

January 18, 1975; text of review submitted to TIME OUT Magazine:

The Canon: An Exposition of the Pagan  
Mystery Perpetuated in the Cabala as the  
Rule of All the Arts by William Stirling,  
Garnstone Press; hardback £6.50, paperback  
£2.50.

All those interested in occult philosophy will find this an invaluable though difficult work of reference. It has been reprinted from its only edition of 1897 through the sustained efforts of London's Research into Lost Knowledge Organization (commonly known as R.I.L.K.O.) and one of the Council of that group, author John Michell, has written a brief foreward. It is impossible to read this book through at once; the reviewer tried and was defeated. The density of the information is overpowering, and may have eventually overwhelmed its compiler, since the only two biographical facts ever discovered about the mysterious nineteenth century author, Stirling, are that he was a freemason and that he killed himself at the Adelphi in London. No one seems ever to have known him, nor has his birth ever been established!

The basis of this quite extraordinary book is the esoteric Jewish Cabala tradition. However, Stirling quickly moves to demonstrate his thesis of a common ancient Egyptian origin for both the Cabala and the Greek Pythagorean tradition. Fundamental to both is an attitude towards numbers and measurements which treats certain values derived from ancient astronomy as a canon for architecture, philosophy and religion. Most of the subject matter of the book concerns the principle, unknown in modern languages, of gematria. For in ancient Greek and Hebrew the letters of the alphabet doubled up as symbols for numerals as well. Thus every word in those languages could not avoid also representing some numerical quantity. In Greek, for instance, if

one wanted to add one and one, it was necessary to add alpha and alpha. It is possible to construe from this that the claim by Jesus Christ to be "the alpha and the omega" was not so much an alphabetic as a numerical reference equivalent also to saying "I am aleph and tau" - meaning, "I am all numbers or all that can be signified by numbers." This is reminiscent of Pythagoras, who said that numbers were the principles and elements of all things. Stirling believed that the relative distances of the planets in our solar system provided the basic measures embodied in the Tabernacle, the Holy Oblation, the New Jerusalem, the Temple of Solomon, the Ark of Noah, the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy Rood, and Christian cathedrals. He also discusses the numerical values of the names of the Greek gods and heroes: Hephaistos is equivalent to the diagonal of a square whose side is Prometheus; ho Helios ("the Sun") is equivalent to the diameter of a circle whose circumference is Poseidon; Apollo and Zeus, and Artemis and Leto have similar geometrical connections, and so on. At times it runs thick like molasses, but everyone knows that molasses is rich in vitamins and minerals. Can it be that we could use some nutriment like The Canon? Let any occult philosopher suffering from textual anaemia try a dose of this!

(Robert K. G. Temple)