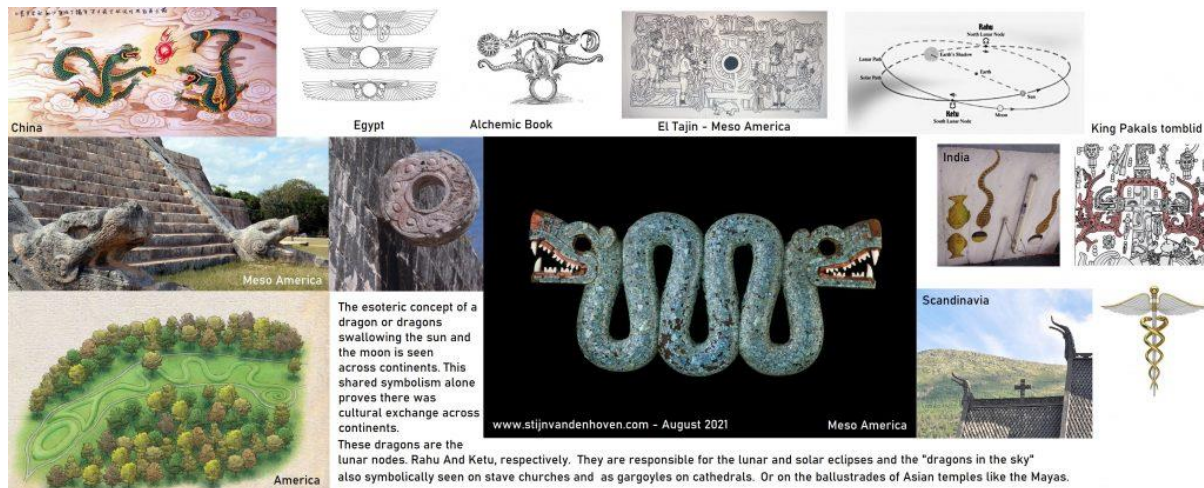


The meaning of snakes and dragons across world cultures on religious buildings and in their iconography.



Introduction

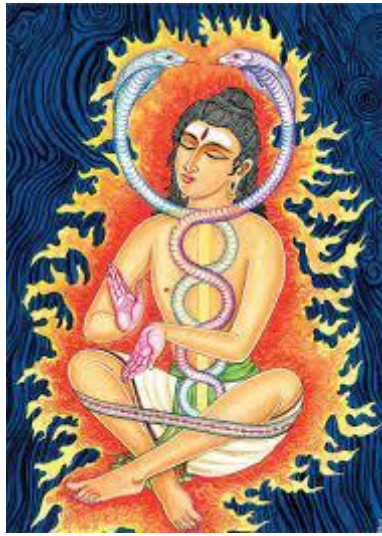
It took me a while to decipher why there are two snakes on the Egyptian sun disk or why snakes in general played such a role in ancient cultures. The snake, shedding its skin, was an eternal life symbol, like the evergreen pine/tree of life. I had to look at other cultures across the globe and the relation of these snakes to astronomy, but I think I finally cracked it and figured out their meaning across cultures worldwide

I believe they are representations of the lunar nodes. Rahu and Ketu, the causes of the ecliptic of the sun and the moon, which, for a star/moon and solar observing culture would make perfect sense to give this high importance.

It proves without a doubt, that there was cultural exchange in antiquity as similar concepts of dragons swallowing the sun and the moon were incorporated in their cultures. From Egypt to India, China and South America.

To say ancient cultures developed as stand alone cultures with no cultural exchange is completely ludicrous if one starts paying better attention to the expressions of their buildings, art and symbolism. So are the ancient aliens theories. Answers to expressions of meso American art like King Pakal's tomb relief, the Aztec calendar stone and Chitzi Itza's snake design is found in astronomy. The "form" of art is undeniably different, the symbolic language is not when compared to other cultures. The use of the turtle, or world tree with snakes and bird on top are seen in more cultures. Not just because "birds sit in trees."

Although other researchers have pointed out "similarities" like the snake balustrades on temples in Asia and Meso America, they failed to answer why, or thought the answers were in the micro cosmos of the body in the form of the Ida and Pingala.



Kundalini, depiction of Ida, Pingala

Personally, I don't agree to that interpretation and I think the reason of such art and expressions is instead astronomical. Perhaps they are both and both Macro and Micro cosmos is as above as below., the left side and the right side of the body was also used to attributed to female and male side of the body respectively (moon/sun)

Those snakes and dragons

In my opinion, there is a reason why we see dragons on churches, Makaras on Buddhist temples roofs, snake on balustrades, snakes on temples.

The reason for the dragons or snakes on temples and in art across cultures worldwide is the concept of symbolically portraying the paths of the sun and the moon and the lunar and solar eclipses, Rahu and Ketu, in the concept of the dragon/snake monster swallowing the sun and moon on eclipses.

Stijn van den Hoven - August 2021

Ketu: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ketu_\(mythology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ketu_(mythology))

Rahu: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahu>



Drawing by Daniela Epstein

The drawing above by Daniela Epstein is of a ball court relief panel from El Tajin in Veracruz, Mexico, associated with Building 4. Ballcourt scene. Note the entwined serpents in circle form.

To see Kurma, the Hindu world turtle on El Tajin relief with its snakes as pointed out by **Bibhu Dev Misra** in [this 2016 article](#) is indeed no coincidence. He wrote his article on an earlier article of **Carl de Borhegyi**: <https://www.mushroomstone.com/> Stipulating this looks like a representation of the Indian mount Meru and the churning of the milky ocean.



A Turtle supporting a pillar or mountain on its back. Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City. Credit: Bibhu Dev Misra

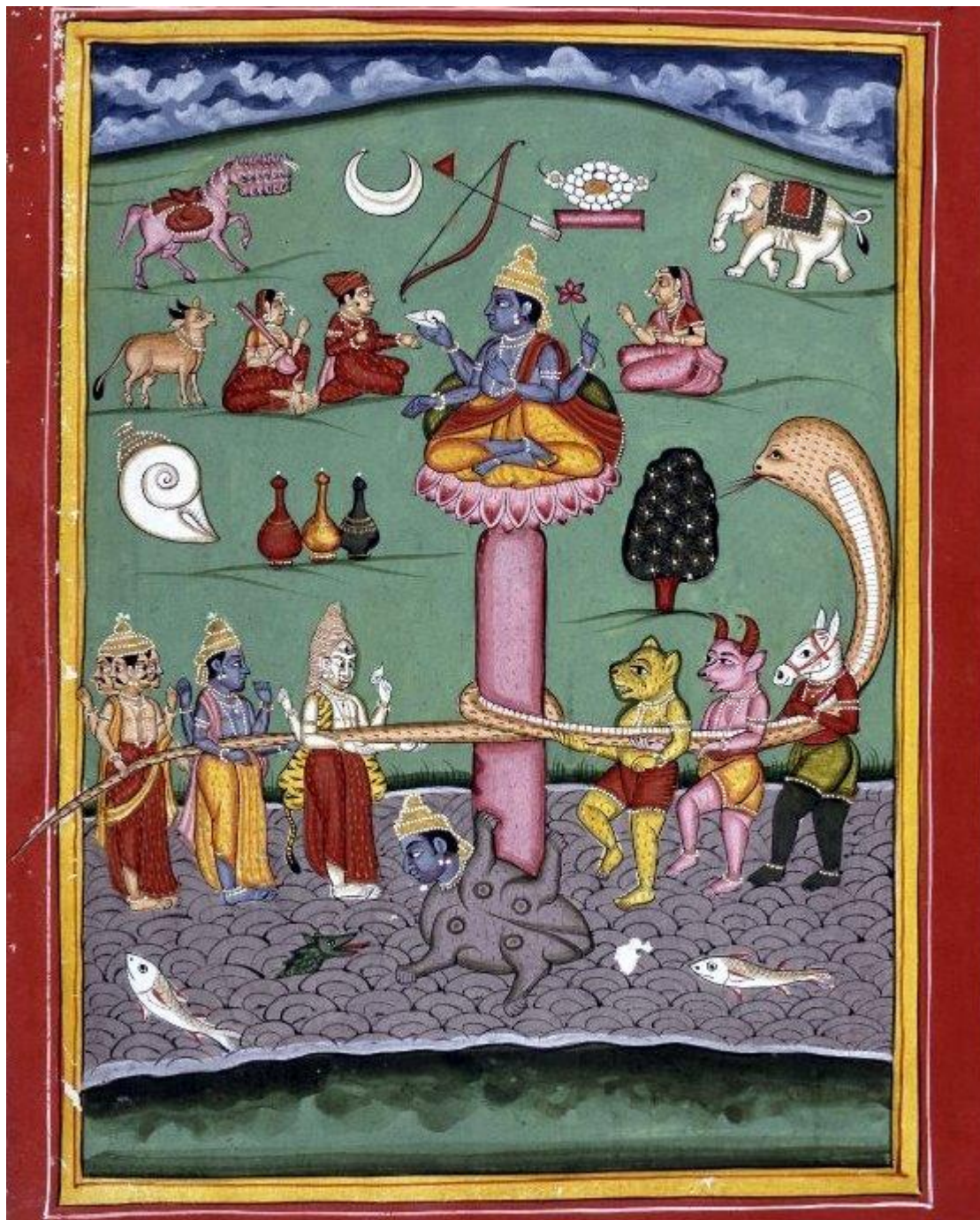
However these are not the only images. There are more artifacts, found in the form of the god Pauhtun the mayan worldbearer Note the hole on top of some.





Pauahtun the mayan worldbearer





Churning of the milky ocean. (Turning of the milkyway)



The head in the turtle is what stands out in the Indian expressions, as Kurma is an avatar of Vishnu.

The serpents/dragons of the sky played a major part in the iconography of the world religions, for a good reason, as they used the same metaphors, especially of the two snakes.



These serpents are also seen on the ballhoop at Chitzen Itza. No, it was not because they liked snakes.

As the turtle was already recognized by other, besides the specific Pauahtun the Mayan worldbearer connection, I instead focussed more on the dual snake/dragons symbolism seen usually on top (or around Mount Meru) or on the single snake expression Vasuki although Vasuki does have a sister Manasa, which again points to Rahu and Ketu. Noteworthy that the "man in the snake" only also depicts one celestial snake and not two, However through the Meso American world they are usually depicted in pairs for the two lunar nodes respectively.

If thou wilt thys warke begyn,
 Than schrey the clene of alle thy Seyne :
 Contrye in bert wyth alle thy thowght,
 And ever thenke on hym that the der bought.
 Satisfaction thou make wyth alle thy myght,
 Than thre fayre flowers thou hast in syght ;
 Yet nedest the mor to thy conclesyon,
 Take thou good hede nowe to thys lessen ;
 Thou must have Grafe, Nature, and Resen,
 Spekelatif, and Coning, wyth good Condition :
 Yet thou must have more now berto,
 Experience, wyth Pracktik, Prudent also ;
 Patient that thou be, and Holi in Lysyngs,
 Thenke thou on thys in thy beginings ;
 Thes fourtyn Hestys as I the saye,
 Ever kepe thou man both nyght and day,
 Of thy desyres thou mayst not mysse,
 And also of heven that swezt bleß.



The most iconic of illustrations from the [Theatrum chemicum Britannicum](#) is the two headed dragon facing the sun and moon. It comes from page [212](#) at the end of the chapter called Liber Patris Sapientiae.

An interesting point to make is that the above manuscript *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* and the image of the two dragons was first published in 1652. It is an extensively annotated compilation of English alchemical literature selected by Elias Ashmole. However. Its not alchemy. Its astronomy and depicting the lunar nodes dragons swallowing the sun and moon respectively in an almost identical composition to the El Tajin Relief. However El Tajin was not discovered or documented to be visited by Europeans until 1785. An interesting point to make is that the above manuscript *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* and the image of the two dragons was first published in 1652. It is an extensively annotated compilation of English alchemical literature selected by Elias Ashmole. However. Its not alchemy. Its astronomy and depicting the lunar nodes dragons swallowing the sun and moon respectively in an almost identical composition to the El Tajin Relief. However El Tajin was not discovered or documented as to be visited by Europeans until 1785. The city also died around 1200BC long before any European set foot.

Quote: "El Tajín is a pre-Columbian archaeological site in southern Mexico and is one of the largest and most important cities of the Classic era of Mesoamerica. A part of the Classic Veracruz culture, El Tajín flourished from 600 to 1200 CE and during this time numerous temples, palaces, ballcourts, and pyramids were built. From the time the city fell, in 1230, to 1785, no European seems to have known of its existence, until a government inspector chanced upon the Pyramid of the Niches."

So where did this expression come from? What is the origin of these celestial "dragons"?

Ancient Egypt and Sumeria



Serpopard cylinder seal from Sumeria. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpopard>

Or was the concept Egyptian. Who influenced who?



Serpapards on Tablet found in Egypt. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serpapard#/media/File:Ceremonial_Palette_from_Hierakonpolis.jpg



Serpopards on other side of the Narmer Palet.

I have always said the other side of the Narmer tablet is Orion. The whole Narmer tablet is an astronomical tablet. Its the pose and the bulls on top that give this away. The sandal bearer is the star Sirius. This relation has also been pointed out here by another researcher:

<https://historyofyesterday.com/orion-not-hunter-but-thunder-god-de03c6c369a5>



www.stijnvandenhoven.com

Like the snakes and dragons the serpopards on the other side was always a mystery. I now suspect the serpopards morphed into the later dragons of the sky. The two snakes/dragons, also seen on top of the Chinese Bixi stele is indeed no different to the cultural expressions seen across the pond or anywhere else in the world.

Even the Hatshepsut temple in Dendera has the snake balustrades, topped by the Horus falcon for the sun, the winged sun disk. Being buried in a pyramid as the symbol of the primordial mountain, in Egypt or Meso America, or in the actual mountains itself in the valley of the kings is much of a muchness.



The two snakes and the sky/sun have always been linked since antiquity. Wadjet and Nekbeth, the two sisters or Hero Twins, all names for the two disks in the sky and their celestial paths.

The Horus and snake symbolism seen in Egypt and the winged sun disk, to the later eagles carrying the caduceus at Baalbek in the form of Jupiter and also, Or Garuda with his snakes and also, Viracocha carrying his snakes. The Roman/Zeus eagle, Nazi eagle or American eagle all refer to the same.



Winged sundisk and snakes.



Jupiter eagle on Baalbek entrance carrying the caduceus with two snakes.

These "relations" are hard to "proof" from an academic standpoint as archaeologist and anthropologists are looking for similar language, similar art or at the expressions of forms of such art to conclude they are the same culture or were culturally influenced by one other. Of course, they were not the "same culture" But they are not looking at shared concepts that are depicted in different ways. Because they don't understand the reasons for temples or ancient astronomical concepts in the first place as an archaeologist or anthropologist. For them, its just "decorative snakes on a temple" or "coincidence". They don't understand the underlying concepts responsible for these expressions across the globe and label them as "separate cultures" yet their very core shows they shared similar astronomical concepts that had to be exchanged between them somehow. Its easy to say that Egyptian civilization and Sumerian civilization influenced each other, but if one looks closely, one can see these concepts travelled to Asia and created temples there. And from Asia they travelled across the pacific to

the Meso American cultures via sea. There is no other explanation to the shared iconography seen across continents.



Naga balustrades on Asian temples are found in all shaped and forms

Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia

Snakes play a vital role in the design of Angkor Wat. They are not "decorative". The whole building is a 3d representation of the astronomical concept of the churning of the milky ocean, in more modern language, the rotation of the milky way, or universe.

Displayed in Mount Meru with its 5 peaks, with the demons and gods pulling the snake Vasuki around it. This is well known, acknowledged and documented.



Churning of the milky ocean

Which iconography was the very basis for the snake bridges at the Angkor Wat temple complex. The temple itself being mount Meru.

Few would notice Gaudi's turtle and pillar symbolism in the Sagrada Familia or for that matter the Turtle seen in the earlier ElTajin Relief. I did write another article on the turtle and pillar symbolism which can be found here:

<https://www.stijnvandenhoven.com/2018/02/12/why-there-are-crabs-turtles-or-scarab-at-base-of-obelisks/>



Turtle with world pillar at the Sagrada Família Church Barcelona

The snake bridges of Angkor Wat

No one would deny the solar alignment aspect of Angkor Wat, with its perfect alignment of the sun to its top tower on the spring/autumn equinox. The other two towers the summer and solstice respectively as discussed in one of my previous articles where I go deeper in on the symbolism of mount Meru throughout history:

<https://www.stijnvandenhoven.com/2021/08/09/temples-trees-and-pyramids/>



Angkor Wat

An event, also seen at some Meso American buildings.



Dzibilchaltún

Then we have Chitzin Itza with its 360 steps and cardinal alignments, and they slapped on a pair of snakes. So if the snake played such an important part on Angkor Wat, why would these snakes be "just decorative" in Chitzin Itza or any other temple.

They are not. They are astronomical concepts that are shared across the globe, expressed in each culture's own unique way but still very much related to one another. The orbital paths of the sun and the moon, intertwining as they cross across the universe creating the two points of intersection, the lunar nodes.



Chitzen Itza temple with its snakes, that, its shadows on the equinox

Temples, gods and religion across the globe in different cultures are earthly expressions of the universe, of astronomical concepts of snakes in the form of the lunar nodes and the rotating skies itself. There is a clear link to the stars and to the the heavens in all these buildings. Their gods on the mountain the constellations and planets.

Capturing the cosmos on earth

Churches temples mosques are, Like Angkor Wat, modern interpretations of the cosmos, mount Meru. Noteworthy to say here that the word for pyramid is Mr.

A tree of life is no different them a cross or a Mayan tree with celestial snakes or even a Jewish stylized Menorah as I pointed out in this earlier article:

<https://www.stijnvandenhoven.com/2020/09/23/religious-relations-with-tree-of-life-symbolism/>

The Gargoyle dragons on churches are there for a reason.



Gargoyle dragon



The Makaras on asian temple roofs, or the dragons on early stave churches as well.



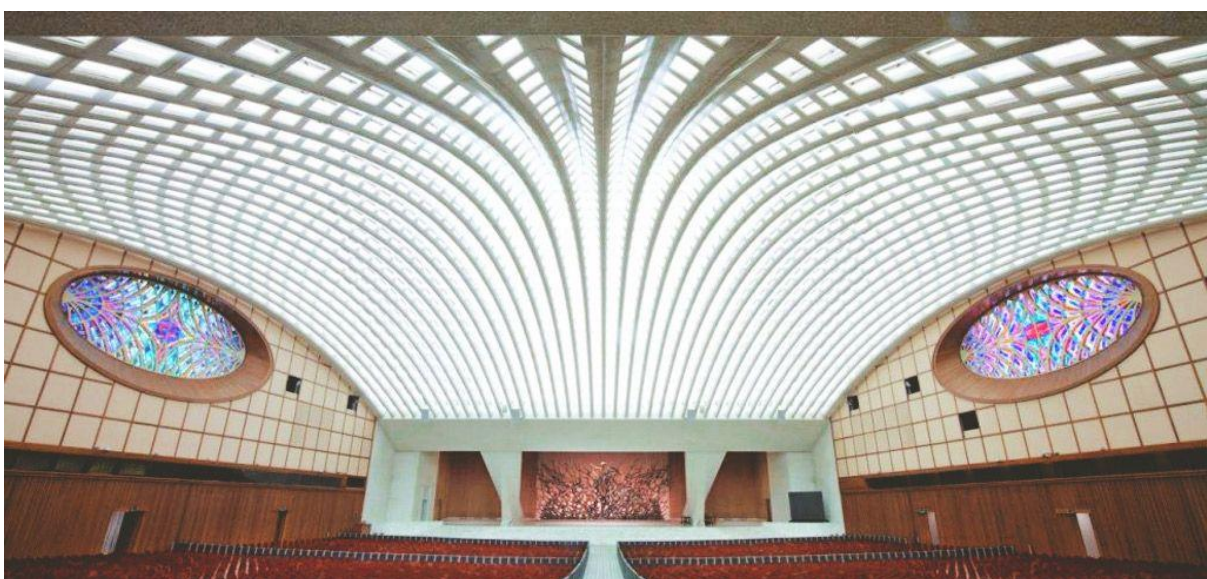
Like the snakes on the temple of the feathered serpent in Teotihuacan. Together with the rain sky god Taloc all these temple buildings across the ages share similar concepts that are related to Astronomy. Its not just decorative or because they all liked dragons and snakes.



These same snakes can be found on Asian temples that are placed on the stairs just like some mayan temples.



The snake is found today still in the Vatican. Even though the snake is a symbol of the devil in this religion, the Paul VI audience hall is designed as a giant snake. The universe shedding its skin and man being in "the belly of the beast". The pope sitting on a throne, in front of a tree of life modern expression. Like the Mayan temples and priest on top, the core symbolism is still the same.



All these different cultures and religions expressed the same shared concepts. At first I suspected the two dragons or dragon could be attributed to Draco and Hydra, yet it would not

explain the intertwining aspects seen in the caduceus and ball hoops. That only can be the paths of the sun and the moon and the "dragon in the sky" that swallows the sun and moon.

A temple, is basically, a man attempt to capture the universe/creation/time itself on earth and worship it using different shared metaphors or allegories.

The snakes or dragons have been associated to the skies since ages. We are in the belly of the beast so to say, a small part of creation. This celestial dragon swallows the sun or the moon at times, due to the celestial orbits. As the Asian temples display Kirtimukha or the monster of time that "eats itself" its just another metaphor for ever changing creation and the universe itself. With its two Makaras in its mouth, its very much the same as the Aztec sun disk with the central figure, tongue sticking out, devouring the two snakes / Makaras. As I pointed out in my Makara paper the Aztec sun disk "snakes" are more Makaras, with two front legs and upward pointed snout. Very specific Asian iconography, that can not easily be attributed to "coincidence".



Fire serpent, Xiuhtecuatl
Aztec, AD 1300-1500

Many of the objects in the Mexican
Gallery embody powerful nature deities
that are described in myth and were
worshipped in ritual. Here a fire serpent.



Close up of Kirtimukha with its tongue sticking out, the greed monster or the monster who eats itself. The ever recreating universe.



Boro Bodur Doorway with Kirtimukha on top devouring two snakes / makaras

This used iconography is very similar to the Aztec Sun disk if one can see it the two makaras on it and the central figure with its tongue sticking out.

The statue in front of Harvard Library

Although the turtle was fairly easy to link to ancient beliefs, being the world turtle and also the constellation of Orion in some cultures (spring), the snakes/dragons on top took me a while to fully understand. Going towards Asia, through the Makara version of the serpopard, they became more "single creature like" and hence the fictional dragon image was born.



Bixie turtle at Harvard University in front of the library

The turtle was obviously visible on the El-Tajin relief. In Hindu Mythology an avatar of Vishnu carrying the world mountain or celestial pillar, later transformed in the Bixi stele. The two snakes on tempels or dragons on top of the pillar (or around Mount Meru), was more difficult to decipher. But, with 360 steps on the Chitzen Itza pyramid the answer had to be found in the celestial spheres.

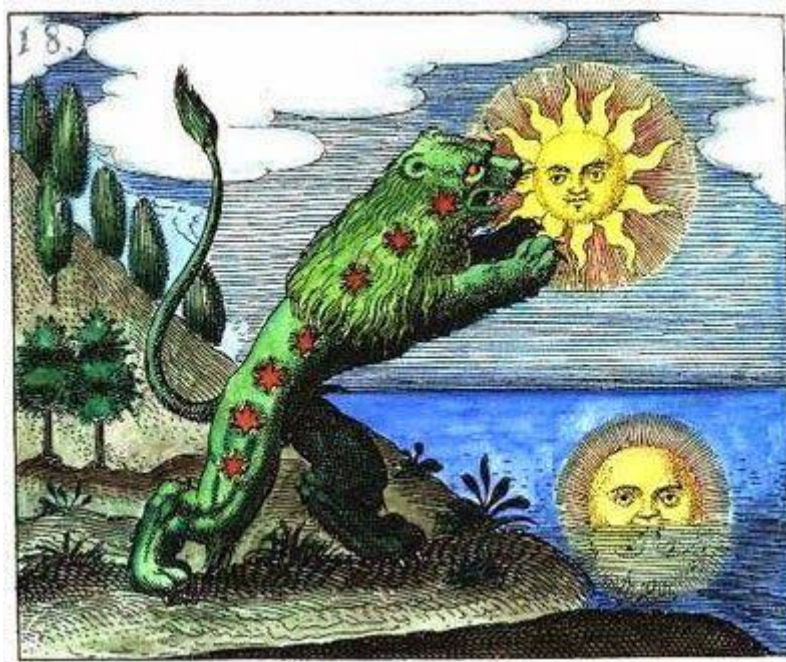
The two dragons of China and the Makara balustrades in India as highlighted in a paper I wrote, are visible on the Aztec sun disk. Two of them, each with a hero twins head in their mouth, makes perfect sense for the two dragons in the sky swallowing the sun and the moon respectively in eclipses. The hero twins were the classical opposites, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Night and Day, Moon and Sun, Dark and light, being swallowed by the dragon in an eclipse. In my opinion, that is what your looking at when looking at the Aztec sun disk. One only has to place the two Makaras on either side in the central figures mouth to come to near identical depiction of Kirtimukha. The devouring and birthing universe, time itself.



Aztec Calender, the central universe, the two snakes/dragons/makaras and them swallowing the Hero twins in the eclipses of the sun and the moon.

The knowledge of the celestial paths of the sun and the moon and the lunar nodes was thus depicted across cultures and displayed in "snakes swallowing the sun and moon" twin. A symbolic language that carried across the pacific and the reason why there are snakes on Mayan temples balustrades as seen in Asia. These are Rahu and Ketu, the lunar nodes and two "dragons in the sky". Hence it becomes obvious that this knowledge travelled across all the ancient cultures and that they did not all came up with the same iconography by default.

A more modern version is found in the Tarot of a "green lion (monster) swallowing the sun"



The green lion devouring the sun. Eclipses.

Some say "A pyramid is the easiest way to build a tall building, hence that is why we see pyramids across the globe."

A correct statement to an extent. But then to say cultures with no relations, come up with similar symbolism of two snakes/dragons in the sky, or them swallowing the sun and moon by coincidence would be wishful thinking, one needs to understand at what they are looking at.

To me also Chitzen Itza is an astronomical book in stone, like the Aztec sun disk or Pakals tomb lid with its world tree, that in its branches also carries the two snakes. The two snakes on the balustrade were noted by others as "similarities" yet failed to understand or explain their true meaning in the correct context of Rahu and Ketu and its importance to a 360 step sun temple as the two snakes were symbolically responsible for eclipses.

These cultural expressions might not be in the same artform or design language as other cultures to compare with and hence thus "seemingly unrelated" but if one looks closer, they surely express the same knowledge and concepts astronomy. Of world turtles and celestial snakes swallowing the sun and moon respectively. They used the same metaphors as for example in India, China or other places in Asia. One can conjecture, it goes back as far as the Egyptian winged sun disk with its two snakes. It was seen in the Caduceus, which is basically the same design language as a winged solar disk with entwined snakes. (As is an eagle carrying snakes in its talons or Horus bird sitting on top of a snake on the temple of Hatshepsut.)



Caduceus



And still seen in modern times in some bishops crossier staffs with two snakes, or in Indian art.



It is also seen in the symbolism of Fuxi and Nuwa, intertwined in symbolism of square and compass. The sign of freemasons. Not only building tools, but symbols of eternal creation and by moving of the planets and stars again time itself captured in an icon.



Square and compass logo from freemasons.

The celestial paths or "snakes" with the lunar nodes Rahu and Ketu, combined with sun and moon in a male and female form of opposites is what drove these expressions of art. It was

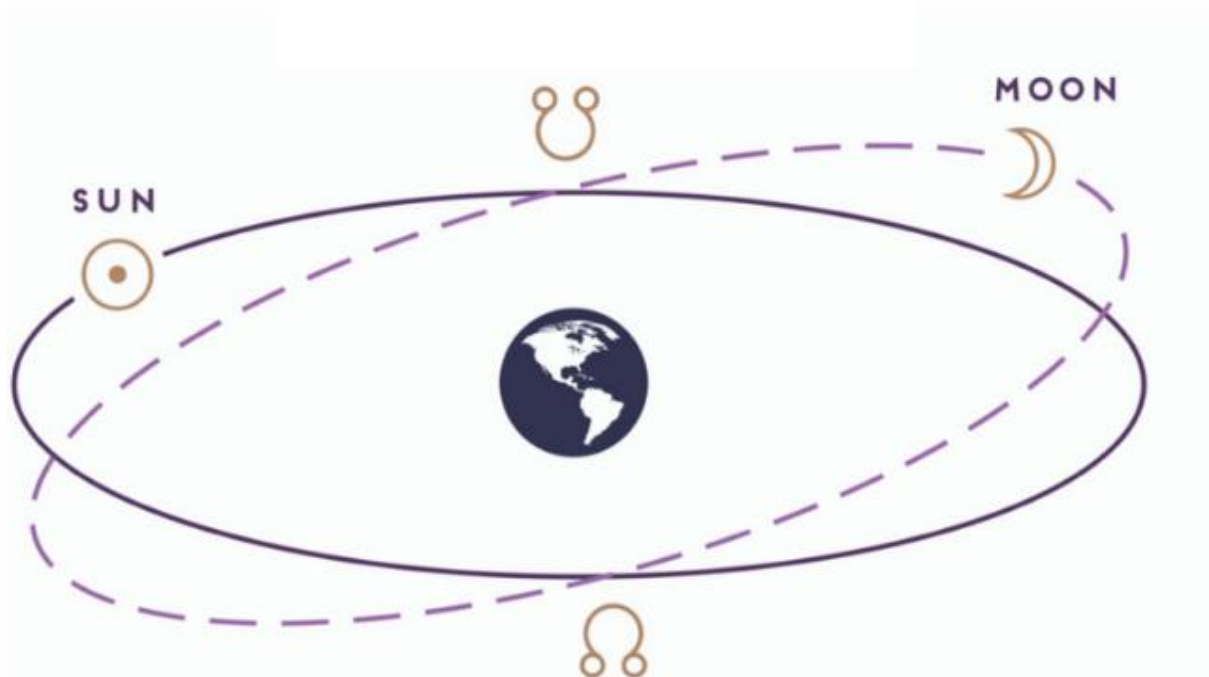


Rahu and Ketu

Looking closer at images of the Tarot green lion and Fuxi and Nuwa, one clearly sees time, stars and constellations and the sun and moon in them.



The above image of Fuxi and Nuwa is basically the same as this celestial diagram.



The intersecting path of the sun and the moon and the lunar nodes.

An expressions of the same concept is seen in the two celestial dragons chasing the flaming pearl. (Eclipse symbolism) If one can read the astronomical symbolic language, this is no different then the image of the gate of Tiwanaku even though they are depicted completed different. Its the underlying concept that is the same.



The dragons as lunar nodes and the path of the sun and moon in relation to earth.

This celestial diagram is captured in stone in temples and "god iconography" worldwide. The snakes on temples are not "decorative" or "they just liked snakes". The two paths the two snakes or dragons. On eclipses "the cosmic snake/dragon" swallows the sun and the moon. This concept was shared amongst cultures that according to the current understanding of things were "unrelated and developed separately".

Yet if one understands what is depicted from an astronomical perspective, its undeniable that the underlying concepts of such expressions are the same across the globe, even though the expressions vary immensely there is a golden thread in it. From the world tree of life, to bird for skygod, the turtle for the world turtle/earth and the usage of the two snakes for the celestial paths of the sun and moon respectively.

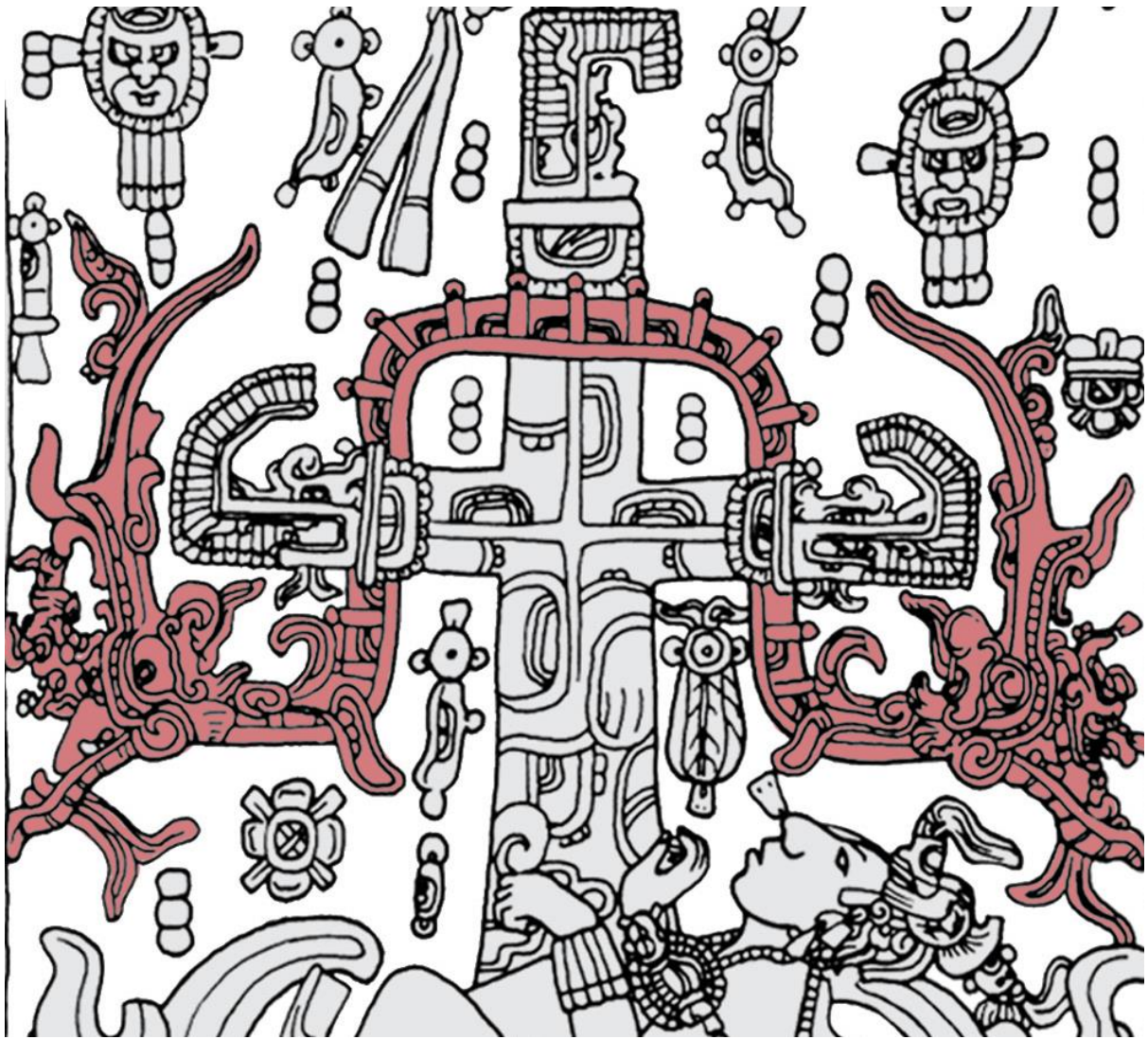


[Mississippian](#) (Cahokia) **Hero Twins** emerging from a crack in the back of a raccoon-faced horned serpent redrawn from an engraved whelk shell by artist Herb Roe.



This is not a man emerging from a snake, but the sun or moon swallowed by "the ecliptic snake".

The anthropologist or archeologist looks at identical art or identical language. By not finding it they conclude there are no relations between cultures. However, they must learn an astronomical language of used metaphores and symbolism and they will find all the relations they need.



The eclectic snakes in King Pakals Tomblid, the sun and moon on either side on top.



The snakes are in the hands of the figure as well, pointing left right sort of on his shoulders, not unlike the Makaras on the shoulders of Budha statues.



"Sungate" at Tiwanaku. In his hands the two ecliptic snakes, or lunar nodes. One snake head down, other snake heads up, the celestial paths. Viracochas depiction here is an early orbital celestial diagram.

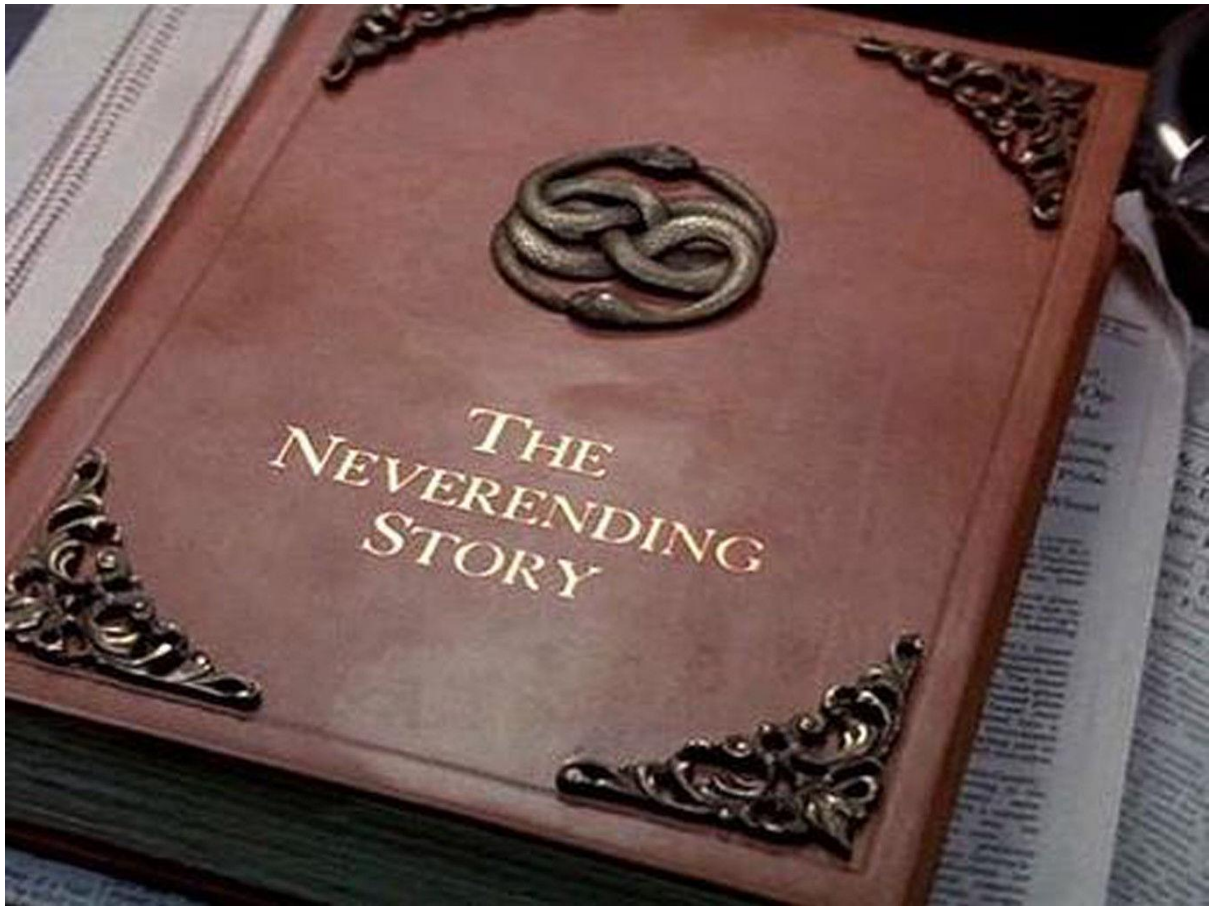
Conclusion:

The answer to the relations of world cultures and their diffusion is not to be found in finding Sumerian clay tablets or Egyptian writing in Meso America. But there are clear recognizable concepts of the world tree and the ecliptic snakes to be found in these cultures that is a "proof of knowing the concept"

For a culture where astronomy played a keyrole, the snakes played a role as they were the "monster that swallowed the sun and the moon" or the lunar nodes. This snake symbolism in relation to the lunar nodes, made its way from Egypt or Sumer to China and eventually became depicted and intertwined (pun intended) as "the hero twins" and snakes on Meso American temples and in their ballcourts. Not because the all liked snakes.

They are the celestial paths of the sun and the moon. An expression of time and the universe itself. Like a snake sheds its skin, a symbol for eternal life like the tree of life, the evergreen pine / Christmas tree full of stars and planets with its polestar on top. Creation and nature keeps regenerating new life, feeding on itself like Kirtimukha.

Whoever designed "The never ending story" book cover was spot on in symbolism and title.



Solar Eclipse



Lunar eclipse or blood moon

Stijn van den Hoven - August 2021