

ROSICRUCIAN LANDMARKS PRESERVED IN GREEK ISOPSEPHIA (GEMATRIA) DOSS MCDAVID, PH.D.

Abstract:

Because the ancient Greeks used the same characters to write numbers and words, arithmetic pervaded their language in a way that is difficult for us to imagine today. The numerical value derived from the sum of letters concealed a hidden meaning and was believed to indicate a correlation between words and phrases having a common valuation. This tradition, which has been called isopsephia, was used as a sort of esoteric cipher and as a means of preserving wisdom for future generations. An investigation of the terminology used in Rosicrucian doctrine and ritual shows that we have inherited a vocabulary that is rooted in this ancient numerology. In the present paper we give examples of the use of isopsephia in its classical setting and also discuss several instances of its incorporation into Rosicrucian ritual, allegories, and doctrinal formulations.

Signes Rosicruciens Préservés par l'Isopsephia grecque Doss McDavid, Ph.D.

Abstrait:

Les anciens grecs utilisaient les mêmes caractères dans l'écriture des chiffres et des mots et par conséquence l'arithmétique était toute présente dans leur langage, à un point difficilement imaginable par nous. La valeur numérique résultat de la somme des lettres cachait un sens secret et on pensait que ceci indiquait une corrélation entre des mots et des phrases qui ont une valeur identique. Cette tradition a été appelée isopsephia et était utilisée comme une sorte de méthode de cryptage ésotérique ainsi qu'un moyen de préserver la sagesse pour des générations futures. Une investigation de la terminologie utilisée dans la doctrine et le rituel Rosicrucien montre que nous avons hérité d'un vocabulaire dont les sources puisent dans cette ancienne numérolgie. Dans cette étude nous donnons des exemples de l'usage d'isopsephia dans son contexte classique et montrons également plusieurs cas de son incorporation dans les rituels, allégories et formulations doctrinaires Rosicruciennes.

Símbolos Rosacruces Preservados en la Isopsefia* Griega. Doss McDavid, Ph.D.

Debido a que los antiguos Griegos usaban el mismo signo para escribir números y palabras, la aritmética infiltraba su idioma de tal manera que hoy en día nos es difícil imaginar eso. El valor numérico derivado de la suma de las letras escondía un significado oculto, y se creía que eso indicaba una correlación entre las palabras y las frases que tenían un valor común. Esta tradición, llamada "isopsefia", era usada como una forma de cifra ésotérica, y como un medio de preservar la sabiduría para las futuras generaciones. Un estudio de la terminología usada en la doctrina y el ritual Rosacruz muestra que hemos heredado un vocabulario enraizado en esta antigua numerología. En este escrito damos ejemplos del uso de la isopsefia en su marco clásico, y también discutimos varios

ejemplos de su incorporación al rito, las alegorías y las formulaciones doctrinales Rosacruces.

*Palabra griega que significa “igual en valor numérico”: iso = igual, psephos – guijarro usado para contar.

Marcos Rosacruz preservados na Isopsefia Grega

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Sumário: Os gregos antigos usavam os mesmos caracteres para escrever números e palavras. Por este motivo, a aritmética penetrou em seu idioma de tal maneira que nos é difícil imaginar hoje em dia. O valor numérico derivado da soma das letras escondeu um significado misterioso e acredita-se indicar uma correlação entre as palavras e as frases que têm uma avaliação comum. Esta tradição, a qual se deu o nome de isopsefia, foi usada como um tipo de cifra esotérica e como meios de se preservar a sabedoria para as gerações futuras. Uma investigação da terminologia usada na doutrina e no ritual Rosacruz mostra que herdamos um vocabulário que está enraizado nesta numerologia antiga. Damos exemplos neste papel do uso da isopsefia em seu cenário clássico e discutimos também diversos exemplos de sua incorporação na alegoria, nas formulações doutrinárias, e no ritual Rosacruz.

Rosenkreuzische Wahrzeichen die in der griechischen Isopsephia vorkommen

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Zusammenfassung:

Da die alten Griechen beim Schreiben von Worten und Nummern die gleichen Schriftzeichen benutzten, ist ihre Sprache von Arithmetik durchdrungen; und zwar in einer Weise, die fuer uns heute nur schwer vorstellbar ist. Der numerische Wert der in der Anzahl der Buchstaben lag, verbarg eine geheime Bedeutung und sollte eine Wechselbeziehung zwischen Worten und Phrasen anzeigen, die einen gemeinsamen Wert teilten. Dieser Brauch, der Isopsephia genannt wird, wurde als eine Art esoterischer Verschlüsselung und als Mittel zur Ueberlieferung von Wissen an spätere Generationen benutzt. Eine Untersuchung der in rosenkreuzischen Lehren und Riten angewandten Terminologie zeigt, dass wir ein Vokabular geerbt haben, dass in uralter Numerologie verwurzelt ist. In der vorliegenden Schrift geben wir Beispiele der Anwendung von Isopsephia im klassischen Rahmen und beschreiben mehrere Faelle ihrer Eingliederung ins rosenkreuzische Ritual, in Allegorien und doctrinelle Formulationen.

ROSICRUCIAN LANDMARKS PRESERVED IN GREEK ISOPSEPHIA (GEMATRIA) DOSS MCDAVID, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

The letters of the Greek alphabet were used for writing both words and numbers. For this reason, every word or phrase had its corresponding numerical value. It has been noted as far back as Pythagoras that there were strange resonances between words and phrases having the same sum.¹ The study of these correlations became known as “isopsephia,” a word referring to small stones arranged in a pile to keep up with the letter count.

The early Christians were steeped in this tradition and the New Testament, written in the Greek language, contains many examples of isopsephia. Thus 666 is the “number of the beast” according to the book of Revelation, 777 is the value of “cross” (using ST=6 according to ancient tradition) and 888 is the value of “Jesus.” Simcox Lea and Bligh Bond, in their book *Materials for the Study of the Apostolic Gnosis*, provided a list of 500 sacramental phrases that add up to 2368, the number of “Jesus Christ.”²

Throughout the centuries, writers on esoteric subjects have referred to isopsephia and to its Hebrew equivalent, Gematria. The “literal Kabbalah” was always an important part of the Kabbalistic tradition, providing a method by which hidden meanings could be discovered in the scriptures. In his *Second book on Occult Philosophy*, Cornelius Agrippa gave tables of numerical values for different languages and commented on the occult virtues residing in names as a result of their numerical values.³ John Heydon provided similar tables in his *English Physicians Guide*.⁴ H.P. Blavatsky referred to the practice in her article “The Esoteric Character of the Gospels” calling it “the esoteric cipher of antiquity—the secret meaning of the numerals, a common property at one time of all nations.”⁵ Her students, G.R.S. Mead and James Pryse, mentioned it frequently in their own writings on Gnosticism and esoteric Christianity.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* states that the Rosicrucians of the fifteenth century devised a “magical language and writing, with a large dictionary, which we yet daily use to God’s praise and glory, and do find great wisdom therein.”⁶ A study of words and phrases used in Rosicrucian teachings and rituals shows that isopsephia was an important element in their formulation. In the present paper we will give a number of examples to support this observation.

THE GREEK CALCULATION TABLE AND ITS USE IN ISOPSEPHIA

The following table shows the numerical values associated with the letters of the Greek alphabet:

A	1	I	10	P	100
B	2	K	20	Σ	200
Γ	3	Λ	30	T	300
Δ	4	M	40	Υ	400
E	5	N	50	Φ	500
--	6	Ξ	60	X	600
Z	7	O	70	Ψ	700
H	8	Π	80	Ω	800
Θ	9	—	90	—	900

In calculating the number associated with a word, we simply add the numbers associated with the individual letters. Thus, for example, ΕΣΤΙΑ is a Greek word for “house.” Using the correspondences listed in the table above, we can see that its value is $5+200+300+10+1=516$. Another word for “house” is ΣΤΕΓΗ which, rendered into numbers, is $200+300+5+3+8=516$. This is an example of isopsephia where synonymous words have the same numerical value. Actually, this is comparatively uncommon. More often, the words will have *related* meanings. An example is the pair ΣΥΝΝΟΙΑ (meditation) and ΣΟΦΙΑ (wisdom), which share the value 781.

Going one step further, it is possible to extend the same concept to phrases and sentences. We simply add the numbers calculated from the individual words to arrive at a sum for the entire phrase. Thus “number visible to the eye” (ΑΡΙΘΜΟΣ ΕΜΦΑΝΗΣ) would be $430 + 804 = 1234$. If we have any doubt that this was engineered by some ancient mathematical genius we can calculate and compare the sum for “ancient sacred arithmetic” (ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΑΓΙΑ ΑΡΙΘΜΗΤΙΚΗ = $713 + 15 + 506 = 1234$).

This numerical code pervaded the literature and culture of the ancient world. Movements such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, tracing their traditional origin back to this ancient world, have carried it forward into subsequent centuries. Writers and literati of later times, steeped in classical culture and often initiated into these underground initiatic movements, have preserved some of it within their writings. We will now examine the Rosicrucian use of isopsephia and its relevance for modern Rosicrucians.

ISOPSEPHIA AND ROSICRUCIAN SYMBOLOLOGY

Beginning as early as the first neophyte degree, the Rosicrucian is taught to look into his sanctum mirror to find the guardian who will guide and protect him or her. This guardian is one's own inner self or conscience. In ancient Greek, the word for "mirror" is ΚΑΤΟΠΤΡΟΝ. Its value is 991. Looking into this number we find the "guardian," ΦΥΛΑΞ = 991, who will guide us through life's journey.

Another symbol for conscience is the Colombe, the Rosicrucian vestal virgin. The Colombe is essential to the activities carried out in every Rosicrucian Lodge and Chapter. She represents purity and tends the sacred flame in our Temples. Her name means "dove." A Greek word for "dove" is ΠΕΛΕΙΑ = 131. It also refers to a prophetic priestess and is numerically equivalent to ΙΕΡΕΙΑ, another Greek word for "priestess."

The Colombe reminds us of another important Rosicrucian symbol—the sacred fire or flame. The Greek word for Fire is ΠΥΡ with a number of 580. This number is equal to that of ΘΑΡΣΟΣ meaning "courage" or "daring." The Greek word for the torch on our altars is ΛΑΜΠΙΑΣ = 352. It shares its numerical valuation with ΝΙΚΗ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ which means "victory of truth."

Rosicrucians refer to the Deity as "The God of my Heart." In Greek this would be Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΡΔΙΑΣ ΜΟΥ = 1708. This is numerically equivalent to ΨΥΧΗ or "Soul," a word used by Rosicrucians to describe the divine essence that gives life and consciousness to all living beings. According to Rosicrucian doctrine, Soul is perfect and complete in every way and needs only to be realized by our evolving personality.

The core Rosicrucian mythos, embodied in the *Fama Fraternitatis*, describes the opening of the tomb of CRC and the discovery of his perfectly preserved body with a book in its arms. In the *Fama*, the body and book are found under a round altar. "The Round Altar" is Ο ΕΥΚΥΚΛΟΣ ΒΩΜΟΣ = 2327. Setting aside from this sum the altar (1112), as we are told in the *Fama*, we find a body (ΣΩΜΑ = 1041) and a book (ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ = 174). This tale seems to be a new edition of the much older story of the discovery of the body of Hermes Trismegistos. Depending on the source, either Alexander the Great or Apollonius of Tyana opened the tomb of Hermes and found his body holding the Emerald Tablet. Once again we can read this story using isopsephia. "Sarcophagus of Hermes" may be written as ΣΑΡΚΟΦΑΓΟΣ ΕΡΜΟΥ = 1780. This is numerically equivalent to ΕΥΡΗΚΑ ΣΩΜΑ ΚΑΙ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ which means "I have found a body and a book."

In his book on *The True and Invisible Rosicrucian Order*, Paul Foster Case uses Greek isopsephia and its Hebrew equivalent, Gematria, to analyze the early Rosicrucian manifestos.⁷ In this book, he points out that that "Rose" (ΡΩΔΟΝ = 294) is equivalent to "assembly" or "church" (ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ) and that "Cross" (ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ = 1271) is numerically equivalent to "the gnosis" (Η ΓΝΩΣΙΣ). Taken together they may be said to

signify the members of the Rosicrucian Order and the esoteric knowledge they preserve and seek to apply in their lives.

ISOPSEPHIA AND ROSICRUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

Rosicrucians are taught that “knowledge is power” and this quotation has been traced back to Sir Francis Bacon, the Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order during Elizabethan times.⁸ It is interesting to note that ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ (knowledge) and ΚΡΑΤΟΣ (power) share the value 691. As a classical scholar as well as the leader of the Rosicrucian movement in England, it seems more than likely that Bacon made this statement in full knowledge of its roots in isopsephia.

While Rosicrucians express a belief in God, their concept of God is that of an abstract impersonal ideal expressing the highest concept of goodness and holiness. In Greek, ΘΕΟΤΗΣ (Deity), ΑΓΑΘΟΤΗΣ (goodness), and ΑΓΙΟΤΗΣ (holiness) all share the value of 592.

Rosicrucians are “mystical pantheists.” They believe that the universe as a whole is the manifestation of the Deity. The Greek word for “The Deity” is Η ΘΕΟΤΗΣ. It has the same value as “universe” (ΚΟΣΜΟΣ = 600), its manifestation.

Rosicrucians are taught that creation is a cycle and that natural phenomena follow a law of cycles. In Greek “creation” (ΚΤΙΣΙΣ) and “cycle” (ΚΥΚΛΟΣ) share the value 740.

Rosicrucians learn early on in their studies that we live in a universe of law and order in which mathematics and number play an important role. Pythagoras is credited with popularizing this concept in ancient times. It is interesting to observe that ΝΟΜΟΣ (Law), ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΙΚΑ (Mathematics), and ΑΡΙΘΜΟΣ (Number) share the value 430.

It is a fundamental teaching of Rosicrucian metaphysics that matter is a manifestation of vibratory energy. In Greek, “the prima materia” is Η ΥΛΗ. A word for “vibrations” is ΚΡΑΔΑΣΜΟΙ. Both have a value of 446.

Rosicrucians maintain that man and nature are inseparable. Man is a microcosm or little world reflecting every property of the macrocosm or great world. In the language of isopsephia, we note that “man” (ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΟΣ), and “nature” (ΦΥΣΙΣ), share a value of 1310.

Rosicrucians are taught to listen to the inner voice, which brings perfect knowledge. Voice is ΦΩΝΗ and perfect knowledge is ΕΠΙΓΝΩΣΙΣ. The common value is 1358.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

It may be debated whether the curious synchronicities of isopsephia arise from chance, human ingenuity, or divine inspiration. Perhaps all three are responsible in different instances. The fact remains that the equivalence of numbers and letters in ancient languages has provided an important didactic tool as well as a source of inspiration down through the centuries.⁹ Generations of Kabbalists have found a means of deepening their understanding by pouring over the scriptures guided by the light of Gematria. Writers as diverse as Blake¹⁰, Goethe¹¹, and Poe¹² have woven little-known correspondences into their published works, which very few readers understand today.

Many skeptics have disputed the authenticity of the modern Rosicrucian movement and its connection with its traditional sources. Read in the light of isopsephia, the vocabulary, rituals and teachings used today stand as an unbroken link with the past although we may often be unconscious of the fact.

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