
THE SEPHIROTIC TREE INTEGRATED INTO LANDSCAPE DIVINE HARMONY REFLECTED IN A BAROQUE GROUP OF CHURCHES

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Abstract

This text delves into the fascinating theme of the influence of Kabbalah on architecture and art, specifically focusing on the Broumov group of churches. The analysis suggests that Kabbalah could have played a significant role in shaping the architectural elements, spatial arrangement, and symbolism of these sacred structures. Kabbalistic symbols, such as the Sephirothic Tree of Life or the symbolism of the number 10, may appear as part of the decoration, emphasizing the connection between heavenly and earthly spheres. Kabbalah provides an architectural perspective that utilizes mystical teachings in designing harmonious proportions and spatial arrangements for buildings and urban complexes, reflecting teachings on harmony and balance. Symbolic geometry, based on Kabbalistic principles, can be presented either explicitly or subtly for those with knowledge and understanding of these concepts. Lastly, the concept of the monastic landscape is transformed into a harmonious habitat connecting social, spiritual and economic aspects of life. The Benedictine order aimed to create a community that reflected the needs of both the spirit and the landscape, leading to the establishment of a more integrated and harmonious environment. The Broumov group of churches not only presents architectural masterpieces of the Baroque period but also signifies the profound spiritual significance of the connection between the human and the transcendent. This text provides a pilot study on how architecture can serve as a means of connecting people with the spiritual dimension and the landscape, demonstrating how physical matter can carry an invisible yet strongly felt significance. It serves as an example of how historical cultural heritage can continue to inspire and enrich our understanding of the world, becoming the subject of further intensive research.

Keywords: monastic landscapes, Christian Kabbalah, Abraham Cohen de Herrera, sacred, geometry

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1. Monastic landscapes as harmonious systems of life

Monasteries have a long history in shaping the cultural, religious and economic character of the landscape. Their influence on the organization of the surrounding environment and agricultural activities was particularly evident in medieval Europe. The concept of the ‘monastic landscape’ is often associated with the Cistercian order, which was one of the most prominent actors in this regard [1]. These institutions served as centres for religious life, education and economic activities. Their strategic placement in the landscape was intentional; monasteries were often situated in key locations, allowing for their functional integration into the surrounding environment. They frequently possessed extensive land, which they cultivated and managed. In this way, monasteries not only ensured autonomy and self-sufficiency but also transformed the local landscape and the way of life for the population.

Monasteries were capable of producing goods that were exported and traded within broader regional and international commercial networks. This not only contributed to economic growth but also facilitated cultural exchange and enrichment, introducing new technologies, production methods and cultural elements to the region. As centres of intellectual and cultural life, monasteries were connected to distant centres of learning. This connection was notably facilitated by the comprehensive education of monks, who studied not only religious themes but also delved into Science, Philosophy and art [2]. The education of monks in the Benedictine monastery in Broumov can be partially reconstructed through a comparison with other Benedictine monasteries. Monks had the opportunity to study either within their own monastery or at universities outside the monastery. University education was often a necessary condition for obtaining higher ranks or offices not only within the home monastery but also within the entire order. An example is the Benedictine monastery in Melk, where a significant reform in favour of quality education took place. Selected monks studied at universities such as Bologna, Rome, Vienna, and Salzburg. In the 18th century, a reorganization of studies occurred, favouring domestic education within the monastery. Students specialized in Philosophy and Theology, and graduates were obliged to teach briefly at the gymnasium to gain practical experience. This system allowed a combination of domestic and university education, and students and teachers could move between various monasteries in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Although individuals, these monks, with their talents, curiosity and open minds, brought ideas and philosophical influences from various parts of the world into the monasteries, enriching the spiritual and intellectual horizon of the region. This was achieved through the systematic acquisition of books for monastery libraries, as exemplified by the library of the Broumov monastery. Books were procured by designated merchants from European metropolises such as Germany, Spain and Italy. The collection included works in Hebrew, Latin, translations of the Bible into Coptic Syriac, banned books and a Latin book on Jewish Kabbalah. The relationship of monasteries to distant places often

reflected global trade and cultural networks. Monastic communities became centres where various cultures, traditions and ways of life converged.

Monasteries were constructed in harmony with the natural environment, emphasizing the ideal unity between the spiritual and physical worlds. The ideals of the religious orders naturally influenced the perception of the landscape. Monastic landscapes remain essential elements of European history with an impact on our present, provided we remain receptive. In this text, monastic landscapes are conceptualized as harmoniously designed habitats, offering sources of inspiration and reflection even today. These landscapes were founded on the endeavour to build harmony between humans, Nature and community. They embody a strong commitment to a holistic approach that includes a connection to the transcendent.

When contemplating the monastery landscape, we can observe synergy among various aspects of human existence. Monasteries, in particular, present a model of integration - harmony between silence and meditation, between work and spiritual development. This monastic philosophy emphasizes the creation of a system that is equally based on social, spiritual and economic values. Similar to the monastery landscape, which sought harmony between monastery buildings, gardens, and the surrounding nature, the ecology of the soul seeks harmony between the individual, the community, and the environment. This concept underscores the importance of a sustainable lifestyle, healthy communication, and respect for oneself and the surrounding world [1].

Among the well-explored stories of monastic landscapes is the influence of the Cistercian order. Founded in the 12th century, the Cistercian order aimed for a strict separation of monastic life from the secular. Cistercians emphasized simplicity and minimalism, reflected in the architecture of monastery buildings and the design of gardens. For the Cistercians, the monastery landscape was not merely an economic backdrop but also a place of spiritual life and devotion.

The Benedictines, who adhered to the motto 'ora et labora et lege' (pray, work and read), recognized the significance of education. Already in the 14th century, there existed a Latin monastery school for boys who served in the church. In the 17th century, under Abbot Johann Benn, the school was revived, and Jan Placentius played a key role in the development of the Benedictine gymnasium in Broumov from 1629 onward. Placentius, a significant member of the monastery, was proficient in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He contributed to the enrichment of the library [2]. Among the books brought to Broumov by Jan Placentius was a Hebrew textbook, 'Institutiones Linguae Hebraicae', by the Jesuit Saint Robert Bellarmine, published in 1606 in Antwerp. The first Hebrew grammar, 'De rudimentis hebraicis', was published in 1506 by Johann Reuchlin, a German humanist and teacher of Greek and Hebrew. Reuchlin is a key figure associated with Christian Kabbalah. His work initiated the scholarly study of Hebrew and supported efforts to study the Old Testament in its original language. This led to the publication of multilingual editions of the Bible, known as polyglots, during the 16th and 17th centuries. Christian Hebraism flourished during this time, particularly in Italy, Germany and France. In Bohemia, interest

in Hebrew was stimulated by biblical research and exegesis within the Unity of the Brethren. The translation of the Holy Scriptures into Czech was done using original Hebrew and Greek texts, often through studies at foreign universities. Mikuláš Albert z Kaménka, the first professor of Hebrew at the Prague University from 1611, was among the translators of the Old Testament. Over time, the study of Hebrew became a common part of education for theologians and scholars, and knowledge of the biblical language was crucial for proper interpretation.

The documented history of the Broumov library and gymnasium reveals the long-standing presence of Hebrew language experts both in the monastery and among the gymnasium students. Another personality with profound knowledge of Semitic languages is Celestin Scholz, the prefect of the gymnasium [2]. He was not only a scholar but also a teacher of Hebrew and contributed to the theological education in Broumov for nineteen years, from 1783 to 1801. Hebrew was also mastered by his fellow monk Augustin Kretschmayer, who succeeded Scholz as vice-prefect between 1802-1803 and was the first Greek language teacher at the gymnasium since 1782. Among other significant figures was Leander Schiffer, a gymnasium professor who dedicated himself to teaching Hebrew, especially among fellow monks during domestic monastic studies. The last known Hebrew language teacher was Stanislav Klimann, appointed to the gymnasium in 1795/1796. Scientific study of Hebrew was maintained, particularly with the aim of studying the Old Testament in its original language. Knowledge of Hebrew is also essential for the study of Christian Kabbalah. The cited monograph's author concludes the chapter with words stating that the exploration of Hebraica in the Broumov library is by no means considered closed and encourages further research in this area. Similarly, this text serves as an introduction to further understanding how monasteries sought the transformation of the mental, spiritual and material aspects.

2. Broumov's spiritual message in architectural form

The history of the monastery in Broumov dates back to the medieval period and has rich and significant traditions. The monastery was founded by Benedictine monks in the 13th century, specifically in 1213, during the reign of King Přemysl Otakar I. It was one of the first monasteries of this order in the Czech lands.

The Broumov monastery quickly gained importance and over the years became the centre of spiritual, cultural and economic life in the region. An influential figure in the history of the Broumov monastery was Abbot Othmar Daniel Zinke (1666-1738). At that time, the Benedictine order was in decline, and Abbot Zinke decided to initiate an extensive restoration of the monastery. He succeeded in obtaining financial support and gradually began to repair and expand the monastery. Under his leadership, the monastery experienced significant growth, not only in a spiritual sense but also in the economic sphere.

The Benedictine order left a significant mark on both the town and its surroundings, where it operated for many centuries. Its presence in this region influenced both the spiritual and religious life, and, up to the present day, continues to impact economic and cultural development. The Benedictine monastery became a centre for key activities that positively shaped the regional identity and landscape. Today, the entire landscape complex is referred to as the Broumov Group of Churches.

Since 2022, the Broumov churches designed by the Dientzenhofers have been recognized as national cultural monuments, forming an interconnected architectural ensemble rather than individual structures. This collection comprises eleven landmarks distinguished not only by their stylistic coherence but also by architectural uniqueness, authenticity and scope. The text emphasizes their architectural concept, which interacts with the landscape, creating a harmonious biotope that intertwines the earthly with the supernatural.

The Ministry of Culture, which initiated the declaration of these structures as national cultural monuments, highlighted the exceptional nature of this ensemble. This composed cultural landscape, also known as Broumovsko, emerged in the first quarter of the 18th century through the collaboration of Benedictine Abbot Othmar Zinke and architects from the Dientzenhofer family. The ensemble of churches and chapels not only reflects Baroque aesthetics but also harmoniously integrates into the surrounding rock formations of the Broumov Walls, creating a unique landscape and architectural whole. This collection of buildings is not merely a static monument but continues to have a living impact on the region to this day. The Ministry of Culture emphasizes that by declaring them national cultural monuments, the significance of the Broumov churches is deepened. This step was taken in connection with significant anniversaries associated with the Dientzenhofer family. Their work constitutes an important part of the cultural wealth of the Czech Republic, and their holistic approach to landscape building is gaining increasing importance today.

Opat Zinke played a crucial role in revitalizing the monastery, transforming it into a prominent centre of culture and spirituality. During his tenure, significant construction modifications and renovations were undertaken, shaping the monastery complex's appearance to this day. This transformation was achieved through collaboration with architect Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer (1689-1751) and his father, Kryštof Dientzenhofer (1655-1722), both prominent figures in high Baroque architecture. Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer's work is highly regarded on both the Czech and European levels.

After relocating to Bohemia in 1677, Kryštof Dientzenhofer worked under the guidance of architect Abraham Leuthner and collaborated on various projects, including the Cistercian monastery in Waldsassen. In 1689, he received permission to carry out construction works, subsequently contributing to significant structures in western Bohemia, especially for the Premonstratensians in Teplá. Dientzenhofer became renowned for his dynamic style and attention to detail. His buildings featured innovative elements, such as intricate vault constructions connecting geometric surfaces. He created shining examples of

dynamic Baroque, including the Chapel of the Revelation of the Lord in Smiřice, the Church of Saint Nicholas in Prague's Lesser Town, and the Church of Saint Margaret in Břevnov Monastery.

Beyond religious structures, Dientzenhofer also worked as a fortification builder in Cheb and contributed to various projects in Prague and Bohemia. His workshop and style significantly influenced Baroque architecture in the Czech lands. Kryštof Dientzenhofer passed away in Prague in 1722. His legacy continued through his son, Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer, who also excelled as an architect in the era of high Baroque.

Kilián's work is characterized not only by ornamentation and meticulous craftsmanship but also by innovative floor plans. After completing his education at the Jesuit gymnasium in the Lesser Town and gaining experience through travels across Europe, he returned to Prague to continue his father Christoph's work. Both the overseas experiences and family connections to significant European locations facilitated shared studies and exchanges with influential architects, shaping their distinctive style. They became prominent figures in high Baroque not only in the Czech lands but also throughout Europe.

Dientzenhofer's architectural oeuvre encompasses diverse floor plans and architectural elements. While his early works followed his father's style, his later style began to diverge. Churches designed by him are characterized by dynamic floor plans and emphasized details. His bold approach to floor plans and technical prowess allowed him to construct monumental churches, castles, and houses. His extensive body of work comprises over two hundred structures, with some of his most famous works including the Church of Saint Nicholas on the Old Town Square and the completion of Saint Nicholas Cathedral in the Lesser Town. Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer passed away in 1751 and was buried in the Malá Strana Cemetery in Prague. His legacy endures through many structures, considered cultural treasures and exemplars of high Baroque art to this day.

This unique set of churches represents not only masterpieces of Baroque architecture alongside the process of creating a monastic landscape but also the symbolic intertwining of spirit and matter, the spiritual and the material, giving this architectural complex a special depth and significance. Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer, together with Abbot Othmar Zinke, sought to create an architectural symbiosis in which spiritual messages interweave with architectural forms. Their collaboration was fundamental to the creation of a unique project that aimed to reflect the perfection of God on Earth. The Broumov Group of Churches is not just a complex of buildings; it is also a mirror of faith, spiritual growth and the search for connection between the earthly and the supernatural. The Broumov Group of Churches thus represents not only technical mastery and architectural beauty but also contains a profound intellectual dimension and spiritual message.

3. The Sephirotic Tree integrated into the landscape

This text proposes viewing the Broumov Group of Churches as a human intervention into the landscape, where the arrangement of the churches is designed and situated according to a complex diagram known as the Sephirotic Tree. This diagram captures the structure of a harmonious organization of both earthly and heavenly space based on the attributes of God. The churches surrounding the Broumov Monastery engage with Baroque aesthetics, reflecting not only Baroque art but also an effort to connect the structures with the overall character of the landscape. The buildings are carefully integrated into the specific characteristics of the natural valley that surrounds them. The overall impression is thus interconnected, not only visually but also symbolically.

The group of churches around the monastery is not merely a random cluster of buildings; it forms a harmonious whole. The churches are arranged to face inward, towards the monastery itself, serving as a place of turning for individuals towards both tradition, prayer and community. Simultaneously, they express a desire and quest for spiritual connection with the transcendent, pointing upwards.

The designed landscape becomes a space where the earthly and heavenly dimensions intertwine, harmonizing the natural surroundings with human spirituality. This intention aims not only for aesthetic and spiritual inspiration but also seeks to impact economic prosperity and the well-being of all inhabitants of the landscape. Sephirotic trees are traditionally used as theurgic tools to intensify God's blessings - an attempt to draw back God's presence into the space from which, according to Lurianic Kabbalah teachings, God voluntarily withdrew to create a space for human agency [3]. Thus, the organized landscape becomes a representation of the connection between humans and God, a fusion of human creative power and an intense life in God's presence, captured in the Sephirotic diagram.

4. Kabbalah and Christianity - influence and synthesis

In the period around 1700, there was a penetration of Italian Kabbalah into Christianity, particularly within the framework of the Jewish-Christian intellectual dialogue and the study of Jewish mystical texts by non-Jewish scholars [3]. There were interests in gaining knowledge and understanding of Jewish Kabbalah, as well as finding parallels between Kabbalistic concepts and Christian theology.

During this period, translations of Jewish Kabbalistic texts into Latin or other European languages emerged, providing access to these texts for Christian scholars. Some texts of the Kabbalistic master Isaac Luria (1534-1572) or his disciples were translated and began to be studied in Christian circles. Another factor contributing to the penetration of Kabbalah into Christianity, although not discussed here, was the influence of Hermetic thought and Renaissance esoteric currents interested in occult and mystical teachings. These currents had a long-

standing impact on certain Christian thinkers and philosophers seeking new ways to understand the spiritual world.

The process of the encounter between Kabbalah and Christianity was not uniform and did not influence all Christian scholars. Interest in Kabbalah arose particularly among those engaged in Theology, Philosophy and mysticism, and those interested in non-European languages and complex cosmological concepts. Around 1700, a broader fascination with Kabbalistic symbols and ideas began to manifest in Christian circles. In 1678, a book titled 'Porta Coelorum' [4] was published in Germany in Latin, providing a very accessible introduction to the terms and concepts of Lurianic Kabbalah within the context of Christianity.

Research on the phenomenon of Christian Kabbalah has seen increasing interest in recent decades, with many specialists examining how Christian intellectuals began to study Kabbalistic sources and other Jewish traditions [5]. Before focusing on Herrery's text, it is necessary to mention one of the most well-known representatives of Christian Kabbalah, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. According to him, Kabbalah represented an ancient theology containing truths identical to Christian teachings and could serve as a means to defend the Christian faith. Although Kabbalah as Jewish mysticism was previously unknown to Pico, he elevated it to the level of ancient revelation to be shared with Christianity.

In the year 1486, a young Italian noble embarked on a project so grandiose that parallels are sought in vain either before or after him. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), then twenty-three years old, envisioned inviting a large group of intellectuals from across Europe (offering to cover their expenses) to convene in Rome under the guidance of the Pope and engage in a public debate. This was based on a series of approximately 900 theses he had written for this occasion. While public disputes of this kind were not uncommon, the number of theses rarely exceeded twenty or twenty-five, and even debates on a single thesis could last hours or even days. Pico's project was of an entirely different magnitude: the following nine hundred dialectical, moral, physical, mathematical, metaphysical, theological, magical and Kabbalistic opinions, encompassing both his own and teachings from Chaldean, Islamic, Jewish, Greek, Egyptian and Latin philosophies, were to be publicly discussed. The goal was to find the universal history of truth. Pico's project aspired to create a platform for all philosophical debates - an imaginary dispute of universal dimensions that would resolve all problems once and for all. It is not surprising that it never materialized. After initial censorship of thirteen specific theses, Pope Innocent VIII eventually condemned all 900 theses in 1487, emphasizing those that 'renewed the errors of pagan philosophers', those that 'perpetuated the fallacies of the Jews' and those dedicated to 'certain arts that masquerade as natural philosophy' (meaning magic). It was the first case in history where a printed book was banned, and almost all copies were burned. Pico's project, while an extreme example of interest in various sources of ancient learning during the Renaissance, innovatively incorporated many topics from the

Kabbalah, known as the secret tradition of the Jews, into other intellectual currents of European thought.

As emphasized by Scholem, Pico was the first non-Semitic Christian around 1700 to engage with the Kabbalah, utilizing it as the most significant philosophy for defending the Christian faith [6]. His Christian Kabbalah was part of the so-called *prisca theologia*, in which he connected Kabbalah with other philosophical ideas. Research on this phenomenon indicates mutual influence: Christian Kabbalah influenced Jewish Kabbalah during the Renaissance, becoming crucial for the study of Jewish culture in early modern Europe. This new wave of research contributes to a deeper understanding of the significance and complexity of Jewish-Christian relations during that time.

Most research on Christian Kabbalah is written by experts in Jewish studies, perceiving Christian Kabbalah mainly as a phenomenon of Jewish-Christian interaction. For this reason, they usually only briefly mention the *prisca theologia* stream as a phenomenon likely separated from Jewish sources rather than connected to them. One notable exception to this rule is Moshe Idel [3]. On the other hand, scholars writing about *prisca theologia* or the *philosophia perennis* of the Renaissance tend to focus more on the relationship between Christianity and pagan sources, often neglecting an in-depth exploration of Christian Kabbalah.

In the context mentioned, Christian Kabbalah should be perceived as a typical intellectual trend of its time, not as a separate development. It is crucial to realize that figures like Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin and Abraham Cohen Herrera, who will be discussed in more detail, did not focus on Jewish esoterics per se but were interested in ancient and universal wisdom. According to them, this wisdom was true and divine in essence and origin, and therefore 'Christian' by this definition, regardless of where it was found; Kabbalah was not seen as the possession of the Jews, but rather something they preserved [5]. This conviction also led to the belief that Jews should surely turn to Christianity once the true secret of their own tradition was revealed. This line of thought was adopted from the writings of the Church Fathers, with an emphasis on Moses as the original and oldest recipient of Divine wisdom.

This brings us to a place that is fundamental for both religions and other intellectual and artistic forms through which theologians and intellectuals in subsequent centuries sought to approach God's perfection, infinity and beauty. The Decalogue, as a common element in Jewish and Christian traditions, occupies a significant place in the religious thought of both systems. What appears to be an apparent connection between these two religions is also a source of deeper understanding of the application of Kabbalah to art, architecture or philosophy.

The Ten Commandments, known from the Torah and the Bible, the Old and the New Testament, represent fundamental ethical guidelines for human life and social order. Its content is admirably consistent, although interpreted in various contexts. Within the Kabbalistic tradition, the number 10 holds special significance and symbolism [3]. This number is closely related to the Sephirotic

Tree, a Kabbalistic concept illustrating ten attributes of God, spiritual principles, or spheres. Each sefira reflects a specific aspect of the divine essence and carries specific qualities and functions. The number 10, in this sense, contains the complete system of Kabbalistic teachings, symbolizing fullness and wholeness. Kabbalah further connects the number 10 with other digits it contains. The number 1 represents unity and divine essence, while the number 0 signifies nothingness and infinity, associated with the concept of absolute infinity called *Ein Sof*. In this complex coherence of meanings, the number 10 plays a significant role as a key element for understanding the Sefirotic Tree and other Kabbalistic concepts. The number 10 becomes a bridge between Jewish and Christian religions, expressing the connection between the spiritual and material worlds and revealing deeper layers of symbolism that transcend the boundaries of purely religious discourse. The architecture of sacred buildings often associated numerical relationships with spiritual significance. Thus, the number 10 is reflected in the internal structure of the Broumov buildings and carries hints of multiplicity and connection between the divine and the human. (For the purposes of this text, the term ‘Broumov group of churches’ refers only to the buildings - that is, the 10 churches whose architects were Christoph and Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer (Figure 1). Excluded is the Church of Saint Martin in Martínkovice, built between 1709-1712 and 1716-1717, according to the design of Martin Allio of Löwenthal or his nephew Jan Baptista Allio.)

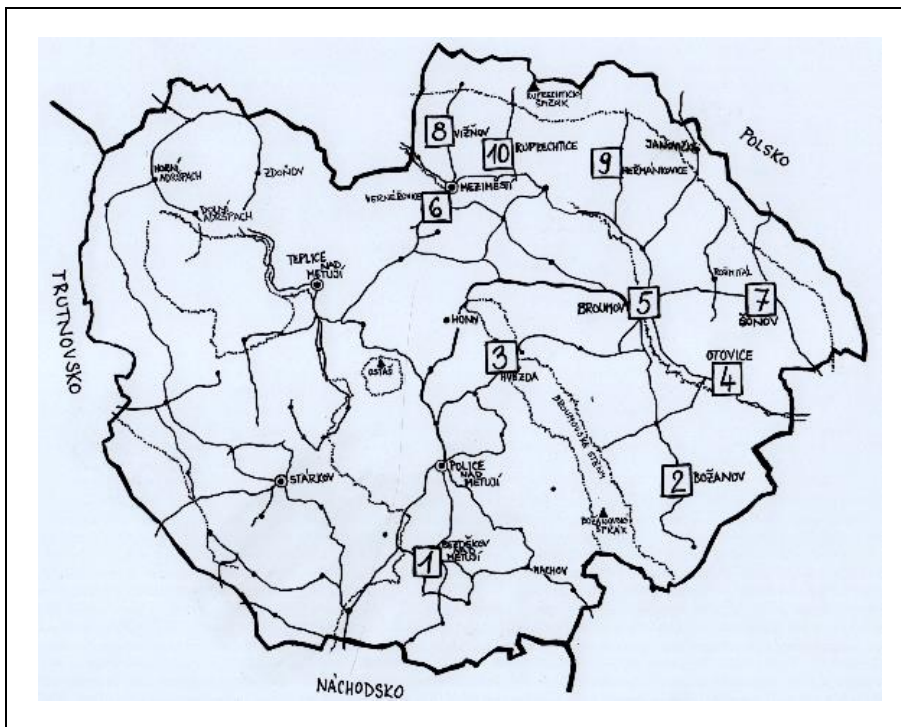


Figure 1. Map of the distribution of Broumov Churches. Source: author’s archive, original drawing of Jana Čambalová for purposes of this text.

5. The gateway of Abraham Cohen Herrera to the heavens

Abraham Cohen de Herrera (Hebrew: אברהם רבי בן כהן אברהם רבי), also known as Alonso Nunez de Herrera or Abraham Irija (1570-1635), was renowned as both a religious philosopher and a Kabbalist. It is believed that he hailed from a lineage of Marranos in Lisbon, Portugal, although alternative sources associate him with Italy, specifically Tuscany, and identify him as family member of the chief rabbi of Cordoba in Spain. It is also known that he married Sara de Herrera in Amsterdam in 1600 [7]. There is evidence that he had an uncle, Juan de Marchena, who worked for the Sultan of Morocco. While on a trade mission for the Sultan in Cadiz, Herrera was supposed to be captured by the English. Following diplomatic correspondence between the Sultan and Queen Elizabeth I, he was released and returned to Amsterdam, where he reclaimed Judaism. He initially wrote his texts in Spanish, which were later translated into other European languages, bringing Kabbalistic concepts to the broader awareness of European intellectuals of the time, particularly the Marrano community living in Amsterdam.

Marranos were descendants of Jewish individuals in Spain and Portugal who were compelled to convert to Christianity due to religious persecution in the 15th and 16th centuries. The conversion to Christianity was often enforced through violence and pressure, although many converts secretly maintained their affiliation with the Jewish faith. The term ‘marrano’ comes from Portuguese and means ‘pig’ or ‘young pig’. This term was used in a derogatory sense to refer to Christians of Jewish origin who concealed their Jewish identity and practiced their faith in secret.

Despite officially being members of the Catholic Church, Marranos frequently continued to surreptitiously observe Jewish customs, traditions and beliefs, while facing both religious persecution and suspicion of clandestine Jewish practices. Consequently, they were perceived as potential apostates to the faith. Inquisitors relentlessly pursued and interrogated Marranos, who were compelled to testify. It appears that Herrera, through his body of work, sought to dispel such suspicions and mount a defence against accusations of convert adherence to Judaism.

His most notable work is a book in Spanish known as *Puerta del Cielo*. It is characterized as a contemplation on Kabbalah and religious themes of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in connection with Occidentalism and Platonic philosophy. In other words, the text explains Herrera’s Kabbalistic doctrine on God and the Cosmos. (The second text, ‘Casa de Dios’, predominantly deals with theories about angels and pneumatology. Manuscripts of both works can be found in the Ez Hayyim Library in Amsterdam and the Royal Library in the Netherlands. Quite soon after their creation, these texts were translated into Hebrew by Isaac Aboab da Fonseca and published under the titles ‘Sha’ar ha-Shamayim’ (Amsterdam, 1655) and ‘Beit Elohim’ (Amsterdam, 1655). Both books are considered unique Kabbalistic writings composed in Spanish.)

Herrera considered Kabbalah as a source of ancient truth [7]. As a representative of syncretic thinking, he attempted to combine teachings from Kabbalistic sources such as the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Zohar*, the teachings of Kabbalist Moses Cordovero, Isaac Luria, and the Lurianic school (Herrera was a student of Israel Sarug, a disciple of Luria) with Aristotelian, Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics, medieval Islamic and Jewish theology, and scholasticism. This careful synthesis follows the syncretic model of Pico della Mirandola and also explains the book's appeal to philosophers such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Henry More, Hegel and Jacob Bruckner. (In 1699, Herrera drew the attention of Johann Georg Wachter, who, based on Latin translations of Herrera's works in 'Kabbala Denudata' by Knorr von Rosenroth, accused Herrera of inspiring the alleged pantheistic heresy of Spinoza.)

Puerta Del Cielo is among the very few Kabbalistic texts written, intended, and comprehensible for ordinary readers even today. Let's briefly examine some basic terms and concepts Herrera worked with in the text. (The foundational explanation of Kabbalistic terms and concepts presented in this article closely aligns with the teachings of Moshe Idel, as described in his books and articles. I attended his Kabbalah courses for four years during my studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.)

The first term is *Ein Sof*, a Hebrew term meaning 'Without End' or 'Infinity'. It describes God in His infinite and countless essence, having no boundaries or limitations. In Kabbalah, *Ein Sof* represents the transcendent, unattainable and indescribable essence of God that surpasses human understanding [3, p. 58]. It is a state of absolute infinity and being that is entirely beyond the reach of human perception and words. *Ein Sof* is so non-existent in a way that it cannot even be named. It emphasizes not only the lack of human words and concepts to describe God but also underscores the transcendence and timelessness of God. *Ein Sof* represents the cornerstone of Kabbalistic thought, reminding Kabbalists that the true nature of God is extraordinarily complex and immense, encompassing all aspects of existence.

The next crucial term addressed in the text is the Kabbalistic term *Tzimtzum*. Originating from the Hebrew mystical tradition, this concept holds fundamental significance in comprehending creation and the relationship between God and the Universe. Literally translated as 'withdrawal' or 'contraction', it represents a perspective on how the vast and inaccessible God could have 'withdrawn' or 'restricted' His infinite presence to create space for the created world [3, p. 39].

According to Kabbalistic teachings, *Ein Sof*, signifying God, decided to create the Universe and manifest His creative abilities. However, in order to create space for the act of creation, God had to perform *Tzimtzum*, meaning the 'withdrawal' of His infinity from a specific area. This action resulted in the creation of an empty space for the existence of the created. The concept of *Tzimtzum* elucidates the paradoxical connection between the unattainable essence of God and His ability to communicate and act within the created world.

In the initial chapters of the book, Herrera delves into introducing the doctrine of permutations of Hebrew letters found in several variants of the names of God. He also explores the concept of *Adam Kadmon* [3, p. 38]. The term *Adam Kadmon* refers to the archetypal or primordial being in Kabbalistic mysticism, symbolizing the first fundamental emanation in the process of creation. This concept is particularly prominent in the sefirotic system of Kabbalah, where *Adam Kadmon* metaphorically represents a universal archetypal being encompassing all aspects and potentials of future reality.

The first emanation from the emerging Adam Kadmon is the intelligible world and the Tetragrammaton - the Hebrew letters signifying God. This principle serves as the foundational building block of the Chain of Being, establishing a connection between the divine aspects and the structure of the universe. *Adam Kadmon* represents not only the fundamental structure of Creation but also the connection with the intelligible world. The intelligible world refers to the philosophical and mystical concept denoting the realm of reality beyond the physical and perceptible world. In Kabbalah, it is associated with the Divine emanations, expressing the highest and most abstract level of existence. This world contains archetypes and patterns shaping lower levels of reality.

Herrera accompanies his writings in the book with illustrations depicting both man and diagrams, providing a visual representation that aligns with subsequent chapters discussing the teachings of the Sefirotic Tree.

6. The Sefirotic Tree as a diagram of inner harmony between God and the world

The Sefirotic Tree, also known as the Tree of Life, stands as a foundational visual symbol in Jewish mysticism (Figure 2) [3, p. 116]. This intricate diagram represents the hierarchy and interrelations of the ten sefirot, spiritual principles or spheres within Creation. Positioned at the top of the tree, the Sefira Keter, or Crown, signifies the connection to the highest aspect of absolute being, while the subsequent sefirot descend, forming a gradual process of emanation and structuring of reality.

Lurianic Kabbalah, named after Isaac Luria (1534-1572), introduced significant innovations to the conception of the Sefirotic Tree. Luria's teachings emphasized the breakdown of the originally harmonious structure of the sefirot in the process of *Tzimtzum* (and *Shvirat ha-Kelim* - the breaking of the vessels) [3, p. 94]. This rationalized the concept of evil and chaos in Kabbalistic doctrine, explaining the existence of non-physical evil in the world. Lurianic Kabbalah sparked further interest in exploring and understanding the interactions between the divine and the material world, shaping the ongoing development of Kabbalistic practice.

Kabbalistic ideas concerning the doctrine of the sefirot began permeating Philosophy, religious thought and art. Mystics, philosophers and scholars sought to integrate Kabbalistic symbolism with traditional teachings and other

intellectual currents. Various interpretations of the Sefirotic Tree emerged, becoming part of profound spiritual exploration and reflection on the nature of reality, divinity and human existence. Besides symbols reflected in built interiors they were used also used in landscapes projects, as we can see in Figure 1.

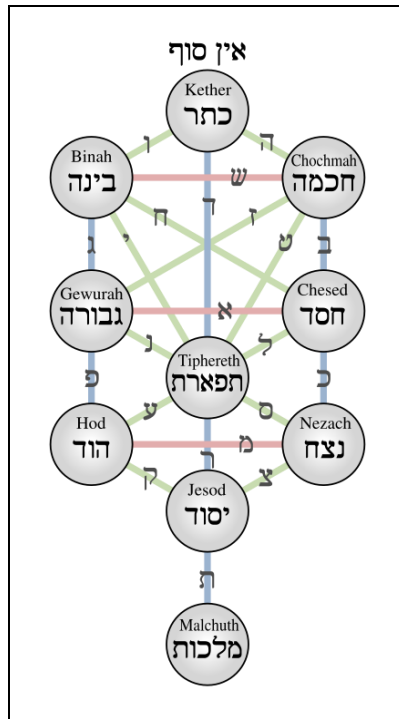


Figure 2. One of the contemporary methods of depicting the Sefirotic Tree, comprising 10 sefirot and 22 paths. Source: Anon Moos, Kabbalistic Tree of Life, World History Encyclopedia, <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9278/kabbalistic-tree-of-life/>.

Numerical symbolism and sacred geometry were often employed in the designs of sacred structures. They contributed to perceiving space as harmonious, spiritual and symbolically rich. Geometric shapes and their combinations were used to create balance and proportions with aesthetic and symbolic significance. Numbers, such as prime numbers, sequences, or the four basic arithmetic operations, were frequently associated with cosmic and spiritual principles. Sacred geometry is considered a means of creating proportions that harmonize with the natural world and possess the ability to transmit a certain spiritual energy. In line with this, numerology serves as a source of hidden or symbolic spiritual meanings within Architecture. The selection and combination of geometric shapes and numerical symbols always depended on the intention of the creator and the spiritual message the structure aimed to convey. In this way, sacred geometry and numerical symbolism become not only architectural

elements but also tools for connecting spiritual and cosmic principles with the material world and the human community that structures represent.

Let's examine the representation of the Sefirotic Tree, a depiction that could have been known to the Benedictines of Broumov. Presented here is an excerpt from a Kabbalistic tree by B. Godines dating back to 1675 (or according to the Jewish calendar, the year 5435). This illustration reveals the structure of divine emanation from the highest sphere, Keter. The drawing is part of a manuscript containing the original ten books (in printed books, individual chapters) of Herrera's works [4].

At the heart of this intricate drawing is a schema of the sefirot, interspersed with symbols of the Jewish Temple: eight flying cherubs, the tablets of the Decalogue, the Menorah, a table with bread, and altars. Above the highest sefira is a circle without a visible connection to the lower sefirot, representing *Ein Sof*, with a spring or fountain inside. Surrounding the sefirot is a garden with four trees: grapevine, apple tree, palm and olive tree. Among the fruit depictions are combinations of letters from divine names. Between the leaves of the apple tree and the olive tree are symbols of the zodiac and the seven planets. The entire drawing illustrates perfect order, deemed essential for maintaining the *Shekhinah* (divine presence) on Earth - the space from which God voluntarily withdrew. On the margins, a note in Portuguese signed by Samuel de David Curiel emphasizes the great value and rarity of this book - only one other sketch existed. He advises treating this book as a jewel, given its appraisal of more than 200 patacas. Curiel also informs the reader of adding content to the end of the manuscript.

Additional notes underscore the seriousness with which the text was handled. Annotations in Portuguese with a Dutch translation on the margin mention a dedication to the library: the book was presented to Ets Haim by Rabbi Jacob Ferrares with the intention of safeguarding it from inappropriate use in the future. Amsterdam, 26th of Heshvan 5603 (October 18, 1842).

The author's drawing is also commented upon with a text explaining and warning that the diagram is based on an 'ilanu' (Hebrew tree) printed in 1629 by the convert Philip d'Aquin, whose concept differs from Jewish Kabbalists - meaning it is acceptable after studying in Christian circles. Herrera concludes his chapter on the doctrine of the Sefirotic Tree with a proclamation: *FINIS. SOLI DEO GLORIA per CHRISTUM*, meaning *The End. Glory to God alone through Christ* [7].

7. The diagram of perfection

In the introductory text of Chapter X, it is evident that Herrera meticulously and systematically refers to key works of Kabbalah, with particular emphasis on the mention of *Sefer Yetzirah* [8], also known as the Book of Creation, dating back to the 7th century (some sources suggest as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries). However, it is indisputable that *Sefer Yetzirah* represents a

source of ancient mysticism associated with numbers and letters, fundamentally introducing the concept of sefirot into the Kabbalistic context.

The sefirot constitute the fundamental building blocks of Jewish mysticism. The term ‘sefira’ - ספירה in Hebrew (plural: sefirot) is likely derived from the Hebrew word ‘safar’ - ספר, meaning to *count*. This diagram of ten elements and the paths between them forms the basic structure of the entire existence. Sefirot are aspects of God, expressing not only His nature but also the manner in which He operates in the world. They emanate from God like flames from glowing charcoal, creating a complex network of connections between the Divine and the material world. The sefirot are as follows:

1. **Keter (Crown)**: the highest aspect, akin to a crown, representing Divine will and guidance;
2. **Chochma (Wisdom)**: Divine wisdom, the source of creativity and inventiveness;
3. **Bina (Understanding)**: represents Divine understanding and intellect;
4. **Chesed (Mercy)**: expresses Divine mercy and generosity;
5. **Gevura (Strength)**: represents Divine strength and justice;
6. **Tiferet (Beauty)**: symbolizes the harmony and balance of Divine attributes; above this sefira is sometimes drawn the symbol of the Da’at (Knowledge) sefira, which is invisible and often completely omitted in diagrams, representing profound spiritual knowledge;
7. **Netzach (Eternity)**: expresses Divine eternity and permanence;
8. **Hod (Glory)**: this sefira represents Divine glory and dignity;
9. **Yesod (Foundation)**: symbolizes the connection between the Divine and the earthly;
10. **Malchut (Kingdom)**: physical reality.

The interconnected sefirot create a complex system that allows understanding the interrelations between God and the material world. In addition to the sefirot, Kabbalah distinguishes four ‘worlds’: Atzilut (emanation, from Hebrew אציל, to set aside), Briah (creation, from Hebrew ברא, to create), Yetzirah (formation, from Hebrew יצר, to form), and Asiyah (action, from Hebrew עשה, to make). These worlds represent different levels of God’s manifestation and relationship to the material world. Herrera, in his texts following the introduction to the issue, works in detail with these worlds, connecting the sefirot to individual worlds, assigning biblical figures to them, organizing angelic choirs, associating them with colours, elements, planets and Christian saints. Herrera incorporates numerous references to older and well-known Kabbalistic writings, quotes significant Jewish scholars, and uses Hebrew expressions - either directly in Hebrew script or transliterated into Latin characters. The text remains not only readable and poetic but also maintains the structure of an academic text from a contemporary perspective. Chapter X is introduced with the words:

“§.1. This section introduces a sophisticated system of doubled veils, where the first Adam is hidden, surrounded by brightness. This system has ten circles and ten mysterious parts, discussed in Emek ha-melech, part 4, chapter 6.

§.2. This is followed by ten Sefirot - spheres and a system of circles around Tiferet, from which radiance emanates. This is discussed in *Emek ha-melech*, part 5, chapter 3, which describes the spheres of radiance as having ten mysterious levels and containing ten colours, integral to these Sefirot. They are the entities of these Sefirot, emanating from the realm of shadows, as mentioned in the *Book of the Source of Wisdom*, compiled by our teacher Moses. However, darkness is nothing but an absolute flash.

Further written: "These are: Light of light, Radiance of radiance, Flash of flash, etc., so that light is more noble than radiance, and radiance is more noble than flash". The first light is the miraculous light called Keter; the second is the hidden light called Chochma; the third is the sparkling light called Bina. This means that the first three are undoubtedly Keter, Chochma, and Bina, and are equal; because in these three, being and substance are one and the same, they grow together and do not separate.

Furthermore, the fourth light is called fine and radiant light; this is the radiance of light. The fifth is the radiance of light, from which emanates the radiance of radiance. And these are Gedula and Gevura, which are the emanating radiance of the Crown and Wisdom together with three other radiances.

Then follows the sixth, called the bright light; this is the radiance of light. The seventh, pure light, is the radiance of radiance, i.e., the Crown and Intuition, together with three flashes. From this radiance emanates Tiferet, shining thanks to Chochma, as a son subordinate to the father. And Necach is pure light, as if to say, it is like dissolved silver, into which no skin is mixed.

Further, the eighth is called the bright and radiant light; the ninth is the light of clarity, emanating from the radiance of radiance. The sense of this is that the radiance of Wisdom and Intelligence together with three flashes, emanate radiance. Jesod arises from the union of Hod and Necach, shining in the ether, as the radiance of beautifully white light, but not entirely pure. And finally, the tenth is called serenity, that is, pure clarity.

§.3. In the midst of this is the name of the sphere Tiferet itself and its radiance, which surrounds all worlds, according to the first Adam hidden in the original mystery. See *Thefes Cabbalisticas*, Apparatus. Part II., page 150, Thef. 5, etc." (author's own translation)

The author complements the dynamic poetics of describing celestial spheres with sketches of various compositions and arrangements of sefirotic diagrams, depending on what they are associated with. The images are accompanied by captions that, although concise, precisely capture the main idea and concept of the diagram. Here is an example of one caption, in which brief words hide complex concepts of Jewish mysticism, recognizable by the knowledgeable but not provocative for readers from Christian inquisitorial circles. "The circle (Q.) represents the Afriatic (made, according to the Hebrew word for "make") world, which is the World of Heavenly Spheres, where the inscription of the Tetragrammaton is found: 1. יהוה יהוה אלף, 2. הוה הוה ורה. Now comes: The Sefirot. Names. Parts. Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge,

Mercy, Strength, Fear, Power, Triumph, Beauty, Search, Words, Will of the King Lord, I am I am, I am, Highest of Highs, Judge of Judges, and I have seen.”
(author’s own translation)

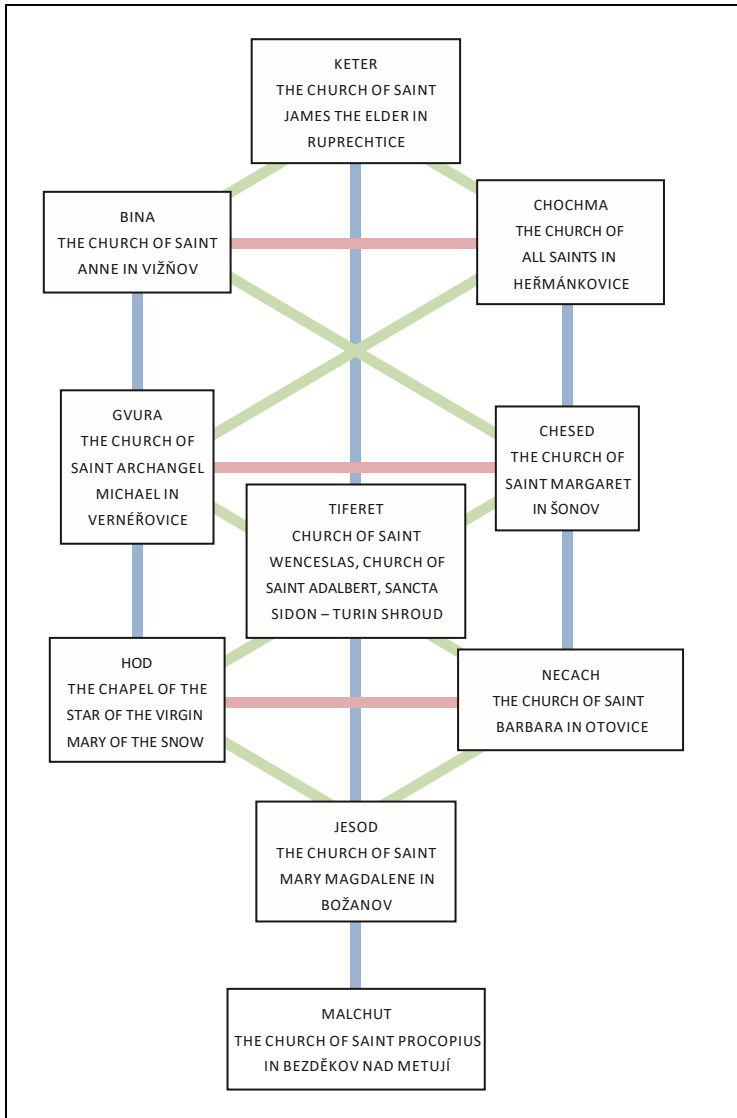


Figure 3. Proposal for the arrangement of the Broumov group of churches according to the sefirotic diagram. Source: author’s archive.

In Figure 3, the arrangement of churches in the landscape reflects the structure of the Sefirotic Tree, as known from texts available in Christian circles in Europe at that time. Let us now examine three selected sefirot in more detail and the significance of what they represent. The selected structures show how the sefirotic tree was used and how the system of Kabbalistic interpretation

functioned in a Christian context. (If it is not stated differently, descriptions of sefira are based on lecture notes and texts of M. Idel, mentioned in bibliography.) In my upcoming publication, all structures will be elaborated in the context of the monastery landscape.

From top to bottom description of Figure 3:

- Keter: the Church of Saint James the Elder in Ruprechtice;
- Bina: the Church of Saint Anne in Vižňov;
- Chochma: the Church of All Saints in Heřmánkovice;
- Gvura: the Church of Saint Archangel Michael in Verněřovice;
- Chesed: the Church of Saint Margaret in Šonov;
- Tiferet: Church of Saint Wenceslas, Church of Saint Adalbert, Sancta Sidon - Turin Shroud;
- Hod: the Chapel of the Star of the Virgin Mary of the Snow;
- Necach: the Church of Saint Barbara in Otovice;
- Jesod: the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Božanov;
- Malchut: the Church of Saint Procopius in Bezděkov nad Metují.

8. Tiferet - Glory - Monastery Church of Saint Adalbert and Church of Saint Wenceslas in Broumov

Returning to the excerpt from Herrera's text, we see that the Tiferet sefira occupies a very significant place in his interpretation. He states that "*the radiance of the Tiferet sefira surrounds all worlds*" but also that it shines thanks to the higher sefira Chochma, "*like a son subordinate to the father*". Here, Herrera's effort to embed the Sephirothic Tree into Christian theology becomes apparent. In the context of this statement, it is worth noting another passage from Herrera's text, where he speaks of a radiance resembling silver. "*From this radiance emanates Tiferet, shining through Chochma, as a son subordinate to his father. And Netzach is pure light, as if saying it is similar to dissolved silver, into which no impurity is mixed.*" While this quote specifically pertains to the sefira Netzach, it opens up possibilities for further exploration of interpretations of the Shroud of Turin by Christian mystics and scholars of that time.

In 1999, a unique copy of the Shroud of Turin from 1651 was discovered in the Abbey Church of Saint Adalbert above the Chapel of the Holy Cross, adorned with a gilded stucco wreath inscribed with *Sancta Sindon* (holy fabric, a term used to refer to the Shroud of Turin) in a wooden box. The accompanying document revealed that the Archbishop of Turin had gifted the cloth to the abbot of Saint Nicholas Abbey in Prague, who, in turn, donated it to the Broumov monastery during his lifetime. The elevated placement of the box likely ensured the security of this valuable relic, making it challenging to access within the church. The inscription on the box clearly defined its contents with the term commonly used for the Shroud of Turin. Therefore, it can be assumed that other reasons also justified its elevated location [9].

Tiferet is a sefira in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, carrying significant and multifaceted meanings. Often translated as Beauty, Glory, or Harmony, Tiferet holds a central position on the Tree of Life, connecting higher and lower sefirot. Let's delve into a detailed description of this significant sefira, which Herrera and other kabbalists before him paid great attention to in both texts and diagrams. Tiferet serves as the centre from which concentric circles emanate, connecting, holding and stabilizing the entire cosmological concept.

The significance of the Tiferet sefira includes:

1. **Harmony:** Tiferet represents a harmonious balance between various forces and aspects of life. It is the connection between the spiritual and the material, emotions and reason, the masculine and feminine principles. Tiferet symbolizes the unification of opposites and the integration of diversity.
2. **Beauty:** Tiferet is associated with beauty in all its forms, whether physical beauty, aesthetics, art, or spiritual and moral beauty. Tiferet enables us to perceive and experience beauty in the world around us.
3. **Glory:** Tiferet is also linked to glory and nobility, referring to manifestations of higher potential and the nobility of human existence. Tiferet allows us to express and live in harmony with our highest calling and potential.
4. **Heart:** Tiferet is often connected to the heart as the symbolic centre of love, compassion, and inner strength. It represents the emotional and spiritual dimensions of human existence and the ability to express love and compassion for oneself and others.

Tiferet is a sefira that mediates harmony and connection between the inner and outer worlds. It is the key to an integrated and balanced life where various aspects of our being are developed and interconnected.

In addition to the monastery church, another significant building in Broumov is the Church of Saint Wenceslas, constructed on the orders of Abbot Zinke. This church, built by the architect Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer, is noteworthy for its floor plan featuring an elongated Greek cross. This structure also holds historical significance in European history. Originally, a Lutheran church stood at this location, erected after the issuance of the Letter of Majesty by Rudolph II. In 1618, Abbot Zinke decided to close the Lutheran church, leading to complaints from Lutherans and eventually sparking the Prague Defenestration and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War [10].

During the war, the Lutheran church burned down, and a chapel dedicated to Saint Wenceslas was built in its place in 1676. However, even this chapel was later destroyed by fire. The current church was completed in 1729 at the decision of Abbot Othmar Zinke. In 1788, the church was closed, but it was later restored and resumed its religious functions in 1885. After 1950, the church was closed again and used as storage. Following restoration after 1989, the church was reconsecrated in 1995. On July 1, 2022, it was declared a national cultural monument. The altar paintings of this monument are also considered peaks of Czech Baroque. The frescoes dedicated to the patrons of the Czech lands are the

work of Felix Antonín Scheffler, who frequently collaborated with Benedictines [11].

Both churches and their placement at the centre of the entire system can be interpreted as a significant expression of reverence for Czech patrons, who hold crucial importance in the local context. However, it is essential to consider that one of these churches housed the Shroud of Turin, kept in the Chapel of the Holy Cross. This decision indicates an intention to connect the monastery not only with prominent religious centres in Europe but also to strengthen the spiritual dimension of the entire complex situated in the Broumov landscape.

9. Gevurah - Stern Strength - Church of Saint Archangel Michael in Verněřovice

Gevurah (Hebrew: גבורה) is a sefirah in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life with several meanings and connotations. Gevurah is often translated as Stern Strength or Valour. This sefirah represents the principle of strength, limitation, and discipline. The root of the word is the same as in the Hebrew word גבר *geber*, meaning *lord*. All connotations of words derived from this root are strongly masculine, encompassing strength, justice and the courage to overcome obstacles.

Archangel Michael was sent alongside Archangel Gabriel to destroy Sodom simultaneously. His name in Hebrew can be translated as ‘*Who is God*’. Michael, the archangel and protector, is mentioned in the Old Testament. In visions conveyed to the prophet Daniel by an angel, Michael appears as his helper in the battle against the enemy. This book also describes events that are to occur in the ‘last days’. In the New Testament, Michael is referred to as an ‘archangel’ and a guide who confronted the dragon-devil and triumphed over it, often depicted with him. However, his most famous appearance in the New Testament comes in the Book of Revelation, also known as Apocalypse. This book builds on the prophecies of Daniel about the last days and identifies Michael as a key figure in the struggle between good and evil. Archangel Michael is often perceived as a protector and warrior for good and justice, and his presence is frequently associated with significant events and the end of times.

The strength, severity, and masculine attributes of the Gevurah sefirah are harmonized with the opposite sefirah, Chesed, representing attributes such as mercy and kindness. The harmony between these two sefirot signifies a balanced and just ratio of power, strength, will, and compassion. Gevurah and Chesed work together to create a harmonious relationship between will and compassion. Both principles positioned against each other in the diagram most clearly indicate the effort to build a balanced and harmonious world.

10. Chesed - Mercy - the Church of Saint Margaret in Šonov

Chesed is associated with the expression of love, mercy and compassion. It represents the ability to show kindness and give without expecting anything in

return. Chesed enables the manifestation of love and care for oneself and others, fostering harmonious relationships built on compassion.

Additionally, Chesed is linked to the principle of abundance and generosity. It denotes the capacity to give and support others without fear of scarcity. It is a principle that advocates for giving and receiving unconditional love, contributing to the creation of peace and harmony in the world.

Saint Margaret, whose feast day on June 13th is currently primarily associated with the well-known superstition about the sickle as a symbol of the beginning of harvest, is a figure to whom a church in the Broumov group is dedicated in a location corresponding to the position of the Chesed sefirah. Margaret, however, was venerated as the patroness of pregnant women, nurses, virgins and mothers. During childbirth, Margaret's candle would be lit and Margaret's belt would alleviate pain [*Benediktini a břevnovský klášter*, <https://www.brevnov.cz/cs/benediktini-a-brevnovsky-klaster/svata-marketa-anti-ochijska>, accessed on 06.09.2023]. The popularity of this patron saint is evidenced by the enduring usage of the name Margaret across centuries.

The Church of Saint Margaret in Šonov, situated outside the village amidst fields on an elevated site, is oriented towards the Broumov monastery, providing a view of the monastery. The floor plan is an elongated octagon, and the entrance facade is adorned with a pair of prism towers. The church has a total of six entrances, three leading to the vestibule and three to the nave, which is capped by a coffered ceiling. This Baroque structure in the midst of Nature creates an impressive and romantic setting with views of Broumov, especially during sunrise or sunset. It is also one of the most photographed buildings in the entire group.

11. Keter - Crown - Church of Saint James the Greater in Ruprechtice

This sefirah is associated with transcendental principles and infinite potential. The word Keter is translated as 'Crown'. Keter is a sefirah representing the highest state of being and the source of everything that exists. It is a principle that inspires the search for higher meaning and a close connection with the infinite. Keter allows experiencing unity and harmony in life, finding inner balance and tranquillity in the presence of absolute unity. It is the source of all creation and contains unimaginable power and energy.

Above the entrance to the Church of Saint James the Greater, there is an inscription on a marble plaque: "FILIO / TONITRUI / S.IACOBO MAJORI / EXCITAVIT 1721 / O.A.B." Translated, it means: "To the son of thunder, St. James the Greater, Othmar, abbot of Broumov, built in 1721".

Saint James the Greater was one of the prominent apostles in the Christian movement. His brother was another apostle and evangelist, John. Jesus called James to follow him immediately after calling Peter and Andrew when they were working on a boat with their father. James and John, however, accepted Christ's call immediately, leaving their father and the boat to follow him. In the discipleship lists of Jesus, James is usually listed in the second or third place

after Peter and Andrew. James and John were nicknamed the “sons of thunder”, referring to their turbulent and passionate nature. This nature became apparent when the Samaritans refused to accommodate Jesus and his disciples on their way to Jerusalem. James and John suggested they could call down fire from heaven to punish the Samaritans, but Jesus sternly rebuked them for their proposal (Luke 9.52-55). James belonged to the disciples who witnessed significant moments in Jesus’s life and was often mentioned alongside Peter.

The character of Saint James is associated with both proximity to Christ and acknowledged theurgical (intentionally not using the word magical) ability. The words ‘theurgical’ and ‘magical’ are essential concepts in the field of mysticism and spiritual practice, but they have different meanings and historical origins. These terms are related to various aspects of mystical and esoteric techniques. The word ‘theurgy’ comes from Greek and literally means ‘Divine activity’ or ‘activity of God’. It is a term associated with mystical practices focused on communication with divine or supernatural entities. The goal of theurgical practices is to achieve spiritual ascent, gain spiritual wisdom, or receive divine guidance. In contrast, the word ‘magical’ is derived from the ancient Greek word ‘magos’, which referred to sorcery or magic. Magical practices aim to influence the surrounding world. Magical practices focus on achieving specific results, such as healing, prophecy, or changing reality. The main difference between these two terms is their intention and emphasis. Theurgy focuses on spiritual ascent and communication with God, while magic focuses on achieving a specific result. The sefirotic tree embedded in the landscape can be considered a way in which Abbot Zinke, with his architects, sought to establish communication with God.

Pergament from Brescia, a significant Kabbalistic centre in Lombardy, was likely written by a Spanish scribe around the end of the fourteenth century. The text is often attributed to Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla (1248-ca.1305) [J.H. Chajes, *The Kabbalistic Tree*, 2022, https://ilanot.org/detail?id=https://ilanot.org/resource/item/manuscript3vxth&shape=shape_region_8738f197-0f1c-4525-aaa-f27f843d94bf#6.000/-133.979/107.382, accessed on 23.09.2023]. It employs a characteristic circular tree diagram. Similar to the scheme through which Abbot Zinke and his architects might have planned the layout of the Broumov group of churches, the main centre of the diagram is Tiferet, the centre of the entire Sephirotic Tree. It can be understood as a compass in the centre of concentric circles. Chajes notes that, as in the parchment stored in the Vatican, Tetragrammaton is at the top of the innermost circle in the usual order of letters, along with inscriptions emphasizing the important central position of Jacob.

Jacob is considered one of the three patriarchs of the Jewish nation, along with Abraham and Isaac. His story is also linked to the formation of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, which form the basis of the Jewish people. The name Israel, which he received during his struggle with an angel, became the designation for the entire Jewish nation.

The circles surrounding Tiferet in this diagram, however, do not appear elsewhere. The manuscript dedicates itself to twelve orders: zodiac signs, Hebrew months, tribes of Israel and possible sequences of the four Tetragrammaton letters. Chajes formulates a cosmological interpretation, stating that *Ein Sof* may be the source of everything, but Tiferet is the centre of Creation. The inscription inside the medallion is in line with this idea: “The sanctuary corresponding to the centre” (באמצע מכון הקדש היכל - ba-‘emza mekhuvan ha-kodesh heikhal -

What he further notes in his commentary is equally interesting and requires additional comparisons with the urban ensemble of the Broumov group. For example, mapping the paths in the landscape could provide further insight into the composition of the group. Chajes points out that inscriptions of channels connecting Tiferet with the surrounding sefirot reveal the theosophical content, such as ‘paths of Chochma leading to Tiferet’. The arrangement of these channels is unusual. Despite attempting to depict the theosophical transformation of the 10 sefirot and 22 letters of the Sefer Yetzirah into the characteristic Tree of Life diagram with ten circles connected by 22 paths, the examined diagram has half the number of connections compared to similar drawings - all eight exclusively originating from the Tiferet sefirah. He emphasizes that, in this variant of the sefirotic diagram, the author considered Tiferet not only as the centre of God’s sefirotic constellation but also, based on this, as the centre of the three-dimensional space itself.

In addition to the dominant sefirah Tiferet, a typical element of the manuscript from Brescia is the tip of an arrow or the head of lightning at the top of the Keter sefirah, where the inscription *Ein Sof* appears and certain depictions, like a spring, as mentioned in the previously used diagram. Chajes again points to the parchment found in manuscript MS Vat. ebr. 530 III, where neither of these two diagrams includes *Ein Sof* in any form. The authors of both manuscripts only write about infinity in the upper space of the parchment background.

Similar to the Sephirot drawn in Kabbalistic Trees of Life, the Broumov group of churches represents spheres of interaction between God and humanity. The Benedictine monastery, situated in the heart of the Broumov monastic landscape, precisely at the location of the Tiferet sefirah, plays a crucial role. It is a place where the spiritual and earthly realms converge, symbolizing the profound connection between human beings and transcendence. This allegory reminds us not only of the importance of the monastery as a spiritual centre but also of its responsibility for economic development and landscape care.

The Benedictines inhabiting the monastery were considered good stewards who cared for the surrounding landscape throughout the region. The Broumov group of churches thus becomes an architectural expression of this spiritual connection and earthly responsibility. Here, where the divine meets the human, the harmony between the spiritual and earthly worlds is immensely important. The monastery and churches represent not only places of liturgical prayers but also a symbolic gateway between two worlds, reminding us of our

responsibility to care for our landscape and promote economic development with consideration for spiritual values.

12. Open conclusion and proposal for further research

The conclusion of this pilot study leads us into a fascinating world where Architecture and spiritual philosophy converge on many levels. The Broumov group of churches, as well as other similar architectural treasures in Europe, reminds us that the art of building can be much more than just the construction of walls and roofs. From the concepts of sacred geometry, we know that Kabbalistic ideas can be incorporated into architecture, creating a space that not only serves practical needs but also holds deeper spiritual meaning. Symbols of Kabbalah, such as the Sephirotic Tree of Life, can be used as architectural elements that refer to the connection between heavenly and earthly spheres. It is important to emphasize that Kabbalistic elements may not be explicit and visible to every visitor; they may be intended only for those who have knowledge and understanding of Kabbalistic concepts, creating an additional layer in architecture accessible only to those willing to delve into deeper meanings.

Additionally, the text encourages contemplation on how principles of harmony and the connection of spiritual symbols have been reflected in urbanism. The monastery landscape, combining economic development, landscape care, and spiritual development, can serve as inspiration for the creation of communities and societies seeking wholeness and harmony in their functioning. The Broumov group of churches poses many new questions and inspirations for further research into the connection between Architecture and Spirituality. Kabbalah served as inspiration for creating harmonious proportions and spatial arrangements that reflect teachings of harmony and balance. Architectural elements of symbolic geometry can mirror Kabbalistic notions of connection with the divine world. Moreover, inspiration can also be drawn from the monastery landscape and the concept of harmonious biotopes. Creating communities and systems that connect social, spiritual and economic aspects of life can lead to a more holistic and harmonious environment. This approach could serve as a model for modern societies reflecting the needs of spirit, body and the planet.

The Broumov group of churches has left us not only with architectural treasures but also with a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire and enrich. It is a perfect example of how Architecture can serve as a means of connecting people with the spiritual dimension and how physical matter can carry an invisible yet strongly felt meaning. How can we utilize this wisdom in a world that is constantly changing? These questions remain open and await further exploration.

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