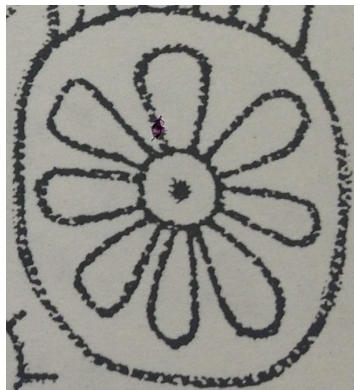


## The Case of the Missing Sun

For the past 40 years or so, I have been arguing that the testimony provided by prehistoric rock art, coupled with that from ancient myth, provides compelling evidence that the solar system only recently presented a dramatically different appearance, one that is impossible to reconcile with its present order. During my presentation at the annual SIS conference in 1999, for example, I pointed to prehistoric petroglyphs from Ireland (Cairn T at Loughcrew) that seemingly depict the ancient sun as a burgeoning flower-like form (see figure one).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure one**

The petroglyphs carved at Loughcrew are typically dated to the tail-end of the fourth millennium BCE (roughly 3300-3000). The fact that virtually identical artworks are to be found from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt during this same general time period is consistent with the hypothesis that the sun only recently presented a radically different

---

<sup>1</sup> Cairn T from stone 14 as adapted from E. Twohig, *The Megalithic Art of Western Europe* (Oxford, 1981), figure 235. M. Brennan, *The Stones of Time* (Rochester, 1994), p. 94 referred to the image in question as being “the emblematic solar symbol.” See the discussion in E. Cochrane, “The Saturn Theory,” *Chronology and Catastrophism Review* (2000:1), pp. 88-90.

appearance.<sup>2</sup> Figure two, for example, shows a purported “solar” image from ancient Mesopotamia that resembles nothing so much as an eight-petaled flower.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure two**

It is equally common to find the sun depicted in the form of a four-petaled flower.<sup>4</sup> Consider, for example, the cylinder seal from Middle Bronze Age Syria depicted in figure three.<sup>5</sup> Here the so-called sun-disc is represented with a quatrefoil on its face. This image, in turn, finds a close parallel in a petroglyph carved alongside the eight-petaled rosette on Cairn T at Loughcrew (figure four).

---

<sup>2</sup> See the images depicted in J. de Morgan, *Memoires, Vol. 12* (Paris, 1912), p. 79.

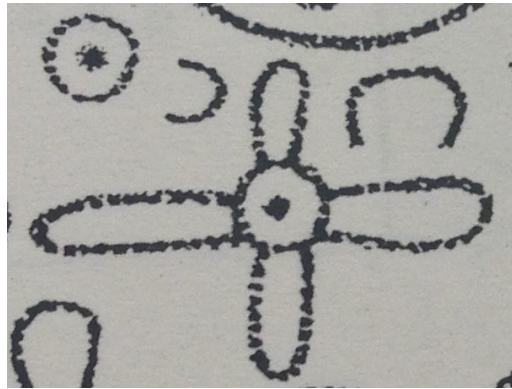
<sup>3</sup> Adapted from figure 264 in W. Ward, *The Seal Cylinders of Western Asia* (Washington, D.C., 1910), p. 91. For a parallel from the New World, see R. Heizer & C. Clewlow, *Prehistoric Rock Art from California* (Ramona, 1973), figure 85.

<sup>4</sup> Attested already during the late Ubaid period at Tepe Gaura (circa 4000 BCE). See here figure 240 in A. von Wickede, *Prähistorische Stempelglyptik in Vorderasien* (München, 1990). See also figure 34 in D. Collon, *First Impressions* (2005), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from figure 80 from B. Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography on Syrian-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age* (Fribourg, 1996), p. 67.



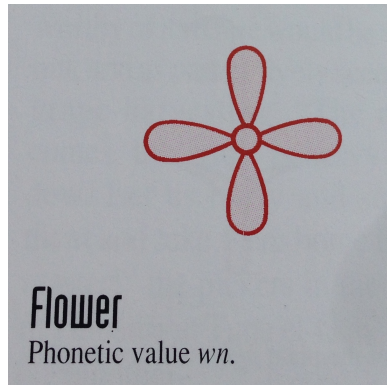
**Figure three**



**Figure four**

How is it possible to understand such artworks? The most economical explanation, as well as the most logical, is to conclude that the prehistoric skywatchers of Ireland and Mesopotamia were endeavoring to record their visual impressions in the wake of some extraordinary astronomical event such as a supernova explosion or an especially powerful auroral display centered on a sun-like object. Although this possibility is virtually never considered in the voluminous scholarship on prehistoric artworks, this idea will serve as the starting point for the investigation to follow. It is possible to test this hypothesis: If our hypothesis has merit, it stands to reason that the world's corpus of artworks and mythological traditions describing the sun will reveal a wealth of evidence attesting to its former floral appearance.

There is good reason to believe that Egyptian skywatchers remembered the sun's former appearance as flower-like form. Thus the *Coffin Texts* celebrate the *wnb*-flower associated with Re: "I am the *wnb*-flower which issued from Rē, the *ꜥb*-flower which issued from the horizon, I am the *ꜥb*-flower which issued from the garden, I am the uraeus which issued from Chemmis."<sup>6</sup> The word *wnb* itself denotes "flower" and is written with a four-petaled flower/star (see figure five).<sup>7</sup>



**Figure five**

An iconic image in Egyptian cosmogonic myth and religious iconography finds the nascent sun-god rising on—or as—a lotus-like flower.<sup>8</sup> The following passage from the *Coffin Texts* describes the Horus-star's appearance during the tumultuous events attending Creation: "The earth opens its mouth, Geb throws upon his jaws on my account, and I will raise up Horus pre-eminent in Pe on to his lotus-flowers..."<sup>9</sup> Of the lotus that appeared during the time of Beginning, James Allen remarked: "It was from this flower that the sun could blossom into the world."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> VI: 198 as translated in R. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Oxford, 1973), p. 184. Hereafter *CT*.

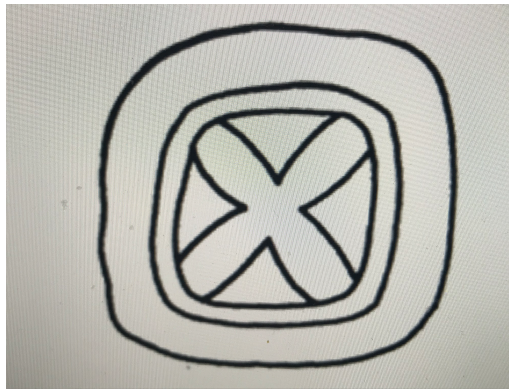
<sup>7</sup> R. Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I* (Mainz, 2003), p. 348.

<sup>8</sup> H. Schlögl, *Der Sonnengott auf der Blute* (Graf, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> *CT* VI:95.

<sup>10</sup> J. Allen, "The Celestial Realm," in D. Silverman ed., *Ancient Egypt* (London, 1997), p. 120. See also W. Waitkus, "Die Geburt des Harsomtut aus der Blute...", *SAK* 30 (2002), p. 377: "Nach diesen Beispielen ist klar...daß der Sonnengott des Morgens aus einer Lotusblüte geboren wird und sich in einer Barke über den Himmel bewegt."

Analogous traditions are to be found in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. The Maya, like the ancient Egyptians, employed a hieroglyphic script in order to record their sacred traditions and history. The hieroglyph denoting “sun” (*kinh*) depicts a four-petaled flower (see figure six).<sup>11</sup> This imagery is perfectly familiar to all students of Mesoamerican culture: “In Maya iconography and epigraphy it [the sun] was conventionally represented as a four-petaled flower, sometimes infixed with the T533 NIK or ‘flower’ glyph.”<sup>12</sup>



**Figure six**

Mayanists exploring such traditions commonly invoke metaphor to explain the sun’s intimate association with floral imagery.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, I’m not aware of a single scholar who has ever entertained the possibility that the hieroglyphs in question might actually encode something about the sun’s visual appearance at some point during the distant past. Yet it is certainly relevant to the matter at hand that Mayan mythological traditions likewise speak of a flower-like sun. In a Maya document known as *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, the sun-god—there known as *Ah Kin Xocbiltun*—was described as follows:

---

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from figure 6 in M. Leon-Portilla, *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya* (Norman, 1998), p. 19. See also M. Macri & M.Looper, *The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs, Vol. One* (Norman, 2003), p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> M. Looper & J. Kappelman, “The Cosmic Umbilicus in Mesoamerica: A Floral Metaphor for the Source of Life” *Journal of Latin American Lore* 21 (2000), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> J. Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy* (Boulder, 2014), p. 232.

“Four-fold [or four-branched] was the plate of the flower, and Ah Kin Xocbiltun was set in its center.”<sup>14</sup>

The report that the Mayan sun-god resided within a four-petaled flower forms a striking parallel to the archaic Egyptian traditions describing the sun as set within a lotus flower.

The inherent connection between the sun and floral imagery is on full display in the Uto-Aztec symbolism attached to Flower World, a paradisiacal Elysian Fields centered on that celestial body.<sup>15</sup> According to the anthropologist Jane Hill, who first brought this widespread theme to the attention of comparative scholars, “The Flower World...is often called the Spirit Land, or ‘paradise,’ and is often thought of as a land of the dead.”<sup>16</sup> Karl Taube, more recently, has documented the very same idea among the Maya: “The placement of both Flower Mountain and sun god on the east wall of Rio Azul Tomb 1 indicates the journey of the tomb occupant to Flower Mountain and solar paradise.”<sup>17</sup>

It is significant to note that Mesoamerican cosmogonic myth likewise ascribes floral imagery to the nascent sun. In the classic Aztec account of Creation, a hideously ugly dwarf known as Nanahuatl hurls himself into a great hearth in order to generate the sun. According to the mythical account transcribed by the Franciscan Friar Bernardino de Sahagún: “Like so he burns, he blossoms, his flesh sizzles.”<sup>18</sup>

Here, too, questions arise as to how we are to understand such traditions? The most logical explanation, surely, is to conclude that the ancient mythmakers were trying to tell us something important about the sun’s recent history and its central role in the natural events attending Creation, among other things.

There is much reason to believe that the Aztec myth of Creation has still more to tell us. In Mesoamerica, as in ancient Egypt, the prototypical appearance of the nascent “sun”

---

<sup>14</sup> R. Roys, *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Washington D.C., 1933), p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> J. Hill, “The Flower World of Old Uto-Aztec,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* (1992), p. 147 notes that the Flower World is consistently localized at the “place of the dawning sun.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>17</sup> K. Taube, “Flower Mountain,” *RES* 45 (2004), p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> K. Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington, 1998), p. 53.

occurs in a general context of cataclysmic tumult in which an apocalyptic Darkness prevailed. At the very moment of the inaugural appearance of the new sun, according to Sahagún, a divine assembly convened. In the account in question, the sore-laden Nanahuatl is led to a divine hearth known as *teotexcalli*, whereupon he sacrifices himself in order to produce the new sun:

“When midnight had come, all the gods proceeded to encircle the hearth, which was called *teotexcalli*.”<sup>19</sup>

Unless I miss my guess, in Sahagún’s account of the divine assembly that gathered around the cosmic hearth to witness the birth of the new sun we have a precise mythological parallel to an ancient Mesopotamian account of Creation wherein the prototypical appearance of the sun is distinguished by the gathering of a divine assembly. Thus, the Great Shamash Hymn invokes the god as follows: “At your rising, the gods of the land assemble.”<sup>20</sup> The same basic scenario is evident in an Old Babylonian fable known as *The Tamarisk and the Palm*, wherein the introduction harks back to the circumstances attending Creation:

“In former days...the gods of the land, Anu, Enlil, and Ea, convened an assembly...In their midst Šamaš was seated.”<sup>21</sup>

A divine assembly is mentioned in conjunction with the awe-inspiring appearance of the Sumerian sun-god Utu as well. Witness the following passage: “Utu, great hero, focus of the assembly.”<sup>22</sup> The word translated as “focus” here is *lipiš*, literally denoting the “heart” and doubtless commemorating the observational fact that the sun-god formerly stood in the midst of the divine assembly, as in the previous Akkadian tradition surrounding Shamash.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the same hymn describes the god’s epiphany as

---

<sup>19</sup> B. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Book 7* (Sante Fe, 1953), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Line 47 from the Great Shamash Hymn as translated by W. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (X, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Lines 1-5 as translated in W. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1996), p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Line 4 from “A hymn to Utu (Utu B),” *ETCSL*.

<sup>23</sup> On the meaning of the term, see J. Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon* (Los Angeles, 2006), p. 159.

follows—“the heavens tremble before him and the earth shakes” and “[He] thunders over the mountains like a storm”—supports our claim that the ancient scribes were not describing the familiar appearance of the present sun.

In ancient Egypt the divine assembly was known as the “sun-folk”—*ḥnmmt*. In the *Coffin Texts*, one god boasts that he appears with the “sun-folk about me, about me, like Re when he was born.”<sup>24</sup> Notice the specific reference to the gathering of the Divine Assembly at the time when Re “was born.” In short, the testimony from ancient Egypt is consistent with that from ancient Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica: The sun’s prototypical appearance or “birth” at the time of Creation occurred in conjunction with the dramatic appearance of a Divine Assembly. Implicit in these archaic cosmogonic traditions is the memory that the nascent sun stood in the midst of a Divine Assembly—presumably an assembly of stellar gods.

In seeking to understand these archaic and seemingly universal accounts of a Divine Assembly attending the prototypical appearance of the sun-god, we would suggest that the most methodologically sound practice is to simply allow the archaic artworks to illuminate the mythological traditions. The Mesopotamian cylinder seal depicted in figure seven likely offers the very clue that we are looking for.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure seven**

---

<sup>24</sup> CT 4:122.

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from L. Werr, *Studies in the Chronology and Regional Style of Old Babylonian Cylinder Seals* (Malibu, 1988), figure 26.



The resemblance between this image and that presented in figure three is obvious at once: Indeed, the two images are virtually identical except for the fact that figure seven includes an assemblage of dots or “satellites” about the central star—the Divine Assembly in our historical reconstruction. Note further the presence of the crescent adorning the so-called sun. Although there is nothing about this image that even remotely suggests that the ancient artists were trying to depict the present sun, the presence of the crescent recalls countless images of the ancient sun on Mesopotamian cylinder seals (as in figures two and three).

Occam’s razor rears its head at this point: Granted that the Old Babylonian cylinder seal illustrated in figure seven offers a relatively realistic representation of the prehistoric sky, there can be little question that the circle of satellites around the central star would be conceptualized as an “assembly” or band of stellar gods circling about the sun. Yet once grant this possibility and the floodgates are suddenly thrust open, revealing at once that conventional astronomers’ view of the solar system’s recent history is little more than a modern fairy tale.

## **Conclusion**

Images of a flower-like sun are encoded in the sacred traditions, language, and religious iconography of numerous cultures around the globe, thereby attesting to what amounts to a universal cultural memory. Such traditions did not arise by mere chance, nor do they have anything to do with figurative language or abstract reasoning. Rather, such traditions constitute the proverbial smoking gun—in this case, a tell-tale sign and permanent record of a lost solar system, one in which a floral-formed sun dominated the celestial landscape together with its Divine Assembly, a veritable circle of stars.