

# A Unique Expression of the Venus Star Symbol Among the Petroglyphs of the Lower Colorado River

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Over the years, researchers with a serious interest in the potential of so-called "rock art" (e.g., petroglyphs and pictographs) to contained actual prehistoric communications (as opposed to simple "doodling" on the other end of the spectrum) have long recognized that many very similar images or symbols are found over a wide geographic area. A suggestion is often made that a particular symbol which has been used over a wide area may hold the same meaning or intention in all areas of it's use. The same is true for symbols which endure through time with only slight change. It is dangerous, however, to assume that the original meaning or intent of such a symbol has remained unchanged. Only quality unbiased research can somewhat relieve the problem of symbol intention or meaning in time and space.

In much of the New World over the years, researchers have come to recognize a particular symbol which has been variously called the "outlined," "boxed," or "enclosed" cross which most commonly has this appearance:



However, it can have a number of varieties of expressions (see Figure 1). This symbol is very common in southern and western Arizona, and in southern California, and is found in parts of much of the western hemisphere (Figure 2.). The author has noted that few other symbols appear to have such a wide distribution in both area and time. As such, it was believed that possibly this symbol could be traced to the general area and time of it's original meaning.

A number of years ago the author spent a special day with the world-famous Hopi elder and teacher, Mr. Thomas Banyacya, at Sears Point petroglyph site on the Gila River in southern Arizona. That day was exceptional for the author because he learned clearly for the first time that petroglyphs are indeed a medium of communication by ancient people. Mr Banyacya located many petroglyphs symbols of which he was fully aware of their origin and meaning. Many symbols were identified as ancient Hopi clan symbols. According to Mr. Banyacya, one of the four ancient migration routes of the Anasazi/Hopi people came from the Four Corners area and down the Colorado River, then east up the Gila River, and finally back to the north via the Verde River Valley to their first "modern Hopi" villages today known as Oraibi. Mr. Banyacya became very excited when we located the ancient clan symbol for his own family clan, which is "corn born of water.

The glyph does illustrate well a somewhat stylized ear of corn emerging out of water. However, the author's most vivid learning experience was at a very large panel of petroglyphs at the Sears Point site which Mr. Banyacya called a picture story about the original creation. In addition to many symbols which Mr. Banyacya discussed in much detail, each relating as part of the Hopi creation account, he pointed to an outlined cross symbol in the far upper right corner of the panel and identified it as the Morning Star Venus (Figure 3). Then he explained, as we viewed the panel

toward the eastern sky, how the Venus Star was in the appropriate place on the panel to represent the actual sky position of the real star, Venus.

Finally, he noted that Venus symbolically represented the rising of the Hopi Creator into eastern sky (Banyacya, Personal Communication, 1982). The Hopi people today expect the return of the sky god back to the earth from the eastern sky in the not too distant future. They call him Pahana, the returning white brother (Kaiser 1991:60-76, and Boissiere 1990:67-92). (See also Figure 4 for a similar panel from Atlatl Rock, Nevada.)

Over many years of research by the author concerning the personage of the Native American creator (who is known variously as Kukulcan to the Maya, Quetzalcoatl to the Aztec, Viracocha to the Inca, and Kumastamho to the Quechan, to name only a few), it is now clear that to the natives of America, the rising of the Morning Star of Venus is symbolic of the rising of the creator from death to rebirth. The very same relationship exists between the Morning Venus and each of the multi-named Native American creator persons. Mesoamerica researchers have been successful in identifying several Venus Star symbols which were used by the Maya, Toltec, and Aztec cultures to identify the Creator (Sejourne 1976:65-74, 89-96; Spindel 1975:93; Aveni 1979:274-285).

One of the symbols used by these cultures to identify the rebirth of the creator Quetzalcoatl is an outlined cross. We learn from Agustin Villagra, a specialist in pre-Columbia art in Mexico, that the Aztec creation god after being on earth, became an astral or sky god who "Occurs in the Mexican iconographic system in both anthropomorphic and serpent form, and he is also symbolized by the Morning Star, often in the form of an outlined cross" (Villagra 1954:80). (See Figure 2; C-F) Upon learning that the Aztec version of the outlined cross is similar to those in the southwest, the author wondered if that symbol had indeed retained it's basic image and meaning through time from southern Mexico to the southwestern United States. This question was posed at the symposium of the National Pictographic Society in Vernal, Utah, in 1990. At that symposium were Mary and Alex Patterson, avid researchers on the distribution and meaning of Native American symbols. Mary and Alex took on the task to learn if the Venus Star symbol had connections between Mesoamerica and the southwest. Their research concluded that indeed there is good reason to believe that a connection can be made in both time and geographic area (Patterson 1991). A powerful confirmation of this proposed connection comes from the Native Americans of Arizona, who have no question about the meaning of the outlined cross in the southwest. To them it is the symbol of the rebirth of the creator.

The above discussion represents only the first half of the question of the outlined cross - Venus Star - Quetzalcoatl - rebirth connection. The second half of the discussion emerges at the author noted that within the lower Colorado River region a number of double Venus Stars are present at petroglyph sites, and occasionally together with the regular Venus Stars at some sites (Figure 5 and 6). The questions are posed: What does the double star mean? Does it have a connection with the regular Venus Star, etc.? The author and the Patterson sought input from other researchers and Native Americans. And indeed, information was forthcoming. Many researchers sent the author photographs and locations, but none of them knew much about the meaning of the double Venus Star. The author did learn that the double Venus Star (sometimes called the twin Venus Star) is found or known in several areas of northern Mexico and the American southwest. The twin Venus Star motif has survived among both the Hopi and Navaho people - the Navaho often



using the twin stars as a central design on many of their rugs.

However, it was again the research of Alex and Mary Patterson who later were able to demonstrate the connection between the single and double star symbols of the southwest with those found in Mexico. At a site known as El Tecomate in Sinaloa, Mexico, as originally reported by Ortiz de Zarate in 1976, the Pattersons found good evidence that both figures are related to the creator Quetzalcoatl. Ortiz states that :

*The most interesting type (of cross) is found in El Tecomate and at the foot of the Mjada de Arriba (in the State of Sinaloa, Mexico), for without doubt they seem to be the same type of crosses that are in Tula, Hidalgo and other places (in Mexico) represent Quetzalcoatl, under the aspect of the "Morning Star" or "Venus."*

To add further weight to what has been shown about the aforementioned god, in one of the petroglyphs from El Tecomate (upper left, top row, Figure 7), the god would seem for certain to be speaking, because of the commas which are exiting from the image (an indication of speech in the Codices of ancient Mexico). (Patterson 1992:76 after Ortiz de Zarate 1976:61-62, 117.)

The El Tecomate, Mexico, site is part of our answer. At this site we see examples of both the single and double Venus Stars which are almost identical to those we see along the Colorado and Gila Rivers (see Figure 7). The major addition from the El Tecomate site is the use of a speech scroll which extends from the outlined cross in the upper left side of Figure 2. This speech scroll helps us identify the Venus Star as a person who speaks. The Venus Star figure found at the great Aztec Temple city complex of Teotihuacan is known to represent Quetzalcoatl, and has four speech scrolls preceding from it (see Figure 8, from Sejourne 1976:90). The El Tecomate and Teotihuacan illustrations leave little doubt that the Venus images of the Colorado River region are connected with those of Mexico. The regular and double Venus Star symbols are found all the way down into South America (Figure 9).

Perhaps the most enlightening information about the double or twin Venus Star was learned while visiting with some members of the local Quechan tribe about the nature of the double cross. The answer emerged - the double star was indeed a Venus Star. In fact, a double Venus Star (Figures 5 and 6). The lower part represents the evening aspect to Venus as it sinks below the western horizon. The western aspect of Venus represents the death of the creator Kumastamho as he goes "into the underground." The upper part represents the return of Venus after being "underground" for 8 days. The beauty of the rising Morning or Dawn star represents the rising of the creator from his death in the underworld to the newness of life - a rebirth or resurrection of the creator. What the Quechan shared with the author is exactly what the Mayan have said about Venus and Kukulcan/Quetzalcoatl for a very long time (Aveni 1979:274-285; Hadingham 1984:226-270) (see Figures 10 and 11 for various examples.) It is not an accident that the same themes about the creator exist in ancient Mexico and in the ancient southwest. Kukulcan of the Maya, Quetzalcoatl of the Aztec, Pahana of the Hopi, and Kumastamho of the Quechan and Mohave people are all the same individual.

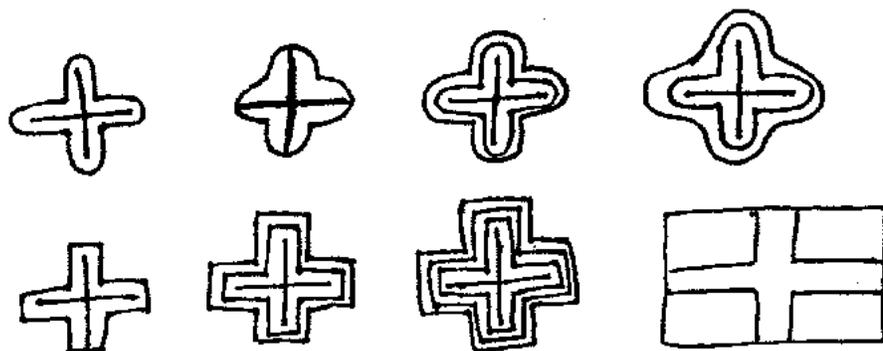


Figure 1 (A) Various styles of outlined crosses known in the Americas.

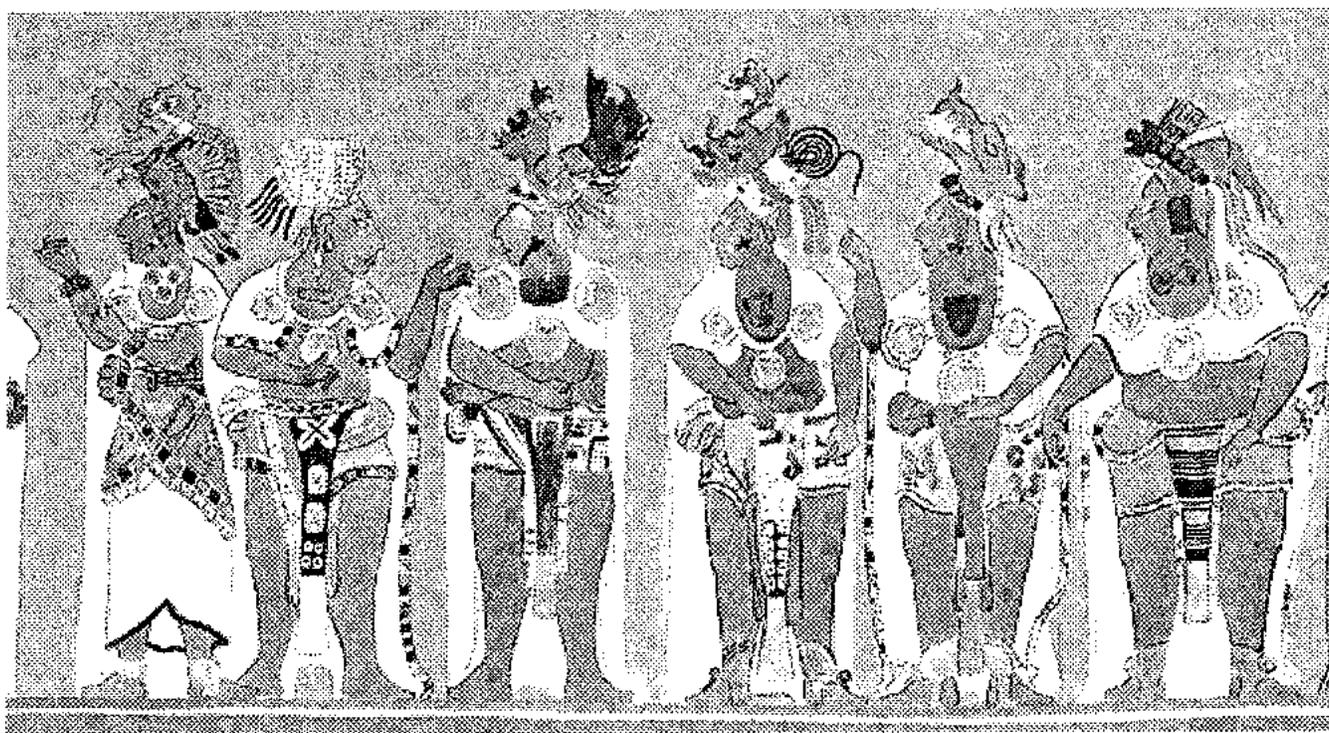
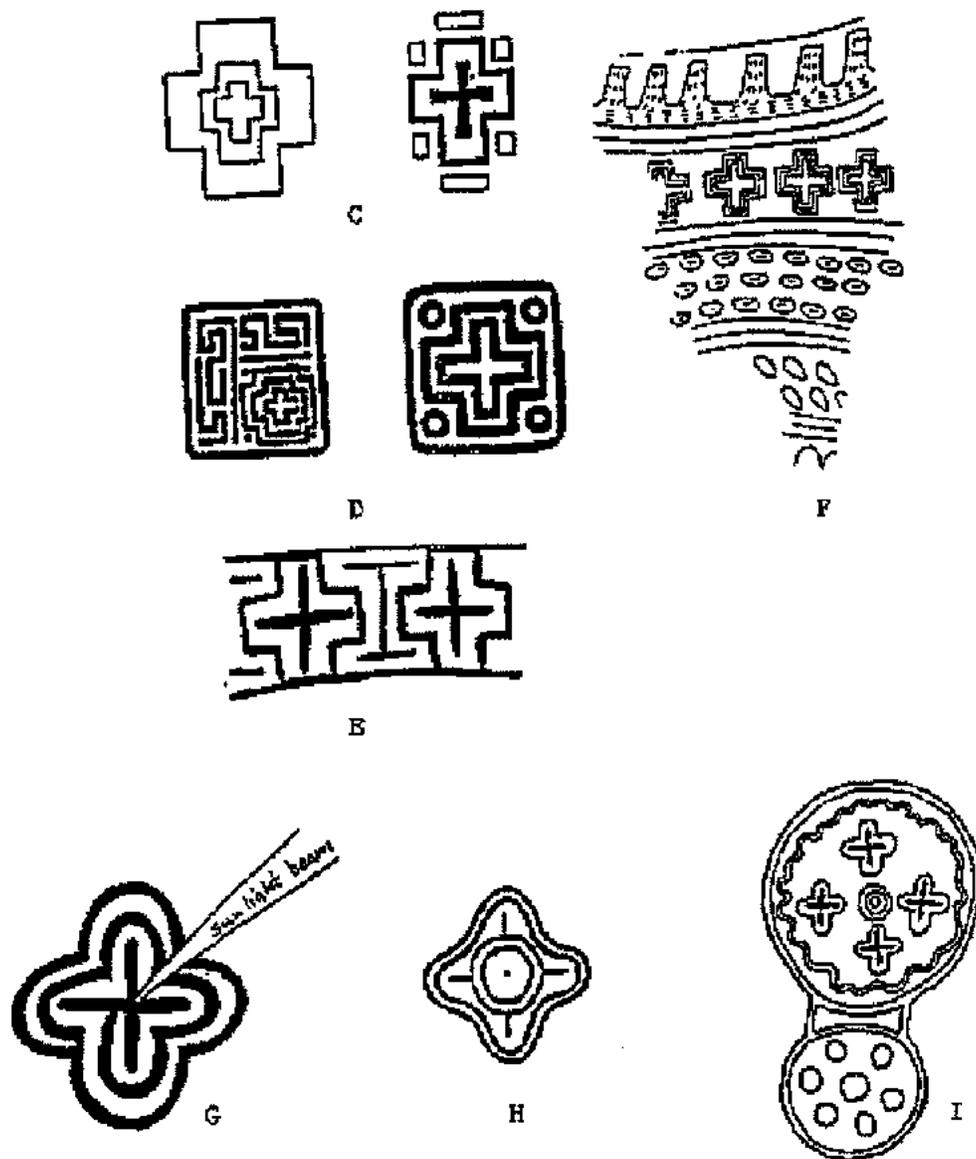
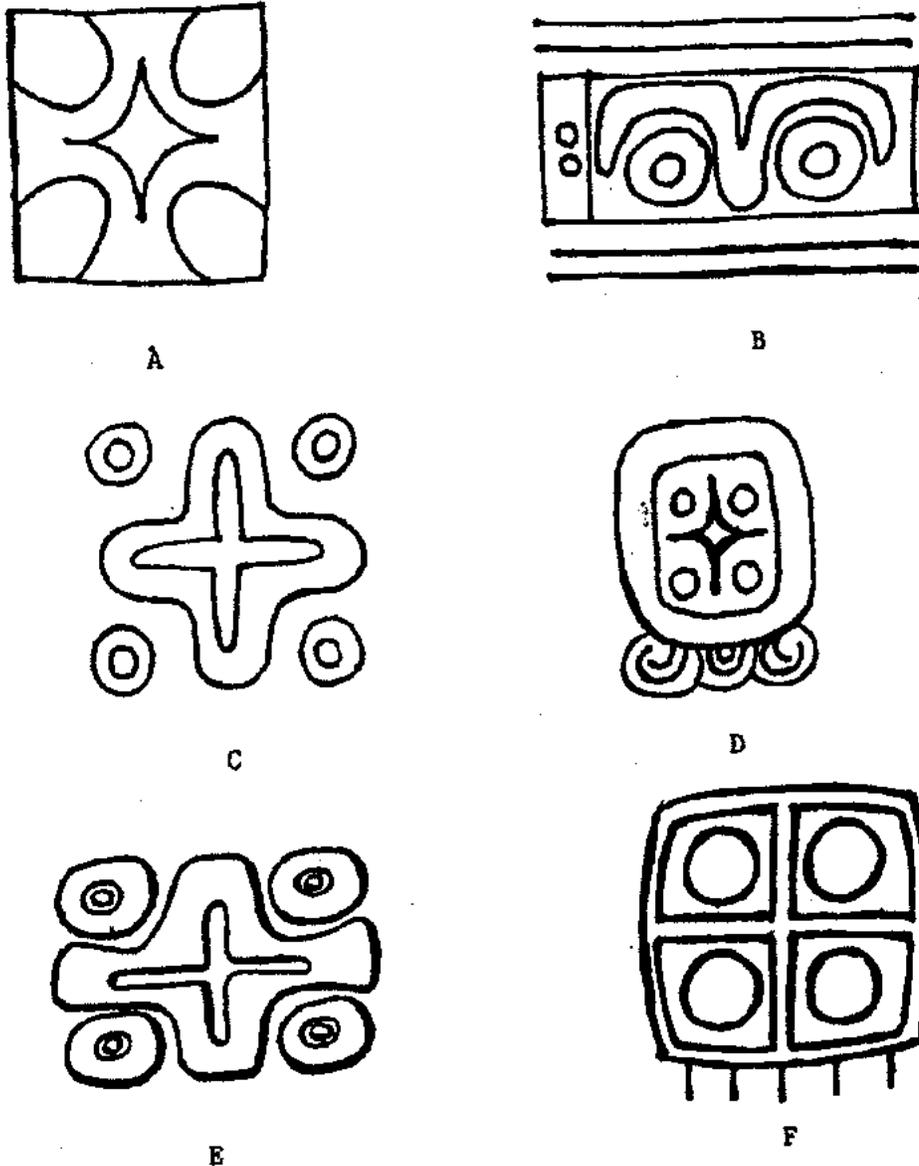


Figure 1 (B) A high Priest painted in a mural in at Bonampak, southern Mexico, dating around A.D. 800-850, is wearing an outlined cross on his waist (second from left to right) (Leonard 1967:111)



**Figure 1 Continued.** Square-ended outlined crosses; (C) Ceiba Island, Nicaragua; (D) Valley of Mexico; (E) Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico; (F) Spiro Mound, Oklahoma. Various other styles; (G) Archaeoastronomical "sundagger" and cross at Petrified Forest, Arizona; (H) Mound culture style, southeastern United States; (I) Modern survival of outlined cross among

the Huichol culture of the Sierra Modres, central Mexico (Mallory 1889:730, Hamilton 1981:261, Funderburke & Foreman 1957, Berrin 1978:66).



**Figure 2, Various symbols from ancient Mexico which represent Venus, the Morning Star of the Eastern Sky. Venus in Mayan, Toltec, and Aztec cultures symbolized the rebirth of Quetzalcoatl, The Feathered Serpent God of Creation. Sources of various glyphs: (A) Dresden Codex (Spinden 1975:93); (B) Palenque Ruin, Yucatan; (C) (Waters 1975:180); (D) (Schele and Miller 1986:318); (E) (Seler 1963:191); (F) (Miller 1977:113-114).**

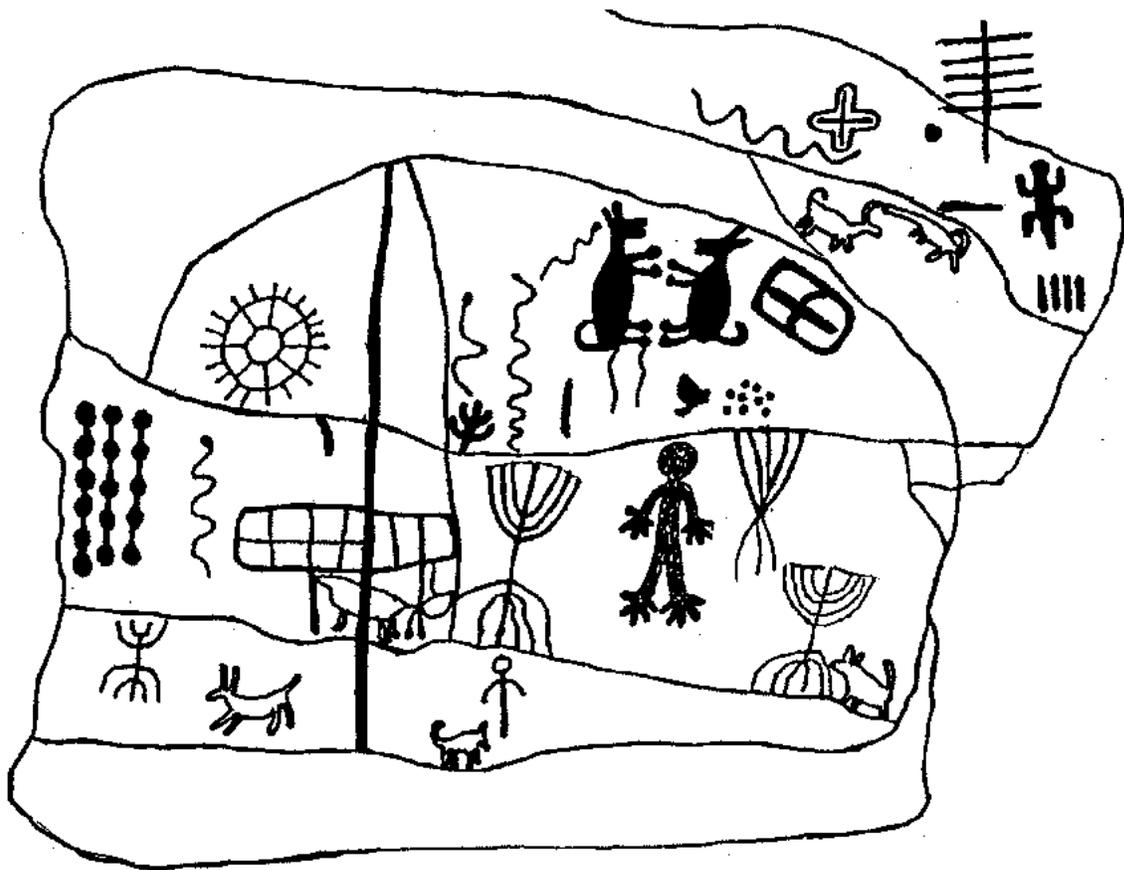
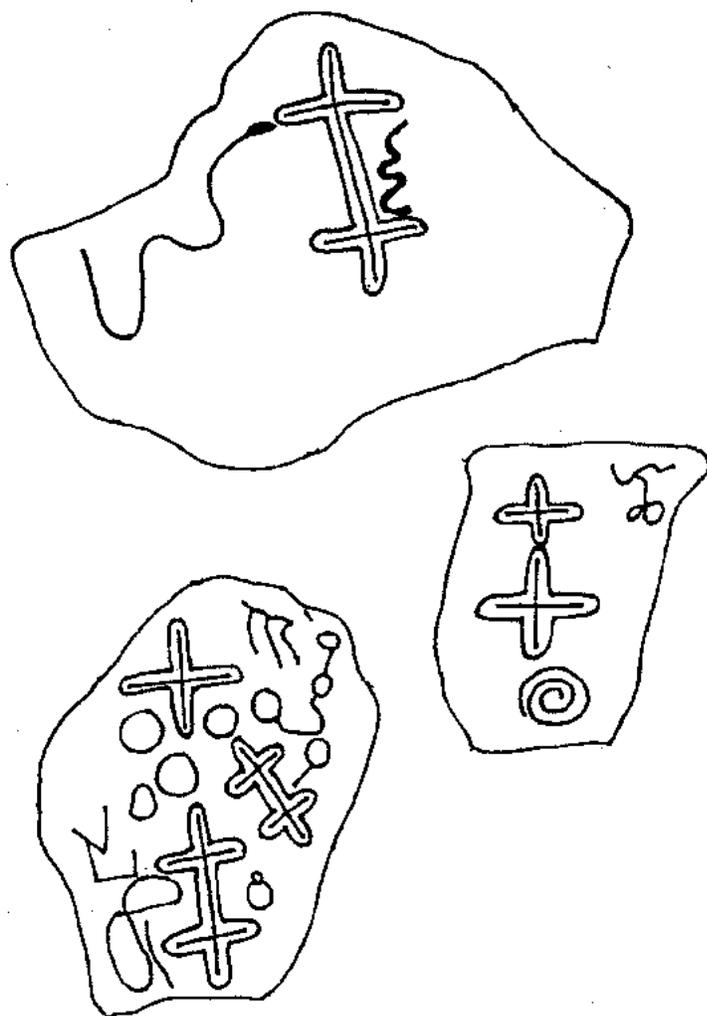


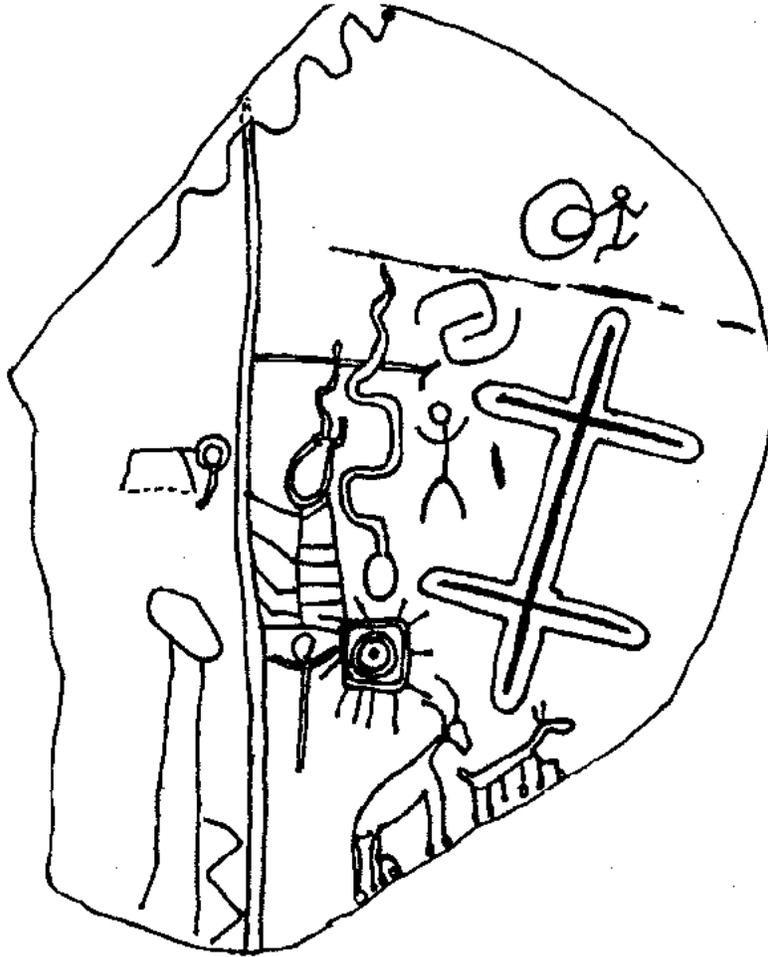
Figure 3. The creation story panel at the Sears Point Site, Lower Gila River, Arizona. Note the Venus Star figure in the upper right corner of the panel.



Figure 4. A typical use of the outlined cross as part of a large panel context. This panel is part of the Atlatl Rock Site, Valley of Fire, Nevada (after Schaafsma 1971:122).



**Figure 5.** Three petroglyph panels at the North Kofa Site (Kofa Game Range, Arizona) with varieties of the single and double Venus Stars. Note the similarity to the outlined cross figures from South America and the Caribbean (Figure 7).



**Figure 6.** A double Venus Star symbol associated with a Path of Life symbol and descending serpent enroute to the hole in the ground where it disappears into the underground, as also symbolized by the lower of the two cross symbols. Later in the legend the serpent will re-emerge, then ascend into the sky via a hole in the sky. Located at the Dripping Springs Site south of Quartzsite, Arizona.

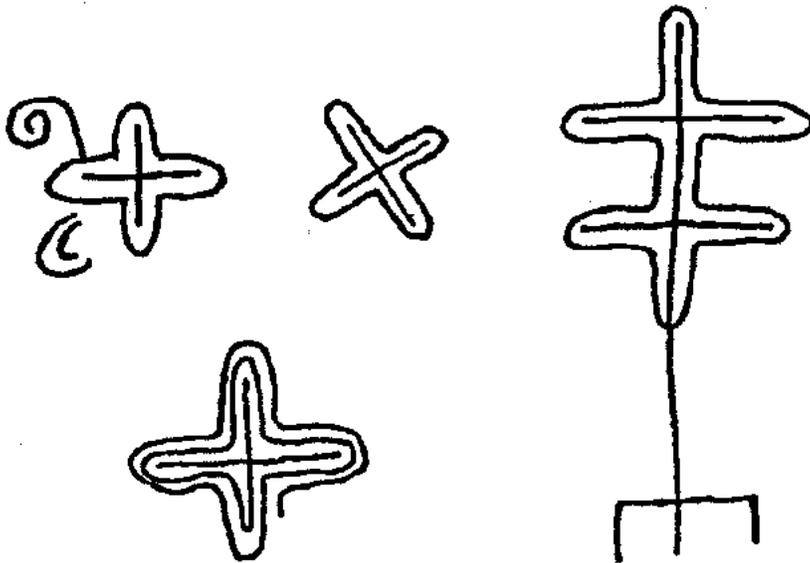


Figure 7. Examples of the single and double Venus Star symbol of Quetzalcoatl from El Tecomate, Sinaloa, Mexico. (Patterson 1992:76, after Ortiz de Zarate 1976:61-62, 117).

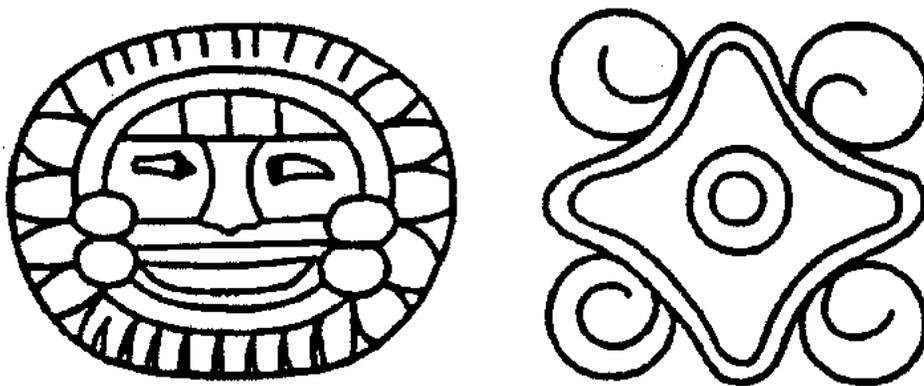
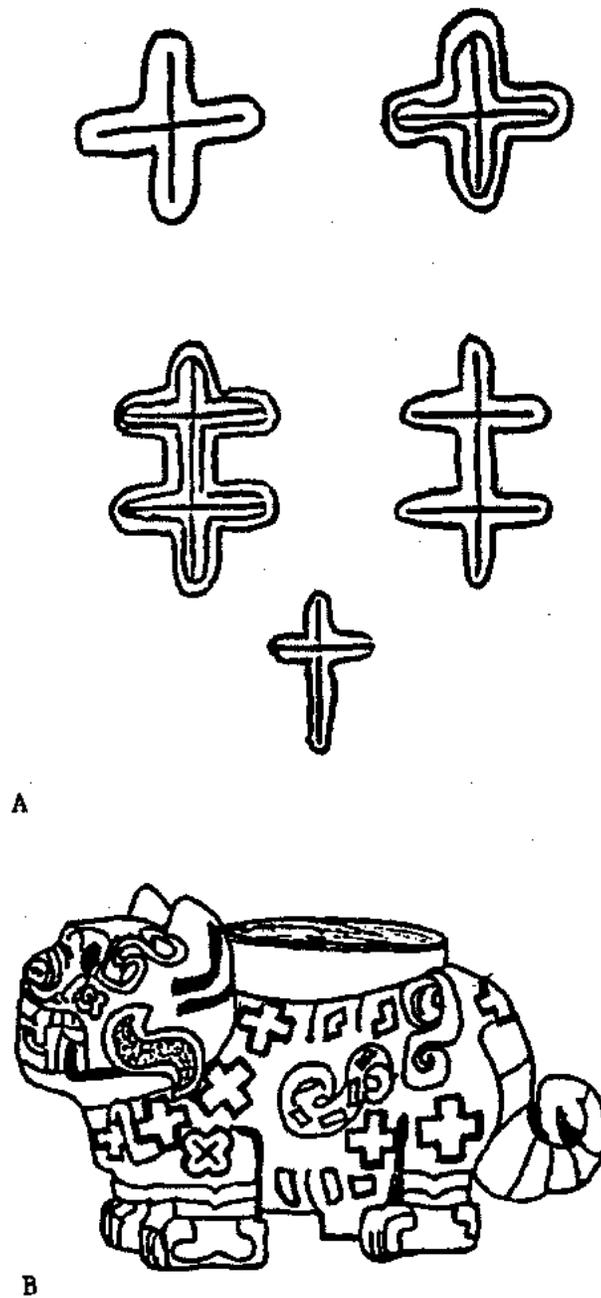


Figure 8. This face, symbolizing the Fifth Sun or Quetzalcoatl, alternates with the sign of Venus (right) to frame a door in one of the palaces at the huge Aztec temple complex at Teotihuacan (Sejourne 1976:90)



**Figure 9.** The outlined cross is commonly found through much of the South American Cordillera and the Caribbean Antilles. Note the outlined cross on the shoulder and cheek of a carved stone Puma from the Chavin culture of pre-Spanish Peru. This symbol is also a Venus symbol in that country. (A). (Subelaar 1968:107-108, after Patterson 1991:) (B) (Mason 1957:37)

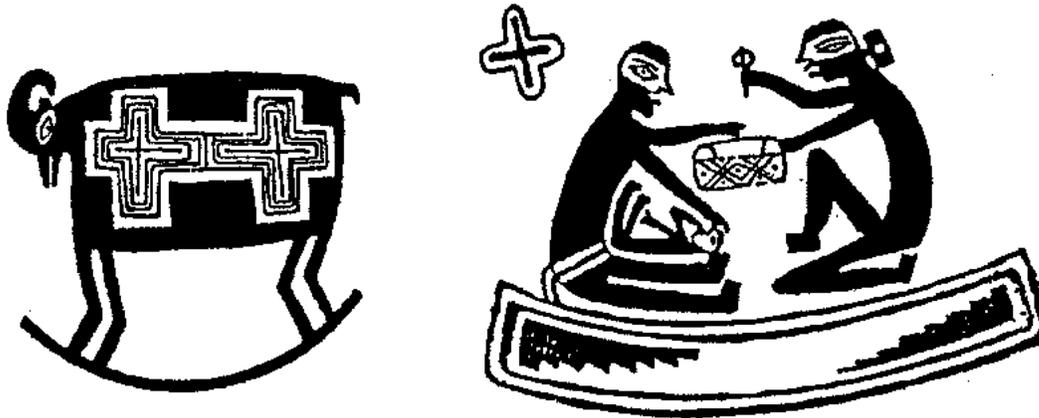


Figure 10. Examples of the outlined cross on Mimbres pottery from New Mexico. The square ended double Venus Star is somewhat unique. Several single Venus Stars of this style are found at the Eagletail Mountains petroglyph site in western Arizona (Patterson1991:24).

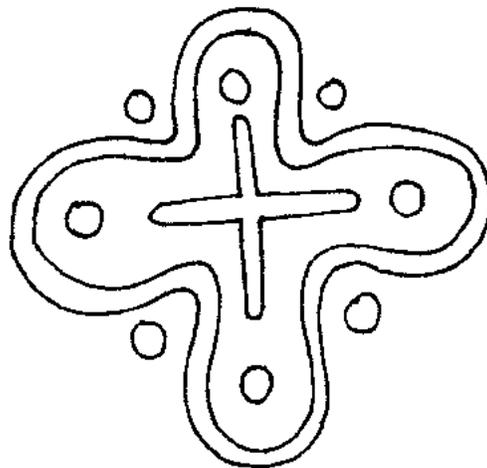


Figure 11. An interesting type of outlined cross found in Valcamonica, Italy. At present, the author does not know the meaning of this symbol to the prehistoric Italians.

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