in the overriding narrative of handcrafted goods and the rejection of the machine. Lethaby writes in regards to the origin of architecture 'we find two great factors, response to need – the basis in utility – and, secondly, a magical and mystical element' (Lethaby, 1939:17). The first factor, utility, could be aided through scientific advancements and of course, the machine. Lethaby understood the value of the machine and realised that when used properly, it would have an important role in the social liberation of the worker. This is also true of Morris, who after reading Karl Marx (1818-1883), understood the capability of the machine to liberate humanity (Naga, 1992:68). The addition of magic and the mystical to this formula creates analogous conditions that proliferated during the Modern Movement. The relationship between the Arts and Crafts Movement, the machine, and the occult would therefore benefit

further study. This could subsequently identify a clear precedent for the Modern Movement, much earlier in time, suggesting an evolution of form but not necessarily a revolution in thinking.

Lethaby was an architect who sought reform. He was progressive in his outlook and was one of the earliest architects to understand the value of machine production to future architecture. Lethaby publicly rejected 'sham styles' and sought to bridge the gap between Art and Science. He appreciated the virtues and shortcomings of both and believed that there was a way to reconcile the two, to create an architecture suitable for the future. In this respect Lethaby was a visionary: 'Thus we see the truth of the prophetic teachings of men of whole vision – men like Lethaby who pointed to the need "to reconcile Science and Art"' (Ward, 1957:222). This said, there was forever a part of him that remained attached to the past and the magic of the ancients: 'In saying that the old ways are closed to us, please do not think I would have it so if it might be otherwise; my own mind rests with the poetries of the ancients' (Lethaby, 1956a:16). He was aware that there was a strong need for innovation to prevent national decay; nevertheless, this movement forward was, for Lethaby, eternally grounded in the magic architecture of the past: 'It seems clear at first sight that such a practical art as building developed in the main in response to bodily need, but even this may be doubted. Without the stimulus provided by theories of magic man might have been content with the bare satisfaction of very simple needs' (Lethaby 1956a:147).

At times, it has been postulated that Lethaby had a change in outlook through his life, whereby his earlier, more romantic theories were set aside in favour of a more rational emphasis, the revision of his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth* to the later

Architecture, Nature and Magic testifying to this change. The author would propose that Lethaby did not have a complete change in outlook from his first book to his last, but over time found a form of expression more suitable for his own era in which to express magic symbolism.

As Lethaby matured, he abandoned much of his earlier terminology and public advocacy of mythological and mystic symbolism. It seems that this was in part due to his realisation that such things were unable to be taught in a formal way but must be experienced and assimilated in the mind. This is summed up quaintly in a poem by a student paraphrasing Lethaby:

In church, cathedral, cloister, hall
Some hours each day I'd spend,
And this a touch of dignity
To all your work will lend (Roberts, 1957a:40).

Lethaby realised that his earlier idealistic and somewhat naïve book had not been fundamentally understood, and had led to the superficiality in design being augmented into something of a 'magic style' to which he was opposed. This forced him to campaign for the teaching of science, as '[p]roperly only science can be taught, for you cannot teach beyond knowledge' (Lethaby, 1922:123). This was by no means Lethaby's rejection of art, nature, magic or myth, but a realisation that these things were unable to be taught successfully in the current climate:

I don't think there can be any agreement on aesthetics and human nature so that they can be taught by this Institute, it does not follow that these things do not interest me profoundly. Indeed, it is because I want a true artistic or human-nature content given to our buildings that I would sweep away with the teaching of grandiose bunkum as architectural style ... I want the most exquisite poetic beauty but I do not see how this Institute is to teach how to produce it. Therefore I say train up to practical power ... then each of us can supply his poetry to taste (Lethaby, 1922:123).

In many ways Lethaby's subsequent advancement of science mimics the scientisation of magic and spiritual ideas by occult societies, who began a push for scientific

terminology to show the rational and forward-thinking concepts they endorsed. By subscribing to a scientific outlook, questionable beliefs were sanitised and given credence through the scientific sphere. This gave the public greater assurance in the validity of the claims, and they were more contented to ascribe to comparable views.

Lethaby's focus on science was not because he believed that the traditions of magic architecture had become redundant, but because it was the only way to preserve such concepts for the future. He wanted architects to comprehend the past magic symbols inherently, moving beyond a facile understanding, and fully realising the underlying spiritual profundity of such symbols. This, he believed, would bring life to a new architecture, with real meaning and content.

For Lethaby there was no special symbol, just as there was no special sauce for cooking: 'Art is not a special sauce applied to cooking; it is the cooking itself if it is good' (Lethaby, 1922:209). It was this intrinsic understanding which encompassed the whole being that Lethaby sought. When the deliberate and superficial attempt at creating profundity ceased was also when, for Lethaby, architecture arrived: 'When poetry and magic are in the people and in the age they will appear in their arts, and I want them, but there is not the least good in saying, "Let us go to and build magic buildings. Let us be poetic." Yet let me say again, it is because I want these things that I face this problem' (Lethaby, 1922:92).

Lethaby was searching for the middle ground – the dissolution of the duality between Art and Science, which he believed never truly existed. Lethaby encouraged students to learn mathematics, engineering and the intricacies of new materials like concrete and iron – he wished he himself had invested more time in studying them (Meynell, 1940:130). However, this was coupled with that poetic element of architecture which

could not be taught and was only truly realised through meditation on previous successful works of architecture, works that embodied archetypal forms and shared a part in 'the permanence of the universe' (Lethaby, 1956a:147): truly alchemical architecture.

What, then, did Lethaby hope to achieve through his 'magic' architecture? The author would put forward that Lethaby desired to create an almost intangible world in a corporeal environment: an elusive dimension hidden in plain sight, beyond the limits of time and space, activated by its observers and occupants, where the symbols of the natural world were used to allude to a supernatural one – which may not have been as far removed as once imagined. Lethaby's consistent yearning to represent the world temple on a microcosmic level reveals his simultaneous desire to bring to mind the celestial world. He himself acknowledged this in *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, where he asked: 'what is the connection between the kingdom of heaven, and matter of fact mortar, tee-squares and trowels?' (Lethaby, 1994:13). He then responded to his query, stating: 'Esoteric masonry occupied itself in reality, with a temple built without sound of hammer, axe, or tool of iron. It was the temple of the skies, the Macrocosmos, in point of fact' (Lethaby, 1994:13). It was the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Part of Lethaby's ambition for architecture was social regeneration. Lethaby considered it important to attend to the social needs of humanity before contemplating the spiritual, declaring: '*Here comes before the Beyond*' (Lethaby, 1922:2). However, once the basic social aspects of design were addressed, spiritual regeneration was sought. Architecture, Lethaby believed, was capable of deeply affecting the soul and spirit of man. Meaningful architecture was therefore able to innately leave an impression on the unconscious and spiritually elevate man and, consequently, society in general.

Lethaby not only desired his buildings to be comprehended by the already initiated, but wanted to appeal to a wider public: ‘a symbolism, immediately comprehensible by the great majority of spectators’ (Lethaby, 1994:16). Probably, like his contemporaries, Lethaby considered ‘[h]is pre-eminence of suffering[] in attaining the heights and depths of human experience ... set[] him apart from the insensitive multitude which he ... [had] to guide and enlighten’ (Robb, 1935:275).

Lethaby, illustrated in Figure 62 (Rothenstein, 1921), was not just an ordinary man but something more of a saint, prophet or grand master, equipped with knowledge of the occult, magic and alchemy, with which he helped guide and enlighten his followers towards the light of a new dawn. The research has only begun to scratch the surface of the man behind the mask, and the affiliations between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the occult. However, much is still left to be done and to be discovered.

Appendix I

Chronological summary of W. R. Lethaby's life

1857	Born 18 January in Barstaple, North Devon.
1860	Family moves to Ebberley Lawn, Barnstaple.
1868	Student in the Department of Science and 'Night Drawing Class' at the Barnstaple Literary and Scientific Institute.
1871	Apprenticed to Alexander Lauder the architect.
1876	First drawings published in <i>The Builder News</i> .
1877	Leaves Lauder's office.
1878	Moved to Duffield, Derby to work for Richard Waite.
1879	Worked for T.H.Baker in Leicester for three months. Awarded Soane Medallion. Began work for Norman Shaw as chief clerk.
1880	Admitted to the Royal Academy.
1881	Wins the Pugin Prize.
1883	St. Georges Art Society founded. Exhibits at the Royal Academy.
1884	Art Workers' Guild Founded, Lethaby a charter member.
1885	<i>A Drawing of a Room</i> .
1888	Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society founded. First exhibition – Lethaby exhibits two drawings. <i>A Beryl Shrine</i> .
1889	Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society second exhibition. Lethaby exhibits a number of works. <i>A Garden Enclosed</i> . Frontispiece for the Architectural Association Sketchbook. Dinner invitation: Architectural Association. Meets Ernest Gimson. Sets up his own practice.
1890	Kenton and Co. founded. Avon Tyrell, Hampshire. Font and canopy design for St John the Baptist Church.
1891	Leaves Shaw's office. Joins the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (S.P.A.B.). Publishes <i>Architecture, Mysticism and Myth</i> .
1893	The Hurst, Four Oaks, Warwickshire. Publishes <i>Leadwork, Old and Ornamental and for the Most Part English</i> . Joins Webb and Morris on the committee of S.P.A.B. Visits Constantinople and meets future wife Edith Crosby.
1894	Appointed Art Inspector to the Technical Education Board, London. Publishes <i>The Church of Sancta Sophia, Constantinople</i> .

1896	Opening of the London Central School of Arts and Crafts William Morris dies.
1898	Melsetter House, Orkney. Eagle Insurance Building, Warwickshire.
1900	Rysa Loge, Orkney.
1901	High Coxlease, Hampshire. All Saints Church, Brockhampton, Herefordshire. Appointed Professor of Ornament and Design at the Royal College of Art. Marries Edith Crosby.
1902	Submits Liverpool Cathedral Competition design.
1903	Buys 111 Inverness Terrace, London W2. Appointed principal of the London Central School of Arts and Crafts.
1904	Publishes <i>Medieval Art</i> .
1906	Publishes <i>Westminster Abbey and the Kings' Craftsmen</i> . Appointed surveyor of Westminster Abbey.
1911	Resigns from the London Central School of Arts and Crafts. Elected Master of the Art Workers' Guild. Publishes <i>Architecture: An Introduction</i> . Publishes <i>Westminster Abbey and the Antiques of Coronation</i> .
1915	Philip Webb dies.
1918	Resigns as Professor of Design the Royal College of Art.
1922	Publishes <i>Form and Civilisation</i> . Arts Workers' Guild presentation in honour of Lethaby's 65 th birthday. Awarded Hon.D.Litt from Manchester University.
1924	Was offered but turned down the RIBA Gold Medal.
1925	Publishes 'Philip Webb and His Work' <i>The Builder</i> . Publishes <i>Westminster Abbey Re-examined</i> .
1927	Edith Lethaby dies.
1928	Resigns as surveyor of Westminster Abbey.
1929	Publishes 'Architecture, Nature and Magic' <i>The Builder</i> .
1931	Dies, London, July 17.

Appendix II

W. R. Lethaby's principal architectural works

1. Avon Tyrell

Location: Ringwood, Christchurch, Hampshire
Client: Lord Francis Manners
Design: 1890
Construction: 1891, terrace 1900
Materials: Brick, stone dressings
Note: Plaster work executed by E. Gimson.

2. The Hurst

Location: Hartopp Rd, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire
Client: Charles Edward Mathews
Design: 1893
Construction: 1894
Materials: Brick, stone dressings
Note: Demolished 1960.

3. Melsetter House

Location: Hoy, Orkney
Client: Thomas Middlemore
Design: 1898-1900
Construction: 1899-1900
Materials: Harled and whitened sandstone rubble

4. Chapel of SS Margaret and Colm

Location: Hoy, Orkney
Client: Thomas Middlemore
Design: 1900
Construction: 1900
Materials: Local stone and concrete
Note: East window 'Nativity' by Ford Madox Brown. North window 'Christ on the Cross' by Edward Burne-Jones. The stone arch separating the chancel from the nave has no structural function.

5. Rysa Lodge

Location: Hoy, Orkney
Client: Thomas Middlemore
Design: 1900
Construction: 1900
Materials: Local stone

6. Eagle Insurance Building

Location: Colmore Row, Birmingham, Warwickshire

Client: Eagle Insurance Co.

Design: 1898

Construction: 1900

Materials: Portland stone, steel, brick and terracotta

Note: Recently restored.

7. High Coxlease

Location: Lyndhurst, Hampshire

Client: Thomas Eustace Smith

Design: 1901

Construction: 1901

Materials: Brick, stone dressing

Note: Survives with extensive rear and on one side.

8. All Saints Church

Location: Brockhampton, Ross-On-Wye, Herefordshire

Client: Alice Foster

Design: 1901

Construction: 1902

Materials: Local stone, concrete, thatch

Note: All fittings, including the font, by Lethaby. Wrought iron hanging lamps removed from interior.

Appendix III

Selected bibliography of W. R. Lethaby's publications

***For a complete list of Lethaby's writings see the bibliography prepared by the staff of the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1950). A reprint of the bibliography can be in Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Works 1857-1931*, (1986). The Architectural Press: London, appendix C.**

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Illustrations

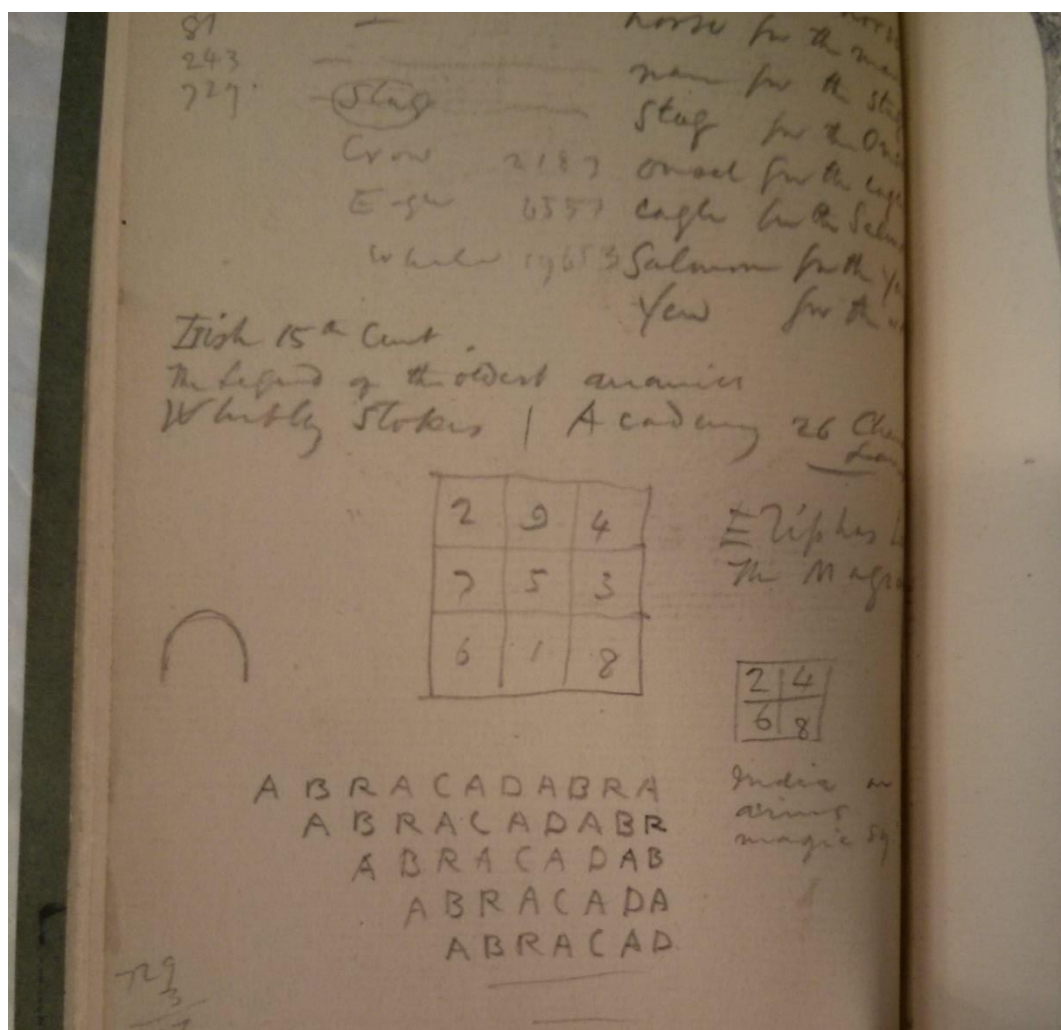


Figure 1: Éliphas Lévi in Lethaby's Sketchbook (Source: Lethaby, 1886)

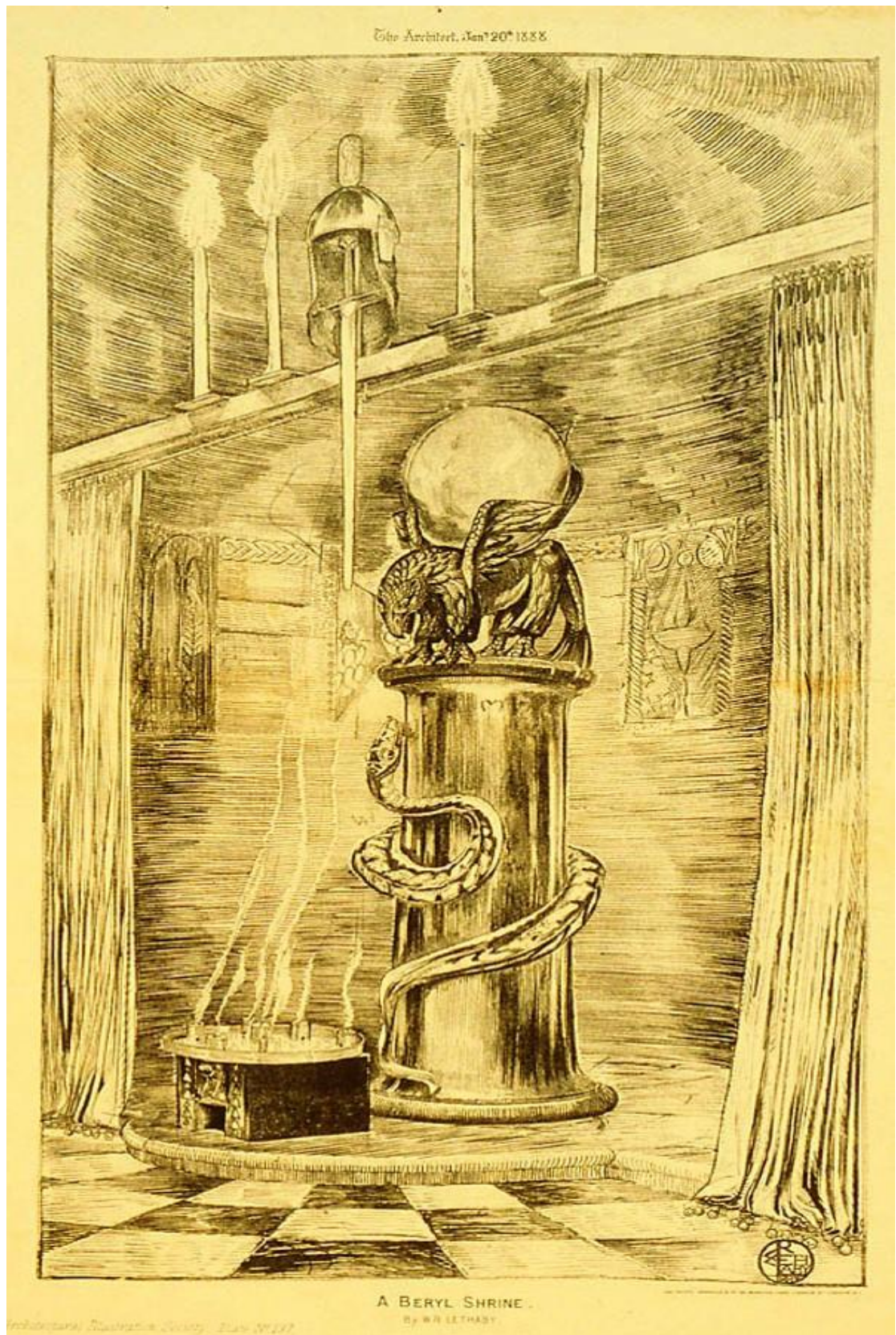


Figure 2: A Beryl Shrine (Source: Lethaby, 1888)

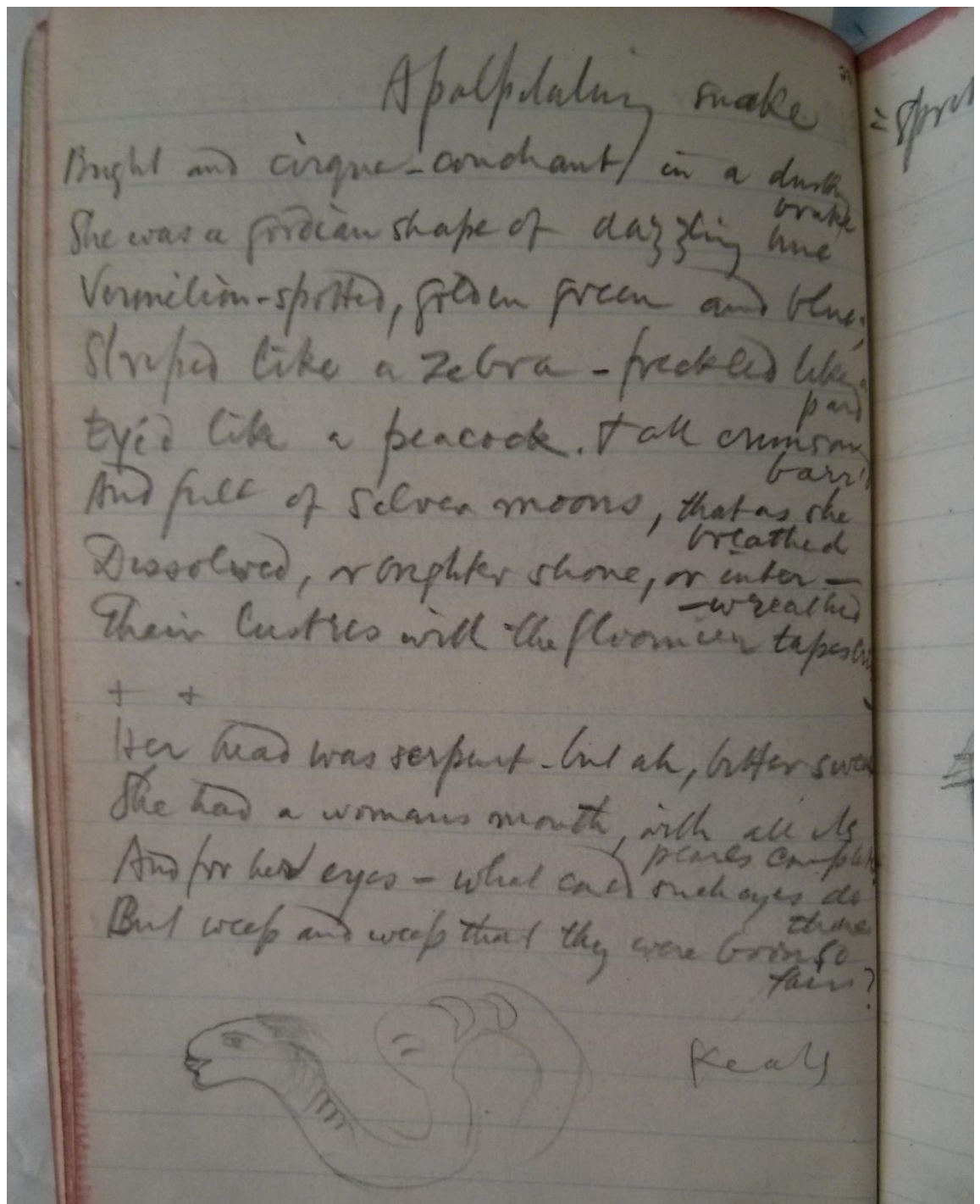


Figure 3: Poem 'Lamia' by Keats (Source: Lethaby, 1886)



Figure 4: Lady Lilith (Source: Rossetti, 1866-68)



Figure 5: Liverpool Cathedral Competition Relief. The author has overlaid the second image with diagrams seen in red and blue to make clearer the symbolism employed by Lethaby. (Source: Lethaby, 1902)

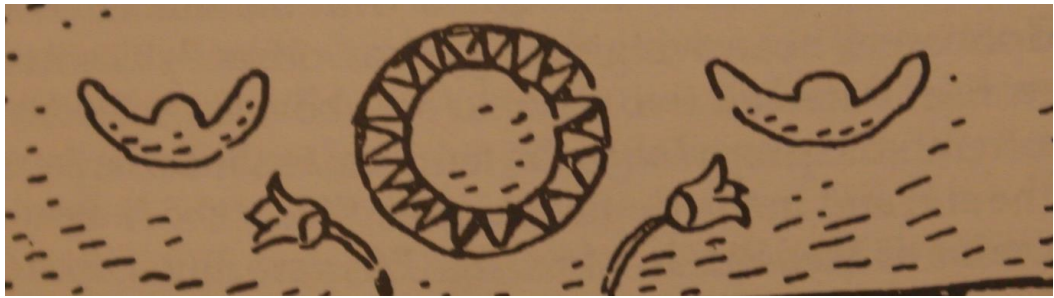


Figure 6: Sun rises between two moons (Source: Lethaby, 1891)



Figure 7: The Golden Gate of the Sun (Source: Lethaby, 1891)

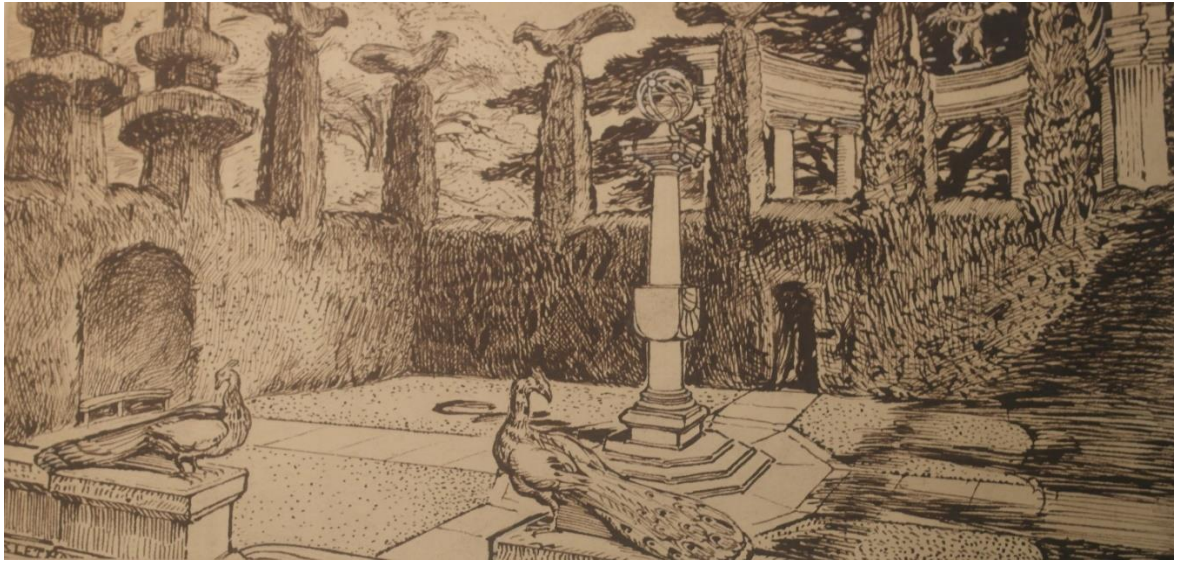
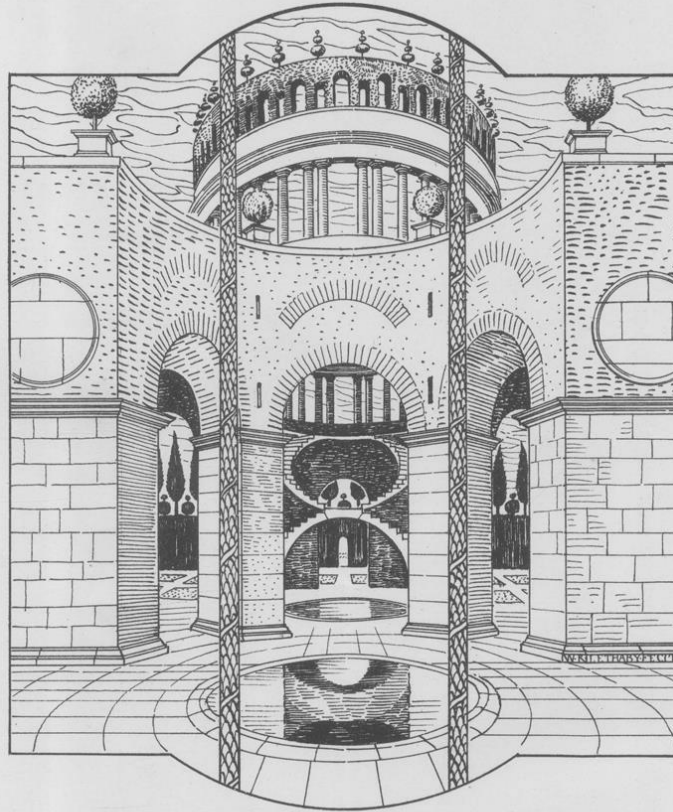


Figure 8: A Garden Enclosed (Source: Lethaby, 1889a)

THE ARCHITECTURAL
ASSOCIATION SKETCH BOOK:



NEW SERIES VOL. IX.



LONDON: 9 CONDVIT STREET. W.
1 8 8 9

Archit. Assoc. Sketch Book, "New Series," Vol. 9.

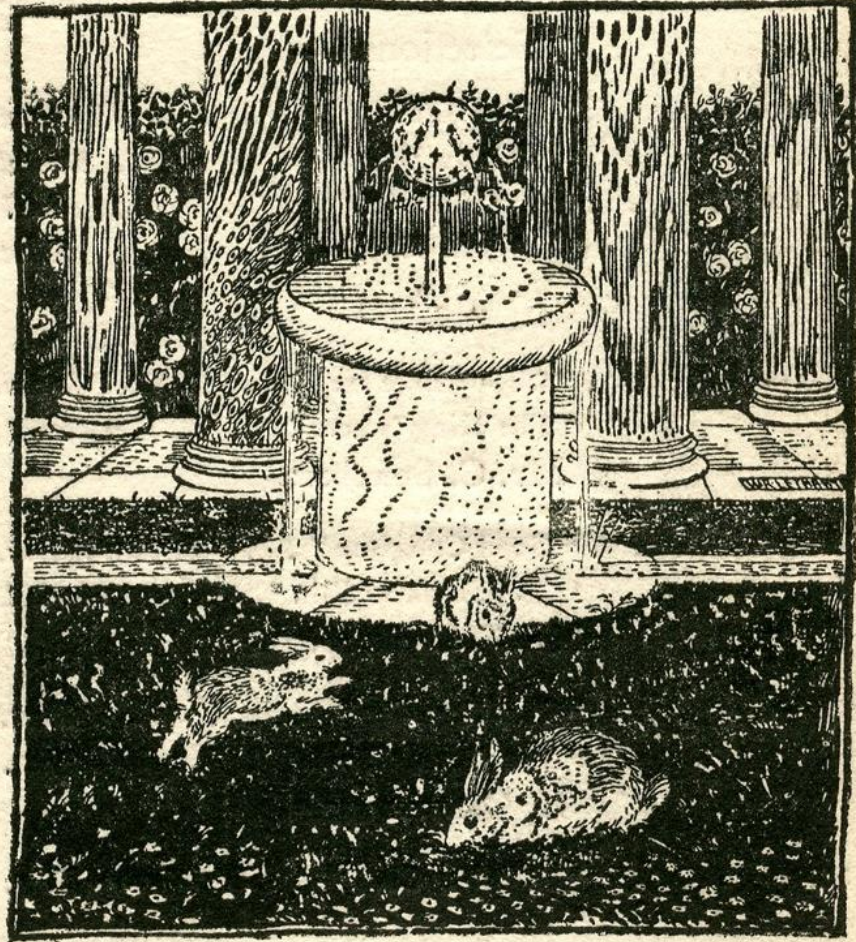
C.F. KELL, PHOTO-LITHO, 8, FURNIVAL ST. HOLBORN, E.C.

Figure 9: The Architectural Association Sketchbook Frontispiece (Source: Lethaby, 1889b)

The Architectural Association

9, CONDUIT STREET, LONDON, W

President :—LEONARD A. S. STOKES



ANNUAL DINNER, 28 MAY, 1891

AT THE CRITERION, PICCADILLY, W

Session 1891—1892

President :—FRANK T. BAGGALLAY

Figure 10: The Architectural Association Annual Dinner Invitation (Source: Lethaby, 1891a)



Figure 11: Font and Canopy (Source: Lethaby, 1890a)



Figure 12: A Drawing of a Room (Source: Lethaby, 1885)



Figure 13: Splendor Solis Plate Sixteen (Source: Trismosin, 1582)



Figure 14: Candle Sconce (Source: MacDonald and MacDonald, 1896)

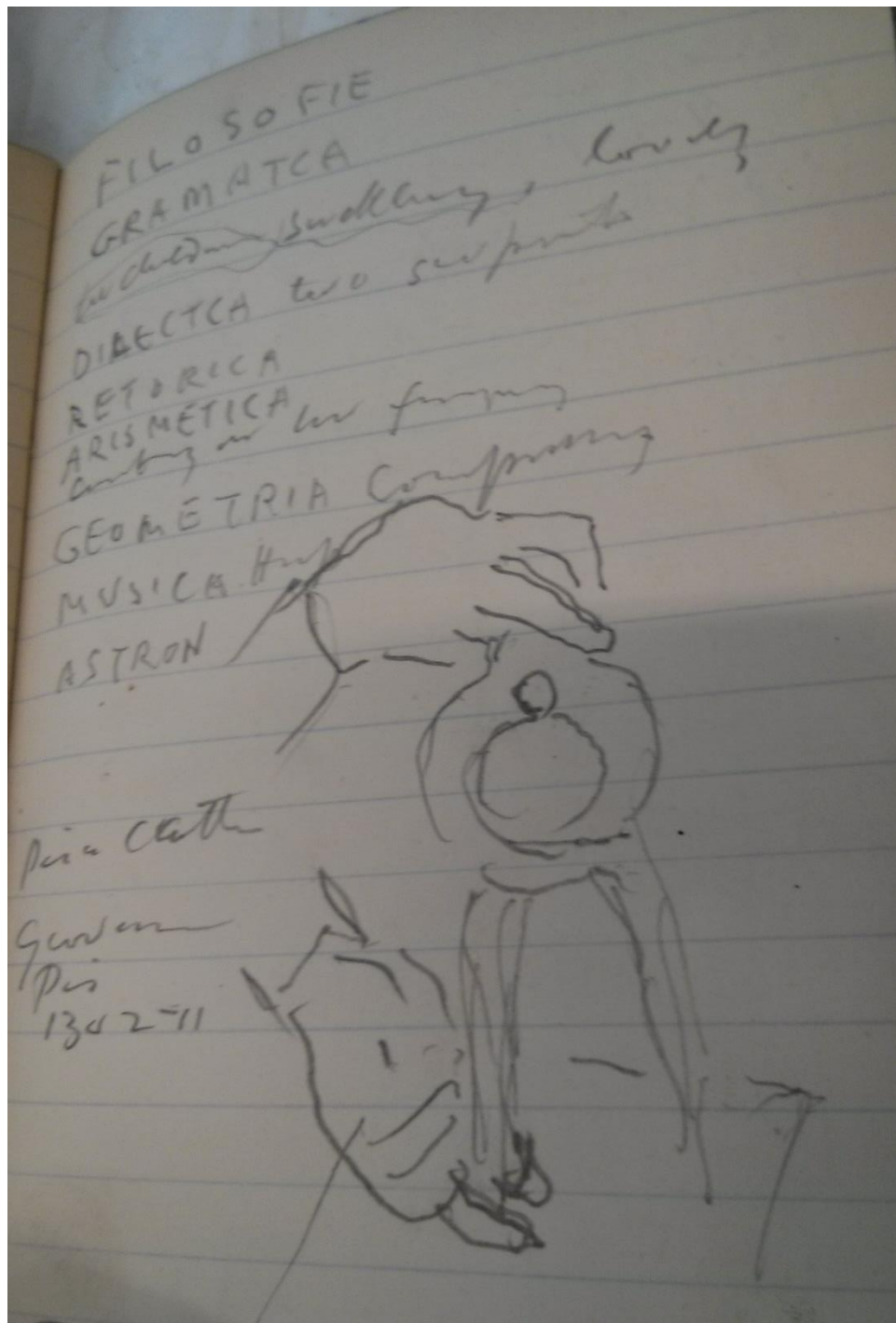


Figure 15: Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences (Source: Lethaby, 1901)



Figure 16: Seal of Solomon (Source: Lévi, 1854-56: facing 1)

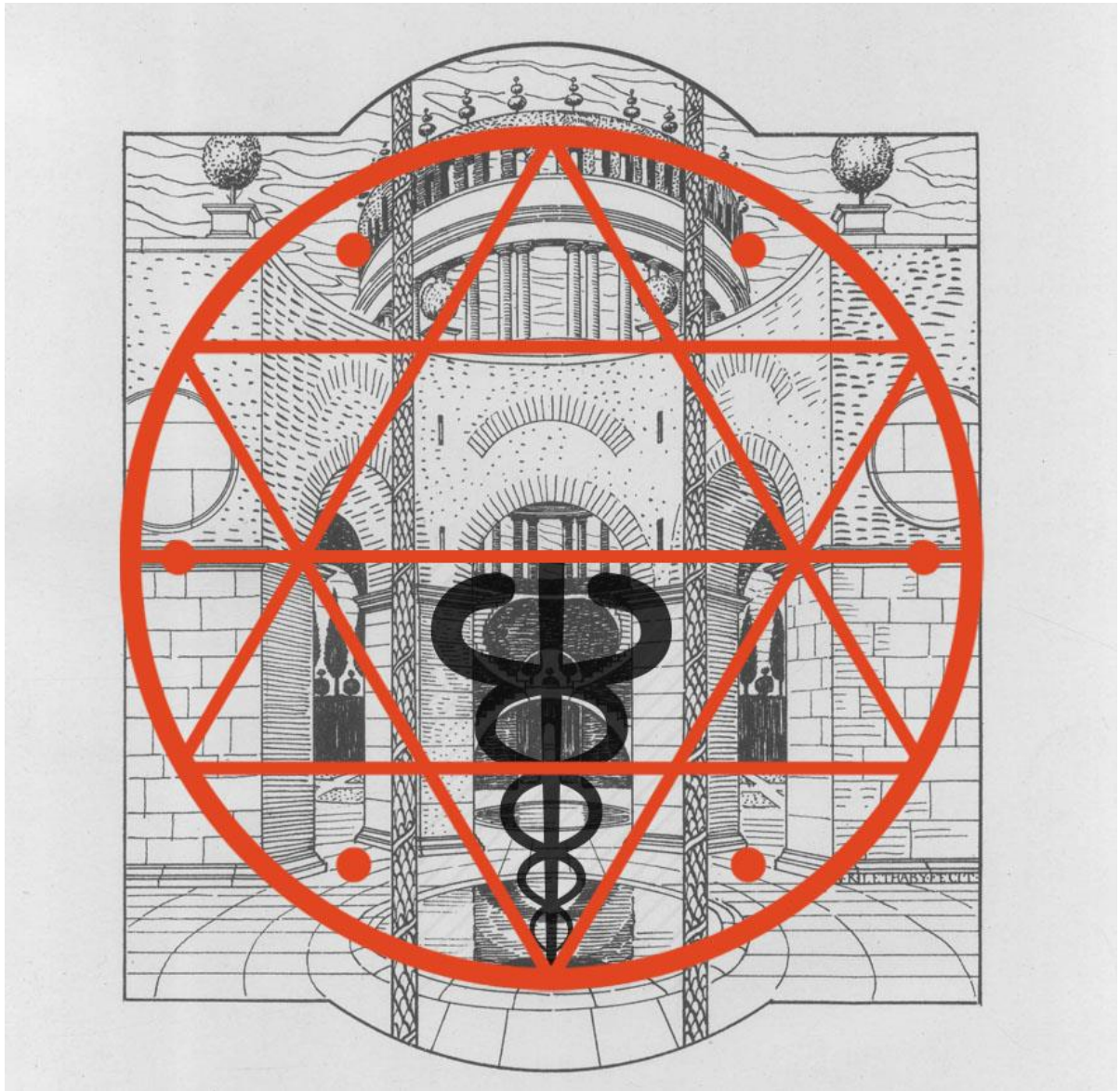


Figure 17: Architectural Association Sketchbook frontispiece deconstructed. The author has overlaid the drawing with an image of the caduceus (seen in the centre) and the Star of David enclosed within a circle. The Star of David is spilt horizontally with a line running through its centre.



Figure 18: The Sabbatic Goat (Source: Lévi, 1854-56:186)

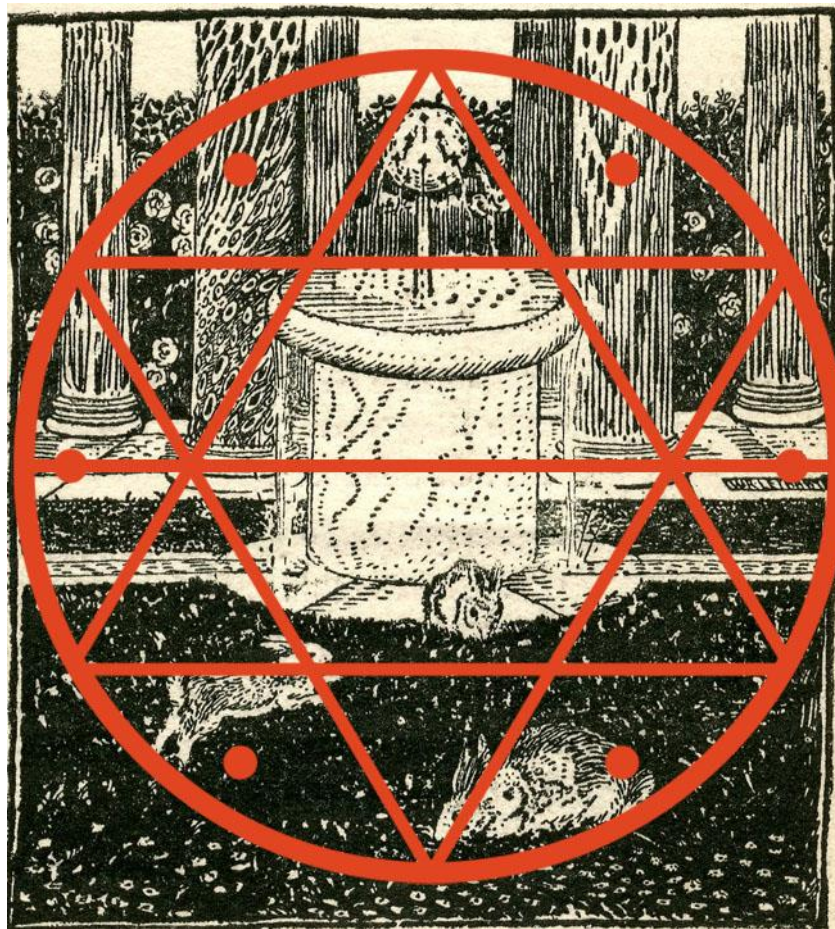


Figure 19: The Architectural Annual Dinner Invitation deconstructed. The author has overlaid the drawing with the Star of David enclosed within a circle. The Star of David is spilt horizontally with a line running through its centre.



Figure 20: Sacred and Profane Love (Source: Titian, 1514)



Figure 21: The Holy Family with Three Hares (Source Dürer, 1496)

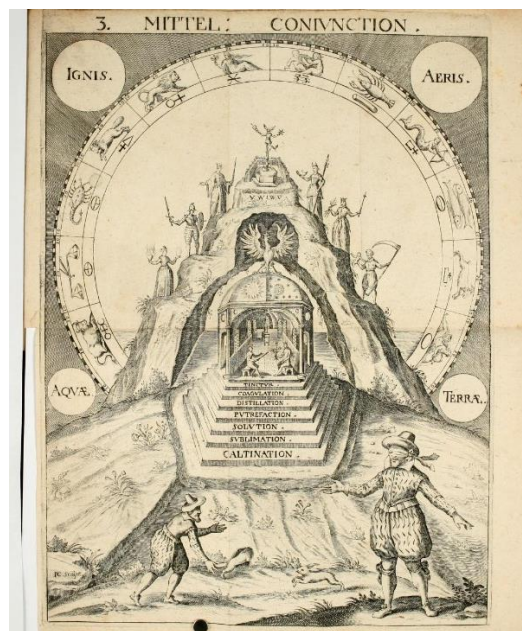


Figure 22: Plate 3: Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur in Alchymia (Source: Michelspacher, 1615)



Figure 23: Mons Philosophorum 1604 (Source: Zacaire, 1724)



Figure 24: Hunt of Venus (Source: Valentinus, 1677)

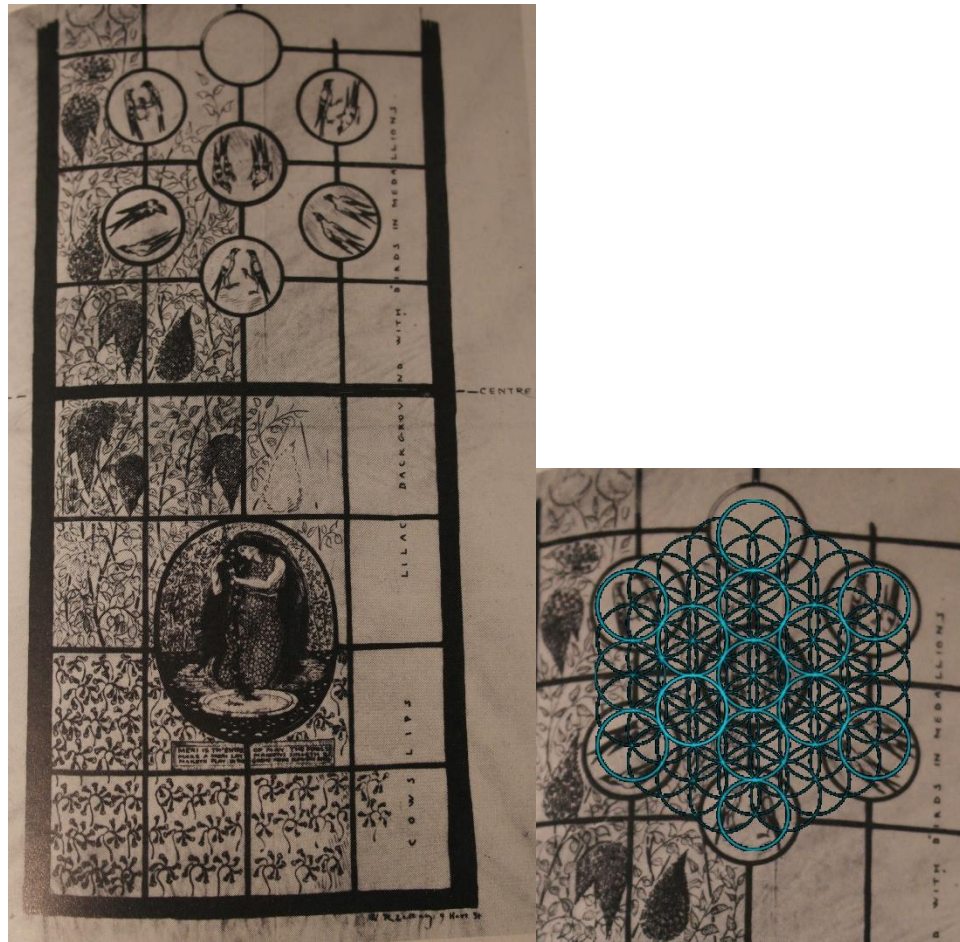


Figure 25: Design for a sash window in grisaille glass, at Bromley, Kent. The author has overlaid the design on the right with a diagram of the Flower of Life. The Fruit of Life found within the Flower of Life diagram is emphasised in blue.
(Source: Lethaby, 1890b)



Figure 26: The tree of the philosophers, surrounded by symbols of the *opus* (Source: Mylius, 1622)



Figure 27: The Mercurial Fountain (Source: Rosarium Philosophorum, 1550)

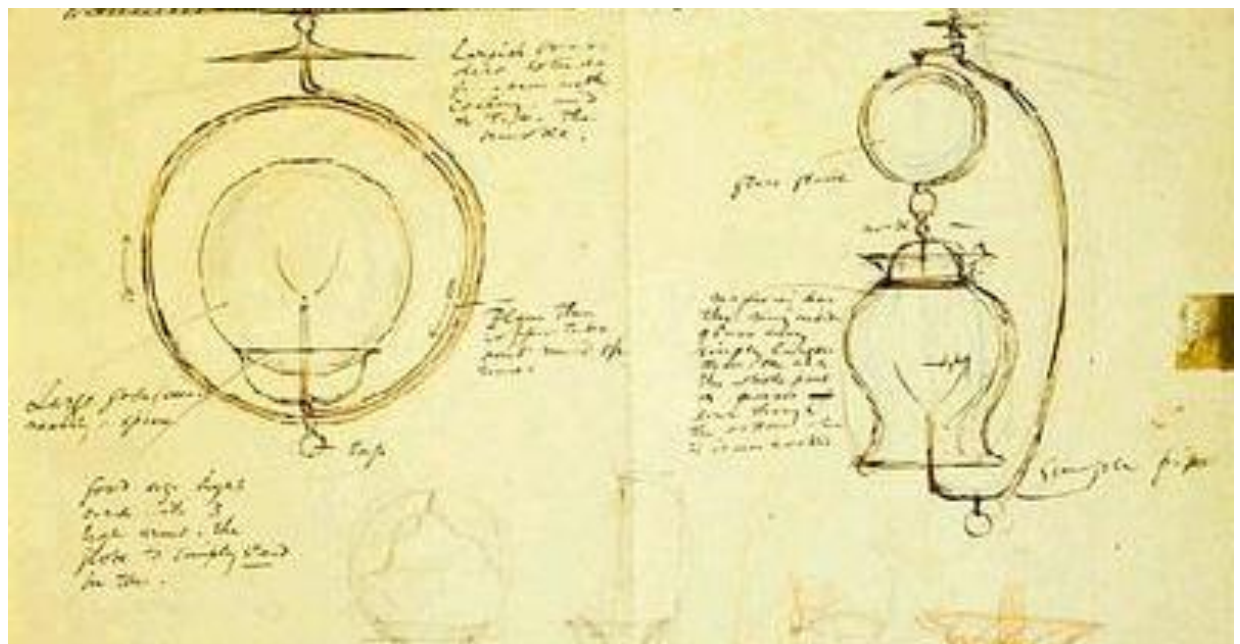


Figure 28: Water collection for font designs (Source: Lethaby, 1889c)



Figure 29: Ripley Scrolls (Source: Huntington Library, 1415-1490)



Figure 30: The Hurst plan (Source: Lethaby, 1894)

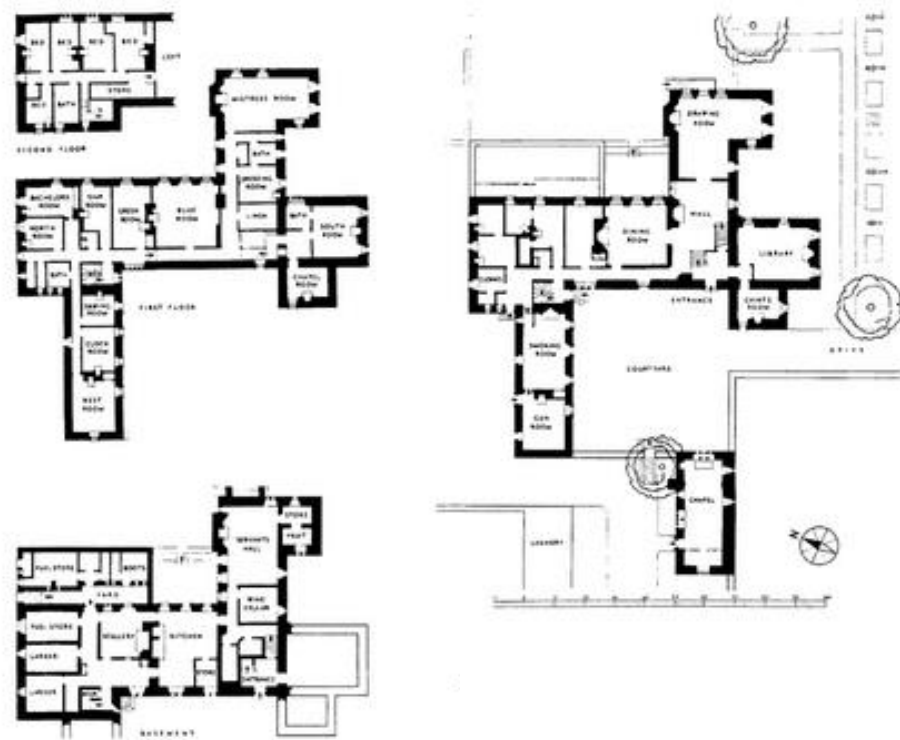


Figure 31: Melsetter House plan (Source: Lethaby, 1898)

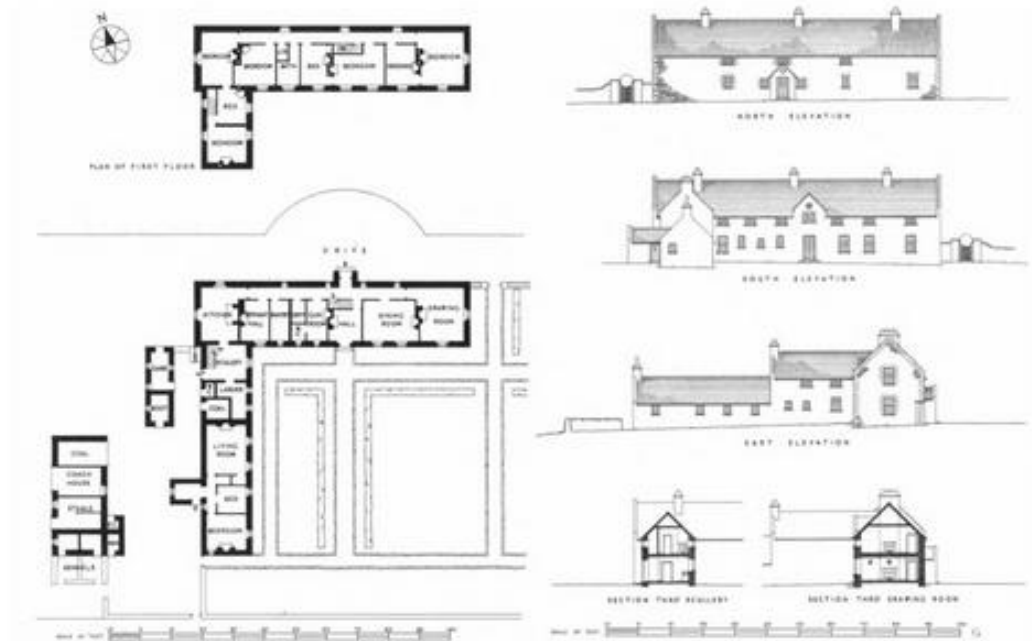


Figure 32: Rysa Lodge plan (Source: Lethaby, 1900a)



Figure 33: High Coxlease plan (Source: Lethaby 1900b)



Figure 34: Meander in the interior of the garden house at Avon Tyrrell



Figure 35: Arch Gateway in courtyard at Avon Tyrrell



Figure 36: South façade at High Coxlease



Figure 37: Crow stepped gable at Melsetter House (Source: Lethaby, 1890c)

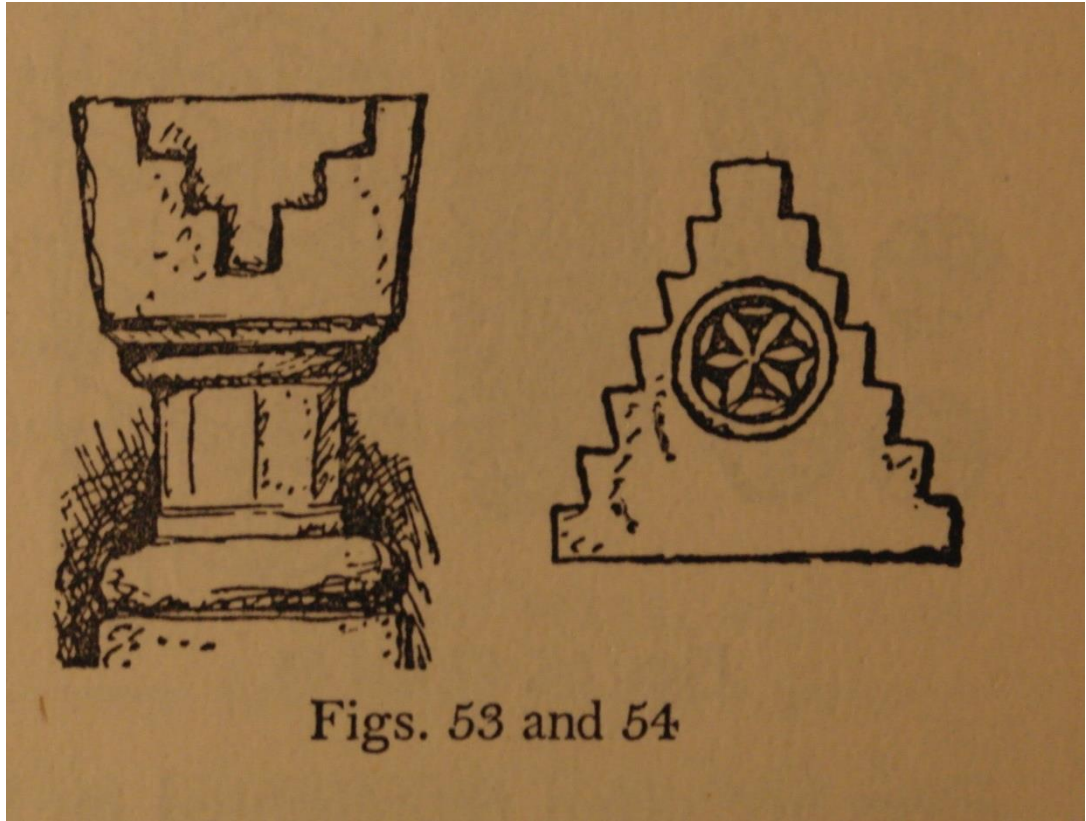


Figure 38: Ziggurat charm (Source: Lethaby, 1928)



Figure 39: Protruding chimney bricks at Avon Tyrrell. (The author has overlaid the image with a swastika symbol)

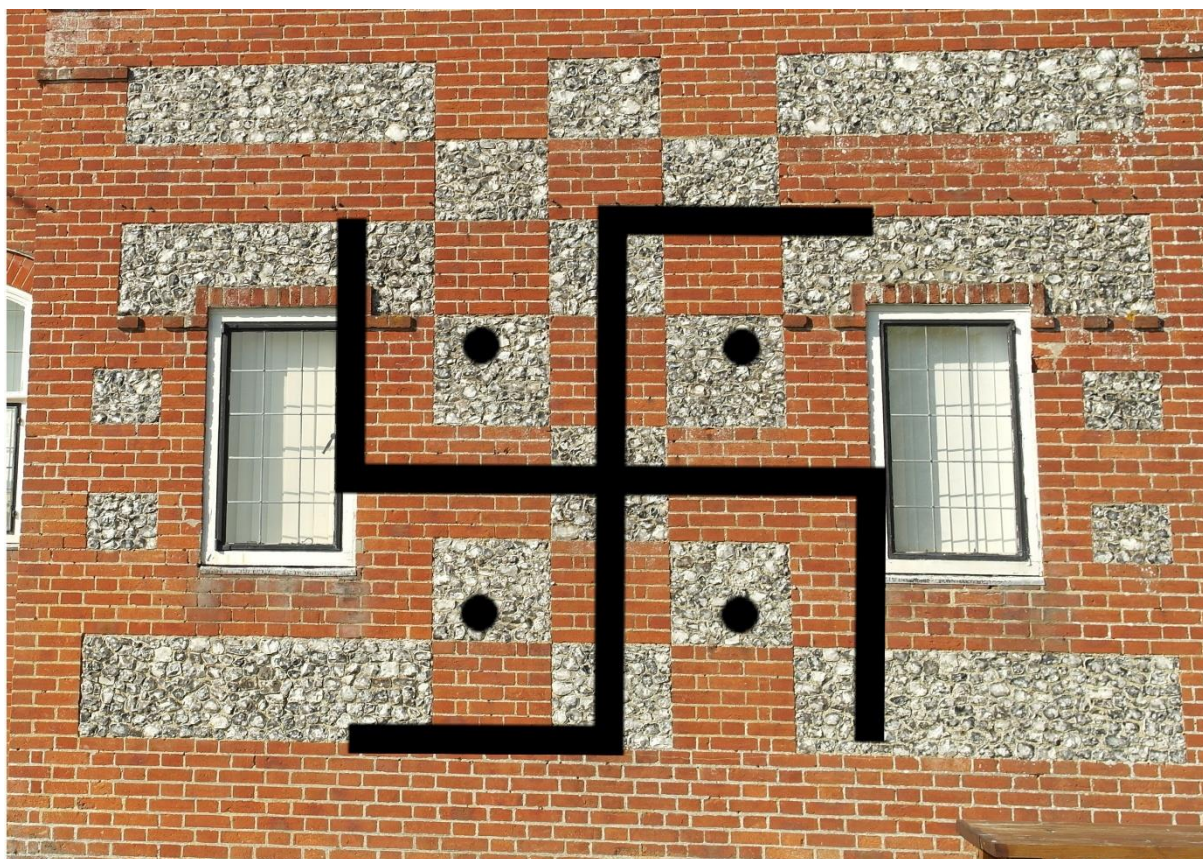


Figure 40: Inlaid stone pattern at Avon Tyrrell. (The author has overlaid the image with a swastika symbol)



Figure 41: The Theosophical Society seal (Source: The Theosophical Society, 1875)

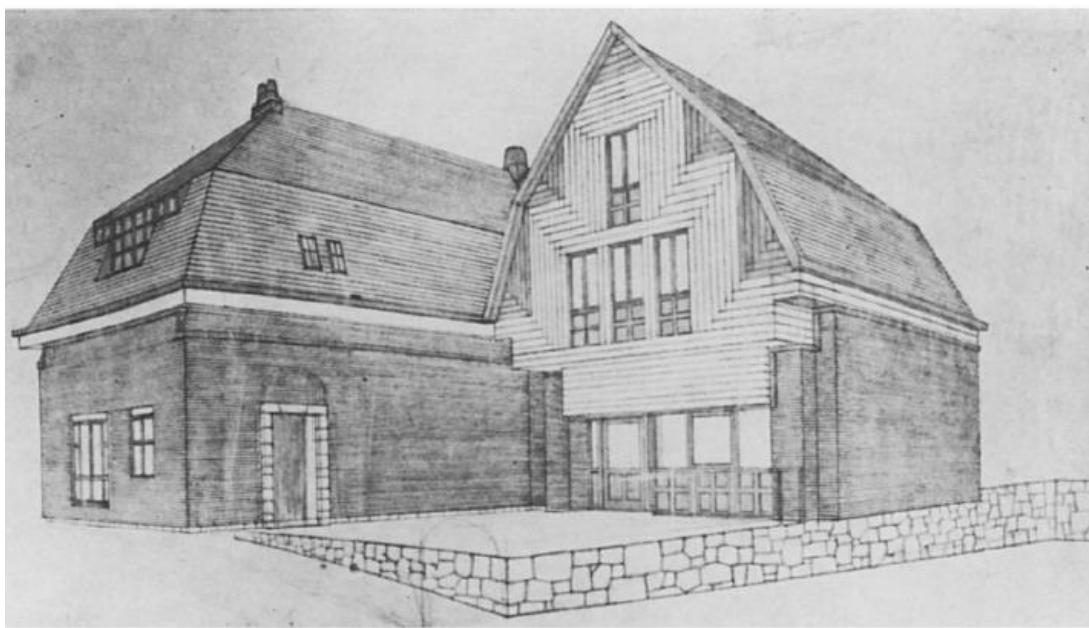


Figure 42: Thorn-Prikker House in Hagen (Source: Lauweriks, 1907)

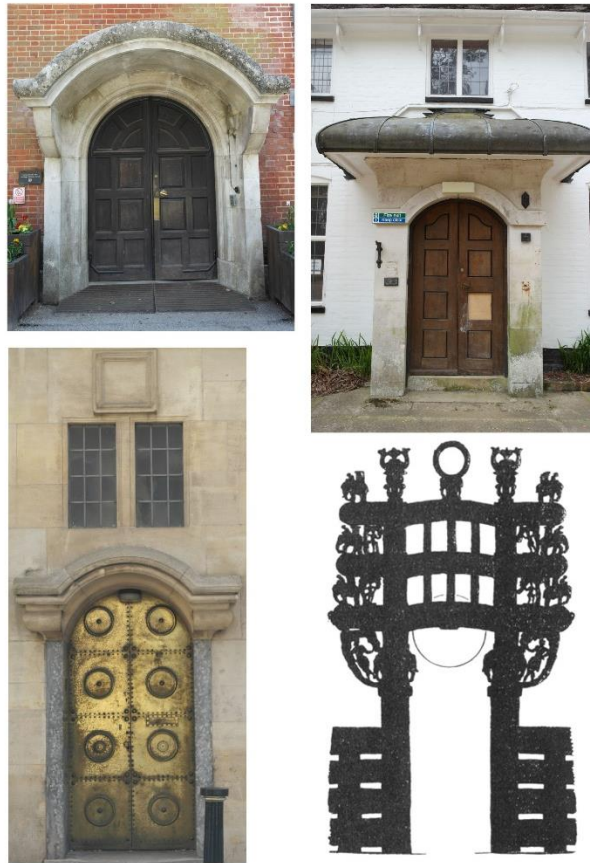


Figure 43: Lethaby's doorway designs at Avon Tyrell, High Coxlease and the Eagle Insurance Company Building, compared to his illustration of 'The Golden Gate of the Sun' taken from *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*



Figure 44: Lethaby's attempt at creating a world temple at Avon Tyrell and All Saints Church. Drawings by Lethaby taken from *Architecture Mysticism and Myth*



Figure 45: Exhibition for Christian Art, Dusseldorf (Source: Lauweriks, 1901)



Figure 46: Exhibition for Christian Art, Dusseldorf (Source: Lauweriks, 1901)

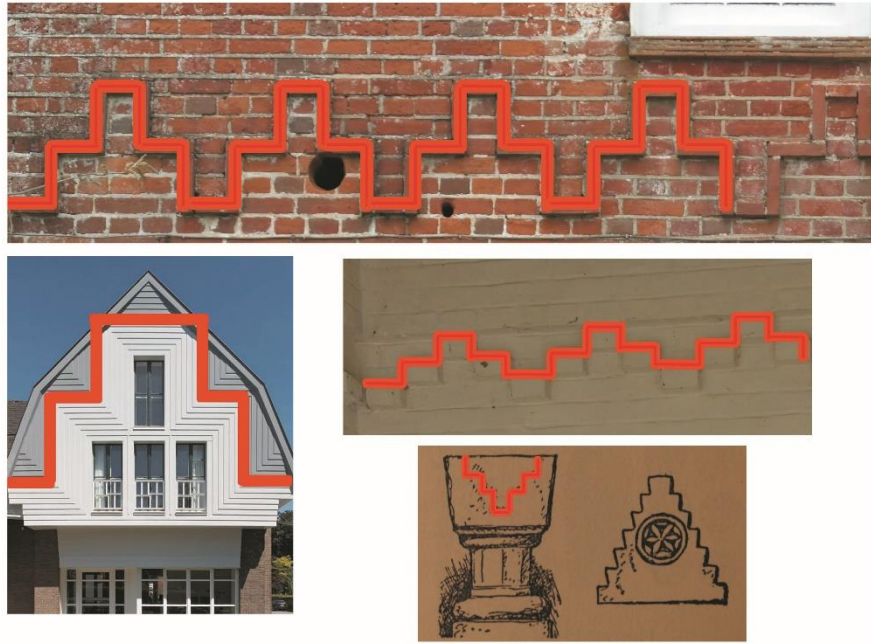


Figure 47: Lethaby's and Lauweriks's comparable use of the meander deconstructed. The author has annotated the images in red to emphasise the use of the meander.



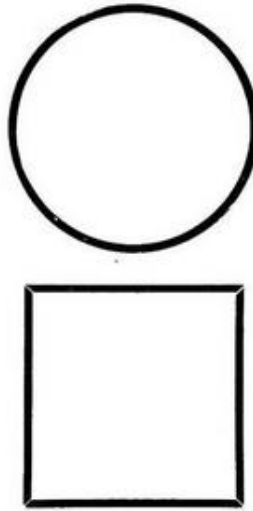
Figure 48: Eagle Insurance Building



Figure 49: Garden House at Avon Tyrrell

ARCHITECTURE
MYSTICISM AND
MYTH. *By W. R. Lethaby*
with illustrations by the Author

*'Are there symbols which may be called constant; proper to
all races, all societies, and all countries?'* CÉSAR DALY.



1 8 9 2
NEW YORK: Macmillan & Co.



Figure 50: Preface to Architecture, Mysticism and Myth (Source: Lethaby, 1892)

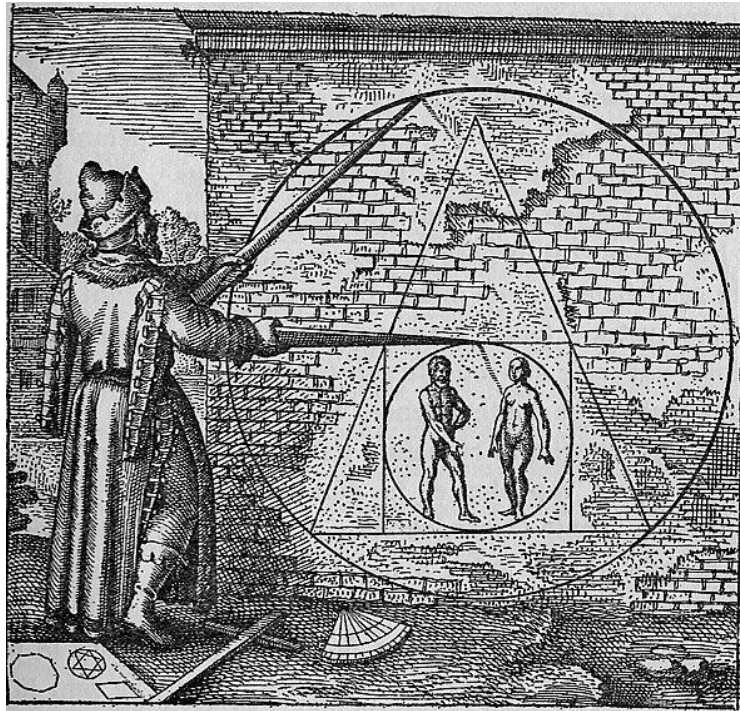


Figure 51: Atlanta Fugiens emblem XXI (Source: Maier, 1618)

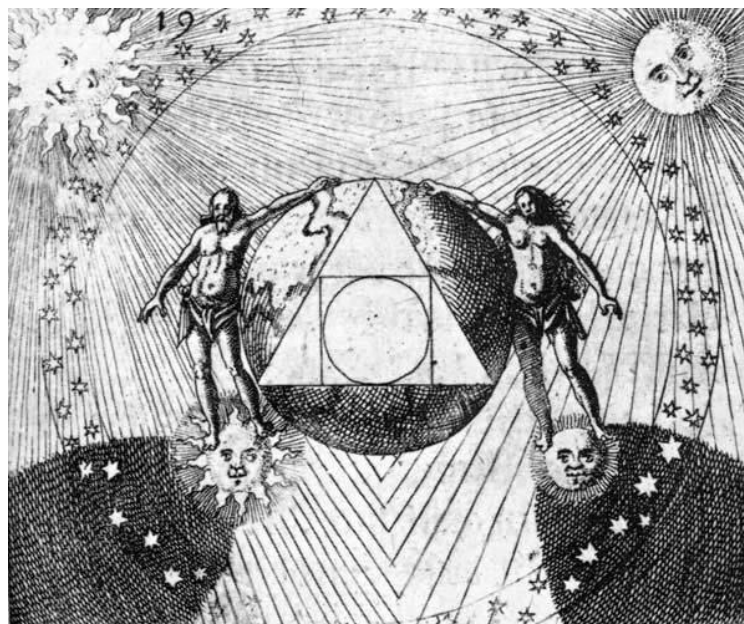


Figure 52: Alchemical use of the square circle (Source: Jamsthaler, 1625)

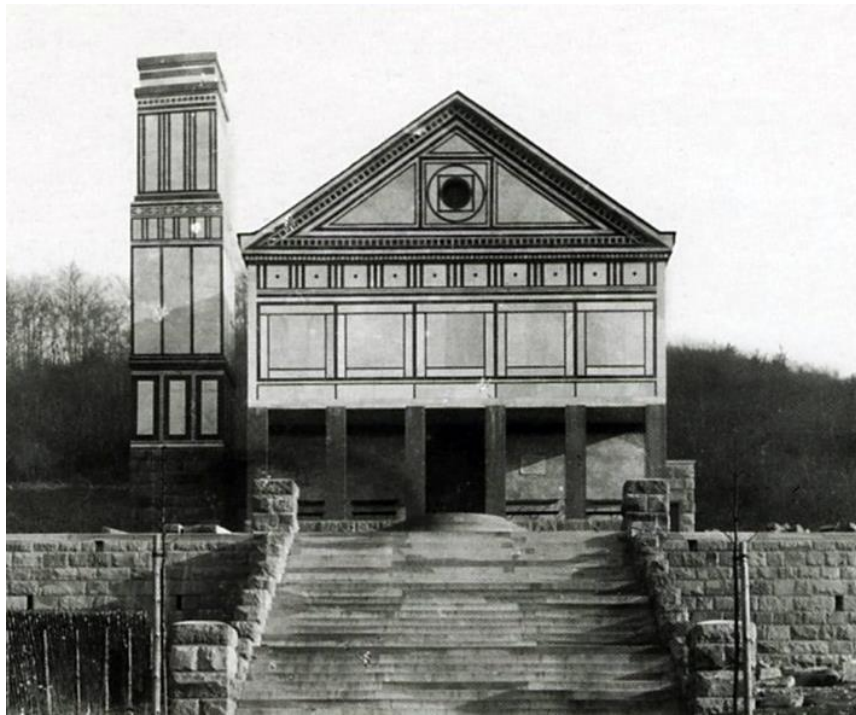


Figure 53: Peter Behrens crematorium in Hagen, Celstern (Source: Behrens, 1907)

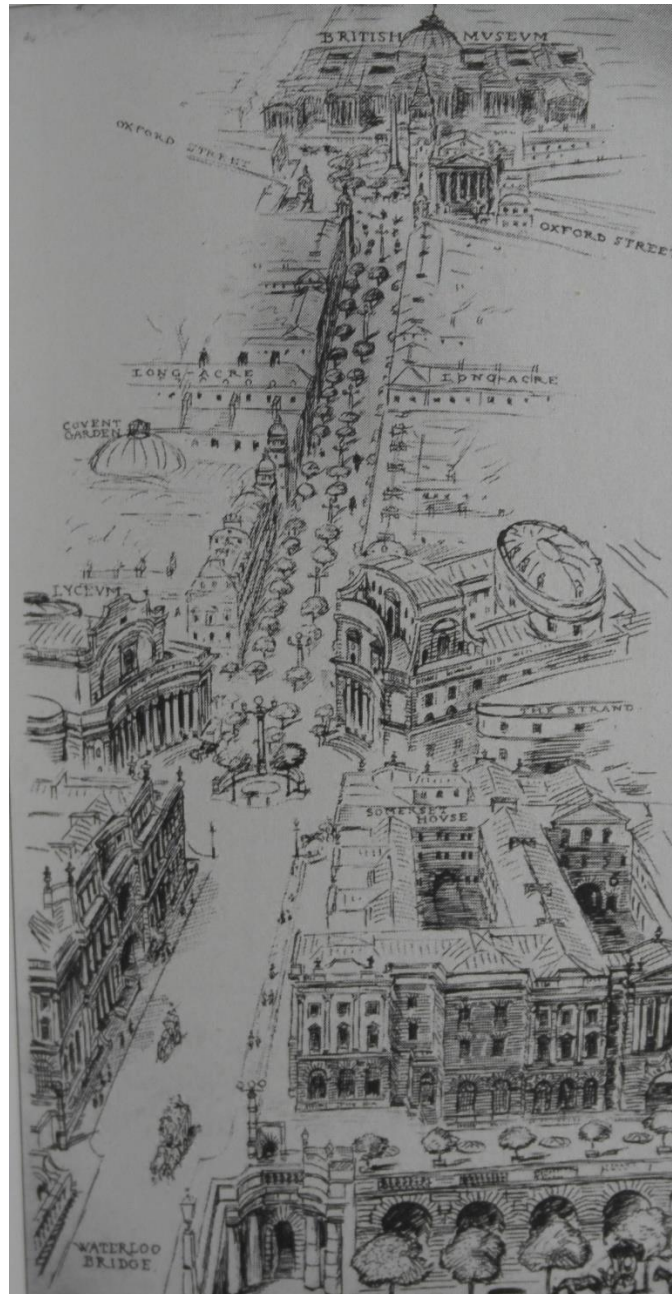


Figure 54: A Proposal for a Sacred Way (Source: Lethaby, 1891b)



Figure 55: Frank Lloyd Wright monogram (Source: Wright, 1898)

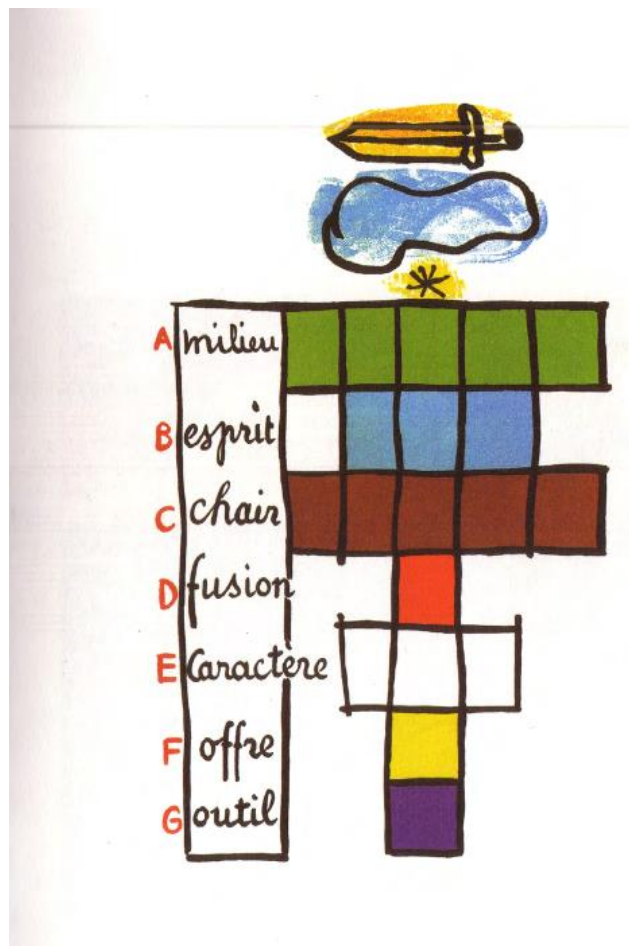


Figure 56: The Poem of the Right Angle, iconostase (Source: Le Corbusier, 1947-53)



Figure 57: Lethaby monogram (Source: Lethaby, 1887)

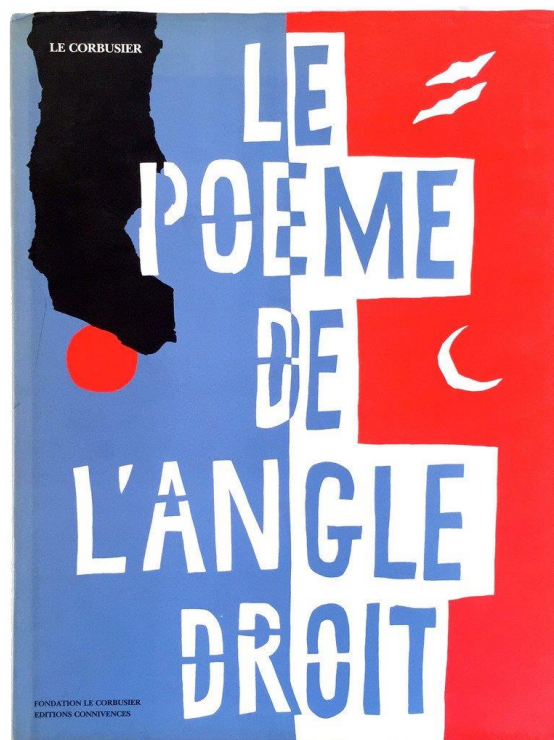


Figure 58: Front cover of the Poem of the Right Angle (Source: Le Corbusier, 1947-53)

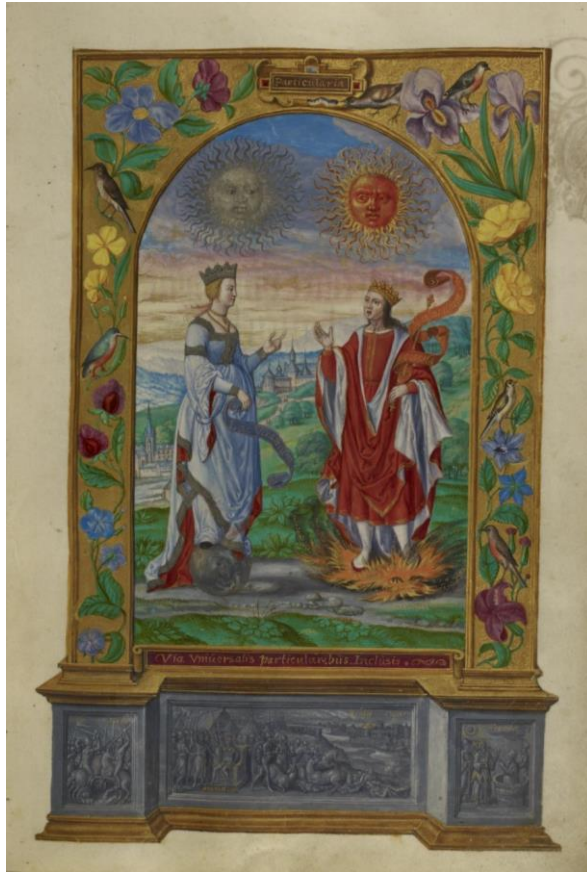


Figure 59: Splendor Solis plate four (Source: Trismosin, 1582)



Figure 60: The Extraction or impregnation of the Soule (Source: Rosarium Philosophorum, 1550)



Figure 61: The Poem of the Right Angle, (Source: Le Corbusier, 1947-1953)

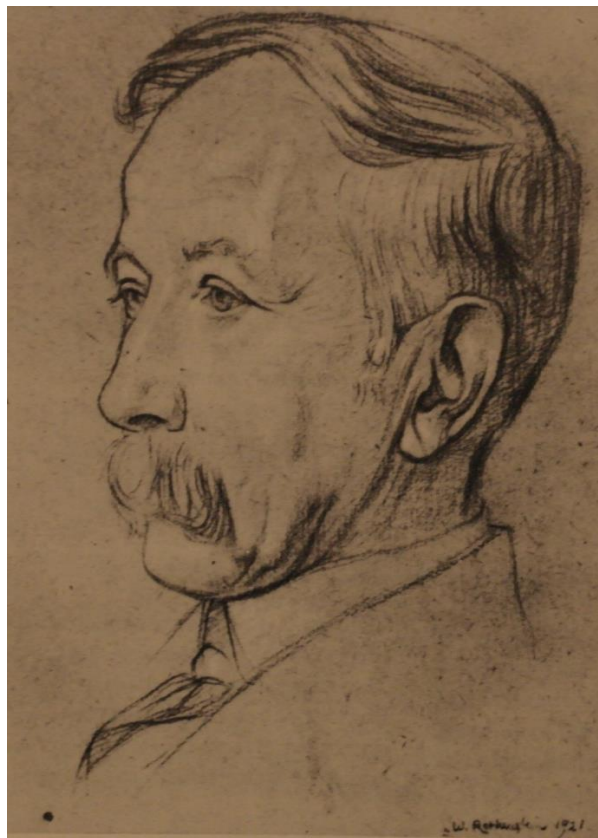


Figure 62: Portrait of Lethaby by Sir William Rothenstein (Rothenstein, 1921)