

Asia in America: The Puzzle of Similar Symbols

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In an effort to understand the meanings of the rock art symbols found in the Southwest, I have been studying the symbols found elsewhere, especially Asia. It has been the accepted belief that the early inhabitants of the Americas came from Asia, either across the Bering Straits (by land bridge or by boat) or raft across the Pacific. Could they have brought their symbols with them?

Our research on the symbols of India, Tibet and China puzzled us. There seem to be surprising similarities with the symbols we find in the Southwest, particularly in the Anasazi culture area of Arizona and Utah.

India was the birthplace of Buddhism and the Buddha (born about 550 B.C). His teachings spread over Asia by 1,000 AD. Initially Buddha was considered too holy to be depicted in human form (Coosmaraswamy 1972:1). He was depicted only by certain symbols from his life: the Bodhi tree under which he was enlightened, the wheel of his doctrine, and the Stupa or burial shrine that held holy relics (Schulberg 1968:62) (Figure 1). Above each symbol was the topknot, made of parasol(s) against the sun and garlands of flowers, which honored any holy or kingly person on public appearances. This multi-level topknot idea evolved over the centuries into the Asian pagoda buildings of the recent past (Sechel 1964:114) (Figure 2).

In northern Arizona and southern Utah, there are numerous petroglyphs with single and multiple arcs appearing over the heads of anthropomorphs, similar to the topknots of Asian iconography (Figure 3). Grant (second image from right) attributes this pictograph in Canyon del Muerto, northern Arizona, to the Basketmaker/Modified Basketmaker period (AD? to AD 700). He also comments on the top of the head and left ear devices as being connected "with shamanic attributes, including 'power' of some sort" (Grant 1978: 261).

Multiple layers of heavens (and hells) seem to be frequent imagery in cultures around the world. Miguel Leon-Portilla describes the 11 levels of the 13 heavens of the Aztecs of Mesoamerica (Figure 3). "These heavens are comparable to a blue dome", separated by "celestial crossbars" (Leon-Portilla 1963:59). In the Buddhist universe there are the "Immeasurable spheres of the twenty-eight different heavens", arising around the sacred Mountain Meru in India (Lauf 1972:37).

Mystics through the ages have seen layers of colored light (Figure 4) around heads of people, especially those considered godly. Scientists today are studying this phenomenon (Brennan 1987: chapter 5).

Besides the topknot symbols there are others found on coins of India, circa 300 BC to 300 AD, which seem similar to rock art symbols of Arizona and Utah. The top row of Buddhist symbols in Fig-

ure 5, D 1-4, the *Stupa*, or burial mound seems like the Hopi cloud symbol (Figure 6) (Patterson 1992:60). The next symbol, C 1-2 and A 1-4, the wheel of doctrine and the lotus (Figure 5) are similar to the octagon symbol of *Muingwa*, the Hopi germination god (Figure 6) (Patterson 1994:235). Another symbol, B 1-4, the tree surrounded by a railing, signifying Buddha's received illumination (Figure 5), is found frequently (without the railing) as the tree or plant or centipede or one pole ladder symbols (Figure 6) (Patterson 1992:58).

J. Allan, Curator of the British Museum, produced a summary of the coins of Taxila, an ancient city in north India which lies at the foot of the Kyber Pass—the main trading entry and exit from India to Europe and Asia (Figure 7). Allan based his nomenclature on the work of Sir Alexander Cunningham, the original authority on Indian coins. Note that Allan uses "Mountains" for what Foucher had called "*the Stupa*, or burial mound." Allan adds the *Svastika* (*Swastika*), the Hollow Cross, and the River to his menu of Indian signs, symbols found often in the Southwest.

In summary, there are seven similar symbols: arc(s) over the head, topknot, clouds, Stupa or mountain, wheel or octagon, tree, swastika, hollow cross, and river. It remains an intriguing puzzle to us.

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FIGURES

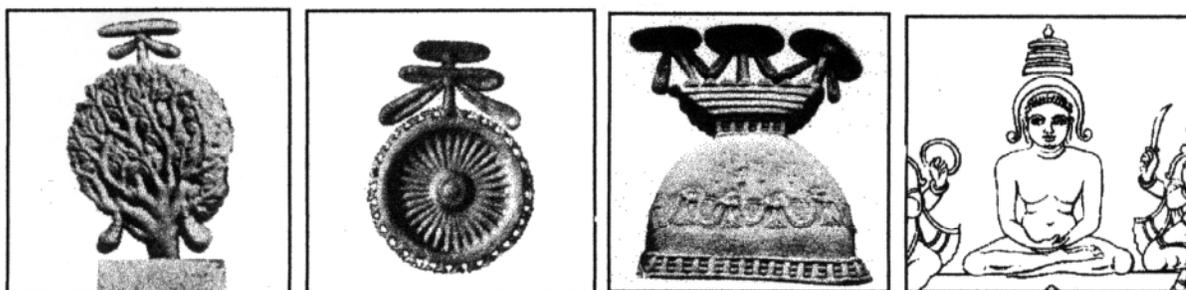


Figure 1. Buddha's symbols with topknots. Left to right: the bodhi tree where Buddha was enlightened, the wheel of his doctrine, Stupa or burial holding holy relics. All are Sanchi, India (Schulberg 1968). Far right: later Jain holy man (India) with topknots (Herman 1974:120).

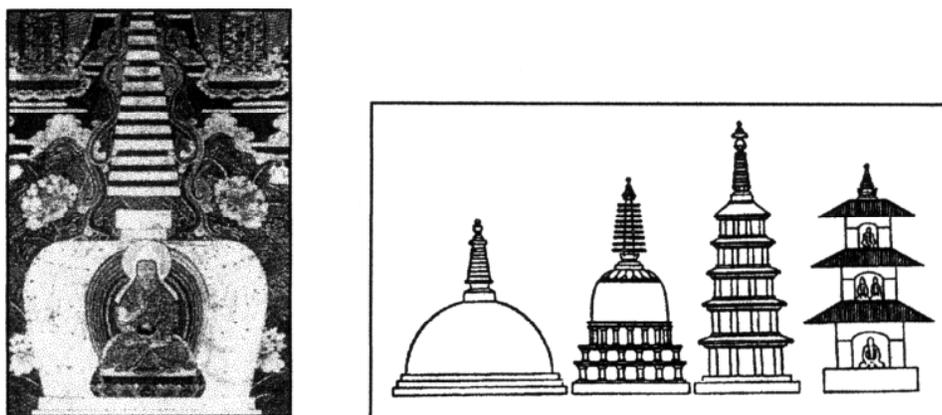


Figure 2. Left: Lamist painting of holy man and Stupa with multi-topknot Mongolia 18th century (Laut 1972:89). Right: Evolution of Indian Stupa with topknots, into Asian pagodas with multi-roofs (Sechel 1964:114)

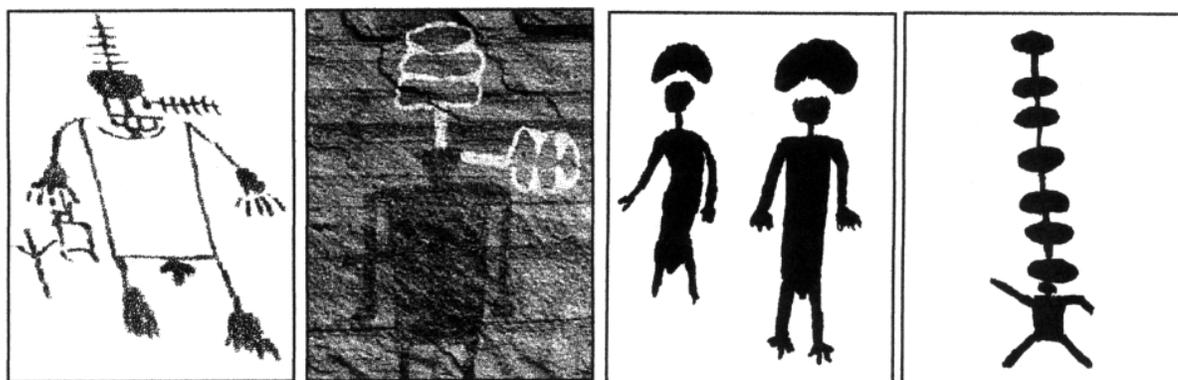


Figure 3. Topknots in Utah and Arizona Rock Art. Left to right: Butler Wash, San Juan River, Utah; Canyon del Muerto, Arizona (Grant 1978:261); figures at Dawwa Park, Hopi Res., Arizona. (From author's photos except Grant).

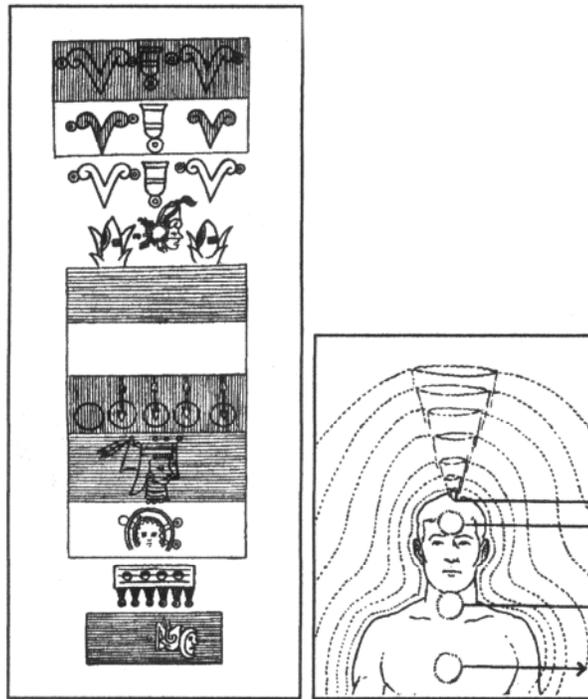


Figure 4. Left: The Eleven Levels of Heavens (from the *Vatican Codex A, Fol. 1*. Leon Portilla 1963:58); right: seven layers of colored auras. (Brennan 1987:47)

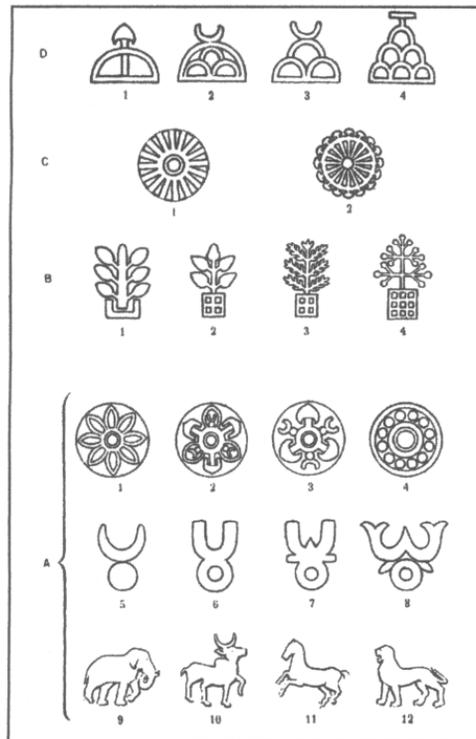


Figure 5. Symbols on coins of India, circa 300 BC to 300 AD associated with life of Buddha. Top to Bottom: D 1-4: Stupa, or burial mound; C1-2: wheel of his doctrine; B 1-4: tree of his illumination; A 1-4: lotus, symbol of birth of Buddha; A 5-8: taurine symbol, for zodiacal sign of Taurus, the Bull, the month of Buddha's birth; A 9-12, sacred animals: elephant—conception, bull—nativity horse—great departure, and lion—leader of his people (Foucher 1972:Plate 1).

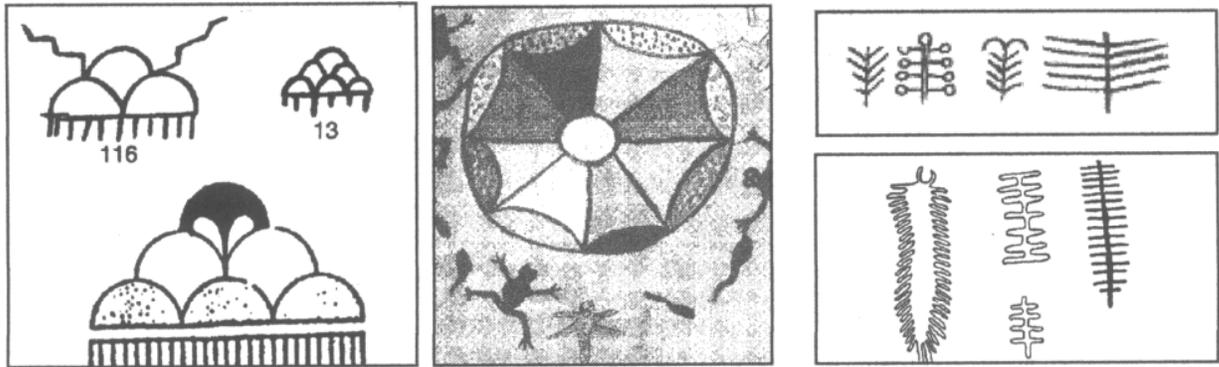


Figure 6. Left to right, top: rain-cloud (clan) symbols at Hopi from Fewkes 1897:1-10; bottom, rain-cloud with kachina face from O'Kane 1950:248 (quoted in Patterson 1992:60); symbol of Muingwa, Germination God from Stephen 1892 (quoted in Patterson 1994:235); tree or plant (Castleton 1984:xix); and centipede or one-pole ladder in Warner 1982 (quoted in Patterson 1992:60).

SYMBOLS ON COINS OF ANCIENT TAXILA	
INTERPRETATIONS BY J. ALLAN, CURATOR, BRITISH MUSEUM	
1.	Mountains
2.	Tree in railing
3.	Svastika
4.	Monastery w/mound
5.	Hollow cross
6.	Plant form
7.	Pillar & Pillar in railing
8.	Laksmi or Prosperity Goddess
9.	River
10.	Standard
11.	Grapes
12.	The Taxila Symbol
13.	Nandipados
14.	Unknown

Figure 7. Symbols on coins of ancient Taxila, interpretations by J. Allan, curator, British Museum.