

ON THE PROBABILITY OF AN OLD WORLD ORIGIN OF THE CHACOAN „T“

by

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Summary

Religions and religious symbolism are durable artifacts of culture which can shed useful light on early population migrations and interactions. The evidence presented indicates a diffusion of the Tau Cross (T), with its doctrines and ancillary symbolism, from the Old World to the New, c. 1000BC. Earliest occurrence of elements of this complex are in Middle Eastern contexts of the fourth millennium BC. It continues in use today in Indo- Tibetan and Amerindian Pueblo contexts. As befits iconological studies, most of the evidence is visual in nature.

INTRODUCTION

On a recent visit to the ruined pueblos of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, I was pleased to discover a significant shift of opinion among scholars in regard to the famous T-shaped door-ways at the site. A utilitarian interpretation of them had long prevailed but now, it seems, there is movement toward the position I have advocated for nearly a decade. In the words of one of the printed site-guides available at the park: "T-shaped doors are frequently associated with kivas and great houses. Researchers believe their form is symbolic rather than practical." One of

our leading authorities on Anasazi culture, Stephen Lekson (1999), agrees: "I submit

that T-doors are an archaeologically obvious architectural message design, too long over-looked." Unfortunately however: "We don't know what they mean." But of one thing he is certain: "T-doors begin with Chaco."

IN THE FOLLOWING pages the reader will discover that the T form, which iconologists call the Tau Cross, was a sacred symbol of the first rank among a number of ancient peoples of Asia and the Mideast. Moreover, we will learn that its known meanings (there are four



T-shaped Door of the Ruined Pueblos of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico

principle ones) are identical in both hemispheres. This is the crux of the matter, since the Tau's simple form seems to bear no visual relationship to any of these meanings (let alone all of them at once). It is unlikely that any two unaffiliated cultures would, by accident as it were, assign the same meaning(s) to the same abstract glyph, the form of which suggests nothing in particular. Any duplication in this respect would more likely be the result of the diffusion of a convention, than of some fortuitous co-invention. And if this is true of any two unaffiliated societies, it is, a fortiori, even truer where several or many are involved, as here.

As we proceed we will find the Ancients in substantial agreement as to the Tau's

significance, but we find also that it is especially prevalent in certain specific contexts-of-use. The design of temples is an example. Where the Tau is concerned the correspondences between the hemispheres are complex and multifaceted. Exuberant variation is present in all of the regional traditions we will examine, but the unifying themes, the four principle meanings, are never hard to spot.

A gradual word-of-mouth diffusion of the Tau and its doctrines across the face of the Old World is demonstrated by the evidence and presents few hurdles to acceptance. Vast as it is, Eurasia is a contiguous landmass, afterall, and alive with human traffic for many millennia. Eventually, the Tau would be recognized

from Western Europe, through Egypt and the Mideast, to China. It can be shown for a fact that it reached the latter by c.1800BC.

THE SITUATION is nearly identical in the pre-Columbian Americas, but here the diffusion was along a north-south axis. The Tau once enjoyed sacred status from Peru to northern New Mexico (at least) and nearly everywhere of consequence in between. Again, the archaeologically-obtained evidence (symbols and icons are primary historical documents) proves this was the case. But again, we are dealing here with contiguous regions. Given this geographic connectedness, few anthropologists oppose a diffusion hypothesis in such cases. It is only when transoceanic cultural diffusion over the past 5,000 years is suggested that battle lines are drawn. Then "positions" are taken up and defended tooth and nail. Academic warfare, like the other kind, can be pretty ugly.

IN THIS GREAT, century-old trial between the Cultural Isolationists and the Cultural Diffusionists, with the true history of the Western Hemisphere at stake, one side (the former) is occupying a position ("No Contact"), while the other side is still offering evidence in support of its claims. It has grown into a pile of respectable proportions over a hundred years. To adopt a position before all the evidence is in is to disqualify oneself from the proceeding. Dogmatized assumptions and other prejudgements are hindrances to a search for truth. My own experience in this field is that some cases of cultural correspondence arise from co-invention, some from primary or secondary processes of diffusion, and some from mere chance. It behoves us to avoid academic position-taking as we concentrate on the evidence and try to render credible judgements as to which

case is attributable to which cause. This is the heuristic approach we follow here.

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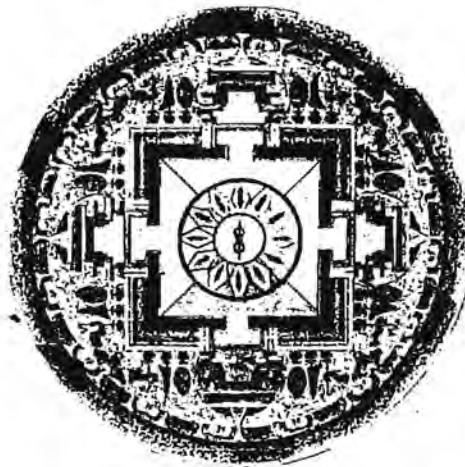
THE HEAVEN-SUPPORTING PILLARS

One of the principle contexts-of-use in which the Tau is found is cosmography. Cosmography is what might be called "theoretical geography." Its subject is the metaphysical, rather than merely physical, design of the world or cosmos. Its "maps" are known as cosmograms and the most familiar of these are the Indo-Tibetan mandalas. It would appear that a similar world-view underlies the series of cosmograms below. A basic knowledge of mandala cosmography helps us greatly to understand early civilizations worldwide. This is because ancient societies often deliberately designed themselves to be reflections and encapsulations of their world-views. Such was the case with the "native" American civilizations. Striving to present to posterity the gist of their conception of the cosmos and its ordering principles, the mandala-designers have simultaneously told us much about themselves and the societies in which they lived.

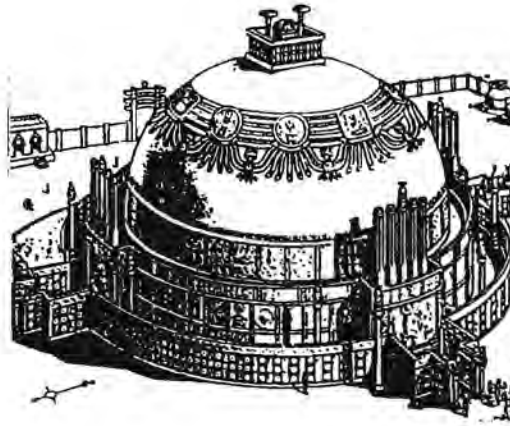
IF OUR COLLECTION of cosmograms is any indication, the T is one of the oldest and most enduring elements of the genre. Artists consistently contrive to include it. Following Zimmer (1946), Campbell (1974) interprets the four T-shapes on Indo-Tibetan mandalas as "door-ways, or the landings of the stairs leading up and down the temple-mountain." A mandala is a view of this "sacred world-mountain" from above. Thus we are to imagine that



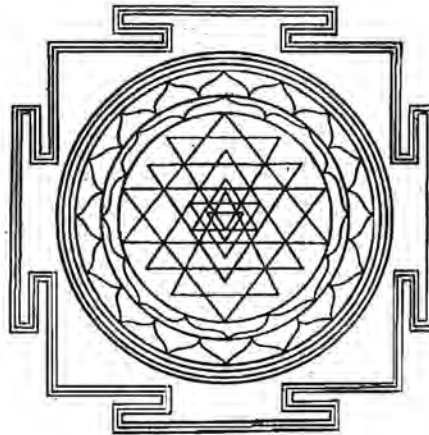
Design on a decorated bowl, Nuzi, Sumer, c.3800 BC. Others of the type known from Tepe Gawra, same period (late pre-dynastic). Possible cosmogram; if so perhaps the earliest surviving example of the type. About 260 years after this bowl was made, a directionally-oriented T-shaped temple was built at nearby Warka/Uruk.



Indo-Tibetan mandala, contemporary. The basic mandala elements are a circle, denoting heaven (the all-encompassing sphere of the sacred) and the cyclic nature of time and a square, representing the earth, the four seasons, the four directions, the four elements, and so on. Like the Hindus and Greeks and the entire Hellenistic world, the Aztecs defined the four primordial elements as fire, air, earth and water. The underlying and informing structure of pre-Columbian American civilization (from the tribal stage upward) is based upon the number 4.



Stupa (Buddhist reliquary tomb) of Amaravati, India, c.200 AD. An architectural cosmogram, with four T gates oriented to the cardinal directions. A model of the world (the northern hemisphere). The walled city of Shishupalgarh (India) was also equipped with directionally-oriented T-shaped gateways.



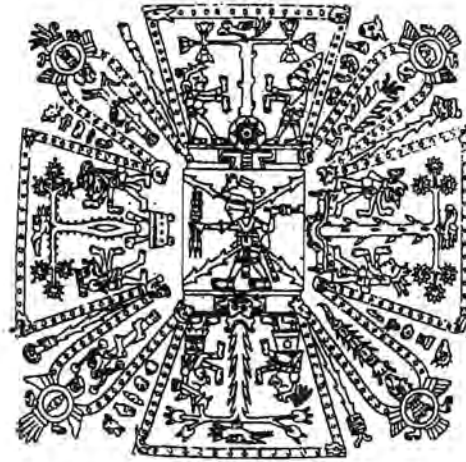
“Sri Yantra” diagram (an aid to meditation); Hindu, contemporary/traditional. Such diagrams act to regulate vital forces while providing insight into the true metaphysical structure of the cosmos. In Zimmer’s words, the frame represents “a square sanctuary with four doors opening out to the four quarters, a landing before each entrance, and a low flight of steps leading up from the ground”.



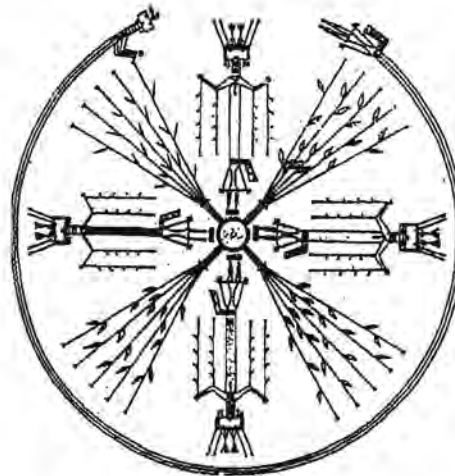
T-L-V type cosmographic bronze mirror-back design. Han Dynasty, China, 200 BC – 200 AD. This genre is contemporaneous with the stupa at Amaravati (fig. 3). In Campbell's (1974) words "the T's represent the gates of the four quarters". The L's, he says, indicate rotation, and we recall the "whirling" Mount Mandara of Hindu myth. The extremely common Asian substitution of l for r produced "mandala". The same occurs with the Sanskrit mula ("root") which becomes mura in some dialects. Similarly, the Polynesian sun-god Ra is known also as La. In Japanese, there are r's but few l's. In China and among the Maya, the reverse is true.



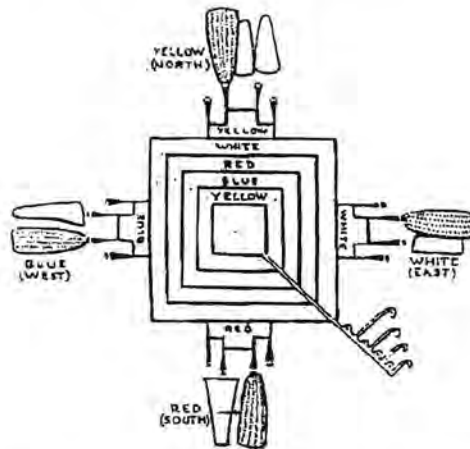
Cosmographic Chinese dinner plate. Found at garage sale; provenance unknown; probably contemporary. The four T's around the inner circle edge indicate the tradition from which the decoration has emerged. Knowing the symbolic intent of the artist we can say that the dish depicts that Happy Land at the center of the earth which mythology knows as the Terrestrial Paradise.



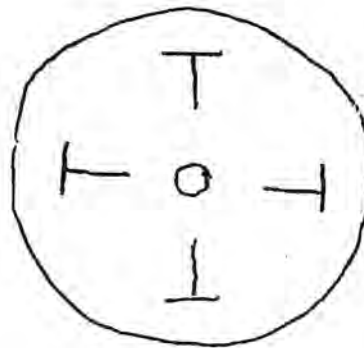
Aztec cosmogram depicting the four quarters of the world and the flora and fauna found in them; c. 1450 AD. The T-shaped trees indicate to what tradition the drawing belongs. Like the Hindus, Chinese, Maya, and others, the Aztecs assigned specific colours to the world's quadrants. There is about 75% agreement among the systems. In Aztecs cosmograms, east is up.



Navajo cosmological sand painting; contemporary/traditional. Design used in the "Beauty Way" cycle of chants and rites and especially for curing "snake infections" (eg; aching feet, dry throat, painful urination, confusion, fear and loss of consciousness). In a similar vein, Moses, schooled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, caused to be made and erected a brazen serpent raised up upon a cross when his people were afflicted with the fiery serpents (?). As there were no crosses of salvation in the world of 1400 – 1200 BC other than the Tau, it is believed the T was used for this purpose. This is consistent with its meanings of life, health and regeneration.




Hopi "universe painting", ie; cosmogram. Contemporary/traditional. The four T's are said to be "rain cloud" signs (see section II). Associated with them are some "stone axes" and four ears of corn. "The diagonal line in the lower right-hand corner is the Road to the Underworld, with walking sticks". All Toads of the Sun, Roads To (and From) the Underworld, Roads to the Western Land, Paths of Eternal Return, etc; fall within the purview of Tau symbolism. At Mitla in southern Mexico a wonderful T-shaped temple presides over a necropolis. The earlier form of the name was Mictlan, meaning "Entrance into the Kingdom of Death". We find the same symbolism at Giza and Palenque.



Floor diagram used in West African voodoo rites. My informant for this is New York artist Cristopher Wynter, who I met at the Chaca Canyon campsite. When he learned of my interest in T-shaped doorways he asked for paper and pencil, and drew this figure. He found it in a book called "Flash of the Spirit" (Thomson). The center circle, he said, is a "pole" which "connects the upper and lower worlds". This is the ancient, shamanic Axis Mundi, of course, so fully and ably discussed by Professor Eliade in his many books. Its presence establishes the cosmological nature of the design, which the T's confirm. The drawing effectively projects the voodoo wizard to the plenipotent Center of the World.

the central point of the drawing is also the highest point, corresponding in the real world with lofty Mt. Meru, home of the Indian pantheon and center ("navel") of the earth. Simultaneously, it corresponds with the North Pole, as the World-Mountain corresponds with the Northern Hemisphere. Indeed the word mandala is the same as Mandara, the fabulous "whirling mountain" of Hindu myth. And cognate with mandala/mandara is our Latin mundus, "world." The mandala presents us, then, with a schematic, squared-off diagram of the local cosmos, seen from above and oriented to the Cardinal Directions (as is the World).

OUR FOUR Ts mark these directions and in so doing become caught up in the symbolism of the Four Pillar Mountains. These stand along the furthest edges of the world, where they uphold the great inverted bowl of the sky. They too are placed strictly according to the cardinals, and are the Boundary Stones of the world of men. These cosmological elements of Doorway, Cardinal Direction, and Heaven-supporting Pillar-Mountains recur all over the ancient world in association with the Tau.

Figure 11 is the plan of the ziggurat of Ur, c. 2000BC. At the top of the principle staircase landing we notice a T-shaped portal; indeed, the stair passes through it, as photos of the monument reveal. Here we have Campbell's "doorways, or the landings of the stairways leading up and down the temple-mountain" to a T, as we say. Moreover, Budge (1977) informs us that the Egyptian hieroglyph , means "gateway, door." Dr Jett tells me there were T-shaped doors in the Yayoi Period of Japan, while in figure 12 we have an inverted Tau Cross framing the doorway of a Mayan temple. T-shaped doors may be "enig-matic", but they are not rare. Note that the upper incisors of the monstrous

mouth have been "filed" to a T, one of several shapes favored by the Maya gentry, who did in fact file their front teeth.

In figure 13, a burial shroud from Han Dynasty China, a pair of inverted Taus form a sort of gateway or passage between worlds. On the Taus sit the Lords of the Eastern and Western Boundary Mountains, wearing exaggerated mortar-board hats. We'll return to this shortly. It will suffice to say for now that the concept of "doorway, portal" finds application within this system to the mysteries of life and death, and especially to the actual passage from one state, level or plane to another. This is precisely why the T and the stairway are so often combined in iconographic compositions. Note, for instance, that in the Navajo "sandala" (fig. 8) the necks of the T-headed direction gods are ladders. Moreover, their headgear represents "two pointed rocks on the summit of Mount Taylor," writes Campbell (op. cit.). Once again, the T, the stair, and the temple/mountain in combination, this time in Arizona. And by the way: the Tibetans also make sandalas, or sand-paintings, for magico-religious purposes.

THE APACHES called the Pillars of the Sky the Four Grand-father Mountains. To the Hopi they are the Talking Gods (probably a reference to thunder). The Maya knew them as the Four Bacabs or Acatuns. In India they are the Lokapalas, guardians of the world's gates. The Egyptians knew them as the Four Sons of Horus, while the Chinese bestowed upon them the most excellent of names: the Four Ti(s). And so that there should be no mistake about it, Chinese artists have left to posterity several paintings in which the august Presidents of the Principle Mountains are depicted as a standing group of Confucian bureaucrats, arms folded in the Mandarin way, wearing exaggerated graduation caps

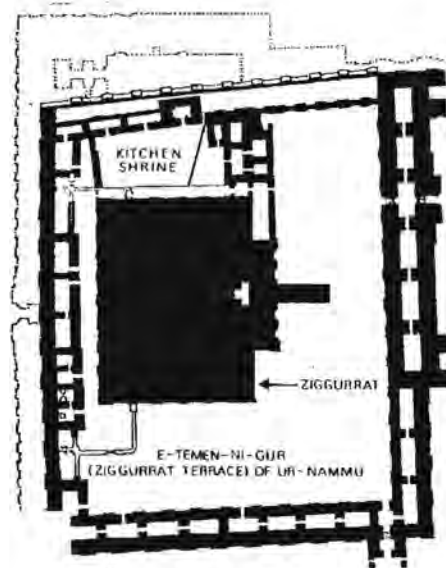


Figure 11: Plan of the Ziggurat of Ur; 2000 BC.

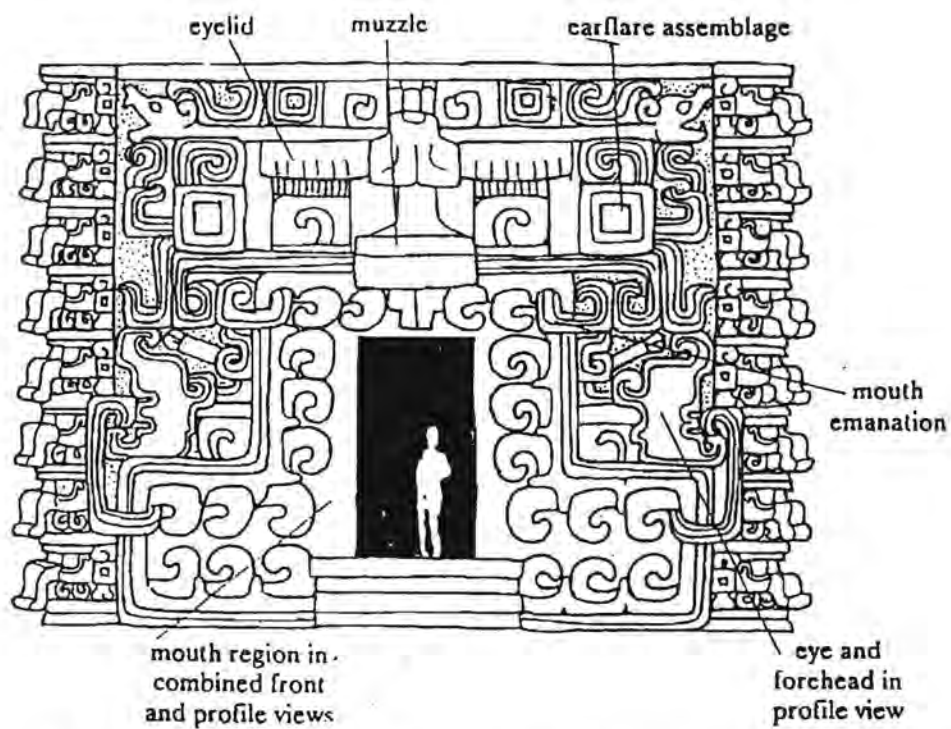


Figure 12: Inverted Tau Cross Framing of the Doorway of a Mayan Temple



Figure 13: A Burial Shroud from Han Dynasty, China

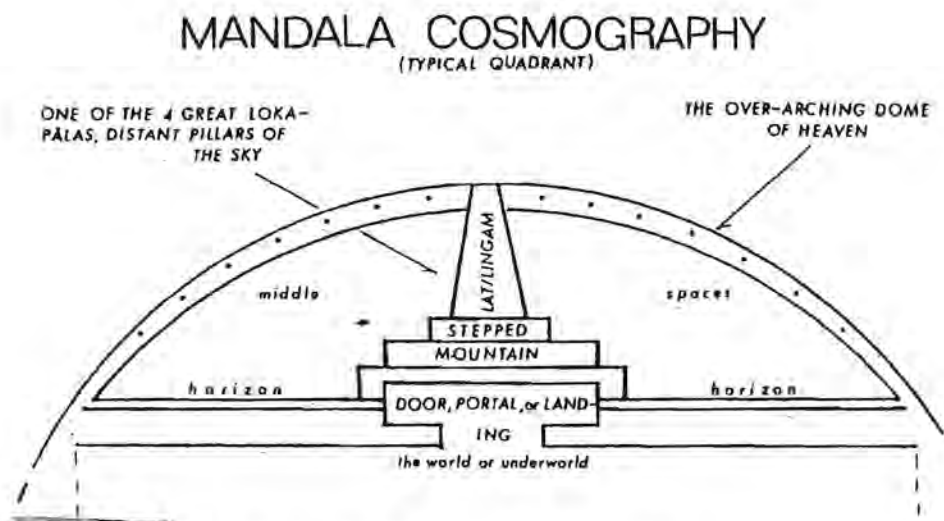


Figure 14: Mandala Cosmography

that make them look like a capital T convention! Is it safe to call this an outrageous coin-cidence? (The Chinese word *ti* means "god". According to Forlong (1906) the Kelts had the same word with the same meaning. The Sumerian *ti* meant "life." *Ti* is possibly related to such words and roots as *di*, *dio*, *dios*, *deo*, *teo* and so on). Mandalas provide another glimpse of the archaic world, if we know how to decipher them. This time, we'll imagine that we're standing in the center of a mandala (say, figure 2), looking directly out toward one of the quadrants. Now we will reach out and take hold of the circle's edge and lift it up and inward, making a crease along the edge of the square. This process is known as *rabbatment*, and is an important aspect of Egyptian temple design (Badawy, op.cit.). The result is what figure 14 depicts, except that I have replaced the Mansion of the Lokapala with a more austere *lingam* (an Indian cult stone in the form of a short pillar) as in other, less ornate compositions of this ancient genre. Now we have a proper Sky Pillar, rising up from the flat plane of the distant horizon, to support the soaring arch of the azure vault. Of course, the same view would be had turning to the other cardinal directions. And of course, since these Pillar Mountains are so very far away, no one had ever seen them, actually, and so there is a certain amount of variation in the depictions. But here, as elsewhere, we recognize the basic elements of T, stair-way, and pillar/mountain.

OBVIOUSLY Lekson is right: the T-shaped doorways of the greater Anasazi sphere are indeed symbolic statements, meant to be seen, indicating "special" buildings, and so on. Some, as at Mesa Verde, were designed to be reached by ladders, and at Casa Rinconada (Chaco), stairways descend into the kiva through T-shaped portals set due north and south. These portals are vertical Ts, while at another kiva within the park a stairway

descends through a horizontal T let into the ground. We knew such portals were symbolic from the presence within the same cultural sphere of other forms of Tau symbolism such as wall niches, altars and petroglyphs. But no one -myself included- could have foreseen how far afield we would have to go to find the full explanation of them. With regard to kiva symbolism specifically, the Tau signifies a place where passage, or communication, between the Upper and Lower Worlds is possible. The presence in the kiva of the *sipapu* -an open conduit to the underworld- confirms this. In section III we will penetrate to the heart of the Tau's doorway connotation. This will shed light not only on certain Anasazi petroglyph motifs but also upon kiva ritual generally.

LIFE, BREATH, AND THE WATERS OF REGENERATION

Running parallel to, but also occasionally intersecting with, the cosmological aspects of Tau symbolism is another set of themes sharing the common underlying idea of life. This basic concept of life blossomed in time into elaborate doctrines of eternal life, regeneration, life-force and so on. In this regard we see in the Tau Cross a strange foreshadowing of the † cross with its associated doctrines of salvation and life everlasting. Did an earlier belief system attain the same global dispersion that Christianity can now claim?

IN THE TAU "religion" water is sacred. It is seen as Heaven's principle gift of mercy to mankind and a conveyor of life-force. It has the power to resurrect dead and buried seeds to new life. A tired, dusty man who takes a bath emerges feeling born again. Water washes away



Figure 15: T-shaped Pond with Holy Water

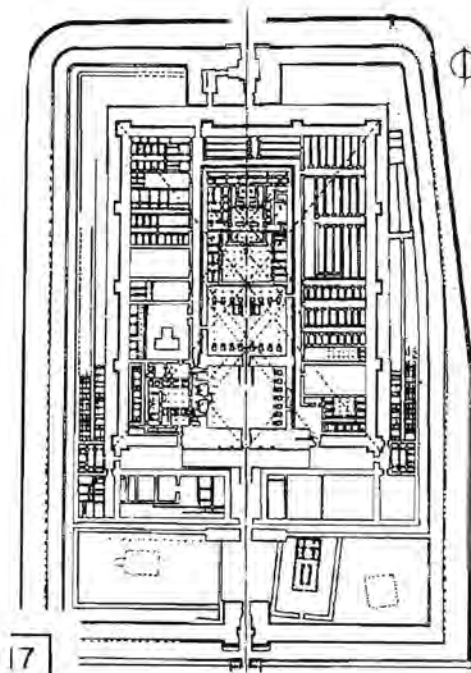
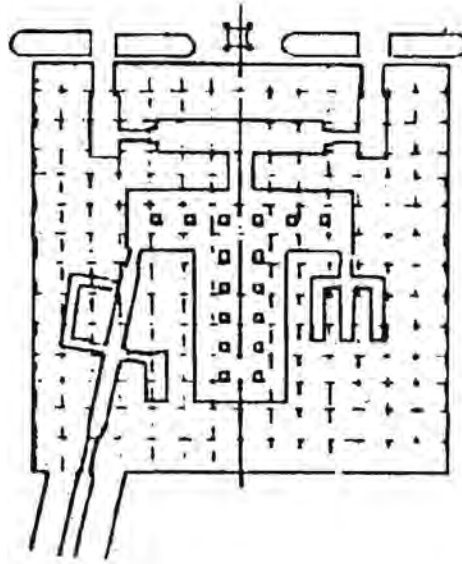
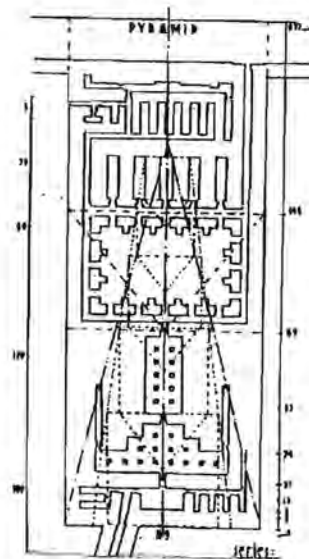


Figure 16: Badawy's Plan of the Temple of Rameses III; c. 1180 BC



VALLEY TEMPLE



MORTUARY TEMPLE

Figure 17: Chephren's Valley Temple and Mortuary Temple at Giza

the filth (sins) of the world; by means of it one attains purity. Every human babe is "born into the world upon a flood" and so on. To the ancient natural philosophers, life and water were in some sense identical.

Modern science has not exactly contradicted this, but consider this rather odd passage from the *Rig Veda* (c. 1500-1200BC). It indicates what sort of philosophical speculation was current among the Brahmins of ancient India: "Next concerning the Shining Fires. Fire is the first form, the Sun is the latter form; the Waters are the linking; Electricity is the joint of the linking. Thus far concerning the Shining Fires" (Sri Aurobindu trans.). Water is, of course, the basis of all the body's electrolytic processes and these processes are synonymous with life. T-shaped ponds and basins were popular in Egypt "in all historic periods", says Professor Badawy (1965). That such ponds contained magical Waters of Life -ie; Holy Water- is shown by figure 15, a portion of a wall painting in the tomb of Userhet, New Kingdom, at Thebes. Figure 16 is Badawy's plan of the temple of Rameses III, c. 1180BC, with its prominent T-shaped tub. Did the king's body soak in its "Sea of Natron" (an embalming fluid) in this tank? Akhenaten's earthly paradise at Amar-na -the Meru-Aten- included such ponds and basins (Badawy, op.cit.). Just south of the entrance to the Valley of the Kings an enormous T-shaped harbor was dug. There can be no doubt that it was designed to receive the funeral barges from the Land of the Living across the river. This was quite literally the gateway or sacred portal leading to the Underworld, Amenti, the Hidden Land. Many of the actual tombs in the Valley of Kings are similarly configured. "The tombs vary in detail, but the usual plan consists of a walled

courtyard ...behind which is cut a T-shaped chapel...." (Ruffle, 1977). Most are dug into the base of a mountain known in ancient times as *Peak of the West*. It is presumed that all these tombs incorporate stairways, reproducing -with the element mountain- an iconographic combination familiar to us. T-shaped tombs are also found in pre-Incan Peru, says Mosely (1992). Apparently such tombs were looked upon as doorways leading to the Place of Regeneration.

AT GIZA, Chephren's Valley Temple is a great, pillared T-shaped hall with ancillary chambers (figure 17). Of such halls Badawy writes only that "they are thought to embody in their plans religious dogmas" (op. cit.). We concur. Chephren's Valley Temple is connected by a causeway to his Mortuary Chapel which abuts his pyramid, standing here in place of the Western Pillar-Mountain. The Chapel's main hall features a number of T-shaped pillars. All of this symbolism speaks of the Last Journey, to the Uttermost West, and the underlying metaphor is solar in nature. We'll address this in the next section. The Reverend Dr King (1864) had an inkling of the Tau's significance, although he regrettably failed to be specific as to his source for the following. Citing only "ancient authors" he says

[they] state that the badges distinguishing the three orders of the Egyptian

priesthood were the ☉ signifying the Sun; the T Eternal Life; and △ the Pleasure.

Obscure as it is, this statement (with reference to the Tau at any rate) is perfectly consistent with the accumulated evidence, most of which was yet to be discovered in King's day.



Beyond this, Dr King's Classical learning was vast and his scholastic reputation was impeccable. The excerpt hints at a rather disquieting fact: more was known about the Tau a hundred years ago than today. How this came to pass is a mystery in itself. Consider the following, for instance, from the *Edinburgh Review* (Jan. 1870). In an article entitled "Pre-Christian Crosses" the Tau is called

the symbol of symbols, the mystical Tau, the "hidden wisdom" not only of

the ancient Egyptians, but also of the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Mexicans,

Peruvians, and of every other people commemorated in the history of either hemisphere....

Far from being 19th century academic hyperbole, this radical statement is in perfect harmony with the facts, many of which were still in the ground, so to speak, 130 years ago. Ten years' work on this subject leads me to make a similar radical statement: With almost no exceptions, wherever we can observe the historical process of Urbanization at work, the Tau is present in an iconographical, frequently architectural, context. Chaco is an outstanding example of this. It is almost as if Civilization bears a trademark or logo, and what that trademark seems to say is MADE IN SUMER--3500BC.

IN AKKADIAN cuneiform tablets of the late 3rd millennium BC, the T sign indicates "land, foundation, rain" (Goff, 1963). Here's how rain appears in the Chinese Oracle Bone script of several centuries later: . And here is what the Hopis call a rain cloud symbol: . Does the term "iconographic continuum" seem appropriate? Even the highly questionable Le Plongeon (1996, reissue)

could be right where the Tau was concerned. The T, he says,

is seen adorning the breasts of statues and statuettes in Palenque, Copan, and the ancient cities of Guatemala, Nicaragua, and various localities of Central America. Everywhere it was associated with water. In Babylon it was the emblem of water deities.

THE READER has not forgotten, I hope, the T-form ponds of Egypt, that famous "rainless land." These symbols are adopted, then adapted and this gives rise to a lot of variations on the themes.

Figure 18, from the Dresden Codex, shows the Mayan gods of the Cardinal Directions with their T-shaped eyes. Dr Morely (1946) believed this was a reference to rain, via tear. In the next illustration, we see Tlaloc, the Aztec god of rain, wearing his T-shaped "ceremonial mustache", so-called. This is not a mustache, it is a Tau Cross nose-ornament. I would be surprised if Tlaloc's priests did not in fact wear such crosses, probably made of thinly-beaten gold plate. No such artifacts are known to me, but the thrust of the evidence is plain. Tlaloc's nose-plate touches on another aspect of Tau symbolism which is related to breath. Mayan iconography spells this out in no uncertain terms: the hieroglyph T, pronounced ik has the meanings "life, breath, wind, spirit" (Disselhoff and Linne, 1966), the precise definition of the old Latin spiritus. The T-shaped windows at Palenque derive from this Tau=breath equation. The Tau may have been used as a window design at Chaco, but I was unable to confirm it. With reference again to Tlaloc's nose ornament I think we can

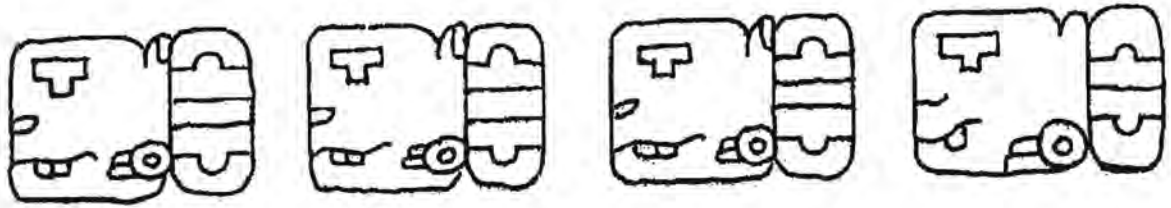


Figure 18: Mayan Gods of the Cardial Directions with Their T-shaped Eyes; Dresden Codex



Figure 19: Tlaloc, the Aztec God of Rain, Wearing His T-shaped “Ceremonial Mustache”

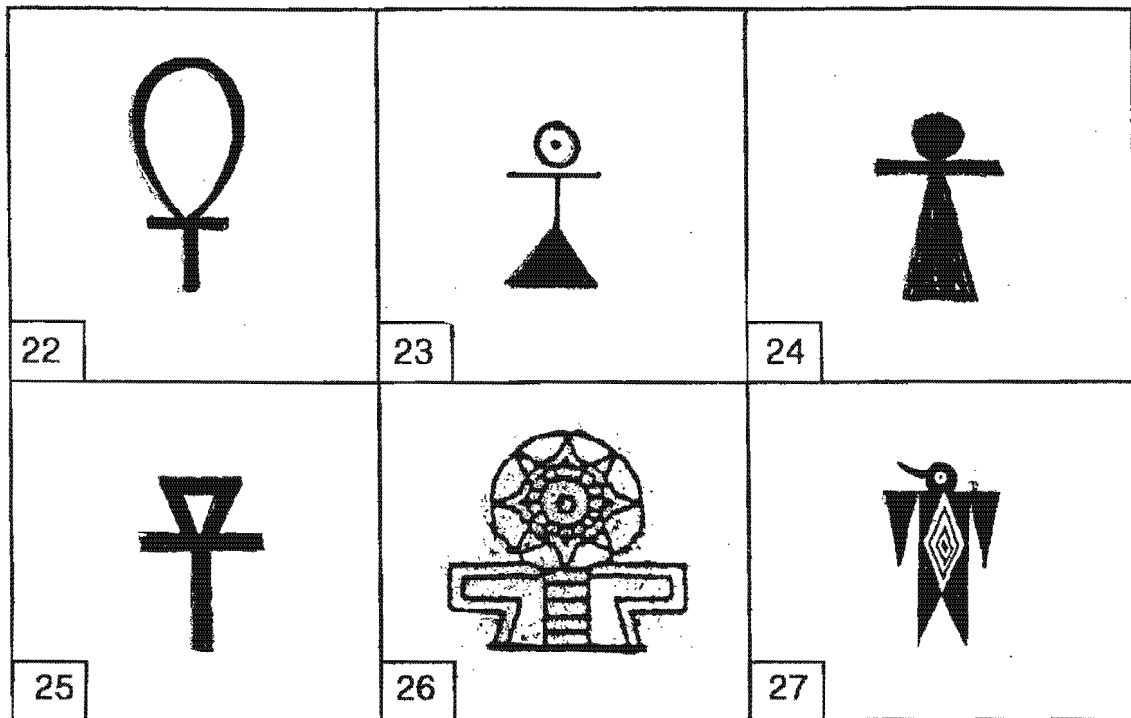
say that more than just breath is indicated. Breath is also humid; from Tlaloc's humid breath condense the clouds that carry water to our cornfields.

In Egyptian funerary art the ankh often appears to be synonymous with breath. Frequently we see it offered to the nose of the tomb's owner, with hieroglyphic captions saying things like "Isis, Queen, grants life and health to this Pepi's nostril." This raises the unresolved question of the ankh's origins. Taking his stand with Eliade(1986), D'Alviella (1911) and Biedermann(1989), the present writer sees in the ankh a Tau Cross equipped with a suspension loop for wear as a charm or amulet. The authors of *The Book of Talismans* (1914) say the Tau was once "universally" worn in this fashion. Certainly this is what the traditional Latin name of the ankh implies: it should be obvious, afterall, which part is the crux and which the ansata ("handle"). A sort of Mayan ankh was noticed at the Peabody Museum by Dr Jett, who kindly sent me a sketch of it. It is simply a Tau Cross intended to be worn around the neck. This practice continues today among Christians, although the cross is a little different, and we can easily appreciate how a similar custom could arise among the Egyptians, if the Tau meant "life" to them, as King reported. That great font of religious esoterica, Godfrey Higgins (*Anacalypsis*, 1836) says that stone Taus were used in ancient Britain "to mark the terminus of districts", but also signify "eternal transmigrating life." Use of the Tau in a "boundary stone" capacity derives straight from mandala cosmography, and I was much bemused at the frequent references to India and Mount Meru found in the Rees' brothers outstanding *Celtic Heritage* (1989).

IN FIGURES 20 through 25 we have a series of ankh-like icons, beginning with the most ankh-like of them all.

I have saved for last what is arguably the greatest and most spectacular application of the tau-water motif ever conceived and erected, the Akabana, at Tiahuanaco. Described by its excavators as a "T-shaped pyramid", it was a marvel of hydrological engineering. Rainwater, collected in a large cistern on the uppermost tier (see figure 26) was channeled down to ground level via a system of scuppers and drains, where it gushed out impressively, filling a moat. Although I have not been able to confirm it, it seems more than likely that this magical water was then directed to the nearby "semi-subterranean temple" so-called. This sunken plaza was, I think, a "ritual bath", or pool, of a type with which all the major temples of India and Further Asia were equipped. Is this the legendary Fountain of Youth, so assiduously sought by the Spanish empire-pirates? All the elements are here: the Tau, symbolic of Regeneration and Eternal Life; the Waters of Life and the Mystery of its Renewal; the location of the site, high among the Heaven-supporting Pillar-Mountains at the eastern edge of the world; its very altitude, suggesting Heaven; the myth of the Birth of the Sun from nearby Lake Titicaca, etc. Here are all the trappings of an Andean Lourdes, a place of healings and a destination for pilgrims.

WE NOW HAVE in hand the four principle meanings of the Tau Cross, namely: 1) cardinal mountain/heaven-supporting pillar; 2) rain/water; 3) portal/door; and 4) eternal life/ re-generation. Stairway, tomb, and



22] Egyptian ankh. As depicted in Lehner's *Symbols, Signs, and Signets* (1950) with emphasis on wearability.

23] King's "three badges of the Egyptian priesthood" stacked to form a figure resembling an ankh on a cone, pyramid or mountain.

24] Figure associated with Tanit and Astarte in Syria and among the Phoenicians. Egyptian scarab amulets are known from the same region and period.

25] Ankh-like symbol found among the icons at the stupa of Amaravati (see figure 3).

26] Figure at the base of the eastern quadrant of the Aztec cosmogram (figure 7). A solar disk rising from a T-shaped temple platform equipped with stairs.

27] T-bird, Southwestern Pueblo Culture. A fairly numerous genre often depicted in pairs (see section III).

Figures 20-25: A Series of Ankh-like Icons

**PLAN OF THE AKABANA'S CISTERN
FOUR CONJOINED TAUS**

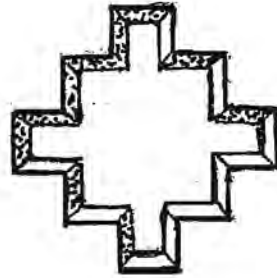


Figure 26: Sunken Plaza, a „Ritual Bath“?

terminus/boundary are identified as related, or associated, symbols and concepts. The diffusion of a single, coherent system is indicated, as well as regional adaptation, shifts of emphasis, artistic stylization, and so on, all pointing to a vigorous and lively tradition. No slavish copying here; we see instead enthusiastic participation in a hallowed system of practices and beliefs. In the next, and final, section we will explore the solar aspect of Tau “doctrine” and learn how it served as the basis of a personal religion.

**THE DOORS OF THE SUN, THE
SPIRAL STAIR, AND THE
PHENOMENON OF PAIRING**

OUR SET of ankhs-apparent has provided a segue’ into our next area of exploration. In this new thematic genre the Tau is intimately associated with the Sun and his endless circular journey, metaphorically described as a series of deaths (sunsets) and births (sunrises).

Now, the theme of Death-and-Rebirth is the great unifying thread which binds together nearly all ancient, non-Christian cults and religions. Even Christianity could not entirely dispense with it, as shown by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This great theme has been successfully traced back through the Bronze Age to Neolithic and Shamanic strata, and again, the circular life of the Sun seems to be the underlying inspiration. For when the Sun becomes Our Father, there arises a possibility that his Children may do as he does in this regard, namely, conquer Death and rise again. In this phase of Tau doctrine, the Eastern and Western Boundary Mountains (boundary stones writ large) are predominant in that they harbor that pair of doors which are necessary to the completion of the Sun’s daily round. The ideas of ascent and descent are automatically included in this conception, leading us back to the stairway/ladder complex of symbols. Figure 27 is my attempt at a visual summary of this doctrine, using hopefully-familiar Egyptian names. The cult is transnational, obviously, and provides a viable explanation for the

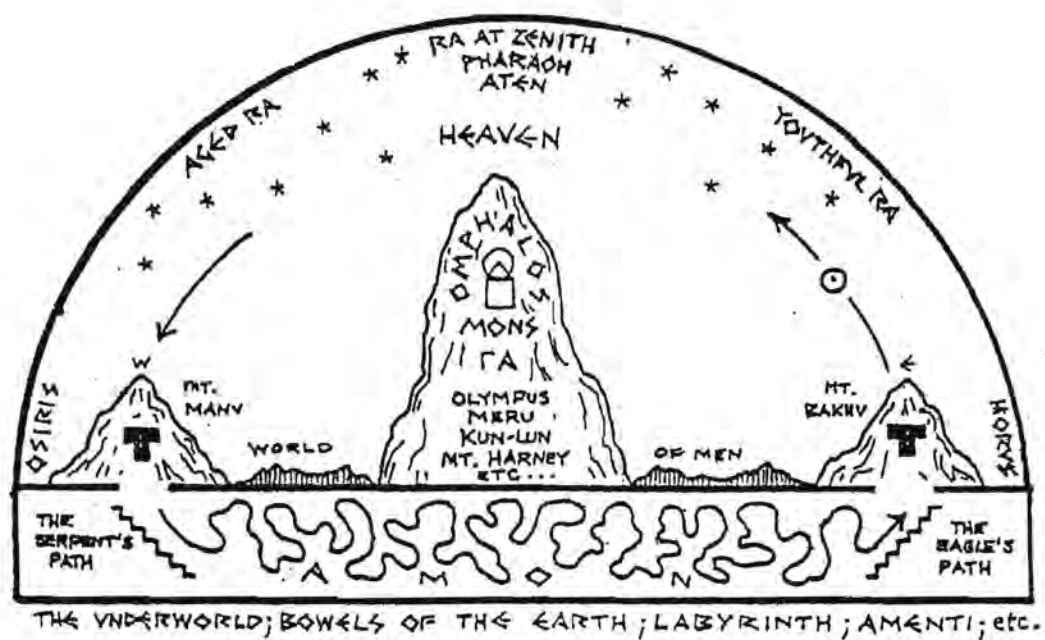


Figure 27: A Stairway/Ladder Complex of Symbols

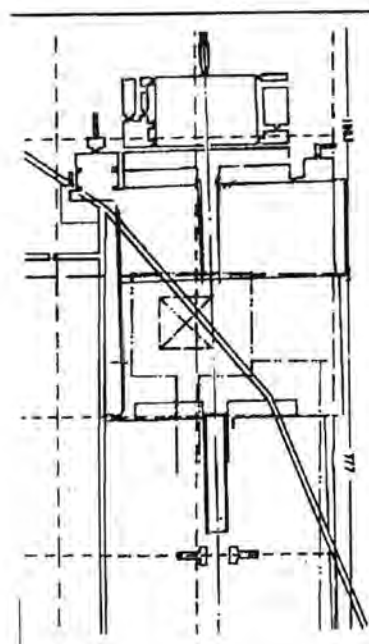


Figure 28: A Pair of T-shaped Pools in Hatshepsut's Mortuary Temple at Deir el Bahari



Figure 29: A Pair of Tau-formed Offering Tables Flanking Creatures Associated With the Sun in Egyptian Symbolism

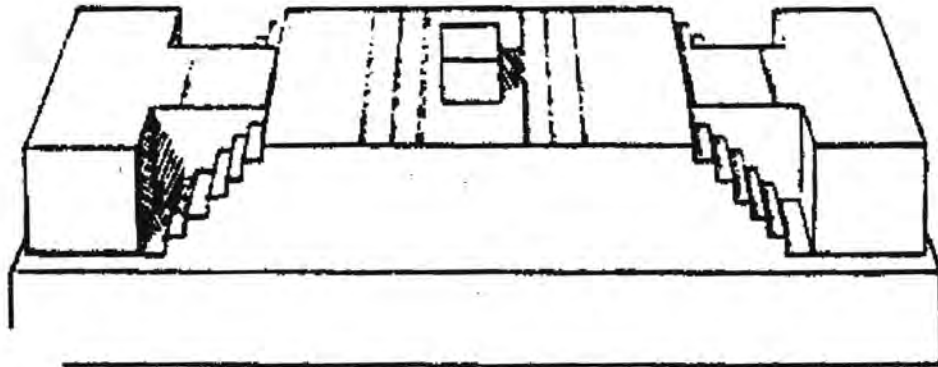


Figure 30: An Egyptian Shadow Clock of the 6th Century BC

rather common occurrence of paired T's in the iconographies of either hemisphere. The earliest known examples of this convention are from Sumer and Egypt. Goff (op.cit.) reports the existence in the former of "T-shaped altars or cult-objects", frequently found in pairs. Figure 28 reveals a pair of T-shaped pools in Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el Bahari, and in 29 we have a pair of tau-formed offering tables flanking creatures associated with the Sun in Egyptian symbolism. Another, very charming, adaptation of the symbols and ideas is shown in figure 30, an Egyptian shadow clock of the 6th century BC. Here we have a functional representation of the daily journey of the Sun from the eastern T to the western, with stairs thrown in for good measure.

What Dr Badawy calls a "double chapel" was built at Karnak by Sesostris I, c. 2000 BC. Division along the transverse symmetry line indicated by Badawy gives two T-shrines as in figure 31. Badawy makes the interesting observation that this is the earliest known example of the use of the socle (a raised platform foundation) in Egyptian sacred architecture. I am persuaded that the socle's primary purpose was to necessitate stairs. I am also persuaded that this double chapel was used to enact the daily disappearance and reappearance of the sun-god Amon-Ra. Amon, we know, means "hidden", and corresponds with the setting, ie; dying, sun and his journey through the Underworld, Amenti, on his way to the Eastern Birth-giving Mountain. Emerging from the chapel at dawn Amon becomes Ra, the resplendent, visible solar orb. On the other hand, the yearly death and resurrection of the Sun at winter solstice may have been the subject of the ceremony.

Figure 32 we have a T-shaped Mayan temple raised at Cerros around 50BC, or contemporaneous with the invention or introduction of the institution of kingship among the Maya. This temple was decorated with stucco masks of the rising and setting sun, say Schele and Freidel (1990). The Karnak shrine was proportionally analyzed by Badawy (the dotted lines); I did the other, following his method. The similarities are striking, to say the least: both incorporate the Golden Section as the underlying design canon, for instance. Professionals are likely to consider this correspondence simply too good to be true, but the evidence will not, on this account, evaporate. It's bothersome, but it's real. Some will ease their minds by declaring this a case of mere coincidence, but it's not an isolated instance, as we know.

TEMPLES, typically, are decorated stages for rituals. Schele and Freidel (op.cit.) have an idea of the character of the ritual celebrated at Cerros:

To enter [the inner sanctuary]
the king had to walk through the front
door
of the temple, circle to the west
(his left), pass through the center wall
door
into the rear gallery and then
circle back to the east to enter the room
from
from the back gallery. In other
words, he *spiralled* into the inner
sanctum
in a clockwise direction. When
he left he reversed the spiral, thus
emulat-
ing *the movement of the sun from
east to west*. [my emphasis]

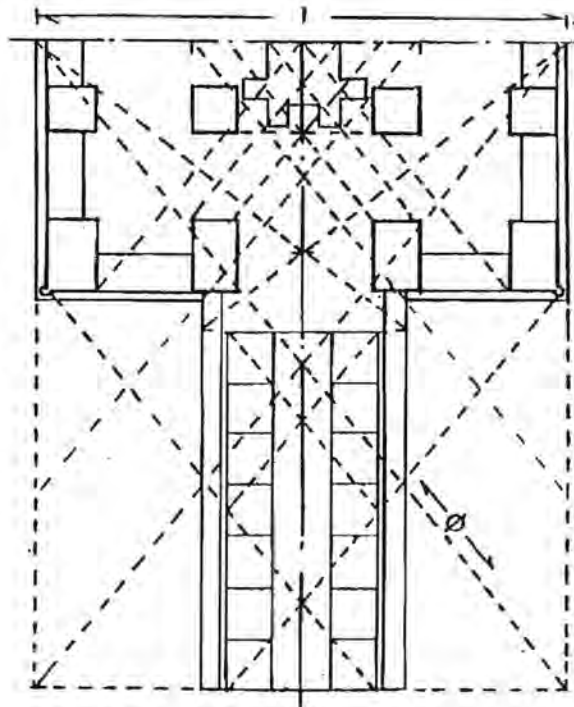


Figure 31: A “Double Chapel” built at Karnak by SesostrisI; c. 2000 BC.

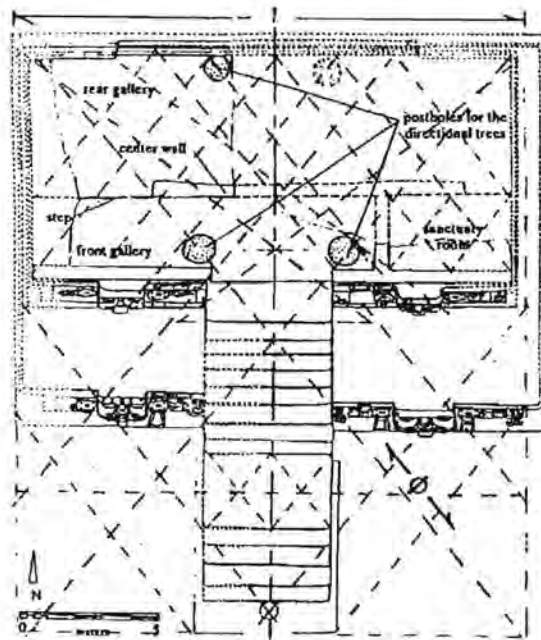


Figure 32: T-shaped Mayan Temple Raised at Cerros Around 50 BC.

It would be hard to find anything more to our purpose than this, especially since all Maya temples were looked upon by their builders as sacred mountains harboring even more sacred caves (the inner sancta), say Schele and Freidel (op.cit.). And since the king (in the role of the Sun's "ritual impostor") had first to ascend a stairway, we can appreciate the similarity to the Palenque wall relief shown below (figure 33). By now we are more than familiar with the linkage between taus and staircases, but what about that odd appen-dage sticking out the back? In point of fact, this new icon was the opposite of odd in the ancient Americas, --it was a common feature of the landscape of symbolism, as our next set of figures reveals. The reader will find it under the name "step-fret" in the literature; my own name for it is "spiral stair." A "standard" spiral stair is shown in figure 34; but as the others reveal this was an icon subject to stylization ad libidum. Indeed, in some cases it is the presence of the tau that clinches the identification. In figure 35 two T-birds and a pair of spiral stairs adorn the inside of a water bowl. I will guess this water was used in healing rituals. In 36 two T-birds and two staircases emphasize the notions of ascension and descension (as does figure 33). Spiral stairs, taus, and stepped mountains decorate a Peruvian pitcher in figure 37. Four taus and some highly-stylized spiral stairs are found in figure 38, which should be compared with 39, an Aztec design in which interlocking stairs bear the identifying marks (ie; feathers and spots) of the Day Sun and Jaguar Night Sun, respectively.

DETERMINING just what the spiral stair was intended to represent was not an easy matter, but I believe I have done so. Learning that the proper hermeneutic context is solar lead to the necessary breakthrough. The issue here is the yearly solar "journey" from winter solstice (the southern leg) to summer

solstice (the northern). From December 21st to June 21st, the track of the sun -if we could see the lower course as we do the part above the horizon- is an expanding spiral. After culmination at midsummer, the spiral slowly collapses as the days grow shorter and the Sun moves gradually south. In other words, it is by a spiral path that the Sun ascends and descends the sky through the year. Each day carries him a step higher or lower: this is the significance of the "spiral stair." I think we can apply the same interpretation to the spirals which decorate many of the megalithic tombs and monuments of neolithic Europe. A number of these feature functional solar alignments - indicating solstices, typically- and in some cases the spirals are joined in pairs as if to emphasize reciprocal movement. Equipped with this new knowledge, we are ready to return to Chaco Canyon. To quote from the Casa Rinconada site-guide (available at the park): "An unusual feature of Casa Rinconada is a lower entryway placed beneath the steps of the northern entryway. This entryway consists of a stone-lined trench that connected with a spiral pattern of stone slabs on the floor of the great kiva." So, here again, we have the T, the stair, and the spiral in combination (just as in figure 33) at a site fairly bristling with solar, and other directional, alignments. What does this suggest about the rituals for which Casa Rinconada was the "decorated stage", or "set"? Did at least some of them celebrate "solar mysteries"? In the face of the evidence, this is hard to disbelieve. In support of such a reading we have a couple of interesting sherds (figure 40) from the site. One displays a pair of spiral stairs and the other, what I take for a rayed sun. And I mustn't forget to mention the pair of T-shaped altars discovered at the Pacquime pueblo to the south of Chaco, as reported by Lekson (op.cit.). We first encountered this iconographic phenomenon in Sumer, c.3200BC, as you will recall.

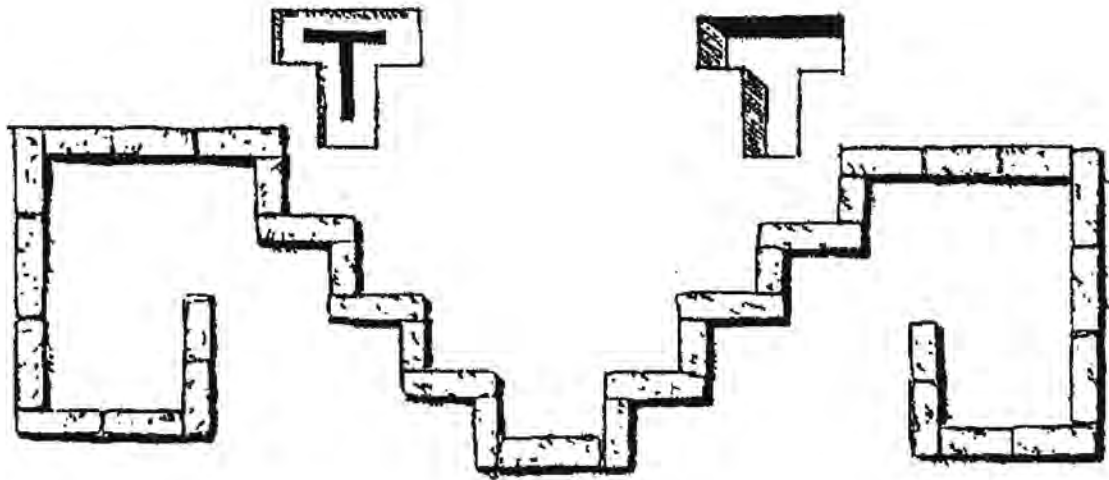


Figure 33: Wall Relief of Palenque



Figure 34: A "Standard" Spiral Stair

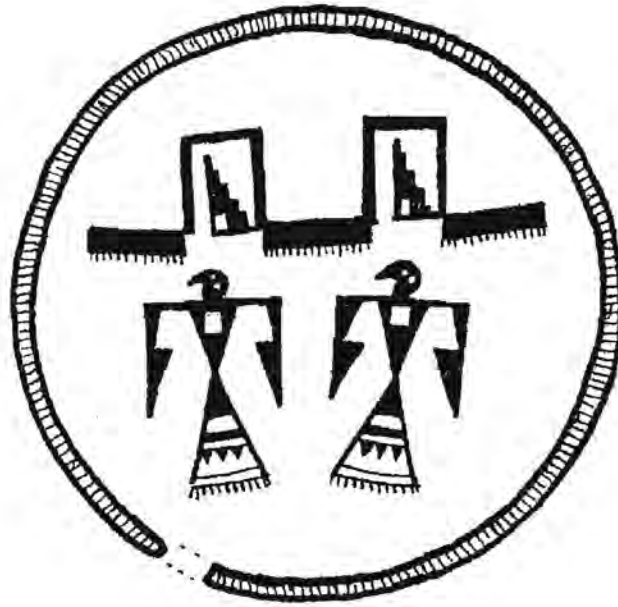


Figure 35: Two T-Birds And a Pair of Spiral Stairs



Figure 36: Two T-Birds And Two Staircases



Figure 37: A Peruvian Pitcher With Spiral Stairs, Taus, And Stepped Mountains



Figure 38: Four Taus And Highly-Styled Spiral Stairs

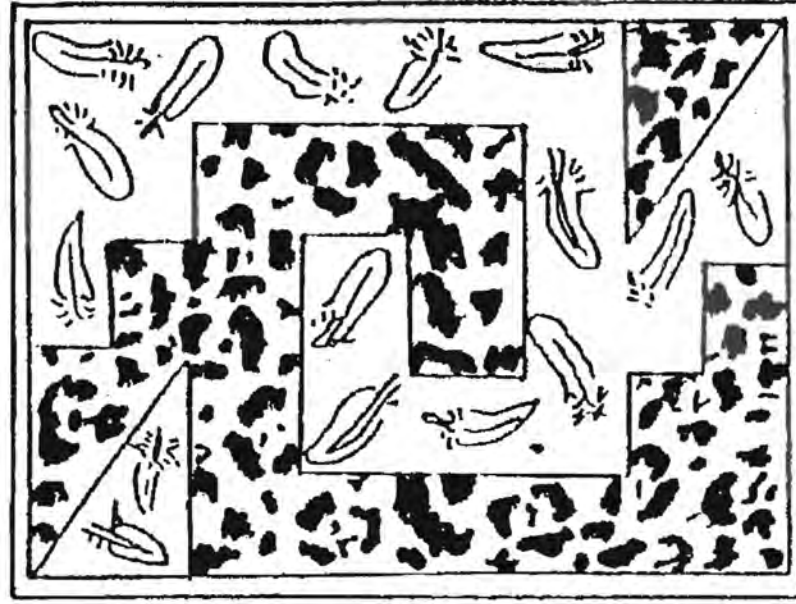


Figure 39: Aztec Design With Interlocking Stairs

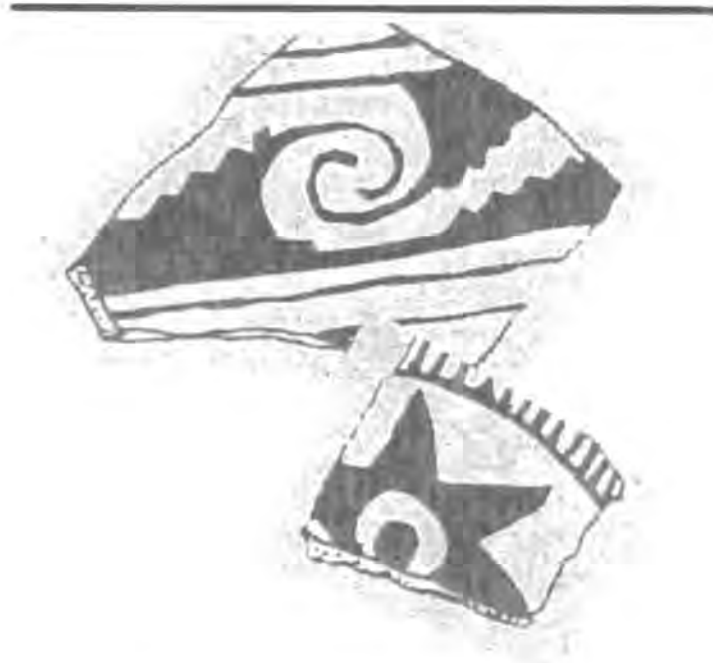


Figure 40: A Pair of Spiral Stairs And a Rayed Sun

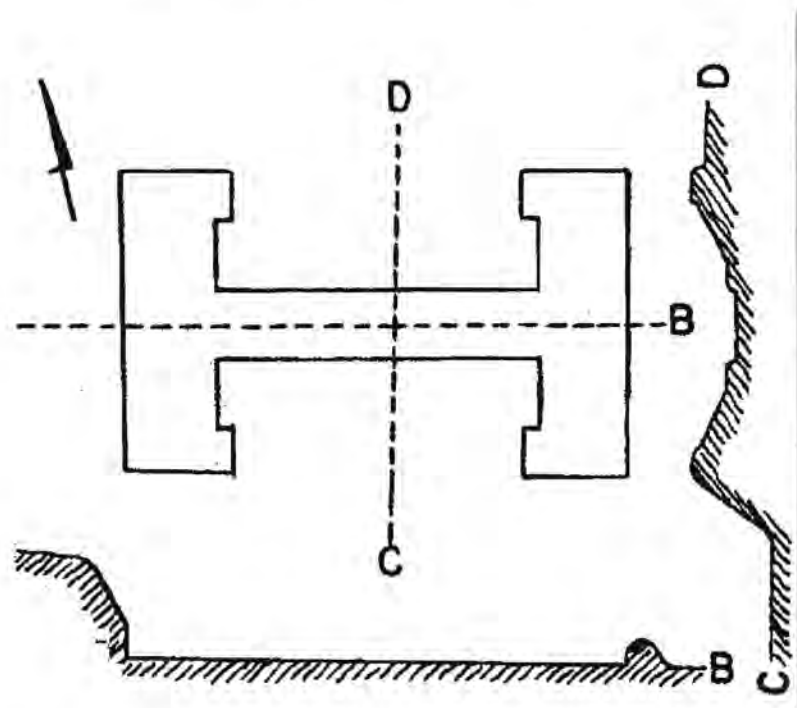


Figure 41: T-Shaped Symbolism of Central American Ballcourts

Striking confirmation of the relationship between the Sun and the Spiral is found at nearby Fajada Butte, where, on the winter solstice, an arrowhead of light plunges to the heart of a petroglyphic spiral. Sadly, this famous monument has been tweaked out of alignment and no longer functions. It should be fairly easy to repair the damage, however, and in any case, the phenomenon has been very well documented and photographed by archaeoastronomers.

OUR FINAL TOPIC concerns the design and symbolism of Central American ballcourts. According to Gladwin (1938), about half of these are T-shaped, as in figure 41. I would point out, however, that the same shape results from joining two T's base-to-base, reminding us of figure 30. This observation, coupled with one of iconology's standard equations -ball=sun- points to a solar

interpretation of the game. This is hardly revolutionary. In Michael Coe's (1986) words: "The ball game was not a mere athletic contest. The court itself was a cosmological diagram, with the ball symbolizing the sun." Precisely. And because the sun-ball was too hot to touch, players never did, except with heavily-padded elbows and hips. Schele and Freidel (op.cit.) demonstrate that the theme of Death and Resurrection forms part of the mythic substructure of the game. They tell us too that ball courts were thought to provide access to the Underworld. Such themes have clear diagnostic value where the Tau-or, as here, pairs of Taus- seem to be present. Apparently the Olmecs deserve the credit for the invention of the American ballgame. According to Mary Miller (1996), sometime around 900BC, at the site of Teopantecuantitlan, "Olmec lords constructed a monumental sunken court lined

with green travertine rock, and marked by unusual *T-shaped sculptures on the west and east sides*. These feature Olmec maize gods, who define *the four corners of the universe*." (my emphasis) Furthermore, "a ballcourt occupies much of the sunken patio." We could hardly ask for more! Not only does this case present us with the earliest use of the Tau in the western hemisphere that I know of, it also goes far to prove that we are dealing with paired T's in the design of these courts, and not I's. Final confirmation comes from Harold Gladwin (op cit.), who says that about 5% of Central American courts are T-shaped. While the Southwestern Pueblo Cultures received the ballgame from their neighbors to the south, we find no Tau-shaped courts north of the current Mexico border -only ovals. A rare case of "dropping the ball" where the Tau is concerned!

CONCLUSION

I HAVE PRESENTED what I consider to be conclusive proof of my thesis, namely, that the Tau Cross is a symbol of religious and cosmological significance which attained a nearly global state of diffusion in ancient times. While I accept the possibility that such a simple glyph may have been independently invented in some cases, the idea that it would then be fitted out with the same complex of interrelated meanings and doctrinal associations in each and every locale just defies belief. Such an assertion would be as ludicrous as that of some imaginary future historian who, looking back upon the panorama of the past, would declare that Catholicism and its salient symbol (†) had been independently invented in Peru, simply because Rome and South America are so far apart! I think Campbell must have been right on target when he wrote in *The Masks of God*: "The system of

new arts and ideas brought into being within the precincts of the great Sumerian temple compounds passed to Egypt c. 2800BC, Crete and the Indus c. 2600BC, China c. 1600BC, and America within the next thousand years." As you recall the Olmec ballcourt bears the very early date of c.900BC

With this, we are brought round to the position of the diffusion theorists of a century ago. They were convinced that Civilization had been invented once and once only, in the Near East, and exported thence to all the waiting world. For a long time I considered this too radical a position to align myself with, but I have felt compelled to reconsider it. If I may be allowed to quote myself: "With almost no exceptions wherever we can observe the incipient processes of Urbanization at work, the Tau is present in an iconographic, frequently architectural, context. Chaco is an excellent example of this. It is almost as if Civilization bears a logo or trademark, (ie; T) and what that trademark seems to say is MADE IN SUMER."

It's a typical pebble-in-pond model of diffusion, with distant regions receiving the impulse last. This great and ancient cultural wave finally petered out, in New Mexico, about 500 years ago, and was soon eclipsed entirely by another wave of civilization arriving from another quarter, bearing other imperatives and a different kind of cross.


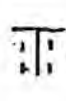

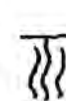
THE APPARENT correspondences between the ancient civilizations of Asia and the Americas are real: they derive from a common inheritance of beliefs and ideas. Within this heritage the Tau and its doctrines played an indispensable formative role.

AFTERWORDS




Since the writing of the preceding paper (in the autumn of 2001), new material has come to light which, while possessing intrinsic interest, also confirms the viability of the interpretive framework I have proposed for the Tau. Rather than incorporate these data in the text, I present them here as the sketchy postscripts they are. Some are internet gleanings and I have made no effort to verify them. They are only clues at this point, but they point in interesting directions.

- 1) The principle building so far unearthed at the Chinese site of Erh-li-t'ou (Honan province) was built on a T-shaped foundation. The building "dominates the settlement" and may have been the palace of the founder of the Shang Dynasty (c.1700BC). This constitutes another example of the occurrence of the Tau in an architectural context at a site of incipient urban-ization. The T is found as a sacral symbol in Oracle Bone and Shang Dynasty script of c.1800-1600BC, as shown in Table 1. The meanings are consistent with the proposed hermeneutic framework. "Under the Ming and Qing rulers there was no open Tiananmen Square as there is today. Instead, the space was composed of an unusual [sic] T-shaped walled courtyard..." The T sign is found on several of the jade "celts" which were buried (as a foundation deposit) with the famous Olmec figurines at La Venta. Dr Mike Xu (TCU) claims that the inscribed celts bear Shang Dynasty script and his proposed decipherment confirms the dedicatory nature of the emplacement.
- 2) "T-shaped entrance vestibule" within Ne-User-Re's sun temple at Abu Ghauob. T as door-way, yet again.
- 3) On Bali: at Goa Gajah "the famous Elephant Cave", "the grotto inside is T-shaped."
- 4) "The strange linguistic relationship of many of the world's languages was explored too, especially the use of the letter T and its relationship to tombs, temples, the burial mounds called 'tulas', etc. I added my own bit of mystery: the Toraja of Sulawesi call the ceremonial statues of their dead 'tau-tau.'" "He told me then of another site known as Cochaqui [Ecuador] [with] T-shaped tombs of unknown kings..." At the Chan Chan citadel of Trujillo "the T-shaped platform that housed the king's burial chamber was the most important construction in the complex."
- 5) "The highest summit was crowned by a seven-walled terrace enclosing an unusual [sic] T-shaped temple" [in Chachapoyas, overlooking the Marañon River]. The Akabana at Tiahuanaco was a seven tiered "T-shaped pyramid." "Peculiar to Purepecha culture were T-shaped pyramids [called "yacatas"] rising in terraces." The Purepecha speak a language with "little connection to any known Native American tongue."





A). T + WATER/RAIN:

 FOUNTAIN  RAIN  RAIN  WATER

B) T + SUN

 SUN ( MOUNTAIN)  GOD, SHEN

C) T as "GOD RADICAL":

     (SHEN)

D) T + "SACRED TRADITION" in a general sense:





 BLESSING  ANCESTOR, FOUNDER  RELIGION, BELIEF  SACRIFICE

Table 1: The T Is Found As a Sacral Symbol in Oracle Bone And Shang Dynasty Script of c. 1800-1600 BC.

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