

The *Hieroglyphic Monad* of Dr John Dee as a
Synthesis of Late Renaissance European
Thought

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Abstract

John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* presents his universal symbol of knowledge and explains some of the secrets contained within. A fundamental assumption of such a symbol is an underlying oneness of reality and of knowledge in which everything can be shown to be interrelated. In producing his symbols Dee combines a number of disparate topics in a way that seems impossible to modern readers but was considered only natural by his contemporaries. Thus, in this thesis I examine the manner in which this important aspect of Renaissance thought can be illuminated through a study of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

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Introduction

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there has been significant historical interest in the origins of science, logic and our modern way of conceiving of the world, focussing on the technological, theoretical, cultural and ideological changes of the late-Renaissance and Reformation periods.¹ Both the natural sciences and the alchemical arts of these periods have been of great interest to historians of scientific thought due to their direct connection to modern scientific disciplines, and because the men studying these areas often took copious notes and went to significant effort to preserve them.² While the ideas raised in early scientific thought are for the most part now outdated, the origins of this kind of thought, and the procedures and methods developed by these early thinkers are still important fields of historical investigation if we are to understand how our scientific world-view came to be.

In Enlightenment histories a narrative was constructed that showed a clear and direct path from what was considered to be the ignorance and superstition of the past into the rationality and knowledge of the modern age.³ This was done by focussing primarily on four major fields of knowledge; those of mathematics, astronomy, natural science and alchemy (at least in so far as it can be considered the precursor to chemistry).⁴ Since the end of the Enlightenment, however, this type of history has fallen out of favour and the idea of a straight un-branching line of progress has been done away with.⁵ This has led to an increased interest in the ideas and works of more divergent thinkers; those whose ideas did not fit the traditional narrative but who often did contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge.⁶ My subject, Dr John Dee, falls into this category. He was a man whose interest in magic, alchemy and astrology placed him firmly outside of the traditional narrative of scientific progress, but whose ideas nevertheless influenced contemporary thought.

I intend to consider here one of Dee's most esoteric works and one of those which garnered much attention from his contemporaries, his *Monas Hieroglyphica*, written in

¹ Cohen, I. B., 'The Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Concept of Scientific Revolution' *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol.37 No.2 (1976): p257–288.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Clulee, N.H., *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Parry, G., *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2011).

1564.⁷ In examining the *Monas* I intend to interrogate the symbols Dee used and examine the way in which, through them, he was able to bring together important strands of Renaissance thought. By doing this I will shed light on the state of thought at the end of the sixteenth century. I contend that Dee's symbol can be used to provide such insights both because he conceived of the Monad as *the* universal symbol, which was to explain the underlying unity of existence and return the world and all schools of human thought to the perfect state in which God had created them, and because it was taken up by many contemporary thinkers and accorded a place of esteem in the eyes of scholars that came after Dee.⁸ I do not intend to suggest that Dee was indeed successful in summarising all knowledge by means of his symbol, nor that he was in some way able to capture a complete picture of the way in which scholars were thinking at the end of the sixteenth century. Rather, I contend that his *Monas* provided scholars of this period with something brand new and yet entirely familiar - a symbol that took disparate aspects of their knowledge and combined them in ways that, while new and unprecedented, were nevertheless in line with contemporary principles and practices. I will also accord due focus to the fact that Dee employed a technique little seen in alchemy in a way that transcended its conventional limits of application, namely applying Qabalah to the study of esoteric symbols.⁹

The *Monas Hieroglyphica* itself is a small but complex work describing a symbol of the same name. To maintain the distinction between the symbol and its explanatory text, I will, throughout the remainder of this thesis refer to the symbol as the Hieroglyphic Monad or Monad, while the text will be referred to as the *Monas Hieroglyphica* or *Monas*. The fundamental, universal and perfecting nature of the Monad mean that it is equivalent to, and can actually be considered to be, the Philosopher's Stone, which itself was supposed to be a catalyst for perfection.¹⁰ Many who study it believe that it is now impossible to understand the entirety of Dee's meaning and argument because "Dee wrote within an oral and secretive alchemical tradition that has probably been

⁷ Dee, J., *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, trans. J.W. Hamilton-Jones (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000) p.vii.

⁸ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

Parry, G., *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2011) p52-59.

⁹ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

¹⁰ Linden, S.J., *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

permanently lost”,¹¹ and thus the “specific message which Dee tries to convey by his symbol of the Monad, and by his treatise thereon, is lost. His explanations are sometimes explicitly addressed to *mystae* and *initiati* whose secrets we do not possess”.¹² Despite this we can determine some of the works and ideas that influenced Dee’s *Monas*, both through what is expressly written in the *Monas* and what can be inferred through reading his work with the appropriate intellectual contexts in mind and this is the approach I take.

In this thesis I will attempt to use Dee’s *Monas* to reveal the unity inherent to Renaissance thought. To do this I will first examine the way in which Dee’s work has been examined by other historians, especially in relation to the intellectual traditions and schemas into which Dee’s work has been placed. Then I will examine and explain a number of contextual factors which influenced Dee in the writing of the *Monas*, followed by an inspection of the *Monas* itself and the way in which these diverse factors are drawn together and shown to have a fundamental unity. Finally, I will examine the reactions of Dee’s contemporaries to the *Monas* and the ways in which the *Monas* was employed. By doing this I will show that the *Monas* had a profound, if indirect, effect on European thought and through it reveal the underlying assumption of unity present in late-Renaissance thought.

¹¹ French, P.J., *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

¹² Josten, C.H., trans., ‘A Translation of John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica*’, *Ambix* Vol.12 (1964): p84-221.

Chapter One: The Current State of Scholarship on Dr. John Dee

Dee's wide ranging and varied fields of interest and study have meant that historians and other scholars have been able to focus on whichever aspect of his work was of particular interest to them or their period. Perhaps because of this one will find little or no significant historical work done on Dee in the period prior to the late nineteenth century, as the presence of a man whose beliefs and fields of study ran to such areas as alchemy and magic did not agree with Enlightenment conceptions of progressive and modern thinking.¹ For this reason, and supported by the image of Dee provided by Meric Casaubon (son of the famously learned Isaac Casaubon and a scholar of the spiritual world) in his *True and Faithful Relation* (1659),² Dee was almost only ever presented in the period to the end of the nineteenth century as a charlatan and a black magician. Casaubon's work consisted of scrutinising the latter part of Dee's experiments in scrying and his attempts to communicate with angels for two purposes.³ The first was to discredit Dee by presenting evidence, much of it by Dee's own hand, which portrayed him as consorting with devils and evil spirits rather than (as had been Dee's intent and belief) with angels.⁴ This was remarkably successful and tainted Dee's image for centuries.⁵ Casaubon's second aim was to use Dee's actions to convince atheists of the reality of spirits, as a means of converting them, and in this he was less successful.⁶ It is important to note these aims because they led Casaubon, and subsequent writers whose opinions were coloured by this text, to focus on Dee's *enochian* (relating to angels) works and thus ignore his scientific, alchemical and other mystical work.⁷ As the *Monas's* meaning was too obscure and not as demonstrably 'evil' in nature as his conversations with angels, it was not of interest to those intent on presenting Dee as a fraud or conjuror and thus was not included to a significant degree in histories of this period. Thus, for a long time scholarship on Dee languished in disdain and misinterpretation.

¹ Clulee, N.H., *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988).

² Casaubon, M., *A True and Faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee... and some Spirits* (London: D. Maxwell, 1659) p14-20.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Dee, J., *John Dee's Five Books of Mystery Original Sourcebook of Enochian Magic*, trans. Joseph H. Peterson (Boston: Weiser Books, 2003).

⁵ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

⁶ Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation*.

⁷ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

In the early twentieth century a more balanced view of Dee's work began to emerge in a growing focus on his scientific works, itself largely due to an increased interest in the history of science. This trend in Dee scholarship began with Charlotte Fell Smith's *John Dee* (1909) which, while still containing significant reference to Casaubon and thus not entirely breaking with the image of Dee as a conjuror, did focus on his scientific work and began to acknowledge its significance.⁸ Smith aimed at presenting a more complete picture of Dee, both the science and the magic, although the idea that these may be aspects of the same thirst for knowledge and consistent way of seeing the world was not present. Smith continued to present Dee's magical pursuits as foolish and misguided and as hindering his more valid scientific ones.⁹ Again the *Monas* is largely left out, being mentioned in passing but receiving little focus because it didn't fit easily into either area of interest: it was not an obviously scientific work, nor was it a part of his angel conversations, the work for which he was most infamous. From here, however, Dee's reputation as a scientist was able to grow as his work was examined by less biased scholarship.

Studies of Dee as a scientist in the first half of the twentieth century did much to rehabilitate his image from that of a fraud but they did not, I contend, present any more accurate a picture of Dee as a learned man of the late sixteenth century. The new approach presented Dee in terms of his more legitimate interests (by modern standards), ignoring the more questionable aspects of his life.¹⁰ They focussed on Dee's position within the context of the development of a narrowly defined scientific field, aiming to show his importance in the evolution of a specific discipline. This is evident in E.G.R. Taylor's *Tudor Geography 1485-1583* (1930), which was largely a partial biography of Dee but one which avoided his less 'modern' attitudes and lines of thinking.¹¹ In a similar vein is F.R. Johnson's *Astronomical thought in Renaissance England: A Study of scientific writings from 1500 to 1645* (1937), which considered Dee only in terms of his work as an astronomer, his attitude towards Copernicus and his formulation of an experimental scientific method.¹² What is telling in this text is that

⁸ Fell-Smith, C., *John Dee (1527-1608)* (London: Constable & Co., 1909).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Taylor E.G.R., *Tudor geography, 1485-1583* (London: Methuen, 1930).

Taylor E.G.R., *The mathematical practitioners of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Institute of Navigation, 1954).

Johnson F.R., *Astronomical thought in Renaissance England: A study of English scientific writings from 1500 to 1645* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1937).

¹¹ Taylor, *Tudor geography*.

¹² Johnson, *Astronomical thought*.

Dee's work in astrology, which was a very important component of his approach to astronomy and especially Copernicus, was ignored. What these histories did for Dee was earn him a legitimate, if not prestigious, place in sixteenth-century intellectual history.¹³ What they failed to do was acknowledge that in the sixteenth century Dee's 'non-scientific' work was considered not only legitimate but praiseworthy. They thus anachronistically divorced these aspects of Dee's activities from the rest of his work.

Since the 1950s there has been an effort to reinterpret Dee and present his career as a more complete and cohesive whole within the context of his historical period.¹⁴ This involved an attempt to maintain his importance in the intellectual developments of the sixteenth century while reconciling this with his less 'scientific' occult interests and activities. The earliest work of this kind is I.R.F. Calder's *John Dee Studied as an English Neoplatonist* (1952), which allowed Dee's scientific and occult activities to be subsumed under a Neoplatonic model.¹⁵ This idea was expanded upon by Frances Yates and further developed by Peter French and Graham Yewbrey. The works of these authors all fall into what is known to subsequent scholars of Dee as the Warburg interpretation: attempts to fit Dee's work into one of a number of specific intellectual traditions so that it could be included as a part of the wider narrative of the scientific revolution, which originated with a number of scholars associated with the Warburg Institute.¹⁶ Thus all of these interpretations conceptualised the problem of Dee as one of classification, that is to say, as a matter of determining what intellectual tradition he fitted into. The drive behind this scholarly interpretation was a desire to make sense of his confusing and often seemingly contradictory ideas and practices, as well as reaffirming Dee's importance by associating him with intellectual traditions that had a significant effect on modern thought. It is clear that there is some benefit to asking the question of which schools of thought influenced Dee and into which schema he best fits, because this allowed for Dee's rehabilitation from charlatanry and the acknowledgement of his esoteric practices as equally valid. However, in all instances of the Warburg interpretation it seems that the investigation of the intellectual tradition has overruled the investigation of the man himself, especially when his complexity places some of his

¹³ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Calder, I.R.F., *John Dee: Studied as an English Neoplatonist* (London: University of London, 1952).

¹⁶ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

actions outside of a specific tradition.¹⁷ As such, although much work was done on Dee in the wake of Calder, there was comparatively little written on the man in his own right, rather he was examined as an embodiment of the particular pre-established tradition under investigation.

This being said, there were significant reasons why Calder's dissertation became the touchstone for research into Dee. Despite its failings, it contained an extensive study of the biographical record, an analysis of all of Dee's available writings, and it attempted to trace the origins of Dee's ideas.¹⁸ These materials were then presented within the frameworks of a number of different interpretative models designed to show Dee's works as a part of a coherent whole and establish his historical importance by relating all of his projects to a central philosophical position, thereby aligning him with the progressive movement of science in the sixteenth century.¹⁹ Citing Dee's mathematical view of nature, Calder counted Dee among the Renaissance Neoplatonists (thinkers who followed the teachings of Plotinus and other ancient Greek scholars' expansion upon the ideas of Plato), who are credited with laying the foundations of the modern physical sciences.²⁰ In applying the label of Neoplatonist to Dee, Calder relied on the definition of Neoplatonism presented in Edwin Burt's *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (1924); that the foundation of Neoplatonic thought was that the universe could be reduced to mathematical constructs and thus mathematics becomes the avenue to studying the fundamental constituents of the natural world.²¹ It is this theory of mathematical fundamentalism, Burt argues, that underpinned the formation of mathematical science; therefore, according to Calder, Dee's advocacy of this stance places him firmly in the school of quantitative, Platonic science, rather than that of qualitative, Aristotelian science.²² To further cement this position, however, Calder did all he could to emphasise Dee's Neoplatonic predilections and associations while downplaying those from more naturalistic or magical traditions.²³ In this we can see the trap into which many who based their work on Calder or used a similar schema have fallen. To describe a polymath

¹⁷ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

¹⁸ Calder, *John Dee*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Burt, E., *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1924).

²² Calder, *John Dee*.

²³ *Ibid.*

such as Dee through one intellectual tradition, delineated retrospectively, inevitably results in omissions and selective representations.

Another interpretation of Dee to come out of the Warburg interpretation, championed by Frances Yates, was to explain Dee's interests through the traditions of the Hermetic Magus, rather than as a Renaissance Neoplatonist.²⁴ Hermeticism in the Renaissance was based upon translations of ancient Greek texts attributed to *Hermes Trismegistus*, Thrice Great Hermes, the origin of much of the alchemical thought at that time.²⁵ Hermeticism presented man as a semi-divine being, capable of exerting power over the material world and his own physical and spiritual existence through magic.²⁶ Most importantly, this form of magic was divorced from demonology, which was implicit in most other kinds of magic and thus led to their condemnation by ecclesiastical authorities.²⁷ In fact, with the reintroduction of a more complete set of the works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, to Europe in 1460 Hermetic mages were considered to be acting piously, as religious philosophers with access to ancient secrets of the divine and natural order.²⁸ However, the Hermeticism of the Renaissance was altered by the influence of Neoplatonism and Kabbalah and was heavily Christianised. By locating Dee within this school of thought, Yates was able to use the Hermetic conceptualisation of the driving force of the universe to reconcile Calder's Neoplatonic validation of Dees work describing the world mathematically with his more magical works.²⁹ The nature of operational power of the universe means that Yates could show that Dee's angelic conversations, his occult experiments and his practical scientific endeavours all flowed from the same fundamental principle, while still allowing for the fact that Neoplatonism seemed to be his fundamental attitude to the study of nature.³⁰ Following this idea to its extreme conclusion, Yates argued that Dee's effect on Hermetic thought was so great that the later evolution of Hermeticism (which she identifies as Rosicrucian Hermeticism), can be traced directly to Dee's influence, especially his emphasis on mechanism, with works such as his *Monas*

²⁴ Yates F.A., *The occult philosophy in the Elizabethan age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Yates F.A., *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

²⁶ Yates, *Occult Philosophy*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Salaman, V.O., Wharton and Mahé, *The Way of Hermes* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000), p9.

²⁹ Yates, *Occult Philosophy*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Hieroglyphica and his angelic conversations cited as particularly influential.³¹ The ultimate interpretation that came out of Yates's work was much like Calder's in that it attempted to fit Dee within an acknowledged intellectual tradition and prove his prominence based on his espousal of mathematical mechanics.³² However her accentuating of Hermeticism and the association with the Rosicrucian tradition is superior to Calder's focus on Neoplatonism in two major ways. Firstly, it subsumed all of Dee's work as coming from one central source. Secondly, it accommodated the strain of religious reform and prophesy present in Dee's activities in Europe after the 1580s. Neither of these were accounted for in the Neoplatonic explanation, which tended to marginalise or ignore such topics.³³ Yates also elevated Dee to a level of cultural leadership in the Elizabethan Renaissance and the Rosicrucian order, a situation that was not evident in Calder.³⁴

This idea of Dee as a cultural catalyst was taken even further by authors such as Peter French (1972) and Graham Yewbrey (1981).³⁵ These authors argued that Dee's major motivations were political and pragmatic, and that all of his attempts to gain knowledge can be seen from this point of view. Support for this theory was found in the practical matters that Dee worked on, such as navigation and religious reform.³⁶ Even Dee's most occult practices can be considered in this light, given the political uses to which he turned them: for example, asking about the British Empire during his angel conversations, and casting of horoscopes for important political figures.³⁷ His presence in Queen Elizabeth's court, his association with the Sydney Circle centred on Sir Philip Sydney and his constant petitioning for a more permanent place in Elizabeth's court as a court philosopher, are biographical details emphasised by these theorists to support their argument.³⁸ In addition it is pointed out that when these efforts failed, he travelled abroad in order to seek other patrons and political acclaim.³⁹ In contrast to Yates, these

³¹ Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

³² *Ibid.*

Yates, *Occult Philosophy*.

³³ Yates, *Occult Philosophy*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

³⁵ French, P.J., *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

Yewbrey, G., *John Dee and the 'Sydney Group': cosmopolitics and Protestant 'activism' in the 1570s* (England: University of Hull, 1981).

³⁶ French, *John Dee*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

theories presented Dee's program of magical philosophy and Hermeticism as being primarily politically, rather than intellectually, driven. While this approach does neglect Dee's intellectual motivations for choosing his fields of study it did acknowledge his changing situation and motivations throughout his life.

A more complete image of Dee as a man, rather than as the embodiment of a concept, came with Nicholas Clulee's *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (1988). For the first time the seemingly contradictory aspects of Dee's thinking were acknowledged, and rather than understand Dee by placing him in an intellectual tradition Clulee recognised his place in history at a point where ideas were changing and the boundaries between traditions less well defined.⁴⁰ Thus, Clulee states, "his interest in applied science, mechanics and an activist approach to nature was modelled on Roger Bacon's idea of a natural magic, that this appreciation for mathematics and understanding of the application of mathematics to the study of nature was inspired by the example of Bacon and by Proclus's philosophy of mathematics, not magic, and that only his spiritual magic owed anything to Renaissance Hermetic or Neoplatonic influences".⁴¹ Unlike the authors mentioned so far, Clulee was far more willing to admit that Dee did have other influences during different parts of his career, that his ideas did not always fit one tradition. Thus, he in no way suggests that Bacon was the sole factor or influence by which Dee can be understood.⁴² Clulee defied the conventional wisdom that proto-scientific thought was right and progressive, and that Aristotelian philosophy and the occult were objects of ridicule and backwardness, by showing that in Elizabethan thought these could exist simultaneously within the thinking of one man and often within the same theory.⁴³ By breaking down the divide between magic and science Clulee lessened the impetus for a unifying intellectual tradition to be found to explain Dee's interest in both and thus freed himself of the requirement to place Dee within such a tradition, as was done in the Warburg interpretation.⁴⁴ Clulee's analysis of Dee did, however, have one other outcome. By relegating the influences of Hermeticism and Neoplatonism to Dee's spiritual magic alone, Clulee ignored the effect that these schools of thought had on Dee's scientific work and thus effectively reduced Dee's status as a significant contributor to pre-scientific thought. Instead Clulee's account

⁴⁰ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

sought to show that Dee's philosophy did help to bring about the shift towards scientific thought and rationalism, *despite* the seemingly misguided motivations behind his ideas.⁴⁵

The most recent scholarship on Dee has followed the historiographical lead of Clulee, examining the evolution of Dee's thought and the different theories that drove him at different points in his life. Benjamin Woolley's *The Science and Magic of Dr. Dee* (2001) is an example of this, going further than Clulee by drawing on the tradition of Peter French and giving Dee's political standing and aspirations equal attention to his quest for knowledge.⁴⁶ By examining Dee in such a light Woolley is able to make better sense of Dee's life, explaining not only the origins of Dee's ideas but also the motivations behind many of the choices he made. This is especially so with regard to Dee's political fortunes and his choice to travel to the continent, where Woolley finds that his motivations were sometimes to do with his academic integrity, and sometimes to do with his political ambitions and often influenced by both.⁴⁷ Woolley also identifies a conflict between the necessity of Dee's practical work for maintaining his political position and financial wellbeing and his preference for pursuing high philosophical knowledge.⁴⁸ While Woolley follows Clulee's tradition of balancing Dee's disparate interests and synthesising them into a cohesive whole, his focus on the political aspects of Dee's career necessitates that Dee's other works receive less emphasis.

One of the most recent studies of Dee is Glyn Parry's *The Arch Conjuror of England* (2011).⁴⁹ This book ties all of the aspects of Dee together in a seamless whole, taking into account his different interests, his political life and the fact that as he grew and changed over his lifetime his work evolved as well.⁵⁰ Parry ties together the post-Clulee interpretation of Dee, with its focus on the fluid nature of the man and the original impetus for the study of Dee, the elucidation of Elizabethan thought, by using Dee as an archetype of the learned man in that period.⁵¹ Through Dee, Parry highlights the way that knowledge was understood in Elizabethan England, the way that this affected thinkers of this period and the effect that the changing religious and political landscape

⁴⁵ Clulee, *John Dee's Natural Philosophy*.

⁴⁶ Woolley, B., *The Queen's Conjuror: The Science and Magic of Dr. Dee* (London: Harper Collins, 2001).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

of this time had on all types of knowledge.⁵² I contend that it is through this synthesis and by accepting the different strains of thought that Dee subscribed to, that we can best understand how he thought and how the state of knowledge was being altered in this period.

One aspect common to almost all of these histories is that the *Monas Hieroglyphica* does not feature heavily in any of these studies of Dee. It is often mentioned to support other points, as the synthesis of all of the aspects of his thought- Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Kabbalistic, alchemical or otherwise- and is generally referred to as the work that Dee himself seems to have valued the most; and yet due to its esoteric nature and difficulty of interpretation it is rare for any significant explication of the text to take place.⁵³ Conversely, in the more political biographies of Dee, it is often featured as a turning point in his career, because of its dedication to Maximilian II, the connections it forged between Dee and Queen Elizabeth I and the split that it cemented between Dee and the majority of the English scholars.⁵⁴

My purpose in studying the *Monas* in this dissertation is to extend the understanding of how Dee synthesised the disparate intellectual influences acting upon him. I will explain how Dee's diverse range of interests (which seem to modern eyes to be contradictory) can be seen, from a Renaissance perspective, to be a coherent, interconnected set of ideas. I will do this by examining the work which Dee valued most highly himself and that he intended to be the ultimate synthesis of thought at the time. In this way I hope to contribute to the post-Clulee tradition of understanding Dee within his intellectual context. However, given the confines of an honours thesis, instead of examining a grand theory of Dee I will be attempting to use his Monad as a way of understanding the interconnectedness of some aspects of Renaissance thought.

⁵² Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Woolley, *The Queen's Conjuror*.

Chapter Two: Dr. John Dee's Intellectual Context

Understanding any work, especially one such as the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, relies upon grasping the context in which it was written. In this case, it is important to investigate the state of knowledge and academic thought in England and Western Europe in the years leading up to Dee's writing of the *Monas* in 1564¹, a date which my research indicates is universally accepted by scholars of Dee's work and which I have found no reason to question. Despite living at a time that is often considered to be outside the Renaissance Dee tends to be investigated as a Renaissance scholar for two reasons: firstly, many historians consider the English Renaissance to continue into the seventeenth century, and secondly, Dee's works show much stronger ties to Renaissance thought than to that of the Reformation. Due to the rapid development and divergence of different schools of thought throughout the Renaissance a complete overview is both nigh impossible and ultimately unhelpful. Dee, and indeed any scholar of the time, would not have been exposed to all that was on offer. As such, I will attempt to summarise what appear to be the major strands of Renaissance thought that Dee was exposed to in the period prior to the writing of the *Monas* so that the analysis of this work that follows in this thesis can be placed in context. The contextual factors to be examined here will be the influence of patronage, political pressure and Dee's Catholic background, the philosophies of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and Qabalah and the Arts of alchemy, magic and astrology. I will focus on these areas as they each had a significant impact on Dee prior to his writing on the *Monas*.

Like all scholars of the time, Dee's financial well-being, academic and social standing and position within society were dependent upon the acquisition and maintenance of wealthy and influential patrons.² Patronage in Renaissance Europe was primarily a political system, through which both client and patron could improve their prestige and standing.³ For the client, the acquisition of a powerful patron or group of such patrons had the obvious benefits of providing financial support and the protection, especially the political backing required to explore more controversial or taboo topics.⁴ Attracting patronage also conferred legitimacy upon the works that were published by the clients,

¹ Dee, J., *The Hieroglyphic Monad* trans. J.W. Hamilton-Jones (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000), p17.

² Pumfrey, S.P. and Dawnbarn, F., 'Science and Patronage in England, 1570-1625: a preliminary study', *History of Science* Vol.42 (2004): p137-188.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

as it was assumed that powerful and influential people would not support inadequate scholars.⁵ Conversely, those that could not attract patrons were considered to be of poorer quality, else they would be recognised by patrons.⁶ For the patrons, the benefit of providing patronage varied depending upon the political system in which they functioned as well as the areas which they chose to patronise. In the case of the arts, and to a significant degree in the fields of natural philosophy and the scientific arts, a major driving force was that of accumulating prestige.⁷ A noble who could afford to commission an artwork from a great painter, or have the works of a great philosopher dedicated to him, was afforded a higher social standing than those who could not.⁸ The men who fell under a noble's patronage were therefore an indication of the noble's wealth, power, importance and the weight that should be given to their opinions.⁹ There were also practical reasons for providing patronage. The works of the client could be exploited by the patron: in the case of clients that produced a practical product this could be utilised by the patron while in the case of those who produced a purely intellectual product, such as navigators and philosophers, the patron could benefit from their client's expertise.¹⁰ The patronage system was the major source of income for Dee and the principle means by which he could carry out his studies.¹¹ Between his private studies in the service of various patrons and his study at universities both in England and on the continent, Dee accrued a vast array of knowledge, including amassing one of the largest libraries known in Europe at this time and he brought much of this knowledge and experience to bear in the creation of the *Monas*.¹²

In addition to the financial and political pressures that patronage imposed upon scholars they were also subject to religious limitations and constraints. These depended upon the religious upbringing and beliefs of the particular scholar as well as the religious context in which they were working. In the late sixteenth century this was particularly important as the religious landscape of Europe was changing due to the rise of Protestantism. England's religious state was particularly volatile during Dee's lifetime

⁵ Moran, B.T., ed., *Patronage and Institutions: science technology and medicine at the European court, 1500-1750* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991), p485.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Pumfrey and Dawnbarn, 'Science and Patronage', p137-188.

⁷ Findlen, P., *Possessing Nature* (California: University of California Press, 1996), p227-230.

⁸ Tse, A., 'Discussion of the role of patrons in the Renaissance', *Art Resources* (2006).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Clulee, N.H., *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988).

¹¹ Parry, G., *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹² *Ibid.*

and changed between Catholicism and Protestantism a number of times during Dee's life. Dee himself was born and raised Catholic and seems to have held closely to much of the beliefs and ritualism of the Catholic faith throughout his life¹³, even becoming a Catholic priest during the reign of Queen Mary.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the religious landscape was highly political and Dee had trouble with both Queen Mary and the Pope at different times in his life, and served in Elizabeth's Protestant court. Eventually, it appears he rejected orthodox Catholicism for his own, divinely revealed, form of Christianity.

The Christian faith of both Catholics and Protestants rested, fundamentally, on the belief in one true, eternal God, existing as three aspects (known as the Holy Trinity): God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit,¹⁵ and this is an aspect of Christianity that Dee held to and which influenced his political and philosophical outlooks. In as much as they can be separated from one another the aspect of The Father is the creative force behind the world, creating and nurturing all things and is active in people lives¹⁶; The Holy Spirit is the aspect of God that dwells within individuals, leads them to God and allows them to live a righteous and faithful life,¹⁷ as well as inspiring and allowing the interpretation of Holy Scripture¹⁸; and God the Son acts as the bridge between Man and God, allowing the sins of Man to be absolved so that he can re-join with God after death.¹⁹ The God of the Christianity in this period was understood to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent and to exist outside of all creation, being immaterial and unknowable unless by divine revelation.²⁰ After a person's death it was believed that God would judge the soul of the departed, sending them to one of two possible fates- Heaven, to spend eternity in glorious union with God; or Hell, where the unrepentant are sent to endure everlasting separation from God.²¹ To this eternal

¹³ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p3.

¹⁵ Erickson, M. J., *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 1992).

¹⁶ Koessler, J., *God Our Father* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), p68.

¹⁷ Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, p265–270.

¹⁸ Hammond, T.C., Wright, D.F., ed., *In Understanding be Men: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine* sixth edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), p134.

¹⁹ Kreeft, P., *Catholic Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001) p71-72.

²⁰ Gilles Emery O. P. and Levering, M., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 263.

²¹ Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, p265–270.

destination, Catholicism added a third, transitory, dimension - Purgatory, a temporary condition in which souls may be purified in order to reach heaven.²²

Another aspect of the Catholic Church, one that Dee rejected, was that it laid claim to the title of 'The One True Church', claiming itself to be the only path to salvation for all of humanity.²³ The Church taught that it was founded by Jesus Christ himself and that it was fulfilling the Great Commission, in which he instructed the apostles to continue his work.²⁴ The Catholic Church was "the continuing presence of Christ on Earth".²⁵

An important part of Catholicism, especially during the Renaissance, was a focus on ritual, from the seven sacraments, to the power of holy objects, to making the sign of the cross or the repetition of holy words to ward off evil.²⁶ The seven sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony - were the rituals that channel God's grace to those who receive them and marked major events in a person's physical and spiritual life.²⁷ The ritual and liturgies that are performed in each of these sacraments makes them binding and elevates them beyond the mortal world, imbuing them with divine power over a person's soul.

Likewise holy objects, such as holy water, holy oil and blessed candles among others, were believed to have the power to drive off evil spirits and expel evil and corruption from people or places.²⁸ Some of the most well-known holy objects, the sacramental bread and wine were thought to undergo a literal transformation according to Catholic teachings into the body and blood of Christ.²⁹ This miracle was the most hotly contested aspect of Catholicism by Protestants during Dee's lifetime but may have appealed to him as a pseudo-alchemical act, the transformation of a 'base' object into a more perfect and divine state. But it was not just rituals or objects that could have power, words or simple actions could exercise some of the same influence. For example, the sign of the cross was also a method to ward off evil and the *Book of Hours* or *Primer* from which many laymen learnt to pray contained incantations of God's magical names that would conjure angelic assistance, provide physical protection or even curry earthly

²² Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, p265–270.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Bokenkotter, T., *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p30.

²⁵ Schreck, A., *The Essential Catholic Catechism* (Michigan: Servant Publications, 1999), p131.

²⁶ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p1-4.

²⁷ Schreck, *The Essential Catholic Catechism*, p131.

²⁸ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p1-3.

²⁹ Pohle, J., 'The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist', *Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1913).

favour.³⁰ The reality of such magical effect on the world clearly had a great impact on Dee's outlook, making it readily apparent that seemingly mundane acts and objects could hold great power.

While these spiritual factors were important to the state of Renaissance scholarship Dee was intellectually influenced by a number of ideas that were not incompatible with Christian beliefs contained within contemporary Neoplatonism, which was very influential throughout the Renaissance due to its flexibility and compatibility with Christian teachings. At that time, of course, the term 'Neoplatonism' was not in use because such interpretations were presented and received as true and accurate recounts of Plato's original teachings.³¹ The scholars who are considered to be the original Neoplatonists have been divided into three periods based primarily on differing approaches to the soul: the first being that of Plotinus and his student Porphyry in the third century, the second Iamblichus and his school at Calchis in the late third and fourth centuries CE and the third being a period in the fifth and sixth centuries CE when the academies of Athens and Alexandria were the centres of Neoplatonic thought.³² While there are differences between these three periods they were all dedicated to expanding on and examining the ideas of Plotinus, so there are many aspects of central dogma that are held in common and can be considered typical of the Neoplatonists. The primary form of Neoplatonism available to Renaissance scholars was Marsilio Ficino's translation of the works of Plotinus, so it is this version of Neoplatonic thought that I examine below.³³

Neoplatonism is primarily a metaphysical and epistemological philosophy, and a form of idealistic or theistic monism (the philosophical view that all of reality can be derived from or explained by a single original substance).³⁴ In Plotinus's system the original substance is known simply as 'The One' and it is the first principle of reality. This 'One' is ineffable, utterly simple and unknowable, and is both the creative source and teleological end of all existing things. In fact, The One cannot really be said to exist at all, not in the same sense that any sort of being exists.³⁵ Rather, it is a creative principle that

³⁰ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p3.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Wallis, R. T., *Neoplatonism* second edition (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1995).

³³ Robb, N.A., *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968).

³⁴ Cross, F.L., ed. and Livingstone, E.A., ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

³⁵ Dodds, E.R. 'The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic "One"', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol.22 (1928): p136.

is beyond being, an idea that Plotinus derived from Book VI of Plato's *Republic*.³⁶ According to Plotinus's model, The One is the cause of reality, and in general outline this is the scheme shared by other Neoplatonists, although there were departures on many of the finer points, including the nature of evil.³⁷ The One gives rise to the Demiurge or the 'Nous' (intellect or intelligence), which is a perfect image of The One and an archetype for all existing things. It can be considered to be simultaneously being and thought, bringing it a step closer to physical reality than The One.³⁸ As it is an image of The One, the Nous corresponds directly and perfectly to The One; but as it is a derivative of The One it is also entirely different, lacking the ineffability of The One but retaining its immaterial nature. Plotinus identifies the Nous as the highest sphere that is accessible to the human mind, being the sphere of pure intellect in and of thought itself.³⁹ While The One may be the origin and creative source of all reality, for Plotinus it is the Nous that manifests or organises the material world so that it is perceptible to human beings.

This organisation of the material world is achieved through the introduction of a further concept, that of the 'world-soul', an image and product of the Nous which, like the Nous and The One, is immaterial. The world-soul stands between the Nous, which gives the material world order and perceivability, and the phenomenal world, which we all experience.⁴⁰ The Nous permeates and illuminates the world-soul, which is in contact with the phenomenal world, and when the two unite the world-soul is disintegrated and collapsed into physical reality.⁴¹ Conversely, it is the world-soul which allows beings of the phenomenal world access to the higher spheres, and thus provides the route to salvation or ascension.⁴² All beings have the choice, through the world-soul, to either be informed by the eternal and infinite Nous, or to turn aside from the Nous and lose themselves by falling into the phenomenal world of the senses and the finite.

In Neo-Platonism the phenomenal world is made up of three types of matter, the first are bodies that are ruled by idea or soul, which are considered to be good as they are a

³⁶ Plato, *The Republic* trans. Jowett, B. (Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2014), p509.

³⁷ Dodds, 'The Parmenides' 129-142.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Schopenhauer, A., *Parerga and Paralipomena* trans. Payne E. F. J. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Dodds, 'The Parmenides' 129-142.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

reflection of the upper world of the Nous, and by extension The One.⁴³ The second type of matter is inert, formless and without idea. This is the raw stuff that the world is made up of and it is defined by Plotinus as evil.⁴⁴ Evil is not used here in the modern or religious sense but must rather be understood as parasitic, not possessing an existence of its own. The third type of matter is the second kind of matter given form, shaped by that which is ruled by ideas. This matter is neutral, but its neutrality is not dependent upon the material having been given form but rather its inherent capacity to *be* given form.⁴⁵ These forces must be kept in balance and harmony for the phenomenal world to exist, therefore evil, strife and discord are inherent to the phenomenal world as is the unity and harmony derived from the world-soul and other higher spheres.

These metaphysical considerations lead Neoplatonism to reach certain conclusions about the purpose of a good life, how the soul should go about achieving perfection (and the individual, happiness) in the phenomenal world so that it might re-join with the higher spheres after death. The soul must retrace the path outlined above, with the goal of attaining a likeness to God or 'The One' and ultimately achieving a unity with The One.⁴⁶ This begins with what Plotinus calls the civil virtues, which are the lowest form of virtue in terms of attaining enlightenment. Civil virtues merely adorn a life without elevating the soul, they provide little more than practice for the attaining of higher virtues.⁴⁷ The next level of virtues is the purifying virtues, and it is by these that the soul is freed from sensuality and led back to its true nature. This requires ascetic observances through which the soul is elevated to the level of the Nous, causing the human to become a spiritual and enduring being free from all sin. This, however, is not the pinnacle of perfection for the soul, for the highest enlightenment can only be obtained by becoming 'God' and achieving unity with 'The One'.⁴⁸ As the Nous is the highest realm of human thought it is only through an ecstatic approach and a state of perfect repose and passivity that the soul can touch the primal Being. This state can only be reached when, after observing the purifying virtues and in a heightened state of

⁴³ Wallis, R.T. and Bregman, J., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p42–45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Plotinus, 'On the immortality of the Soul', in *The Six Enneads* trans. Mackenna, S. and Page, B.S. (Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2014).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

concentration and tension, the soul (or mind) loses itself and, in a moment of divine inspiration, is able to see God, touch divinity and thus enjoy indescribable bliss.⁴⁹

The fate of the human soul under the Neoplatonic system corresponds to the level of enlightenment achieved in life. It is important to reiterate here the Neoplatonic ideas of good and evil: good being defined as having existence, form and idea, while evil is defined as an absence of these qualities or excessively focusing on the physical. It can thus be seen that salvation for a Neoplatonist lies in finding these missing good qualities and returning them to the soul, thus restoring it to its complete and perfect state.⁵⁰ This process is not necessarily possible to complete in any one lifetime and Neoplatonism embraced the idea of reincarnation, teaching that the soul would be purified and then take up a new place based on the level at which its earthly life was lived. Thus, if a person lived a life in line with the phenomenal world, without making any effort to better their soul or become more in touch with The One, then they would be reincarnated at the phenomenal level of reality, in the form of an animal or another human.⁵¹ If the earthly life was of a higher level, then the soul would take up a position in the afterlife corresponding to that higher level, existing in one of the higher spheres or reuniting with The One. Each time a soul dies it is purified, wiped clean so that it may once again be a blank slate when it descends for its next reincarnation. In this way an immortal soul can be reborn again into the world and continue its quest to attain perfection and unity with The One.⁵² When this unity is achieved the soul never again descends and, in effect, ends.

Another important school of thought that shared a number of aspects with Neoplatonism and which influenced Dee's *Monas* was that of Hermeticism. Hermeticism was re-introduced into Western thought in 1460 when Cosimo de' Medici, the de-facto and unofficial ruler of Florence, sent an agent to find a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which he then had translated into Latin.⁵³ Copies spread throughout Europe and, in addition to the Neoplatonic texts discovered at about the same time, had a great impact on many schools of thought. The *Corpus Hermeticum* consisted of the collected writings

⁴⁹ Plotinus, 'On the immortality of the Soul'.

⁵⁰ Bowersock, G.W., Brown, P., Brown, P.R.L. and Grabar, O., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Smith A., *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (London: Springer Science and Business Media, 1974), p43.

⁵² Arieti, J.A., *Philosophy in the Ancient World: An Introduction* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p336.

⁵³ Salaman, V.O., Wharton and Mahé, *The Way of Hermes* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000), p. 9.

of a philosopher known as Hermes Trismegistus, Thrice-Great Hermes, now thought to have lived sometime between the third and sixth centuries CE but believed during the Renaissance to have been a contemporary of Moses.⁵⁴ It has since been shown that there was no single philosopher who wrote all of the works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus but, regardless of whether they were the work of one philosopher or many, the Hermetic texts were extremely influential during Dee's time.⁵⁵ In addition to the *Corpus Hermeticum* the Hermetic texts included *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus* and *The Perfect Sermon*, which together formed the core of Renaissance Hermeticism. The teachings of Hermes Trismegistus contained in these works were closely related to those of the Neoplatonists and contain a number of the same ideas - a single divine being, the Nous and the phenomenal world. In Hermeticism, however, the divine being, called alternatively God, The One or 'The Absolute', is not as completely separate and impersonal as that found in Neoplatonism, but instead actively exerts its will in the phenomenal world and tends to be understood in a manner more in line with the Judeo-Christian God.⁵⁶ This aspect made it easier for Christian theologians to synthesise Christianity and Hermeticism, which was a major factor in Hermeticism's spread throughout Europe during the Renaissance.⁵⁷

A key feature of Hermeticism is the idea of a *prisca theologia*, or a single true theology. This gives rise to three principle ideas: firstly that the *prisca theologia* was granted to ancient man by God; secondly that there is some aspect of the truth of God present in every religion; and thirdly that every religion has imperfections to the extent that it diverges from the common truth in all religions.⁵⁸ This is important as it allowed Hermetic philosophers and other thinkers to utilise ideas developed outside the Christian world, even to the point of questioning Christian ideas. It also directed the efforts of Hermetic scholars towards the uncovering of ancient knowledge, extending the idea that God had revealed secret truths to ancient man to include natural and scientific knowledge in addition to purely theological knowledge.⁵⁹ Thus, for thinkers of the Renaissance it was often considered to be more important to uncover ancient

⁵⁴ Yates, F., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964), p27 and p293.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Trismegistus, H.M., *The Divine Pyramander*, trans. Everard, J. (White, 1884).

⁵⁷ Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p9-14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p14-18 and p433-434.

⁵⁹ Hanegraaff, W. J., *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p360.

knowledge than to make new discoveries, as nothing that could be discovered by mortal means could possibly come close to the divine truths revealed by God.

There were three parts of the wisdom revealed to Hermes Trismegistus and detailed in *The Emerald Tablet* which were supposed to cover all aspects of the world, the mastery of each of them being what granted Hermes his 'thrice-great' title. The first aspect was alchemy; which included the study of chemical reactions and the balancing of the elements, the ultimate mastery of which resulted in bringing a natural body to perfection, thus completing the *magnum opus* (to be discussed later).⁶⁰ The second was astrology; the operation of the planets and stars as well as the study of their movements, including the effects that they exerted upon the Earth and how to deal with these influences.⁶¹ The final part of wisdom was theurgy; the study of divine magic derived from angels and Gods (as opposed to black magic which relied upon alliances with evil spirits).⁶² Thus, the goal of any Hermetic practitioner was to attain a perfect understanding of these three subjects through the study and recovery of the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus.

Hermeticism also had a moral and ethical aspect which was important to the way that knowledge was sought and approached. According to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Nous brings forth either good or evil, depending upon whether one received their perceptions from God or from Demons.⁶³ According to Hermetic theory, the actions of God or of Demons are the only ways in which good and evil can be brought about.⁶⁴ Similarly to Neoplatonism, Mankind is unable to achieve absolute spiritual purity because, having bodies, they are always consumed by their physical natures, which leads them to be ignorant of supreme, absolute goodness.⁶⁵ Focussing upon this physical life is an offence to God (in a similar way to which it prevented enlightenment in Neoplatonism), while creating something and thus tapping into the generative aspect of God was considered to be the greatest good that could be done in life. A final aspect of Hermetic morality, presented in the *Emerald Tablet*, is the principle "That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to

⁶⁰ Eliade, M., *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p149 and p155–157.

⁶¹ Powell, R., *Hermetic Astrology Vol.1* (Colorado: Sophia Foundation Press, 2006), p19-20.

⁶² Garstin, E.J.L., *Theurgy, or the Hermetic Practice: A Treatise on Spiritual Alchemy* (Florida: Ibis Press, 2004), pv.

⁶³ Salaman, Wharton and Mahé, *The Way of Hermes*, p. 42.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.47

accomplish the miracle of the One Thing".⁶⁶ Thus, anything that happens on any level of reality also happens on every other (spiritual) level, referring back to the way in which every layer of reality is an image and reflection of the level above.

Finally, there is the Hermetic account of creation and the composition of the world. In the *Corpus Hermeticum* it states that in the beginning God created the primary matter that constituted the cosmos. From this the four elements from which all other substances can be created - earth, water, fire and air - are separated and ordered (by God) into the seven heavens: the spheres of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Moon and the Sun.⁶⁷ The phenomenal world then leaps forth from the four elements, unthinking and unformed. God, in the form of Nous rather than The Absolute, then makes the seven heavens spin and thereby earth is separated from water and creatures without speech are brought forth. Finally, androgynous Man is created in God's image and God hands the world over to androgynous Man, giving him authority over all creation.⁶⁸ Man showed 'The All' to 'Nature' and Nature fell in love with The All, while Man, seeing his reflection in water, fell in love with Nature and wished to dwell there. Upon becoming one with Nature, Man became a slave to its limitations, such as those of the senses (food, sex and sleep), and also became 'double', being simultaneously immortal in spirit and mortal in body.⁶⁹ This origin story goes on to explain the way in which Man fell from grace, describes the evil of obsession with the physical and draws together the three wisdoms of Hermeticism: the alchemy of the world's composition, the astrology of the seven heavenly spheres and the theurgy involved in Man having dominion over the world and willing himself into nature. This creation myth corresponds well enough to the Christian version of creation that it was not, during the Renaissance, considered heretical or incompatible with Christian teachings.

A school of thought derived in part from Hermeticism, but not as commonplace as the other contextual factors I have described here but deserving of individual consideration because of its influence on Dee's work, is that of Hermetic Qabalah. Hermetic Qabalah is a derivation of the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah (the spelling varies from source to source but I will here be using Qabalah for Hermetic Qabalah to differentiate it from its

⁶⁶ Hauck, D., *The Emerald Tablet: Alchemy for Personal Transformation* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) p45.

⁶⁷ Mead, G.R.S, *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, Vol. 2 (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1906) p20-52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Jewish source) and included influences from astrology, alchemy and Hermeticism, among other traditions.⁷⁰ Its primary concern was with the nature of divinity, which was a combination of those expressed in the Kabbalistic and Hermetic teachings.⁷¹ It rests on the idea that the manifest universe arises from the 'godhead' as a series of emanations which in turn are preceded by three preliminary states.⁷² These three states are known as *Ain* (nothingness), a concentration of *Ain* known as *Ain Suph* (infinity) and the movement of *Ain Suph* known as *Ain Suph Aur* (limitless light, also known as the light of creation) and it is from the last that the first emanation originates.⁷³ There are ten such emanations, which are known as the *Sephiroth* (enumeration), and it is through them that the world is made manifest from the light of creation.⁷⁴ This light passes through each *Sephiroth* in turn before being made manifest. The order of the *Sephiroth* is: *Kether, Chokmah, Binah, Chesed, Geburah, Tiphareth, Netzach, Hod, Yesod* and *Malkuth*. In addition there is a hidden *Sephirah, Daath*, placed between *Binah* and *Chessed* but it is not considered to be one of the *Sephiroth*.⁷⁵ Each of the *Sephiroth* are a nexus of divine energy with its own specific attributes, which Qabalists would consider in order to gain a better understanding of that *Sephirah* and thus gain a greater understanding of the nature of the material world and that of God.⁷⁶

The Tree of Life or Great Tree of the *Sephiroth* (figure 1) is the diagram of the *Sephiroth* which depicts the way in which the light of creation becomes manifest as well as the path of man's spiritual ascent. It is called the Tree as it was considered synonymous with the Tree of Life in the Biblical Garden of Eden.⁷⁷ Its construction includes twenty-two paths between the different *Sephiroth*, rather than simply those by which the Light of Creation travels and each of these paths corresponds to one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, as well as being associated with the Tarot's *Major Arcana*.⁷⁸ While the

⁷⁰ Fortune, D., *The Mystical Qabalah* (London: Aquarian Press, 1987), p6.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p44.

⁷² *Ibid*, p29-42

⁷³ *Ibid*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

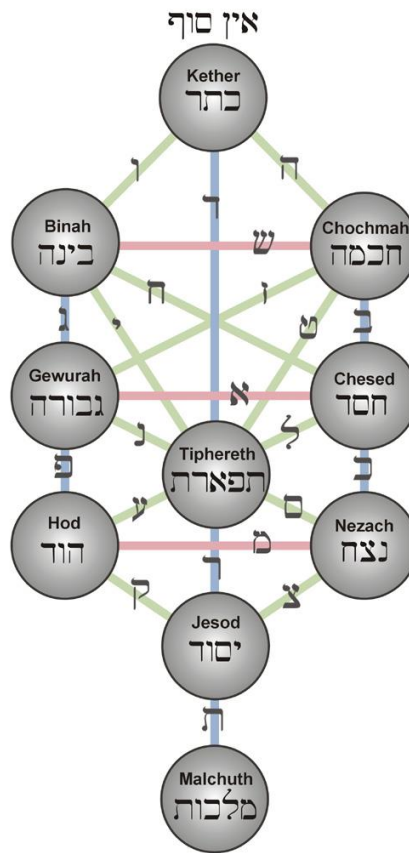
⁷⁵ Regardie, I., *The Golden Dawn: The Original Account of the Teachings, Rites & Ceremonies of the Hermetic Order* (Minnesota: Llewellyn, 2002), p51.

⁷⁶ Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p29-42.

⁷⁷ Schneersohn, S.D., *The Tree of Life – Kuntres Etz HaChayim* trans. Touger, E. (New York: Sichos in English, 1998).

⁷⁸ Waite, A.E., *The Holy Kabbalah*, (New York: University Books, 1960), p554-557.

Sephiroth themselves described the nature of divinity it was thought that the paths between them could describe the ways of knowing God.⁷⁹



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Figure 1: The Great Tree of the *Sephiroth*

The interpretation and manipulation of language was one of the ways in which Qabalists hoped to understand the world. It was believed that God created the first human languages based on His own first language, the language of creation, and that hidden within the letters of human alphabets could be found reflections of this original language and thus the secrets of creation.⁸¹ In traditional Kabbalah this included only the Hebrew language, but Hermetic Qabalists expanded it to other languages including Latin and Greek.⁸² In addition, each Hebrew letter also designated a number which allowed for an extra level of investigation through assigning numerical values to words and phrases and comparing these to other words and phrases in a system known as *Gematria*. It was thus thought by Qabalists that by analysing the languages of Man that

⁷⁹ Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*, p554-557.

⁸⁰ Wessel, F., *Wikimedia Commons*, based on information drawn from *Sefer Yetzirah*.

⁸¹ Dan, J., *Kabbalah: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸² Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p17-21.

the language of God could be reconstructed and decoded and thus an ontological and unbiased truth of the world could be uncovered.⁸³

Complementing these theories of the nature of reality and its creation were a number of methods for manipulating the physical world and explaining its functioning. One of the most important and widespread of these theories was that of alchemy. Contrary to popular belief, alchemy is not simply the search for a method of converting base metals into gold by means of creating the Philosopher's Stone, although this was a specific and important aspect of alchemy known as the *Magnum Opus* or Great Work.⁸⁴ Rather, alchemy is an art focused upon understanding the composition of the elements in physical substances, and thus determining the best way in which the elements could be brought into alignment and balance so that the substance could achieve a state of perfection.⁸⁵ This perfection is conceptualised in terms of achieving a likeness to the divine or most pure form of a substance. The most fundamental aspect of alchemy in the Renaissance was not, in fact, the four basic elements but rather the four attributes by which the first, or primal, matter was divided into the four elements. These are presented as two sets of opposing attributes - hot and cold, dry and moist. Dry and moist were the qualities which gave a substance its primary character, but they did not have the same meanings to alchemists as they did in everyday life.⁸⁶ Dryness was the quality associated with rigidity and stability and it was what allowed a substance to define its shape and remain fixed and structured; whereas moistness was the quality associated with fluidity and flexibility and allowed a substance to adapt to external conditions and constraints and expand to fill its surroundings. The other two attributes pertain to the direction in which a substance seeks to move. Hot substances seek to ascend, while cold substances seek to descend⁸⁷. Each element is comprised of two of these attributes: Fire is hot and dry with hot being dominant, meaning that it seeks to ascend and is the most volatile of the elements; Water is cold and moist with cold being dominant, meaning that it seeks to descend and condense; Air, being hot and moist seeks to ascend but its dominant moist aspect prevents its full ascension; while Earth is cold and dry, seeking to descend yet being blocked by the rigidity imposed by its

⁸³ Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p65-70.

⁸⁴ Linden S.J., *The Alchemy Reader: from Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione* trans. Williams, C.J.F. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p47-55.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

dominant dry aspect, and it was these properties that made Earth the most fixed or least volatile element.⁸⁸ In this way, Fire and Water are seen as the two purest elements, their aspects working in harmony; whereas Earth and Air were considered to be the most material elements, suspended in time and space, caught between the extremes of above and below which Fire and Water exemplified respectively. The most important fundamental of alchemy was that every substance is solely made up of these four elements, the only difference between them being the proportions in which they are present.

Much alchemical thought throughout the Renaissance was directed towards the methods by which one element could be transmuted into another, therefore transforming the substances that contained these elements.⁸⁹ To illustrate the general method by which substances could be transformed it is useful to imagine the elements and their attributes arranged in a square with hot in the upper left hand corner and the other attributes placed at the other corners of the square in the order dry, cold and moist in a clockwise direction.⁹⁰

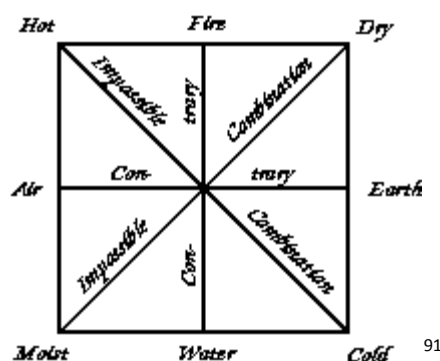


Figure 2: Aristotle's Square of Opposition

This arrangement gives the elements Fire, Earth, Water then Air on each side of the square travelling clockwise from the upper edge. This was known as Aristotle's Square of Opposition (figure 2) and from it alchemists composed their theories of transmutation. There were four rules which governed any transformation that was to be performed in this way. Firstly, the movement through the square had to be in the form of a clockwise rotation, starting with Fire and moving in the direction that accentuated

⁸⁸ Sendivogius, M., *The New Chemical Light One: Treatise on Mercury* (Sequim USA: Holmes Publishing Group, 1998), p3-12.

⁸⁹ Linden, *The Alchemy Reader*, p12-15.

⁹⁰ Hauck, D., *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Alchemy* (New York: Penguin, 2008), p86.

⁹¹ Opsopaus, J., *The Rotation of the Elements* (n.p., 1995).

the primary attribute of the next element into which the substance was to be transformed.⁹² Secondly, elements could not be directly transformed into their opposite: Fire could not directly become Water or vice versa and the same applied to Earth and Air, as they have no attributes in common. It was, however, possible to transform an element into its opposite by stages, - for example, Fire becomes Earth which becomes Water.⁹³ Thirdly, the qualities are always inversely proportional to one another, meaning that if an earlier quality in the rotation has a higher intensity then the rate of increase of the following quality will be greater and, conversely, the higher intensity a later quality in the rotation has then the more the preceding quality will decrease. For example, increasing the dry attribute will increase the cold attribute but decrease the hot attribute.⁹⁴ Finally, whenever there were two elements that shared a common quality then the element in which it is not dominant would be overcome. This is referred to as the Cycle of Triumphs and was first described by Raymond Lully (1229-1315). According to this system Earth overcomes Fire, Water overcomes Earth, Air overcomes Water and Fire overcomes Air.⁹⁵ Therefore, by carefully altering the attributes of their materials an alchemist could transform its elemental makeup and thus change its form. The ultimate goal of this was to balance the elements in such a way that the material could reach a perfect state in which all of the elements existed in equilibrium.

Alchemy was not just applied to inanimate objects but to living things as well and, most importantly, in the medical understanding of human ailments. In this case the four elements took on yet another form - that of the humors - and their attributes were identified in various physical states and illnesses.⁹⁶ Fire was represented by the Choleric humor of yellow bile, which was hot and dry and dominant in people who were energetic, active and 'on-fire', both in terms of fever and behaviour. Water was associated with the Phlegmatic humor of phlegm which represented the clear fluids of the body such as those secreted from the mucous membranes and those carried by the lymphatic system. If dominant it led to congestion and sweating. Air was associated with the Sanguine humor of the blood and was associated with fatigue when dominant. Earth was associated with the Melancholic humor of black bile and was dominant in those

⁹² Hauck, *Guide to Alchemy*, p87.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p87-88.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p88.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

⁹⁶ Hippocrates, *Hippocratic Writings* trans. Lonie, I.M., Chadwick, J., Mann, W.N. and Withington, E.T. (London: Penguin UK, 2005), p262.

who had skin conditions or insomnia.⁹⁷ The identification of these humors with disease as well as the elements led to many alchemical remedies. These included removing the fluids associated with humors that were in excess, administering herbs and metals which contained opposing elements, and attempting to alter the attributes of an afflicted person's body in order to mitigate disease. But these practical and material forms of alchemy were not the entire extent of alchemical practice, for it also extended to spiritual matters.

The ultimate act of alchemical transformation was not, as is often supposed, the transmutation of base metals into gold, or even the creation of an elixir of life to transmute the human body into a perfect, deathless state, but rather the balancing and purification of the human soul, so that it may attain salvation.⁹⁸ This was done in much the same way as the transformation of physical bodies, by attempting to balance the emotional and mental states that were associated with the four elements. When this was done perfectly, it was thought the soul would be purified of all sin and doubt and would thus be ready to ascend to heaven.⁹⁹ This spiritual or metaphysical alchemy added extra importance to the alchemists' work as everything that they learned by manipulating the physical make-up of the world could then be applied to the quest for salvation.¹⁰⁰ Despite this potential benefit, however, spiritual alchemy was not a popular field of study during Dee's time as the changing political landscape made such paths to enlightenment risky given their potential to clash with dominant religious views. This lack of active pursuit, however, did not mean that the idea of spiritual alchemy was unknown to Renaissance thinkers, who often utilised it in following other theories, such as those prescribed in Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and even applying such theories to Christian teachings. It is with this aspect that we can see the true extent and reach of alchemy's quest for perfection, and the true power that its practitioners hoped to unlock.

The most important factor affecting the course of alchemy in the late Renaissance and early Reformation period came not from religious volatility but from within academia itself, and its belief that the ancient philosophers and alchemists of Greece had already

⁹⁷ Hippocrates, *Hippocratic Writings*, p262.

⁹⁸ Faivre, A. and Hanegraaff, W.J., *Western esotericism and the science of religion: Selected Papers Presented at the 17th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Mexico City, 1995* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1998), p96.

⁹⁹ Merkur, D., *Gnosis: an esoteric tradition of mystical visions and unions* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁰ Faivre and Hanegraaff, *Western esotericism and the science of religion*.

solved all of the problems and uncovered all of the secrets of alchemy or been given such answers by God, as detailed in the Hermetic teachings. This belief meant that the best and only path to alchemical success was to study these past works in ever greater detail, removing from them the corruption of hundreds of years of editing and mistranslation.¹⁰¹ To question the wisdom of the ancients or to contradict their teachings was the alchemical equivalent of blasphemy and those who dared, such as Paracelsus, were ostracised and dubbed madmen.¹⁰² Nevertheless, as the Renaissance progressed it began to become more commonplace for alchemists to attempt new experiments and put forward their own theories; rarely in direct contradiction to the ancients and almost exclusively remaining true to the basic principles of the four elements, but nonetheless examining them anew and attempting to find new applications for alchemical knowledge.¹⁰³ The alchemists, including Dee, who engaged in such work were treading a very fine line, however, for their questioning often led them into areas which were not compatible with the doctrines of the, or those of the Christian Churches supported in this period by various European states.

Another way in which it was thought that the action of the world could be understood and manipulated was through the practice of astrology. Renaissance astrology was a system for predicting events based upon the premise that there was a correlation between the movements of the celestial bodies, the stars and 'planets' (which included the sun and the moon), and events that occurred on Earth.¹⁰⁴ This correlation was not considered causative but rather reflected the Hermetic maxim "as above, so below" which implied that the macrocosm of the stars was reflected in the microcosm of the individual.¹⁰⁵ Thus the same influences that were prevalent in the Heavens at a given time would also be prevalent in the world in general as well as in the individual. The origin of this tradition, as is the case with much of Renaissance thought, can be traced back to ancient Greek texts. Specifically, Renaissance astrology was primarily based upon the *Apotelesmatika* (effects), also called the *Tetrabiblos* (four books), written by

¹⁰¹ Kahane, H. and Kahane, R., 'Alchemy: Hellenistic and Medieval Alchemy', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol.1 ed. Jones, L. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p244-248.

¹⁰² Ball, P., *The Devil's Doctor: Paracelsus and the World of Renaissance Magic and Science* (London: Random House, 2006).

¹⁰³ Coudert, A., 'Renaissance Alchemy' in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol.1 ed. Jones, L. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), p250-254.

¹⁰⁴ Kassell, L., 'Stars, spirits, signs: towards a history of astrology 1100–1800', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* Vol.41 (2010): p67–69.

¹⁰⁵ Robbins, F.E., ed., *Ptolemy: Tetrabiblos* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940).

Claudius Ptolemy in the second century CE and first available in full in Europe in a Latin translation produced by Plato of Tivoli in 1138. The *Apotelesmatika* was not an entirely novel work but rather a compilation and explanation of contemporary astrological practices. It provided a schema by which accurate and true astrology should be performed and was considered essential reading for any astrologer in universities throughout Europe during the Renaissance.¹⁰⁶

Predicting events using astrology relied on the position of the planets in relation to the signs of the Zodiac. The seven classical planets acknowledged in the Renaissance were the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, and each of these were considered to be associated with two of the four alchemical attributes: heat, dryness, coldness and wetness.¹⁰⁷ The Zodiac is a circle centred upon the ecliptic, the apparent path of the sun across the sky over the course of the year, and is made up of twelve divisions of 30° of celestial longitude.¹⁰⁸ Each division is associated with a sign: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces, which correspond to the twelve constellations bearing the same names.¹⁰⁹ The Zodiac commences on the Vernal (or spring) equinox and this day is known as the First Degree of Aries, as Aries is the first sign of the Zodiac.¹¹⁰ However, by the time of the Renaissance the precessional movement of the Earth meant that the tropical zodiac (which uses the vernal equinox as the starting point) was out of synchronisation with the sidereal zodiac (which relies on the stellar background to determine its beginning and end) meaning that the sign of Aries actually fell within the constellation of Pisces.¹¹¹ This simply meant that the predictions made using tropical astrology were based on the time of year and not directly on the positions of the Zodiacal constellations.

The process of making predictions in astrology, known as casting a horoscope, revolved around determining the exact relative position of the stars and planets to the subject of the prophecy, whether that subject was an individual, a relationship, a monarch's rule or an entire country. To do this the exact location and time of the beginning of the

¹⁰⁶ Rutkin, H.D., 'The Use and Abuse of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe: Two Case Studies (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Filippo Fantoni)', *Ptolemy in Perspective: Use and Criticism of his Work from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* ed. Jones, A. (Netherlands: Springer Netherlands, 2010), p135-149.

¹⁰⁷ Robbins, *Tetrabiblos*.

¹⁰⁸ Sachs, A., 'A Classification of the Babylonian Astronomical Tablets of the Seleucid Period', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* Vol.2 No.4 (1948): p271-290.

¹⁰⁹ Whitfield, P., *Astrology: A History* (New York: Abrams, 2001).

¹¹⁰ Thurston, H., *Early Astronomy* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1994), p135-137.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

subject must be known (birth for people, coronations for monarchs, founding for countries, etc.) and a chart of the heavens made for this time.¹¹² The astrologer then had to compare the relative positions of the celestial bodies to each other and the subject and, by interpreting these positions based upon previously established rules, would then be able to foretell the subject's future.¹¹³ Furthermore, it was considered that "the lesser cause always yields to the stronger",¹¹⁴ which meant that predictions for an individual would be subject to alteration based upon those of other individuals, their community and country, adding layers of complexity that had to be overcome before an accurate foretelling could be made. In addition, Ptolemaic astrology allowed for the concept of free will, in that the celestial influences made certain events more likely, but not inevitable, and that only when all relevant horoscopes aligned was an event fixed.¹¹⁵ This concession to free will is one of the reasons that astrology was allowed to be practiced in Christian countries whereas other forms of predicting the future through occult practices were not.¹¹⁶

While not technically a part of the academic and intellectual culture in which Dee moved it is important to acknowledge here the impact that magic had upon his world. Modern definitions of magic include what Dee would have called natural magic or 'occult knowledge' (literally meaning hidden knowledge or knowledge of hidden things) and he would have considered these a legitimate area of study. The Renaissance concept of magic involved explicitly summoning, bargaining with or receiving of power from, supernatural beings. For many this always meant demons, but to others the scope was wider and included the conjuring of any supernatural beings, from the highest angel to the most infernal demon (this last was an inherently evil act of magic). In Dee's time, the power and reality of these beings, and the practice of magic, was rarely if ever questioned, and thus it was commonplace to take such forces into account in any kind of work, not just those specifically dealing with the occult arts. Fields that would now commonly be considered to be magical, such as alchemy, astrology and the influences of 'lines of force' (often associated with astrology but also applying to other supposed sources of power) were not classified as magic during the Renaissance. They were all

¹¹² Robbins, *Tetrabiblos*.

¹¹³ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.25–29.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ Lindberg, D. C., *The beginnings of western science: the European scientific tradition in philosophical, religious, and institutional context, prehistory to A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p247.

accepted aspects of reality, as unquestioned then as gravity is today, although the morality of toying with such forces was sometimes called into question.

This was the intellectual context in which Dee, in 1564, conceived of and published his *Monas Hieroglyphica*. It was a world in which present day distinctions between religion and secular philosophy, science and magic were less rigid and where an intellectually curious man could, often without attracting significant comment, traverse boundaries that it would be impossible to consider crossing today. This interconnectedness of reality and knowledge also meant that a symbol like the idea of a universal symbol such as the Monad could be seriously contemplated and accepted as potentially summing up all knowledge. With this premise in mind I will now turn my attention to the way in which Dee's Monad was able to embody a number of Renaissance influences.

Chapter Three: Bringing Disparate Ideas Together in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*

A number of works and schools of thought clearly inspired Dee's *Monas*, including Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, alchemy, precessional astronomy, tantric gnosis, astrology, hermetic qabalah and geometry among others but I will focus here on alchemy, astrology, Qabalah and geometry as they are the schools of thought which are most strongly represented and easily identified in the text. In this chapter, I will explore why, and then how, these different disciplines and schools of thought were combined by Dee in what was an important integrative exercise. I have drawn on two translations of Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, that by C.H. Josten and that by J.W. Hamilton-Jones. The Hamilton-Jones edition was published first and I have used it due to its use of contextually specific knowledge in translation as well as the explanation of the theorems that follows the translation of Dee's work. It is acknowledged as a good translation of Dee's work but is not considered the best or most accurate, which is why I have also examined the translation by Josten. Josten's translation of the *Monas* is considered to be the most accurate translation made to date and includes the preface to Maximilian II that is not included in the Hamilton-Jones version.

Before providing the analysis, a brief description of the *Monas* and the Monad, along with an examination of Dee's motivation for writing the *Monas*, is useful.

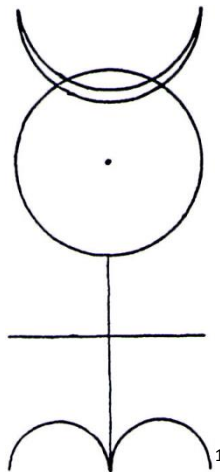


Figure 3: The Hieroglyphic Monad

¹ Dee, J., *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, trans. J.W. Hamilton-Jones (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000), p32.

The Monad itself is simply the symbol pictured here (figure 3) - a circle with a dot at the centre with a semi-circle passing through the top, all atop a cross with two semicircles originating from its base.² In this simple glyph Dee attempted to symbolise all of creation and to uncover the secrets of nature.³ Dee believed that the symbol was given to him through divine inspiration and that hidden within it were the secrets of healing the world and returning it to its original perfect state.⁴ The *Monas Hieroglyphica*, the text explaining his symbol, was written in thirteen days in Antwerp in 1564.⁵ Dee was in Antwerp following an intellectual tour of Europe that began in 1562 and included Louvain, Paris, Zurich, Venice, Rome and Graz.⁶ During his travels Dee visited a number of prominent intellectuals and spent much of his time making copies of books, especially those concerned with alchemy and Kabbalah.⁷ Ostensibly, Dee wrote the *Monas* in a state of divine inspiration, but there are other explanations for why Dee decided to finally write about his Monad in 1564 after “seven years gestation”⁸. As already mentioned, Dee’s aim in producing the *Monas* was to uncover the secret, underlying unity of all things and thus perfect all schools of knowledge.⁹ It was believed that, once this was done, the world could be returned to a perfect, Eden-like state, ending all hardship and uniting Christendom. A pre-requisite for this was the discovery of the Philosopher’s Stone, which the Monad was supposed to accomplish, and the appearance of a ‘Last World Emperor’.¹⁰ The Last World Emperor was a mythical figure who, it was thought, would arise immediately before the apocalypse and unite Christendom, destroy or convert all non-Christians and rule in peace and prosperity before finally giving up their empire to God; and that this would herald the rise of the Anti-Christ and the beginning of the apocalypse.¹¹ Dee’s reason for writing his *Monas* in 1564 might have been due to the recent coronation of Maximilian II, (a member of the Hapsburg family and later Holy Roman Emperor) as King of Hungary as the Hapsburgs had long been associated with the myth of the Last World Emperor.¹² By presenting

² *Ibid.*

³ Josten, ‘John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica*’, p84-221.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p53.

⁶ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, pvii.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Daniel, E.R., ‘Medieval Apocalypticism: Looking for the Last Emperor’, *Christian History* Vol.61 (1999).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*.

Maximilian with the key to fulfilling this destiny Dee was clearly hoping to bring about his new world order and was likely trying to garner political favour for himself as well. The *Monas* itself consists of a series of twenty-four theorems, each building on and adding layers of meaning to those before it. The book itself is aimed at initiates only, so that the great secrets would not fall into the hands of the unworthy and be misused.¹³

Dee's conception of the Great Work of alchemy involved a holistic approach which required both a spiritual and physical transformation in order to function at all. According to Dee the Great Work (i.e. the transformation of base metals into gold) was much easier to perform in the past but had become more difficult as time went by due to the gradual spiritual degradation of humanity since its expulsion from the Garden of Eden.¹⁴ Thus, in his time, he believed that the Great Work couldn't be completed. As Burns and Moore (2007) explain, "by physical, external, or mental means alone, but requires that in parallel to the physical processes of the alchemist's laboratory and mental gyrations of the student's mind a holistic inner alchemical transformation takes place within the entirety of the alchemist himself or herself. It is through the catalyst of inner transformation that the external process can be fulfilled."¹⁵ By the same logic, the knowledge of the past, the great secrets of alchemy handed down to the magi (ancient Greek philosophers) by God, did not work for Dee's contemporaries, because their debased spiritual state was such that they could not employ them successfully. Despite this, alchemy was a fundamentally important part of the world view of sixteenth-century natural philosophers and, if Dee hoped to create a glyph that explained the entirety of creation, he needed to include not only the instructions for physical alchemy but also provide guidance on how to achieve the spiritual state that would allow the alchemist to succeed in the *Magnum Opus*. As the physical and spiritual forms of alchemy explained between them the workings and perfection of all physical matter and the human soul it was essential that a universal glyph contain both of these dimensions.

Despite the fundamental nature of alchemy there is little direct reference to it in Dee's *Monas*, and yet it was an important aspect of the Monad's construction. In fact, it has been suggested that the *Monas* was constructed as a series of steps that should take the student through a process of contemplation to the final dawning of understanding

¹³ Forshaw, P.J., 'The Early Alchemical Reception of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*' *AMBIX* Vol.52 (2005): p247-269.

¹⁴ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p17.

¹⁵ Burns, T. and Moore, J.A., 'The *Hieroglyphic Monad* of John Dee Theorems I-XVII: A Guide to the Outer Mysteries', *Journal of Western Mystery Tradition*, Vol.2 (2007).

that is, at its heart, an alchemical process in which the student is transformed into an initiate in both mind and soul. This is best exemplified by Dee in theorem XIII (see appendix 1) where he tells us that the alchemical transformation is not possible “in this current epoch unless we add to this coralline crystal work a certain SOUL separated from the body by the pyrognomic (heating to the point of incandescence) art”.¹⁶ If we accept the student as the basic material of the alchemical transformation then this passage can be interpreted as the need to purify the spirit of the student in order for them to be successfully transformed into an initiate.

Alchemy is also present in the *Monas* in a more explicit way wherever Dee expounded the physical principles which govern the world. The first instance of this is in theorem V,¹⁷ in which Dee referred to the Light of the Philosophers, the light that God created on the first day, which is not the light of any celestial body and is the essential element of alchemy.¹⁸ Secondly, theorem XIII¹⁹ is (in addition to its spiritual meaning) a step in physical alchemy in which the substance is purified.²⁰ In this case the ‘SOUL’ represents a corrupting force or substance which needs to be removed, as in the case of an impure substance from which a foreign contaminant could be removed by, for example, the liberation of fumes or vapours. Thus a step in physical alchemy, which would be readily understood by Dee’s contemporaries, provided a way into the mysteries of the Monad and thus furthered the transformation of the student. In addition to this a major section of Dee’s glyph, the central cross, represents the four alchemical elements: earth, water, fire and air, their combinations and the purification of each.²¹ By positioning the elements in this central position Dee shows that they are fundamental to all that is and positions them as the subjects of manipulation by the other forces represented in his glyph. This balancing of the elements and astrological forces on the central ‘terrestrial body’ has been interpreted by some authorities as Dee’s attempt to explicate his theory for producing the Philosopher’s Stone.²² As a final example of the explicit use of physical alchemy in *The Monas*, theorem XVIII contains a number of references to physical alchemy, the first and most obvious being in the associated diagram (figure 4) which

¹⁶ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p17.

¹⁷ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p11.

¹⁸ Burns and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

¹⁹ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p17.

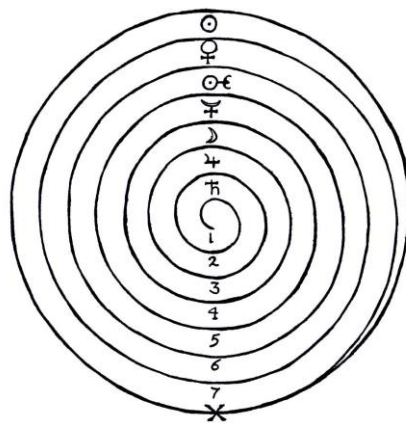
²⁰ Linden S.J., *The alchemy reader: from Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.17.

²¹ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p12.

²² Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p57-59.

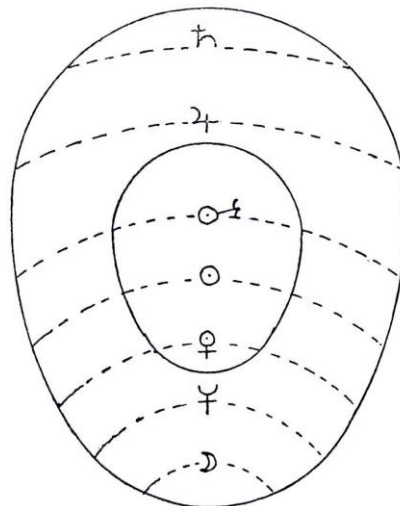
shows the progression from lead in the centre of the spiral to gold at the periphery, indicating the process by which the impure, base substance may be transformed into its most perfect form.

In addition, Dee includes the symbol of the egg, within which the symbols for the planets are contained (figure 5).²³ The egg was an important motif in all forms of alchemy, as both a symbol of transformation from a mineral to animal form and as the vessel (known as the *Ovum Philosophicum* or *aludel*) in formulations for the Philosopher's Stone itself. So despite the *Monas* containing little direct reference to it,



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Figure 4: Dee's Spiral diagram in theorem XVIII



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Figure 5: Dee's Egg diagram in theorem XVIII

²³ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p24-28.

²⁴ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p27.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p25.

alchemy was fundamental to Dee's world view and the transformative process he believed was necessary for the initiate and thus it should be no surprise that it is a recurring and fundamental part of his Monad.

In addition to the alchemical properties of matter it was believed by Dee and his contemporaries that the planets and stars exerted a real and active force upon the world.²⁶ This effect was separate from horoscopic astrology which relied upon the correspondence between the material and celestial worlds and was thought to occur through the action of rays of force that emanated from the stars and interacted with earthly matter, including human beings.²⁷ In this way, the planets and stars affected the fates of men and nations and even the way in which physical processes and alchemical reactions occurred. Thus, if a symbol was to explicate the entire world and all of creation, these forces and their effects had to be an integral part of it. Closely associated with this type of astrology was the field of optics, the manipulation and focussing of these rays as well as of light, by the manipulation of mirrors and lenses. Through this process of focussing opticians were able to heighten or lessen the influences of different planets and constellations and thus specific effects could be evoked. The Monad incorporates both of these fields and presents the way in which they can be combined to create the perfect balance of the celestial rays.

More fundamentally, however, astrology was always linked to alchemy - with the astrological planets each representing one of the alchemical metals. While Dee does take advantage of this, especially in the case of Mercury in theorems VI, XII and XIII (alchemical Mercury being the fundamental and most basic physical material with which an alchemist can work), there were other ways he joined the two. A prominent instance of this is in theorem X when he says, "The Sun and the Moon of this Monad desire that the Elements in which the tenth proportion will flower, shall be separated, and this is done by the application of Fire".²⁸ Fire in this case refers specifically to the Fire of Aries which is the first sign of the Zodiac and the beginning of the Zodiacal cycle. This combination of an alchemical process, the heating of a substance to separate it into its component parts, with astrological influences, the Sun, Moon and Aries, allows for multiple layers of meaning to be encoded in a relatively simple sentence. Similarly,

²⁶Shumaker, W., ed. and trans., Heilbron, J.L. contributor, *John Dee on Astronomy: Propaedeumata aphoristica* (London and Los Angeles: Berkely, 1975).

²⁷ Guiley, R.E., *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2006), p23-26.

²⁸ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p14.

alchemy and astronomy are again combined in theorem XII where we “have ‘Mercury’/Hermes, the ‘pure magical spirit,’ performing the ‘whitening,’ one of the steps of physical alchemy, upon a zodiacal age, suggesting that external alchemy involves the transformation of time as well as space.”²⁹ The idea of temporal alchemy, the transformation of time or a period of time, seems to be consistent with the idea discussed earlier about physical alchemy being impossible in Dee’s era without an infusion of SOUL. In this theorem the focussing of astrological influences, specifically those of the Sun and Moon, along with Mercury and the fire of Aries, is used to mitigate the gradual degradation of the human soul and achieve the desired spiritual transformation through the SOUL of these stellar bodies.

The inclusion of astrology in the *Monas* is often quite explicit, with Dee spending much of the first fifteen theorems explaining how the symbols of the planets make up the Monad and how they were incorporated metaphorically as well as symbolically.³⁰ This argument begins in theorem III, with Dee explaining how the sun, moon and planets make their revolutions around the Earth. Initially this seems to indicate that Dee is working from a geocentric (rather than heliocentric) model of the solar system, and this is certainly one way in which the *Monas* can be interpreted. However, if we take into account Dee’s Hermetic context, then another possible interpretation presents itself. Employing a Hermetic interpretation Dee may not be claiming that the Earth is literally the centre of creation but rather that a person, as the spark of divine consciousness through which the whole of creation can be perceived, must take themselves as the central starting point from which the rest of the universe can be perceived and upon which external forces act.³¹ It is also possible that Dee was being influenced by his knowledge of celestial navigation and horoscopic astrology (he was a practitioner of both), as the important factor for both disciplines is not simply the relative position of the celestial bodies to the sun but rather their relationship to the individual: for navigators, to discover their location and bearing, and for astrologers, to predict an individual’s future.³² In both instances, therefore, we can see that it is of primary importance where the celestial bodies are in relation to the individual and that the goal is to determine the path which one should or will take, for navigation, direction; and for astrology, the likely future. As with alchemy this suggests a dual purpose for

²⁹ Burns, and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

³⁰ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p9-20.

³¹ Burns, and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

³² Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy*, p23-26.

astrology/astronomy in Dee's Monad, supposedly providing astronomers with the ability to observe the orbits of the heavenly bodies "at any given time and without any mechanical instruments",³³ as well as indicating a map or perhaps a foretold fate by which the student can be initiated into Dee's greater mysteries.

The way in which the Monad evokes these alchemical and astrological meanings is through the tradition of Hermetic Qabalah. The most prominent writer on Hermetic Qabalah in this period was Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), a German magician, occult writer, astrologer, alchemist and theologian who wrote the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* which, among other subjects, incorporated the theory and practice of Jewish Kabbalah into Western magic.³⁴ It is known that Dee had access to this text and it can be deduced that many of his ideas were taken from this source along with other writers who drew on Agrippa's ideas in the sixteenth century.³⁵ The primary aspect of Qabalah that Dee drew upon was the analysis of the language of creation, the language spoken by God and through which all of Creation was brought into being.³⁶

Dee's inclusion of Qabalah in the *Monas* is almost universal as the entirety of the text can be seen as a Qabalistic deconstruction of Dee's symbol, examining it as though it were a letter or a sentence to determine the truths that it hid.³⁷ Essentially, Dee was claiming that the Monad itself is a divine symbol; a truth of nature that he has discovered rather than created, and the *Monas* is his proof of its divinity. This can be made clear in the way that Dee assigns the number 252 to the Monad in theorem XVII by taking the products and sums of numbers derived from the central cross of the Monad.³⁸ In Jewish Kabbalah, the fact that Hebrew letters each corresponded to a number is of great significance as it allows words and texts to be analysed mathematically to determine their hidden meanings.³⁹ The significance of the number 252 is that it enabled Dee to associate his symbol with the entire Hebrew alphabet as "it is the product of the three types of letters in the Hebrew alphabet: three mothers, seven doubles, and 12 simples, $3 \times 7 \times 12 = 252$ ".⁴⁰ This made Dee's symbol very

³³ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, px.

³⁴ Agrippa, H.C., *Three books of occult philosophy* annotated by Donald Tyson (Minnesota: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2005).

³⁵ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, pg 54-56.

³⁶ Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy*, p155-159.

³⁷ Burns, and Moore, 'A Guide to the Outer Mysteries'.

³⁸ Josten, 'John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', p84-221.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Burns, and Moore, 'A Guide to the Outer Mysteries'.

important as, to a Qabalist, the Hebrew alphabet represented the entire powers of creation.⁴¹ If one symbol could be conclusively shown to be equivalent of the Hebrew or any other directly divinely inspired alphabet (Latin or Greek, for example), then it truly would be a universal symbol and must therefore contain all of the secrets of creation.

The *Monas* can also be interpreted as a set of instructions for constructing the Qabalistic Great Tree, a diagram that represented the way in which the world was thought to have been created through the Ten *Sephiroth*. This consisted of, initially, the spheres of “the Sun and the Moon, with the axis of the Middle Pillar running through their central points, conjuncting the cross”.⁴² Thus Dee’s revolutions of the Sun and the Moon in his explanations of the symbols of the planets in theorems XII and XIII can be seen to correspond to the Ten *Sephiroth*, as does his identification of the Decad (set of ten) in the central cross of the elements in his *Monad*.⁴³ Because the Great Tree of the *Sephiroth* explained the way in which the power of the ineffable God can enter, create and maintain the world, these associations bring the *Monad* one step closer to the divine truth that Dee sought to represent.⁴⁴ By combining this idea with the astrological rotations and the four elements, Dee united three of the major forces that were thought to govern the world - God’s will, the actions of the planets and the natures of the elements, the very matter from which the world is made.

Dee’s Decad also incorporated another Qabalistic idea that is fundamental to understanding Man’s place in the world, and that is the soul. The cross of the *Monad* not only indicated the Decad and the Quaternary, explicitly representing the four elements, but also the Ternary. In Qabalistic terms the Ternary represents the three parts of the soul, *nephesch* (meaning rest and being the part of the soul concerned with physical desire and instinct, possessed by everything that exists), *ruach* (meaning wind and being the part of the soul that can distinguish good and evil, the ‘life force’ possessed by all living things) and *neschamah* (meaning breath and being the part of the soul that gives Man intelligence and the part that lives on after death, and is only possessed by Man)⁴⁵ as well as the three parts of a human being; Body, Mind and Spirit.⁴⁶ This ultimately allowed the *Monas* to illuminate the Qabalistic idea of

⁴¹ Fortune, D., *The Mystical Qabalah*, (London: Aquarian Press, 1987).

⁴² Burns, and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

⁴³ Josten, ‘John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica*’, p84-221.

⁴⁴ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, pviii.

⁴⁵ Boteach, S., *Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge* (Maryland: Jason Aronson, 1996).

⁴⁶ Burns, and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

pantheism, that all that exists is a direct expression and ultimately a part of the ineffable God.⁴⁷ Dee's Monad equated the four elements, the mortal soul, and the seven planets and alchemical metals (Dee's septenary) with the Great Tree of the Ten *Sephiroth* which encompassed the expression of God. Thus the Hieroglyphic Monad symbolically represented the unity of existence which in turn enhanced its significance. This is because the Hermetic teachings found in the *Emerald Tablet* express the idea that every plane of existence is a reflection of the one above it in the cosmic order, so if one can fully understand the physical world one can understand something of the higher planes of existence as well.

The final influence on Dee's *Monas* examined here is that of geometry and mathematics, which, during the Renaissance held a similar status to the original language in Qabalistic thought.⁴⁸ During this period these fields held a greater significance than they do today, and were not seen as merely being a passive tool through which the universe can be measured but rather as the force through which the universe was created and maintained. This was thought to have been performed by God through the use of 'formal' numbers, the numbers that describe the letters and words with which the entire universe was described and brought into being and with which, if they could be discovered, it could be returned to its original, perfect state.⁴⁹ The idea of formal numbers parallels the principles of Hermetic Qabalah, which allows for numbers to be manipulated in symbolic, metaphorical and even (because of the correspondence between Hebrew letters and numbers) linguistic ways, rather than simply mathematical ones.⁵⁰ As a consequence of this it was thought that geometric shapes "were sacred images and manipulating them was a way to evoke the divine in one's own mind".⁵¹ For all of these reasons it was essential that Dee include geometry in his Monad.

Arguably the most explicit inclusion of mathematics in Dee's *Monas* is that of the Pythagorean *Tetractys* or Decad. This was based on the fourth triangular number, which is ten, and which Pythagoras had frequently described as $1+2+3+4=10$.⁵² This is important as it is one of the ways in which Dee produced his Decad out of the quaternary. Additionally, the Pythagorean Decad was considered to be a metaphor for

⁴⁷ Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, p37-42.

⁴⁸ Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy*, p155-159.

⁴⁹ Recorde, R., *The Grounde of Artes* (London: Reynold Wolff, 1543).

⁵⁰ Guiley, *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy*, p155-159.

⁵¹ Burns, and Moore, 'A Guide to the Outer Mysteries'.

⁵² Dantzig, T., *Number: The Language of Science* (New York: Plume, 2007), p42.

the three dimensions: the “1” representing the point, or zero dimensions; the “2”, a line defined by two points or one dimension; the “3”, a two dimensional object such as a triangle defined by three points; and the “4”, a three dimensional object such as a pyramid defined by four points.⁵³ In this way the Pythagorean Decad represented all existent objects, from the dimensionless ‘source’ of the Hermetic god to the lines of force of the celestial bodies to the physical matter of the world. Finally, since the top point of the triangle that represented the Pythagorean Decad was considered to be the tenth, and it is in the line that represented the single point the numbers 1 and 10 are considered to be one and the same in mystical geometry, meaning that the whole of the ten was contained within the one of the point, or monad.⁵⁴ This configuration ties in with Hermetic Qabalah as the ten *Sephiroth* were all a part of, and emanate from, the one that is God, further deepening the layers of meaning in Dee’s glyph by interconnecting the principles of Pythagorean mathematics and Hermetic Qabalah within the Monad.

Dee manipulated the geometry of his Monad throughout the text. He specifically defined the geometric dimensions of the Monad in theorem XXIII but in other theorems, specifically theorems XVI, XII and XIII, the lengths of the lines of the cross are altered.⁵⁵ In these theorems Dee also removed parts of the Monad or cut it up using specific geometric operations to create either discrete astrological signs or Latin letters. This in turn allowed him to explain astrological influences in a geometrically predetermined order and the key word *LUX* (light, here possibly meaning both the Light of the Philosophers and that of astrology and optics as discussed earlier) within a specific mathematical context, further enhancing the Qabalistic dimensions of the Monad.⁵⁶ Finally, the entire text can be seen as instructions for creating a three dimensional depiction of the Great Tree of the *Sephiroth*, based on a combination of the Pythagorean progression of the dimensions detailed above, the astrological rotations through which Dee describes the different astrological systems, and Dee’s specifically stated geometric operations.⁵⁷ Just as it was thought to do in the world, Dee used

⁵³ Guthrie, K.S., *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ Josten, ‘John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica*’, p123.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p84-221.

⁵⁶ Burns, and Moore, ‘A Guide to the Outer Mysteries’.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

geometry as the underlying force through which all of the other influences were combined and held together.

These four strands of thought are not the only ones that Dee utilised in the crafting of the *Monas Hieroglyphica* but they are the most fundamental and arguably the most important. All four held claim to being the path to discovering the fundamental, divine truth and were all essential ways of understanding the world during Dee's time. By drawing on all of these different schools of thought and showing how all of them fit into his Monad, Dee imbued his symbol with divine authority. As all four of these influences (and most of the others Dee used) derived their authority either from God or from the supposedly indisputable wisdom of the ancients, Dee's Monad was on a very firm footing in the intellectual context of his day.

Chapter Four: Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century

Reception of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*

As has been shown, Dee's *Monas* was a remarkable synthesis of Renaissance thought and the culmination of Dee's accumulated knowledge at the time of its writing but, despite this, it did not achieve the prestige that Dee had hoped for it, nor did it bring about the drastic change in the approach to knowledge that he intended.¹ In this chapter I propose that there were two major reasons for this, the first being that Dee's political reputation in England was severely damaged, and the second was that his *Monas* was only understandable by a select group of learned men who were familiar with the background knowledge outlined in the previous two chapters. I will also show that among such men the *Monad* did achieve a level of respect and acclaim but, as it was still unintelligible to the majority of the wealthy patrons who funded such thinkers, this ultimately profited Dee himself little. The *Monad's* influence in these circles is evident through the rest of Dee's life and into the early to mid-seventeenth century and so it is this period that I will be examining in this final chapter.

Dee dedicated his *Monas* to Maximilian II in an effort to gain his patronage but it appears the Holy Roman Emperor ignored the *Monas*, if indeed he ever saw it.² This lack of response was characteristic of the way the social and intellectual elites in general reacted to Dee's *Monas*, with no serious patronage being offered to him because of this work and the *Monas* itself being rejected by English universities.³ Their disinterest does not seem to have been due to a lack of perceived merit in Dee's theories, for as we shall see in this chapter many of his contemporaries who studied Hermeticism and Qabalah valued the work highly.⁴ Rather, it was a consequence of the text's incomprehensibility and Dee's poor standing politically, which stemmed from political intrigues in the English court. By the time he had returned from continental Europe, where as previously mentioned he wrote the *Monas*, Dee had acquired a reputation as a conjuror

¹ Josten, C.H., trans., 'A Translation of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', *Ambix* Vol.12 (1964): p84-221.

² Parry, G., *The Arch-Conjuror of England: John Dee* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2011), pg 60.

³ Forshaw, P.J., 'The Early Alchemical Reception of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', *AMBIX* Vol.52 (2005): p247-269.

⁴ French, P.J., *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p80.

and, far worse in Protestant England, not just a conjuror but a Catholic conjuror.⁵ Dee's reputation was severely damaged by these claims, created and elaborated upon by his political rivals. Foremost amongst these rivals was Vincent Murphyn, now known to be a forger and charlatan who was brother-in-law to John Prestall, a Catholic anti-Elizabeth conspirator and conjuror whose magical attacks and predictions Dee was credited with countering on a number of occasions.⁶ Murphyn forged letters which implicated Dee in conjuring in aid of the Catholic cause,⁷ and these included one document that went on to be published in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (first published in 1563), a popular book detailing the suffering of Protestants under The Catholic rule of Mary I.⁸ *Acts and Monuments* is considered to be the origin of the idea that Dee was a conjuror and a Catholic sympathiser because, as well as reproducing the forged letter, it detailed some of Dee's service to Bishop Bonner of London during the reign of Queen Mary.⁹

Despite Dee's political woes the *Monas* did manage to garner some interest amongst the upper echelons of society, most notably from Queen Elizabeth herself.¹⁰ Dee sent a copy of his *Monas* to the queen prior to his return to England in 1564 and, upon his return, was called upon to instruct the queen herself.¹¹ We know of this meeting from Dee, who wrote:

Her Majestie very graciously vouchsafed to account herselfe my scholar in my booke... *Monas Hieroglyphica*; and said, whereas I had prefixed in the forefront of the book; *Qui non intelligit, aut taceat aut discat* [Who does not understand should either learn, or be silent]: if I would disclose unto her the secretes of that booke she would *et discere et facere* [both speak and do]; whereupon her Majestie had a little perusin of the same with me, and then in most heroicall and princely wise did comfort me and encourage me in my studies philosophical and mathematical.¹²

This encouragement, however, did not extend as far as Dee had hoped as, despite Elizabeth obviously being interested in the *Monas*, Dee did not receive the kind of highly

⁵ Foxe, J., *The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church* (London: Day, 1563), p1744-1745.

⁶ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p60-68.

⁷ *Ibid*, p67-68.

⁸ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, p1744-1745.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p60.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² Dee, J., *Compendious Rehearsal*, (n.p., 1592), p19.

lucrative patronage being granted to other alchemists at this time.¹³ Nor did being introduced to the *Monas* alter Elizabeth's manner of ruling which, if Dee's assertion that a monarch who understood the *Monas* could become the Last World Emperor was correct, it should have. The reason for this lack of response from Elizabeth, which was promised when she said she would "*et discere et facere*" (both speak and do),¹⁴ may have stemmed from Dee's political problems mentioned above. While it does not seem that Elizabeth gave the rumours of Dee being a Catholic conjuror much credence, given her continued close association with him, they did make it politically inadvisable for the queen to be seen to favour him too strongly. Another explanation for Elizabeth's inaction could be the specific needs and capabilities of England at this time. Elizabeth's England was a comparatively poor nation, beset with enemies from mainland Europe, especially the Catholic French and Spanish, and torn by religious tension between Catholics and Protestants.¹⁵ This was not a situation which purely philosophical or spiritual knowledge would be able to remedy; it required the immediate applicability of utilitarian knowledge that would provide England with the funds or military advantages that it needed to stabilise itself and its position in Europe. Nor did England, in its current condition, have the military or economic power to gain and hold the apocalyptic empire that Dee envisaged for it. Thus what funds were invested in patronising alchemists and natural philosophers tended to go to those with a more physical rather than spiritual bent, such as Cornelius de Lannoy, who boasted that he had the ultimate alchemical secret of transmuting base metals into gold and offered to perform this for Elizabeth.¹⁶ This gained him royal patronage of £120 per annum, while Dee's promise that his universal symbol would revolutionise the intellectual disciplines and reunite Christianity in a truer form, failed to secure him any significant patronage. While he clearly instructed Elizabeth about the Monad, the secrets in Dee's symbol were only available to initiates and offered no immediate or short-term practical benefits.¹⁷ Thus, despite Dee believing that the Monad was a fundamental tool for improving any discipline, its obscure nature and the difficulty involved in applying it meant that his efforts went unrewarded at the English court.

¹³ Parry, *The Arch-Conjuror of England*, p75-77.

¹⁴ Dee, *Rehearsal*, p19.

¹⁵ Pumfrey, S.P. and Dawnbarn, F., 'Science and Patronage in England, 1570-1625: a preliminary study', *History of Science* Vol.42 (2004): p137-188.

¹⁶ Turnbull W.B. et al., ed., *Calendar of State Papers Foreign: Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth I, 1547-1589* (London, 1861-1936).

¹⁷ Josten, 'John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', p84-221.

The lacklustre reception among the nobility, rejection by the English universities and the comparative rarity with which it is cited has led some scholars, most notably Brian Vickers (1979), to question the importance of the *Monas*.¹⁸ How, it could reasonably be asked, could a work that received so little support or indeed notice from the political and intellectual institutions of its time be worthy of any consideration, let alone be considered to be an important and influential work. And even when we look at Dee's goals in writing the *Monas* - to reunify the Christian faith and by extension Christendom, revolutionise all schools of thought and return the world to a perfect state - it can only be concluded that his glyph failed in achieving any of these. But within the elect group of intellectuals who could understand Dee's ideas, the *Monas* was well received and drawn upon directly by a number of (mostly continental) thinkers. Its impact within the spheres of Hermeticism, Qabalah and alchemy was significant and, until these intellectual traditions went into decline with the rise of modern science, the *Monad* played an important role in expressing the underlying unity of these fields. Thus, while it may not have been the apocalyptic reshaping of thought and society that Dee had envisioned, the *Monas* did manage to play an important role in shaping the intellectual landscape of Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

One thinker who was inspired by the *Monas* was Petrus Bungus (died 1601), an Italian numerologist, cabbalist, philosopher and mathematician, whose work *Mysticae Numerorum significationis: liber in duas partes divisus* (1618) dealt with the mysteries of numbers, including information on the religious significance of different numbers which was highly respected by his contemporaries.¹⁹ In it he refers the reader to Dee's *Monas* directly in relation to the letter X, which Dee analyses in theorem XVI.²⁰ In this section Bungus focussed on the idea of the point at the intersection of four radiating lines, much as Dee does in theorem VI. He argued that the unity of the letter X denotes God and thus a good intellect, and that a duality, which Dee argues in theorem XX is logically impossible to derive from a cross, denotes a demon or bad intellect.²¹ As the ideas of

¹⁸ Vickers, B., 'Frances Yates and the Writing of History,' *Journal of Modern History* Vol.51 (1979): p287–316.

¹⁹ Bungus, P., *Numerorum Mysteria, Ex abditis plurimarum disciplinarum fontibus hausta: Opvs Maximarvm Rervm Doctrina, & copia refertum. In quo mirus imprimis, idemque perpetuus Arithmeticae Pythagoricae cum Diuinae Paginae Numeris consensus, multiplici ratione probatur* (Paris, 1618), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

²⁰ Dee, J., *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, trans. J.W. Hamilton-Jones (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000), p17.

²¹ Bungus, P., *Numerorum Mysteria* p51, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

the four lines, central point, unity and duality are important in Dee's *Monas*²² and given that Bungus referred to Dee's *Monas*, it is clear that this work was considered to be of real worth to numerologists in the sixteenth century.

Another thinker inspired by Dee was Andreas Libavius (1560-1616), a Saxon anti-Paracelsian and anti-Rosicrucian doctor and chemist who wrote the encyclopaedic work *Alchemia* (1597), which some claim to be the first textbook of chemistry.²³ In a 1595 letter to George Limnaeus, professor of astrology at the University of Jena, Libavius referred to Dee's use of Aesop's story of the enmity between eagles and scarabs favourably, stating that Dee accommodated the story to the alchemical creation of gold. Libavius praised Dee for recommending that his readers consider the individual components of the egg and even went so far as to call Dee's work a '*mirabilis expositio*'.²⁴ Later, in *De Sceuastica Artis* (1606), Libavius supported the idea of a single hieroglyphic symbol that combines the signs for the various chemical essences into one,²⁵ and goes on to say that such a symbol must agree with the operations and materials of the alchemical art, rather than being arbitrarily fabricated.²⁶ He praised Dee's Monad for being systematically formed from the symbols for all of the traditional planets and metals, as well as for being a logical version of this kind of symbol.²⁷ In addition, he supported Dee's idea that there are many figures other than those for the metals contained within the Monad and praised Dee's hard work in the endeavour of uncovering them, as well as proving his assertion by himself deriving a list of alchemical glyphs from the Monad.²⁸ Finally, Libavius also openly admitted to utilising Dee's glyph to determine the proportions of his laboratory in his ideal "house of chemistry".²⁹ But Libavius did not always look so approvingly on Dee's work; for while he believed that the Monad was a useful tool for physical alchemy and that Dee's understanding in this field was excellent, he disapproved of the idea of combining physical and spiritual disciplines, and especially the practice of Dee and others of using one to support the

²² Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p17.

²³ Partington, J.R., *A History of Chemistry*, 4 volumes (London: Macmillan & Co., 1961), p247.

²⁴ Libavius, A., *Rerum Chymicarum Epistolica Forma ad Philosophos et Medicos quosdam in Germania* (Frankfurt: Peter Kopf, 1595), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

²⁵ Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception', p247-269.

²⁶ Libavius, A., 'De Sceuastica Artis' (1606), in *Die Gerätschaft der chymischen Kunst: Der Traktat "De Sceuastica Artis" des Andreas Libavius von 1606, Übersetzung, Kommentierung und Wiederabdruck*, ed. B. Meitzner (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

other as though they were directly correlated -an idea fundamental to Hermeticism and the creation of any universal symbol. This disdain for combining disciplines is evident in one of Libavius's earlier publications, *Tractatus Duo Physici* (1594), in which he disapproved of Dee's tendency to cross disciplinary boundaries, such as those between physical and metaphysical alchemy, and ridiculed Dee's idea of *the Horizon Aeternitatis* as presented in the *Monas*.³⁰

Gerard Dorn (c. 1530-1584), a Belgian philosopher, physician and alchemist (and a major proponent of Paracelsianism and translator of Paracelsus's German works into Latin), also acknowledged the value of the *Monas*. In his commentary to the *Tractatus Aureus* by Hermes Trismegistus, Dorn referenced the *Monas* directly with relation to the terms ternary, quaternary and septenary, claiming that the septenary in particular should be contemplated "with the eyes of the mind, for the vulgar eye, as John Dee of London says, will here find fault and be most distrustful".³¹ This is a close paraphrase of Dee's words in the *Monas* that "The vulgar eye will here be blind and most distrustful".³² Dorn also expanded upon Dee's numerical manipulations of the central cross of his Monad in theorem XVI, by arguing that the two letter Vs mirroring one another represented the 'As above, so below' maxim of the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus, with the upper V being incorporeal and the lower being corporeal.³³ Dorn then went on to point out that, by bringing the two V's together the letter X is produced, which in Latin is the denarius or number ten and is the numerological number of perfection. From this conjunction he derived the word OVUM³⁴ (obtaining the O from the fact that X equals ten, i.e. one 'O', the V and U from the two Vs mentioned before, these two letters being interchangeable at that time; and the M from the Roman numeral for 1,000 which, to a Pythagorean mathematician, is simply an expanded form of the number 10), thus returning to the alchemical idea of the egg discussed by Dee in theorem XVIII.³⁵ In this example, Dee is explicitly acknowledged as the creator of the Monad. However, such an acknowledgement of Dee's authorship was not always the case. For example, in one of Dorn's other works, the *Chymisticum Artificium Naturae*, published just four years after

³⁰ Libavius, A., *De Philosophia Harmonica Magica Fratrum de Roseae Crucis*, bound with *Examen Philosophiae Novae, quae veteri abrogandae opponitur* (Frankfurt, 1615), p273, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

³¹ Manget, *Bibliotheca Chemica Curiosa* (Virginia: A. Forni, 1976), p409, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

³² Josten, 'John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', p84-221.

³³ Manget, *Bibliotheca*, 421, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p24-28.

the first edition of the *Monas*, the Monad itself appears on the title page without acknowledgement.³⁶ Dee's copy of this work by Dorn has survived via the collection of John Winthrop the Younger, first Governor of Connecticut (1606–1676), (who was also known to have used the Monad symbol, thus spreading Dee's influence to America).³⁷ In it Dee wrote "He learned to form these new characters from my *Monas Hieroglyphica*, without so much as a by your leave or any acknowledgement".³⁸ This use of the Monad without any reference to Dee was a not uncommon occurrence, making it difficult to trace the true extent of Dee's influence.

Other examples of Dee's Monad being used without reference to Dee himself include Cesare della Riviera, an Italian alchemist and Hermeticist, who included the Monad in *Il Mondo Magico de gli Heroi* (1605) in which he also discussed the mystical character of Aries and the composition of the symbols for Mars, Saturn, and the rest of the planets.³⁹ In addition, he reflected on the way in which the Latin numerals for 50, 5 and 10 form the word LUX,⁴⁰ just as Dee did in theorem XVII.⁴¹ Despite these allusions, Dee's name is not mentioned among those cited in the text. Another example of the unacknowledged appropriation of the Monad, albeit after Dee's death in 1608 or 1609, is in the second volume of Athanasius Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1653–1655), in which he discussed Dee's Monad, renamed as the "*Crux Hermetica*".⁴² Kircher, a German Jesuit polymath who's most notable works were in comparative religion, hieroglyphic writing, geology and medicine, was widely respected by his contemporaries and considered one of the leading thinkers of his time.⁴³ In his section on *Alchimia Hieroglyphica* he utilised quotes from the *Monas* and reproduced some of Dee's diagrams for constructing the Monad. In another chapter Kircher presented an elaborate variant of the Monad, also without

³⁶ Dorn, G., *Chymisticum artificium naturae, theoreticum et practicum* (Frankfurt: Thomas Guarin, 1569), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

³⁷ Wilkinson, R. S., 'The Alchemical Library of John Winthrop, Jr. (1606–1676) and his Descendants in Colonial America,' *Ambix* Vol.9 (1963): p33–51.

³⁸ Clulee, N.H., 'John Dee and the Paracelsians', *Reading the book of Nature: the other side of the Scientific Revolution* eds. Debus, A.G. and Walton, M.T. (Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998), p119.

³⁹ della Riviera, C., *Il Mondo Magico de gli Heroi, Edizione del 1605, Introduzione di Piero Fenili* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1986), p34–35, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, p23-24.

⁴² Kircher, A., *Oedipus Aegyptiacus; hoc est, Universalis Hieroglyphicae veterum Doctrinae temporum injuriâ abolitae instauratio* (Rome, 1653), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

⁴³ Glassie, J., *A Man of Misconceptions: The Life of an Eccentric in an Age of Change* (New York: Riverhead, 2012).

citing Dee.⁴⁴ However this unacknowledged use of Dee's work was not the norm and both the Monad and Dee's efforts in synthesising such a symbol were usually afforded due credit.

A writer who drew on the more alchemical side of Dee's *Monas* was Dr Heinrich Khunrath, a Hermetic philosopher and alchemist who met Dee in 1589 as we know from Dee's diary.⁴⁵ In his book *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae*,⁴⁶ Khunrath paraphrased Dee's *Monas*, reiterating Dee's distinction between his 'real' Qabalah of that which is, the Qabalistic investigation of reality, and the vulgar cabalistic grammar of that which is said, the Qabalistic investigation of language.⁴⁷ In addition, the Monad is included in *Amphitheatrum* in Khunrath's circular figure of the 'Rebis', or alchemical hermaphrodite, found on the breast of the Hermetic bird and forming the O in the alchemical word AZOTH.⁴⁸ This is significant as the word AZOTH is formed of the first and last letters of the three matrix languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and thus "encapsulates the whole alchemical work, the transformation of *prima materia* into *ultima materia*".⁴⁹ The placement of the Monad at the centre of this word emphasised the significance that it held for Khunrath. A similar example can be found in his inclusion of Dee's Monad in this *Alchemical Citadel* engraving, also found in the *Amphitheatrum*.⁵⁰ This image shows twenty-one entrances to the citadel, twenty of them fraudulent while only one, that which is adorned by the Monad, leads into the citadel and thus to the heart of alchemical truth.⁵¹ All of this shows how important Dee's influence was to Khunrath and is one of the explanations for the evidence of Dee's influence found in the Rosicrucian manifestos.

The Khunrath connection points to the impact that Dee's *Monas* had on the Rosicrucian Order. The existence of any such organisation has been a hotly debated subject but is not particularly relevant here. This is because the mere idea that there was such an Order did alter the course of Hermetic thought and the general intellectual culture in

⁴⁴ Glassie, *A Man of Misconceptions*.

⁴⁵ Halliwell, J.O., ed., *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee* (London: Camden Society, 1842), p31.

⁴⁶ Khunrath, H., *Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae solius verae: Christiano-Kabalisticum, divinomagium, nec non physico-chymicum, tertrium, catholicum* (Hamburg, 1595), cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception', p247-269.

⁵⁰ Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum*, cited in Forshaw, P.J., 'Alchemical Reception'.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the early seventeenth century.⁵² Consequently, the works that influenced the Rosicrucian manifestos can be seen as important regardless of whether or not the Rosicrucian order itself actually existed. Khunrath's *Amphitheatrum* is considered to be a precursor to the Rosicrucian manifestos as its imagery and ideas are strongly reflected in the first Rosicrucian manifesto, *Fama Fratennis* (1614), with direct parallels between much of the symbolism he used and that of the *Fama*.⁵³ The purported existence of the Order came to the attention of the general public in 1614 with the anonymous publication of the *Fama Fraternitatis* (although manuscript copies may have been circulating as early as 1607),⁵⁴ with further details of the Order's ideals being revealed in the *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615)⁵⁵ and the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (1616).⁵⁶ These three works purported to show the existence of an Order of philosophers and learned men who were supposedly in possession of great esoteric truths.⁵⁷ They detailed the group's founding, principles and goals through allegorical teachings revolving around the life of their founder Frater C.R.C., identified in the *Chymical Wedding* as Christian Rosenkreutz, who is often considered to be a purely allegorical figure.⁵⁸ The influence of Dee's *Monas* can be seen throughout these works, and the Monad itself is found in the *Chymical Wedding* next to the invitation to the royal wedding delivered to Christian Rosenkreutz by an angelic figure.⁵⁹ There are some writers who believe that Dee was himself a member of the Rosicrucian Order because of the strong correlation between his work and the doctrines of the Rosicrucians.⁶⁰ However, there is no strong evidence to support this claim, and it has been dismissed by most modern historians of both Dee and the Rosicrucian Order because of this lack of evidence.⁶¹ The ideas behind the Rosicrucian Order as well as their means of presentation have, however, been linked to Dee's *Monas* through the types of ideas

⁵² Sedir, P., *History & Doctrines of the Rose-Croix* trans. Vaughan, P.A. (New Jersey: n.p., 2006).

⁵³ Waite, A.E., trans., *Fama Fraternitatis and Confession of the Rosicrucian Fraternity* (Texas: Stone Guild Publishing, 2009).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ McLean A. (ed.), 'The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz', trans. J. Godwin, *Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1991).

⁵⁷ Lindgren, C.E., 'The way of the Rose Cross; A Historical Perception, 1614–1620' *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research* Vol.18 No.3 (1995): p141–148.

⁵⁸ Churton, T., *The Invisible History of the Rosicrucians: The World's Most Mysterious Secret Society* (Vermont: Inner Traditions/Bear & co, 2009).

⁵⁹ McLean A., ed., 'The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz', trans. J. Godwin, *Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1991), p16.

⁶⁰ Schringner, L.S., *The R+C Legacy: Dr John Dee* (The Rosicrucian Archive, 1993).

Ashmole, E., *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London: J. Grismond, 1652), p478-484.

⁶¹ Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p37-40.

Churton, *Invisible History of the Rosicrucians*.

they express and the methods of explanation used in the Rosicrucian pamphlets.⁶² The aim of the Rosicrucian literature was to transform the arts, sciences, religion and political and intellectual landscapes of Europe, much as Dee had promised that his Monad would do.⁶³ The Rosicrucian manifestos also explicitly stated that “We speak unto you by parables, but would willingly bring you to the right, simple, easy, and ingenuous exposition, understanding, declaration, and knowledge of all secrets”.⁶⁴ This claim to the knowledge of all secrets is akin to Dee’s claims that the Monad would reveal universal knowledge, as well as mirroring his deliberately obscure style so that the secrets could be revealed only to the enlightened and the worthy.

So we can see now the broad range of areas on which the *Monas* had an effect, and diverse number of Hermetic, alchemical, and natural philosophers who incorporated it into their work. This influence in contemporary intellectual circles is testament to the significance of Dee’s Monad and his success in uniting these areas into a single glyph. Thus it can be seen that, despite not being cited as much as less opaque works, the *Monas* had an impact in certain areas of high intellectual thought through its influence of certain members of the European intellectual community.

⁶² French, *John Dee*.

⁶³ Lindgren, ‘The way of the Rose Cross’, p141–48.

⁶⁴ Churton, *Invisible History of the Rosicrucians*.

Conclusion

Attempting to understand how the western intellectual tradition has changed over time and the different factors that led to these changes has long been a topic of historical interest. Too often, however, this has resulted in a narrowing of our focus to the strands of thought that can be shown to relate to specific intellectual traditions that are the forerunners of those fields that are considered valid today. While this practice does allow lines of influence to be traced back it does tend to remove much of the work that, despite ultimately proving to be intellectual dead ends, often inspired or contributed to those ideas that were able to be taken forward. John Dee is a perfect example of this kind of omission as, until recently, he has been portrayed either as an example of all that was superstitious and backward in Renaissance thought, or as a contributor to a few select fields directly relevant to modern thought, such as navigation and astronomy. This has meant that works such as Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*, which were influential with Dee's contemporaries, have been for the most part disregarded.

In contrast to the way in which many historians divide Renaissance thought into those schools of thought that led to more modern disciplines and those that did not, in this thesis I began with an idea fundamental to the *Monas*: that to Renaissance scholars all knowledge was built upon a universal basis which united all subjects. I showed this by examining and delineating a number of types of thought prevalent in Renaissance Europe, showing that sixteenth century scholars did not have the definitive boundaries between different types of thought that seem logical and natural to modern scholars.

Building upon this idea of intellectual unity I examined the *Monas* as a microcosm of the broader intellectual landscape of Europe in the sixteenth century. As a work that not only implicitly accepted the underlying unity of all schools of thought but actively embraced it, the *Monas* illustrates the depth of intellectual unity in late-sixteenth century knowledge. By examining the way in which Dee combines multiple intellectual schools and utilises them simultaneously I have discovered that not only were the different schools of Renaissance thought considered to be interconnected, they were considered to be the same, with theories and conclusions derived from one school being directly applicable to other schools.

In investigating the *Monas Hieroglyphica* I found that, contrary to the conclusions of some historians, the *Monas* proved influential throughout mainland Europe in the late

sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This is important as it indicated an acceptance, by a number of leading scholars, of the idea that a synthesis of all knowledge was able to be expressed in terms of a single symbol. Thus, by examining the ways in which the *Monas* was employed by thinkers in different fields I was able to show its perceived usefulness across this range of fields and establish that the concept of a universal basis for all fields of knowledge was not peculiar to Dee but rather was a widespread and integral part of the milieu of Renaissance thought.

In cases where the *Monas* was not accepted my investigation shows that this was often due to either the obscurity of the *Monas* preventing it from being understood or an unfavourable social or political circumstance. The latter I have shown to be due predominantly to efforts to damage Dee's political standing by associating him with the practices of magic and conjuring. I have demonstrated that these efforts not only affected Dee's standing with his contemporaries but also influenced the opinions of subsequent historians who then engaged in efforts to divorce some of Dee's intellectual activities from his more questionable pursuits. This led to Dee being examined in terms of specific intellectual traditions that tended to exclude or diminish parts of his work that did not conform to these traditions.

In this thesis I have tried to avoid the common historiographic tendency to examine Dee and his work through a specific intellectual tradition and instead attempted to understand a portion of the intellectual tradition of the sixteenth century through an examination of the *Monas*. Primarily I have shown that the artificial borders between the 'valid' scientific schools of thought and the 'invalid' occult schools did not exist in the sixteenth century and, in fact, that to many Renaissance scholars it would be impossible to contemplate one without the other. This fact is important as, by acknowledging it, we can gain a more authentic understanding of the way in which Renaissance scholars conceived of the world and thus explain how their ideas, and therefore our modern way of thinking, emerged.

Appendix

Appendix 1: My brief summary of the theorems of Dr. John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* based on the translations by Hamilton-Jones and Josten.¹

Theorem I	All things that exist can be described through the use of straight lines and circles.
Theorem II	An explanation that a circle cannot exist without a line (the radius) and a line cannot exist without a point (a line being defined as the displacement of a point). Therefore nothing can exist without the point, or Monad.
Theorem III	The central point of the Monad is the Earth, around which the Sun, Moon and other planets travel. The Sun is represented as a circle with a visible centre as it has the 'supreme dignity.'
Theorem IV	Despite being placed above the Sun in the glyph the Moon is still considered to be inferior. Dee explains that although the Moon looks similar to the Sun it only reflects the Sun's light and desires to be 'impregnated' with solar energy. The Moon is represented by the horns or Cornucopia.
Theorem V	Adding the Moon completes the solar circle as the morning and the evening (when the sun and moon meet) were the first day and this was when the Light (<i>LUX</i>) of the Philosophers was made.
Theorem VI	The cross in the Monad refers to the Ternary (as two lines with a copulative point) and the Quaternary (as four lines meeting at the centre or the four right angles enclosed by them). By doubling these sets of four the Octad can be produced and by combining the Ternary and the Quaternary the septenary can be made. Here Dee also draws attention to the idea of Body, Soul and Spirit in terms of the Ternary.
Theorem VII	The Quaternary interpretation of the cross represents the four Elements. It is reiterated that a line is produced by the displacement of a point and thus the production of an Element from a complex substance occurs through a "continual cascade of droplets".

¹ Dee, J., *The Hieroglyphic Monad* trans. J.W. Hamilton-Jones (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000). Josten, C.H., trans., 'A Translation of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', *Ambix* Vol.12 (1964): p84-221.

Theorem VIII	The Quaternary is a reduced form of the Decad because $1+2+3+4=10$ (as in the Pythagorean Tetractys). This is also shown by the fact that X is ten in Roman numerals. It is also pointed out that X is the twenty-first letter of the Roman alphabet and that the four lines indicate the place in which “the ternary conducts its force into the Septenary.”
Theorem IX	The importance of the Sun and Moon are emphasised, and Dee introduces the idea of a conjunction between them and the Elements, with the circle of the Sun passing through the ends of the elemental lines.
Theorem X	The Sign of Aries at the bottom of the Monad is introduced to represent that the use of fire is required in the practice of the Monad. Dee sums up the Monad as indicating that the Sun and Moon desire the Elements be separated by the application of Fire.
Theorem XI	The place of the sign of Aries at the equinox is established and Dee says that twenty-four hours divided by the equinox denotes the most secret proportions but does not explain these secrets further here except to say that this is with respect to the Earth.
Theorem XII	The Sun, Moon, cross of the Elements and the sign of Aries can be used to make up all of the symbols for the other planets. In this theorem Dee explains how the signs of Saturn, Jupiter and Mercury are made up by rotations of the Moon and the cross of the elements.
Theorem XIII	Dee shows how the signs for Mars and Venus are produced by The Sun, the cross of the elements and Aries in a similar manner to that used for the moon. He also uses this to introduce a symbol for the Mercury of the Philosophers and explains that this cannot be made equivalent to the Sun without the addition of a certain SOUL. This can be seen as the transformation of base-metals into gold by the philosopher’s stone.
Theorem XIV	Dee connects the Monad with the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus by saying that the Monad depends upon the Sun and the Moon which are its Mother and Father. This equates the <i>Monas</i> with ‘The One Thing’ of Hermes.
Theorem XV	The transition between the signs of Aries and Taurus are considered, as well as the effects that this had on the Sun and Moon. The fact that the signs of Aries and Taurus are associated with Mars and Venus respectively is also pointed out. Dee also points out that the sign for

	Taurus is the same as the Greek diphthong and, turned on its side, gives the letter alpha twice.
Theorem XVI	The cross is examined by dividing it in half in two different ways and examining the ways in which the Roman Numerals/letters produced correspond with each other, ultimately giving the decadal (decimal) progression: 1, 10, 100
Theorem XVII	Dee equates the cross with the number 252 by adding four times five (from each of the V's, Roman Numeral for 5, that can be formed from an X), four times 50 (from each of the L's, Roman Numeral for 50, that can be formed from a +), ten (X being the Roman Numeral for 10), 21 (X being the 21 st letter in the Latin alphabet) and 1 (representing the unity of these Numerals into a single unit). Dee also acknowledges the fact that these letters make up the word LUX (U and V being interchangeable), returning to the fundamental creative power of the Light of the Philosophers that was introduced in theorem V.
Theorem XVIII	Here the idea of the astrological orbits is related to alchemy and Dee laments the ignorance of contemporary alchemists. Dee then refers to an Aesopian fable relating to the scarab beetle and the eagle, explaining how by following the example of the scarab the egg can be dissolved to produce "an excellent medicine". He then claims that by contemplating this it can be shown that nothing can exist without the Hieroglyphic Monad.
Theorem XIX	The heating of metals to incandescence removes from them the igneous (hot) and aqueous (moist) humors of the Sun and Moon respectively.
Theorem XX	It is explained that the Binary cannot be produced from the cross as the point must be included for the lines to be contiguous, otherwise the Quaternary will be produced. He claims that the central point is essential in the Ternary but superfluous in the Quaternary and so must be rejected when considering the cross in terms of the Quaternary.
Theorem XXI	Dee examines the Monad inverted, splitting it into the symbols for the Sun, Moon and a third symbol which he then goes on to analyse through the influences of the first two. In doing this he associates the third symbol with <i>Argent vive</i> (bright silver). He then goes on to consider a number of symbols made up of half-circles, for which I have found no

	convincing explanation.
Theorem XXII	The Monad is deconstructed into its component lines and reassembled into the alchemical vessels. These vessels are then given a number of other meanings, many with Christian religious associations, adding the spiritual and religious aspects that Dee considered necessary for alchemy.
Theorem XXIII	This theorem begins with a description of the exact proportions of the Monad and the way in which they are to be put together. Dee then goes on to examine the Metathesis of the Quaternary, which involves performing a set of mathematical functions to the numbers one through four. Dee claims that by studying these operations knowledge can be gained in a diverse range of subjects, from the study of nature to the ruling of men, going so far as to say that there is no “created power or influence which cannot be absolutely favoured and influenced by” the Monad.
Theorem XXIV	Dee concludes the <i>Monas</i> by emphasising once more the importance of the Quaternary and the number twenty-four, linking the end of his work to the end of a day, 24 theorems in line with 24 hours. After a pair of biblical quotes praising God, drawn from the Book of Revelations, and dating his work, Dee concludes with the phrase: “Here the vulgar eye will see nothing but Obscurity and will despair considerably.”

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