

A note on the symbolism of structure AB in the Karahan Tepe site

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Abstract

Karahan Tepe site is considered one of the most ancient settlements, dating back to the pre-pottery neolithic period. The symbolism behind the structures appearing in Karahan Tepe is unknown. In this note, we are focusing on Structure AB in Karahan Tepe, which contains ten straight pillars that have been carved out of the bedrock and a curl one that was implanted there, including a human-serpent-like head carved out of the bedrock at the wall of the structure. Here, we show a striking resemblance between structure AB in the Karahan Tepe site and the description of the tree of life, also known as the tree of sefirot in Jewish Kabbalah, according to the old book *Sha'arei Orah* written by Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla at the 14th century AD. While there is a large cultural and temporal gap between the two sets of symbolic structures, and there is a clear need to search for a solid connection, the proposed relations may imply a dramatic conclusion, e.g., concluding that Karahan Tepe is much more recent than concluded, or there is an esoteric knowledge that has been passed from generation to generation.

Keywords: Karahan Tepe, kabbalistic tree of life, Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, ancient symbolism

Karahan Tepe is a pre-pottery neolithic site in southeastern Turkey in the Tektek mountains. It dates back to around 11,500 years ago. It is located near the famous Göbekli Tepe site, dated back around the same time as Karahan Tepe, and is famous for its massive circular enclosures adorned with T-shaped megaliths. Karahan Tepe was discovered in 1997, and archaeological excavations began in 2019 (see, [1-5]). The site may be the earliest known human village, predating the development of agriculture, and includes structures that show signs of early human ritual practices. Three chambers were excavated, revealed between 2019 and 2021, and known as structures AA, AB, and AD. In this paper, we put our focus on structure AB. Structure AB contains ten straight pillars carved out of the bedrock and an additional curl pillar that is not cut out of the bedrock. The chamber also contains a sculpture carved out of the bedrock in the form of a human-serpent-like head that looks at the chamber's entrance. The following is a sketch of the AB structure.

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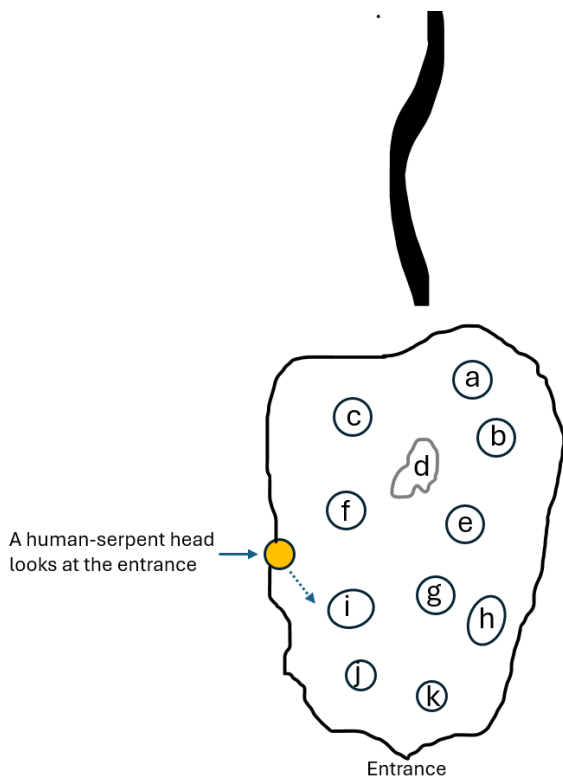


Figure 1. A sketch of the structure AB in Karahan Tepe. The chamber contains ten pillars carved out of the bedrock (pillars a-c, e-k), while pillar d has not been carved out of the bedrock. Pillar d is curled and resembles a serpent. The yellow circle is a human-serpent head that appears to look at the chamber's entrance.

In this paper, we are going to show a striking resemblance between structure AB and a fundamental element in ancient Kabbalah, the tree of sefirot (also known as the tree of life). This is based upon the following elements found in structure AB:

- It is commonly believed that the structure AB was intended for ceremonial practice.
- The structure contains ten straight pillars carved out of the bedrock with an additional curl pillar that was not cut out of the bedrock.
- The structure contains a human-serpent-like sculpture carved out of the bedrock looking at the chamber entrance.

The Karahan Tepe site contains various serpent motives, including serpent reliefs appearing on T-shaped pillars, emphasizing the importance of the serpent to the practice of the society lived there (see, [4-5]).

Kabbalah is a form of Jewish mysticism that delves into the nature of God, the universe, and the human form. The oldest book of Kabbalah is the Book of Formation (in Hebrew, it is called *Sefer Yetzirah*), which provides technical details about the creation of the universe by God where a central element is the existence of sefirot (plural of sefira). The sefirot are ten emanations or attributes through which God interacts with the universe and humans. The book has about four different

versions. Scholars do not agree on the origin of the text, with many debates about both its roots and the date of composition (see, e.g., [6]). However, it is commonly considered to be written around 2,000 years ago, the period of the destruction of the Second Temple by the Jewish people in Jerusalem.

Checking the history of occult and esoteric ideas can be challenging because their nature is inherently secretive. There are various references for the structure of the tree of sefirot that is dated back to the 15th century AD (see, [7]). Here, we restrict ourselves to the esoterical book Sha'arei Orah which was written by Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, and is dated back to the 14th century AD. We consider the printed version in the year 1883 [8].

The tree of life (or the tree of sefirot) arranges the sefirot in a certain order that shows their connections, starting from the more abstract sefira Keter to the most material one, Malkhut, which represents the material world.

The following is the general structure of the tree of life as depicted in Sha'arei Orah, printed in 1883.

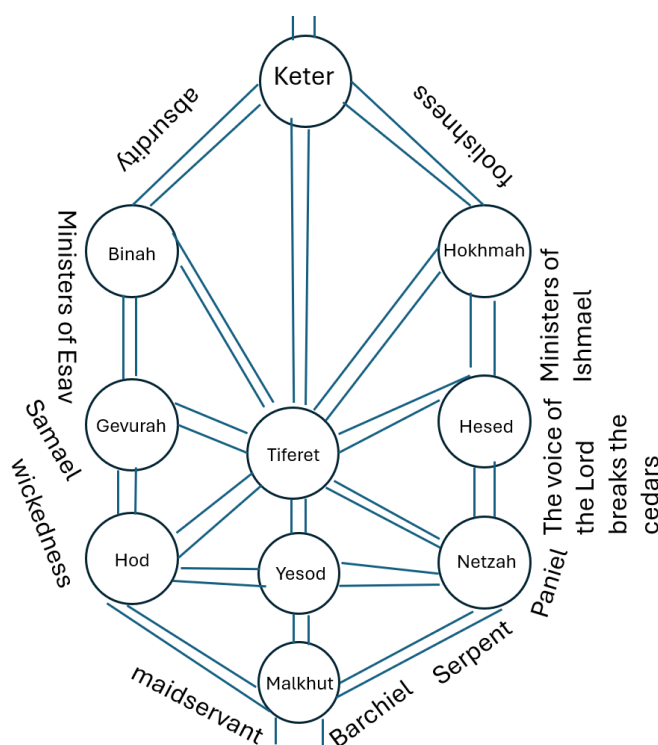


Figure 2. The ten sefirot, which creates the tree of life in Kabbalah. Outside the tree of life, there are negative forces commonly attributed to the ancient serpent of the Garden of Eden.

Following Figure 2, the terms around the tree of life represent the Klipot, the negative entities (forces) around the tree of life. In Kabbalah, it is common to consider that the negative entities (forces) are part of the ancient serpent, including Samael, a Talmudic archangel who is an accuser, seducer, and destroyer. Following Sha'arei Orah (The third and fourth gates): *"...And the serpent outside stands as an ambush against Netzah and Hod. And anyone who is not careful with Talmid*

Chakham (student of sages) or Netzah and Hod deserves to be bitten by a serpent." In another book of Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla named *Sod Hanachash*, which is translated into *The Secret of the Serpent*, the author writes: *"...And understand what we said in this matter because it is a throne of Tiferet from the inside and it was a matter of a serpent from the outside."* which may imply the existence of the serpent outside the tree of life. In the same book, it is also written that the serpent has kind of positive role in the world:

"...And know and believe that the serpent at the beginning of his creation had a great need - the correction of the world by being in his special place in creation, and he was a great sun created to bear the burden of the kingdom and slavery and his head on the (directed at) Aretz (another name of Malkhut sefira and also means earth) and his tail to sheol and destruction."

Moreover, it is written about the serpent: *"...And at first he (the serpent) would stand outside the walls of the holy camp, and he would be connected to the outer wall of the camps, his backside would be stuck to the wall, and his face would face outward..."*. The above quotes give some insights into the location of the serpent around the tree of life, in which his head is directed to the Malkhut sefira, and he is connected to the outer wall of the camps (which may imply the tree of life).

Following *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer* manuscript, speculated to be written around 8th century AD, it is written: *"What did Samael(?) take a group of his own and went down and saw all the creatures that the Lord had created in his world and did not find in them a wise man to do evil like a serpent, as it is said that the serpent was naked and its form was like a kind of camel and it mounted and rode on it."*

According to *Sha'arei Orah*, in the part called *The Fifth Gate*, there is another sefira called *Da'at* (Knowledge), but it is merely a term for averaging the interconnections between the different sefirot. Thus, it is common to call *Da'at* a quasi-sefira. It is a quasi-sefira in that it has not been carved like the other ten sefirot, as given in the *Book of Formation*. According to Jewish mysticism, *Da'at*, the knowledge, sefira, came from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge by Adam and Eve, followed by the seduction of the ancient serpent in the Garden of Eden as followed by the *Genesis* book. A couple of pages after the large tree of life (sefirot) in the *Sha'arei Orah* book, the author/editor provided another tree of life that also captures the *Da'at* quasi-sefira.

The following illustrates the tree of life that considers the *Da'at* quasi-sefira.

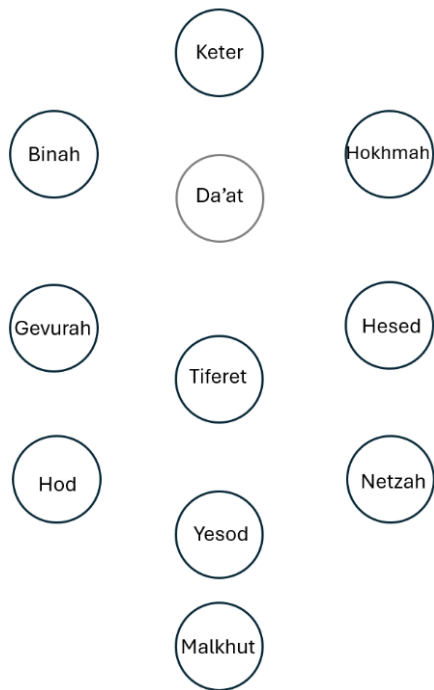


Figure 3. Tree of life with the quasi-sefira Da'at.

We can now deduce the following basic elements from the esoteric manuscripts:

- Following the Book of Formation, the ten original sefirot were carved.
- A quasi-sefira called Da'at exists, not a real sefira that was carved, and it came after the original sin.
- Following Sha'arei Orah and Sod Hanachash manuscripts by Gikatilla, and considering Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer in which Samael is represented by the serpent, around the tree of life, there is a serpent whose head is directed to the Malkhut sefira, and he is connected to the outer wall of the camps.

The following Figure illustrates our proposed speculative connection between the kabbalistic idea of the tree of life and the structure AB in Karahan Tepe.

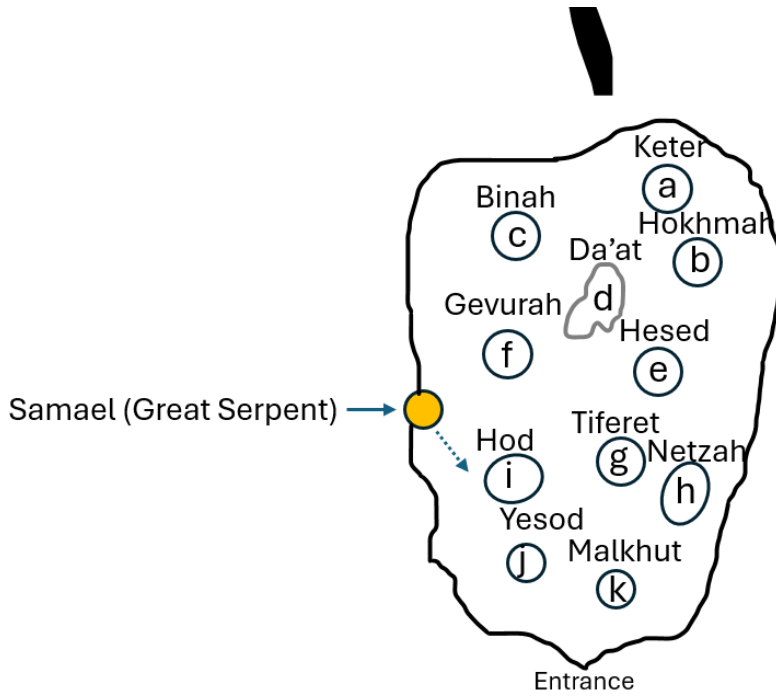


Figure 4. The proposed relations between the pillars and the human-serpent head to the tree of life in Jewish Kabbalah.

In summary, we have shown a remarkable resemblance between structure AB in Karahan Tepe and the tree of life followed by the ancient Jewish Kabbalah. Following the dramatic cultural and temporal differences, if there is indeed some connection between the two symbolic structures, it may imply a dramatic shift in our understanding of the history of human kind; conclusions can vary, e.g., concluding that either the dating of the Karahan Tepe site is not accurate, or there is some esoteric knowledge that has been passed from generation to generation.

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