

MONAS HEIROGLYPHICA



- The Inner Journey

by

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This second article follows on from the *Monas Heiroglyphica - A Study of John Dee's Famous Symbol* by Dylan Warren-Davis.



Figure 1. The End Motif from John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* (Antwerp, 1564)

At the conclusion of Dee's work is found the above motif.¹ At first glance it appears just like a decorative emblem to conclude the book, however it is a motif that requires as much attention as the frontispiece. At the top of this *Monas* image is a feminine figure holding aloft a seven-pointed star in her right hand and a sheaf in her left hand. A virgin holding a wheat sheaf is the image of Virgo, while the star that she holds is Spica or Stella Maris (Star of Mary) - the fixed star located at the heart of the constellation. Virgo is the sign Mercury's exaltation, said to be its Joy. The sign of Virgo is conspicuously missing from the frontispiece, as both the Sun and Moon have their corresponding signs of rulership and exaltation surrounding the egg, while Mercury only has the two twins of Gemini - the sign of its rulership - located on each side of the egg.² The representation of Virgo in the end motif is therefore particularly significant, additionally highlighted by the large size that Virgo is depicted at the crown of the motif. Thus Virgo here reflects the spiritually transformed Mercury, the transmutation of the egg.

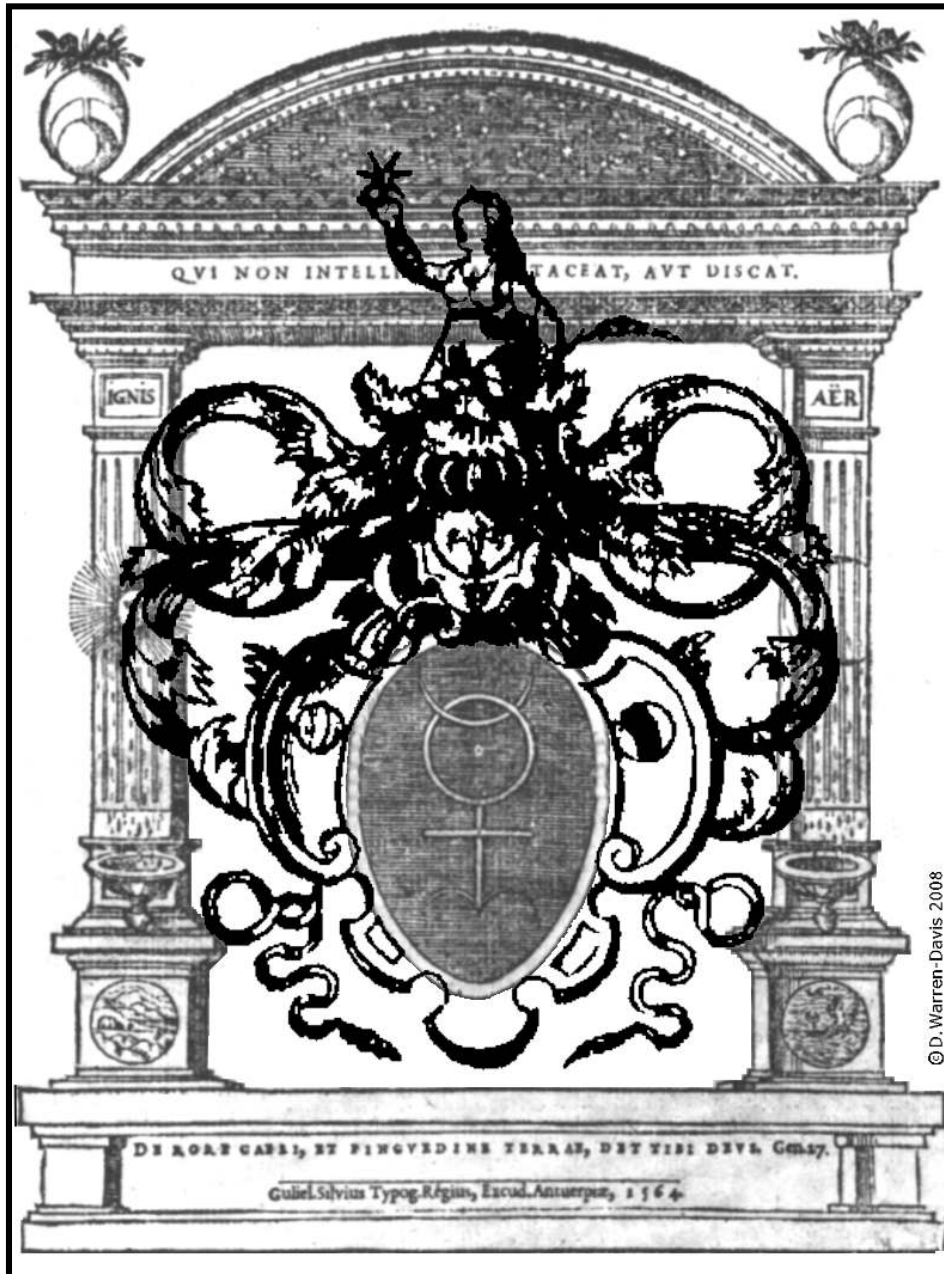


Figure 2. The End Motif projected onto the framework of the frontispiece to Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica

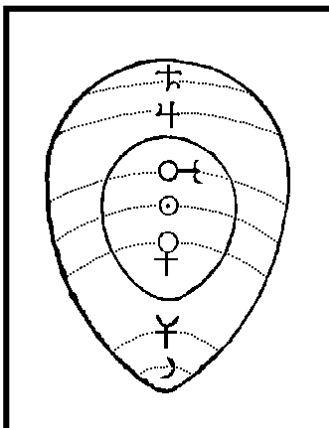


Figure 3. The Egg before transformation.

When the end motif is transposed into the twin pillars of the frontispiece then the positioning of Virgo reveals further interesting details. Key elements of Virgo's figure of fit around the lintel. The tip of the sheaf touches the base, the crown of her head touches the top and the star of Spica reaches up into the heavens and is positioned amongst the stars. Thus Virgo represents a link between Mercury inside the egg and Spica in the heavens.

In Theorem XXXIV from the text includes two further representations of the egg.³ The first shows an egg before transformation, as in figure 3. It shows the traditional Ptolemaic order, with Saturn at the top, with Jupiter next, followed by Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and finally, the Moon. In the symbolism of the egg, the yellow yolk corresponds to the Sulphur principle

through its association with the Sun, while the white or albumen corresponds to the Salt principle through its association with the Moon. Thus in the incubation and transformation of the egg these two components are symbolically combined so that the exalted Mercury hatches out. A closer look at the Planets inside the egg, in figure 3, reveals these correspondences, for the glyphs of Mars, Sun and Venus are all located in the yolk and have in common the Circle of the Soul - linking them to the Sulphur principle, while the glyphs of Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury and the Moon are all located in the albumen and have in common the Crescent of the Spirit - linking them to the Salt principle. It is also noteworthy that the glyph for Mercury as Dee has included it in this diagram seems incomplete, since the glyph lacks a complete Circle of the Soul, however Dee has used it to simply describe an un-illuminated mind, before transformation through inner work.



Figure 4. The Hermetic Egg projected onto the frontispiece to Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica

This idea is further illustrated when the diagram for the first egg is projected onto the frontispiece of the

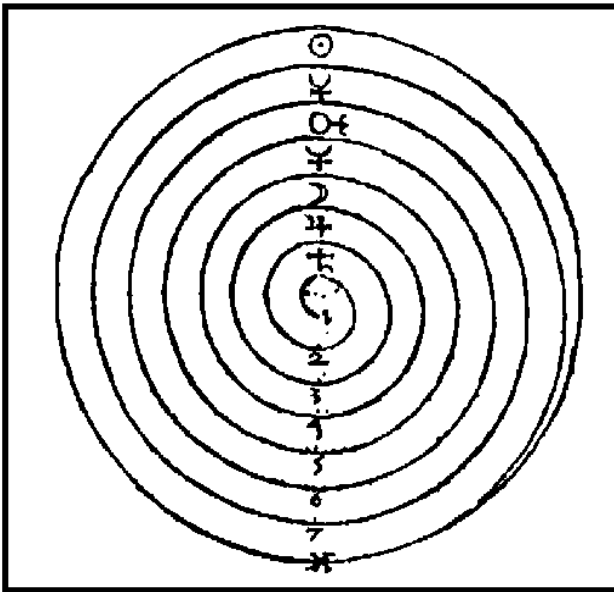


Figure 5. The Process of Transformation.

Monas Heiroglyphica. Now the planetary sequence can be seen to be out of alignment with the key features of the *Monas* glyph, reinforcing the idea of latent inner development. In particular the Solar glyph (☉) most notably does not align with the Solar Circle of the *Monas* glyph, instead it aligns with junction between the Solar Circle and the Cross of Matter. This symbolically shows the neophyte who has yet to connect with the light from their own soul and thus be able to grow spiritually.

The second representations from Theorem XXXIV shows the process of transformation, as in figure 5. It shows different sequence of the Planets to that of the Ptolemaic order, arranged in a spiral sequence.

Starting at the centre of the spiral is found Saturn, then Jupiter, Moon, Mercury, Mars Venus [her is glyph is erroneous, it should be ♀] and finally the Sun, at the top. This sequence reflects the Salt, Mercury and Sulphur configuration described previously inside the Hermetic Egg, however here the sequence of numbering to each turn of the spiral implies stages in the transformative process. Thus the first stage deals with Saturn - that is overcoming all fears, doubts and scepticism, that paralyses the imagination, blocking inner transformation and prevents receptivity to the Hermetic teachings. The second stage deals with Jupiter - that is the humility to ask, the opening of the heart to receive the Hermetic teaching and the

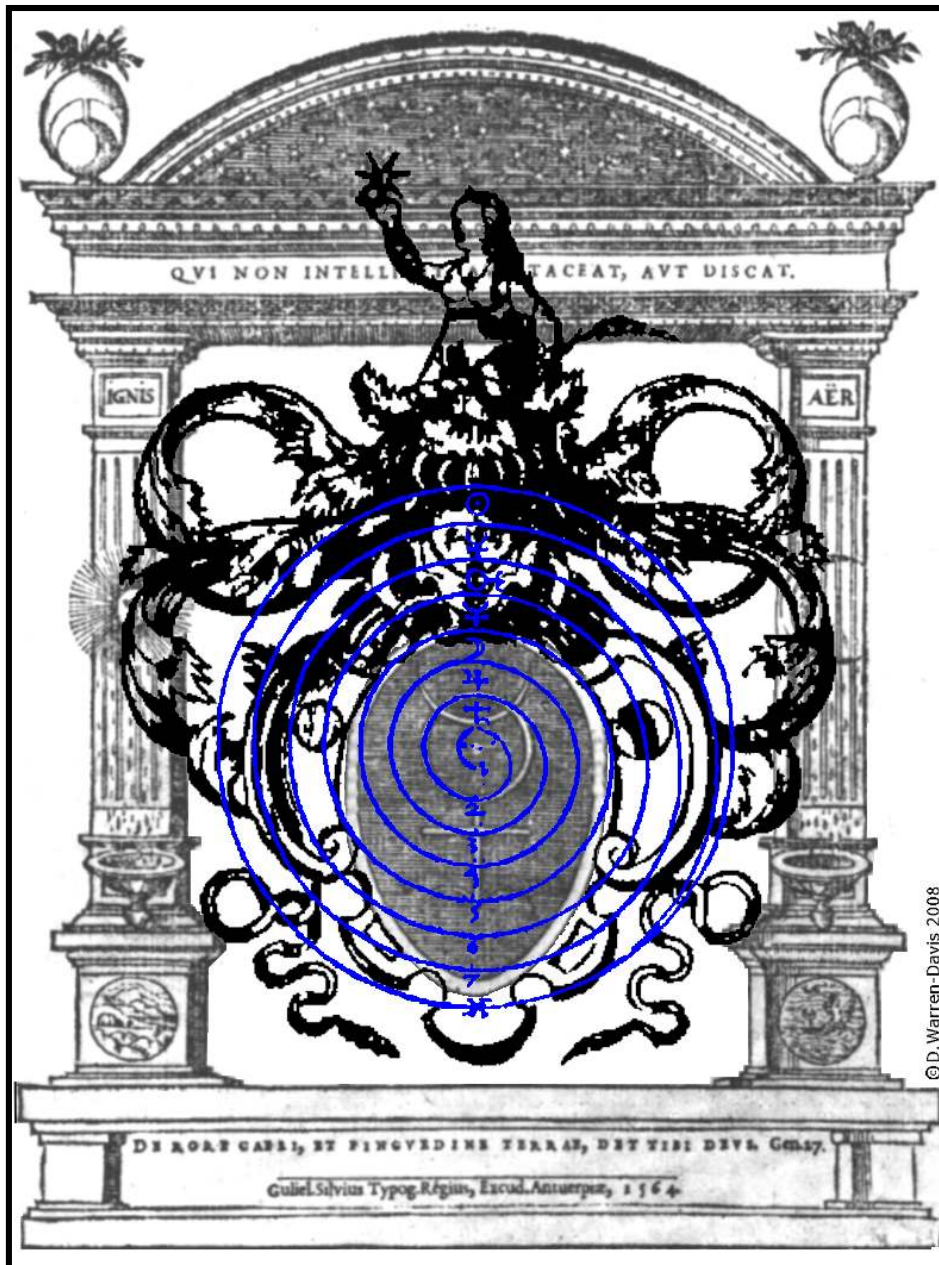


Figure 6. The Spiral of Transformation projected onto the frontispiece to Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*

development of faith in the inner teachings. The third stage deals with the Moon - that is the cultivation of the imagination, so the inner tuition or intuition can start to grow. The forth stage deals with Mercury - that is understanding the Hermetic teaching, facilitating the perception of the inner from the outer - "as above, so below"- and developing your own truth. The fifth stage deals with Mars - that is surrendering ambition and learning to act in accordance with inner instruction. The sixth stage deals with Venus - expression of divine love and the service of humanity. Finally the seventh stage deals with Sun - receiving the grace of the Light and illumination of the soul.

When the Spiral of Transformation projected onto the frontispiece to Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, as in Figure 6, then further correlations become apparent. The spiral path describes the expansion of awareness as the transformation unfolds. At the first stage (𐄂), once free from fear, the light from centre of the soul (symbolised by the dot) ignites and expands to touch the Crescent of the Spirit - activating the imagination. The light increases at the second stage(𐄃), with the heart opening up

awareness expands to embrace the Circle of the Soul. In turn, at the third stage(𐄄), as imagination increases awareness expands beyond the boundary of physical existence, described by the Cross of Matter. By the fourth stage (𐄅), expansion of awareness has reached the boundary of the personality, defined by the egg shell. At the fifth stage(𐄆), awareness further increases through allowing actions to be guided by intuition (𐄇 in 𐄈). Through the development of divine love, at sixth stage (𐄉), awareness expands and embraces the knowledge of creation. A detail highlighted by the Circle of the Venus glyph circumscribing the point of contact between both caducei belonging to each twin of Gemini. Finally at the

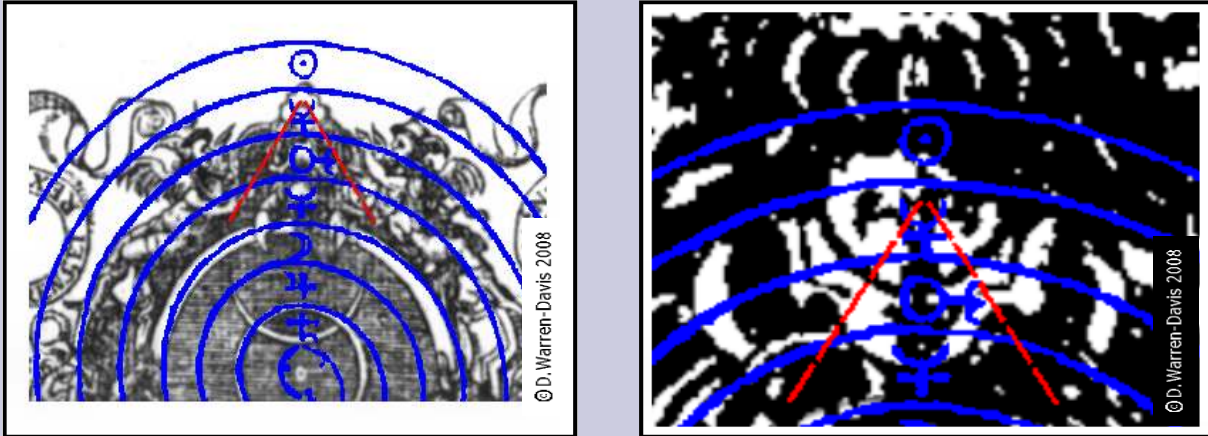


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Figure 7. The Spiral of Transformation projected onto the End Motif to Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*

seventh stage (☉), awareness transcends the limitations of the planetary spheres and the soul becomes free, shown by the Solar glyph exalted above the apex of the Monas glyph.

Figure 8.



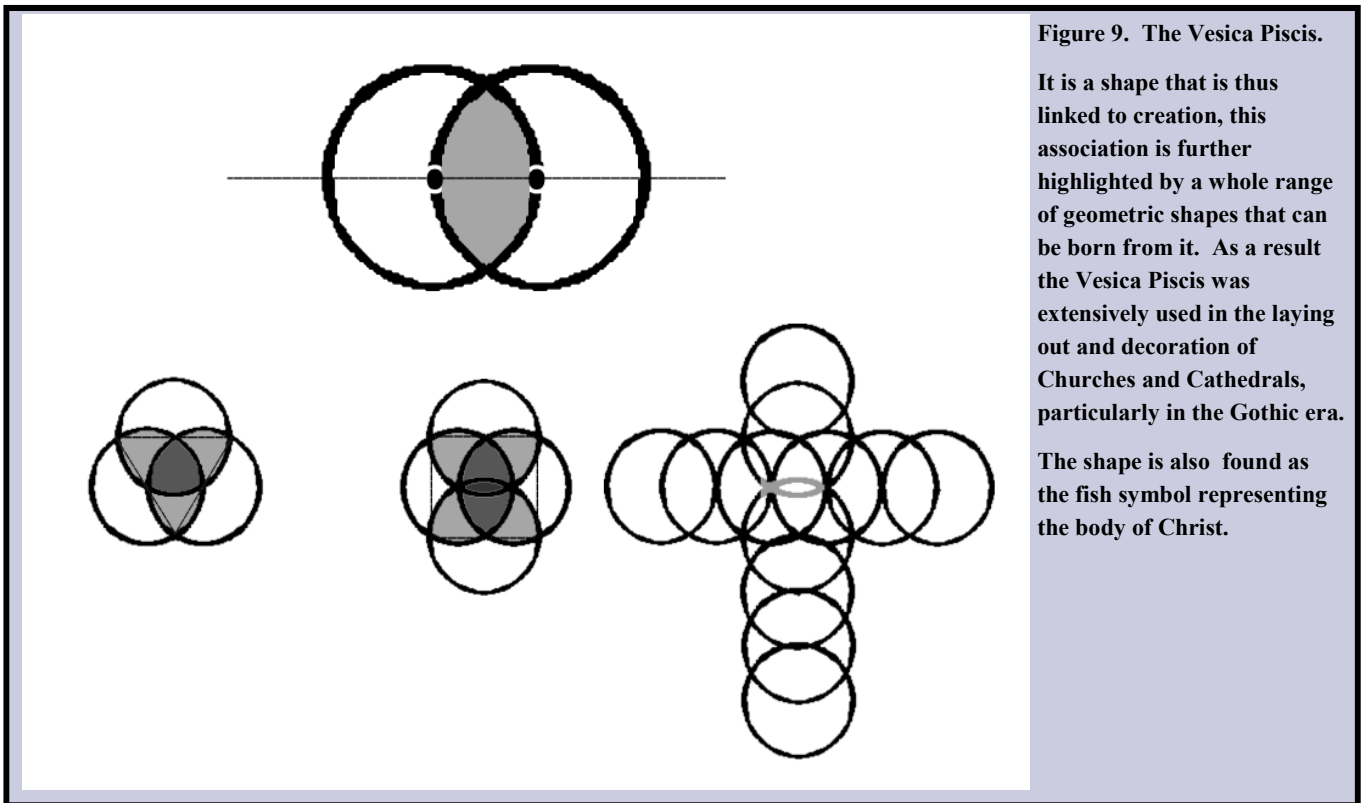
Comparative detail from the frontispiece and end motif. The red lines highlight the position and orientation of the caducei of each twin, which reveals that the location of the dove depicting the Holy Spirit is precisely located at the apex of the caducei.

When the Spiral of Transformation is projected, this time, onto the end motif to Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, as in Figure 7, then more significant correspondences appear. At the sixth stage, the glyph for Venus (♀) becomes superimposed upon a dove, the symbol for the Holy Spirit. The location of the dove is found at precisely the point where in the frontispiece, the two caducei for Gemini point to a central focus. See Figure 8. This recalls the symbolism of the caduceus, explored in the previous article⁴, where the dove is the Mercury principle - the synthesis and balance of the Sulphur and Salt principles. Here though it shows the grace of the Holy Spirit descending in relation to the divine love of the soul.

At the seventh stage, the Solar glyph (☉), becomes crowned by a magnificent wreath, from which swirls of oak leaves burst forth, echoing the twists of the scroll in the frontispiece. The mighty oak tree is ruled by Jupiter, which is significant for during coronations Jupiter is typically chosen to be at the mid-heaven at the time when the crown is to be placed upon the head. This can be found in chart of the coronation of Elizabeth I - a time chosen by Dee himself. Jupiter, in symbolising the drawing down of the spiritual world, as the crown is placed upon the head, represents the investing of spiritual power in the monarch on earth. Thus the coronation of the Sun here symbolises the illumination of the soul. The flourishing swirls thus shows the bestowal of blessings of Jupiter onto the Soul. The three levels of the swirls, shows the blessings descending through all three worlds.

Having exhaustively explored the symbolism of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, there is obviously a Christian dimension to this symbol. The deliberate modification of the Cross of Matter into the Cross of Jesus'

crucifixion and the biblical quotations highlight this connection. However, closer consideration of the *Monas* also reflects other key elements in the Christian story from the Virgin Birth to Resurrection.



Within the *Monas* glyph the ovoid shape of a *Vesica Piscis* is found, formed by the Crescent of Spirit intersecting the Circle of the Soul. The *Vesica Piscis* is itself a composite symbol. The shape is traditionally generated by two intersecting circles of equal radius, so that the circumference of one contacts the centre of the other, as in diagram. If these two overlapping circles are seen as two representations of the Solar glyph (☉), then this shape represents the sexual union between two souls. See Figure 9.

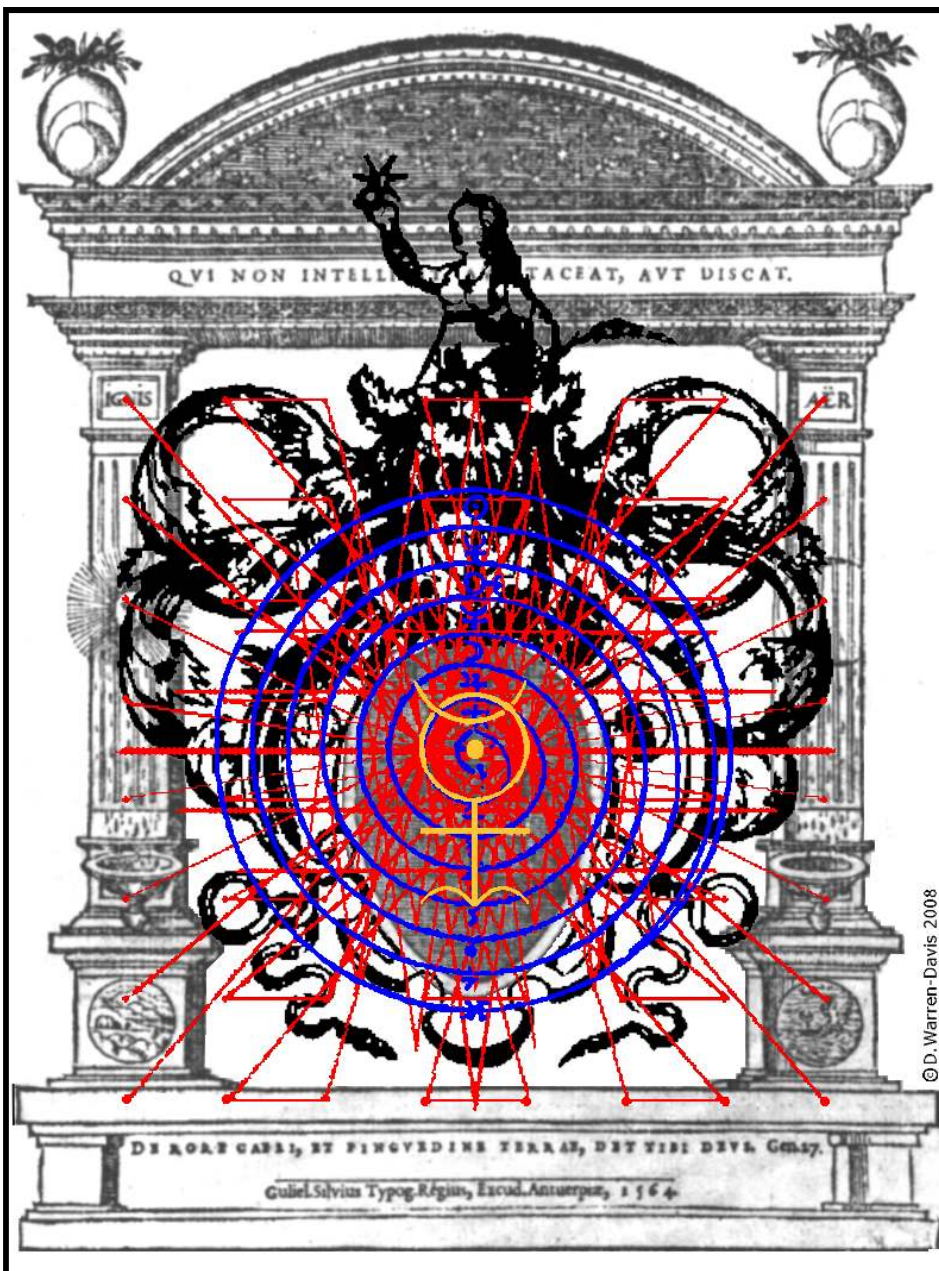
The *Vesica Piscis* is also symbolically associated with Universal Mother through it's shape being analogous to the shape of the vulva. Thus it is through this aperture that incarnation takes place and the soul takes on material (L. *Mater* = mother) form. By extension the *Vesica Piscis* is also linked to rebirth.

The Vesica Piscis (L. lit. = fish bladder) is taken by Christians to be a symbol of Christ, more accurately it should be taken to represent the body of Christ. Churches and Cathedrals too represent the body of Christ, hence the significance of using the *Vesica Piscis* as the starting of their geometry.

The Virgin Birth

When the symbolism of the *Vesica Piscis* and the figure of Virgo from the end motif is combined, a powerful illustration of the Virgin Birth emerges. In the Renaissance, when depicting the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus, artists often included a star as a tiny detail in the picture, either highlighted in the heavens or located on Mary's shoulder. The star is *Spica* or *Stella Maris*. A particularly fine example of such a painting is Fr Fillipo Lippi The Virgin & Child with SS Dominic & Jerome.

In the heavens *Spica* is located at the centre or heart of the constellation of Virgo. Thus these paintings illustrate a correspondence between the light of *Spica* in the heavens and the light and love of Mary nurturing baby Jesus. The figure of Virgo reaching up to the heavens, clearly depicts this link between *Spica* and the *Monas* glyph. See Figure 10.



The dot or “stable pointed hook” at the centre of the *Monas* glyph can now be seen as representing the light of Christ incarnating through the vulva of the *Vesica Piscis*. An idea that is amplified by the overlapping of the Circle of the Soul and the Crescent of the Spirit, in forming the shape of *Vesica Piscis*, simultaneously forms the glyph for Taurus (♉). Taurus, the fertile Earth sign of the Zodiac, thus compounds this idea of incarnation, for it is where the Moon is exalted. Thus the “Virgin” is shown in the heavens above, while the “Birth” is shown in the *Monas* glyph below. The use of the magical squares of Mercury and Venus for the framework to the *Monas Heiroglyphica*, shown here by the red lines, is especially significant in this context.⁵ The name Virgin Mary holds a clue, for Mary is linked to the Latin word *Mare* meaning the sea. Put differently, the virgin sea is an epithet for the Vital Force or

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Figure 10. The Spiral of Transformation projected onto the End Motif to Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*

Aqua Vitae, symbolised by Mercury.⁶ Venus is symbolically linked to the womb and motherhood. Thus this combination is all about manifesting the spiritual into the material world, symbolised by the Virgin Birth.

The Baptism

After the Virgin Birth, the baptism of Christ is the next important stage. Baptism is essentially an initiation, whereby connection to the Spiritual world is established and inner growth can start. The ritual involves water washing clean the aura whereby making the soul receptive to the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In the *Monas Heiroglyphica* the Crescent of the Spirit, is located underneath the head of a lobster, representing Water sign of Cancer. As can be seen in the end motif, the place above the head of Cancer is occupied by the dove of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Lunar Crescent of the *Monas* glyph demonstrates receptivity to the influence of the Holy Spirit, thereby encouraging the quickening of the Soul.

Easter

However it is Easter, the summation of the Christian calendar, that is most strikingly represented in the *Monas Heiroglyphica*. In the Western Church calendar Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after full Moon following the Sun's ingress in Aries. The foundation of *Monas* is sign of Aries (♈), hence the glyph embodies the Sun Aries' ingress. Jesus' death on cross is represented in the *Monas* by the Saturn glyph (♄), found in the lower shaft of the *Monas* glyph. Saturn is the lord of death, while the Planet also rules the bones in the body, the part of the body that remains after all the other tissues have rotted away. The location of Jesus' crucifixion was called "Golgotha" meaning the place of the skull. The glyph for Saturn inside the *Monas*, has been deliberately elongated to allude to the cross of the crucifixion. With Good Friday coinciding with the Jewish celebration of the Passover, Jesus was described as the sacrificial Lamb of God (♈).

In the Christian tradition, on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven. The Spiral of Transformation, as described above, can now be seen to reflect Jesus' ascension. In facilitating this transformation, the Sun is exalted in Aries. The rituals of Easter are performed on the day of the Sun, in celebration of the event. From the combination of the end motif and the Spiral of Transformation, the Solar glyph inside the Spiral elevated beyond the egg, symbolises the ascended Christ. At the foot of the circumference of the Spiral, the glyph for Pisces (♊) can be seen. Pisces is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible, in particular Jesus was anointed on the feet. With Pisces ruling the feet, its location here at the foot of the Spiral is significant, for it implies the path to follow. In the context of the complex symbolism of the *Monas Heiroglyphica*, then Jesus' declaration "I am the Truth (☩), The Light (☉) and the Way (☪)" can be seen in a new light.

Conclusion

In Dee's time he hoped that contemplation of the *Monas Heiroglyphica* would lead people to a direct connection with the divine, whereby people could transcend the religious differences between the Catholic and Anglican faiths, during the reign of Elizabeth I. Exactly 444 years on from the time of Dee's inspiration, it would be wonderful to think that this symbol could once again inspire others to their metaphysical cultural roots, thereby transcending the conflict that exists between world faiths.

References

1. J. Dee, *Monas Heiroglyphica*, tr C.H. Josten
2. These details about the frontispiece are discussed in D. Warren-Davis, *Monas Heiroglyphica - A Study of John Dee's Famous Symbol*, 2008.
3. J. Dee, *Monas Heiroglyphica*, tr C.H. Josten, Theorem XXXIV.
4. D. Warren-Davis, *Monas Heiroglyphica - A Study of John Dee's Famous Symbol*, 2008. Section on the Caduceus.
5. Ibid, Section on Magical Squares.
6. Ibid, Section on Elemental Correspondences

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