

On the Origin of Certain Symbols

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Delivered to Oracle Lodge 1003, Dublin, 09th January 2006

Introduction

Venus has long been source of interest on earth. As far back as the Sumerian empire, it has drawn the wonder and study of astronomers and philosophers. Indeed, when in modern times, UFO sightings began to increase and gain widespread media attention, no less a source than the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena said that at least two thirds of all UFO sightings can be attributed to misidentifications of the planet Venus. This fact alone indicates how spectacular Venus can be in the late evening or early morning sky.

The movement of Venus then has led it to be referred to as the Morning Star, the Evening Star and even the Mother of Light as it has been attributed the role of intercessor between the sun and the Earth.

This level of attention and veneration for Venus was common among many of the ancient civilisations that had an interest in astronomy from the Yucatan peninsula to the Mesopotamia. It is no great leap then, to infer that its influence can be deeply felt in esoteric traditions around the world.

As various ancient civilisations have shown their skills in astronomy by building observatories to help them track and mark the movement of heavenly bodies, such as Stonehenge, Newgrange and the Goseck Circle, it is now accepted that the ancients achieved a high level of accuracy in tracking the often paradoxical movements of the nearest heavenly spheres. The patterns of these movements were expressed mathematically by such luminaries as Copernicus and Galileo, but, many modern researchers have theorised that the ancients may have worked out the heliocentric nature of the solar system and thus grasped the orbits of the planets as they would appear from earth. However, this is an assumption, but there is arguably, much circumstantial evidence to support the position.

One such piece of evidence is the usage of certain symbols in ancient esoteric traditions around the world, namely the pentagram, or five pointed star, and the hexagram, or six pointed star.

The Path of Venus

The orbit of Venus around the sun is inside that of Earth's, Venus being some 38 million kilometres closer to the sun. Venus also travels faster than earth in that orbit with a mean orbital speed of some 35km/s compared to around 29.8km/s for earth. The combination of smaller orbit and faster speeds means that Venus orbits ten times for every eight from earth.

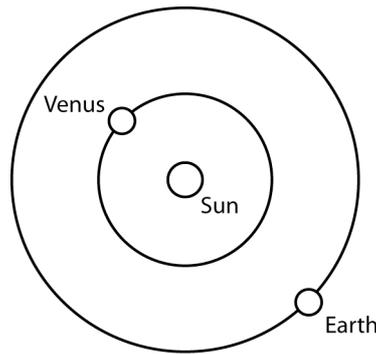


Figure 1. A conjunction between Earth and Venus

In observing Venus and its orbit, a major marking point is called a conjunction. This is when the earth, Venus and sun all line up together. There are two variations no this, first of all when Venus is directly on the far side of the sun in relation to the earth and secondly when it is between the earth and the sun. The former is known as a Superior Conjunction, the latter an Inferior.

Taking the eight years of earth orbits compared to the ten of Venus gives, a cycle whereby both planets would start and finish in the same positions relative to each other, the plot of the conjunctions produces a familiar trace.

In the two circles, each representing the zodiac as followed by the sun, marked on one is the position of the superior conjunctions and the order in which they occur. On the other circle, is marked the positions of the inferior conjunctions and the order in which they occur. In both cases, a line is drawn between position one and position two, then position two and position three and so on. The figure of the pentagram is clearly visible in the traces.

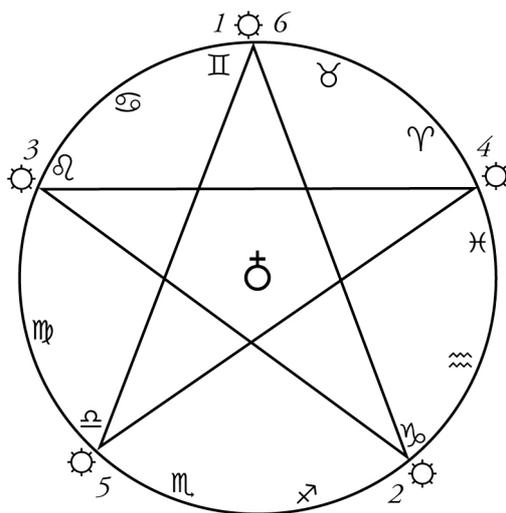


Figure 2. Distribution and sequence of the superior conjunctions of Venus and Sun in 1952-61.

- 1 1952 June 24
- 2 1954 Jan 30
- 3 1955 Sep 1
- 4 1957 April 14
- 5 1958 Nov 11
- 6 1960 June 22

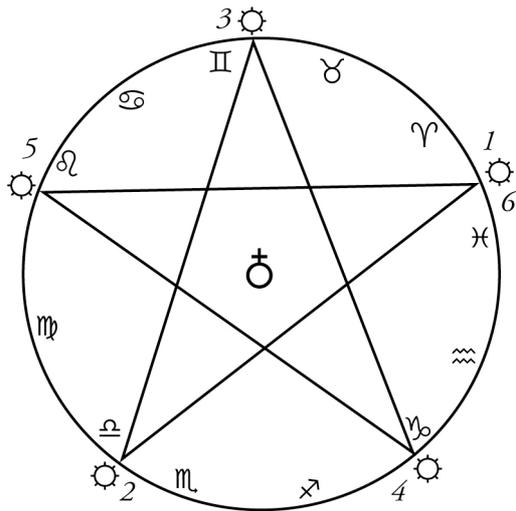


Figure 3. Distribution and sequence of the inferior conjunctions of Venus and Sun in 1952-61.

- 1 1953 April 13
- 2 1954 Nov 15
- 3 1956 June 22
- 4 1958 Jan 28
- 5 1959 Sep 3
- 6 1963 April 12

Figures 2 and 3. Movement and Rythms of the Stars

Mercury

Mercury too and its progression of conjunctions yields an interesting pattern. Its even shorter and faster orbit means that there are six conjunctions three inferior and three superior in each earth orbit. Mercury completes three orbits in less than 50 weeks.

Following the same procedure as for Venus, tracing the pattern of major and minor conjunctions on the circles described by the respective orbits of Mercury and earth reveals a surprisingly familiar pattern.

Again, joining the conjunctions via lines from the first to thee second, the second to the third and the third to the first, the result is a hexagram.

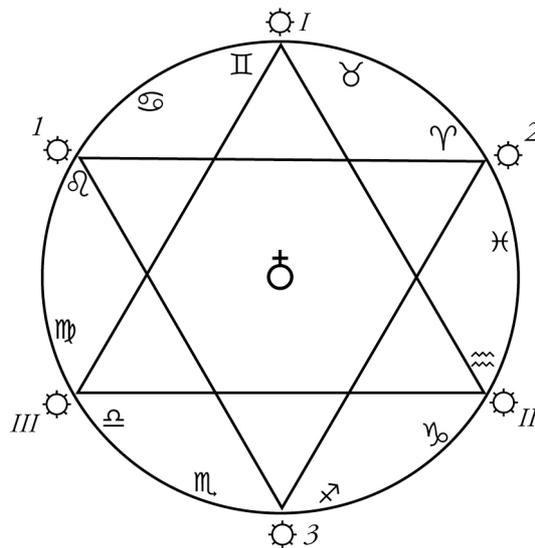


Figure 4. The Rythms of Mercury

Hexagram of the most important positions of Mercury during one year. The superior conjunctions (I, II, III) are drawn schematically in the same manner as the inferior conjunctions (1, 2, 3).

The Import

Obviously, these observations are nothing new and must have struck each student of either esoteric or astronomical schools as they progressed through their studies. However, it is rare that a possible physical grounding can be found for any symbol widely used in esoteric, ritual or religious traditions.

While arguably it is something of a leap to assert that the ancient Mesopotamians, Sumerians, Egyptians or Mayans, were not only aware of a heliocentric solar system but had the sophistication to determine the planetary movements with such accuracy as to derive the figures above, there is evidence to support the position. The stunning accuracy of certain ancient calendars, particularly the self-correcting Mayan calendar, would provide a reasonable basis for this assertion. As all of the ancient calendars were based on celestial observation, one must attribute a certain level of observational, record and mathematical sophistication to these various civilisations.

Following on, it is no small wonder that the two figures derived, the pentagram and the hexagram, figure so prominently in esoteric, zodiacal and ritualistic traditions of the various cultures who looked with such fervency at the night sky.

To look at the possible esoteric meaning of an astronomical origin for these symbols, as a context to their esoteric usage, would be a mammoth undertaking indeed. However, there are possible echoes in various extant traditions, as an ancient Roman proverb, probably derived from Greek roots, states “Ex astris, scientia” or from the stars, knowledge and from the pen of the perhaps legendary Hermes Trismegistos, states “As above, so below”.

Each can be interpreted as suggesting that not only does wisdom emanate from the heavens and its various bodies, but that from the great spheres of the heavens to the very minutia of the world, one reflects the other.

NOTES

Illustrations:

Page 122, *Movement and Rhythms of the Stars*; SCHULTZ, Joachim (translated by John Meeks); English Version - Edinburgh, Floris Books (Anthroposophic Press); 1986

Page 137, *Movement and Rhythms of the Stars*; SCHULTZ, Joachim (translated by John Meeks); English Version - Edinburgh, Floris Books (Anthroposophic Press); 1986