

Friday Jan 28, 1994

This ~~seemingly~~ apparently universal geometric system ~~was~~ is based upon the simplest possible <sup>visual</sup> statement of ritual space. <sup>namely</sup> The four cardinal points and the center. In purely geometric terms ~~it is also~~ <sup>this</sup> the simplest possible geometric scheme for a two dimensional rectangular format. That it is capable of a wide range of adaptability is evidenced in its use in many ~~no~~ visual media. ~~From carved~~ ~~factories~~ <sup>In all of</sup> from jewelry to architecture, ~~where~~ <sup>these</sup> its importance is amply manifested ~~especially~~ in the strictness with which it is applied.

This raises some especially intriguing possibilities. <sup>although</sup> I am aware that ~~any~~ assumptions, especially about these people are always risky, I really do believe that it can <sup>safely</sup> be said that the Maya never did anything without a religious reason. There was no secularism in their serious art or in what we might call their crafts. Even the humblest ceramic <sup>pot</sup> was created with a knowledge of its associations with <sup>the</sup> ~~fine~~ <sup>with</sup> the social center. I feel that <sup>builders</sup> in their pictures, bas reliefs and important temple sculptures, in which ~~the~~ <sup>such a</sup> ritual geometry plays ~~to~~ fundamental role, rich meanings can be <sup>found</sup> ~~in~~ in the close association of its basic plan with geographical and astronomical origins of the quincunx itself. We know that each of the cardinal directions and their individual zones ~~found~~



have special qualities about them which give overtones of meaning to any element placed within them. Their influence.

We know that besides qualities, positive and negative there were other directional associations. Certain trees, ~~colors~~, birds and animals, colors and Calendrical ~~dates~~ days were connected with specific directions as well <sup>the</sup> profound influences of Astronomical events. All of these added up to a kind of inner language <sup>of which</sup> much of which must have been fairly <sup>ones</sup> commonly understood.

Once aware of ~~how~~ <sup>ones</sup> a basic orientation from a center all of these elements <sup>directional</sup> ~~could~~ be read by where they were located in a composition perhaps even in a certain sequence since we are dealing with a ritual space which always implies ritual movement. ~~usually counterbalanced~~ <sup>could</sup> of some kind.

~~I cannot pretend to be able~~

~~I can only say that I suspect this to be true or at least something like it~~

I can say only that I suspect <sup>but</sup> this or something like it to be the case, since my knowledge of Maya symbolism and glyph decipherment is limited I can only speculate

Never the less I have observed some possible clues. Thanks to Justin Kerrs roll out photographs of Maya <sup>ceramics</sup> ~~vases~~ it is possible to see ~~the~~ whole compositions of many wrap around maya vase paintings. In those containing sacrifice penitential



blood letting or prisoner scenes, the figures of these unfortunates are almost always on the left ~~hand~~ side of the central compositional apex and ~~the~~ if possible primarily in the lower left quadrant. The king or high noble is almost always on the right of the same apex and often in the upper right quadrant. I have seen this often enough to suspect a directional motive behind it.

Even in Stela N<sup>o</sup> from Yaprachilan <sup>where</sup> the bowl containing the blood <sup>soaked</sup> offering papers, <sup>which</sup> should be the center <sup>off</sup> for the composition (since the bowl itself is a center) it <sup>has</sup> instead <sup>been</sup> ~~put~~ shifted first to the left of this apex in order to place it in the lower left hand quadrant.

As in so many other of the world's cultures including our own, right ~~hand~~ <sup>and</sup> left handedness have their own special ~~significations~~ meanings. ~~So~~ <sup>to</sup> see this is certainly true among the maya. Time and again the artist has focused on the hands of his figures depicting them in particular, formal and meaningful gestures as a kind of sign language. This emphasis on hands is too obvious to be either decorative or occidental. Who knows, perhaps the hand gestures of the principle personage of a vase painting may give the clue as to the whole painting's meaning since his presence <sup>there</sup> in the first place is ~~what~~ provides the reason



for its insetment.

In the small priest vase with which I began this paper we can see clearly that the old priest chanting his prayers is clearly <sup>in touch</sup> ~~connected~~ <sup>with</sup> all the three worlds. ~~and~~ His left <sup>in</sup> hand firmly on the ground while his right hand in a reinforcing gesture ushers up his prayers.

and the possible

Like wise in the Kimbell vase of the naked sacrificial victim, all the participants in the ritual are heading toward the left (~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> Zone of Sacrifice). The prisoner <sup>himself</sup> is not only to the left of the principle axis occupied by the sacrificer carrying the beheading axe in his <sup>right</sup> hand, but his hands <sup>are tied and are therefore</sup> ~~have been rendered~~ incapable of free ~~expression~~ <sup>vertical</sup> movement and ~~therefore~~ <sup>and thus</sup> of expression or so it seems. Now look more closely. his right hand is on his left side and ~~pointing~~ <sup>very</sup> gesturing very definitely downward. Note the little finger pointing to the underworld. This is the only right hand to do so. ~~The others~~ <sup>those</sup> of the other participants are pointed upward ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~just~~ <sup>and</sup>

and even more

<sup>in which</sup> ~~so~~ importantly have assumed a particular gesture ~~where~~ the circular gap between their thumbs and middle fingers is a direct reference to the same gap in the flint blade of the axe itself. I have noticed this same hand <sup>position</sup> ~~gesture~~ in other depictions of ~~shown~~ <sup>scenes</sup> blood letting, with droplets of blood often ~~depicted~~ falling from them. It appears that this pose of the hand means sacrifice or bloodletting and reinforces



not only the sacrificial nature of the prisoners fate  
but the larger theme <sup>which</sup> states that this offering  
is being made by all the personages <sup>of the painting</sup> involved.

Some interesting speculation could be made  
concerning the leg positions of the figures.  
The man at the far left has stopped <sup>in his movement</sup>, perhaps  
indicating <sup>his</sup> arrival at the designated  
~~lower left hand quadrant~~ sacrificial place.

The prisoner approaches, right leg forward  
in the most active movement of the group  
the other three advance more slowly with their  
left legs forward, again ~~this~~ leftness conveying  
its own <sup>particular</sup> meaning.

All of this is interesting conjecture and  
if it does nothing else it does show how  
wide open this subject is.

It also, perhaps most of all, reveals a  
further dimension in the lives of these remarkable  
people. It shows me that the beauty and balanced  
order we have always responded to in their art  
was the product not just of a sensitive intuitive  
nature but of a carefully thought and planned  
response to a sense of their world <sup>of</sup> and the cosmos too, ~~and~~  
that the splendor these visions shaped and reverberated  
<sup>written them and</sup> within the fabric of all they created speaking to us still  
continues to speak to us.



On page 28 of Pre Columbian art, investigations and insights by Hildegard Pang there are two line drawings of Olmec sculptures over which a geometric scheme has been plotted revealing the use of the Golden mean as the source of the proportions. This is the first investigation of this type that I have seen in pre Columbian art studies and the only ~~others that I am~~ one other than my own of which I am aware. I included them in this work because of the fascinating problems it raises.

~~The way it has been worked~~

Alongside these examples I have worked my own ~~to~~ ~~as~~ to for comparison.

What intrigues me most about the de la fuente examples is how beautifully many of the lines do work and how closely others come to important features on the face. For all practical purposes as far as he has carried it the scheme seems to be ~~the~~ appropriate to the work.

And yet these works were not planned from this ~~golden mean~~ <sup>approach</sup> system. You will see in my ritual ~~system~~ which encompasses the entire figure that there is a greater and a cleaner correspondance of the lines to the sculpted features. Although both <sup>of these</sup> systems share the <sup>some centered</sup> ~~central~~ horizontal and vertical axes.